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Transformative Translations: Cyrillizing and Queering

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> "We are all immigrants in the land of microelectronics. And we will always speak with our accents from the pre-computer era, while this is the mother tongue for the children. They have to learn this language with love and confidence." – Bulgarian cinema preview, 1985

At the 2000 CeBIT, the International Computer Fair in Hannover, then chancellor Schröder proposed the German Green Card Initiative as an attempt to attract international IT specialists to a country sorely lacking in the highly skilled labor force necessary to remain globally competitive.[1] The first such Green Card was issued in August 2000 to an Indonesian computer expert, but the plurality of Green Card holders (39%) come from Eastern European countries. One of these countries, Bulgaria, is the focus of the 2004 documentary *Copy Me—I Want to Travel* by Brigitta Kuster, Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz. Two of the film's declared interests are to explore "the view on the German Green Card from the other side of the border" and "to change perspectives."[2]

Why Bulgaria? The documentary informs us that under the communist dictatorship of Todor Zhivkov, Bulgaria developed a competitive computer industry. In 1982 it outstripped the Soviet Union, as well as many Western countries, including Germany, in the mass production of cheap personal computers, by successfully reverse-engineering the now legendary Apple II. The Bulgarian model, the Pravetz-8, was named after a small town near the capital Sofia, chosen as location for the computers' mass-production to no small degree because it was Zhivkov's birthplace. The Pravetz generated national pride and, thanks to a massively implemented high-school education program, created new generations of students whose "mother tongue," if one is to believe the cinema preview used here as epigraph, was the language or code of computer programming. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the Bulgarian economy, these programming skills have remained largely unused. Many Bulgarian computer specialists emigrated to find work in other countries. Others crossed the border not in person, but by writing computer viruses that traveled across the globe. In this area, too, Bulgaria was ahead of every other nation: in the nineteen-nineties it was home to the most innovative and prolific virus writers worldwide.

Kuster, Boudry and Lorenz offer a queer feminist look at transnational labor by focusing on female computer programmers in and from Bulgaria. Their research for this film begins on the Internet.

WATCH CLIP 1[3]

While the visual track shows a color printer printing out a photo of a man in rear view who works on a Pravetz-8 computer, the voice-over comments, "we find the first image of the copy, the Bulgarian Pravetz 8, on the Internet." The filmmakers look for material in virtual space. The next shot shows a book featuring the same photograph. A comparison with the image from the internet reveals that the photo originally included a woman looking over the man's shoulder. Someone did not make it across the line between real and virtual space: the female IT

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[2] Pauline Boudry, Brigitta Kuster, Renate Lorenz, *Copy Me—I Want to Travel,* color, Germany 2004, 68 minutes, Bulgarian/English/German; version with English subtitles distributed by Women Make Movies.
[3] http://german.berkeley.edu/transit/2006/61213.html

specialist is not part of the image. What was reality in socialist Bulgaria is lost in the postcommunist global virtuality of the web. Is it simply a strange accident that women again appear to be tied to an historically and spatially circumscribed physicality which they are incapable of transcending in a new (postcommunist) era and a different (virtually global) space?

As recent US-American and British research on women and computing confirms once again, information technology, artificial intelligence research, and the computer gaming industry function largely as technologies of gender. The high-tech sector not only produces and markets hard- and software, but also relentlessly re/produces and promotes a binary and hierarchical gender system.[4] Cheris Kramarae, for example, identifies "playing on the computer [… as] a key factor in the perpetuation of existing modes [of gender]—in the reproduction of men as masculine men, and as supposedly superior computer experts."[5] Against this backdrop of the masculinist computer industries of the West, the documentary traces the role of women in the history of the Bulgarian computer industry. It explores whether and to what extent the socialist utopia of the equal status of women did indeed become reality.[6]

How does their feminist approach constitute, as well, a queer perspective? And what does "queer" mean in the German context and for the makers of *Copy Me – I Want to Travel*? The word "queer" has only fairly recently been incorporated as a loan word into the German vocabulary. It has not here gone through the transformation—particular to the American context—from hate speech, to reclamation, to perhaps trivialization. But in traveling from English to German the term acquires layers of meaning that it didn't necessarily have before. The word is copied and in the process mutates.

Queer has left most of its baggage of injury and reclamation at Germany's border and resonates in German with its kin *quer* (adj.: "cross," "transverse," "oblique;" adv.: "crossways," "across"), with which it is sometimes playfully substituted.[7] The recent book title *Quer durch die Geisteswissenschaften* (*Queer/Across the Humanities*) and the name of the organization of lesbian and gay theologians *Kreuz und Queer* (*Cross and Queer/All over*) offer examples for such word play. The borrowing of the English word, and its mischievous confusion with the German homophone, in turn infect *queer* with the various meanings of *quer*. Affected by its travel across linguistic borders, *queer* implies and indeed foregrounds in German a movement across boundaries that in English would most often be expressed by the prefix *trans*.[8] In keeping with these resonances of *queer* in German, the film's queer approach consists in highlighting the intersections of transnational and transgender issues faced by female employees in the IT sector.

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[4] I use the phrase "technology of gender" in the sense given it by Theresa de Lauretis. For further elaboration, see De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

[5] Cheris Kramarae. Review of *Women, Work and Computing* by Ruth Woodfield and *Unlocking the Clubhouse: Women in Computing* by Janer Margolis and Allan Fisher. *NWSA Journal* 15.2 (Summer 2003): 207.

[6] "In relation to these images, a second utopia comes to mind: the one about equal rights for men and women," from *Copy Me—I Want to Travel*.

[7] The OED identifies the link between *queer* and *quer* as an illegitimate family relation: "Queer, a. Commonly regarded as a. G. *quer* (MHG. *twer*, see THWART), cross, oblique, squint, perverse, wrongheaded; but the date at which the word appears in Sc. is against this, and the prominent sense does not precisely correspond to any of the uses of G. *quer*."

[8] One of the particularities of the German context is, of course, that the Berlin Wall was the most salient border in its national imaginary. Literary and filmic texts have often used the Wall as a figure for the barrier between genders and sexualities (examples range from Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* to Helke Sander's *Redupers* to the belated American version of this trope, John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*). After the fall of the Wall, the line of transgression might have shifted further East to non-German members of the former Eastern bloc. This might inform the decision of queer feminist filmmakers like Boudry, Kuster and Lorenz to turn to Bulgaria.

