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RE-INVENTING EUROPE: CULTURE, STYLE AND POST-SOCIALIST CHANGE IN BULGARIA
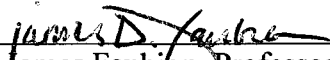
By

Elitza Stefanova Ranova

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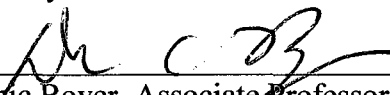IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
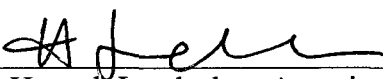REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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ABSTRACT

Reinventing Europe: Culture, Style and Post-socialist Change in Bulgaria

By

Elitza Stefanova Ranova

On the basis of extended field research in Sofia, Bulgaria, between 2004 and 2006, this project provides an ethnographic account of the predicament of art and culture producers after the end of socialism. The end of socialism deprived the Bulgarian intelligentsia from its economic security, prestige, and a sense of clear moral mission. Now young cutting-edge artists, writers, designers, theater directors and other culture producers seek a way out of this predicament and aspire to become moral leaders of the nation. Through ethnographic participant-observation at the lifestyle magazine *Edno,* a mouthpiece for this social segment, and through research radiating from the offices of the magazine to the fringes of contemporary Bulgarian art and culture, this project demonstrates that the new culture producers comprise a social segment in a state of flux, an elite in-the-making. While its future is uncertain—it could solidify in a new dominant faction of the intelligentsia, could disintegrate or could take the shape of a qualitatively new configuration—its present condition sheds light on post-socialist debates about artistic merit, the importance of national versus international recognition, and the changing value of cultural capital. The dissertation investigates how the young culture producers strategically code their artistic preferences and ways of life as "European," and demonstrates that they

strategically capitalize on a historical local anxiety that Bulgaria is deficient and less modern than an imagined "Europe."

The project is indebted to a Bourdieusian understanding of the relationship between taste and social class, and pays close attention to aesthetic preferences in two fields: lifestyle and creative work. At the same time, it departs from Bourdieu in recognizing that while well-suited to account for social *reproduction,* his model is less successful in explaining social *production*: the emergence of new social groups and the re-ordering of existing social relations in the context of rapid social change. The project addresses this problem through the prism of Foucauldian ethics. It suggests that the young culture producers have an at least partially correct understanding of their objective circumstances and consciously reflect on the mismatch between their expectations, and the reality of post-socialist Bulgaria.

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Introduction

This dissertation is motivated by the question, what is happening to art and culture in Eastern Europe after the end of socialism? Much has been written about the political, economic and social dimensions of the transition, but significantly less about the changes in artistic practices and aesthetic preferences. Art and culture before the end of socialism have been studied closely (Konrád and Szelényi 1979; Verdery 1991; Yurchak 2006) as well as the fate of socialist intellectuals after the end of socialism (Boyer 2005; Elfimov 2004; Eyal, et al. 1998; Ninetto 2005) but significantly fewer studies look at the fate of the next generation of Eastern European intellectuals and artists. This is especially true in the case of Bulgaria as the body of anthropological work on this country is tiny. Some of its most prominent themes are village life (Creed 1998; Kaneff 2004), folklore and ritual (Roth and Roth 1990; Silverman 1983; 1992), and women and the Muslim minority (Ghodsee 2005; 2009). Yet historically, intellectuals and artists have had a special place in the societies of Central and Eastern Europe as modernizers and leaders of the nation (Boyer 2006; Daskalov 1996; Eyal, et al. 1998). It is important to ask whether the radical changes following the end of socialism and the rapid market liberalization are affecting the historical role of culture producers, their place in society and the aesthetics of their creative work. The goal of this study is to begin to answer these questions through the particularities of the Bulgarian context.

Specifically, the dissertation suggests that a new generation of Bulgarian culture producers has come into being in the last 20 years and that it struggles to make its presence recognized and respected within the field of cultural production and in the society at large. The character of this social segment is defined primarily by the way in

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which it deals with the competing forces of national belonging, on one hand, and transnational and pro-European aspirations, on the other. This new generation seeks recognition by coding its work and lifestyle as "European" and so superior, and contrasts them to other locally available options that are coded as backward and inferior. In this process, "Europe" is imagined as a standard of normative modernity and as one of the centers for global innovation in culture and style. This proposition determines some of the overarching themes of the dissertation. The text returns over and over to the idea of the nation and the question of its relevance as a framework for the interpretation and evaluation of creative work; to the ways in which "Europe" and the world beyond Bulgaria's borders is imagined by the sons and daughters of the socialist intelligentsia; and to the significance of social privilege in the cultivation of new artistic practices. One of the main theoretical preoccupations of the text is the question of how social change happens, and of how new social segments emerge in conditions of rapid social change, such as those which took place after the end of socialism.

The dissertation describes a new generation of Bulgarian art and culture producers as an elite in-the-making or an emergent elite to suggest that this social segment aspires to achieve an elite status which at present it does not have. In the following chapters, I examine how this social segment comes into being, and I explore the specific practices, preferences and discourses that characterize its members and set them apart from other Bulgarians.

The Setting: A Symbolic and Social Geography

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Most of the field research for the dissertation took place in the capital Sofia, a city of close to two million people. The central part of the city is made up of shady boulevards and streets, plenty of outdoor cafes in summer, and architecture in the style of the Vienna Secession. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the outskirts of the city are taken up by less appealing socialist living blocks. The research started at the offices of the magazine for art, culture and lifestyle *Edno*, centrally located on a chestnut-lined boulevard in immediate proximity to the National Palace of Culture. While mostly focused on the magazine, the fieldwork gradually radiated to other locations around town that I came to know as the usual hangouts of the emergent elite. With notable exceptions, such as the Theater Lab *Sfumato* and the Studio for Independent Culture and Contemporary Art *Dauhaus*, most such places are located in Sofia's center, with many of them no more than a 15-20 minute walk from the offices of the magazine.

One especially significant location is Shishman Street, a long and narrow street that stretches all the way from the Parliament to the narrow water channel that everyone calls simply that, "the channel" (канала), and which roughly marks the border between Sofia's center and the peaceful and expensive Lozenetz neighborhood. Members of the emergent elite usually describe the street as the heart of all that is "cool" and "alternative" in Sofia, and this significance was recognized by a feature-length article and an extensive photographic essay in one of the first issues of *Edno*. This street marks the heart of the symbolic geography of Sofia as imagined by the elite in-the-making.

Next to the usual fare of neighborhood grocery, specialty meat and fish stores, and a few small shoe- and clothing stores, Shishman Steet is the home of some of the typical hangouts for members of the elite in-the-making: *Bilkova, Blaze* and *Club 703,*

which function as coffee shops during the day and bars at night. Here are also several small private galleries and several clothing stores known as places for "alternative" second-hand or new fashion. Just a few blocks from Shishman Street is the Red House Center for Culture and Debate, the cinema for independent film *Odeon*, the undesignated bar *Hambara* (The Barn) which sometimes hosts theater performances and life music, the coffee shop *Apartamenta* (The Apartment), and more. Each of these places tends to attract a slightly distinct set of patrons. In some, such as *Club 703,* one is likely to find people who are slightly older and more established. In others, such as *Apartamenta*, one is likely to encounter college students with their books. In most, however, there is an overlap between the milieu of the emergent elite and representatives of various alternative youth lifestyles. This brings up an important point about the social geography of the city. The rest of the dissertation looks at how the emergent elite relates to various other social segments such as the intelligentsia and nouveaux riches but says little about youth lifestyles. A few words about them are in order here.

The elite in-the-making and various alternative youth lifestyle groups overlap in the physical space of the city as members of these segments frequent the same theater houses, movie theaters, galleries, bars and clothing stores, and shape the character of the settings where this research took place. The overlap can in part be explained by the homologous alternative orientation of the emergent elite and of the representatives of various youth lifestyles. Just as members of the emergent elite define themselves in part through their opposition to dominant modes of production, so alternative youth lifestyles are defined through reference to an imagined "mainstream," which is usually described as engaged in uncritical consumption of mass produced commodities ranging from material

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objects to cultural products such as music and literature. Furthermore, since the cultural production favored by the elite in-the-making is often available to audiences for free or at a low price, young men and women with an alternative orientation and on a limited budged are often among the patrons of such performances, exhibits, etc. The domains of alternative youth lifestyle and of alternative art and cultural production lie on a continuum and overlap in the physical and social spaces of Sofia, and this continuum is not unique to Bulgaria. It is rooted in the post-modern blurring of high and low culture (Jameson 1991), and especially in the appropriations of the latter by the first as another way to question and examine artistic conventions. Just as in the 1980s the world of high fashion, for example in the person of Vivian Westwood, found inspiration in the street attire of punk, so the contemporary art world creates a space for graffiti in the Tate Modern. This blurring of high and low, popular and obscure is part and parcel of the agenda of the Bulgarian emergent elite, and the overlap is one indication of it. Furthermore, as I will show below, the elite in-the-making bears similarity to youth subcultures in one more respect: the importance of "cool."

Research and Writing

As the summary of the chapters above demonstrates, the process through which the emergent elite comes into existence relies heavily on contrasts and foils. The text of the dissertation engages this logic performatively by being similarly organized around a series of oppositions. Almost all chapters contrast preferences and trends that belong to the elite in-the-making to others that do not. Some examples of this are the descriptions

of Elena[1] in chapter two's discussion of theater and in chapter five's exploration of fashion. Another example is the description of the journey of Daniela to Italy in the last chapter. I did not meet Elena and Daniela in the course of research or in any of the usual ways that a foreign researcher may develop friendships and contacts outside of the designated fieldsite. I am tied to them and to other people who appear in the dissertation by my personal history long before I became a graduate student. One of these women is a friend of many years and the other is a neighbor of a relative. My relationship to them and to other personal friends and family affected not only the interactions described in the dissertation but also my understanding of what I saw at the offices of *Edno* and on Shishman Street. While such knowledge is not always made explicit in the dissertation, it nevertheless informs my understanding of how I interpreted my findings in Bulgaria. It also provided the means to begin to perform in writing the foils and oppositions through which the emergent elite comes into existence in the Bulgarian social space.

My personal history in Bulgaria enabled this particular aspect of the research and writing, but it did not translate into a smooth relationship to my informants and especially to people at the magazine *Edno,* where the majority of my research took place. My presence seemingly made the magazine staff nervous, made them stiffen up and made them worried about presenting the right appearance, not only for themselves but also for the magazine as a whole. As people who engage daily in representing others, the editors must have known all too well the tricks and follies of writing about others and must have been worried about the kinds of things I might write about them. However, sometimes I had the feeling that there was more to this than just a concern over the image of the

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[1] The names and other identifying information of the informants who chose anonymity have been changed to protect their privacy.

magazine. I realized this one day when a journalism student showed up and asked to do an internship to fulfill a university requirement. Her request was not denied but was handled in a way that might have something to do with why she never came back.

First, one of the editors suggested that they could spare her the trouble and just issue a note that she had been an intern without her ever having to come back the magazine again. The young woman was not tempted and instead asked to stay for the editorial meeting that afternoon. At the meeting, the same thing happened to her that sometimes happened to me, especially in the beginning of fieldwork. She was formally invited to jump in with suggestions and with comments, but when she did, no one responded. The silence that followed each time she spoke showed disagreement on the part of the editors, but it also made it seem as though her remark was so utterly inappropriate that it wasn't even worth discussing. Still, what she said was quite reasonable, especially for a complete novice.

I realized that this kind of response was not directed at me or at her personally, but that it was the standard fare for any new person with few credentials. People like us threatened to tap into the editors' most valued capital, the magazine's stock of information about what is cool and what is not, without first having proven that we had a contribution to make in return. Famous writers or intellectuals, who sometimes came to the magazine, were courted with cookies and personal attention. Still, even in front of them, the staff members of *Edno* defended reputations, their own and of the magazine as whole. Being partially inaccessible and less than cordial was part of that. I heard established free-lance contributors complain that "everyone on the staff is playing their own game," that the staff was being less than transparent, and so inefficient, in running

the magazine, and that "they act like they are you doing you a favor by letting you write for them."

The silences that met the greetings and comments of outsiders were also a strategy of discouragement, and many times the strategy worked. Like several other aspiring interns and contributors, this one never came back. I kept going back, however, even though I agonized every time at the prospect of awkward conversations and sidelong looks. They never disappeared completely but with time they grew fewer and shorter, and the markers of acceptance grew in number and size. Gradually, I was asked to contribute stories based on my own ideas and was commissioned others; I was invited repeatedly to help myself to coffee and snacks in the kitchen, "because you are one of us now."

Since then I have come to think of the magazine as a factory for the production of one precious good: coolness. What went on in the office rooms was the coining and unearthing of the kind of knowledge that had the power to earn you respect and prestige in the circles of "cool" kids that hang on Shishman Street in downtown Sofia. Sarah Thornton (1996), while writing about clubbing in England, astutely identified the kind of knowledge that generates status and respect in youth subcultures. She draws on Bourdieu's idea that one's place in the social hierarchy is defined by the possession of different forms of capital and the ability strategically to manipulate it: economic, social and cultural capital. So that if you are wealthy, but lack good manners or a particular kind of refinement, you risk not being admitted to the echelons of high society. According to Thornton, in youth cliques and lifestyle currents, material wealth, education and manners matter less than a proficiency in the restricted domain of information about what is cool.

Being cool means knowing about things that most people do not know about: underground parties and undesignated bars; ways of dressing and self-styling that most other people would be unable to appreciate or recreate; and secret little pleasures and vacation spots among other things. This holds true for the staff and readers of *Edno* as it does for club-goers in England.[2]

What happens in the office of *Edno*, then, and by extension in the milieu of the emergent elite, is the handling of cool lifestyle options: the production and circulation of the kinds of knowledge into which "alternative" young men and women may tap selectively in styling their own lives and identities. The resistance against newcomers with questionable credentials is an act of restricting access to this information. The editors try to prevent the devaluation of their cultural capital by making sure that the kind of knowledge that allows them to claim the status of "cool" celebrities is scarce and that it goes only to the right people. This is their most precious commodity, and they trade it wisely expecting equally valuable knowledge in return.

As I will show in the first chapter, the word "cool"[3] was one of the few words (together with "alternative") with which members of the emergent elite described the

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[2] Thornton is indebted to the British tradition of cultural studies and uses the term "subculture," favored by the Birmingham school, while adding a strong empirical dimension to a current of work that traditionally fails to emphasize participant-observation. However, the term subculture is imprecise because it implies a non-existent exclusivity of membership: you are either in or out of a "subculture," while in reality there are degrees and shades of belonging. Furthermore, the term "sub-culture" contradicts the basic anthropological understanding of culture as an experience that is transferable from one generation to another. Subcultures usually have a limited lifespan (think of the succession of beatniks, hippies, disco fans etc. in second half the 20th century). Lifestyle is a more productive term than subculture because it conveys the agency that different actors might employ in constructing the appearance and experience of belonging to an alternative current. An individual's ability to create and perform more or less successfully the markers of a particular lifestyle produces the varying degrees of being in or out, of being popular or of being seen as an impostor.
[3] Members of the emergent elite used interchangeably the English word cool (куул) and the Bulgarian word *gotin* (готин, pronounced g□teen). Outside of the elite in-the-making, the English word cool seems to be used with slightly less frequently than the word gotin, but both are fairly common especially among young people in the cities.

social segment to which they belong. As a shifting signifier, "cool" is about degrees of belonging and about boundary maintenance, and each of the chapters that follow sheds light on a different set of preferences and orientations that are constitutive of coolness and of the specific habitus of the emergent elite. As a researcher and a native Bulgarian, who could potentially have stakes in the game, I had to navigate the invisible boundary that separated the cool from the uncool. This project was enabled but also limited by the extent to which I was able to convince my informants that I had something to offer, and at the same time that I was not a participant in their game and not a competitor.

If I wanted to be included in the casual conversations around the office, to receive a response to my comments or questions during editorial meetings, and generally to be accepted by the staff of the magazine, I had to prove that I was worth it. There were a few things going for me. I hate blow-drying my hair, and I am a helpless wreck on high heels. Incidentally, this glamour-less look was especially favored by the women at the magazine. I am fluent in English and had lived abroad for a long time—all promising indicators that I might know about a few "cool" things that are uncommon in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, other things made me suspect: I exhibited no flare for the retro-1980s style, had a symmetrical haircut, and was virtually ignorant of house music. Furthermore, I studied anthropology, which was better than, say, accounting or business, but still mars you with a suspicion of bookishness. And finally, not only did I come from the United States, instead of Western Europe and the capitals of style like London, Paris or Milan, but also I lived in Texas, and made the cosmopolitan staff of the magazine feel a little sorry for me. So eventually, I was let in the club of the cool kids but was cautiously shown to a seat by the door.

Summary of the Chapters

The first chapter examines the contradictory nature of the new segment of culture producers: while it resembles an avant-garde, it cannot be properly described as such; while it is readily recognized as a distinctive social configuration by both insiders and outsiders, it does not have a name. I suggest that this segment is in the process of becoming, still amorphous and indeterminate, but driven by the ambition to achieve the status of a cultural elite. I introduce the terms elite in-the-making and emergent elite to describe it. These terms reflect that it is far from certain that this segment will ever become part of the cultural establishment but that nevertheless it spends much time and energy to differentiate itself from and prove itself as being more competent than the sections of the Bulgarian intelligentsia which constitute the cultural elite of the nation today. As I will show, the elite in-the-making comes into existence by continuously trying to separate itself from other social segments and by incessantly contrasting itself to others. The first chapter serves also introduces the magazine for lifestyle, art and culture *Edno* which is made by and for members of the emergent elite and which is of central importance for this research.

Chapter two situates the elite in-the-making within the history of the Bulgarian field of cultural production. Drawing on the contrast between two theater plays and the kinds of audiences that they attracted, it shows that the elite in-the-making is characterized by aesthetic individualism and by a distinct anti-collectivist and anti-nationalist orientation. This kind of work belongs to a current of Bulgarian cultural production with similar orientation that dates to the beginning of the 20th century but that

all along has been dominated by creative production which is meant to represent and serve the needs of the nation.

Chapter three begins to examine the ways in which the emergent elite's anti-collectivist, anti-nationalist and transnational orientation plays out in its creative work. By focusing on the production of one fashion photo session, I demonstrate that the creative work of the emergent elite is guided by two related principles: the rejection of nostalgia for socialism, the mythical national past and village life, and the logic of enlightenment (Ossman 2002) which rejects heavy nostalgic attachments and yet constantly calls them into view as a foil.

Chapter four picks up where the discussion of nostalgia in the previous chapter left off, and looks at irony as the other side of the same coin. In considering examples from fashion and fashion photography, this chapter suggests that a preference for irony is a distinguishing characteristic of the elite in-the-making and that it has the power to code certain preferences, such as "glamour," as local and backward, and to suggest that alternatives are possible. While the alternative is rarely defined in specific terms, it usually has the air of being progressive and of foreign origin. If nostalgia is about an attachment to the local and the past, then irony is about alternative options that are linked to far away places and the future.

The next chapter focuses on the transnational orientation of the elite in-the-making. It shows that this segment's anti-nationalist orientation, rejection of nostalgia and preference for irony are directly linked to the way in which it imagines itself as "plugged in" to global currents of global fashion and culture (Appadurai 1996). The chapter examines the nature of this transnational imaginary and the way in which it is

cultivated. I show that it is directly linked to social privilege and is available to members of the elite in-the-making in ways which are not available to other Bulgarians.

Chapter six examines the debate about whether judgments of artistic merit should reflect the contribution that an author or a work makes to the national cause. The chapter examines the production of an issue of *Edno* dealing with "the national inferiority complex," in the words of the elite in-the-making. By looking at the articles which were rejected and those that were accepted for publication, the chapter suggests that by making its anti-nationalist sentiments known, the emergent elite launches an attack on the nationalist orientation of some popular and influential Bulgarian intellectuals as a way to discredit their position, and by extension, them as individuals.

Chapter One: Strangers at Home or an Elite In-the-Making

Осъзнах, че живея в Другата България, а те – в Едната. Че аз съм израстнал като фикус в изкуствената столична среда, в хубава гимназия, в що годе приличен университет, в които идват избрани хора. ... в собствената си страна си на гости в чужд културен свят.

Явор Гърдев, театрален и филмов режисьор (2007)

I realized that I live in the Other Bulgaria, and that other people live in This Bulgaria. That I have been raised like a rubber plant in the artificial environment of the capital, in a decent university that attracts select people... In my own country, I am a visitor in a foreign cultural world.

Javor Gardev, theater and film director (2007)

Javor Gardev's innovative work is frequently associated with an experimental current in Bulgarian theater and with a new generation of Bulgarian culture producers. This quote expresses a sentiment that I heard repeatedly from other creative professionals in Bulgaria. This sense of disconnect from the local Bulgarian environment is simultaneously a source of regret and a source of pride. Culture producers like Javor Gardev frequently suggested that they feel different and isolated from their compatriots and that this is the result of having transcended the limitations of the "backward" Bulgarian context. Similarly, I repeatedly heard the adjective "non-Bulgarian" used as a compliment to describe a level of professionalism, expertise and self-comportment that not only differentiates one from the local environment but also links one to the world beyond Bulgaria's borders and especially to Europe.

In the urban space of Sofia, certain coffee-shops, clothing stores, bars, galleries, theaters, movie theaters, and other kinds of locations are readily recognized as the places for congregation of young artists, writers, photographers, and other creative

professionals. These men and women have similar lifestyle preferences and a penchant for artistic experimentation and innovation. Insiders and outsiders readily recognize that they form a social segment, and they do not have a name for it. This chapter will ask, why this is the case. Who are these young culture producers and what kind of social configuration do they form? And why do they feel like strangers at home?

I will begin to answer these questions by suggesting that this is a social segment of a specific ontological order: a cultural elite in-the-making and in a state of emergence. The interchangeable terms "in-the-making" and "emergence" describe two concurrent and related characteristics. First, this configuration is currently weak and disjointed, taking the shape of disconnected "kernels" or "islands," in the words of its members. It is still too fragmented to constitute a whole that is discernable to the public eye. Second, the very appearance of these "kernels" and "islands" is a reflection of the new practices and strategies which creative professionals develop in order to cope with the changed conditions of cultural production after the end of socialism. In this sense, the term emergent reflects the appearance of a "form a life" that responds to rapidly changing social conditions (Fischer 2003).

When I describe this segment as an *elite* in the process of becoming, I refer to the aspirations of these young men and women to assume the place of the dominant section of the intelligentsia (the cultural establishment in Bourdieu's terms (1993)) which has the power to establish criteria for artistic merit and to confer recognition. The intelligentsia is not homogenous but is internally stratified, with some of its sections more powerful and influential than others. For example, this stratification reflects structural distinctions such as access to positions of power and prestige (Bourdieu 1993; Verdery 1991) as well as

geographic differentiations, with the intelligentsia in the capital Sofia generally holding sway over the intelligentsia elsewhere in the country (sometimes also called "the provincial intelligentsia" as a reference to its location in the provinces but also to its secondary status). The members of the emergent elite are sons and daughters of the socialist intelligentsia conceived broadly and originate from its various strata. Nevertheless, today the young men and women are simultaneously adamant to differentiate themselves from the intelligentsia as a category and to gain access to the privileges and prestige reserved for its upper echelons. Notably, this segment is currently located at the fringes of Bulgarian art and culture.[4] While I describe it as elite, my choice of words is not meant to imply any certainty that it will indeed achieve this status. On the contrary, the future of this segment is far from clear. It may solidify at its current position, may disintegrate, or may morph into a distinctly new configuration.

