

Post-Cold War Gender Performances.
Cross-cultural examination of gender performances viewed through
film re-enactments

by

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based dissertation examines gender as “performance,” as defined by Judith Butler, and its transformations after the Cold War within the ex-socialist Europe. This examination of gender performances is made by analysis of influential films and by reenactments of scenes of these important cinematic works, represented as multichannel video projections. The films are from USSR, Russia, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia and span the period from 1920s to the end of the 2000s. My hypothesis is that new insights about the changing concepts of gender roles and gender

performances in post-socialist countries and globally since 1989 may be produced, not only through theoretical and textual analysis of history, but also through creation of original films that include reenactments of scenes from influential films. My artistic claim is that these new insights about gender performances may be obtained by not only reading a text, but also by having a visual and aural, bodily experience, for both those who act in the films and those who view these artworks. This experience can change cultural attitudes and historical knowledge by other means than a text. This dissertation also explores gender performance cross-culturally, situating the research in a global context. For instance, the actors who participate in the reenactments are from the US, which is intended to integrate issues of cultural translation into the process. The film characters are interpreted through the cultural and political prism of each of the participants. The process of creating this project relies on a critical exchange of ideas, where the re-enactment is treated as an interpretation, rather than a copy of the chosen scene. Finding commonalities, rather than cultural differences is the goal. In keeping with Michel Foucault's view that power is a productive force in society, I attempt to analyze how similar oppressive gender power structures can occur irrespective of the particular political and ideological context. I also seek to represent also individual and collective reactions to these oppressive formations through gender performance.

1. Introduction

This dissertation will examine gender as “performance,” as defined by Judith Butler, and its transformations after the Cold War within the ex-socialist Europe. Butler describes gender as “performative” and “manufactured by sustained set of acts” a definition which is the theoretical foundation of my approach to this research.¹ The examination of gender performances will be made by analysis of influential films and by reenactments of scenes of these important cinematic works, represented as multichannel video projections. The study will focus on manifestations of gender performances in films from Bulgaria, USSR, Russia and Czechoslovakia between 1920 and the 2000s.

My hypothesis is that new insights about the changing concepts of gender roles and gender performances in post-socialist countries and globally since 1989 may be produced, not only through theoretical and textual analysis of history, but also through creation of original films that include reenactments of scenes from influential films. My dissertation will therefore include the following written analysis and a multichannel video installation, comparing the original films with their reenactments. The installation was premiered at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) at Rensselaer.²

My artistic claim will be that these new insights about gender performances may be obtained by not only reading a text but also by having a visual and aural, bodily experience, for both those who act in the films and those who view these artworks. This experience may not only contribute to textual analysis, but can change cultural attitudes and historical knowledge through other means than text, which is sometimes more accessible for people who lack theoretical background.

¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (1990; repr., New York and London: Routledge, 1999), xv. “The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures.”

²² Boryana Rossa, *After the Fall: Multichannel Video Installation*, EMPAC, Studio 2, April 20--April 21, 2012, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://arts.rpi.edu/pl/previous-event-archive/boryana-rossa-fall?category=2012&item=Spring> ; <http://boryanarossa.com/after-the-fall-2>.

This hybrid dissertation (part text and part art practice) exemplifies my hypothesis and serves as a common ground where gender performances from different times and places are compared and interpreted and where socio-political and aesthetic knowledge, initially belonging to different cultures are shared. This moment of translation is intended to help establish inter-“national” connection between these people and their historical and current experiences, suggesting a focus on intersecting similarities, rather than alienating differences.

Gender will be examined as performances following Butler’s definition of constructing gender identity according to sustained set of acts attributed to particular individual or group of individuals. These gender identities are attributed internally by these individuals to themselves, or externally to them by the society. Both society and individuals can read gender performances as definitive for these particular gender identities. A variety of possibilities for gender performances and their evolution after the Cold War will be reviewed through these reenactments following three major threads that affect them: politics, technology, and gender emerging as “queer” practices (queer is here defined as subverting the boundaries of heterosexual binarities). Historically the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties is connected with major processes that eroded binarities in politics, technology and gender perceptions such as:

1. Perestroika, which led to the end of the Cold War and the dismantling of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and uniting the “West” and the “East” into one, politically and economically.³ This process put an end to another major political binary opposition--communist-capitalist and unified politics under neoliberalism.

2. The so-called “third wave of feminism” that incorporated the queer view on gender and introduced an alternative to the heterosexual binary oppositions like male-female. Butler’s notion of “performative gender” gained currency, concerns of homosexuals became more visible, and notions like “unisex” became part of the pop culture.

³ A discussion on the ambiguity of the unification of the two camps will be briefly described later in the text and can be found in Marina Grzinic, “Video in the Time of Double, Political and Technological Transition in the Former Eastern European Context,” in *Transitland Video Art From Central and Eastern Europe 1990-2009*, ed. Edit Andras (Budapest: Ludwig Museum–Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009) 17-34.

3. Technological advances: the large spread of personal computers for domestic use and wide access to the Internet introduced a fusion between human and machine and, along with the proliferation of plastic surgery, promoted technological tools for gender construction. Donna Haraway wrote *The Cyborg Manifesto* in 1985, and introduced the “the cyborg” as a hybrid identity.⁴

This historical and conceptual framework, in which we see blurring or “queering” of boundaries, is what interests me in my choice of films to be studied and episodes from them to be reenacted. I will use “queering” in this broader sense of transgressing and redefining of borders between categories, making them fluid and constantly changing. Reenactment is one way that I have chosen as helpful to represent the transformation of gender performances within different political settings, and social scenarios. The re-creation of the past instrumentalizes specific tools of expression to learn about and interpret evolving gender concepts and their performative embodiment in everyday life.

“Gender performance” is a notion based on Judith Butler's “performative gender.”⁵ Additionally this notion is extended in conjunction with the notion of “cyborg”⁶ borrowed from Donna Haraway, revealing plasticity and hybridity of human and gender identity in highly technological contemporaneity.

“Performative gender” is a notion that focuses on phenomena such as denaturalization and re-signification of bodily categories through acting. The theory of performative gender is meant to challenge the understanding that there are “natural” gender acts, which are functions of “true” identity “predetermined” by the physical body. Butler suggests that gender acts are constructed and developed in accordance with political, social, and medical conventions. According to Butler, subversive performances of gender acts, which “disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender and sexuality” (like drag) is what helps explain gender as performative.⁷ These subversive performances question the solidity of traditional heterosexual binaries, and proliferate through them. Butler critiques essentialist definitions of womanhood, sometimes used by

⁴ Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” (1985), in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 7-44.

⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxxi.

⁶ Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” 7.

⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxxi.

feminists, which reproduce male concepts of heterosexuality and binary division of gender. This critique makes her text iconic for queer theory. By doubting the fundamentality of “natural” femaleness for feminism, and by focusing on the plasticity of borders between heterosexual binarities, Butler clarifies the entrance of feminism in a post-modern stage.

This critique of an essentialist self is related to Donna Haraway’s notion of “cyborg.” Haraway suggests that our identity is altered by and dependent on machines to the extent that we are all cyborgs, a hybrid between machine and organism. The concept of “cyborg” challenges gender stereotypes, because it problematises the cultural association of an actual and specific physical body, with particular gender performance. But what if this natural body is “altered” by our technological intervention? As Haraway says, the cyborg is a “hybrid of organism and machine but also a creature of social reality and fiction.”⁸ The physical properties of the cyborg are the result of “dream concepts” about their expected functions.⁹ The existence of the “artificially created” in the cyborg challenges the concept of the essentialist “natural” by revealing the cultural and social roots of many performative and behavioral patterns that we, as the creators of the machine apply to our creations (whether they are toasters, AI or cyborgs). Artificiality of the cyborg questions what has been defined as “natural” for ages. The “appropriateness” of particular behavioral pattern is designed by us--the “demiurges” who have specific cultural biases. The concept of the “cyborg” in this study therefore helps to reveal the social and cultural foundations of gender notions applied through technology and to introduce a more queer view to heterosexual normativity. Looking at the application of technological innovations and their social implications can also help understanding the appearance of more hybrid, cyborgian gender identities nowadays. Our cyborg body “performs” our fantasies about it—sometimes queer, sometimes hetero-normative. The hybridity, ambiguity and plasticity of gender manifestations, based on technological and behavioral social fictions about bodies, is what I see as the connection between the concept of “performative gender” and “cyborg.” which is the theoretical foundation of my study.

⁸ Haraway, *Gender Trouble*, 7.

⁹ Ibid.

“Gender performances” therefore are what I will call enactments of these blurred boundaries between previously considered stable gender and sexual identities. These blurred boundaries are due to tensions among a variety of ideas about which gender roles are appropriate to which kinds of physical bodies. Therefore these gender performances may follow but also subvert gender conventions, re-interpret physical determinations of species, machines and sexed body shapes, twist borders of widely accepted categories, invert them or question their legitimacy. This queering of politics, bodies and technologies is what I am aiming to expose through film examples in the written dissertation and through the multichannel video installation and the process that led to its creation.