The filmmakers's several collaborative and individual projects emphasize that this traveling across national, linguistic and gendered borders necessitates a more or less strategic self-distancing from prescribed subject positions and therefore enables a critical performance of such positions.[9] This traveling across, or *durchque(e)ren*, thus has the potential to turn into a *durchkreuzen* (a synonym of *durchqueren* that also means "to thwart" and "to erase"), that is to say a thwarting and even perhaps an erasing of these positions.[10] Kuster, Boudry and Lorenz are particularly interested in practices of translation that expose, instead of covering over, their own inadequacy as exact replicas. They look for strategies of replication that skew (*queren*) or fake the original (in the sense of rendering it fake) thereby calling into question the very idea and authority of the original.[11]

While the filmmakers clearly pursue a queer agenda, they do so less by making queerness the topic of their documentary work (representing queers, queer life or queer sex on screen). Rather, *Copy Me—I Want to Travel* attempts to queer the conditions of vision and the modes of representation that the documentary genre affords, by reworking its specific system of the look.[12] While queer film making and film criticism has for some time now tapped the active and passive valences of the look in fiction films (the camera's active, almost transitive look, the characters' active looks and passive look, and the spectators' passively active looking on), documentary filmmaking, because of the particular epistemological assumptions that the genre either entertains or has to reckon with, demands an analysis and reformulation of its own.[13] Against notions of documentary realism that emphasize either a passive recording or an active construction of reality, Kuster, Boudry and Lorenz create a cross-eyed vision that does both at

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[9] See *Die Deutschlandtür geht auf und gleich wieder zu*, eine fiktive Biographie – nach Gesprächen mit Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Theaterproduktion für die Volksbühne Berlin (Prater), 2002, Regie: Renate Lorenz, Brigitta Kuster, Pauline Boudry; *Reproduktionskonten fälschen! - Heterosexualität, Arbeit & Zuhause*, eds. Pauline Boudry, Brigitta Kuster, Renate Lorenz, Berlin: b_books, 1999; *München – Sofia,* video presented at the Kunstverein München, March-June 2004; "Échange sexuel dans le contexte du travail," in k-bulletin nr.3 <kollektive/arbeit>. Pauline Boudry also makes queer political interventions with her electropop postpunk band *rhythm king and her friends* (other band members: Linda Wölfel and (until 2005) Sara John) .

[10] For the play on these synonyms, see Renate Lorenz: Selbstfabriziertes – Heterosexualität, das Kommando und die Liebe zur Arbeit, in Beatrice von Bismarck and Alexander Koch, eds, *beyond education: Kunst, Ausbildung, Arbeit und Ökonomie*, Frankfurt/ Main: Revolver 2005: 77-92: "Kann man sagen, dass es sich bei ihren Wünschen um ein *queeres* Begehren handelt, da es die heterosexuelle Norm und die darin zugewiesenen Positionen durchkreuzt?" (89-90, underline: my emphasis). Lorenz here discusses Rumania Tsekovas' precarious shuttling between programming like one of the guys and reproducing heterosexual femininity as the only female programmer in her company.

[11] Unlike most queer discourse and queer theory in the US, German reflections on the term "queer" tend to locate its critical potential in the term's archaic usage (referring to counterfeit money). See, for example, the article on "queer" in the German version of wikipedia: "Mit der parallelen Bedeutung von *queer* (engl.), beispielsweise in Falschgeld, also queere Lebensentwürfe als unechte Kopie der Heteronormativität, kann durch die positive Neubewertung auch die Existenz des 'Originals' Heterosexualität an sich hinterfragt werden" (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queer, visited 9/15/05).

[12] For an analysis of the "system of the look" see Lauretis, "Film and the Visible," in *How Do I Look?—Queer Film and Video,* Bad Object-Choices, eds., Seattle: Bay Press 1991: 223-64.

[13] For discussions of queer constructions of vision through film and video, see "Lesbian Looks: Desire, Identification, Fantasy," in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film,* ed. Ellis Hanson, Durham: Duke UP, 1999: 129-364; *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video,* eds. Martha Gever, Prathibha Parmar and John Greyson, London/New York: Routledge, 1993*; How Do I Look?—Queer Film and Video,* Bad Object-Choices, eds., Seattle: Bay Press 1991; Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on lesbian and gay film,* London/New York: Routledge: 1990.

the same time, while also keeping in view their own acts of looking.[14] The film, thus, "change[s] perspectives" in the double sense of (a.) constantly shifting between the active and the passive look, and the subject and the agent of the documentary, as well as (b.) ironizing and re-imagining the way we see by translating perceived social norms into a queer-feminist idiom.

The queer perspective of this film, thus, crosses looks with views, and aesthetics with politics. In this article, I will analyze how the film pursues a queer politics and intervenes in the discussion of transnational and post-industrial labor from a queer perspective by calling attention to compulsory transgender performances at the work place and by coding hardware-pirating and virus-writing as queer strategies. Then I will discuss how the film develops a queer aesthetics of documentary filmmaking by providing a medium of exchange between the three filmmakers and three computer programmers in Sofia, by foregrounding the filmmakers' more or less unconscious subjection to fantasies, and by constructing a cross-eyed look that queers the audience.

Gender Re/Production, Fake Labor and Manipulated Balances

The title of the documentary, *Copy Me—I Want to Travel*, evokes the two above-mentioned meanings of *queer* when it speaks of a desire to cross borders and solicits a copying—like viral reproduction—that might just leave a straight economy inoperable. The title is a quote. It repeats a string of a computer virus written by Dark Avenger, pseudonym of the most prominent Bulgarian virus writer and the second focus of the documentary. Dark Avenger solidified her reputation in 1992 by creating the so-called "mutation engine," a toolkit that turns ordinary viruses into polymorphic viruses (viruses that change their appearance with each transfer).[15]

The film validates her malware and her self-reflexive discourse as sophisticated and witty deconstructions of normative economies and epistemologies. It turns Dark Avenger into a queer hero.[16] Kuster, Boudry and Lorenz pursue an uncommon documentary strategy by queering a virtual persona instead of presenting a real queer. What is more, they mark their image of the queer hero Dark Avenger as a fantasy and, when the off-screen voice of Brigitta Kuster asks whether Dark Avenger's "computer viruses [were] directed against the entry of the Western

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[14] Kathleen McHugh contends that "Queer filmmakers perhaps have an edge in experimental, reflexive nonfiction because of their experience living in reflexive and rhetorical subjectivities. Thus this work presents a particularly rich field for investigating effective tactics in experimental non-fiction film and video production in general, because it interrogates representation both in relation to the medium and in relation to the subjects of the work." While her discussion focuses on the films and videos of John Goss, Joyan Suanders and Bill Jones, this analysis of *Copy Me—I Want to Travel* supports her thesis. Kathleen McHugh, "Irony and Dissembling: Queer Tactics for Experimental Documentary," in *Between the Sheets, In the Streets,* eds. Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997: 224-240.