To clarify, I use the term intelligentsia broadly to include people engaged in creative pursuits in the academy and in the arts as well as some technical experts. In this I follow Roumen Daskalov (1996), who attributes key significance to self-identification considering that "objective identification and treatment of the intelligentsia should not be divorced from its self-perception because it is precisely its setting itself apart from the rest of the society for the purposes of educating, edifying or reforming it that characterized the [historic] Eastern European intelligentsia" (1996:49). As Daskalov further points out, the socialist emphasis on education "blurred ... the distinctiveness of the intelligentsia" and led to "an enormous increase of the technical intelligentsia (engineers, technicians, white-collar workers), which outnumbered the scholarly and

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[4] However, despite some obvious similarities, it cannot be properly characterized as an avant-garde in the historical (Bürger 1984; Poggioli 1968) or the structural sense of the term (Bourdieu 1993). This point is developed in detail in the second part of this chapter.

educational intelligentsia" (72). Nevertheless, some technocrats exhibited the values typically characteristic of the Bulgarian historical and of the socialist humanistic intelligentsia: "a deeper feeling for the national values and the historic heritage, a popularizing attitude towards knowledge, a keen interest in social and political life, an appropriation of some kind of moral authority, an aspiration towards public visibility. (…) in so far as such values were exhibited by scientists or jurists, there is no reason to exclude them from this nucleus [of the intelligentsia]…" (73).

First, the chapter will establish the parameters of the elite in-the-making by considering the ways in which its members think and talk about it. Then it will examine the logic of the process through which the emergent elite comes into being, including a detailed discussion of emergence and the ways in which the segment differentiates itself from other social groups. An important vehicle for this discussion will be the lifestyle magazine *Edno* and its audience. The magazine is widely recognized as a mouthpiece for this segment and is made by and for its members. Because the emergent elite's aspirations are elaborated through creative work as well as through personal taste, this specialized publication's focus on arts, culture and lifestyle is an especially auspicious place to begin this investigation. As I will show next, the way in which the authors of *Edno* imagine their audience indicates the emergent condition of the elite in-the-making.

Edno's audience

One evening I talked about *Edno* to an external contributor, who asked to remain anonymous. This writer was unhappy with the magazine and informed me that *Edno* "doesn't really have an audience." He called the magazine "incestuous" and suggested

that the only people who read it are the people who make it, the people who are featured

in it, and their friends and relatives. According to him, unlike other magazines which first

determine the demands of the market and then try to meet these demands, *Edno* is trying

to create its own audience and is not addressing an already existing one. "They think that

they speak to an existing set of readers but they don't. They are actually trying to create

it."[5] I heard similar complaints from others as well, all pointing to the observation that

Edno's audience is ill-defined. Such accusations correctly identified the peculiar

character of *Edno's* audience.

The magazine appears to address its extended family of friends and relatives

because many of the people who make it are a part of the small milieu of the elite in-the-

making, and many of them in fact know each other. *Edno's* audience is not immediately

recognizable as a social segment because the emergent elite exists in a largely fragmented

state. This point became apparent during discussions with magazine staff about the

character of its imagined audience.

When I asked staff members about their readers, I unfailingly received a response

in straightforward demographic terms: readers who are between 25 and 40 years of age,

well-educated, proficient in foreign languages and new technologies, frequently well-

traveled, and with incomes well above the average of 500 lv per month at that time

(approximately $300).[6] When I inquired further about the audience of the magazine, I

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[5] Coincidentally, this matches almost verbatim one of Bourdieu's characteristics of the avant-garde as a segment that "ignores or challenges the expectations of the established audience and serves no other demand than it produces, but in the long term" (1993:82). This is one of the aspects in which the emergent elite resembles an avant-garde. However, the emergent elite cannot be properly characterized as an avant-garde as I will show later.
[6] I was also told that the magazine seeks to educate Bulgarians in general, to teach them good taste, to inform them which cultural products are worth their time and money and which are not, and in a word to enlighten them about style and culture. However, despite the sweeping scope of these ambitions, actual editorial policies clearly indicated little interest in addressing Bulgarians at large and demonstrated the

was repeatedly told that these are enlightened, "cool" and "alternative" people, the kind of people who are known to congregate in the bars, galleries and shops on Shishman Street in downtown Sofia and in its vicinity, and who frequent the Red House for Culture and Debate, screenings during the Sofia Film Festival, the experimental Theater Lab Sfumato, and the movie theater for independent and low-budget films Odeon, among others. This is where the straightforward answers ended. Definitions of 'cool' and 'alternative' were often circular. For example, I was told that a particular bar in the seaside city in Varna is 'cool' because there one can meet the same kind of 'cool' and 'alternative' people as in the bars on Shishman Street in Sofia. Goods, hangout places and people were 'cool' because they were like other 'cool' goods, hangout places and people. It became apparent that the adjectives 'cool' and 'alternative' are connected to a whole set of distinctions about who is in and who is out, who belongs to the audience of *Edno* and who does not. They escape easy definition because knowing what is 'cool' and what is not separates insiders from outsiders.

Over several weeks, I repeatedly and individually met with two of the magazine founders Georgi Toshev and Irina Hristova, who had since left the magazine. Each of them suggested that we meet in *Klub 703,* a coffee-shop during the day and a bar at night, located on Shishman Street. The place was cozy with black and white photographs on the walls, and a long bar framed by mirrors and dark red walls. Both Georgi and Irina knew most other patrons in the establishment, exchanged nods and greetings and repeatedly interrupted the conversation to chat with this or that person, and to introduce me to people who stopped by our table. Independently of each other, both told me a similar

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targeting of a much smaller group of readers instead. This attitude that only some demographics count is typical of connoisseurial publications in general, in Bulgaria and beyond.

story about the people they imagined as their readers when they created *Edno*. They

envisioned an audience made up of people like the friends and acquaintances who

constituted their personal social milieu and whom they frequently met at *Klub 703;*

people like those who stopped by our table. In Georgi Toshev's words:

> We imagined people, who earn not even 1,500 leva a month,[7] who live on much
> less than that, but who have the inner needs of someone who earns $10,000. In
> other words, one may have aspirations for the higher things in life, without having
> a high income, especially in Bulgaria. (...) I call such people 'people who know
> how to spend their money in good taste.' By taste, I mean that for them it is more
> important to spend 15 leva for a concert, rather than to go and eat in the restaurant
> that is most fashionable at the moment. These are people who have their regular
> hangout places; people who like to travel and who would rather spend money on
> travel than on clothes; people who have good libraries of books and of records
> people that you are likely to see in *Odeon Cinema*; people who do not drive
> expensive cars, and if they do, it's definitely not a Mercedes S-class; people, who
> even when they are eccentric and extravagant, retain a degree of personal
> discreteness and elegance.(...)They will not buy ten pairs of expensive shoes.
> They will buy one pair, but a good quality pair. They do have needs like all
> normal people. But they will not buy a sweater from *Ilientsi*,[8] they would rather
> pay more for a nice sweater. All of us are like that. We are not slaves to brands.

Irina Hristova similarly described people with high cultural and low economic

capital, what in German-speaking Europe may be referred to as *Bildungsbuergertum*:

"young people, educated, who like to read, who know foreign languages; they are

independent and they might be self-employed...They are open-minded and curious,

simply well-adjusted to the times in which we live. They are not snobs." Irina pointed out

that *Klub 703* is one of various social enclaves around the country where one can meet

such people and that these people constitute "social islands" that need to come together

before Bulgaria can transcend its post-socialist troubles:

> So the idea is that there exist these enclaves in Bulgaria. They are cultural, social,
> I don't know [*exactly*] what. For example, there is an office that does great work;
> they produce wonderful things, and they are young, cool and energetic people. Or

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[7] Roughly the equivalent of $900 at the time.
[8] *Ilientzi* is a wholesale market on the outskirts of Sofia known for its low prices.

let's say there are two professors in the National Academy of Science, who are the same kind of people, even though they are older. Here and there, there are islands of such people that are spread out, and I want to know how to connect them in order to change the grid of the crystal and to produce a qualitative change for all of us. Everyone tells me that this takes time, you know, social anthropologists and others, it takes time. But I can't wait.

The image of these enclaves floating like islands appeared over and over again in conversations. The enclaves were described also as "kernels," simply "small groups of people" or, in a recent article in *Edno,* as individual "agents" (Trandov 2009), who need to come together to cooperate in order to achieve their individual goals and to improve the state of affairs for all Bulgarians. These people were also repeatedly described as leaders who explicitly seek to affect change. Victoria Vassileva, a veteran staff writer and editor for *Edno* at the time, summed it up like this: "These are people who believe that they can change the social environment …They are trying to advance a new culture, new music, new style; … They seek to earn some kind of public attention because they are trying to change the environment."[9]

As these comments indicate, *Edno's* imagined audience is characterized not just by the demographic characteristics that I was offered but even more so by sets of lifestyle preferences and attitudinal clusters that include 'good' taste, an appreciation of money as a way to have access to goods that are of "high quality" but are not flashy (hence these people are unlikely to drive a Mercedes S-Class), personal initiative and entrepreneurship, professionalism and expertise, and an orientation towards the future and towards innovation, and change. This audience is imagined as dispersed in fragments which do not yet compose a recognizable social segment and which nevertheless *Edno*

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[9] Similar sense of isolation and of a powerful collective mission has historically characterized the intelligentsia in Eastern and Central Europe (Boyer 2005; Daskalov 1996; Eyal, et al. 1998). In this respect, the elite in-the-making is clearly an heir of the intelligentsia.

addresses as such. *Edno* speaks to the elite in-the-making and in the process seeks to aid its coming together as a unified whole.

Edno's elite agenda

Edno not only addresses members of the emergent elite as its audience but also reflects and promotes their aspirations for greater influence in the field of cultural production. It does so, on the one hand, through its content by giving preference to graphic design and visual presentation that decisively set it apart from mainstream publications, and through a constant stream of texts and images that promote the expressive work of the elite in-the-making. On the other, it promotes the cause of the emergent elite by actively participating in cultural production outside of the media domain. The magazine regularly organizes live events such as exhibits, concerts, performances and workshops. These events have the potential to increase public visibility and acceptance of the emergent elite's artistic innovation.

Edno's elitist orientation was especially prominent in the beginning when it systematically defied the conventional ways which magazines adopt to appeal to a large audience. Usually magazines select for their covers images of celebrities that would attract readers' attention. *Edno's* first nine issues did the exact opposite. The covers featured no image at all, just plain background of a single color (green, blue, yellow, orange, etc.) with the magazine's logo and a few sparse leads to stories inside. (Figure 1.) Eventually, it became clear that the effect of the covers was too alienating even for the magazine's elite audience, and the single-colored covers were substituted by fashion

photography. However, with a few exceptions, the magazine still continues to refuse

images of celebrities on its cover.
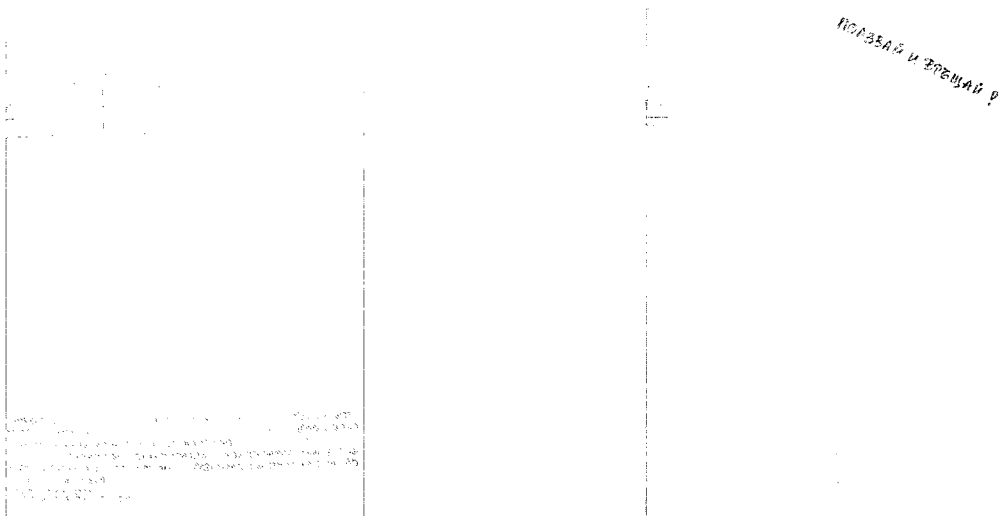
Fig. 1

Like the covers, the magazine's name and logo communicate a similarly

unconventional and elite message. In Bulgarian, *edno* means 'one,' which implies

singularity and uniqueness, and the magazine's logo is the number 1 rendered as a

stylized barcode. The choice to represent the magazine's name with a cryptically depicted

number instead of a word renders the magazine's name potentially ineffable and indicates

that the magazine addresses itself predominantly to buyers who are likely already to

know about it. In addition, *Edno's* price of five leva (about $3) puts the publication at the

top of the price range for magazines. Its name, logo, cover design and price all produce

an effect of opaqueness requiring from potential readers extra effort and confidence in

making the decision to buy.[10]

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[10] Notably, newsstands in Bulgaria are very different from what American buyers have come to expect. Newspapers and magazines are usually sold from street stalls, the publications often covered with a sheet of clear plastic to protect them from the elements and under the watchful eye of a salesman or a saleswoman. Unlike American bookstores where one can pick up and leaf through magazines, the Bulgarian buyer is usually not allowed to look through a newspaper or a magazine until after he or she has purchased it.

Since its inception in 2002, *Edno* has favored long and sophisticated texts on serious topics, as well as a plain graphic design that featured much empty space and little variety in font sizes. As one contributing photographer pointed out, *Edno's* presentation is clearly directed to a select audience: *"Edno* is not easy to sell because they have strange covers which people don't understand. Visually, the magazine is dry; the way texts and pictures are arranged is sterile. (...) *Edno* imposes a certain style that is kind of elitist. They try not to be accessible to everybody which immediately puts them in the category of magazines that are difficult to sell." *Edno* is clearly subjected to conflicting pressures: on one hand it casts itself as an elite publication that shuns the masses and popular appeal. On the other hand, it is still a commercial publication that needs to make ends meet. In trying to strike the delicate balance between distinction and financial survival over the years, the magazine has gradually moved in the direction of becoming more accessible by shortening its texts and increasing the coverage of themes that would appeal to readers from alternative youth subcultures that have a similarly antagonistic orientation to an imagined status quo as do the members of the emergent elite. Nevertheless, the magazine continues to be considered an elite publication by media professionals and by lay readers.

Furthermore, *Edno* reflects and promotes the elite aspirations of the young culture producers by providing regular coverage of their art exhibits, new books, fashion shows, performances and more. It also regularly features narrative portraits of members of the emergent elite and usually frames them as "success stories" and examples of the "best" of what Bulgarian art/music/literature has to offer. For example, an article in *Edno's* issue from September 2005 introduces the band Ambient Anarchist as "the most interesting

stars of the Bulgarian electronic underground" and "one of the best bands in the

Bulgarian electronic underground in the last five years" engaged in the making of "a

combination of 'brain dance,' electro-jazz, electro-funk, hip-hop and trip-hop" (Rajcheva

and Zahariev 2005:40). A different article in *Edno's* October 2006 issue announces the

re-opening of *Studio Dauhaus* after the summer break with similar superlatives. *Studio*

Dauhaus is described as "our favorite independent art space," "the regular, high quality,

hot place for any and all interesting contemporary art in Sofia" (Andreeva 2006). Texts

such as these are a trademark of the magazine. In the words of the magazine's publisher,

Assen Assenov, "We [*Edno*] are always positive; we always write about the things that

we like and that set a good example, and this is one way to try to change the milieu."

In addition to content and design, *Edno* promotes the cause of the emergent elite

by regularly organizing and sponsoring live events. Some examples are the contemporary

dance festival *Sofia Dance Week* in 2007; the series of design workshops and exhibits

Sofia Design Week in 2009; the exhibit of the British contemporary artist Anthony

Micallef in 2005; and the experimental ballet "Interview with Yourself" in 2005 on the

stage of the National Opera and Ballet. I will examine in greater detail only one of these

examples. The ballet "Interview with Yourself" was conceived as an opportunity to

promote contemporary dance in Bulgaria but eventually also took the shape of a

commentary on what was seen as the pitiful state of the institution of the National Opera

and Ballet. The troupe of the National Ballet had enormous difficulties in putting on a

modern dance performance in part because it lacked any training in dance genres other

than classical ballet, and in part because of the advanced age of many of the dancers. Zoia

Vapirova, author of the libretto, described to me her encounter with the dance troupe like this:

> When I got to the Opera, I discovered that there is a ballet troupe of 50 members, and there is no one to dance. It turned out that there are people of retirement age, and there is no other place in the world where people of this age dance. Dancers [normally] retire at 22-23 [years of age]. In Bulgaria, they are on staff until they reach [non-ballet] retirement age. (…) And so they are on the payroll and they are waiting for retirement, and while they wait for their miserable pensions, they can't find a new calling (…) An incredible parody. And so I decided that my only chance is to make them play themselves. (…) . They showed a day of an artist in the ballet. This was the performance: how they came to work, the warm up, the small intrigues among them, the selection, the casting.

The audience for this performance sat on chairs at the back of the stage facing the rears of performers and, beyond them, the empty plush seats where viewers normally sat. To get to their seats, patrons walked through parts of the building that are normally hidden from view and witnessed the dilapidation of the backstage. The performance made the mundane and the everyday its subject, and turned the unspectacular into a spectacle. It put the audience in what surely must have been a troubling arrangement by taking it out of the comfort of the plush red seats, exposing it to the squalor of the dressing rooms, and disrupting its habits and expectations by forcing it to view the backs of the artists and their behinds as they bowed to the empty hall. A break with convention of this kind has been a part of the repertory of avant-garde performers in other countries for a long time; however, it is still much less common in Bulgaria.

Assen Assenov, *Edno's* publisher, attributed the limitations of the troupe and the poor state of the building to state policy and poor management:

> [The Ministry of] Culture needs some very basic reforms (…) The state hasn't even considered the possibility of external producers, who may put on performances in cooperation with the [National] Opera. At the same time, the state gives money only to pay salaries and the power bill. The state budget gives no money to the Opera for performances, for honorariums, for props, etc. The

state prevents the possibility of external productions because it sees the Opera simply as a building. (...)

In addition to that the leadership of the Opera refuses to address this problem. Of course, this leadership was appointed by that same minister of culture. (...) And if you see the executive director of the National Opera and Ballet of the country Bulgaria, you would guess that he is the manager of a Fruit and Vegetable store from the 1980s. It's disturbing. He is a funny little man (чичко) with socialist manners (соцманиер) and no culture, no culture.

This statement clearly reflects the emergent elite's dissatisfaction with state cultural policy and with the people who have the power to distribute coveted state subsidies and to determine what performances get to be put on, how and where. I heard similar complaints repeatedly about other important cultural institutions, such as the National Art Gallery, the National Gallery for Foreign Art, and the National Theater. As the example of "Interview with Yourself" reveals, *Edno's* staff and contributors experience first-hand the problems and concerns of artists from the elite in-the-making. As a consequence, when *Edno* reflects the perspectives and aspirations of the emergent elite it does so not merely as its mouthpiece, but also as a participant in artistic innovation.

The pages above demonstrate how members of the elite in-the-making imagine the social segment and illustrate some of the ways in which the aspirations of the emergent elite are reflected and promoted by the lifestyle magazine *Edno.* The magazine is an example of one of the cultural products that are made by and for members of this segment. Having established these general parameters of the elite in-the-making, next with the help of social theory I will look at how the elite in-the-making is constituted historically and through its relations to other segments of society.

Emergence and the Elite In-the-Making

As already mentioned, the elite in-the-making does not have a name for itself. Insiders describe it generically, as "alternative" or "cool" enclaves, or indicatively through references to specific places, preferences and people. Outsiders reserve different kinds of uses for the word "cool" but adopt "alternative" to describe to some of the same places and people as insiders do.[11] The absence of vernacular name for the elite in-the-making betrays the local recognition that already existing categories such as elite or intelligentsia do not describe the social configuration accurately, and that a new suitable category does not yet exist. Until, if ever, the elite in-the-making becomes an elite, or until it achieves some other stable and recognizable identity, there will be nothing to name but "islands," "kernels" and "individual agents" in a state of transition and potentiality. Some of these islands can be pinpointed on the map of the city, as institutions or informal places of congregation; others are networks of friends and acquaintances. They exist in objective reality outside of my interlocutors' imagination but the power of the imagination to understand them as related and a part of a potential whole is a performative ingredient of the impetus that would be necessary to produce the whole, helping to create that which it calls into existence (Austin 1975).

I suggest that this social segment is in-the-making in the sense that it is in the process of coming together and struggling to create a new identity for itself. It is being brought together by agents' recognition of two important factors. First, young culture producers recognize that their cultural capital has been devalued by the post-socialist transition and their life prospects have diminished. As I will show below, the life

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[11] For an extended discussion of "cool" and the distinctions in using the English word versus the Bulgarian equivalent *gotin,* please see chapter 2.

prospects of people with high cultural and low economic capital decreased significantly after the end of socialism because cultural capital underwent significant devaluation. Second, members of the emergent elite correctly recognize that one auspicious way to improve their prospects for the future is to produce a public identity that allows them to present themselves as agents of progress, "European-ness" and superior professional abilities. In suggesting these powers of recognition on the part of my interlocutors, I propose that agents have the ability to have an at least partially correct understanding of their objective circumstances and that they are capable of producing cultural innovation based on this understanding. In this, I follow a long current of thought in social theory and ethnography (Faubion 2001; Fischer 2003; Foucault 1978; Giddens 1994; Robbins 2004).

Especially applicable here is James Faubion's point that cultural invention occurs from the problematization of a less than a perfect match between reality and one's understanding of it. In examining the work of Aristotle and Foucault, Faubion traces such problematization to the ethical field and suggests that ethical choice involves more than a straightforward application of a "catalogue of rules" to action. He suggests that it requires the use of a practical wisdom through which to choose among abstract rules and decide how to apply them to "the particular here and now of our always somewhat singular lives" (2001:121-122). Importantly, practical wisdom and individual deliberation constitute the space where it is possible to detect a potential lack of fit between existing norms and the demands of life. This is the space where it is possible to recognize the need of adjustments between the two. Such adjustments in the public criteria of ethics, in codes of conduct, and in the rules that separate wrong from right constitute the space of culture

change from within. I suggest that the elite in-the-making emerges from a similar

mismatch between expectations and reality and from a similar need of adjustment.[12]

The elite in-the-making's belief that high social prestige and a certain amount of

economic security need to be guaranteed to individuals in possession of high cultural

capital, as this was during socialism, no longer corresponds to the reality of post-socialist

Bulgaria. The young men and women seek to address this incongruence and produce a

new model of social distinction. They generate a new social configuration that can be

fittingly described with Michael Fischer's term "emergent" as a particular "form of life"

with which actors respond to their rapidly changing late 20th century contexts (2003).