This study will be an attempt to fill gaps in current gender and cultural studies through artistic practice, reflecting this historical moment, when bipolar opposition of East-West has decreased and has even been inverted in political and economic terms, a moment quite different to the situation during the Cold War. This turning-point had created a variety of contexts, in which gender issues are presented differently than in the past. Among these contexts are the continuing economic migration from the post-socialist block to the West and the brain drain, which creates continuous intellectual insufficiency in some parts of Eastern Europe. The brain drain, although addressed on different levels, has been opposed especially in Bulgaria only by the enthusiastic work of local intellectual formations, but not by state policies. Many of these intellectuals got their degrees abroad and have transnational identity. Related to these processes is the feminisation of poverty in many post-socialist countries, due to increasing neglect of women’s rights and regressive tendencies in their self-awareness. A “return” to conservative traditional roles becomes evident by the rejection of some basic values of women’s emancipation, like education and individual financial independence (to name just few).¹⁰ At the same time we can observe the crisis of masculinity, due to economic instability, which expresses itself often in men's increasing activity within religious institutions. Technological and scientific advances and their global proliferation is another factor that shapes gender notions. The plasticity of gender identity introduced by

¹⁰ “Bednostta se feminizira” [The poverty is feminizing], *Dnes.bg*, March 5, 2010, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.dnes.bg/obshtestvo/2010/03/05/bednostta-se-feminizira-otchetoha-ot-knsb.87192>. “Ravni vuzmoznosti za zenite. Sega!” [Equal opportunities for women. Now!], *Bulgarian Helsinki Committee*, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://women.bghelsinki.org/>.

information technologies and biotechnology unfortunately is highly visible in subcultures but not addressed in theoretical and social studies, in the countries, subject of this research, such as Bulgaria. The few studies on the subject are under-recognized in the public realm, therefore their effect on shaping new concepts is not very strong.¹¹

Some of the tendencies that I am looking at seem to contradict each other. For instance there is a growing attention to issues of LGBTQ people on wide political and social level, addressed not only by human rights activists, but also through art and popular culture. At the same time there is also a radicalization of LGBTQ stigmatization, due to rising local nationalisms and progressing class, race and gender segregation (particularly after 2000).¹²

These tendencies are supported and to some extent produced by the general incapability of local mainstream media and the society at large to re-frame gender issues within contemporary settings, to appropriate at least some aspects of gender and queer theory and to situate these issues in relation to current social reality. There is a need of informed discussion and reflection on gender issues. In addition, these processes are not isolated within each particular nation state; they are not local problems only. The deep effect of economic, cultural and political globalization on gender notions increases the necessity of cross-cultural communication. I attempt to reflect on and participate in both local and global discussions with my work, taking the role of translator and representer. I believe there is an increasing necessity for art strategies that challenge gender stereotypes globally. My artistic work follows the logics of the cross-cultural exchange of notions and concepts, which can be found in this text. The issue of cultural translation

¹¹ While there are interesting studies on bio-ethics among which is Assia Assenova, "Moralni problemi pri oplozdaneto in vitro" [Moral problems in in-vitro insemination], (PhD Diss, Bulgarian Academy of Science, 2010), there are also governmental websites like "Gender project for Bulgaria," which is representing women's participation in science in somewhat uninformed way. This website is supposed to be focused on participation of women in science, technology and politics and equality of gender, but its creators do not recognize the importance of language for creating stereotypes. The section about women who participate in technologically sophisticated professions is titled "Video Presentation of an Exhibition on 'Women who run the biggest machine ever created by man,'" *Gender Project for Bulgaria Website*, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.gender-bg.org/en.html>.

¹² Although in Bulgaria there is a tendency to recognize LGBTQ rights, the first gay parade in 2008 ended up with the arrest of sixty right wing extremists, who threw Molotov cocktails on the parade. *novinite.com*, "Bulgaria Skin Heads Attack Gay Parade with Molotov Cocktails, 60 Arrested," *Novinite.com*, June 28, 2008, accessed April 28, 2012, http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=94619. In countries like Russia the situation is getting worse. Michael Schwartz, "Anti-Gay Law Stirs Fears in Russia," *New York Times*, February 29, 2012, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/01/world/asia/anti-gay-law-stirs-fears-in-russia.html>.

for the purposes of transnational and more globalized critical exchange on issues of gender, class and technology is central to my work as a scholar and an artist. The comparative multichannel video installation is the art form that I have chosen with the belief that this is an appropriate way to represent this cross-cultural agenda most effectively.

2. Theoretical and Historical Framework

2.1 Present Binary Conceptualizations of the Socialist Past and their Roots in Cold War Rhetoric

The review of the shifts in politics, gender and technology in the mid-eighties can illuminate aspects of each of them. Most importantly it can help us to understand conceptualizations of power, before and after this turning point, which directly affect gender performances nowadays.

Recently, art theorist Piotr Piotrowski has recognized this simultaneous shifts in politics and gender.¹³ As a sign of this shift he sees the “deconstruction of gender,” and the appearance of concepts like “nomadic subject” and “unstable identity” at a time of dismantling of binary political oppositions. Piotrowski considers both the poly-conceptual view on shifting gender and political identities, and the end of paradigmatic binary oppositions after the fall of the Berlin Wall, unexplored in both in the East and the West, and he appeals for further work within it.¹⁴ Piotrowski also describes the complexity and the ambivalence of the situation, where we see not only deconstruction of binaries, but also revisionist re-construction of political (communist-capitalist) and traditional pre-emancipatory conceptions, one factor contributing to this is the phallogentric nature of the anti-communist dissidence.¹⁵

Along with the quite ambivalent process of democratization in the countries, examples of which I am studying, we see an increasing presence of essentialist theories about the “natural,” which affect gender norms. This happens in the wider context of demonization of any political alternatives to capitalism for more than twenty years, often generalized and stigmatized as “communist and totalitarian,” where these two concepts are used as synonyms with negative meaning.

This tendency to simplify and solidify the past and the variety of the past and present leftist discourses into something entirely negative is perhaps the reason why the

¹³ Piotr Piotrowski, “Gender after the Wall,” in *Gender Check*, (exhibition catalogue), ed. Bojana Pejic (Wien: Museum Moderner Kunst Ludwig Wien, 2009), 240.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Piotrowski, “Gender after the Wall,” 236.

“women’s question” and women’s emancipation, as well as contemporary Western feminist discourses, are also generalized as part of this “big and evil” entirety, a brainchild of the “default” coupling of “communism, socialism and totalitarianism,” an example of which are the texts produced by the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past.¹⁶

Rumen Avramov, Bulgarian historian and economic scholar critiques these publications as “stony and doctrinal,” and finds them responsible for converting knowledge into “exemplary moral conventions or simply (re)-education of adolescents.”¹⁷ His texts, however, represent another quite common and paralyzing opinion about communism, socialism and totalitarianism, which is that “communism” is a result of a common natural national psychology. According to him, “Bulgarian society is ‘pregnant’ with communism,” and “communism” is associated with the will of people to obey the police state.¹⁸ “(Soc)nostalgia,” (*sotsnostalgia*—a term equivalent to “communist nostalgia”) according to Avramov, is a typical sentimentality of leftist ideas per se. For him it names leftism in general. It could have been acceptable if these previously mentioned opinions about socialism and communism were shared in a context tolerant to variety of interpretations of the past and were not aggressively propagated through mass media, by that becoming a common sense. However this is not the case, as we can see in other East European countries as well, after the end of the Cold War. It is not by an accident that one of the first laws to be discussed in the new post-communist parliament of “democratic” Poland was against abortions.¹⁹ Therefore any progressive achievements of the communist governments—for instance women emancipation, social security, education and scientific and technological progress—are

¹⁶ Good example of this ideological tendency, which generalizes and equalizes these notions, is the collection of essays *The Totalitarianisms of the 20th Century*, ed. Ivaylo Znepolski (Sofia: Institute for Studies of the Recent Past, Ciela Publishers 2010). Website of the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://minaloto.org/>. Znepolski was a Minister of culture in the 1990s and publishes also in daily newspapers therefore his speeches and texts are significant for creation of the common sense and public opinion. The history learning books for high school (which had several revisions during the last 20 years) also support the same ideological bias and have strong impact on the younger generations: Peter Delev at al., *Istoria i civilizacia za 11 klas* [History and civilization. 11 grade], (Sofia: Ministerstvo na obrazovanieto I naukata, Knigoizdatelska lusta “Trud,” Sirma AI, 2006).

¹⁷ Rumen Avramov, “Belezki vurhu (soc)nostalgia” [Notes on (soc)nostalgia], *Liberalen pregled*, March 21, 2012, accessed April 28 2012, http://www.librev.com/index.php/--/1530-2012-03-21-10-04-24#_ftnref7.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Bojana Pejic, “Eppur si Muove!,” in *Gender Check: A Reader. Art and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Bojana Pejic (Vienna: ERSTE Foundation, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 2010), 15.

seriously questioned just because they belonged to this past political context all labeled as ignorant “communist nostalgia.” Some researchers, like Alexei Yurchak, call this simplification of political, social and historical notions “binary socialism.” “Binary socialism” is the binary description and analysis of socialism; common assumptions that include the following: “the socialism was “bad” and “immoral” or had been experienced as such by Soviet people before the changes of Perestroika, and further the collapse of Soviet socialism was predicated on this badness and immorality.”²⁰

Yurchak claims that this binary understanding of socialism is “explicitly reproduced in much academic and journalistic writing,” for example with the:

...widespread use of phrases such as ‘Soviet regime’ with the myriad assumptions often packed into it—and the use of binary categories to describe Soviet reality such as oppression and resistance, repression and freedom, the state and the people, official economy and second economy, official culture and counter-culture, totalitarian language and counterlanguage, public self and private self, truth and lie, reality and dissimulation, morality and corruption, and so on.²¹

A substantial analysis of the use of the strategies of describing socialism and communism as “binary” for reducing alternatives to the current mainstream neoliberal ideological bias, is extensively studied and explained in texts from the collection *Remembering Communism*.²² This binary discourse reproduces the Cold War rhetoric in the Post-Cold war context, which doesn’t give space for hybrid views not only on the past but on the present as well and prevents people of analyzing in detail their own experience. The result of this binarity where capitalism is considered “married to democracy,” while socialism is “married to totalitarianism” is the intellectual and political impotence to produce a valuable critique of capitalism as an ideology and

²⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2006), 4-8.