[15] In using the feminine pronoun to refer to Dark Avenger, I am complicit with the film's insistent gender re-imagining of Bulgaria's most famous virus writer.

[16] Since the simultaneous emergence of computer viruses with the AIDS virus in the nineteen-eighties, computers have become veritable "sex machines," mass-reproducing and transmitting diseases in entirely unnatural ways. Just as young adults need "safe sex" education and access to condoms, computer users need "safe computing" know how and antivirus software, lest their high-speed casual encounters on the world-wide web incur fatal infections. See Joost Van, "Viral Hauntings: A Phenomenology of Cyberrisks," gsb.haifa.ac.il/~sheizaf/AOIR5/286.html, accessed 10/5/05.

economy in Bulgaria," they explicitly link their fantasy of Dark Avenger to their investment in socialist forms of resistance against the interests of capital.[17]

With the mass production of the Pravetz began the mass campaign for computer literacy at the high-school level. Over a close-up shot of the words "children" and "skills" from a 1990 New York Times article on the threat of computer viruses from Bulgaria, the voice of Renate Lorenz expresses hope for explicitly socialist hackers who might attack capitalist high-tech economies and heteronormative epistemologies.[18] Yet, marking as fantasy their own fascination with socialism as a queerer culture than Western capitalism, Kuster, Boudry and Lorenz have to make room for the idea that socialist reality might not have complied with their fantasy. They do so by considering a queer critique of socialism, which slackens the bond they established between socialist and queer countercultures. Did Dark Avenger emerge out of the logic of socialist education? Or was Dark Avenger a queer accident, perhaps even the sign of an active resistance against the communist command economy? At one moment in the film, the voice of Renate Lorenz suggests the latter, as she describes the computer education campaign as "something which doesn't just accomplish the plan, but creates an excess," a surplus of knowledge and skills, an excessive repetition that turns against the socialist norm.

I would like to take the queer re-imagination of socialist education a bit further than the film and propose that the footage from the 1985 cinema preview evinces a queer logic that accommodates and prefigures the advent of Dark Avenger. The epigraph contends that computer language "is the mother tongue for the children. They have to learn this language with love and confidence." This rhetoric is rather strange. Apparently, the socialist education system hopes to produce children who love computers like mothers and who receive from their loving computer-mothers the self-confidence necessary for a productive life. By employing the bourgeois nexus between national education and motherly love in the realm of computer science and computer education (the "mother tongue" of microelectronics), the cinema preview creates monsters: half-human descendents of techno-mothers. Dark Avenger is a product of this education: a digital persona who lives in "the land of microelectronics" and replicates there without sex. When she proclaims: "The American government can stop me from going to the US, but they can't stop my virus," she at the same time copies and perverts the obligatory parental desire that one's children will one day have it better than oneself.[19] Like children who might offer their parents remote access to a barred goal, the fruit of her labor, her virus children and grandchildren will allow the virtual persona Dark Avenger to enter the United States across a border that she is unable to

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[17] We do not know who hides behind the pseudonym, and the ominous name certainly invites fantasies. Yet, other participants in the documentary (Vesselin Bontchev, for example, or the computer programming teacher of Sofia's science high school) claim absolute certainty of knowledge about who is and who is not Dark Avenger (both say, "Todor Todorov;" one that he is Dark Avenger, the other that he is definitely not Dark Avenger). Meanwhile the filmmakers create an explicitly imaginary account of Dark Avenger which is meant to challenge perceived reality.

[18] Lorenz's voice imagines the virus writer playing with the Western gaze and turning it against the West: "Dark Avenger—sounds like an ironic commentary on the [Hollywood] imagery of the Cold War."

[19] From Sarah Gordon's interview with Dark Avenger, quoted in the film. Full text at www.research.ibm.com/antivirus/SciPapers/Gordon/Avenger.html: "I think the idea of making a program that would travel on its own and go to places its creator could never go, was the most interesting to me. The American government can stop me from going to the US, but they can't stop my virus."

Dark Avenger dedicates Mutation Engine to Sarah Gordon, an American psychologist and computer scientist expert in profiling computer criminals and now a Senior Research Engineer at Symantec who participates in Homeland Security initiatives (she has a web site tellingly named "badguys.org").

cross in person. There, via hyper-accelerated reproduction, she will be able to do real damage in virtual space.[20]

While Dark Avenger thus has no interest in applying for a Green Card—be it from the States or from Germany—many citizens of Bulgaria (though far less than Schröder's government had hoped for) were working in Germany on a Green Card at the time the film was made. The German Green Card strategically replicates an American institution. Schröder and his consultants inscribed the German initiative into the mythic promise of the American dream by giving it the English name "Green Card" (not for example *Arbeitserlaubnis für Computerspezialisten*).

Literally, the German Green Card is red: red ink on white paper. A "Communist Green Card," Antonia Vlaykova jokingly remarks, inviting us to consider whether German policies continue to be pulled in opposite directions by capitalist interests and socialist commitments. Vlaykova probes the document with visible fascination when she realizes it must belong to someone and that this someone might be in trouble without it. Her worries are immediately assuaged when the document's lack of ontological heft is revealed: "Ah, it's a copy, it's not the original." The copy brings relief in this case because it preserves the original in its place and safe with its rightful owner. But the original German Green Card is already a copy, a copy with a noticeable difference from its US American template: the German Green Card, at the time the film was made, was a work permit valid for only five years, while the American Green Card is a permanent work permit. This difference contributed to the failure of the lesser copy. [21] Was the German Green Card not American enough? Or was it not red enough?