According to Fischer, societies undergoing reconstruction after violent conflict or after

the end of centralized economies are one of the three primary domains where actors

experience a particularly urgent need to adapt their old practices, mental categories and

modes of representation to a rapidly changing environment. (The other two domains

listed by Fischer are the field of scientific and technological innovation, and the altering

of perception by computer-mediated and visual technologies.) The elite in-the-making is

emergent because the specific practices, preferences, and values of its members are

developed in response to the rapid social, economic, and political changes that took place

in Bulgaria after the end of socialism in 1989. If complex societies are based on

"compromise formations" of "emergent, dominant and fading historical horizons," as

Fischer insists following Raymond Williams (2003:37), then the elite in-the-making

belongs to the specific horizon of emergent phenomena and holds out the promise to

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[12] Importantly, while Foucauldian ethics imply that the subject works on the self to achieve a moral state the dimensions of which are known in advance, in the case of the emergent elite this is not the case. The elite in-the-making aspires to the position of an elite but many of the specific characteristics of this new elite are yet to be determined.

generate cultural change by problematizing the difference between the expectations based on previous experience and the actual value of cultural capital at the time of my research.

In taking a closer look at these three historical horizons in Bulgaria, it essential to examine the changes in the value of cultural capital over time in Eastern Europe. Bulgaria specifically appears to follow a trajectory unlike that of countries in Central Europe. Following Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley (1998), I suggest that post-socialist change alters the value of various kinds of capital (that is capital as defined by Bourdieu: social, cultural, and economic) and so alters the life chances of individuals based on the composition of their personal portfolio: "Each individual possesses a portfolio of 'stocks' of different kinds of capital, and when they confront social change they try to reshuffle this portfolio to get rid of forms of capital which are losing value, and convert them into forms of capital which are more valuable" (7). According to these authors, in post-socialist Central Europe "cultural capital is dominant," and the current governing elite is made up of former communist technocrats with high cultural capital in conjunction with the "new politocracy and the opinion-making intellectual elite, many of whom are former dissident intellectuals" (1998:13). Notably, these technocrats and intellectuals are not in possession of significant personal wealth, which leads the authors to conclude that the capitalism in Central Europe is of a particular kind, implemented by technocrats rather than by a class of wealthy private proprietors, "capitalism without capitalists." The members of the socialist elite who lacked the cultural capital demanded by Central European post-socialism lost their privileged position because their political capital fully lost its value.

In contrast, the situation in Bulgaria is quite different. Bulgarian sociologists

agree that the Bulgarian post-socialist transition changed little the composition of the

local political and economic elite, retaining many of the same old figures of power and

wealth and expanding to include newcomers with connections to the criminal underworld

(Kostova 1998; Tilkidjiev 1995; 1998). Nikolai Tilkidjiev points out:

> The transformation of the former administrative and party elite from all different
> levels into a present-day economic elite is statistically overwhelming. This is to
> be expected considering that the transition to the new social order was too
> "tender" and was not accompanied by serious shifts in the social hierarchy neither
> in terms of property, nor in terms of power. What took place is an exceptionally
> closed reproduction and not a circulation of the elite (1995:20).[13]

Members of the former elite benefited from their connections, insider knowledge and

continuing influence and were able to take advantage of large privatization deals,

currency speculations, and taxation evasion among other legal and illegal transactions

(Tilkidjiev 1995:21). They often amassed significant personal wealth in contrast to their

Central European counterparts. A notable segment in the ruling elite are the *mutri*,

nouveaux riches who are involved in organized crime and enjoy little prestige but who de

facto exercise significant power on the local and national level.[14] That the former state

security services and the criminal underworld supplement the ranks of the political and

economic elite today is demonstrated not only by sociological accounts but also by

regular public scandals involving corruption, the exposure of one or another politician's

past service to state security, and the periodic arrests of members of local governments

for criminal activity, including traffic in people and drugs. These scandals are constant

source of tension with the European Union and are discussed in the local media daily.

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[13] This and all other translations from Bulgarian in the text are mine unless otherwise noted.
[14] Literally *mutra* means a mug, an ugly face, and describes a social category that resembles the New
Russians.

In this context, the condition of the Bulgarian intelligentsia and of its elite factions

has deteriorated dramatically in comparison to the time before 1989. The abundant state

funding for culture and the arts has been reduced severely and in some instances has

dried up completely. The constitution of the intelligentsia itself has been under siege as

some of its members are forced into "lumpenization" (Tilkidjiev 1995:43) by taking on

jobs that are either below their qualifications or else being severely underpaid, and many

others are forced into emigration (Gavrilova 2007; Iossifova 2007; Popova 2007;

Tilkidjiev 1995). The intelligentsia has lost not only the economic security that it enjoyed

during socialism but also its prestige and social status, a condition which Roumen

Daskalov characterizes as a "moral crisis": "disorientation and confusion follow from the

deterioration of its economic position, the loss of social prestige and public credibility,

and the general crisis of ideology. (...) The intelligentsia therefore lacks credible

objectives and values on which to build a new group identity and a public role"

(1996:83).

To return to the discussion of various historical horizons in Bulgaria, in the

context described above, the condition of the intelligentsia as having access to generous

state funding, economic security, prominent social status, and in a word, to a position that

is "desirable and socially prominent" (Daskalov 1996:75-76) constitutes a fading horizon.

Presently, the dominant horizon is the intelligentsia's condition of an economic, social

and ideological "crisis" (Daskalov 1996:83). Finally, the emergent horizon is that of the

elite in-the-making as seeking to recapture a position of prominence. The elite in-the-

making operates in the space of ethical reflection when it recognizes the mismatch

between its expectations for privilege and recognition, cultivated as they are on the model

of the socialist intelligentsia, and the failure of the current moment to match these expectations. In striving to increase the value of their cultural capital, members of the elite in-the-making strategically separate themselves from the intelligentsia and adopt new creative practices and lifestyle preferences that they code as superior and "European." When they seek to address this discrepancy and develop new strategies with which to respond to the changes, the members of this segment participate in cultural innovation.

To clarify, in taking into account agents' ability to have an at least partially correct understanding of their circumstances, I follow Fischer's assertion that the study of emergent forms of life needs to heed the "native models" of "practitioners" especially when they exhibit the "pervasive claim ....that traditional concepts and ways of doing things no longer work" (2003:37). Fischer suggests that we take seriously what informants have to say and that "ethnographies are increasingly best done in partnership, conversation and contestation with historians, insiders of all sorts, journalists, filmmakers and others" (58). Many of the people interviewed for this project are either journalists or other cultural mediators and entrepreneurs, whose job descriptions demand para-ethnographic knowledge (Holmes and Marcus 2005) i.e. knowledge that parallels the understanding that an ethnographer would produce, and consequently it is critically incorporated in this project.

The discussion so far suggests that the emergent elite has a correct understanding of its predicament, and this statement is true in its general outlines. However, there is at least one aspect in which the elite in-the-making is mistaken. Members of this segment are right to believe that presenting themselves as more "European" than other Bulgarians

is likely to work to their advantage. However, they are mistaken when they suggest that a similar identification with an imaginary "Europe" is equally available to all their compatriots and that it is more or less a matter of choice and conscious self-improvement. In fact, the members of the emergent elite are able to emulate what they imagine as "European" taste and ways of life only because they, first, have high cultural capital, and, second, this capital is of a specific kind. Most Bulgarians are deprived of both of these qualifications.

A privileged claim to "European" belonging is available only to people with extensive foreign language competence, professional foreign experience, and advanced technological literacy, among others.[15] For example, it would not be available in the same way to an intellectual of an older generation, who speaks Russian but not English, who has traveled little and mostly to the former Eastern Block, and who has only basic computer literacy. This difference in the constitution of the cultural capital of the emergent elite and that of other (and often generationally older) factions of the intelligentsia is a source of antagonism and is strategically employed in the competition between the two sides. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the members of elite in-the-making capitalize on an existing discursive construction of "Europe" as a model of emulation and constitute their opponents in the social space, including other factions of the intellectual elite, as "non-European," backward and outdated. While other chapters in the dissertation will look in detail at the practices and discourses through which this distinction is established, in the next section I will look at the logic which underlies it.

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[15] This point is developed in detail in chapters five and six.

Emergence through Sets of Oppositions

The existence of the elite in-the-making depends on its ability to establish itself as systematically different from other factions of the elite while maintaining its distance from the masses. This difference is elaborated in practices and discourse into sets of oppositions that contrast the elite in-the-making as "European," innovative, enlightened and progressive to its opponents as parochial and less than "European," traditional, backward and outdated. The logic of the constitution of these oppositions can be described through a reference to the production of the ideology of a conservative revolution in Germany between the two world wars as described by Pierre Bourdieu in *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* (1991). I turn to this book rather than to a seemingly more obvious choice, his study of social inequality *Distinction* (1984), because the model of *Distinction* while well-suited to account for social *reproduction* in a stable social environment, is less well-fitted to account for social *production* and for processes that take place in the context of rapid social change such as that in post-socialist Bulgaria. By drawing on Bourdieu's discussion of the supporters of a conservative revolution, I in no way mean to suggest any substantive resemblance between the project of the Bulgarian emerging elite and that of the German national socialists and their troubled history. Rather I am interested in the logic of the production of a new ideological position.

According to Bourdieu, the youth conservative revolution movement coalesced into an ideology as an alternative to other ideological options of the time. It came together as a recognizable entity by contrasting itself to the ideas of its opponents. It could be "derived, like a print from a negative from the properties of its opponents: the

Francophiles, Jews, progressives, democrats, rationalists, socialists, cosmopolitans, and left-wing intellectuals" (1991:23), and the two primary opponents, the supporters of liberal democracy and socialism. In the dialogic writings of different writers on the topic of the conservative revolution, these various ideological positions were fused together into a body of sentiments that supposedly prevented the actualization of the German spirit. This body of sentiments was seen as characterized by the tendency to privilege the city, rationality, civilization and cosmopolitanism. To this the supporters of the conservative revolution responded with a contrasting set of values, which supposedly brought them closer to the authentic soul of the German nation. They coded nature, intuition, and culture as ideas that properly represented the German spirit and developed discourse and everyday practices that were centered on these ideas. The youth conservative movement presented itself as a guardian of the nation that promoted its actualization by striving to return it to its roots.

The supporters of the conservative revolution started out as "potential or actual *declassés.*" Their life chances were jeopardized by the nobility, which refused them access to the most desirable positions in the state administration, by the bourgeoisie which excluded or threatened to exclude them, and by the workers with socialist convictions that put in jeopardy "all the values which helped to distinguish them from the proletariat" (1991:25-26). They grouped together the various social segments and political orientations that constituted a threat to their own future and accused them of posing a threat to the entire nation.

In Bulgaria, similarly, the sons and daughters of the socialist intelligentsia also find their life chances in jeopardy and seek to enhance them by elaborating a position that

strategically presents them as different from their opponents and as singularly capable to improve Bulgaria's position. In order to raise again the value of cultural capital in the eyes of the public, the elite in-the-making claims and so seeks to assume the position of a leader who is solely capable of taking Bulgaria out of its parochial status on the margins of European and global affairs. It contrasts itself to its opponents who supposedly hinder Bulgaria's progress. As in the case of the supporters of the conservative revolution, the future of the nation appears to be at stake while in fact it is really the future of the elite in-the-making.

The elite in-the-making seeks to distinguish itself from the intelligentsia with its devalued cultural capital, from the economic and political elite, as well as from the masses. It claims that these social configurations in common embody values, attitudes and tastes that are detrimental to Bulgaria's cultural, political and economic life: unsubstantiated national pride, allegiance to tradition, lack of professionalism, bad taste, corruption, and more. In contrast, the emergent elite presents itself as an agent of cosmopolitanism, innovation, creativity, professionalism, personal initiative, and enlightened Europeanism; in a word, an agent of Bulgaria's progress. The sets of oppositions through which the elite in-the-making elaborates its identity in contrast to other social segments are elaborated through discourse and practice, and are brought to bear on the creative work, personal lifestyle and opinions of the elite in-the-making.

For example, members of the emergent elite repeatedly suggested to me that much of the political elite (with some notable exceptions such as Miglena Kuneva, a former minister of Euro-integration and former European Commissioner for Consumer Affairs) is involved in corruption, nepotism, conflict of interests, demonstrates basic

incompetence and fails spectacularly in its cultural policies. The nouveaux riches were routinely described as grotesquely stupid, tasteless and enamored of flashy luxury. As the elite in-the-making is careful to maintain its distinction from the masses, Bulgarians outside of the elite are portrayed as an undifferentiated "mainstream" (usually using the English word) with backward taste in culture and lifestyle, without personal initiative or entrepreneurship, lacking professionalism, producing goods of low quality and quick to take shortcuts as they supposedly did during socialism. The emergent elite spends most time and effort to differentiate itself from the intelligentsia and from its dominant sections, the cultural elite, which is its main competitor for recognition and state funding. The intelligentsia is accused of favoring outdated aesthetics, modes of work and self-comportment and most of all, of subordinating art and culture to the demands of the state rather than to a disinterested pursuit of knowledge and creative expression.

The elite in-the-making attributes the political and economic troubles of Bulgaria to the backward mindset of both the elites and the masses, and this is one more aspect in which its grasp of the objective circumstances is only partially correct. As suggested earlier one such misrecognition is the belief that the embodiment of a "European" habitus is available to everyone in Bulgaria in the way that it is available to the emergent elite. To this I now add the misleading belief that Bulgaria's economic and political problems are rooted only in the supposedly defective attitudes of its citizens. The elite in-the-making insists that capitalism in Bulgaria is just not being done right and that change can take place only if and when the number of people with "proper" attitudes and knowledge increases sufficiently to produce a qualitative change; when the "islands" of like-minded people move closer, merge into a solid mass and overtake the dark backwaters of

Bulgaria. In a word, positive change is expected to occur when the values of the elite in-the-making become dominant in Bulgaria.

If Marxists suggest that economics and the material basis of life determine the cultural superstructure, the elite in-the-making tends to reverse this relationship by suggesting that the cultural superstructure can determine the material and economic basis of life. While this belief is partially correct in the sense that structure and superstructure can be shown to influence each other, it nevertheless appears unlikely that only a change in attitudes will solve Bulgaria's myriad problems.

Cultural Innovation

So far I have examined the elite in-the-making historically, demonstrating that it is an emergent phenomenon, and socially, demonstrating that it comes into being through a process of differentiation from other social segments. Next I will look at the innovations which this segment introduces to the local context. This subject requires a more extensive treatment and is taken up repeatedly in the dissertation. The purpose of this section is to outline the two main directions of innovation: lifestyle and cultural production. Innovations in both of these areas are strategically coded as "European." I will look at each of them in order.

In discussing lifestyle, I follow Bourdieu's observation that social domination is produced and reproduced through practices and preferences that originate in the specific habitus of each social class (1984). Similarly, the elite in-the-making makes a daily claim to greater social influence through its lifestyle choices but the principle that guides these choices is a habitus that is simultaneously old and new. It is old in that it exhibits

continuities with the habitus of the socialist intelligentsia, and it is new in that it strategically adopts a disposition towards practices and tastes that can be coded as "European" and progressive.

Bourdieu defines the habitus as a knowledge which is not consciously registered but exists in the form of dispositions developed through the individual's lifetime and dependent on such structural factors as class, age, gender, race, and culture among others. These dispositions, structured from without, in turn structure one's encounter with the world, ensuring one's preference for actions that privilege past experience and reproduce the *habitus* of the group. In other words, people's behavior is guided by dispositions which are not consciously reflected upon. One's coping is based on an intuitive, embodied understanding of "possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions" (1990:54). Bourdieu's *habitus* bridges the gap between subjectivism and objectivism, between the individual and the collective, and between the freedom of reason and the constraints of causality. In his view, *habitus* allows the individual to perceive, think, and act in all the ways which his social, economic, educational, and, in generally, structurally defined position allows. One has complete freedom within a set of internalized structural constrains. I attribute to individuals even greater agency than Bourdieu does because I suggest that in the instances of a mismatch between abstract rules and social reality, such as those that occur during periods of rapid social change, individuals may strategically develop a preference for new modes of thought and action that have the potential to improve their social position.

The members of the elite in-the-making have acquired from their own well-educated parents and from the excellent schools they attended the intelligentsia's attitude of "setting itself apart from the rest of society for the purposes of educating, edifying, or reforming it" (Daskalov 1996:49). They have acquired mastery of literary Bulgarian and other modes of self-presentation that are reserved for people of high social standing. Having achieved a comfortable familiarity with the standards of high culture, they adopt an attitude of irreverence to them and experiment with artistic forms that test the boundaries of what counts as art, theater and dance. Many exhibit sense of entitlement to recognition and achievement which comes with the confidence of being raised in a family with access to both.

These dispositions are evident in the following example. Irina Hristova, one of *Edno's* veteran journalists, expressed a common complaint that the misfortunes and low standard of living of many Bulgarians are the result of their lack of personal initiative and entrepreneurial spirit. She explained that she was "almost brought to tears" during a meeting between art academy students and a British fashion designer, a graduate of Central St. Martins College of Arts and Design, when students asked "rapaciously" about admission procedures and about how to obtain application forms. They did not take the opportunity to discuss the designer's work. She pointed out that application information is available online but many young people do not think independently and "simply cannot transcend the limitations that they have created for themselves and do not imagine that they can do things alone…that they can take interest, that they can put their brains to work, that there is Google and much more." In order to sort out alone and from a distance the specifics of a foreign educational system that is very different from that in Bulgaria

and in order to navigate successfully the admission procedures of a highly competitive

school, one needs to be in possession of skills, knowledge and confidence that are not

available to everyone. They are especially out of reach for people who have little

international travel experience and limited foreign language abilities. Irina Hristova fails

to acknowledge this and fails to recognize that the limitations that "others have created

for themselves" frequently are a reflection of their social disadvantage. Because the

habitus is guided by "an estimation of chances presupposing transformation of the past

effect into an expected objective" (Bourdieu 1990:53), it is possible that the students'

"rapacious" questioning reflects a recognition on their part of the actual limitations of

their position and their inability to transcend them without external help. As Bourdieu

would have it (1984), through the failure to recognize others' limitations as possibly

reflecting their objective circumstances, the elite in-the-making manages to present its

achievements as reflections of personal merit rather than as reflections of its social

privilege and its origin in the milieu of the socialist intelligentsia.

Furthermore the elite in-the-making modifies the habitus which it has acquired

through its domestic and educational environment to include an explicit aspiration to

material well-being and to personal wealth. Financial prosperity is seen as means to

demonstrate personal success and "good taste," a disposition that contrasts with the

intelligentsia's professed "renouncement of its own (profit) interests to work for the good

of the people" (Daskalov 1996:58). Significantly, the elite in-the-making holds in high

regard affluence that has been achieved as a result of one's creative work and without

significant concessions to popular taste. It also insists on purchasing habits and aesthetic

preferences that set it apart from the "flashy" taste of the nouveaux riches.

The production of the new elements of this habitus also draws heavily on foreign models, as members of the elite in-the-making cultivate practices and preferences that are more or less explicitly coded to represent a privileged connection to Europe. This includes fashion and personal comportment, as for example a preference for androgynous styling by both sexes in contrast to the exaggerated femininity and macho masculinity that has accompanied a post-socialist retrenchment of patriarchy in much of Eastern Europe (Einhorn 1993; Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000; Todorova 1993). It also exhibits an emphasis on irony and sarcasm, in both the emergent elite's creative work as well as in the juxtaposition of unexpected materials, patterns and colors in its fashion as explicitly modeled on the street fashion of European capitals. The habitus includes the adoption of already existing practices, such as the preparation of home-made preserves and gardening, and layering them with new meanings, such as an interest in healthful eating and an environmentally conscious subsistence.

The inspiration for these preferences in the majority of instances comes from abroad through personal travel and foreign education; through the travel of magazine issues and other media products; through the strategic uses of the internet (everyone has access to the worldwide net, but only some know where to look for the latest in global street fashion); through contacts enabled by work for and with foreign NGOs; through educational exchanges. The inspiration arrives through these and many other kinds of foreign exposure uniquely available and strategically sought out by the members of the elite in-the-making.

Similarly, the creative work of the elite in-the-making often bears the mark of creative exchange with artistic currents beyond Bulgaria's borders. Expressive forms that

are new to the Bulgarian context but that are well-established elsewhere, such the aesthetics of contemporary art, video art, and performance art, are introduced to the local field of cultural production by people from the milieu of the elite in-the-making. These cultural producers also follow closely cutting-edge developments of their fields abroad (to the extent that they are able to do so considering geographic and financial limitations). Heated debates over the fine distinctions between imitation, inspiration and originality put artistic reputations at stake as foreign influences become recognized. Collaboration with foreign colleagues is valued highly and professional travel, especially so. In listing the significance of foreign influences, I do not mean to diminish the importance of local creativity, ingenuity and originality. However, I suggest that foreign connections are mobilized by this group as a way to legitimate itself. Significantly, much of the work of the emergent elite during the severe economic crisis in the 1990s was made possible through foreign funding from international NGOs and from the cultural institutes of various foreign governments.

Elite in-the-making vs. avant-garde

The description of the elite in-the-making above reveals notable similarities between this segment and the artistic avant-garde. Like the emergent elite, the avant-garde is usually the site of cultural innovation; its audience is small if it exists at all; and it has an antagonistic relationship to the cultural establishment, popular culture and their audiences. The avant-garde is usually theorized in two main ways: historically through a reference to the avant-garde proper of the late nineteenth and early 20th century (Bürger 1984:92; Poggioli 1968) or structurally through a consideration of its position in the filed

of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). The characteristics of the Bulgarian social segment that is the focus of this study exhibit significant differences from the avant-garde in both of these lines of theorization, and I suggest that because of this, it is more fittingly described as an emergent elite rather than as an avant-garde.

In its original borrowing from military contexts, the term avant-garde was used to refer to groups and bodies of ideas advocating radical social and political change. Gradually, it was also applied to literary and artistic circles that shared such ideas and then it came to be used primarily to describe artistic movements with political orientation of varying intensities and allegiances (Egbert 1967; Poggioli 1968). Peter Bürger considers these movements of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, also known as the "historic avant-gardes," as configurations unique to modernity and enabled by the newly gained independence of art from its sacral and courtly purposes. At this point, art is seen as having achieved a sufficient distance from the rest of society in order to be able to reflect on its status and to comment on the direction of social development. Bürger defines the avant-garde's core trait as its agenda to alter the status of art in bourgeois society. The avant-garde sees bourgeois life as reducing human beings "to a partial function (means-ends activity)" (48), as pitching them against in each other in competition and excluding from daily life "values such as humanity, joy, truth, solidarity" (50), all flaws that need to be eliminated.

After World War II, the historic avant-gardes were followed by artistic movements that similarly engaged in experimentation and in investigation of the limits of what counts as artistic productions. While some consider these movements as avant-gardist or as "new avant-gardes," others suggest that they are not proper heirs of the

movements from the first half of the century and so cannot be properly characterized as avant-gardes. Peter Bürger specifically insists that movements such as pop-art have lost their critical distance from life and so are unable to continue the historic avant-gardes' transformative agenda (54).