²¹ Ibid. Good example of a binary-biased text, which creates simplified oppositions, that affect public opinion is the recent interview by previously mentioned Ivaylo Znepolski: Nevena Borisova, “Prof. Ivaylo Znepolski: Zhivkov provedashe stalinistka linia,” [PhD Ivaylo Znepolski: Zhivkov followed Stalinist direction], e-vestnik.bg, February 23, 2012.

²² Maria Todorova, “The Process of Remembering Communism,” in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010). Petya Kabakchieva, “Rethinking Communism: Social Approaches to Comprehending “That Society” in Postcommunist Bulgaria,” in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. Maria Todorova, (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010), 37-56.

economic structure dominating globally.²³ Serbian art historian Bojana Pejic analyses the relation between the “binary thinking” to the resistance of post-socialist societies to connect with contemporary and historical feminist discourses and re-think the failures of the past socialist women emancipation:

This attitude may have changed over the last twenty years, but the truth is that none of the Eastern European post-communist societies have been able to consolidate any relevant leftist political party, and if so, this agent was (and to some extent still is) accused of restoring the “specter of communism.”²⁴

In tune with that, Piotrowski speaks about “reversed political oppositions,” in which many people in Eastern Europe consider “the communists” something alien to them, and use rhetoric similar to the Western propaganda during the Cold War.²⁵ This “reversed” rhetoric, “according to Piotrowski, did not favor alternative ways of thinking,” neither in the realm of politics, nor in gender.²⁶ In addition to that persistent definition of “the East” as “communist” and “the West” as capitalist in local and foreign mass media rhetoric induced the phenomena of many Eastern Europeans developing an animosity to any more leftist ideas and to their own past, suddenly becoming orthodox capitalists, and “proving” that they are not associated with this “bad totalitarian communist nostalgic” stereotype. The pervasiveness of this rhetoric and ideological premises, prevents many people from analyzing in detail their own experience. This binarity, however, is facing a

²³ In his speech at Occupy Wall Street, Slavoj Žižek points out that this specific binarism in contemporary political thinking is very typical for Eastern Europe, but rooted in the Cold War. He says: “...when you criticize capitalism, don’t allow yourselves to be blackmailed that you are against democracy. The marriage between democracy and capitalism is over.” Eric W. Dolan, “Slavoj Žižek, Marriage Between Democracy and Capitalism is Over,” in *The Raw Story Website*, October 10, 2011, accessed February 17, 2012. <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2011/10/10/slavoj-zizek-marriage-between-democracy-and-capitalism-is-over/>.

²⁴ Bojana Pejic, “Proletarians of All Countries, Who Washes Your Socks?,” in *Gender Check*, (exhibition catalogue), ed. Bojana Pejic (Wien: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2009), 26.

²⁵ In most of the East European countries a “purge from the communist plague” had been conducted, not so much physically, but ideologically, which affected the common sense regarding any leftist ideas. In Bulgaria the Union of Democratic Forces, which was the most popular oppositional party in the beginning of the 1990, conducted this purge mostly as mass media propaganda. Nevertheless, most of the people in power, oppositional or not, and to big extent the oppositional right wing think-tanks are still inheritors of the communist *nomenclatura* in one way or another. The relationship and continuity between the oppositional political and economic circles and the communist elite have been analyzed by Dostena Lavergne, *Ekspertite na prehoda. Bulgarskite think-tanks i globalnite mrezi za vlianie [The Experts of the Transition. Bulgarian Think-tanks and the Global Networks of Impact]* (Sofia: East-West, 2010). These connections in most cases render speculative the ideological rhetoric used by both these agents—the old communist *nomenclatura* and its opposition.

²⁶ Ibid.

paradox—two decades of “liberated market and democracy” and people in Eastern Europe face extreme poverty and class segregation, violation of human rights, and restriction of democracy. Then the binarity often turns generational—the “red grannies” belong to the socialist totalitarian past, they are still not dead, while they are alive, the “cool young democratic entrepreneurs,” won’t have the opportunity to realize their dreams.²⁷ This wide spread thinking, which does provoke oppositional voices, continues to dominate attitudes towards feminism and women emancipation.

Interesting analysis of this reversed binary process is made by scholars like Susan Buck-Morss²⁸ and Frederic Jameson.²⁹ Buck-Morss reframes and challenges the bipolarity of the Cold War political bias, often dominated by simplified oppositions between capitalism-communism, democracy-totalitarianism. She represents the communist project as inseparable from the Western modernist project and questions the envisioning of the Bolshevik agenda as a disruption of the progressive modernist development of the world.³⁰ Her statements are fundamental for overcoming binary political cliché:

²⁷ A good example is a manifesto written for the protests in Bulgaria against the “Law of the forests.” The manifesto was considered the one with which most of the protestors associate themselves. This manifesto reproduced every Cold War cliché about communism, capitalism, totalitarianism and democracy. Georgi Deyanov, „Dobro utro! Nie sme detsata na prehoda,” [Good morning! We are the children of the transition,] *Dnevnik*, June 18, 2012, accessed June 18, 2012, <http://bit.ly/L8dqWq>. A critique of these cliché appeared in a text published very soon after, by people who participated at the same protests. These two texts and their popularity revealed the current imbalance between the very popular Cold War cliché and less popular more contemporary critical views. “Kakvo e kapitalizam?” [What is capitalism] *Podsznatelnoto na Baj Dalaj*, July 4, 2012, accessed July 6, 2012, <http://baidalai.org/?p=1743>

²⁸ Susan Buck-Morss, “The Post-Soviet Condition,” in *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. IRWIN (London: Afterall books, 2006), 498.

²⁹ Susan Buck-Morss, “The Post-Soviet Condition,” 236. Frederic Jameson, “Conversations on the New World Order,” in *After the Fall. The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism*, ed. Robert Blackburn (London: Verso, 1991), 260.

³⁰ Representation of the communist project as disruption of modernism or as atavism is not only characteristic for anti-communist media propaganda from the Cold War. It is also a popular academic thesis, although often seriously questioned. Some examples are the two works by Bulgarian sociologist Rumen Dimitrov, *The Nomenclature*, (Geneva Paris Sofia: Georges Neff.) 1991, where on page 31 he calls East European socialism “pre-modern,” and *Tribunal and Forum*, (Geneva Paris Sofia: Georges Neff.) 1999. Other scholars have opposite conceptualizations of the period as a “hypermodern project” or “Dadaism,” “communism as totalitarianism,” the Bolshevik revolution is qualified as a bourgeois revolution, by some; communism is interpreted as “state capitalism” by others, or as an “elitist project,” as “enhanced modernism,” or as “society of networks.” For details on these concepts see Petya Kabakchieva, “Rethinking Communism: Social Approaches to Comprehending ‘That Society’ in Postcommunist Bulgaria,” in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: Social Science research Council, 2010), 37-56.

It is crucial to recognize that the end of the Soviet era was not limited spatially to the territory of the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik experiment, no matter how many specifically Russian cultural traits it developed, was vitally attached to the Western, modernizing project, from which it cannot be extricated without causing the project itself to fall to pieces -- including its cult of historical progress.³¹

Extremely helpful is her description of the “post-communist condition,” (or “the post-Soviet”³² as she puts it) for overcoming Cold War binaries.³³ She emphasizes the importance of understanding the post-communist situation as global, as applying not only to the “former East” but also to the “former West” and descriptive for the general situation after the Cold War. This “Post-Soviet” condition is not about the reunion of the world, which wholeness had been “disrupted” by the “atavisms” of the Eastern political contexts, as generally stated by “socialist binarists,” rooted in Cold War rhetoric, like the previously quoted Avramov. Buck-Morss argues that the profound significance of the end of the Cold War “was not so much its political effects—the replacement of ‘really existing’ (state) socialism by ‘really existing’ (capitalist) democracy—as the fact that this fundamental shift in the historical map shattered an entire conception of the world, on both sides.”³⁴ The world is in the phase of “anti-utopianism.”

Following Buck-Morss' critique of the anti-utopianism, which dominates societies after the Cold War, it is possible to review the post-socialist period as conditional for proliferation of the atomized, individualized neoliberalist logics from both sides, and the extinction of any other alternatives. This process is provisioned by the disappearance of the everyday experience of socialism and even the disappearance of its internal socialist

³¹ Susan Buck-Morss, “Vanguard/Avant-garde,” 2006, *Cornell University Website*, accessed April 28 2012, <http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/sbm5/thoughts.html#lectures>.