The filmmakers interviewed Bulgarian women working on a Green Card in a Munich based IT company. The interviews address how migration, gender, and sexuality shape labor conditions of female foreign workers in the German computer industry. The filmmakers selected three of the interviews and traveled to Sofia, Bulgaria, in order to discuss the material there with three IT professionals: Zlatka Katzova (who is overqualified and underpaid for the work she does; she has studied microelectronics and was trained to design microchips, but now she simply mounts them on circuit boards; the wage for this kind of labor doesn't cover the rent, so, at the age of thirty-five, she lives together with her parents in their extremely small apartment), Rumania Tsekova (who seems to have the most creative and demanding job of the three; she says she doesn't notice time passing when she works; she often stays in the office programming until early in the morning) and Antonia Vlaykova (a computer programmer who seems to either have or make available more time off the job; she participates to a greater extent than the other two in the making of this film and is also involved in an anarchist group that organized a demonstration for the reduction of working hours).

The last sequence of the film shows a dinner party: the three filmmakers from Berlin and the three computer scientists from Sofia sit down and socialize in the same garden where they had discussed the Munich interviews at length.

WATCH CLIP 2[22]

On the dinner table stands a bottle with the label, "An 80 hour week is a rule not an exception." This is a quote from an interview with one of the Munich software engineers. A

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[20] Computer terrorism remains a blindspot of this film. The hacker mentality is endorsed as a (post)socialist critique of US-style capitalism, but anti-imperialist critiques and islamist terrorist acts are not considered.

[21] In 2005 the German Green Card Initiative was declared unsuccessful (i.e. unable to attract the expected number of highly qualified IT specialists to work in Germany). In its new and reformed version, permanent work permits are granted to highly qualified individuals and the program is not restricted to the IT sector.

[22] http://german.berkeley.edu/transit/2006/61213.html

somewhat intoxicated Rumiana Tsekova proposes to replace the label with one that reads, "A 100 hour week is a rule not an exception." Computer programming is largely immaterial labor, where the traditional separations between home and workspace as well as work and leisure time collapse, since certain tasks tend to occupy the programmer's mind even when the workday proper is over.[23] In addition, the film reveals, female programmers perform what the filmmakers call "sexual labor."[24] Over and above the work they are being paid for—more or less—they are subject to the labor of constantly responding, as strategically as possible (if this is at all possible) to gender, sexual and often ethnic interpellations.

The several conversations among Zlatka Katzova, Rumiana Tsekova and Antonia Vlaykova expose the trials and travails of compulsory transgender performances at the workplace. In the masculinist world of IT work ("One imagines software engineers as men who desire women and who constantly reproduce and display this desire"), female engineers are under order to pass as men if they want to receive recognition for their work.[25] Rumiana Tsekova: "Every day I see the male world and I have to survive in this world. Frankly, it is about my survival. When I showed up there for the first time, I was told that I mustn't wear a skirt there. That I must dress like a man, with trousers. […] 'Ok,' I said and when I showed up in the summer wearing a dress, everybody laughed and said, 'no way, today you are a woman.' I answered, 'so until now, I was a guy?' 'Yeah,' they said, 'you are not a woman, you are a guy. You are one of us.'" The exchange shows that a woman cannot be "one of us," because software engineers are guys. The message is clear: a dress makes a woman and good code makes a man. Antonia Vlaykova: "I have male colleagues, for example, and they treat me as an equal, but if they talk to me about women, they ask me: 'Did you ever see a code that was written by a woman? You know, that's something disgusting'" Obviously, Antonia passes as "one of the guys"; otherwise the question wouldn't make sense. If she were a woman, she would of course have seen code written by a woman: her own. Rumiana Tsekova's and Antonia Vlaykova's examples evince that, despite the demand for transgender performance, a hierarchically organized binary gender system and a corresponding compulsory heterosexuality remain in place, and paradoxically undergird this quasi-queer practice. Their male colleagues would not be blind to the femininity of female programmers if it weren't so clear that only men can be good programmers. The fact that the gender binary remains in place makes women's positions at work extremely precarious. The talk of disgusting women's code—a rhetoric that extends stereotypical fears of a fantasmatic female physiognomy (menstrual blood, slime, softness of flesh) onto the products of women's labor—reiterates and reinforces the threat that at any point these particular, female, performers of masculinity (of course the obligatory talk of disgusting programs written by women is no less of a performance of masculinity) can be identified as women and therefore as bad programmers.

Antonia Vlaykova, Rumiana Tsekova and their female colleagues in both Bulgaria and Germany, and probably in most other national contexts as well, find themselves in the double bind of having to reproduce traditional gender norms *and* pass as "one of the guys." For women working in a foreign national environment—in Germany for example—exoticist and orientalist

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[23] See Doreen Massey, "Masculinity, Dualisms and High Technology," in *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Duncan, London: Routledge, 1996:

[24] Pauline Boudry, Brigitta Kuster, Renate Lorenz, "I cook for sex," Introduction to *Reproduktionskonten fälschen! - Heterosexualität, Arbeit & Zuhause*, Berlin: b_books, 1999: 6-35.

[25] Lorenz, *Selbstfabriziertes* 84, my translation.

attitudes are thrown into the mix of paradoxical interpellations.[26] For these women, the workload easily triples: computer work, sexual labor, ethnic labor. Under socialism, the saying went that women have to carry three watermelons under one arm, having to be good activists, good wives and mothers, and good workers. Doriana Moneva, the chemist who set up the production of the Pravetz circuit boards, explains that, despite the claim to equal status of men and women, reality looked and continues to look different: women work more, be it the additional reproductive labor at home—restoring the family members' labor power and raising new citizens—or the reproduction of gender norms and ethnic stereotypes amidst the conflicting demands to both identify with and repudiate a marked gender position and ethnicity.[27] One scene shows the three filmmakers looking in stunned silence at three large watermelons sitting on the desk, as if wondering how else to convince us that, in this predicament, strategic mistranslations or, in the filmmakers's terminology, practices of "manipulating reproductive balances" (*Reproduktionskonten fälschen*) are absolutely vital.