A similar argument can be applied to the Bulgarian emergent elite. While it insists that cultural production should be guided by concerns internal to the field and not by external considerations such as service to the nation or the state, it nevertheless is not interested in radical change of social relations or in altering significantly the relationship between art and the state. Its political agenda is reformist not revolutionary. Indeed, the revolution has just passed, taking shape as it did in the "velvet" revolutions of 1989 and in the turn to market economy and liberal democracy. The emergent elite does not advocate any further radical social reordering but instead advocates fine-tuning. It insists that the changes which started with the end of socialism are not being carried out "properly" and suggests that it is capable of ensuring that this takes place. Radical criticism of capitalist relations is supplanted by the claim that Bulgarians simply do not do capitalism "right." Furthermore, the elite is critical of the state for supporting allegedly outdated aesthetics and for carrying cultural policy that treats culture as an "ornament of the nation." However, despite its allegiance to the ideals of free market economy, it is not interested in severing the ties of dependence between culture and the state because it recognizes the absence of a viable market for most kinds of Bulgarian cultural production[16] and its inability to survive without help from the state.

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[16] The main exception to this is cultural production of low social status that is dismissed by both the establishment and by the elite-in-the-making. This is first and foremost the pop-folk or *chalga* industry which generates large profits and manages to attract some of the best professionals in music and video production. *Chalga* revenue comes from concerts, CDs, and advertisement contracts (Kaloudov 2006).

The significance of the state in Bulgarian cultural life during socialism and today also gives grounds to question the extent to which the sociological term avant-garde applies to the elite in-the-making. Pierre Bourdieu's analysis, based on research in France, organizes the field of cultural production around two axes. One axis reflects the level of consecration of various culture producers, that is the recognition they enjoy from their colleagues. The other axis reflects autonomy, that is the extent to which culture producers support the view that the only true indicator of artistic value is recognition from other cultural producers and not recognition from society at large. This theorization takes into account the relationship between the field of cultural production and the field of cultural consumption, recognizing the key significance of the market in establishing artistic reputations. The higher the social status of one's audience, the higher is his own position along the axis of artistic consecration (so that a product for bourgeois audiences is respected more than a product for working-class consumption). The greater the mass appeal of one's work, the lower the recognition he receives from his colleagues (so that the making of a bestseller is seen as the equivalent of selling out, of sacrificing aesthetic standards in the name of quick profit). Bourdieu places the avant-garde in the lower left quadrant of the field. He describes it as characterized by high autonomy, that is its belief in the independence of the standards of quality of artistic production from the taste of lay people, and by low consecration, that is lacking any significant recognition from the cultural establishment. (Fig. 1)

Similarly, the boulevard novels of Hristo Kalchev about the underground criminal world of the Bulgarian transition sold large number of copies and generated a significant financial return (Eftimov 2006).

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                          ┌─────────────────┐
                          │ High consecration │
                          └─────────────────┘
┌──────────────────┐                │                  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ "Charismatic     │                │                  │ The Academy: recognition │
│ consecration:"   │                │                  │ and patronage from the   │
│ recognition from │                │                  │ dominant segments of     │
│ other culture    │                │                  │ society (bourgeoisie)    │
│ producers        │                │                  │                          │
└──────────────────┘                │                  └──────────────────────┘
                                    │
────────────────────────────────────┼────────────────────────────────────────
┌──────────────┐                    │                        ┌──────────────┐
│ Autonomy     │                    │                        │ Heteronomy   │
└──────────────┘                    │                        └──────────────┘
                                    │
                                    │                  ┌──────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐                │                  │ Folk art: recognition from │
│ Avant-garde: little or │          │                  │ the dominated segments of  │
│ no recognition from │             │                  │ society (working class)    │
│ other culture    │                │                  └──────────────────────┘
│ producers        │                │
└──────────────────┘                │
                          ┌─────────────────┐
                          │ Low consecration │
                          └─────────────────┘
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Fig. 1

This model charts out brilliantly the field of cultural production in 20th century France. It reflects the specifics of that context: the important role of the market and the status of French cultural production as located at the heart of normative modernity. The influence of foreign cultural production is not given significant consideration as it can be assumed that foreign imports may assume their respective place in the chart but are not likely to affect its organization.

In contrast, the Bulgarian field is characterized by the lack of a significant market for all but the most mass-oriented Bulgarian cultural production; by the central importance of the state as a source of both funding and recognition; and by Bulgaria's marginal position and the various exchanges with the world beyond its borders, taking the

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form, for example, of a short-lived influx of foreign capital for arts and culture, of the setting of standards of artistic production beyond its borders, and of the emigration of significant numbers of culture producers unable to achieve recognition and access to funding in Bulgaria. These conditions are largely predicated by continuities with cultural policy during socialism. Because of the scarcity of academic research on this topic in Bulgaria, Katherine Verdery's work on socialist Romania provides an appropriate starting point from which to elaborate my analysis (1991). In their general outlines, her findings with respect to Romania appear to be applicable to Bulgaria because of the immediate geographic proximity and the historical similarities between the two countries.

Verdery points out that Bourdieu's model is inapplicable to cultural production under socialism because of strict party control and because of the limited significance of the market. She suggests that in this context it is no longer relevant whether one's work ingratiates a limited circle of culture producers or the masses (autonomy), but that it is much more important to consider the extent to which an author manages to ingratiate himself to the state and party authorities. Because of this she supplants the autonomy axis (or the axis of economic capital as she calls it in recognition of the market as a factor in establishing the degree of autonomy) with an axis reflecting one's political status. Political status, she suggests, is constituted by the "holding of bureaucratic office (Minister of Culture and Education, activist for culture and propaganda, head of a research institution, director of publishing house, dean of a university) and/or titles having some political significance (President of the Writer's Union, Head of the National Commission of Historians, president of the Academy, etc.)" (1991:92). She retains the

other axis which measures one's recognition by other culture producers, one's "cultural/scientific/creative authority" (92).

Verdery's analysis brings into focus a reversal of the trajectory of consecration. If in France recognition by one's peers may translate over time into a greater general recognition, in socialist Romania the opposite was true. One's ability to obtain higher political status, that is recognition according to criteria not related to the quality of his artistic work, allows him a greater access to the means of cultural production and facilitates one's acquisition of greater cultural authority. For example, political connections could speed up the passage of one's work through the publishing process or could facilitate his participation in the production of defining texts (such as official histories) which serve as "the point of orientation for all subsequent writing in that discipline" (89). One's ability to obtain a favorable position with the state increases one's chances to gain higher authority among other culture producers. Verdery concludes that "authors under socialism need mass publics to buy their works less than they need the attention of bureaucrats who will fund their projects" (94).[17] Because the socialist state produced much greater numbers of intellectuals than it could possibly absorb, various factions of the intelligentsia competed intensely with each other for the attention of state bureaucrats and strove to impose their own views and ideas as the normative. This led to the existence of two kinds of intellectuals. Those whose ideas were "congenial" and whose ambitions permitted "collaboration with power" were able to gain the favor of the state, to earn greater access to the means of production, and often to increase their cultural authority. Others felt that they were entitled to the same kind of opportunity but

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[17] Cultural production that is not formally censured by the state could to some extent bee seen as an exception to this (see Yurchak 2006). However, this informal recognition did not easily translate either in market profits or in an increased access to the means of cultural production.

were deprived from it in part because of failing to represent their work to the state in a sufficiently attractive and convincing manner (1991:91-92).

After the fall of the socialist regime in Bulgaria, state funding for culture and the arts was greatly reduced, and some culture producers with high political status and low cultural authority were discredited. However, the state continued to play an important role in conferring consecration to cultural producers, and the elite in-the-making today assumes the role of a faction that competes for the attention of state bureaucrats. This competition is due to the limited significance of the market for Bulgarian cultural production. However, before turning to the specifics of the present a brief aside is in order on the early history of the emergent elite.

History of the emergent elite

The seeds of the Bulgarian elite-in-the-making were planted in the last decade of socialism by factions of the intelligentsia comprised of young culture producers, who lacked official recognition but nevertheless operated in part through state structures.[18] In Bulgaria, for example, in the field of visual arts, experimentation with installations and unconventional artistic forms took place under the hat of the Club of the Young Artists, a subset of the state Association of Bulgarian Artists.[19] The Club set a precedent by organizing exhibition of such works at the local level on its own initiative in contrast to

[18] This socialist era culture production could also be characterized with Alexei Yurchak's terms "uncensored" or "less-censored" culture production, which was entirely outside of ideological discourse but was nevertheless tolerated and sometimes enabled by the state (2006). Yurchak's term refers to cultural production of various kinds, ranging from work done by culture producers in formal settings to work done outside of state structures and as a personal hobby. In contrast, my preliminary research indicates that the early artistic expressions of the Bulgarian elite in-the-making were produced almost exclusively within one or another state structure.

[19] Much of the following discussion draws on the writings of members of the emergent elite and especially on the edited volume *ProArt/ArtPro* (2007), the first book to give a collective voice to members of this segment across various artistic fields.

the usual practice of putting on shows only when issued an "order from above" from the

Association (Popova 2007:24; Vassileva and Boubnova 2007:6-7). This early work was

"semi-legal." Neither the authors nor their contemporaries were quite certain of the

artistic values of these works by virtue of their taking place outside of the conventional

institutions and their approval. "The artists who through the years had been creating

unconventional [artistic] forms had been guided by various motives ranging from the

conscious artistic experiment to improvised fun, constantly encountering the mistrust and

skepticism of their "classically-oriented" colleagues" (Popova 2007:23). These early

experiments were artistically consecrated only after the end of socialism by members of

the elite in-the-making.[20] Some of the culture producers from this earlier period continue

their experimental creative work in Bulgaria today. Others have either turned to more

conventional work, or have abandoned artistic pursuits entirely, or have emigrated

(Gavrilova 2007:35; Iossifova 2007:115; Kovacheva 2007:163; Popova 2007:24).

Members of the latter category who manage to develop a successful artistic career abroad

are frequently cited by the emergent elite and especially by *Edno* as evidence of the value

of creative talent which the Bulgarian state fails to recognize and keep.

Today all actors recognize that in Bulgaria it is nearly impossible to earn money

from sales of tickets, recordings, books, art pieces or other cultural products.[21] Not

surprisingly, the popularity of Bulgarian films pales in comparison to that of foreign and

especially American large-budget productions. Bulgarian films simply cannot generate

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[20] Similarly, in the field of popular music, the new wave band Nova Generatzia (New Generation), which acquired a mythical significance in the Bulgarian underground music scene, recorded music with the help of the Komsomol, the youth wing of the party, as its producer. (Statelova 1995 in Statelova 2007:142-3).A famous musician, Kolio Gilyna, lead singer of the punk band *Control*, pointed out in 1991, "As much as we may badmouth the Komsomol and its nomenclature today, many of the old musicians started out precisely with the help of this same Komsomol and this same nomenclature." (Rhythm 1991 in Statelova 2007:142-143).

[21] For exceptions to this, please see footnote 16.

box office profits that even come close to those of Hollywood productions. Many distributors are reluctant to show them at all or if they do, it is for just a few screenings and during off hours (Kovacheva 2007:164). This is the fate of most contemporary Bulgarian cultural production ranging from opera (Simeonova 2007:127) to pop music (Statelova 2007:144) to literature (Genova 2007) to dance (Iskrenova 2007). Iavor Gardev, one of the beloved theater directors of the alternative culture producers, comments that in Bulgaria there is no relationship between fame and money: "It is true that in Bulgaria one can become famous, but that does not in any way affect your market price. Money here does not go along with fame. Fame is an autonomous area, and it does not reflect your income directly" (Michailova, et al. 2007:52). Even Bulgarian pop music features the phenomenon of "sponsored pop." Here the fame of music stars generates income not from sales but rather from corporate sponsorship and advertisement contracts (Statelova 2007:144, Kaloudov 2006, Kaloudov, interview with the author).To the extent that a small market for Bulgarian culture production exists, it gives preference to authors and modes of work (and especially so in the visual arts and literature) who achieved consecration before 1989 with approval from the socialist state (Vassileva and Boubnova 2007:9).

Because neither the state nor the market recognized the work of the elite in-the-making, its survival in the 1990s was largely due to foreign funding. Foreign NGOs such as The Soros Center for the Arts, the Swiss Cultural Foundation *Pro Helvetia*, Goethe Institute-Bulgaria, the Austrian *KulturKontact*, the French Cultural Institute, British Council, and more sponsored creative work in contemporary art (Popova 2007:23; Vassileva and Bubnova 2007:10), theater (Gavrilova 2007:32) and dance (Iskrenova

2007:101, Iossifova 2007:116). They did so directly by finding specific creative projects, and indirectly by funding Bulgarian NGOs in the areas of art and culture such as the Red House for Culture and Debate, Institute for Contemporary Art, and the Interspace Center for Media Art. While foreign government and third sector organizations allowed the strengthening of cultural production that was largely ignored both by the state and the market, Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007 created a new problem. This event was largely considered to mark the end of the post-socialist transition, and foreign funding increasingly began to withdraw from the country leaving culture producers from the emergent elite in an urgent search for alternative source of funding and setting their gaze ever more insistently on the state. [22]

Today the elite in-the-making first and foremost addresses the state in its search for recognition, in the hopes that state consecration will later open the road to public recognition and to the market. The emergent elite identifies as its chief opponent the "cultural establishment" that survived the end of socialism. Dessislava Gravrilova, a co-founder and an executive director of the Red House Center for Culture and Debate, best summed up this position during an interview. In her words, the Red House was created in order to provide a forum for cultural production that was not recognized as legitimate by the state, "an artistic center for the *other* culture." She explained:

> In any case, communist Bulgaria had a really powerful cultural policy. Culture was important. There were visionaries such as Alexander Fall, or even Liudmila Zhivkova[23] if you want, and many more that imposed a powerful vision: 'These are

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[22] Notably, the edited volume *ArtPro/ProArt* was published on occasion of the closing down of the Bulgarian office of *ProHelvetia*.

[23] Liudmila Zhivkova (1942-1981) was the daughter of Todor Zhivkov (1911-1998), the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party and a *de facto* leader of the People's Republic of Bulgaria between 1954 and 1989. Between 1971-81, Liudmila held several important offices in the field of arts and culture, including Minister of Culture, and initiated a series of programs marked by her interest in ancient history, mysticism and the Far East. Alexander Fall (1933-2006) was one of her closest associates.

the great Bulgarian writers, the great Bulgarian artists.' And already in the 1980s
there was this, you know, an *established* (*here Dessislava used the English word*)
generation, that is recognized by the people in power, by people who become
ministers of culture, who are members of the Committee for Culture, who are
important figures in the media...and they all impose these names (*of great writers,
artists, etc.*).

In the 1990s, the media naturally were preoccupied with political parties, politics
etc. And the alternative culture project just did not take place in the same powerful
way (*as the political change*). There was no place that would produce an alternative
to this established elite. To make it just as powerful. And this current elite that was
shaped in the 1980s still being supported as *the* elite, as for example by one powerful
medium today, the newspaper *Trud* does it, if you follow this newspaper.

As this statement makes clear, the emergent elite sees itself as an alternative to an

intellectual elite that came to prominence during the socialist 1980s and explicitly seeks

to become "just as powerful" as this socialist elite. A separate study needs to establish the

extent to which the socialist intellectual elite has survived the transition and the reasons

why some members of this elite may have been able to retain their position of authority

while others have not. However, for the purposes of this discussion it is important to note

that the elite in-the-making sees itself explicitly as being in competition with an

"establishment" and a "dominant" elite. This fact together with some of the points made

above, such as the central role of the state and the reformist rather than revolutionary

intentions of the elite in-the-making, demonstrate that the term avant-garde in its

historical and sociological formulations is not fully applicable to the Bulgarian segment.

The term elite in-the-making does not deny this segments similarities with various avant-

garde orientations but rather emphasizes the specifics of the post-socialist space of

cultural production. An avant-garde proper may exist or come to exist in Bulgaria but it is

not within the scope of this study. Alternately, the particularities of the time and the place

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Fall was a prominent historian in the antiquity of Southeastern Europe. He was a Minister of Education
(1979-86) and Minister of a Culture, Education and Science in 1989.

may preempt the emergence of an avant-garde as described by social scientists in the 20th century.

The elite in-the-making and the state

Considering that the emergent elite's relationship to the state marks it off as distinct from the avant-garde, a closer look at this relationship is in order. In this section, I will outline briefly the specific grievances that the emergent elite has towards state cultural policy. The objections run along two main lines: first, that the state supports what is seen as outdated aesthetics and, second, that it carries out cultural policy which deprives arts and culture of their critical potential and treats them as merely "ornamental."

In the discussion that follows, it will become clear that the arguments of the elite in-the-making frequently overlap the categories of the state, art and the market much like, as Amy Ninetto has shown, Russian scientists in Akademgorodok understood the state, science and the market "to be overlapping domains held in a productive tension with one another, not as autonomous and self-governing domains whose interactions consist predominantly of constraints on each other" (2005:460). Like Russian scientists, Bulgarian culture producers compete with factions of the intelligentsia not only for state funding, but also "for the power to claim and to create a particular form of relationship between state and society" and this struggle is coached in the terms of an "overarching project of modernization and development" (2005:460) in ways that resonate with the rhetoric and conception of both science and the arts during socialism. This is one more instance in

which the position of the Bulgarian elite in-the-making reveals not only ruptures, but also continuities with the socialist past.

Members of the emergent elite commonly suggest that the method for distribution of state subsidies is "not only lazy, it is harmful" (Gavrilova 2007:36). The criticism runs in two main directions. First, it insists that the state fails to support innovation and continues to give its blessing and money to outdated aesthetics, modes of work and institutional organization. For example, with respect to the visual arts, the state is seen as continuing to give preference to art that follows the conventions of modernism and fails to recognize the artistic value of contemporary art forms (Vassileva and Boubnova 2007). The practice of providing funding only to state-owned theaters without any consideration of the quality of their work and without any open competition is said to deprive of funding theater troupes outside of the state system where most experimentation and innovation take place (Gavrilova 2007; Michailova, et al. 2007). The only exception to this pratice is the Theater Lab *Sfumato*, which receives state funding and which is seen as a brilliant example of the benefits of "proper" distribution of state money. Dessislava Gavrilova eloquently sums up this position:

> ....[B]y refusing to notice the processes and trends which arise at the margins of the state, with its unwillingness to discover and support the artistically viable part of them, with the fact that the state theaters are predetermined to be the only ones eligible for full subsidy and that the so-called "independent" theaters are by default unworthy of any, the state is suppressing naturally arising cultural processes and misses the opportunity to encourage these developments that are perhaps still vulnerable but are full of potential to attract new audiences and create new meanings. (Gavrilova 2007:35)

The members of the elite in-the-making advocate changes in funding mechanisms in order to allow access to state subsidies for artists, who currently work on "the margins of the state." This is seen as a possibility to infuse Bulgarian culture with new blood, to

help improve the quality of Bulgarian cultural production, and finally to "attract new audiences" and private investors (Vassileva and Boubnova 2007:14). For example, the state's active support for contemporary art is expected to generate an increase of private buyers. In the absence of sufficient private investment in contemporary art, explained with the absence of the appropriate philanthropic and collector attitudes in Bulgaria as well as with the lack of recognition for its artistic merits,

> the role expected from the state is that of a powerful advertising agent and an advocate of art's cause. Only a "confluence" of this kind between the state and the private sector can initiate a sizable market for contemporary art. The active participation of each element of the structure museum-private gallery-buyer is a necessary precondition in the creation of normal market relations. (Vassileva and Boubnova 2007:7)

In a word, in the absence of a significant market for high culture, the emergent elite claims that it can improve the marketability of culture with the help of the state. It suggests that state consecration and funding will help to attract more private money by producing greater visibility for art that is of better quality, up-to-date with global trends, and "full of potential to generate new meanings" (Gavrilova 2007:35).

The second line of criticism against state cultural policy objects to what is seen as a tendency to subordinate art to external purposes. If the socialist state subordinated cultural production to the propaganda needs of the party, the post-socialist state, irrespective of the ideology of the particular political party in power, is seen as attributing to art a decorative function: "The state, politicians and different governments, regardless of whether they are left or right, think of culture as an ornament of the state, a decoration on its monolithic façade" (Michailova, et al. 2007). The complaint that art is treated as an ornament reveals a concern that it is not taken seriously and that artistic pronouncements have little authority and little influence. In contrast to this situation, Javor Gardev draws

attention to Germany's example: "In the German tradition, the theater is socially reflexive. It partners the state in developing understanding of contemporary social processes. In contrast to that the Bulgarian state relegates it to a foggy and purely aesthetic category and expects it to take off its own shoulders any social commitment and to limit itself to being ornamentation, a kind of festive decoration, without of course severing the umbilical connection it has to it" (Michailova, et al. 2007:51). In other words, the emergent elite covets the position of a counselor to those in power and desires the right to help society make sense of itself.

Additionally, the state is criticized also for failing to recognize the value of culture beyond its connection to the nation. "Culture is considered mainly as national – as an instrument to consolidate the nation, as a factor for preserving national identity, sustaining the traditions and establishing a system of values, as something that needs to be protected from external influences and preserved... From this point of view, the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Democrats for Strong Bulgaria, considered to be the two parties on the extreme poles of the ideological spectrum, seem quite close" (Gavrilova 2007: 32). The problems with seeing art as valuable only through its service to the nation is, first, that this imposes an external hierarchy of value on art and fails to take into account the criteria for artistic quality that are internal to the field. Second, considering the alternative culture producers' extensive funding from foreign sources, foreign experience and connections through specializations and grants from foreign governments, it comes as no surprise that it has a cosmopolitan orientation that clashes with state policies aimed at promoting art as a national phenomenon. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, by pre-defining artistic value as an "instrument for the consolidation of

the nation," the state is likely to give preference to subjects and modes of expression that are liable to engage with subjects and methods of depiction considered "typical" of the national culture, "traditional" and in need of being "protected" and "preserved." This is in direct conflict with the emergent elite's values of innovation, experimentation, and change. The elite in-the-making claims that it alone is capable of producing work that corresponds to the new political, social and economic context in Bulgaria as well as to the latest artistic developments around the world. In voicing disapproval of the state's treatment of arts and culture as ornamental to the façade of the nation-state, the elite in-the-making exhibits an affinity to the avant-garde agenda of altering the position which art occupies in society. However, unlike the historic avant-gardes, the elite in-the-making interpolates the state as its main partner and demands that it is granted authority and recognition by those in power.

Chapter Two:
Aesthetic Individualism: Historical Precedents and Predicaments of the Emergent Cultural Elite

Peter Bürger singled out as one of the avant-garde's defining characteristics its imperative to transfer art "to the praxis of life" (1984:51). According to him, the historic avant-gardes saw bourgeois life as reducing human beings "to a partial function (means-ends activity)" (48), as pitching them against in each other in competition, and as excluding from daily life "values such as humanity, joy, truth, solidarity" (50). The avant-gardes proposed to correct such flaws in part through a range of radical political ideas to which they pledged allegiance of varying intensity and in part through the re-integration of art into life and the elimination of its sequestration as a separate sphere of activity. This second proposition is expressive of a particular habitus (Bourdieu 1990) that often grounds innovative cultural production and that explains the penchant of avant-garde culture production for lifestyles that can be described as bohemian, extravagant and risqué. This drive to aestheticize the "praxis of life" is antagonistic to middle-class search of security, comfort and prosperity, and instead advocates self-actualization through experimentation, risk-taking and breaking with convention in creative work and in everyday life. I refer to this trait as "aethsticized individualism" and suggest that it characterizes the Bulgarian cultural elite-in-the-making. As an ethos, a body of affective dispositions (Bateson 1958), it is constitutive of the sets of "structuring structures" that constitute the collective habitus of this social segment.