³² The impossibility of finding one common term to describe the experience of socialism in the countries of the Socialist Block has been described by many scholars (Kabakchieva, Nikolchina, Pejic, Groys, Piotrovski, Grzinic etc.). Having it this mind I prefer to use the notion of “post-socialist condition” rather than “Post-Soviet condition.” “Post-Soviet condition” seems to be a more generalized and even politicized assumption. The use of the “Post-Soviet,” prefix, or even “Soviet Block” (a notion replaced in Eastern Europe by “Socialist Block” with the end of Stalinism in the 1950s) presumes the dominance of the politics of the Soviet Union over all countries in Eastern Europe. At the same time these countries insist on their relative historical and cultural independence, which has shaped local practices of socialism, different to the ones in the Soviet Union. This is particularly obvious in the countries that belonged to the former Yugoslavia, which had independent from the Soviet Union policy and never belonged to the Socialist Block. It is also important for countries like ex-Czechoslovakia and Hungary, because of their local revolutions for “socialism with a human face,” and to a big extent to all other countries like Bulgaria, Romania etc. that insist on their relevant independence from the Soviet Union practices of socialism.

³³ Susan Buck-Morss, “The Post-Soviet Condition,” 498.

³⁴ Ibid.

critique, from the time of its “real” existence. Among these constantly disappearing experiences are gender notions and interactions, which were determined by or were rebelling against social conventions during that time. Almost extinct or politically conventionalized are the memories about women’s emancipation, its successes and failures, which makes the analysis of contemporary gender discrepancies very difficult.³⁵ In this study I will try to escape from the binary path of researching socialist gender. I will try to move towards a multilayered and complex understanding of practices and their causes in current times and towards understanding the production of power on every level, and its critique in a non-binary way.

2.2 Paradoxes of Post-socialist Reality

From the mid-1980s, a worldwide recognition of gay rights intertwined with feminist and human right movements and exposed new perspectives of looking also at class and race issues in contemporary societies. In this section I will make an attempt to show the interconnectedness of some of these issues in Eastern Europe and challenge the general understanding that after the end of “totalitarianism” everything is “getting better there.”

In Eastern Europe the issues of homosexuals suppressed in the past, were expected to be met by the free society after the changes, under the general democratic respect of human rights. This suppression of homosexuality was generally attributed to the “communists” and their “totalitarian ideology.”³⁶ In this sphere of gender analysis we can also observe the “binary socialism” bias, where homophobia is attributed to the generalized ideological communist paradigm. At the same time historical studies like *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia* reveal a more ideologically and historically balanced picture.³⁷ The decriminalization of sodomy between 1922 and 1933, by the Bolsheviks is a fact that shakes the binary scheme in which communists always equal

³⁵ Todorova, “The Process of Remembering Communism,” 13. Yurchak, *Everything*, 8.

³⁶ Monika Pisankaneva, “The Forbidden Fruit: Sexuality in Communist Bulgaria,” *E-magazine LiterNet*, no.7 (68), July 8, 2005, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://bit.ly/Q1Sx14>. Michail Gruev, “Sceni othvurleni pri ‘montaza na oficialnata versia’...” [Scenes rejected during the editing of the official version] *Online Journal Anamnesis*, no.1, 2006, accessed April 28 28 2012, <http://bit.ly/MrpMG2>.

³⁷ Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2001), 3.

homophobes. The author Dan Healey critiques this “totalitarian schema” (or the “binarism”) of looking at sexuality and homophobia during the socialist period applied by scholars like Simon Karlinsky. Karlinsky attributes homophobia to the “totalitarian nature of communism.” The undeniable fact of decriminalization of sodomy is interpreted by him as a “result of neglect and oversight.”³⁸ Healey critiques this attitude by giving detailed examples from the medical discourse of Tsarist Russia, as well as from Stalinism. During Stalinism a new heterosexual ideal had been constructed on the basis of “medical and scientific evidences;” sodomy was criminalized again along with restrictions of other rights like the right of abortion.³⁹ In studies that equalize communism or socialism with homophobia, this pre-Stalinist Bolshevik history remains unnoticed, along with the whole debate around sexuality in Revolutionary Russia, which shared similarities with other socialist countries and will be reviewed later in relation with the Bulgarian film *Detour (Otklonenie, 1967)*.⁴⁰ Unnoticed in these studies often remains the fact that even in the “democratic-capitalist West” recognition of gay rights on a wider societal level had begun quite recently, almost at the time when political binaries begun to be dismantled in mid 1980s.

The attribution of the violation of LGBTQ rights to “communism” has been challenged one more time by the recent developments in Russian law. In 2012 a note prohibiting “homosexual propagation to minors” was accepted in St. Petersburg as defending “Russian traditional values.”⁴¹ This law was also widely critiqued, because according to protesters it considers homosexuals and pedophiles the same category. These regressive tendencies might be attributed to the still very weak academic and wider social debate about gay rights, which could have had its moment in the nineties, especially in Russia. In many cases commercial pop-culture reduced the tendencies of challenging the heterosexual paradigm to some sort of fashion in the 1990’s.⁴² This attitude contributed to the conservative backlash and the inability of the society at large

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 4.

⁴⁰ Gregory Carleton, *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia*, (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press 2005).

⁴¹ Michael Schwartz, “Anti-Gay Law Stirs Fears in Russia,” *New York Times*, February 29, 2012, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/01/world/asia/anti-gay-law-stirs-fears-in-russia.html>.

⁴² Robin S. Brooks, “Cross-Dressing in Bulgaria: Gay-Identity, Post-Communist Fear, and Magical Love,” *Bad Subjects Website*, no. 50, June 2000, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://bit.ly/LscECG>.

to comprehend sexual diversity and LGBTQ rights seriously. Nevertheless, the existence of openly gay movements, made more pronounced the backlash of conservative morals and prejudices and the homophobic nature of reviving local nationalisms.⁴³

As Pejic explains, as soon as “the post-communist states were (re-)founded in the early 1990s, nationalism became an integral part of the newly gained statehood.” Sexism and homophobia go hand in hand with the appeals for strong state under nationalist and often neo-nazi flags. Feminization of poverty showed that women are increasingly deprived of their right to work, and stereotypes about their incapability of dealing with technology re-established traditional clichés in everyday life, appealing to these nationalist and highly patriarchal movements.

If we look in the field of technology and its role for challenging heterosexual binaries, we can see similarly contradictive picture. Technological advances challenged the juxtaposition between machine and organism and consequentially gender norms. For instance-- most of the highly valued labor is made with the use of machines and coding. The physical strength, highly attributed to men is not anymore the one to be most valued characteristic. Many programmers work as freelancers and sometimes do not make any physical contact with their client. Since women have been excellent programmers and can do coding remotely without necessarily exposing their physical identity, this gave an opportunity for the partial abolition of gender restrictions on this profession. The more flexible working time is also another factor which contributed to the successful combination between maternity and work for women involved in this industry. The cyborgian somewhat “genderless” identity of these women, who also often live in countries favorite for outsourcing (like Bulgaria), additionally queered gender notions in regard to labor and class. It is obvious that new technological advances created a shift in gender roles and performances, however the situation is far from even good, and women

⁴³ Extreme examples are Russia and Serbia (although in most of the East European countries the picture is very similar), where all attempts of organizing gay parades end up with violence, initiated by nationalist and religious groups and arrests of the organizers. There are warnings that the local laws “against propagation of homosexuality” will be accepted on a federal level in Russia. See “Noviy zakon protiv gomoseksualistov - problema usugubliaetsia” [New law against homosexuals – the problem deepens], *TVRain*, September 28th, 2011, accessed April 28 2012, <http://bit.ly/M2Jp6u>.

are still not allowed to take the highest professional ranks in management of the companies they work for.⁴⁴

One of the symbols of technological emancipation during socialism was Valentina Terezkova, the first woman cosmonaut. As Pejic says:

...she embodied the “socialist dream that was never truly reached: about women’s involvement in high technology, often considered the ‘upmost level of women’s emancipation.’⁴⁵

In post-socialist settings Terezkova became synonyms of inadequate unnaturalness and stiffness.⁴⁶

And here we face the paradox of the post-socialist situation: gender notions, although changing, continued the tradition of patriarchal power construction that was partly challenged but never overcame through women’s emancipation. The liberation from particular oppressions from the communist past (like for instance bringing back the freedom of religion) induced nationalist and religious wars and also produced radical right wing formations and religious power structures, fused with the state policies that had been disempowered during socialism to a big extent. The power of religion had created a whole new set of possibilities to resurrect old pre-socialist or even pre-modern forms of gender oppression.

Post-socialist researchers explain this paradox with the post-socialist manner of conceptualization of power. Pejic describes the failure of conceptualization of power, in the field of post-socialist art history. Her research showed that art historians continuously attribute power to some sort of an external agent, to which all people opposed during socialism. According to the “totalitarian model” they use:

Power is a harmful force which is external to culture and art; it is something coming from the highest position (the state apparatus) and, ultimately it is a supremacy that politicized artists had to, as they often

⁴⁴ Petya Kirilova-Grady, “Zenite v balgarskata web industria: tsifri, fakti, istorii” [Women in Bulgarian web industry: numbers, facts, history], *net.com*, no. 186, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://netmag.bg/discover-bgfeed186>.