The film offers several models for such a shift of emphasis from real work to fake labor, and from a demand for the recognition of efforts to a manipulation of re/productive balances. In each of these, socialism and queer politics are symbolically linked. One model is presented visually through photos from the eighties of women workers in the Pravetz circuit board production facility, while the audio track declares that "the women in the picture don't work." Indeed, two different photos show two women workers holding a large circuit board while smiling at each other. Obviously their work there consists mainly in the production of female same-sex sociability. The voiceover continues, "In these photos the socialist utopia that technology should take the whole workload seems to have been realized." The dinner party at the end of the film is arranged literally under the sign of the Soviet worker's slogan "They pretend to pay us and we pretend to work." The sequence starts with the filmmakers hanging these words, spelled out in pink and red decorative letters, above the table while an upbeat instrumental by *Rhythm King and her Friends* starts up. The pink mafia colors the stage and twists a socialist topos into a mode of resisting the demands of post-industrial capital.

For the most elaborate model of faking labor, manipulating balances and using the gesture of reproduction for transformative translations, we return to Dark Avenger. One particular virus not mentioned in the film is Dark Avenger's "doctor.exe," a virus masquerading as an antivirus program. Dark Avenger rejects the charge of producing a fake: "As for doctor.exe, it's not fake, it really does the job as it says it does" (ibid.). This is an interesting claim. It only makes sense if one understands the attribute "fake" not as "illegitimate" or "counterfeit" but as "disingenuous" or "fraudulent." A fake doesn't keep his promise; he doesn't actually do what he says he does. This is precisely the accusation Dark Avenger levels against anti-virus software: "anti-virus products are as useless as viruses" (ibid.). In general, both might be worthless, but this particular virus that masquerades as an anti-virus does what it says it does. It keeps its promise. Genuine and fake exchange positions and it becomes difficult to tell them apart. We could say that Dark Avenger fakes the antivirus program in the sense that she exposes the fakeness, that is to say insincerity, of common anti-virus programs while establishing her own creation as reliable. Like queer money, which questions the capacity of the stamped portrait to transmit value, the counterfeit "doctor.exe" challenges the legitimacy of the copyrighted and expensive anti-virus software. It does so in a context where, like queer sex, virus writing is

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[26] In Bulgaria, ethnic subjectivities such as ethnic Bulgarians, Turks and Roma are to be negotiated.
[27] This is another instance where the film momentarily disinvests its fantasy of queer socialism and makes room for a critique of socialist reality.

attacked as an unproductive practice that interferes with the economy of legitimate reproduction.[28] The battle rages over reproduction and the line that separates legitimate from illegitimate, authorized from unauthorized, real from virtual, queer from natural reproduction.

Dark Avenger implicates the officers of capitalist gender technologies in her counterfeiting strategies. Her main target is Vesselin Bontchev, director of the Laboratory for Computer Virology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and one of the main interviewees of the documentary. Both Bontchev and Dark Avenger are internationally renowned top players in their field. They have built each other's fame and, as Dark Avenger likes to point out in her Foucauldian analysis of Bontchev's legalistic discourse, by establishing an industry of antivirus technology in Bulgaria, Bontchev actually participates in the distribution and even the production of computer viruses. The documentary, rather astutely, has Maria Nikolova, one of Bontchev's employees at the Laboratory for Computer Virology, read from a computer screen a statement by Dark Avenger posted on a bulletin board system: "At this point I'd like to express my gratitude to my propagandist, the graduate engineer Mr. Vesselin Bontchev. He gives me a lot of publicity. He has made, intentionally or unintentionally, a substantial contribution to the distribution of my viruses." Dark Avenger playfully underlines her point by writing a virus that attaches itself to the string "copyright by Vesselin Bontchev." Now any antivirus program written by Vesselin Bontchev could carry and spread Dark Avenger's virus. Virus writer and virus hunter copy each other in an attempt to defeat one another. Dark Avenger seems to enjoy the irony of their mutual embrace, while Bontchev—at least from what he projects in the film interviews—does not.

In interviews with Renate Lorenz and Antonia Vlaykova, Vesselin Bontchev likes to draw clear distinctions—between right and wrong, original and copy, male and female, propriety and perversion, self and other. As somebody who grew up in socialist Bulgaria and then successfully built a multinational career in a global market economy, he is emphatically invested in separating capitalism from socialism, and distancing himself from Bulgaria.[29] For Bontchev, virus writing is a socialist practice: a logical consequence of the socialist disregard for private property. To his mind, the state failed to foster appropriate ethical standards by sanctioning the cracking of Western technology. State officials then made matters worse by using names that didn't correspond to reality. What was in fact stealing, according to Bontchev, was officially downplayed as "cyrillizing." Bontchev supports his adamant position that stealing is wrong with the rather extreme analogy that it is equally unjustified of poor people to steal food just because they are hungry—an untenable argument it seems at first, until one realizes that after having successfully crossed the line from victim to beneficiary of the global economy, he is indeed deadly serious about his views. Antonia Vlaykova, who tries to argue with him, leaves the arena with the comment, "it depends on which side of the barrier one is on."[30] Mobility apparently has

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[28] For an analysis of the discursive link between counterfeiting, usury and sodomy since the Renaissance, see Will Fisher, "Queer Money," *English Literary History* 66.1 (1999): 1-23.

[29] Asked whether Dark Avenger has won the rivalry between the two, Bontchev responds, "No, […] he is unhappy and still in Bulgaria." In addition to his tenure as the director of the Laboratory of Computer Virology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bontchev did research at the Virus Test Center in Hamburg, co-founded international organizations such as CARO (Computer Antivirus Researchers Organization) and VSI (Virus Security Institute), and currently works for FRISK Software International in Reykjavik, Iceland.

[30] Her comment has to be read against the background of a factually existing famine in Bulgaria. According to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) statistics, 11 percent of the Bulgarian population was undernourished in 2000-2002. With other Eastern European countries, undernourishment lay at 3 % of the population. The number in Bulgaria reflects a rise of 3 % after the 1996 "grain crisis," when the interests of global

its limits; not everyone was as lucky (or as effectively promoted by Dark Avenger) as Vesselin Bontschev to make it over to the other side.[31] Yet even Bontchev's mobility is limited, in the sense that he cannot return, but has to distance himself symbolically from everything Bulgarian and/or socialist.