The purpose of this chapter is at least in part to nuance some of emphases of the argument so far. As already discussed, the Bulgarian elite in-the-making cannot be properly described as an avant-garde. Nevertheless, it exhibits many similarities to

various avant-garde currents, for example, in that it is a site for cultural innovation, has a limited audience, and exhibits antagonistic relationship to the cultural establishment and to mass audiences. The ethos of aestheticized individualism is one more trait that links the emergent elite to the avant-garde. Furthermore, even though the emergent elite is in part organized around the claim that it brings change to the Bulgarian field of cultural production, its existence and its ideas in many respects are continuous with local history of cultural production. Earlier I proposed that the way in which the emergent elite interpellates the state provides one instance in which such continuities can be observed. Here I outline another continuity by suggesting that the elite in-the-making is a heir of the ethos of aestheticized individualism that has characterized a narrow stream of Bulgarian cultural production since the beginning of the 20th century. Like their early predecessors, the members of the emergent elite refuse to accept uncritically the idea that the goals of the group grant higher meaning to individual existence and are especially critical of the instances in which art assumes as its own the goals of the collectivity and the nation, in particular. Since it is sometimes assumed that many of the tastes and fashions of post-socialism are new and imported, I examine whether this sentiment is a recent phenomenon. I suggest that it is not, and that its history helps to explain the survival of an artistic position of contrariness twenty years after the end of socialism.

Specifically, here I suggest that despite the authoritarian collectivism of the socialist state, members of the emergent elite were socialized in the avant-garde's anti-collectivism through the domestic and elite educational environment. The ethos of aestheticized individualism survived less through the vehicle of cultural production or public protest than through cultural consumption, the family and elite secondary schools.

While the project of tracing the past of a set of dispositions requires even more extensive archival and historical research, in this chapter I chart a line of investigation that promises to be especially productive in the future.

The Bulgarian avant-garde tradition is marked by one significant difference from the Western European avant-gardes. In the young Bulgarian state of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, art, literature and even architecture were harnessed in the project of creating national culture and national consciousness. The drive to think of cultural production primarily in national terms has been strong ever since and has produced the particular contrariness of the Bulgarian avant-garde against a preoccupation with national interests. Unlike the Western European focus on "the status of art in bourgeois society," avant-garde anti-collectivism in Bulgaria has a distinct flavor of resistance to the imposition of national interests on the domain of arts and culture (Bürger 1984:49).

Aestheticized individualism and its characteristic opposition to the limited life of "means-ends activity" surfaced over and over in my conversations with members of the emergent elite. One day in 2005, a young Bulgarian writer explained that in her writing she is not interested in addressing people who live plain lives, "never exit the closed circle of home-work-home," and who sport an emotional state that is "always flat, without great emotional amplitudes." Another writer enthusiastically recounted the story of a friend who climbed up to the seven Rila Lakes barefoot and with only a shirt on his back, braving the mountain cold and the blisters on his feet. She said that artistic inspiration is born out of extreme experience like this. In the comments of the two women, I heard the resonance of the same idea that one ought to treat one's body and

mind not as means to an end but as a creative material that can be shaped, molded, even stretched like clay to the point of rupture, to generate the fullness of knowledge and experience that defeats "means-ends rationality" and restores full humanity. Thus life is less about achieved goals and more about the chiseling away at existence to produce beauty whose shape is not known in advance.

In the following pages, I will examine this ethos by providing a glimpse of the context of contemporary avant-garde artistic production in Bulgaria and by contrasting two recent theater plays, one in the National Theater, a highly authoritative institution, and the other in the experimental Theater Lab *Sfumato*. Later, I will ground my analysis of the two plays and the range of reactions to them in a historical overview of the production and reproduction of aestheticized individualism in Bulgaria.

Theater Sketch I

"Oh, you will hate it," said Irina, and curled her lip. She leaned on the oak counter top of Café Klub 703, while I put away my voice recorder and notebook. Done with the interview and with fieldwork for the day, I was getting ready to see a play called "Hushove" in the Ivan Vazov National Theater.

"How do you know I will hate it? Have you seen 'Hushove'?"

"No, I haven't, but I know" Irina pulled her shoulders up towards her short boyish haircut, and slid her sports shoe on the rail of my chair.

"Hushove" was by all accounts the biggest hit of the National Theater for two seasons straight. Even in its second season, it was sold out a month in advance. Since then seven different awards have marked it with a stamp of approval, including three

Askers (a Bulgarian Tony of sorts) for best play, best director and best leading male

actor. So when my friend Elena called and said "We have to see it," I had no doubt about

it. Irina's frosty comment caught me by surprise.

"Oh, well, in case you didn't know, if you want to see something nice, the

National Theater is generally not the place. You have been away for a long time," she

conceded, referring to the length of my education abroad. "But I mean unless it's Mario

Kurkinski or Vuskresia Vihurova, or any of the more exciting directors, it's not really

worth it. Go to *Sfumato* if you want to see something really good. I've heard enough

about 'Hushove' to make up my mind. It's jingoism of the worst kind."

A former editor of *Edno,* Irina had left the magazine several years earlier to

embark on the next stage of a successful journalistic career. I had good reasons to heed

her warning, but at five minutes to seven and a ticket in my hand, I was about to find out

for myself.

From a distance, I saw Elena in the brightly lit square before the theater, shifting

weight from one high-heeled boot to the other, either keeping warm or else made anxious

by my last-minute arrival. A kiss on each cheek and soon we were engulfed in the warm

glow of the red-and-golden interior of the National Theater. Elena works in the

administration a big trade company, dislikes *Edno,* and in a word seems to be one of the

"mainstream" types of which the elite in-the-making definitely disapproves. Even her

carefully styled appearance and emphatic femininity contrast to the sporty androgyneity

of Irina. Elena is also a personal friend, who repeatedly directed my attention to the larger

context within which the elite in-the-making operates. Tonight was no exception.

Inside, the big theater hall was completely full. One row down and to the left of

Elena and me sat what seemed an entire class of well-behaved eight-graders with their

teacher. Their presence made perfect sense considering that the play was based on a short

novel by Ivan Vazov (1850-1921), a.k.a. the Patriarch of Bulgarian Literature and a

namesake of the National Theater. A required reading for students, the novel takes place

in the period between 1871 and 1876 and recounts the exigencies of Bulgarian *hushove* in

Romania. The hushove [pronounced kh∂shove] are emigrants who, having participated in

armed struggle against the Ottoman Empire, fled from persecution, lived in abject

poverty, lived rambunctiously and made vague plans to "liberate" Bulgaria from the

"Turks."

The play belonged to the subspecies of Hollywood-inspired productions, the

theatrical version of a film packed with special effects, sophisticated props, rich costumes

and exuberant emotions. Snow fell on the heads of diegetic pedestrians, and a slowly

spinning center stage generated action in the moments when a lull was liable to slack

viewers' attention. With enthusiasm reminiscent of a rock concert or a political rally, the

audience responded emotionally to the action on the stage and rumbled with approval

when a character moaned about the "circumcised." He was referring to the Ottomans and

the ritual circumcision commonly practiced by Muslims but his words reverberated with

a growing popular resentment of the Turkish and Roma minorities in the final years

before Bulgaria's accession to the European Union. Adamantly desired immediately after

1989, by 2005 EU membership was increasingly seen as a mixed blessing, especially by

the less affluent and less educated. The fear that Bulgaria would be unable to negotiate

advantageous terms of membership and the worry that Bulgarians would have to abandon

some of their habits and ways of life, in other words that they would lose part of their "culture," were reflected in the flash growth of the nationalist party *Ataka* from a political novice to a parliamentary power in 2005. The audience's cheers at statements directed against the "circumcised" and the "Turks" revealed a resemblance between the anxiety and resurgent populist nationalism of the present day with those that allegedly characterized the 1870s.

The hushove were caught between high ideals of patriotism and independence on one hand, and a difficult survival in exile as thugs and scoundrels, on the other. The audience knew too well that the hushove would not be able to deliver Bulgaria's independence without the help of the Great Powers, the Russian Army and a bloody war. As the school children next to me must have been taught, it was the bloody reprisal over the April uprising of 1876 and the suffering of mythic proportions of both revolutionaries and ordinary people that scandalized Russia and the West and precipitated their interference. Nevertheless, the play seemed to offer comfort and salvation in the image of a sacrifice for a collectivity larger than the individual. It provided hope by transforming misfortune into heroism. At the end of the performance, the hushove boarded the train of history that would eventually deliver their dream of an independent nation-state, and left the stage. The final applause went on for a long time, pleading the actors back for another scene, a monologue or whatever else would constitute a theatrical encore. As far as I could tell without leaving my seat, every single person in the hall, including Elena and the eight-graders, were up on their feet and clapping. Eventually the actors came together in the middle of the stage, exchanged a conspiratorial glance and mightily sang the national anthem. The audience followed.

Theater Sketch II

Elena noticed that I had failed to stand on my feet at the end of "Hushove" and had not sung the national anthem along with everyone else. She said something about me having lived in the United States for a long time, about how it was natural and how it wasn't a big deal but she seemed disappointed. Trying to set things right, I suggested we give it another try. The play "Izkopni Materiali"[24] had been recommended by an ecstatic Alexandra, also an editor at *Edno*. Like Irina, she seemed to have a soft spot for *Sfumato* and claimed that this was the best play of the season. "It's phenomenal. You have to see it."

"Would you like to go see Izkopni Materiali at *Sfumato* next?" I asked Elena few days later.

The answer was no. Considering her limited time and resources, Elena did not want to risk her money and time on something that most likely she would not enjoy. And with *Sfumato,* she couldn't be sure. A regular pattern began to emerge. People at *Edno* liked *Sfumato* and disliked The National Theater. Elena liked the National Theater and in most instances disliked *Sfumato.* I had to investigate.

On the night of the performance, *Sfumato's* main hall was as packed as the National Theater's had been. Notably, it was also significantly smaller, and there were no school children to be seen. The stage was covered with sand (actually cork made to look like sand, as I learned later) and was virtually bare except for light metal structures that were moved about in the course of the performance. Main props: buckets and shovels. The characters: young brigadiers in 1920s socialist Russia, digging a pit in which to pour

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[24] In its usual use the phrase *izkopni materiali* (изкопни материали) refers to natural resources such as oil and ores that are extracted from the earth.

the foundations of a future Home of the Proletariat, a huge structure as tall as a skyscraper. This ambitious project required work around the clock and a military discipline. Scant props, basic costumes, and a collective reciting of the script: the word "austere" describes this performance. High energy and high intensity were dispensed freely, until the pit was finally dug so deep that it could go no further. The workers were brought to the brink of exhaustion and prostrated themselves on stage. On the wall above their lying bodies, a crackling video projection displayed images of Manhattan skyscrapers and the consumer abundance of a capitalist North America. The brigadiers had made their way to the other side of the planet, having worked so hard only to see the building of their dreams already built.

The play was based on a novel by the Soviet writer Andrej Platonov (*The Foundation Pit,* 1930), known for his tense relationship with the socialist state. Unlike "Hushove," "Izkopni Materiali" offered no consolation for the characters' self-sacrifice. Their labor failed to produce the bright socialist future, and the capitalist alternative promised nothing better. The marching back and forth on stage, the measured movements of the hands digging in a ritualized repetition, the slogans recited in a single voice, all offered a cold Brechtian commentary on the pointless erasure of individuality by an authoritarian collectivity. In the end, the socialist austerity emerged as pointless and hostile as the capitalist abundance. Hardship no longer translated into heroism in the name of a collective goal.

In an interview, Ivan Stanev, author of the script and director of the play, warned against the subsuming of man as a "bolt in a large machine:"

> In the structure of the world today, we as individuals are less and less able to
> exercise any kind of influence. (...) In American as well as in Asian capitalism, if

one has a job and has the right to work, he needs to demonstrate a non-stop work enthusiasm to his boss to avoid being fired. If someone like Voshchev, the character from my play ("Izkopni Materiali"), starts complaining, starts thinking, then there are thousands of people waiting for his job. No one can afford melancholy, never mind existential fears. The individual needs to be flexible, active and always happy, and so ever more a subject to the ideology (Dimova 2006).

Stanev's critical position in life and in "Izkopni Materiali" vehemently opposes the idea that collective goals and values should be allowed to supplant individual pursuit of self-actualization through introspection and reflection. The collectivity, either socialist or capitalist, emerges as a tyrant that seeks to erase the very humanity of its subjects. Here it is easy to recognize the ethos of aestheticized individualism, which also characterizes the work and lives of my informants at the magazine *Edno* and the segment of young culture producers of which it is representative. Their enthusiasm for "Izkopni Materiali" and their systematic disapproval of the National Theater and "Hushove" specifically, despite its great general popularity, are exemplary of the elite in-the-making's contrariness to collectivity and its tense relation with nationalism. In the following pages, I will look at the history of present day avant-garde sentiment beginning with the early twentieth century.

First Steps

When talking to members of the emergent elite, I heard on more than one occasion the suggestion that they resemble in some ways the early twentieth century literary Circle Misyl (*Thought*). This comparison reflects the possibility that the legacy of the early Bulgarian modernists survived socialism and is still discernable today. Later literary critics hail the work of the Circle Misyl as the beginning of a focus on the

individual in Bulgarian literature (Igov 2000; Moser 1972). Centered on the literary magazine of the same name, *Misyl (Thought)* (published between 1892-1907), this intellectual circle had four prominent members, Pencho Slavejkov, Krustio Krustev, Peyo Yavorov, and Petko Todorov. The four are conventionally seen as the first Bulgarian modernists. Schooled in the works of some of the most significant Western European philosophers and writers of the time, they were strongly influenced by modernist individualism, and rejected the notion that literature should have any social function at all (Moser 1972:121). In this, the circle Misyl consciously positioned itself in opposition to the literature created immediately after Bulgaria's independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and its main figure, Ivan Vazov (the author of "Hushove").

Immediately after independence, creative work was overwhelmingly seen as part of the project for the production of "national" culture. It was both "an instrument for and a result of" the formation of a Bulgarian national consciousness in the 19th century (Igov 2000).[25] During the existence of the Circle Misyl, this project was still very much alive. The state founded three institutions of national culture in the period of three years: the Sofia University (1904), the National Library (1907) and the National Theater (1907) (Moser 1972:122). In this context, the aestheticized individualism of the Bulgarian avant-garde acquired a very particular flavor of opposition against the insistence that literature and the arts ought to be evaluated in terms of their ability to reflect and cultivate the unique experience of the nation. The members of Misyl proposed that Bulgarian literature needed to transcend the preoccupation with the nation and to raise itself to "an appreciation of the best in world culture" (Moser 1972:129).

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[25] Lambropoulos describes an almost identical development in Greece (1988).

Much of Bulgarian literary criticism centers on this tension, variously described as an opposition between what is "ours" (наше), collectivist and dogmatic, on one hand, and what is foreign, individualist, and anti-dogmatic, on the other.[26] Most critics will agree with Svetlozar Igov that the Circle Misyl constitutes a watershed. With Misyl:

> (t)he Individual takes the place of highest significance, which in the times and poetics of Vazov had been occupied by the Fatherland. This brings about changes in genre, theme and style. The literary attention shifts from the problems of the national and social collectivity to the psychological and moral problems of the individual; a dominant extrovert aesthetic prism becomes replaced by an introvert one, and this leads to a change in the leading genres: the epic prose which dominated until the turn of the century is replaced by a domination of lyric poetry. A lyrical focus on the self becomes a commonplace even in prose writing (Igov 2000).

While the Circle Misyl did not dismiss entirely the significance of national tradition and of folklore as a source of inspiration, it nevertheless initiated a current of work that reflected aesthetic individualism against a call to subsume literary work to the needs of the nation. The four modernists paved the way for the symbolists, expressionists, futurists and other Bulgarian expressions of the Western European and Russian avant-gardes of the first half of the twentieth century. Significantly, their cosmopolitan interest in the "universal human qualities of the individual" (Moser 1972:132) was driven in part by their extensive foreign travel and education. The four spent much time abroad and three of them received their education in Western Europe: Slavejkov studied philosophy at the University of Leipzig and wrote a dissertation on Heinrich Heine; Krustio Krustev obtained a doctorate from the University of Leipzig; and Petko Todorov studied in Toulouse, Bern and Leipzig. Yavorov had the least amount foreign experience, having

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[26] Slavov defines of dogmatism as "asking literature to serve an idea that 'stands' outside of the literary process" and aligns the Circle Misyl with an "anti-dogmatic" current of cultural production (Slavov 1981:17).

been educated in Bulgaria and having visited Nancy only for a few months in 1906 (Moser 1972:120-152).

While further research in literary history and criticism of this early period will illuminate the competing viewpoints, camps and debates and their importance for the Bulgarian avant-garde currents before World War II, my goal is to point out the existence of a tradition of aestheticized individualism in Bulgarian cultural production in the first half of the twentieth century and to suggest that it may be seen as a precursor of later developments.

Socialism

The advent of socialism in the mid-1940s brought with it an authoritarian collectivism that was hostile to the avant-garde preoccupation with the self. Socialist Bulgaria became a close ally of the USSR, but did not benefit in any significant sense from the tradition of the Russian revolutionary avant-garde. As Alexei Yurchak demonstrates, the Soviet avant-garde itself had already been eroded in the 1930s (Yurchak 2006:13). Nevertheless, the contrarian, cosmopolitan, and individualist habitus of the avant-garde did not disappear. Atanas Slavov indicates its traces in the work of Bulgarian literati during the short-lived Bulgarian Thaw (1956-1963). He suggests, however, that the end of the Thaw effectively silenced a concern with formalism and interiority in Bulgarian literary production. The people who advocated it either emigrated (as he did), were co-opted in the party lines, or fell a victim to a kind of a domestic exile by virtue of the inability to publish and participate in intellectual life (1981).

As some authors suggest (Boubnova 2006; Hristova 2005), the end of the Thaw did not permanently erase experimentation in literary and artistic production. However, to the extent that it was there at all, it was largely hidden from the public eye and so had only a limited impact. For example, as a student in the National Academy for Theater and Film Arts in 1983, Ivan Stanev (the director of "Izkopni Materiali" discussed earlier) directed a play by the provocative German playwright Franz Xaver Kroetz. After a single performance, the play was banned and nearly led to Stanev's expulsion from the Academy. In his next reincarnation as a theater director in the small town of Lovetch, Stanev worked to develop an innovative stage language that employed hypnosis and other experimental means to excavate individual emotional memories (Vandov and Decheva 1999). His play "Alchemy of Grief," a collage based on texts by Chekhov, Wittgenstein and Ionesco, was also banned almost immediately after the premiere and precipitated his temporary departure from theater. Because the state silenced Stanev's work so quickly, it was known only to a small circle of theater practitioners and aficionados.

The personal histories of contemporary avant-garde culture producers lead me to believe that the legacy of the avant-garde was preserved less through cultural production and more through the consumption of cultural products and through educated Bulgarians' selective practices of everyday life. I suggest that the ethos of aestheticized individualism expressed itself in what Yurchak calls the domain of "meaningful existence," a sphere of life that stood outside of ideological discourse even it was enabled by a performance of ideological orthodoxy (2006). A *pro forma* participation in activities such as party meetings, elections, etc. ensured freedom from repercussions and freed up time and space for pleasures that were actually meaningful to the individual. The production of a

"normal, meaningful life" required both an active participation in the system as well as its avoidance; the use of its opportunities as well as the circumvention of its limitations.[27] This domain also included "uncensored" or "less-censured" socialist culture, i.e. culture that existed not in opposition but in parallel to the fixed, normative discourse of the state. It was tolerated by the state because it did not resist ideologically charged official discourse and managed to avoid the question of resistance altogether (Yurchak 2004:4-5). Yurchak (2006) points out that production and consumption of "uncensored" or "less-censured" culture was part of a process of "normalizing the official."

In Bulgaria, late socialism offered a variety of means that could be employed in the production of "meaningful existence," and one's choice among the available options was related to one's place in the social hierarchy in terms of education, place of residence and income. As Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padounov demonstrate, socialist citizens were skilled consumers (1995), and they applied their skills to the black market as well as to the field of culture. The preferences characteristic of the ethos of aestheticized individualism found an outlet in the discriminating "uncensored" pleasures and pastimes available to the educated strata of Bulgarian society.

There were two main safe havens in which the ethos of aesheticized individualism was reproduced: the family and the elite foreign language secondary schools. Interviews with culture producers who belong to the present-day bearers of the avant-garde ethos, as well as with their parents, reveal the background of educated families with comfortable living standards and a taste for specific kinds of cultural products. These include "uncensored" or "less-censured" music, literature and film produced abroad, in the West

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[27] Verdery (1996) makes a similar point with respect to the gray economy. It was a way of inhabiting the niches of centralized economy and of making do, without seeking to change or subvert it.

as well as in other Eastern Bloc countries. The parents systematically eschewed the late socialist pirated video tapes of *Rambo* and *Rocky,* the music of Serbian pop-folk stars like Lepa Brena and of Bulgarian wedding musicians (precursors of the present-day Bulgarian pop-folk or *chalga* (Rice 2002)) as tasteless entertainment for the uneducated. Instead they indulged in the pleasures of "intelligent people" such as the films of Antonioni and Bergman and the music of the Bob Marley, the Beatles and Pink Floyd. From the large quantities of state-supported Bulgarian cultural production, they chose the works of authors that reached beyond socialist realism to the intimate ruminations of poets such as Petia Doubarova and Hristo Fotev. Martina and Dimityr Hristovi, parents of Iskra, a writer and editor at *Edno,* had a circle of friends that enjoyed the same kinds of pleasures: "In this town, as in every town, there are different milieus. There are always people who like *chalga*, who perform *chalga*. Alright, back then we did not call it *chalga*. But we were different *(from this kind of people)*. And all of our friends were like us. They liked the same books, the same music."

Furthermore, the parents' stories of their youth exhibited the same contrariness to mainstream "common practice" that I observed in their children. Vasilena and Hristo Mladenovi, parents of Plamen, a writer for *Edno*, explained that their family vacations were "different from those of most people." They did not go to one of the room-and-board hotels (почивни станции) to which workers received admission "cards" from their employers at subsidized rates. Instead they chose to camp and hike in the wilderness with their two sons because of the pleasure of "being alone with nature."

In other instances, the families preserved an elite "bourgeois" spirit of erudition in the high culture of Western Europe and the Antiquity that was foreign to the socialist

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project of mass education. (After 1945, classics were no longer part of secondary

education. The single elite school, which offered instruction in ancient languages and

history during socialism, was re-established in 1977). Ivan Stanev attributes the

development of his own expressive language as a writer and a theater director to such a

family environment. His description reveals the preservation of family traditions from

before 1945:

> In my family there was a terrible contradiction between the reality and high
> culture, which was due to my mother. She comes from a bourgeois family, knew
> Latin and Ancient Greek. I was engulfed by the utopia of the high culture of the
> 19th century, which she had preserved. On the other hand, her brothers, the
> Rajkovi Brothers, who were known puppeteers, created an environment that was
> frequented by Valeri Petrov and Konstantin Pavlov.[28] As a kid, I was in their
> troupe. All of this created a shield from external reality and a huge distress when I
> finally had to deal with it (Vandov and Decheva 1999).

In the protected domestic environment, well-educated parents were able preserve the

ideas and ideals they had acquired through pre-socialist education and to pass them on to

the next generation.