⁴⁵ Pejic, “Proletarians of All Countries,” 23.

⁴⁶ Lubomir Staridolski and Nina Vasilevska, “Rozovi panteri na zultite paveta. Muzete se kipryat v nezni tsvetove, Evite se kontiat v cherno-bialo” [Pink panthers on the yellow bricks. Men adorn themselves in bright colors, the ‘Evas’ are beautifying themselves in black and white] *Standart*, December 27, 2007, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://paper.standartnews.com/bg/article.php?d=2007-12-29&article=216061>. This is an article in a Bulgarian newspaper that reviews the “feminine” colors used by men in Bulgarian Parliament and the “manly clothes” worn by women, who “look like Valentina Tereshkova.”

did, oppose. This is the standard understanding of power we encounter in literature dealing with dissident and underground art, or, in the case of USSR, with non-conformist art.⁴⁷

In this traditional critique, state and people, public and private are simply juxtaposed, without any attempt of understanding the complex mechanisms of power production that proliferate the private as much as the public. Pejic believes that customary imaginations of power have to be bypassed and mechanisms of power relations have to be questioned recognizing along with Foucault that power is a productive force in society. In an interview in 1976, Foucault says:

I do not want to minimize the importance and effectiveness of State power. I simply feel that excessive insistence on its playing an exclusive role leads to the risk of overlooking all the mechanisms and effects of power which don't pass directly via the State apparatus, yet often sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximizing its effectiveness. In Soviet society one has the example of a State apparatus which has changed hands, yet leaves social hierarchies, family lives, sexuality and the body more or less as they were in capitalist society. Do you imagine the mechanisms of power that operate between technicians, foremen and workers are that much different here and in the Soviet Union?⁴⁸

A more complex non-linear analysis of power formation has to be produced to explain how opposite processes of liberalization and conservatism can exist at the same time. Dismantling the myth that everything was “bad” during socialism and everything should be “good in democracy” is what can help some of the binary clichés of understanding power to be overcome.

Film historians and journalists (with significant exceptions among which is Dina Iordanova) also reproduce the binary formula of “good people against the bad state” when speaking about filmmakers’ dissident struggle against the state power.⁴⁹ However if we look closely at the characters produced by these very filmmakers (particularly the anti-communist dissidents) and see what disciplinary role they played in society and particularly in establishing gender conventions, we can ask the question: what was this

⁴⁷ Pejic, “Proletarians of All Countries,” 21.

⁴⁸ Michael Foucault, “Questions on Geography,” (1976), in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings by Michel Foucault*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 72-73.

⁴⁹ Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: BFI Publishing 2001). Iordanova, Dina. *New Bulgarian Cinema* (London: Blurb 2008).

dissident struggle about? Was it against domination and for liberation, or for establishment of the same logics of power by a different agent?⁵⁰

2.3 Studies of Everyday Practices. Avoiding Exoticism Through Cross-cultural Comparisons

To understand the constructions of power better, and their particular effect on gender performances, a careful look at recent everyday socialist and post-socialist practices, as opposed to creating theoretical constructions unrelated to practice, might be helpful. This, however, appears to not be so easy for several reasons. Grzinic talks about the necessity of re-collecting the history of socialism and re-inventing the very recent history of transition from socialism to capitalism, for the purposes of critiquing the present.⁵¹ She claims this to be difficult task because the East has been deprived of its history, sucked into submissive assimilation into the global world, where “capitals move freely, but not bodies.”⁵² Deprivation of history in this sense doesn’t mean there are no historical studies of Eastern Europe. Grzinic rather exemplifies that global corporations and not people are what determine current politics and social practices globally, as her post-colonial analysis reveals. Not only utopian visions are lost (as Buck-Morss tells), but the simple self-esteem of people from post-socialist countries is gradually disappearing. Their real experiences of the past are gradually replaced by notions using the “totalitarian” theoretical model to analyze the past. Their current experiences are claimed “a result of the totalitarian past,” and are submitted to the promises about the consumerist heaven of the new twenty years old post-colonial economies.

Similarly Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova, finds amazing that “most of the early approaches to real socialism started with theory and not with empirical research.”⁵³ She also acknowledges the lack of studies of everyday practices of socialism, and the tendency of over-conceptualization and over-theoretization of the period, for the

⁵⁰ For critical analysis of representation of communism in film see: Vania Stoianova, “The Communist Period in Postcommunist Bulgarian Cinema,” in *Remembering Communism*, ed. Maria Todorova, (New York: Social Science research Council, 2010), 373-390.

⁵¹ Grzinic, “Video in the Time of Double, Political and Technological Transition,” 20.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Todorova, “The Process of Remembering Communism,” 11.

ideological purposes of the post-Cold War world.⁵⁴ Todorova again questions particularly direct parallels between Nazism and the “comparatively long East European experience,” and the mutual substitution of concepts like communism and totalitarianism. The equalization between socialism and Nazism is what deepens trauma and creates difficulties for people with socialist past to cope with their contemporary identity. People are traumatically rejecting the entire past and embracing uncritically the unsatisfactory present, trying to avoid any positive memories about their damned history, being afraid to be called “communist nostalgics.” Todorova emphasizes on the importance of individual memories, personal archives, artistic and cultural production for creating informed and more realistic picture of the past and the present:

...the promise of the totalitarianism theory virtually crashes under empirical scrutiny, and what becomes highlighted, especially in institutional research, are aporias, antinomies, and paradoxes, rather than the rigid contours of a regime formula.⁵⁵

The books she edited like *Remembering Communism*⁵⁶ and *Post-Communist Nostalgia*⁵⁷ challenge the understanding that the socialist past was only dominated by totalitarian unlawfulness and uniform thinking. They also upend the understanding, that people from the post-socialist countries are hunted by the past in its most idealized form, as time of unquestionable stability and social security, that they are ignorant “nostalgics.”⁵⁸ Through careful collection of everyday history and its analysis, Todorova and all her contributors succeed to avoid the political binarity.

Following these examples, I focus on collecting everyday practices of gender performance, reflected in film. By working with actors living in the US, I propose a practical tool for re-invention and re-interpretation of these practices, not only for people from the post-socialist countries, but to the ones from “the other camp.” Hopefully this approach can contribute to overcoming political binaries, left from the past. It is also

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. Maria Todorova, (New York: Social Science research Council, 2010).

⁵⁷ *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, ed. Maria Todorova, (New York: Social Science research Council, 2010).

⁵⁸ The following text gives an update on leftist movements in post-communist Balkans, with an analysis of the notion of “post-communist nostalgia.” This notion is reviewed from both the East and the West perspectives: Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks, “Welcome to the Desert of Transition! Post-Socialism, the European Union, and a New Left in the Balkans,” *Monthly Review*, vol. 63, no. 10, 2012, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://monthlyreview.org/2012/03/01/welcome-to-the-desert-of-transition>.

important that the structure of my work requires the active participation of these foreign, mostly “Western” people. By that I am hoping to avoid the fate of many written studies, or even art pieces, which remain locked behind the ghost of the Iron Curtain, never reaching anyone outside the borders of the former Socialist Block. Pejic uses the term “gettoization” of art in regard to the one produced in Eastern Europe.⁵⁹ She, along with many others, claims that European exhibition policies and mechanisms of the art market isolate art produced in Eastern Europe. This can be said not only about art, but about any cultural production. Producing knowledge only about and for the Eastern European “ghetto,” is a voluntary submission to the continuing erasure of Eastern Europe from the international cultural scene⁶⁰ and re-enforcement of the resurrection of the Cold War political binaries. Lacking attempts of overcoming these binaries from both former camps will only deepen the Cold War ideological constructions, which exist in the post-Cold War space, keeping it as segregated as it was before.

Cultural exoticism is another double-edged sword, which deepened self-colonizing and gettoization premises. The red star, and the hammer and the sickle were among the first attractive and culturally specific attributes to be used in porn production from Eastern Europe, during its appearance after the changes.⁶¹ From one side, exoticism is an easier access to exposure, but from another side it reproduces expected stereotypes. Queering the limits of communication, problematizing the communication itself and inventing new strategies of cultural and knowledge communality are other strategies that might help avoiding political binaries. The overview of the chosen film examples in this text and the video installation presents bits and pieces of information, by no means complete but hopefully having the potential to create critical ground for examination of the “uncannily similar” (Susan Buck-Morss' term) cultural forms that produced also

⁵⁹ Bojana Pejic, “Proletarians of All Countries,” 20. Bojana Pejic, “Eppur si Muove!,” 19.

⁶⁰ Grzinic, “Video in the Time of Double, Political and Technological Transition,” 22.

⁶¹ Use of Soviet and communist symbolics in non-East European films about Eastern Europe after the changes can be traced back to the time of Perestroika. For instance the French mocumentary film *Sex and Perestroika* (*Sex et perestroika*, 1990) by François Jouffa and Francis Leroi directly puts together a naked female body over the hammer and the sickle for the film poster. Accessed July 10, 2012, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0164876/>. Parallel to that is the use of Soviet symbolism by Soc-art, where these images are used ironically and demystified by the culture that produced them. Good example of the spirit of the epoch is the film *Sideburns* (*Bakenbardy*, 1990) by Yuri Mamin. Typical for contemporary art, music and subcultures, this use of Soviet symbols is different to how they were used by local commercial porn industries, to meet the request of exotic images from the area, and a tool for attraction of customers: *Penthouse Bulgaria*, May 2010: <http://www.slusham.com/1-may-e-edelweiss-se-snima-v-erotitchen-sots-stil-za-penthouse.html>.

similar gender performances in art in both the East and the West.⁶² Haraway's argument for "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction" is particularly useful for the artistic practice of cross-cultural reenactment.⁶³ The border between cultural bodies is transgressed through the pleasure of the shared physical experience, baring the responsibility for creation of new concepts.