The Berlin filmmakers are interested in the implicit parallel between cyrillizing and queering. Cyrillizing suggests not a theft but a transcription or translation, a traveling across a linguistic border: a queer/*quer* naming.[32] The Bulgarian practice of copying Western technology would then be doubly illegitimate: Bontchev considers it improper not only to clone the Apple II computer without permission, but to also describe this act as translating instead of stealing. The improper naming seems worse to him than the unlawful act. Apart from the fact that one is an illegal, the other a sanctioned, transfer, stealing differs from translating in that it preserves the transferred object intact while translations are always transformative (despite evident investments in the complementary and equally reductive ideas of translations as either overall faithful or utterly untrustworthy).

This brings us to another sense of queer, namely the interest of queer theory not only in the transformative potential of language, but in the possibilities of transforming linguistic usage. Queer theorists have carried deconstruction's analysis of performative speech further. While speech acts (like name-calling or pronouncing two people married) draw their force from repetition, their success or failure remains for that same reason provisional. They work only as quotations of earlier speech acts of the same sort and as anticipations of similar ones to come. As such, speech acts are dynamic and unstable since each (re)iteration can potentially introduce a shift in meaning. Perceived as a threat to the binding force of speech, this instability occasions a rigorous discipline of covering over the citationality of speech acts with an air of originality.[33] But the same instability attracts queer theorists interested in undoing, at least partially, the discipline of this concealment and opening a space for transformation in repetition: a space for translation.[34] The practice of cyrillizing that Bontchev so defames fascinates the filmmakers because, as much as it is a dictatorial, state-sponsored, nationalistic instance of name-calling (in this case calling the process of reverse-engineering "cyrillizing"), the culture of this speech act seems capable of relaxing the rigor of obscuring its citationality. At the intersection of reverse-engineering, transcription and queer naming, "cyrillizing" literalizes the process of repetition and transformation inherent in each speech act. The linguistic act turns the copy of the Apple II into the original Pravetz 8. At the same time, calling this kind of original production "cyrillizing" marks it as a copy, or at least as a translation. While the Pravetz was officially hailed as an original Bulgarian product, contrary to the expectations of the filmmakers it was no secret to anybody in Bulgaria at the time that the Pravetz was an Apple clone. One did not preclude the

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capital exacerbated a natural grain shortage due to flooding, by forcing the export of grain that was sorely needed at home in Bulgaria. www.fao.org/faostat/foodsecurity/MDG/EN/Bulgaria_e.pdf, visited 10/4/05.

[31] The female IT specialist (as a type) did not make it, for example. See my discussion of clip 1.

[32] The Pravetz-8 was not a mechanical copy of the Apple II. The handbook provided with the original Apple II (called "the red book") included a large amount of technical details. To fill in the missing information, Bulgarian engineers had to take the Apple computer apart and try to reconstruct how each element worked. This process of reverse engineering introduces an element of transformation into the replication; the operation called "cyrillizing" translates the original PC into a different context.

[33] See Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" 226-27 (in *Bodies that Matter,* New York: Routledge, 1993: 223-242)

[34] For a discussion of queer translations of intimate alliances, see Will Bishop, "The Marriage Translation and the Contexts of Common Life: From the *Pacs* to Benjamin and Beyond," forthcoming in *Diacritics*.

other—a cross-eyed perspective was common. Contrary to their own episteme, as shaped by Western democracy—where, in order for the designation "Bulgarian product" to be upheld, the reverse-engineering of the Apple PC would have to be kept secret, and the Pravetz naturalized as a Bulgarian product (that is to say, its citationality and the history of its production would have to be obscured)—in the Bulgaria of the nineteen-eighties, it was possible and even common to simultaneously maintain two mutually exclusive truths.

Here, the copy makes a difference. Having just explained the process of reverse-engineering the Apple II, Zlatka Katzova remarks that "this was a very interesting job: to see that something is developed from scratch, which helps a lot of people." The copy is a copy that is developed from scratch. As such, it makes a difference in a lot of peoples' lives: in the lives of school children who find their electronic mothers, of adults who detect an accent in their own speech, of computer programmers who exist in excess, and of queer filmmakers (and possibly spectators) who recognize in all of it models for their own practices of manipulating reproductive balances.

A Cross-eyed Look

Traveling to Sofia with the interviews recorded in Munich, the filmmakers open a two-way-street of information. On the one hand, they leave familiar territory and expose their preconceptions of Bulgaria and Germany to "the view […] from the other side." On the other hand, the information gathered in Munich, about the conditions and experiences of women who decided to cross the border in the other direction to work in the computer industry in Germany, travels back to Sofia and becomes available to those who might find themselves contemplating a similar move.

The footage of the Munich interviews is not directly included in the documentary. Instead, the soft- and hardware engineers in Sofia—Zlatka Katzova, Rumiana Tsekova and Antonia Vlaykova—re-enact parts of the interviews. This is one way for the Bulgarian interlocutors to play an active role in the film. Here they act, in other scenes they interview, often they analyze—in any case, they are not just there to provide or authenticate information. Kuster, Boudry and Lorenz construct this film not as a traditional documentary, but more as a laboratory, as a medium of experimentation and conversation across borders that queers, i.e., *durchquert* and *durchkreuzt*, traverses and transforms mutual prejudices, expectations and fantasies.

For the Bulgarian participants of *Copy Me—I Want to Travel*, the act of playing the Munich interviews is a form of traveling. Over the course of the film, we witness how the re-enactments spur discussions between Katzova, Tsekova and Vlaykova that turn into collaborative analyses of the position of women in the high-tech workplace and of the advantages and disadvantages of labor migration for women. Playing the interviews helps to generate a transnational and "collective experience" of the role of the female IT specialist, which Zlatka Katzova, Rumiana Tsekova and Antonia Vlaykova either don't have or cannot inhabit at work because there they are lone fighters: either the only female programmer in their company or in an overdetermined rivalry with other female software engineers.[35] The experience of a transnational community opens a critical space that enables both the protagonists and the viewers—so the filmmakers hope—to "*strategically* redefine and reinstall the position of women as a queer-feminist one."[36]

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[35] See Lorenz 86-87 for her adoption of the Foucauldian notion of "collective experience."
[36] Lorenz 92, my translation.