In the context of socialist Bulgaria's isolation, the elite secondary schools were

one of the few places where one could obtain knowledge about the world west of

Bulgarian borders.[29] Virtually all of the young culture producers whom I interviewed had

attended one of the elite secondary schools. Most had graduated from one of the foreign

language schools, but others had attended the National School for Classic Languages and

Cultures or one of the schools specializing in study of the arts or the natural sciences.

Each of the foreign language schools specialized in one foreign language, English,

German, French, or Spanish. (Russian was not one of them because its study was

mandatory for all students). Some of the instructors were native speakers living in

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[28] Well-known Bulgarian poets.
[29] A similar phenomenon existed in Russia as well (Beloussova M.S.).

Bulgaria only temporarily, for example as part of an alternative military service. Foreign students also visited and provided the opportunity for personal contact with a foreign world. According to Vassilena, who attended the Varna French Language High School, these foreigners brought with them not only knowledge of life in Western Europe but also actual artifacts, including books and records. These high schools allowed to their students greater liberties than regular schools did. They significantly improved one's chances for admission to some of the best universities and desirable professional careers. Ivan Andonov's feature film *Vchera (Yesterday)* (1988) about an English language secondary school reflects some of the unusual freedom (and the resulting greater awareness of restrictions) that characterized the experience in many of these schools.

Significantly, Ivan Stanev too attended one of these *gimnazii*, the Varna German language school. His early familiarity with the German language and culture was highly influential in his later work. Some of his major influences came from German language philosophy and avant-garde beginning with Heiner Müller and, through him, Brecht, but also Herder, Wittgenstein, Kreutz, and Dürrenmatt. Building on a personal friendship with Müller, Stanev translated a half of dozen of his plays and used fragments from his plays in his own scripts. He later emigrated to Germany (Vandov and Decheva 1999).

Acceptance to the elite schools was and continues to be very competitive. It requires extensive preparation well beyond the education received at school. In many cases, one's admission to such a school demonstrated that the parents were well-informed, that they had foresight and ambition as well as in many instances a readiness to pay for private lessons in preparation for the entrance exams. As Alexandra--a graduate

of the French language school in Sofia in the 1960s and presently an associate of *Edno--*

pointed out, social differences were important:

> This was an environment made up of children of the better informed segments of Bulgarian society. Elite is not a precise word, because it does not correspond to the conditions back then, but just to simplify things, let's say that they were an elite. These were well-educated parents with good jobs or else these people who had lived and worked abroad. In either case, these were people with wide personal horizons.

By virtue of the foreign worlds made available to students, these schools provided an

opportunity to foster an ethos that was cosmopolitan, individualist, and with a pro-

Western orientation. This was strengthened even further by the relative leniency towards

the infractions of elite students, ranging from violations of the dress code to the

publication of a student newspaper without an official sanction.

Significantly, as the selective admissions of the elite schools and the significance

of the family demonstrate, the reproduction of the avant-garde ethos took place in

segments of society that already had high cultural and social capital. This confirms

Bourdieu's observation (1993) that the ranks of the avant-garde are generally filled by

men and women with high cultural capital. At the same time, because this education was

free and because admission to these schools was in theory available to any excellent

student, the children of some ambitious and informed parents of modest means and

education were able also to join the ranks of the graduates.

Post-socialism

One common interpretation of the past suggests that there were two kinds of

socialist cultural production. One was in complicity with the socialist state and the other

resisted it. This would lead one to expect that the end of socialism would have eliminated

the premise for contrarian cultural production. In fact the opposite is true. Presently there exists a robust current of thought which defines itself through opposition and difference from the "mainstream" of Bulgarian culture, and the staff of the magazine *Edno* is representative of it. This position accuses the bulk of new work in theater, the arts, music and literature today of still following the outdated standards and aesthetic taste of socialism. It claims that no substantial changes have occurred since 1989 and that the Bulgarian field of cultural production continues to exist in oblivion to "world" trends and standards of quality, as it did during the state-imposed isolation of the previous period. What is worse, supporters of this position claim that the leaders of Bulgarian arts and culture intentionally choose to aggrandize "national achievements" by ignoring the unfavorable comparison between parochial Bulgarian production and that of the advanced world and Europe in particular. The publisher and majority owner of the magazine *Edno,* Assen Assenov, put this succinctly:

> The problem with Bulgarian cultural production is that it is the kind you get in the deep provinces. Nothing new is being made. All the same models are being recycled. There are no competent people who know how to produce anything innovative. This is the problem in the state institutions: the National Theater, National Gallery, National Opera and Ballet. People from an old and dated generation are in charge. (...)The culture elite is old and exhausted and not only doesn't help the renewal of culture but obstructs it.

The tidal wave of pre-accession nationalism, of which the play "Hushove" is one emblem, does not sit well with this contrarian sentiment. Not unlike the members of the Circle Misyl, the supporters of this contrarian current advocate elevating Bulgarian culture above its insular concern with the nation to a universalistic focus on art which because it is free from the need to serve and be understood by a collectivity can afford to

tap in the experimental spirit and the break-with-convention ethos of aeshteticized

individualism.

To return to one of the characters of my story so far, twenty years after the end of

socialism, Ivan Stanev continues to be an outcast and a foreigner to the Bulgarian theater

scene. One interviewer introduced him like this:

> I met Ivan Stanev a day after the premiere of "Izkopni Materiali." The
> conversation took place in the National Theater "Ivan Vazov" and, as readers will
> probably agree, this was an unusual place for this meeting. I greeted Ivan at the
> main entrance and led him to the room, where we would talk. I could tell that he
> was not familiar with the hallways of this building (Vandov 2005).

The National Theater is a strange place for a conversation with Stanev not only

because since 1988 he has lived and worked in Berlin, but also because he was never

admitted to any of the symbolic and institutional centers of Bulgarian culture. The

magazine LIK (notably specializing in foreign art and culture) introduces him as "a

foreigner to Bulgarian cultural space: coming from someplace else, suspicious of his own

people, foreign to the mentality of the Balkan milieu" (Dimova 2005). Stanev's personal

website is in German only, a reflection of his membership in German but not in Bulgarian

cultural space.

Stanev describes his work in Lovetch in the 1980s as cultivating "aesthetics as

resistance to the state" (Vandov and Decheva 1999). Considering the context outlined

above, it is possible that work like Stanev's resisted not just the *socialist* state but the

state in general, that it is informed by an ethos that locates itself above politics in general

by virtue of its position of contrariness to collectivity. Stanev's position as an outcast in

the past and today suggest the continuity of an intellectual position not only against one

or another kind of power, but also against the political arena in general and in favor of

values that are universal. Alexandra said this in so many words when she told me that "I and others who actively participated in the process (*of postsocialist political change*) later withdrew from it because we realized that there are a number of decisions, steps, facts and observations that conflicted with our personal ethics and that are unavoidable part of any social change." She had her fair share of peaceful protest as a journalist during socialism and rubbed shoulders with iconic figures of the tiny Bulgarian dissident movement, such as Jelio Jelev, the first democratically elected Bulgarian president after 1989. However, the nitty-gritty of everyday political life had no appeal for her, and she retreated to her work as a writer, a journalist and an editor for *Edno.*

Similarly, the only instances in which *Edno* takes an openly political stand are those in which a collectivity such as the state or the invisible hand of the market threatens to encroach on spaces where the individual may still generate alternative modes of being and experience and through them carry on the old project of merging art and life. Most regularly the magazine takes a stand on the environment, unregulated construction on the Black Sea coast and encroachment on natural preserves. Significantly, Plamen, whose parents took him camping and hiking rather than room-and-boarding, is a driving force behind the magazine's effort to raise awareness of the encroachment of a greedy laissez faire capitalism on natural destinations away from the symbolic and actual pollution of the world. In another, more controversial move, the magazine protested a new drug law which attributed equally severe punishment for the sale and use of marijuana as for that of drugs that are usually considered more dangerous, such as heroin and cocaine. Edno's staff members rolled tobacco in cigarette papers to make them look like marijuana joints and placed one in each MP's mail box. The protesters sought to make a point that

because it fails to discriminate between drugs of various severity, the law is likely to facilitate heavy drug use.

Traces of the habitus of the avant-garde, generated as it was by a drive to merge art and life and grounded in the dispositions of aestheticized individualism, survive today in the works and lives of members of the emergent elite who, like their predecessors, take an anti-collectivist stance with an anti-nationalist flavor. While future research is still needed, it seems likely that the ethos of this new generation is rooted in a tradition that starts with the early Bulgarian modernists and then was suppressed but survived socialist rule in the niches tucked away from the open seas of normative ideological discourse: uncensored or less-censored cultural consumption, the family and the elite secondary schools. In the next two chapters, I will continue to examine the common trends in the creative work of the elite in-the-making. In addition to adherence to an ethos of aestheticized individualism, the emergent elite exhibits a scorn for specific nostalgic sentiments and a distinct preference for irony.

Chapter Three: The Heavy Burden of Nostalgia

In the course of fieldwork, three subjects came up with great frequency and under different guises: the question about the significance of the legacy of socialism; the question of nationalist sentiment and its impact; and the question of the village as either a place of backwardness symbolic of Bulgaria's peripheral status internationally, or as a repository for unique and picturesque traditions and ways of life. Each of these topics is taken up repeatedly in the course of the dissertation. In this chapter, I begin to examine how the attitudes of the emergent elite on each of these subjects play out in the creative decisions of culture producers. I take as an example the production of a photo session for the magazine *Edno* and assess how assumptions about the legacy of socialism, of the significance of a mythical national past, and of village life shaped the content of one photo shoot.

In April 2006, I joined a photographic crew of about twelve: photographers, stylists, models, staff and free-lance contributors, as they headed to the town of Koprivshtitza. Over the course of the weekend, the crew was supposed to create a photo shoot for the May issue of *Edno*. The theme of this particular issue was fashion, from the street trends to its high varieties, and the photo shoot was about "high fashion."

The setting for this photo session, Koprivshtitza, is a popular travel destination. Quaint and quiet, and little over a 100 kilometers east of Sofia, it is nestled in the soft hills of the Sredna Gora Mountain and is known as a pleasant getaway from the capital. It is also a prime tourist destination because of its historical importance, many museums and marvelously preserved 18th and 19th century architecture. The town is a regular feature on the itineraries of Bulgarian and foreign tourists, and Bulgarian school children

usually visit it at least once on a school trip. Koprivshtitza is also the home of about 2,000 permanent residents who make a living mostly from tourism and subsistence agriculture.

As I explored the town with the magazine crew in search for suitable locations for the photo shoot, and as I strolled on Koprivshtitza's streets during this and previous visits, it became apparent that Koprivshtitza has at least three different faces to show to a visitor. One and the most obvious was that of the town as a national tourist destination. Another was Koprivshtitza as a place of daily activity for its residents. Outside of the touristy parts of town, Koprivshtitza feels like a large Bulgarian village with streets lined by one- or two-story houses set apart by adjacent vegetable gardens and livestock yards. Finally, in Koprivshtitza, as elsewhere in the country, one could catch glimpses of the recent past and of the material environment of socialism. The grocery store in the central plaza was one example of this. A narrow long room with dusty windows, old refrigerator cases with glass displays, a basic selection, and plenty of empty space on the store shelves—this was a familiar site that easily transported the visitor 20 years back.

In a word, Koprivshtitza seemed like an auspicious backdrop for the photo session in part because it provided several possible backgrounds with which to frame to the photo shoot in a visually intriguing way. The photographers could take advantage either of the town's history and 18th and19[th] century architecture, or of its rustic character, or of the surviving spaces with socialist design. However, in the end the photographic crew produced a series of images that eschewed all three of these options. The photo shoot showed little interest in the depiction of a specific period of the past or a specific place. Instead, it featured images that stand for a generic past and a generic rural place: an

unspecified non-urban location seemingly frozen in time. By examining the choices of the magazine crew, I suggest that this particular representation was shaped by one organizing principle that is emblematic of the sentiments of the elite in-the-making: a refusal of the usual nostalgic attachments to socialism, the nation, and the village. The absence of the usual attachments to socialism, the nation and the village is one of the features that make members of the emergent elite recognizable as a social segment.

Simultaneously, even as these young men and women are eager to prove that they are not affected by the nostalgic malaise of other Bulgarians, they have an interest in keeping this malaise within sight and of evoking it repeatedly, because it contrasts with their own beliefs and sentiments, and because it brings their own professed modernity and transnational identity into a sharper relief. As I will show below with the help of Susan Ossman's work, modernity, enlightenment and global belonging are best showcased through a contrast with their opposites: tradition, backwardness and localism. The photographic crew needed the image of Koprivshtitza, albeit stylized and purified, as a background against which to establish its own distinction.

I begin with a discussion of nostalgia as a term and as a historically constituted sentiment, and I link it to Susan Ossman's idea of the contrast between lightness and heaviness in the making of modern sensibilities. Then I proceed by looking at each in turn: nostalgia for socialism, for a mythic national past, and for village life, and I show how each of these was excised from the photographs in Koprivshtitza.

Nostalgia, Heaviness and Lightness

Nostalgia can be defined as an experience of emotional attachment or a refusal to let go of an affinity for a particular *place* or *time period* (or the idea of them) which are usually seen as superior to the here and now. In regard to *place*, nostalgia is a fixation on ideas or places which are experienced as constitutive of the individual, and so are felt to be familiar, close and intimate. In its relationship to *time*, nostalgia is usually a gaze that is turned backwards to the past because it involves the sense of having lost something that was previously available. The word nostalgia was created in the 17th century by a medical student who used it to describe the ailment of young men and women who upon separation from their native homes exhibited the symptoms of an illness that could be alleviated only by their return home. The term fused two Greek words: *nostos*, or return home, and *algia*, or pain and longing, and its very etymology contained a reference to the home as a site of both familiarity and comfort, and as necessarily located in the past (Boyer 2006; Boym 2001).

In its expanded meaning, nostalgia refers not only to the experience of longing for a real home, but also to the mourning of a home that is utopian or even metaphorical but that nonetheless is imagined as a place where one truly belongs, feels comfortable and so legitimately can call home. I use this extended meaning of the word when I discuss nostalgia for socialism, the national past, and the village. For the nostalgic, these three hold the promise or the memory of a better life. While for many Bulgarians nostalgia may be experienced as an attachment to their personal past as situated within socialism, or to the mythical past of the nation, or to village life, for the elite in-the-making these three things hold little appeal. Instead members of this social segment are by far more

interested in the promises of the future and of the world beyond Bulgaria's borders. They have their dreams and nostalgic longings, too, but these are usually of a different kind and may include experiences such as backpacking through Europe or the practicing of yoga in an Indian ashram. In fact, nostalgia's attachment to a local context and to the past is diametrically opposed to the emergent elite's orientation to the world beyond Bulgaria's borders and the future. I will make this point with the help of a detour and a discussion of the relationship between nostalgia and the cultivation of modern, "enlightened" sensibilities.

The rejection of nostalgic sentiments described in this chapter resembles what Ossman calls the logic of "en-lightenment" (Ossman 2002). Ossman describes en-lightenment as a process through which some ideals of beauty and some norms of self-styling come to be seen as "modern" and "Western" in contrast to others that are marked as "traditional," local and outdated. This is a two-step process. The first step involves the shedding of heaviness. This may include the shedding of weight literally so that in Casablanca and Cairo, two of Ossman's research locations, heavy hijabs are left at home or else are shortened and playfully modified. Voluptuous bodies may loose their weight to become slimmer and at least seemingly more mobile. En-lightenment also includes a more figurative shedding of weight, such as the discarding of previous ideals of beauty. For example, "haunches of pyramidical size," a "large heavy bosom," and "taut ripe body" may no longer be considered attractive by either men and women (20). In the words of one Egyptian man, "In the past men looked for women with large hips. The woman was much more passive. Beauty has changed as a result. Now men want a thin woman so that she can move about. A fat woman, a man thinks, will not be active. This is

why we think slimness is beautiful now" (Ossman 2002:20). In other words, this new

preference for lightness involves not only the actual shedding of extra body weight and

heavy garments, but also the rejection of existing ideals and norms, and through them, the

rejection of the contexts and social conventions which generated these norms. The lighter

appearances of women are linked to different expectations of their roles in the home and

society. An attractive woman should no longer be passive and immobile, but instead be

the opposite, active and mobile.

To rephrase, the process of making light, which Ossman describes, involves a

refusal of practices, adornments and ideals that are seen as firmly local, contextual, and

grounded in the past. En-lightenment is about a separation from a context that is

construed as traditional and old-fashioned. And so a model in a magazine may exhibit

tattoos that appear beautiful and exotic because they are placed in the en-lightened

context of the new style media. But the same tattoos on the bodies of tribal Moroccan

women are seen as signs of their belonging to traditional social milieus. Rather than

feeling beautiful and exotic as the model in the magazine, these women may "feel

disgusted with themselves" and "regret what in their villages was considered beautiful"

(Ossman 2002:12).

The second step in the process of en-lightenment involves the incorporation of

heaviness in the images of lightness as a heavy background against which the light can be

made to appear to be even lighter. The tattoos on the fashion model described above are

one example of this. They serve as markers of contrast—vestiges of old practices and

significances, whose dual purpose is, first, to emphasize lightness by serving as its foil,

and, second, to add color, flavor, and character to what otherwise may become too bland

and too generic of a "light" appearance. Importantly, heavy decorations such as the tattoos can serve this function only after undergoing themselves a process of enlightenment. They need first to be transformed into "light images of the heavy" by being visibly separated from their original context (Ossman 2002:22).

The same two-step process of enlightenment takes place in the photo shoot in Koprivshtitza. The photo session was organized around the narrative (the "story book," to cite professional slang) about a woman from a small town or a village, who had been forced to go to the big city to find work. She pays a brief visit to her husband and son in the country, complete with an evening of conjugality and a fight. In the photographs, the wife is made to stand for lightness, while her husband and the generic rural setting are rendered as a foil and a heavy background (with the husband as a personification of the village). Importantly, Koprivshtitza as a setting was made suitable to serve as a foil only after it had been enlightened and separated from the usual contexts of interpretation. The representation of Koprivshtitza in the photographs was alleviated from its nostalgic significances as a national memorial, a village, and a heir of socialist ways of life.

In the photographs, the town emerges only as a "light image of the heavy," as a reference to a generic past, generic tradition and generic village. But its presence in the photo shoot is crucial because it provides the heavy background against which lightness can be made visible. The photo shoot elaborates the tension between heavy and light through a series of other oppositions: a traditional patriarchal husband and a progressive mobile wife; a backward, static village and a dynamic city; a recognizable if generic local Bulgarian context and the cosmopolitan fashion-forward taste of the wife. Like rose petals, one creamy-colored layer nestled into another and then into another, the images of

heaviness and lightness, are nested into each other to present to the viewer a final set of pictures in which lightness becomes apparent through the contrast with its heavy background.

The emergent elite understands its place in the world according to a logic parallel to that of heaviness and lightness (even though its members do not use these specific words to talk about it). It sees in the Bulgarian context traits, meanings and sentiments that are conceived as irreparably local, traditional and outdated, and suggests that Bulgarians need to shed these in order to become "modern," up-to-date and relevant to a globally interconnected world. In this, the meaning of enlightenment as a process of becoming less heavy meets the meaning of enlightenment as freedom from the darkness of ignorance and misconception. Since nostalgia is a refusal to let go of attachments to the mythic national past, the village and socialism, it is also the opposite of the decisive shedding of weight that the emergent elite advocates. Nostalgia for these three things is the opposite of the pursuit of enlightenment.

The emergent elite is not interested in nostalgia's attachment to locality. Unwilling to claim a Bulgarian intellectual heritage, in possession of cultural capital that makes it especially well-positioned to benefit from its international ties, and with many of its credentials coming from abroad in the form of foreign travel, education, funding, and connections, the elite in-the-making is not nationally but transnationally-oriented.[30] Its future depends less on its ability to speak to and represent the local, and more on its ability to introduce new artistic perspectives, and to legitimate its own work as representative of the latest global trends. With its gaze fixed on foreign art, culture and

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[30] For a detailed discussion of the elite in-the-making's transnational connections and their significance, please see the chapter titled "A Transnational Imaginary."

style, the emergent elite has little interest in nostalgic ruminations on the supposed disappearance of local ways of life.

Its members are also not interested in a nostalgic fascination with the past because it conflicts with its predominant orientation to the future. Still lacking substantial prestige in the present, the emergent elite draws its authority from the promises that it makes for the future: that if only given the opportunity, the prestige, the funding, the breathing space, it can produce Bulgarian art and culture of "world quality;" that it could put Bulgaria on the world map of artistic masterpieces; and that through its work, it could help Bulgarians re-examine their beliefs, attitudes and practices, transcend their flaws and actually make their way to becoming an equal partner of the developed West. The fixation on the past that is one of the characteristics of nostalgia is thus foreign to the emergent elite, and instead it is substituted by a fixation on the future.

Socialism

Upon arrival in Koprivshtitza, the art director Alex, the stylist Milena and I looked for a setting for the photo shoot. Given the limited time at our disposal, it was determined that much of the photography had to be done indoors. One of our options was to rent rooms in someone's home, a common practice in Koprivshtitza, where many locals supplement their income by letting space to tourists, and we decided to explore. One of our first stops was a privately owned house a few hundred meters from the center of town. A middle-aged woman opened an iron gate the color of unripe figs and led us up along a fenced off section of the yard where a few hens casually picked the April mud.

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Up a few stairs, we entered a semi-detached wing of the main house that consisted of two bedrooms connected by a wide hallway doubling up as a living room.

I thought that the setting was perfect: synthetic orange shags which were ubiquitous in the late 1980s, green walls with hand-drawn golden ornaments from a slightly earlier period, and the sour smell of dried fruit and herbs. After all the story board for this particular photo shoot was driven by a narrative premised by the post-socialist crisis of unemployment and the deteriorating economy of the countryside. This was a believably worn country setting, seemingly unchanged in the last fifteen-years or so that could drive one out of her home in search of better opportunities. The setting was also highly representative of the homes of many Bulgarians in small towns and villages that I had seen personally on visits to friends and relatives. Despite of what I thought was the ubiquity of settings like this, or perhaps, precisely because of it, the house was immediately dismissed as a possible place for the photo shoot: by Alex, the art director, mostly for practical reasons—he was concerned that the green walls would shed a greenish hue on models' skins in pictures; by Milena, the Bulgarian stylist, "because this smacks of socialism" and "because everyone has that at home. What is the point of featuring it in a magazine?" Reasoning that most other private homes are likely to look the same on the inside and "to smack of socialism," Milena and Alex decided that we need to explore other options, such as doing the photo shoot inside a museum or in a hotel.

The rejection of this house as a setting for the photo shoot and the decision not to look for other private homes because they were likely to have a similar "socialist" décor had a tangible impact on the final appearance of the images. This was a conscious

creative choice that by the process of elimination helped to determine what the finished

photographs would look like. This not a spurious decision but instead it reflected the

sentiments of the elite in-the-making to socialism and the recent past. For the young

culture producers, the legacy of socialism still lives on in unwelcome forms and

Bulgarians fail to recognize this every time when they soothe themselves with pleasant

thoughts of life before 1989. According to the elite in-the-making, Bulgaria today still

fails to live up to the ideal of an imagined "Europe" and the developed West in part

because Bulgarians have failed to execute a radical break with the past. To progress and

prosper, it is implied, Bulgarians need once and for all say good bye to both socialism

and their illusions about it.