As previously stated, this dissertation will present a queer analysis of mechanisms of power represented by gender performances in film. Therefore I decided to focus on concepts rather than chronology as organizational method of my findings. The scope of this study doesn't allow the possibility to create a complete list of films, in which gender performances can be reviewed. Since every single film has a gender aspect and potentially be included among the reviewed ones, I have set conceptual rules to justify my choice. My choice is strictly targeted to examples I find the most appropriate to illustrate specific problems. These problems are organized under four different sections such as: technology, patriarchy, sexuality and gendered embodiment of political power. Therefore I am not offering a final and complete list of important films, but rather a collection of fragments that can identify processes and mechanisms of power, which direct gender performances. Films are not given priority because of their aesthetic and artistic qualities, or commercial success. They are rather looked at as representations of tendencies in society, both conventional and critical, institutionalized and underground. This is the reason some of the films are commercial hits, and others are representative of experimental and counter-cultural tendencies, which I have the privilege and the freedom to investigate as a participant in their production.

I have also decided to avoid a chronological approach to this collection of examples because the end of the Cold War is not a specific moment in time: it is a process. Its end is dated 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down. But this is rather a symbolic date. The end of this war began much earlier and still might not have ended (as Grzinić claims).⁶⁴

⁶² Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, " x. "From the present side of this temporal divide, the cultural forms that existed in 'East' and 'West' (to use the Eurocentric terminology of the Cold War) appear uncannily similar. They may have differed violently in their way of dealing with the problems of modernity, but they shared a faith in the modernizing process developed by the West that for us today has been unalterably shaken. It is with the aim of illuminating the changed nature of our present situation that this book compares their dreamworld forms."

⁶³ Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 8.

⁶⁴ Grzinić, "Video in the Time of Double, Political and Technological Transition," 19.

Therefore “after the Cold War” for me is the time after the beginning of the process of this big shift in politics, gender and technology around the mid-1980s that I talked about previously. To additionally reflect the shift as a conceptual process and avoid chronological methodology, I decided to review films comparatively from both the socialist and the post-socialist period. Some films appear several times under different topics, as relevant to all of them. There are fewer films chosen for reenactment than reviewed in the written part of my dissertation. The reason for that will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.4 The Role of the Translator of Words and the Translator of Images and Actions

Since I am in the role of “translator” of concepts between cultures, both with the help of text and through art it will be useful to look at Walter Benjamin thoughts on translation:

The traditional concepts in any discussion of translations are fidelity and license -- the freedom of faithful reproduction and, in its service, fidelity to the word. These ideas seem to be no longer serviceable to a theory that looks for other things in a translation than reproduction of a meaning.⁶⁵

I look for interpretation rather than reproduction of meanings, and the “original” in my case is not only the gender performances of a particular culture, but also the art piece (the film) that I am translating through reenactment. My work consists both of language and art production, where the language translation is supported by images and is released to a big extent from the demand of “fidelity to the word.” I am working on the border between art and language translation, where the art production has a primal role. The “translation” through body work or reenactment is escaping the scope of linguistic translation; it overcomes the traditional problems of “lost meaning through translation” which Benjamin is addressing. My translation relates on images or body actions that can expose “common language” easier than if I had to communicate them only through verbal and written language. In other words my art work is a translation. Therefore by its

⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," (1923), in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), accessed November 3, 2011, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/12733233/Walter-Benjamin-the-Task-of-Translator>.

very definition it is closer to the final goal of the translation if we look at Benjamin's comparison of the role of these two:

Although translation, unlike art, cannot claim permanence for its products, its goal is undeniably a final, conclusive, decisive stage of all linguistic creation. In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were.⁶⁶

By making art I can “claim permanence” of my products. In these terms it will probably be more useful to look at concepts like “copy of the original” by Benjamin or “documentation as an art piece” by Boris Groys as related to performance and film documentation of it.⁶⁷ Discussion on that can be found in Chapter Three where I discuss methods of reenactment. The concept of linguistic translation, apply primarily to this area of my work, which determines the choice of scenes to be reenacted and the consideration of the amount of text in them. I looked for better “translatability” of the scenes to use Benjamin's term, aiming towards greater independence of the “translation” from the “original.” Therefore I focused more on silent scenes and body language. My intention was actually to create an “original” from the “translation.” This reversed process had not yet been clearly proposed by Benjamin, but has been described rather later by Groys' reading of Benjamin. However, the possibility of creation of an original from the translation can be seen in Benjamin’s text, as pre-conditioned by the “translatability” of the original:

Yet, by virtue of its translatability the original is closely connected with the translation; in fact, this connection is all the closer since it is no longer of importance to the original.⁶⁸

This is how I made the choice of particular scenes, dependent on the possibility of their actual physical enactment and creation of an independent art piece. The presence of a spoken text therefore has been secondary. The words play several roles. One is to support the primal role of the body language in the depicted situation, like in the scene of domestic violence from *Ladies' Choice* (*Dami kaniat*, 1980). The words exist also as flat

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Boris Groys, “Art in the Age of Biopolitics. From Artwork to Art Documentation,” in *Biomediale*, ed. Dimitry Bulatov (Kaliningrad: National Centre for Contemporary Art, Yantarny Skaz National Publishing House, 2004), 168-174.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

propagandistic slogans, such as widely known declarations from the Cold War, seen in the film *Circus* (Tsirk, 1936) and *Hipsters* (Stiliagi, 2008). And finally the words can be sometimes found as literal equivalent of disciplinary verbal techniques, applied in different cultures. An example is the interrogation of the “communist” (by US investigator) and the “bourgeois” (by Soviet investigator) in the reenactment of the film *Hipsters*. Since my goal is to find common grounds of understanding gender performances, idiosyncrasies and cultural specificities can be of a possible interest for the viewer only after he/she looks at my work, not prior to that. Interest in historical and cultural details can be consequential of my art, not its primal goal. The viewers may get interested in Bulgarian and Russian film, so they might decide to study the language and understand better what these films are about. Therefore during work on the reenactments, I gave informative, but not detailed background to my actors and consequentially to the viewers. I tried to avoid linguistic obstacles and try to emphasize on body language. Historical details are only a backdrop or scenery of the “translatable” gender performances.

The structure of this dissertation is meant to connect writing and artistic practice, introducing to the “temple of knowledge”----the knowledge, obtained and distributed through practice. The style of writing is meant to follow academic standards in humanities, but the section dedicated to artistic process and practices will follow principles known from autobiographical literature and individually “bred” artistic manifesto style. My review of gender performances in film will be set against my background as artist and practitioner, and will intentionally avoid classical methods of analysis from film history and film criticism in order to focus on the genealogy of images and the techniques used by the film authors to convey ideas through performance and montage.

My choice of particular scenes has been determined also by the actual possibility of their physical enactment. I have decided to avoid scenes that require extensive study of dialogues, although some of my episodes are explicitly based on verbal expression. Studying text brings back into the scene all issues of language translation and requires more mimicking of film shots and imitation of the editing style of the original, rather than improvisational interpretation. I have chosen to leave space for imagination and

comparative thinking, individual to each actor or viewer, for which the existence of an extended amount of text could have been an obstacle. For instance, the reenactment of *Hipsters* is based on sophisticated English text. People who don't know the language will have to watch it with subtitles. This will limit their perception. They are also deprived of understanding the flavor of English slang. Therefore I and my partner Oleg Mavromatti focused on expressive performance, which can compensate to some extent the language difficulties.

From reading about and watching around hundred films, I have chosen to reenact or use in the video installation scenes from seven films, which are my focus: *Circus* (*Tsirk*, 1936); *Monday Morning* (*Ponedelnik sutrin*, 1966); *Daisies* (*Sedmikrásky*, 1967); *Ladies Choice* (*Dami kaniat*, 1980); *Hammer and Sickle* (*Serp i molot*, 1993); *Hipsters* (*Stiliagi*, 2008); *Mission London* (*Misia London*, 2009). More films are used as a context of the ones reenacted and might be reenacted in the future. Among them are *The Man With a Movie Camera* (*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*, 1929); *Detour* (*Otklonenie*, 1967); *The Attached Balloon* (*Privarzaniat balon*, 1967), *Bastards* (*Vybliadki*, 1999); *Gloss* (*Glyanets*, 2007) and *Miracle* (*Chudo*, 2009). They are more expensive as productions and involve the participation of many people. Since I am working without any budget for this project, I have asked people to volunteer for acting. This has not only economic reasons, but I wanted to develop relationships with the actors before they act; and spend more time of informal, not project oriented cultural exchange. Therefore most of my actors are my personal friends also, who know more about my cultural origins and personal experience, than someone, with whom I would have had only professional relations. More reasons for this artistic choice are discussed in Chapter Five.