For us viewers, the fact that Katzova, Tsekova and Vlaykova reenact the Munich interviews adds a layer of mediation that disrupts our ability to clearly identify the subjects and their voices. There is an element of faking or falsifying in the reproduction of these interviews that undoes the documentary genre's authenticity effect. We are not simply and directly informed about the working conditions of Bulgarian computer engineers in Germany; rather we become queer participants in a conversation across borders, with the documentary as its medium. As its audience, we find ourselves slightly off center, only indirectly addressed. This unsettles the way we view what we see. We are neither passively looking on nor yet actively participating in the conversation, but we intersect with it at a slanted angle—forced to adopt an oblique (*quer*) look. By resetting the epistemological frame to one that de-hierarchizes and de-naturalizes the interview, *Copy Me—I Want to Travel* thus begins to queer the spectators.

As indicated earlier, the filmmakers do not obscure but rather highlight the fact that they travel to Bulgaria with expectations, projections, and fantasies of socialist Europe. Kuster, Boudry, and Lorenz have prepared their trip with extensive research on Bulgaria, its computer industry, and the women working in this industry, and still, they notice that precast images structure their interest in Bulgaria. Even when these projections do not meet the intellectual and critical standard of their research, they are integrated into the documentary; precisely because it is a concern of this film to show that we reproduce cultural stereotypes and norms despite our conscious intentions, and that only through strategic repetition might we be able to shift them.

Projections organize and interfere with the documentary gesture of mapping reality. The filmmakers' car travel from Sofia to Pravetz begins with a shot through the windshield of the highway which cuts through a forested hilly landscape. On the dashboard lies a map, i.e., a ready-made image of the landscape. In this shot, the perspective of the spectators is lined up with that of the car's occupants, whom the reverse shot establishes as the filmmakers (Brigitta Kuster, Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, and Antonia Vlaykova). Only a sliver of the actual map is visible at the lower edge of the screen, but almost half of the windshield is covered by the reflection of the map. What we see "through" the supposedly transparent apparati that enable, protect, and limit our view (camera and windshield) are not the outside reality, nor the scientifically appropriated version of this outside reality (map), but the reflections of our own ready-made images.

Another, more flashy way of incorporating collective Western fantasies of Eastern Europe into the documentary material derives from the popular culture of the West during the Cold War. Occasionally, the documentary drifts into drag scenes (gender drag and ethnic drag), in which the filmmakers themselves somewhat awkwardly reenact scenes from various classic James Bond movies, a popular culture that is driven largely by anxiety over technological supremacy and mixed with a heavy dose of machoism and orientalism. The scenes draw attention to the subjectivity of the filmmakers, to their prejudices and anticipations as they set out to shoot this film. The amateurish quality of these variations on familiar Bond motifs marks them as performances. The filmmakers silently invade the space of the documentary like strange and overdetermined apparitions, while the electronic music of *Rhythm King and her Friends* creates a similarly unrealistic and eerie audioscape. These quotations of vastly popular spy movies make visible, and render uncanny, how reality is invaded and shaped by big narrative cinema's production of fantasies: in this case, Cold War images of the Soviet East and sexist images of technology-supported macho masculinity and replaceable femininity.

WATCH CLIP 3[37]

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[37] http://german.berkeley.edu/transit/2006/61213.html

Sitting on the steps of the building where, in the early eighties, the Pravetz was developed, Zlatka Katzova explains to Pauline Boudry how the Apple II was cloned. While Zlatka Katzova speaks, a stern-looking woman in a grey skirt suit, white dress shirt, and tucked-in tie enters the screen. Under her arm she holds a thick grey folder labeled, in enormous letters, "Secret." This apparition interweaves several different circulating images. Most viewers will identify the figure as a citation of Colonel Rosa Klebb, the defected Soviet Intelligence agent and lesbian villain in the James Bond movie *From Russia with Love*. In the Bond picture, Rosa Klebb conveys the Cold War fantasy of Soviet obedience and brutality. She is played by the seasoned Lotte Lenya, whose iconicity, particularly her Germanness, palpably affects the emblematic status of her character (as is evident in another version of Rosa Klebb: Frau Farbissina [and her German accent] of Mike Myers' *Austin Powers* series). The entanglement of Lenya and Klebb in the original image gives this citation an interesting twist: the German filmmaker, Brigitta Kuster, plays an iconic Soviet villain whose evil is carried by the Germanness of the original actress. The marked recurrence of the German in this fantasy of the Eastern-European highlights how the self frames and inhabits the scene of the fantasy.[38] As a sullen, old, and villainized lesbian character, who is killed by the young and beautiful love interest of 007, Rosa Klebb communicates sexual and gender norms by negative example. Brigitta Kuster looks rather masculine in other scenes of the documentary where she appears as one of the filmmakers, and would be described as butch by a queer audience. Thus, when the butch Brigitta Kuster wears a skirt and nylon stockings to impersonate Rosa Klebb, she plays in drag. This second-order drag—a masculine female-bodied person in female drag—not only bends standard ideas of gender, but comments on such bending and, therefore, introduces an explicit difference to the closeted, or rather staged as closeted, i.e., open-secret, lesbianism of Rosa Klebb. When the figure here literalizes the open secrecy of traditional models of lesbianism by wearing the word "secret" under her arm, if not exactly on her sleeve, she also offers a visual commentary on the false expectations with which the filmmakers came to Sofia. They thought that it was a secret that the Pravetz was a pirate copy, when indeed this fact was common knowledge.

Zlatka Katzova, whose explanation of reverse-engineering is interrupted by Kuster's performance, laughs at the filmmakers and their curious expectations. She leans back and closes her eyes as if refusing to see this figure of Rosa Klebb, symbol of the filmmakers' projections. Before she re-affirms the normalcy of the idea of an original copy with a resolute nod of the head, she comments on the farfetched ideas of her interlocutors with another nervous giggle. Just as she might laugh nervously—instead of other more genuine but less acceptable reactions— when she meets a Westener who doesn't know where Bulgaria is.[39]

One of the filmmakers, Pauline Boudry, grew up in Bulgaria but lacks an insider's perspective as well. She, too, has to rely on precast images: a few photos and the memory of a spy film set in Bulgaria, which she saw after her family had emigrated to Switzerland. The visual track shows her family photos from Bulgaria. Her voiceover comments, "I only had a few pictures from Bulgaria. And in the cinema and in TV I looked for images. The first movie, which I saw at the end of the seventies with my family, was called 'Le parapluie bulgare.' It is about the umbrella of a Bulgarian agent. The umbrella held a poisoned capsule that entered the body of the victim like a virus and killed him or her." Her commentary here provides a nexus, which

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[38] For a psychoanalytically informed discussion of fantasy as seeing oneself within the filmic system of the look, see Lauretis, "Film and the Visible."