And yet, all the while as the emergent elite presents itself as the alternative of

everything that can be labeled "socialist," it refuses to relegate socialism to oblivion and

insistently calls it into view. It suggests that Bulgarians have not looked at the recent past

carefully enough, have not examined it sufficiently critically, and have not learned their

lessons. In this way socialism is made to provide a heavy backdrop against which the

emergent elite can appear ever more progressive, pro-European and professional. Similar

sentiments surfaced repeatedly in the texts and images of the magazine *Edno,* and I will

look at some examples below.

In the specific case of the photo shoot in Koprivshtitza, the socialist setting was

not included in the photographs as a heavy background for at least two related reasons.

First, to serve as a heavy background, the socialist décor first would have to needed to be

reworked, turned into a "light image of the heavy." Second, both Alex and Milena

occupied somewhat marginal positions within the magazine and within the emergent elite

and that might have made them less likely to undertake the project of reworking the heavy socialist setting into a light image of itself. Alex is not Bulgarian and so lacks investment in the causes of the emergent elite; Milena's opinions and taste sometimes differed significantly from those of the core magazine staff, and her perspective may be representative of her individual circumstances. At the time, she was a freelancer for *Edno* hoping that she would get hired on staff. However, she did not get hired when an opening presented itself possibly because her work was not considered to be representative enough of the perspective and the quality of the magazine as a whole. She lacked the foreign credentials that others one staff had and had more modest financial resources. At the time, she still lived with her parents in a beautiful part of Sofia on a quiet chestnut-lined street. With mustard-yellow bathroom tile and tired plywood cabinets, the residence was a living testimony to socialism. Milena had a good personal reason to find the socialist setting banal. While she shared the critical attitude to socialism with the rest of the magazine staff, her personal creative judgment precluded a decision to represent it critically in the photo shoot.

Notably, for the emergent elite, heaviness resides both in socialism and in people's attachments to the socialist past. Such attachments were easy to spot during my research. I repeatedly heard Bulgarian acquaintances reminisce of a time when they were younger and things were simpler, at least from the perspective of the present. Some middle-aged people thought of socialism wishfully as a time when they had a greater job security, better standard of living and felt more respected. Pensioners sometimes referred to the years before 1989 as a time of prosperity and happiness, since it also coincided with their youth and most active years and contrasted with the present day of low

pensions, ill-health and a general sense of insecurity. Hardly anyone expressed the desire to actually reinstate socialism and turn the course of history, but as Svetlana Boym demonstrates, nostalgia that seeks an actual restoration of the home, "a return to the original stasis," is only one kind of nostalgia (Boym 2001:49). She calls this kind restorative nostalgia. The sentiment to which I refer here is of another kind, a "reflective nostalgia," which concerns "the individual and cultural memory" rather than the grand narratives of nation and state. Rather than seeking to restore the past, reflective nostalgia "cherishes shattered fragments of memory" and "savors details and memorial signs" (Boym 2001:49). [31] As some of the other issues of the magazine Edno demonstrate, the emergent elite was critical of precisely these kinds of nostalgic attachments to the "details and memorial signs" of socialism. Below are some examples of the ways in which socialism was both denigrated and evoked on the pages of Edno.

Six months before the photo shoot in Koprivshtitza, *Edno* had a special issue dealing with the socialist 1980s. In text and images, the magazine made the point that Bulgarians today continue to misrecognize their socialist past both as dead and as desirable. As Iana Genova wrote, too many people would like to part with their socialist accoutrements but simply cannot afford it:

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[31] The phenomenon of various kinds of attachments to the socialist past is not unique to Bulgaria (Berdahl 1999; Ten Dyke 2000). Dominic Boyer suggests that in the case of united Germany, *Ostalgie* is a construct with which citizens of the former FDR can strategically imply that citizens of the former East Germany are radically different, "trapped in old habits," and "frightened by change and the future" (Boyer 2006:373). Boyer points out that in reality citizens of the former GDR express a feeling of loss only about their personal pasts and do not fantasize of a return of socialism. Because of this, Boyer questions the validity of term nostalgia when applied to the way people feel about the passing of socialism. Similarly, when the emergent elite accuses its compatriots of undue fascination with the past, it is pursuing a strategic agenda. Despite this similarity, I retain the word nostalgia to describe existing attachments to one's personal past and to the imagined and real pleasures of life under socialism in the sense of "reflective nostalgia" as outlined by Boym.

Today the 80s persist around us in a strange way: there are two kinds of covers of the past: The original versions today are sad. The *Minsk* refrigerator more than 20 years old and the *Raketa* vacuum cleaner of the same declining age, the *Sofia* TV set from the middle of 1983, the *Perla 3* semi-automatic laundry machine, all of these are long-lived objects still in use not because of the awesome quality of the old industries. The unpleasant truth is that poverty keeps a large part of Bulgarians trapped in the way of life of another era. And this way of life is a cover version of nothing else but itself (Genova 2005:67).

A photo session emphasized the ways in which the material vestiges of socialism, such as shabby trolley cars, the ancient trains of the Bulgarian state-owned railroad company, and even elements of the Bulgarian cuisine, continue to exist unnoticed because of their ubiquity. The photographs featured models' torsos dressed in white T-shirts custom-made for the photo shoot. Printed on each were images of objects and emblems that the magazine staff considered to be symbolically socialist: a clear lemonade bottle full of the electric green liquid, the blue street car of a trolley, and a jar of home-made pickled vegetables. Decontextualized on the pages of the magazine, these objects ceased to be material things with which Bulgarians interact only distractedly, as Benjamin might have put it. Instead, they were made into objects of contemplation as vestiges of socialism and as the visual evidence of the material continuity of socialism in the present day.

In addition to these tangible remnants of socialism, members of the elite in-the-making were highly critical of the popularity of socialist cultural production. During my research, Bulgarian TV viewers were thrilled by the Bulgarian National Television's revival of old Bulgarian movies. This included a designated Monday night rubric showing only Bulgarian cinema, much of it produced before 1989. Newspapers capitalized on socialist nostalgia by releasing a series of DVDs of Bulgarians films with

their issues, and the national radio station Tangra specialized exclusively in Bulgarian music with playlists dating to before 1989.

In contrast to this popularity, members of the elite in-the-making insisted that the film, literature, music and art of the previous era are parochial and profoundly substandard when compared to best examples worldwide. I was repeatedly informed that much of the pop culture of socialism was actually "stolen" from Western artists. An article in *Edno* exposed the work of beloved Bulgarian pop musicians as a daylight theft from international music stars. Sylvia Katzarova was revealed to be an impostor of Tina Turner; Georgi Hristov of George Michael, Tonika SV of the Italian group Ricci-e-Poveri, and more (Petrov and Keremedchieva 2005). According to *Edno's* editor Viktor Manev the blatant socialist theft of songs and of musicians' self-styling was facilitated by Bulgaria's international isolation, which allowed the passing of stolen work as one's own. Socialism was considered to have inflicted great damage on the development of Bulgarian popular and elite culture, most of all by eliminating the opportunity to push Bulgarian cultural producers to higher standards.

The popularity of socialist cultural products was seen, first, as misguided in the sense that people were not aware that it was not original, and, second, as harmful, in the sense that there were no consequences for its authors and that they could continue to enjoy their previous popularity. In this, it was important for the elite in-the-making to establish the inferior quality of socialist art and culture as a way to discredit the socialist intelligentsia and its representatives, in part because they were believed to continue to be in positions of power today and to effectively prevent the elite in-the-making from becoming part of the cultural establishment. *Edno's* passionate argument in revealing the

alleged theft and incompetence of socialist culture producers was driven less by the actual popularity of these veterans (interest in Bulgarian cultural production, with the exception of *chalga,* pales in comparison to interest in foreign film, music and literature) than by the need to establish the elite in-the-making's local competitors as incompetent, parochial and stuck in the past—in a word as a heavy background for the elite in-the-making's own enlightenment.

The mythical past of the nation

The period of the National Revival is one of the most researched periods in Bulgarian national history, and the emblematic Revival architecture is one of its most prominent symbols. The magazine crew made use of the rich Revival setting of Koprivshtitza in a unique way, alleviating it from its historical and nationalist significance, and transforming it into an image of a generic past and a generic location of traditional life. This image was in turn contrasted to en-lightened fashion preferences and ways of life embodied in the figure of the diegetic wife. Before I proceed with an exploration of how this was done, a few more words about the National Revival, the architecture and their relationship to nostalgia are in order. This will shed light on the kinds of references and significances which were eliminated in the process of creating an "en-lightened" image of Koprivshtitza.

The Revival is commonly understood as a time period between the middle of the 18th and the end of the 19th centuries. [32] In Bulgarian, Възраждане literally means an

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[32] The conventional understanding of the Bulgarian past attributes a thirteen-century long history of the Bulgarian state. Established in 681 AD, the country became a significant power on the Balkans and a major opponent of Byzantium. The state's decline was gradually brought about by a period Byzantine rule (1018-1185). In the 15th c. Bulgarian lands were brought under Ottoman rule and remained part of the Empire

"awakening" or "re-birth" and refers to the idea that during this time Bulgarians

recognized themselves as a unique group (народност) that deserves independence from

the Ottoman Empire and has the right to its own state. Bulgarian historiography describes

the Revival as a period of changes in three parallel domains: the development of a sense

of a national belonging; a spiritual and cultural transformation, "a transition from a

medieval (religious, traditional, folklorist) world-view toward Modernity;" and a series of

economic and social changes, "a transition from (Ottoman) feudalism toward capitalism"

(Daskalov 2004). Bulgarians are said to have "lost" sense of their national identity when

they became incorporated in the Ottoman Empire and to have awakened to it again during

the Revival.

The Revival has a special place in the popular imagination. This is in part because

the cultural changes and armed struggles that took place during this period resulted in the

establishment of an independent Bulgarian state in 1878. Independence opened the road

to modernization and Europeanization in all areas of life, from the development of local

infrastructure, industry, and technology, to the arts, culture and architecture. This period

is also experientially available to contemporary Bulgarians in ways that the more distant

past is not. For example, material remnants of the First Bulgarian Kingdom survive in the

form of archeological ruins and artifacts that are largely undecipherable for laypeople

without extensive reconstructions and exegesis. In contrast, the Revival period is directly

available and immediately appealing through the hundreds of preserved picturesque

houses-museums. Beautiful textiles, hand-made embroideries, and domestic tools and

objects are exhibited in period museums, and many of these household objects are

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until 1878, when Bulgaria gained independence, and a monarchy was established. The period between 1878 and 1945 (when Bulgaria officially became a communist republic) is known as the second Bulgarian kingdom.

personally familiar to older Bulgarians, since they were in common use in rural areas until the middle of the 20th century. As the historian Mary Neuburger points out, the material remnants of the Revival and the period architecture "literally (have) allowed Bulgarians to dwell in this past" (Neuburger 2008:148).

Importantly, the past that emerges from this materiality is also carefully constructed. The houses have been maintained and renovated, provided with a staff of museum workers, and framed by signs and displays that clearly designate them as remnants of the Revival period. As Mary Neuburger shows, some of the complexities and entangled ethnic relations of the Ottoman Empire and the revival period have been simplified and eliminated. The material environment of the Revival was the result of influences, styles and exchanges ranging in geographic scope from Western Europe to Persia. The resulting blend usually is recognized as typically Ottoman, but in the Bulgarian context it has come to be seen as uniquely Bulgarian. The past that is available through Revival architecture is a past "that has been purified and sorted, renovated and reconstructed in a highly nationalist, but also surprisingly nuanced manner" (Neuburger 2008:148).

The tourist popularity of sites such as Koprivshtitza, the money invested in their upkeep, the pride with they are recommended to foreign visitors are some of the indicators that many Bulgarians have a particular attachment to these places and the past for which they stand. Since, as established at the beginning of this chapter, nostalgic sentiment is an attachment to a specific (real or imagined) place that has receded in the past, it is fair to describe places like Koprivshtitza as sites with a nostalgic resonance that symbolize the period when the Revival spirit flourished. Mary Neuburger recognizes the

same sentiment when she says that period houses are "the focus of a nationalist nostalgia, not for the Ottoman period, but for the mythic time of the Bulgarian national awakening" (Neuburger 2008:157).

The connection between nostalgia and patriotic sentiment is neither new, nor unique to Bulgaria. In fact it can be traced to the 17th century when both the word nostalgia and the idea of a community based on national belonging were coming into being in German-speaking Europe. Dominic Boyer demonstrates that nostalgia, as a term to describe the physical pain caused by one's separation from home and the homeland, provided "a language within which the health of home and nation is contrasted against the afflictions of migration and translocation" and that "naturalized nationalism as a physiological state" (Boyer 2006:368). The medical dissertation, which proposed the term nostalgia, played a "generative and coordinative role" in the development of the category of the nation (Boyer 2006:367). Similarly, in Bulgaria the idea of the nation and the experience of nostalgia are connected. Nostalgia is driven in part by the fear of losing the homeland and the nation, or at least of losing some of its unique characteristics, because of the passage of time and of change. Town-museums, such as Koprivshtitza, claim to preserve the past and with it the essence of the nation. They function as foci of nostalgic sentiment and as embodiments of a nostalgic fascination with the "mythical time of the Bulgarian national awakening." [33] (Fig. 1).

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[33] Notably, Koprivshtitza is also the home of the largest yearly folklore festival in Bulgaria.

Fig. 1. Revival houses in Koprivshtitza, http://www.koprivshtitza.com/pictures.php, accessed 10-16-2009

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Koprivshtitza was one of the wealthiest towns in Bulgarian lands. The wealth of its residents, acquired mostly through trade and artisanal production, allowed to them to educate their children and to invest in churches, bridges, and local schools, including two secondary schools, one for men and one for women, as well as a *chitalishte* (a local center for literacy and culture). On April 20th, 1876, here was fired the first shot of the April Uprising, which is often celebrated as the courageous effort of a small nation to stand up to the monstrous Ottoman Empire and open the road to its independence.[34] Today among the houses-turned-museums in Koprivshtitza are the homes of two leaders of the April uprising, Todor Kableshkov (1851-1876) (Fig. 2) and Georgi Benkovski (1849-1876); as well as of the brothers Liuben Karavelov (1834-1879) a writer, and Petko Karavelov (1843-1903), a post-independence prime minister (Fig.3); and of the poet Dimcho Debelyanov (1887-1916).

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[34] Other more skeptical readings question the moral grounds of the uprising considering that it was poorly organized and that the organizers did not believe in its success but saw it as a way to provoke the Ottoman Empire into bloodshed and to incite international interference in favor of the Bulgarian cause. According to some estimates more than 20, 000 people, many of them civilians, women and children, died before the uprising was put down. Two years later, after direct military involvement of Russia and with political pressure from Western Europe, Bulgaria gained independence from the Ottomans (Daskalov 2004). Unlike other settlements which were burnt to the ground and their inhabitants victimized by Ottoman military and para-military forces, Koprivshtitza's wealthy residents were able to pay a ransom and save the town, which in part accounts for the survival of many of the Revival period structures today.

Fig.2. Todor Kableshkov's house-museum
http://www.koprivshtitza.com/museums.html, accessed 10-23-2009

Fig. 3 Fig.1 Karavelov's house-museum, Koprivshtitza, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyuben_Karavelov, accessed 10-16-2009

Considering the symbolic importance of the Revival Period in the Bulgarian national imagination, and considering Koprivshtitza's emblematic importance, the decision not to emphasize the specificity of the town's unique and recognizably Revivalist setting is intriguing. Next I will look at how exactly Koprvishtitza's historical and nationalist particularities were stripped before it was incorporated into the photo shoot, and will begin to inquire into the reasons why.

After Milena and Alex decided that renting rooms in a private home was not a good idea because of the rural socialist décor, we explored the possibility of shooting in one of the many house-museums. However, the negotiations did not go far because museum staff was reluctant to keep the buildings open outside of working hours, which would further limit the time available to for the photo shoot. Our last alternative was renting rooms in a hotel, and museum staff recommended the Hadji Ivanchovata Kyshta,

a large Revival house from the mid-19th century that was updated and converted into a

hotel. (Fig. 4) Brief negotiation with the hotel owners ensured that we could rent one

large room and have full use of the common areas of the otherwise completely empty

hotel for a discounted price. In exchange, the magazine offered publicity for the Hadji

Ivanchovata House (Fig. 3) by acknowledging it as the setting for the photo shoot. We

unloaded bags of equipment from the car and set about making preparations for work.
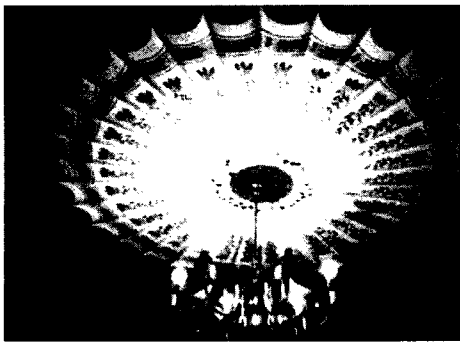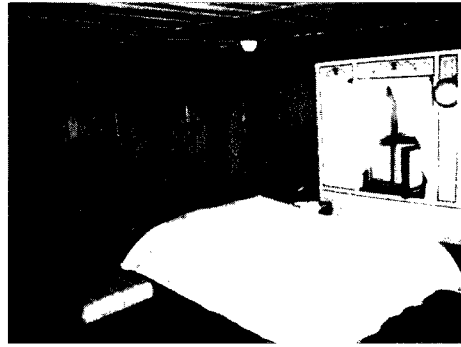
Fig. 3 Hadji Ivanchovata House,
http://www.motoroads.com/gallery/koprivshtitsa-hadji-ivanchova-house.aspx, accessed on 10-16-2009

Brown window frames punctuated the yellow façade of the two-story building,

which was set at the back of a large yard covered by a green carefully manicured lawn.

The yard was closed off on all sides by a *duvar*, a fence made out of layered stones, and

topped off with red bricks (for example of a *duvar*, please see Fig. 2). A wide stone-

covered swath of land connected the house to a big wide gate that opened to the street

and was large enough to let a horse-drawn cart in. The outside of the hotel, very similar

to the appearance of some of the house-museums, prepared one for the period decoration inside.

Our room was on the second floor, up a wooden staircase that led to a large central common area. The common area had previously been the *hayat* or the equivalent of the salon of the house, a typical feature of large Revival homes, which opened to four individual and rather large rooms. The room we rented had elaborately painted beige wall panels with large stylized floral decorations in white and gray. These were framed by borders in grayish blue and brown. Lavish wooden panels decorated some of the walls and the ceiling, and narrow divans lined up under the windows. The room featured a large bed, an updated bathroom, and a sitting area with a coffee table, sofa and a TV. White cotton linen and white curtains were clearly meant to add to the period décor. (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Photography of the author.

And yet as the photo shoot progressed there was little interest in showcasing the impressive details of the décor. The photo shoot followed the story board drafted in Sofia without any preliminary knowledge of the setting, and no adjustments to it were made. The carved wood, the emblematic painted wall panels, the divans— all appeared in the finished images as rather generic fragments often unrecognizable as parts of the larger

whole. They were stylized and purified, made light by the shedding of their connections to the specific context: the 19th century Revival house. In Ossman's words, they were stylized and rendered into "enlightened images" of a static past and of tradition.

For example, one of the images that was thought to be most successful and was considered for a cover picture of the issue, featured the female model Irma, sitting on the floor in the hotel room, with her back leaning against the bed (Fig. 5). In the story board, the image was meant to show the wife contemplating her dissatisfaction form her return home and her planning to return to the city, as indicated by an open suitcase on the bed behind her. The suitcase was a prop owned by one of the stylists. It was old and boxy, and judging from the design, it looked like it might have actually been in active use sometime in the 1950s. In the picture, the Revival setting of the hotel and of Koprivshtitza is virtually indiscernible and shows no trace of the recognizable architecture or the décor. And yet, the image clearly is a reference to the past: the textured cream-colored surface of the bed spread appears outdated and old-fashioned by today's standards, just like the suitcase visible behind Irma's head. This effect was further strengthened by Alex's manipulation of the image in Photoshoop which toned down the colors and especially the warmer shades producing an image reminiscent of old photographs that have grown pale with age.

Fig. 5. http://zine.edno.bg/showissue.php?issueid=48, accessed 12-12-2008

At the same time, the past, to which this picture refers, is indeterminate: the suitcase, the cigarette in the model's hand, and the shirt slouching down low on her shoulder suggest a time that is much later than the 19th century, but it is unclear whether this is the early 20th century and the time of symbolist poets such as Koprivshtitza's Dmicho Debelyanov, or whether it is perhaps the 1930s, or even the 1950s. The image depicts a past that is generic and deprived of specific references not only to the National Revival but also to any other historical period. (Notably, the magazine crew also choose not to take any photographs on the streets of Kiprivshtitza, with the exception of a single shot that did not make it in the final selection for publication, showing that it had no interest in featuring specific house-museums or historical sites.)

Such lack of clarity and inconsistency is to be expected in fashion photography. Layers of references, accessories from different eras, a contrast between the décor and the appearance of the models: all of these are means to create layers associations and to produce vague suggestions and auras of significance whose primary goal is not accuracy to any single version of reality, but rather the conjuring of a world of fantasy and dreams. In this particular case, the setting of Koprivshtitza provided the means to construct the aura of generic past and of a place that is stuck at indeterminate previous point of time. This generic past is the background against which the stylistic preferences of the elite in-the-making and the ideals and ways of life that go with them could be made to stand out as "lite" alternatives, as options that gain meaning from their rejection of the past, that are up-to-date with the present and that profess a progressive focus on the future rather than a fixation on a fruitless past. As I will show in the next section, in the photo session, the

generic past is also linked to an image of a generic village with concomitant and

stereotypical ideas about norms of masculinity and femininity, ideals of beauty, and

gender relations.

While in photographs Koprivshtitza was reconstituted as the heavy background of

locality, parochialism and unhealthy attachment to the local, travel, the cosmopolitan city

and life in implied far away places were all treated more favorably. For example, the

opposition between travel and stasis features prominently in the photo shoot. The fashion

session opens with Irma's arrival at the train station (Fig. 6) and ends with her departure

(Fig. 7), and the railroad lines and the train feature prominently in both images. As the

story board suggests, the wife copes with her disappointment from her native village and

her home by packing her suitcase and leaving. There is no room for a nostalgic

attachment to the past, to tradition, or to the home.

Fig. 6
http://zine.edno.bg/showissue.php?is
sueid=48, accessed 12-12-2008

Fig. 7. Photography of the author.

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The village

In Bulgaria, a nostalgic attachment to village life is predicated at least in part by the recent history of urbanization. Until less than a century ago, Bulgaria was a predominantly rural country. In 1945, at the onset of socialist rule, 75% of Bulgarians lived in villages. By 2001, this number had dwindled to 31%, in part as a result of the rapid socialist urbanization. Even after they moved, many of these recent urbanites maintained solid roots in villages across the country. During socialism, they continued to work the fields of friends and relatives in exchange for gifts of fresh produce and preserves, all essential for life in a socialist economy of shortage (Smollett 1989). Children of barely literate peasants earned higher degrees, took white-collared jobs, and often found themselves still attached to the village by emotional and nostalgic ties. Many of these people have personal memories of growing up in a village and these memories are likely to be spurred by present-day encounters with the materiality of the village life. A fifty-year old Bulgarian acquaintance, with a master's degree in Bulgarian literature and a career in the non-profit sector, still talks about village poplars in the purple twilight and the smell of freshly plowed earth as something eternal, the "real" and "existential" stuff. She is sorry to think of all the young people living in the cities, who have never been exposed to it. And she was right to some extent.