The focus on several countries is determined by two reasons. The first is personal—I am born Bulgarian and the films I review are part of my personal history. I also have a personal relationship to Soviet and Russian film, because I have been working during most part of my career with Oleg Mavromatti, who is a Russian artist and filmmaker. Besides that, the film histories of these countries are culturally and historically connected. Filmmakers reflected these connections in different ways--some of them were educated in the same film schools and followed the conventions of this scholarship. Others preferred to oppose the connections between these countries and intentionally

developed relations with other film histories. However this intention, as a counter-reaction is another way of reflecting the very connection they are trying to avoid. Other specific past and current cultural and political connections among these countries are also reasons to choose them. In the previous historical analysis I tried to address some of them. Since the analysis of these connections is quite complicated and needs additional attention, I would prefer to act like an experimenter and see how these connections and juxtapositions will be perceived by the audience originating from these countries. The experience of the art piece by them is actually my attempt to reconsider these relations and reinterpret them without preliminary conceptualization.

3. Conclusion

Sometimes reading is not enough to understand what people think. Seeing and acting can help. During my four years of work on this project, I went through variety of ideas about how to communicate my anxieties and concerns related to contemporary gender issues. As a visual artist, I believe my strongest communication tools are the visual ones. My dissertation is intended to make visible the dependence of cross-cultural communication on verbal language and successful translation. Body language and the physical experience can overcome some of the difficulties faced by language translators, but exposes others. That is why I focused on the use of these particular methods of expression, to illustrate the textual part and to bring it to another level of perception, where subtleties of art language contribute to opening another dimension, for facilitating the perception of gender performances.

The research subject—post Cold War gender performances—has been reviewed and examined in variety of ways in order to better understand contemporary processes: some of them progressive and some reactionary. The interconnectedness between gender and sexual identity, politics, economics and technology has been investigated by film examples and body actions or reenactments. Most of these examples incorporate concepts of all these spheres. When seen simultaneously, they create more profound understanding of contemporary gender performance.

During this research I have spent time watching many films and talking to some of their creators and audiences. This research gave me rich material for work, and I hope I was able to reveal this richness dialectically. Perhaps many of my findings will not be relevant in the future: they will remain tied to particular historical situation. However, I hope they will give a starting point for threads of thought and categories that can further be explored in variety of ways. Each of the categories such as “techno utopias” or “sexuality” deserves separate research on the topic. One topic that I regret I did not have the opportunity to explore and represent in detail is the theme of “eroticism juxtaposed to pornography.” I have mentioned the several discussions on Bulgarian magazine *Kinoizkustvo*, in which only men participated. However, unexamined remained the crucial role of sexist and homophobic analysis of sexual intercourse for restrictive

stereotypes about women's behavior and sexuality in general in Bulgaria, which these discussions represented. The topic of rape and violence remained untouched. In parallel to that, underexplored remained the evolution of representation of sex in film from the beginning of Perestroika to current consumerist and religiously conservative society. Representations of sex as social protest in the Soviet films from the 1980s and 1990s shifted towards consummation of sex as a commodity, and objectification of female body intertwined with restrictive requirements on women's virtue in the 2000's Russian films. This process is partly seen by comparison of researched films like *Detour* and *Miracle*.

Underrepresented is the topic of inter-ethnic relations and race (except touched vaguely in analysis of film *Circus* and *Hipsters*). Both Russian and Bulgarian cinema is rich in examples where this theme is on focus. For instance in the amazing Ivan Andonov's film *Roof* (*Pokriv*, 1978), in which Pepa Nikolova (the actress who played Tony in *Monday Morning*) is a Roma woman, who is in love with a Bulgarian truck driver. Focus on this topic could have ended in more intentional collaboration with people in color in the reenactments.

Unrevealed and under-recorded in the text remained the rich material, I have collected, addressing gay identity and homoeroticism. These films were created mostly during Perestroika or are representative of independent and experimental cinema – both in Russia and Bulgaria. Perhaps, especially in Russia, where LGBTQ rights are continuously violated and identity of this sort is widely considered “not-normal” in both medical and social terms, the existence of these topics only in independent and experimental film shows a hardening heterosexual conservative tendency. In Bulgaria I found difficulties scheduling an interview with actor and director Marius Kurkinski, who has created some of the most unforgettable gender-bendy characters in film and theater. He was both director and leading actor in his only film, *Diary of a Mad Man* (*Dnevnikut na edin lud*, 1996), which is emblematic on this matter. Kurkinski openly speaks in the media about his homosexuality. His identity, however, is mostly discussed as a sensation, in otherwise quite homophobic tabloid Bulgarian press, and doesn't necessarily promote respect to LGBTQ people. I have spent quite a bit of time trying to convince him to give me an interview, and, I have told him, it will be about “gender in

film,” and is for a doctorate dissertation, not a tabloid press material. Finally, on August 8, 2011--the day we were supposed to meet, he sent me a text message stating: “Unfortunately there is no sense to make this interview. I simply don’t have necessary, pressing (*nalezasti*) words.” This is how, I lost my hope to talk with perhaps the only one openly gay Bulgarian film director (who otherwise willingly speaks to tabloids), had faced an indefinable (to me) obstacle, the meaning of which I can only speculate.

Another topic, which seems to me underdeveloped, but quite urgent, is the continuous rejection of women, engaged in women-related activism or art, to accept feminism as a notion that describes their work. To a large extent, this rejection traps their activity in essentialist premises and ignorance about other women identities and critical practices. This tendency restricts opportunity for solidarity and effective actions for defending women’s rights. Gender scholar, Krasimira Daskalova, points out that the:

...women movement in Bulgaria is entirely patriarchal and oriented towards traditionalism, confirming Foucault statement that there is no power that exists without some element of confirmation and submissiveness on the side of the oppressed.⁶⁹

This statement was made back in 1998, and since then many things had changed – particularly in the LGBTQ activism, which in Bulgaria was pioneered and still led predominantly by women.⁷⁰ However my second unsuccessful attempt for an interview confirms that Daskalova’s statement is still relevant. I didn’t succeed to make an interview with prominent actress and university professor Tsvetana Maneva. Her numerous female characters in film (for instance in Binka Zeliaskova’s film *The Last Word* (*Poslednata дума*, 1973), she also played Mrs. Wrestler (Pehlivanova) in *Ladies’ Choice*), which is about women political prisoners) were to me a convincing evidence, that she is quite consciously engaged with women causes. She was also active participant in politics before 1989 as a member of the 7th and 8th National Assembly of Bulgaria and a member of the Plenum of Culture. Therefore I decided to describe in

⁶⁹. Krasimira Daskalova, “kakvo da bude za damata?” [What would the lady prefer?], *Kultura*, 9 (2018) March 6, 1998, accessed April 28, 2012, http://www.kultura.bg/media/my_html/2018/damata.htm.

⁷⁰. Examples are the former activist organizations BGO Gemini, and Bilitis, <http://www.bilitis.org>, staff and board consist mostly if not entirely of women.

detail my research when inviting her to the interview; something that I never did in such detail and in a written form for any of my other interviewees. Surprisingly, this preliminary introduction appeared harmful. Maneva said she is not interested in the topic of gender in film and that feminism is not of any interest for her. I asked her on the phone to at least reflect on some of the unforgettable female characters she had created on screen. She answered, that she is not interested in speaking about these old characters, because she is working as a theater actress now and is far away from cinema. I continued insisting that she at least share some thoughts about women in contemporary Bulgaria. She said that the only thing she can say is the following:

Who creates the warmth and comfort in your home? The mother. This is what the woman is; nothing can exist without the vitalizing touch of the woman. We are all dead without it. You can include this in your dissertation!

So, I am including it. This emotional and touching statement however reflects very little about women's gender identity and simplifies the whole very complex picture of gender relations and performances. The dependency of gender performances on political and cultural contexts, technology and self-perception of the members of the researched societies is difficult to see in this statement. I hope my work had contributed to complicating the "mesmerizing image" of the "vital feminine touch," and had revealed a more complicated picture, a variety of identities and their relationship, through the exposure of the already existing quite impressive palette of gender performances in film. I believe that my contribution to gender studies, although atypical, is informative to the extent that is capable of creating anxieties in other people, who can elaborate on the same subject and contribute to a society welcoming for all.

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Appendix A: After the Fall Videos

Mp4 formatted video files are available publically on Youtube and Vimeo and on digital disk labeled *Boryana Rossa: After the Fall*:

Rossa, Boryana Dragoeva. *Reenactment: Stilyagi 2008*.

Direction by Boryana Rossa and Oleg Mavromatti. Camera by Oleg Mavromatti.

Edit by Boryana Rossa. Music by Chris Skinner, Victoria Kereszi and Andrew Lynn. Acting by Chris Skinner, Adam Zaretsky and Victoria Kereszi.

Production by Boryana Rossa and Oleg Mavromatti.

12:05', 522 MB, on data disc. Also available at <https://vimeo.com/41884287#at=0>.

Rossa, Boryana Dragoeva. *Reenactment: Daisies 1967*.

Direction by Boryana Rossa and Oleg Mavromatti. Camera by Oleg Mavromatti.

Edit by Boryana Rossa and Oleg Mavromatti. Acting by Angela Washko.

Production by Boryana Rossa, Oleg Mavromatti and Olga Timofeyev.