[39] The chemist Doriana Moneva points out that it was particularly satisfying to impress European and US-American business contacts with their product when "many of these Americans didn't even know where Bulgaria was."

importantly structures the film, between the Cold War fantasies that the filmmakers' enact and modify with their variations on James Bond, and the hacker persona Dark Avenger that they re-imagine and invest with queer and anti-capitalist energy.[40] Indeed, Claudine Boudry plays a typical, ethnically marked spy movie character who doubles as an image of Dark Avenger.

Following an interview with Plamen Vachkov, former director of the Pravetz plant, about his fake attempt to pay for pirated software, the camera pans to the left, closing in on a man in a suit, with a suitcase, standing next to a car, talking to the driver through an open window.[41] A person in a sable coat and sable hat enters from the right, exchanges the suitcase for another identical-looking one and moves to the left. The camera follows and now we can see that it is Pauline Boudry in ethnic drag. The gender of this figure remains ambiguous, which corresponds to the film's gender re-imagining of Dark Avenger. The heavy fur overcoat, fur boots and fur cap are deployed here as stereotypical Eastern-European winter attire, vaguely associated with Bulgaria.[42] Pauline Boudry's voiceover tells us that her family emigrated from Bulgaria to the West when she was a child. Like Brigitta Kuster's gender drag, Pauline Boudry's ethnic drag is a second-order gesture: a Bulgarian émigré impersonating an orientalizing stereotype of the Eastern-European.

While these drag scenes mark the filmmakers' subjection to and involvement in Cold War fantasies about the East, they also already rework or translate these fantasies. "I only have those images. How can I tell a *different* story with them?"[43]—says the off-screen voice of Pauline Boudry, while her version of Dark Avenger walks toward the camera. It is the explicit concern of this film to "change perspectives," to reconfigure our images of Bulgaria, of computer programmers and of women. The filmmakers acknowledge that they cannot straightaway escape the perspective of these collective fantasies, but by copying or restaging them the way they do they introduce a space for critique and transformation. Pauline Boudry as Dark Avenger replaces one black suitcase with another. And yet, the reiteration highlights their difference. While the film montage suggests that this scene is a visual comment on Plamen's story, it also functions as an illustration of the film's own strategy of "chang[ing] perspectives." Plamen's strategy was to pretend that all money is equal. If Microsoft charges three or four percent of the selling price of the Apple II for its software, then Plamen offers to pay the same percentage of the price of the Pravetz in Rubles. One black suitcase for another. The most neutral business accessory (black

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[40] While she draws an explicit link between her memory of this Cold War image of Bulgaria and the hacker Dark Avenger, another association might have influenced the choice of Rosa Klebb as one of the Bond characters to be impersonated: Rosa Klebb had a poisoned folding blade in the tip of her shoe.
The next comment refers again to an anti-capitalist fight by means of electronic technology: "Is the computer virus the Bulgarian umbrella of the nineties?"—This question shows that the "Bulgarian umbrella," in the spy movie of the same name or in Pauline Boudry's memory (see footnote 40) functions as a weapon against the West or against Western agents. In reality, such an umbrella was used in 1978 by the Bulgarian secret police to assassinate the Bulgarian dissident journalist, Georgi Ivanov Markov.

[41] Plamen Vachkov to Zlatka Katzova: "At the fair in Hannover in 1987, a journalist asked me during a press conference, if we pay for the usage of the 'Microsoft' software. And this happened in the presence of the engineers from the 'Microsoft' booth. I then asked one of the engineers how much the programs cost. How much of the percentage is this cost of the selling price of a computer in Europe? He told me the programs are between 3 and 4 percent. I said: 'no problem!' I converted the price into rubles and said: 'We are willing to pay the corresponding amount in rubles and transfer it to an account that you name me.' Of course everybody cracked up laughing, since it was obvious that in European countries and in the world one trades with hard currency, while we in the RGW traded with rubles. That, in short, is the story. After that, I was never asked again why we didn't pay for the software."

[42] That the specifics are lost (both images of the Eastern-European impersonated here—Dark Avenger and Rosa Klebb—are or look Russian) forms part of the general sense, addressed by the film, that Bulgaria is not on the map.

[43] My emphasis—KP

leather suitcase) for the most abstract material manifestation of value (money). And yet it doesn't work (which means, of course, that it works): while one black suitcase might look just like its substitute, the Ruble is indeed very different from the Dollar. Of course, both the selling price of the Pravetz and the value of the Ruble are much lower than the figures Microsoft representatives usually operate with. They can only laugh at Plamen, which suits him just fine. And the film has snuck in a shift in perspective. By repeating the same collective images, projections or fantasies, the film begins to resist and reinvent them.

The filmmakers suggest that their physical travel to Bulgaria and their research there dissolve some of their own prior assumptions and projections about communist Bulgaria. But they do not claim that their preconceived images are revised by an unmediated reality. They emphasize instead that "what [they] can learn about the other side of the Cold War is told in stories," as well. The reality they meet with beyond the home turf of their projections is also— only differently—structured by figures, looks, fantasies and jokes.[44] To "change perspectives," thus, means to translate one story with another, or to maintain both visions in view at the same time. But this is impossible if both eyes focus on the same point in space. Even though binocular vision might create the illusion of depth, we need a cross-eyed vision to produce a fragile and dynamic balance where one story reflects on and revises the other.[45] Inviting the viewers to such a cross-eyed look on gender dynamics in the globalized high-tech industry, *Copy Me—I Want To Travel* opens a two-way street of information, an exchange of looks, a copying and traveling that multiplies and transforms precast images; in short, it encourages a dynamic and precarious mode of mutual recognition.

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[44] Plamen Vachkov's story is particularly humorous.

[45] This cross-eyed vision would be similar to Benjamin's notion of translation, according to which translation allows both the translated text and the original to appear as fragmentary parts of a greater language. See Bishop.