11:58', 529 MB, on data disc. Also available at <https://vimeo.com/36790855>.

Rossa, Boryana Dragoeva. *Reenactment: Monday Morning 1966*.

Direction by Boryana Rossa and Oleg Mavromatti. Camera by Oleg Mavromatti.

Edit by Boryana Rossa. Acting by Angela Washko and Jim deSeve. Interviews with

Irina Aktasheva and Hristo Piskov. Production by Boryana Rossa and Oleg

Mavromatti. 26:51', 990 MB, on data disc. Also available at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=w4bFbiaRGuQ.

Rossa, Boryana Dragoeva. *Reenactment: Ladies Choice 1980*.

Direction by Boryana Rossa and Oleg Mavromatti. Camera by Oleg Mavromatti.

Edit by Boryana Rossa. Acting by adam Zaretsky, Chris Skinner, Victoria Kereszi,

Soyo Lee, Nao Bustamante, Brandon Costelloe-Kuehn, Mike deSeve, Lea Donnan,

Daniela Kostova and Paolo Milanti. Production by Boryana Rossa, Oleg Mavromatti and Daniela Kostova. 24:14', 990 MB, on data disc. Also available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Qo_-t5fVMO0.

Rossa, Boryana Dragoeva. *Reenactment: Hammer and Sickle 1994*.

Direction, camera and edit by Boryana Rossa. Acting by Adam Frelin, Kara Jeffs, and Alex Young. Production by Boryana Rossa. Shoot at The Contemporary Artists Center, Woodside. 9:34', 398 MB, on data disc. Also available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=wsplPvv94S0.

Rossa, Boryana Dragoeva. *Reenactment: Mission London 2010*.

Direction by Boryana Rossa. Camera by Kathy High and Boryana Rossa. Edit by Boryana Rossa. Acting by Alejandro Borsani, Geri deSeve, Lea Donnan, Paula Gaetano, Kathy High, Victoria Kereszi, Soyo Lee, Jack Magai, Joshua Thorson and Kian Tjong. Production by Boryana Rossa and Olge Timofeyev. 9:32', 382 MB, on data disc. Also available at <https://vimeo.com/41891411>.

Rossa, Boryana Dragoeva. *Documentation of EMPAC installation 2012*.

Camera and edit by Boryana Rossa. Shoot at Experimental Music and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), Troy, NY. 7:06', 267 MB, on data disc. Also available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0PKY10k1Kw&list=UU0o-a2qA65F58otMaaB8eYA&index=1&feature=plcp>.

Appendix B: After the Fall Program

After the Fall

Video installation by Boryana Rossa in collaboration with Oleg Mavromatti

This multichannel video installation examines "gender performance" in film after the Cold War through re-enactments of scenes from selected cinematic works. These films are from USSR, Russia, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia and span the period from 1920s to the end of the 2000s. By reading these films through the lens of contemporary feminist and gender theory, Boryana Rossa seeks to understand what are some of the transformations of gender concepts in post-socialist countries. Working with actors, Rossa has created reenactments of the following films: Monday Morning (1966), Daisies (1967), Ladies Turn (1980), Hammer and Sickle (1994), Styliagi (2008), and Mission London (2010). In the installation, two video screens display both the original scene and the re-enactment.

After the Fall also explores gender performance cross-culturally, situating the research in a global context. For instance the actors who participate in the reenactments are from the US, which is intended to integrate issues of cultural translation into the process. The film characters are interpreted through the cultural and political prism of each of the participants. The process of creating this project relies on a critical exchange of ideas, where the re-enactment is treated as an interpretation, rather than a copy of the chosen scene. Most of these reenactments were made in close collaboration with the actors. Finding commonalities, rather than cultural differences is the goal.

In keeping with Michel Foucault's view that power is a productive force in society, Rossa tries to analyze how similar oppressive gender power structures can occur irrespective of the particular political and ideological context. She seeks to represent also individual and collective reactions to these oppressive formations through gender performance.

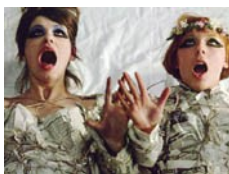
The theoretical and historical research for *After the Fall* is part of Rossa's dissertation for the [Rensselaer's doctoral program](#) in Electronic Arts.

1950's Subcultures and Gender. McCarthyism/Stalinism



This reenactment is a comment on an epoch in which power structures created repressive apparatuses both in the capitalist West and the communist East. The installation features instructional movies from Stalinist Soviet Union and from the US. The Russian feature film *Stilyagi* (2008) (a.k.a *Hipsters* for international distribution) is a contemporary comment on the same time period. The subculture "stilyagi" (a Russian appropriation of the English word "style," in Bulgaria they are called "swingi") is the subject of this film situated in a larger historical context, which symbolically embodies youth resistance to moral and political conventions. Parallels to stilyagi in the West are phenomena such as Teddy boys and girls, or Rockabilly. Gender roles are reviewed through the perspective of the repressive ideological rhetoric and the resistance against it.

1960's Sexual Revolution



The Czechoslovakian film *Daisies* (1967) is one of the milestones of the Czechoslovakian New Wave cinema and can also be qualified as "Surrealist." In a stylized grotesque form it features the rebellion of two girls against the societal conventions and expectations for "proper" female behavior. The film's aesthetic and concept are very contemporary, even now. The reenactment therefore almost blends with the original.

1960's Internal Critique. Leftist Dissidence



The period of transition in Eastern Europe from socialism to capitalism created the stereotype that the dissidents were mostly people who protested against communism in favor of capitalism.

Conservative right-wing figures like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his influential book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, had become emblems of “democratic” dissidence. The dissidents from the left, who protested against anti-democratic and hypocritical realization of their ideals, existed from the very beginning of the establishment of the communist rule. Their work and life, if not misinterpreted as “pro-capitalist,” have been buried and forgotten due to the general proliferating perception of globalizing capitalism as an equivalent of democracy. The film *Monday Morning 1966*, not shown in Bulgaria until 1989, is one of these misinterpreted artifacts. The main character Tony is an embodiment of their political protest, which is intertwined with a critique of the patriarchal society that projects its values on the construction of political power. In this film, female sexual rebellion, which is typical in 1960s film worldwide, is not portrayed as merely girlish naughtiness. It is linked to questions about the betrayal of ideals, including the ideal of gender equality and women's emancipation, both fundamental principles of the communist program. The reenactment deals with the difficulties of translating these complex relationships and meanings to different culture and time.

1980's The “tender man” and the “manly girl.” Explorations of the philistinism of patriarchal society



The comedy *Ladies Choice* (1980) is a film about men's problems in a society based on traditional gender roles. When talking about patriarchal values and traditional gender roles, it is often taken for granted that they are only favor of men and women who want to submit to them. This film shows a vulnerable man, who cannot find his place in this scheme, although he really wants to. Exploited by women, who have married for money, he seeks escape with the “manly girl,” the only one who is independent. Although appreciating this strong woman's independence, he is incapable of accepting it. He is

trapped by patriarchal rules and his own submission to them. The reenactment shows variety of characters that are commonly found in many societies.

1990's The end of the Cold War and the beginning of the cultural and economic "shock therapy." Backlash against women's emancipation and feminism



The Perestroika period (mid-1980s to early 1990s) is a time of dramatic shifts in political and social values. When looking at the films from this period, Hammer and Sickle (1994) for example, there is visible a tendency to eliminate the varieties of previous socialist practices and to generalize the socialist period as "Stalinism." Negatives and positives of the Soviet era are joined together, depriving the viewer from having alternatives to the current form of neoliberalism that is promoted as being "married" to democracy. In this film, besides "Cold War-style" anti-communist propaganda, we see the presentation of three important "statements" that lead to: a regression in regards to women rights; a technological backwardness; and homophobia. These statements are against the use of technology by women (driving tractors, being scientist, or filmmaker); the participation of women in "male" professions viewed only as "masculinization of women"; and the representation of a sex-change as an evil and "unnatural" experiment, only possible as a brainchild of diabolic leaders like Stalin. The reenactment looks at the final embodiment of all these concepts.

2000's Historical and gender atavism on all levels of society. Historical woman as a self sacrificing volunteer



Post-colonialism creates conditions for an increase in local nationalisms. Traditional patriarchal values are viewed by the disempowered countries as properties of their mythologized and mighty past. The Bulgarian comedy Mission London (2010) looks at this complex relationship between global politics and local gender performances. The reenactment elaborates on these complexities.

CREDITS:

Directors: Boryana Rossa and Oleg Mavromatti

Camera work: Oleg Mavromatti, Boryana Rossa, Daniela Kostova, Kathy High

Editing: Boryana Rossa and Oleg Mavromatti

Music and lyrics of Stilyagi-song: Chris Skinner, Victoria Kereszi and Andrew Lynn

Production assistant: Olga Timofeev

Actors: Alejandro Borsani, Nao Bustamante, Brandon Costelloe-Kuehn, Geri deSeve, Jim deSeve, Mike deSeve, Lea Donnan, Adam Frelin, Paula Gaetano, Kathy High, Kara Jeffs, Victoria Kereszi, Daniela Kostova, Soyo Lee, Andrew Lynn, Jack Magai, Paolo Milanti, Chris Skinner, Joshua Thorson, Kian Tjong, Angela Washko, Alex Young, Adam Zaretsky.

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