The nostalgic sentiment, which she felt, was foreign to *Edno's* staff. The members of the photo shoot crew refused to celebrate the rural through the materiality that appeals to new urbanites from their parents' generation. They sealed out the actual village from the final product of their work as well as from the work process. When the crew was

working inside the hotel, a cloud of cigarette smoke and house music barred any other smells and sounds from penetrating the set.

In considering how the photographic crew chose to represent Koprivshtitza in the photo session, one circumstance was especially fortunate for me as a researcher. In the story board, the husband was supposed to personify the backwardness and stasis of the village. The male model, Miro, who was selected to play the husband, had no previous experience in working with *Edno* and did not share many of the same assumptions as the magazine crew and the elite in-the-making. As early as the beginning of the trip out of Sofia, it became clear that Miro and the *Edno* crew made a poor match. Fifteen minutes after we hit the road, he had already been introduced to the opinions of other passengers on several important topics, and they did not sit well with him. He disclosed details about his girlfriend's preference for pop-folk and was almost immediately advised to dump the girlfriend and drop the pop-folk *chalga* clubs. Soon after that he tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to stop the car and drop him off. He wanted to take his personal Volkswagen (despite the warning from the fashion assistant that they would not cover the gasoline) and make the two-hour trip to Koprivshtitza alone. While many of the decisions about where and how to shoot were not the subject of much conversation on the set, seemingly because they were based on an implicit consensus and in part because of the order of decision-making seniority, the scenes involving Miro required extensive discussions, instructions and comments. These verbal exchanges were especially useful in revealing the assumptions of the magazine crew about village life and villagers.

A tall muscular guy with a square chin and rugged look, Miro was expected to perform what the urban magazine crew imagined to be a rugged village husband: strong,

sweaty and primitive (Fig. 8). In the "sex scene," with Irma sitting right below his

stomach, he blushed and could not look her in the eye. Photographers and stylists

jumped in with instructions: "Act more aggressively. She is on top, and you are the *man*.

You are angry because you want to be on top. Show it." And more, "Try to smell her. She

comes from the big city. She smells good." Still Miro failed to produce satisfying

amounts of rough machismo or believable bestiality.

Fig. 8. Photography of the author

That same day, the crew also shot the fight scene, in which Miro was supposed to

be mad about his wife going back to the big city. He had to hold Irma's arm and pull

back while she struggles to leave (Fig. 8). The instructions dispensed suggested that the

husband was seen as a stereotype of a peasant male: someone who is aggressive, violent,

and in command of physical force. He is also rather unrefined, considering that he is

invited to smell the wife, because she, coming form the big city smells good, and he, by

implication, as a villager is not used to such good smells. His lack in refinement is also

evident by the instructions to Miro to pretend being angry because he is not on top, with

the suggestion that the primitive villager may want to dominate in any situation, unaware

of the fineries of love life. A village husband may supposedly also get so upset by his

wife's decision to return back to the big city despite his objections that he would resort to physical force to make his point, as in the "fight scene."

Fig. 8. Photography of the author.

The failure of the husband to respect his wife's decision was a clear reference to stereotypically traditional gender roles, in which the husband has the power to restrict his wife's movements. Among themselves, Bulgarian women sometimes use the word "Turk" to describe a husband who is especially controlling. This refers to the imagined exorbitant restrictions that Turkish, and, by implication, Muslim husbands impose on their wives, and has clearly negative and orientalist connotations of backwardness and a departure from imagined European norms. Most women would consider such power dynamics to be typical of "traditional" Bulgarian families as well. The attempt of the diegetic husband to control his wife's movements taps into the stereotype of the brute and backward husband, with all the concomitant assumptions about traditional gender roles, the imagined Orient, and Bulgaria's unwelcome proximity to it.

The supposed brutishness of the husband was also implicit in some of the garments that Alex, Milena and Mitko picked out for him wear. Earlier that morning in a downtown Sofia store, they perused the racks of clothes until they found items that they thought "seem suitable for a peasant," for example, a pair of nondescript jeans and a

short-sleeved button-down shirt in a checkered blue and white. The checkered design of the material and the basic design of the shirt were in sharp contrast with Irma's garments of lush lace, satin and silk, and in solid blacks, deep reds and beige.

Clearly, this depiction was far from flattering; it was exaggerated and highly stereotyped. Importantly, the stereotype of a dominant and brute Bulgarian man was coupled with a village provenance. All along Miro's character was imagined and described as a "peasant" and as someone whose lack of refinement was in part due to his village residence. This depiction was deprived of the idyllic meanings of the village as a setting for a morally superior way of life. It was not celebrated for its ability to preserve old values, folk traditions, and the unadulterated spirit of the nation, as the educated strata might fantasize (Elenkov 1994) when they turn to folklore and the village as one of the components of an "authentic" national soul (Handler 1988).

The idea to include the village as a setting of backwardness and lack of refinement belonged to the art director Alex. His inspiration came from *chalga* (the Bulgarian pop-folk) and the over-dressed and over-the-top made-up *chalga* stars, the mafioso girlfriends and wives *(mutressi),* and the regular women on the street, all of whom have a penchant for glitter and glamour. He wanted a photo session that comments obliquely and subtly on what he saw as "opulence out of place:" "Kind of like, why is she dressed like that? Here you can see a woman going to the gym on high heels (...) And then I wanted to portray the opulence at the wrong place, so I needed to do it among smoke, chickens and things like that." So he thought the collection of Mariela Gemisheva was perfect because the garments were "completely overdressed but not cheap."[35]

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[35] Since this was meant to be a "high fashion" photo-shoot the selection of garments for Irma was not an easy matter. The magazine crew was well aware that "high fashion" in the world of global design meant

In the actual photo shoot, the village was represented as backward not through a representation of its physical materiality, "smoke, chickens, things like that," but rather through the character of the husband. By refusing to show the actual materiality of village life, the photographic crew in effect produced a "light image of the heavy" village. The old ladies with dusty head-scarves lining the village benches like birds on a wire, the sweat of manual labor, the bleating goats and stinky manure, the hens, all the smelly materiality of this image had to be purified and en-lightened before it could become suitable to even appear on the pages of the magazine.

In one scene, Miro pretended to chop wood (Fig. 6). Before the camera started shooting, two assistant-stylists armed with spray bottles diligently sprayed Miro's underarms to produce make-believe sweat. The frame was shot in the yard of the hotel which was covered by fresh green grass crisscrossed by stone paths. This yard looked nothing like the yards of most actual village houses, where most land is put to good use for gardening, is closed off as a yard for free-roaming chicken, or is taken up by cow, sheep or pig pens. Instead of it, one sees a clean, fresh lawn, and the clean and brand new shirt of Miro stained by fake sweat. The way in which this scene was produced demonstrates that the magazine crew was not interested in representing the village literally.

And yet stereotypical village sights were readily available in Koprivshtitza. Hens were pecking the mud of the first house we considered as a setting for the photo shoot. In

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haute couture and items created by world-famous designers, which were simply not available in Bulgaria. Garments from the latest collection of the Bulgarian designer Mareia Gemisheva fulfilled the formal requirement for haute couture by being one of a kind, and Gemisheva was one of the few Bulgarian designers for whom members of the elite in-the-making had some respect. Her work was considered to pale in comparison with the work of world-famous designers but to be better than the work of most other Bulgarian designers.

the evening, when I left the set in search for coffee, I passed by an open gate where a man in his work clothes, probably dusty and actually sweaty in contrast to Miro, hoed his garden. In the distance, a shepherd's call buoyed over a sea of bleating sheep and goats coming home for the night. A faint smell of manure seeped through the purple evening air.

As Laura Marks demonstrates with respect to intercultural cinema, visual representation can be used to evoke haptic, olfactory and other memories of village life (2000). For example, the representation of someone consuming a drink may bring the memory of that specific taste to the viewer. Similarly, images of actual village life could have been used to remind *Edno's* readers about the smells and sensations of the country. Yet this project held no appeal for the magazine crew, in part because it is likely to serve as an occasion for nostalgic ruminations (which is indeed frequently the case with intercultural cinema).

Chapter Four: Glamour, Trashy Pictures and the Power of Irony

In April 2006, the lifestyle magazine *Edno* organized an exhibit called "I Will Eat You." The exhibit opened in Galleria Academica, one of the exhibition venues of the National Academy of Art, and featured sculptural busts of the ten people voted as the most successful Bulgarians of the last year in a recent sociological survey. This included the president Petyr Stoyanov, the soccer star Hristo Stoichkov, three pop-folk music stars, and the pop music duo Karizma. Usually, the sculptural bust is a paradigmatic sign of recognition, with its marble, bronze or other lasting material substance expected to impart the ability to survive the trials of time to the legacy of the people it immortalizes. But what kind of message does a bust send that is made out of chocolate, as the busts in the "I Will Eat You" exhibit? Does the appetizing material make a new kind of contribution to the achievements of the ten most successful Bulgarians or does it mock them by virtue of its transient nature and tendency to melt as soon as removed from the refrigerated display cases? It is unreasonable to ask that works of art, such as the chocolate busts, explain what "the author wanted to say." Nevertheless, the vagueness that was inherent in the exhibit, the ambiguity of whether or not it was being critical or celebrative, and if critical, then critical of what: all of these uncertainties are emblematic of both the pervasiveness of irony in the lives and works of the emergent elite, and of the ambiguity that accompanies it.[36]

There were myriad ways in which the lives of the Bulgarian elite in-the-making, its creative projects, its fashion and personal taste, all bear a trademark infatuation with

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[36] The exhibit bears uncanny resemblance to the work of the New York sculptor Janine Antoni and the *Lick and Lather* self-portrait bust series executed in both chocolate and soap during the 1990s. However, Antoni was never credited by the artists and the exhibit's organizers as an influence or an inspiration.

irony. In this, irony is not just a trope of verbal expression. Rather it is a prevalent and omnipresent characteristic of the way the emergent elite inhabits the world and relates to it. Irony serves an important function for the elite in-the-making: it makes it recognizable as social segment and does this in a particularly powerful way. It is *polemical* in that it allows the emergent elite to continually challenge its opponents in the social space and to suggest that alternatives are possible. It also makes the existence of the elite in-the-making *felt* in that it triggers emotional responses of approval and enjoyment, or of annoyance and anger. Through irony, the elite in-the-making discredits the seeming universality of competing norms and ideals, and establishes its own authority. In this paper, I will focus on irony predominantly through the prism of fashion and style. I will first look at representations of fashion in images and texts to examine the *polemic character* of the emergent elite's irony. Then, I will look at irony in the personal self-styling of members of the elite in-the-making in order to assess irony's *affective potential* and its ability to enhance awareness of difference by making difference felt. Finally, I will assess how irony not only helps to establish the elite in-the-making as a separate social segment with alternative norms and ideals but also can be used to make the argument that members of the elite in-the-making have access to superior knowledge, skills, talent, and more.

Irony, Recognition and Competition

My use of the term irony in this paper does not deviate from the typical definitions of the word in dictionaries and from its common use in anthropology (for example, see Fernandez and Huber 2001). A common dictionary definition of irony states

that it is a linguistic trope in which the literal meaning of a message is different from its

actual significance.[37] This discrepancy in meaning is usually indicated either by a sign

contained in the message itself or in the manner of its delivery (as for example when an

accompanying wink suggests that the speaker means the exact opposite what was said).

The discrepancy can also be made known by the way in which the message relates to the

larger interpretative context. In other words and importantly for the argument developed

here, irony has the potential to communicate simultaneously alternative meanings: to

state one possible content, a statement, a norm or an expectation, and immediately to

subvert it by suggesting that this is not the only possible option and that there exists the

possibility of other meanings, alternative norms, and unexpected developments.

Frequently, ironic communication may not specify exactly what the alternative is, and

may merely destabilize the meaning of the original message by suggesting the possibility

of an alternative. This is the overarching definition of irony that guides me in this paper:

an instance in which the existence of a specific norm or an expectation is acknowledged

and simultaneously subverted by the suggestion of an alternative, whether or not this

alternative is specified. While the elite in-the-making uses irony to mock, criticize and

show disapproval of local practices and norms, it may or may not elaborate an alternative

to them.

Irony is the trope of choice for the elite in-the-making because it reflects the

specificity of its condition. An intensification of ironic sentiment has repeatedly been

linked to contexts and periods (and most notably to postmodernity) in which existing

norms and ideals cease to be a fitting match for reality, and it is not longer possible to

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[37] For example, Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/irony, accessed on October 29, 2009.

commit to them earnestly (Marcus 2001). This is precisely the case in Bulgaria. Here, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the end of socialism was marked by a normative instability which brought about not only the need to reorganize ownership, political practices, and economic relations, but also to reorder people's "worlds of meaning," in Katherine Verdery's words (Verdery 1999), including survival strategies, ideas of morality, authority and personal success. For the emergent elite, the experience of the inadequacy of existing models was even more acute than for other Bulgarians for several reasons.

First, the formative years of the majority of its members coincided with the years of the post-socialist transition. If people older than them could maintain belief in the norms of their own acculturation by virtue of conviction, habit or nostalgia, this option was not as easily available to the young people, who grew up in an environment where these norms were being actively challenged. Second, by virtue of its social, educational and economic background, and by virtue of its professional engagements and leisure practices, the emergent elite is highly aware of the foreign world and the ways in which life in Bulgaria relates to life worlds beyond the national context. Its experience corresponds to what Marcus describes as "the anxieties of knowing that one is somehow tied into what is happening elsewhere but without the relationships being clear or precisely articulated. Subjects are participating in discourses that are localized but not their own" (Marcus, p. 215). Such instances are especially conducive of irony.

Fashion is one powerful example of this interlocking of the local and the distant. The emergent elite is anxious about what they see as the insufficient refinement of Bulgarians in matters of style and taste. While it is eager to promote and present itself as an agent of cutting-edge fashion and design, the question of what constitutes the cutting-

edge is never fully resolved and is always open for contestation. One thing is clear: the standards of good taste are set beyond Bulgaria's borders, in foreign fashion power-houses and on the streets of global capitals, such as London, Paris and New York. Beyond this, the question of what specific characteristic comprise the foreign model of aspiration for the emergent elite remains open, not only because of the temporal instability of the cutting-edge, but also because fashion, like other contemporary phenomena, is part and parcel of a process of a postmodern multiplication of authorities, competing hierarchies of value, and the absence of certain and singular interpretative frameworks. (This indeterminacy of the cutting edge affects not just fashion and style, but also artistic and cultural production as outlined in the next chapter). The elite in-the-making's discussions of style, taste and fashion in Bulgaria "localize" discourses about the latest trends in these fields, but always with the awareness that these discourses are not their own, that the norms are generated abroad and are always changing, and that local Bulgarian actors have little influence over them.

To sum up, the elite in-the-making is predisposed to irony in part because of its specific location both in a normatively unstable context and at the nexus of global and local connections. Additionally, it is also predicated by the elite in-the-making's ongoing struggle to make its existence known and to establish itself as uniquely suited to serve as a cultural leader of the nation. First, irony helps to make this social segment recognizable to others. Social theorists demonstrate that the recognition of difference is one of the main prerequisites for social distinction. Frederik Barth demonstrates that "ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves" (1969:10), that is, that ethnic difference requires both that each agent understands himself or herself as

belonging to a particular ethnic group, and that this belonging is accepted, that is

recognized, by others. Similarly, Max Weber acknowledges the importance of

recognition in the formation of status groups: if the category of class is based on the

distribution of private property among people, that is, it has an objective ontological

dimension, the category of status is based on lifestyle (which is linked to wealth but is not

determined by it) and on the recognition that agents successfully approximate the lifestyle

norms of the particular status group. Pierre Bourdieu takes the Weberian observation of

the importance of lifestyle a step further to demonstrate that personal taste perpetuates

not only status but also class inequalities.

In other words, recognition plays an important part in the construction of social

difference, as a matter of ethnicity or of class. I suggest that irony is one of the means

through which difference can be made visible and recognizable. In treating irony not only

as a figure of expression but also as a potentially powerful social force, I also follow a

line of work readily associated with theorists such as Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1984; Bakhtin and

Holquist 1981) and Bergson (Bergson 1911), who recognize humor as having a social

function.[38] Specifically, the emergent elite generates recognition for its own distinct set of

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[38] The power of irony to engage polemically with available aesthetic options echoes a general theoretical understanding of humor as having the power to serve as an argument. For Bergson (1911) humor is a corrective. It is one of the ways in which society can keep in check people who fail to exhibit the flexibility of adapting to others and making the compromises on which social life is based (that is, for example, limiting one's expectations and personal desires to accommodate those of other people). Laughter has the power to deride and humiliate, and so to limit thoughts or actions that may threaten sociality. For Bakhtin (1984; 1981), laughter offers the means to provide a comment and a viable alternative to the stagnant and stiff forms of officialdom, with its concomitant institutions, rites and discourses. In other words, humor in general and irony specifically are well-suited expressive means by which to make an argument, regardless of whether this argument is in favor of or against the existing state of affairs. Notably, Alexei Yurchak has shown that irony and specifically its late-socialist Russian expression in the form of *stiob* can also serve to escape an ideologically charged discursive field by allowing agents to refuse to take a clear stand either in favor or against official discourse. His observation confirms the polemic power of irony since it offered late socialist citizens the option to understand themselves as different from both the activists and the dissidents, and to constitute themselves as *svoi* or "normal" people.

values, beliefs and opinions by relying on irony's *polemical inflection* and by producing in others an *emotional experience* of difference.

Second, irony helps to establish members of the emergent elite as experts. The character of their preferred ironic disposition is different from what James Fernandez and Mary Taylor Huber define as "true irony." True irony is said to "dwell in uncertainty," with an awareness of the "impermanence of all things human" which involves certain generosity to its enemies and the memory of their common humanity (Fernandez and Huber 2001:21-22). In contrast, the irony of the elite in-the-making is more competitive and less "friendly" than this true irony. It is the weapon of a turf war in which the elite in-the-making strives to establish its own authority and expertise, to define itself as distinct from its opponents and also as superior. Its use of irony often includes its more aggressive sub-varieties, sarcasm and parody, and fits well Fernandez' and Huber's description of "militant irony:"

> Indeed, satire and parody have been described as militant forms of irony that are positioned confidently as to what is right and wrong in the world. Militant or malicious ironists use parody or satire of the other to express their self-confidence and mock the others' lack of knowledge, and/or value and accomplishments. These expressions pretend to possess a sense of how the world works and what the causes and solutions are, and they use the tools of discrepancy positively or negatively, benignly or maliciously, to favor that confident world view (Fernandez and Huber 2001:22).

The irony of the elite in-the-making participates in the competition between different interpretations of the world, different hierarchies of value, and different norms, including the norms of beauty. At the end of the chapter, I will show how irony can be used to establish one's authority as a talented writer, a competent reader, and a fashion expert.

My choice to focus on fashion and style in this chapter is predicated by several reasons. As already suggested, fashion is a domain where the links between the local and global are especially prominent. Fashion, style and taste were also among the subjects in which members of the emergent elite seemed especially interested. This was due in part to my entry in the field site through a magazine that specializes in fashion and lifestyle, as well as in art and culture, and in part to the important role that taste and aesthetics play in the creation of social identities and in the competition between rivaling social segments.

Specifically, I will look at the relationship between irony and the categories of "glamour" and "trashy aesthetics." I suggest that as used by the emergent elite, the word glamour (pronounced [glemər] (глемър) in Bulgarian) refers to an ideal of female beauty and style that is marked by high artificiality and is charged with a literalist sexual appeal. This ideal is one option in the spectrum of available ways to perform the female gender in Bulgaria (Butler 1993) and is linked not just to self-styling but also to aspirations and life choices, as well as to a renegotiation of gender roles that took place after the end of socialism. Glamour, especially in its more over-the-top emanations, is seen by the emergent elite as emblematic of Bulgarian women's lack of taste and imagination, and is frequently mocked in conversations and discussions. An embrace or a rejection of glamour can easily be interpreted as an outward sign of the extent to which one may be expected to share the sentiments of the elite in-the-making in matters of beauty, style and more.

I suggest that an alternative aesthetics provides an ironic commentary on glamour, and I call this set of preferences "trashy aesthetics." The term "trashy" (in Bulgarian it is

pronounced the same as in English) is used by people in the Bulgarian fashion media to describe the properties of a specific kind of fashion photographs. I expand the use of the term to refer not just to fashion representations, but also to stylistic preferences in the everyday life of the emergent elite. Trashy aesthetics acknowledges the existence of glamour and then proceeds to ironize it.

Polemical inflection: trashy pictures, irony and glamour

One day, Julia took me along to see her shoot a fashion photo session for *Capital Light*, a magazine insert of the highly respected weekly for politics and economics, *Capital*. At the time Julia was *Edno's* fashion editor but she also freelanced on the side. We met at *Studio Bliss*, an enterprise run by two photographers, Drago and Moni, in an old downtown house with chipped paint in immediate proximity to the Presidency. Drago was in charge of this particular photo shoot, and he was well prepared. When Julia needed stockings for the model, he brought out a bag-full: white, green, polka dots, fish nets and more. Julia picked out what she said was a "trashier pair" (*po-trashi*): tacky bright pink socks with thick black elastic on top that reached to the middle of the thigh. The petite brunette model put on the stockings and wore them through the duration of the photo shoot together with a pair of old white boots, which Julia found in a second-hand store. The model could have easily been the embodiment of glamour with sour cherry lips and long lush curls but instead the final images were pictures of glamour with a wink, that is glamour with an ironic comment on itself. The socks alone would have been enough to throw the picture off and make it recognizably different from what most

Bulgarian women would consider beautiful, but Julia and the photographer did not stop there.

The model tried out different poses, looked over her shoulder, flirted, but Julia did not approve. Julia said that the model looked too much "like she was posing." Drago instructed the model: "Now can you pose without posing? That doesn't make sense but you know what I mean." The model nodded. She relaxed her shoulders perceptibly, her posture eased off, and her entire body and expression assumed a casual air. Her eyes no longer half closed, but wide open, she looked directly at the camera. "Much better," said Julia. (Fig. 1).

In this particular shot, the model wore a see-through dress the color of a clear morning sky. Romantic furls unfolded in place of a collar and generous folds of fabric streamed down from the waist. The dress would have been an image of innocence itself, but the model grabbed the skirt with two hands and lifted it to just below the crotch to show the thick black elastics of the pink socks. Through the diaphanous material, one could see her black panties with a matching pink elastic. The stockings and the boots, the glimpse of black underwear, all brought a hint of street fashion and reference to society's trash, the exaggerated femininity of the whore and the punk, and the stylistic militancy that emerges from the intentional crossover to kitsch. This picture, like the rest of the photo session, made an ironic comment on glamour and conventional beauty, acknowledged their existence and their norms, and then proceeded to turn them into something else.

The provenance of garments bore a similar touch of irony. Two of the four images in the photo shoot featured brands that most Bulgarians consider quite expensive: the

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Bulgarian label Capasca and the Italian Max & Co, a branch of Max Mara. The other two images showed generic second-hand garments. This mixing of the brand and the brand-less, their treatment as equals in the production of style was a comment on the supposed doubling of popular magazines as shopping catalogues. A professional joke among *Edno's* staff and contributors has it that *mutressi,* the kept women of the nouveaux riches, go shopping with *Eva,* a glossy women's magazine, in hand and ask for garments from the pictures. The unique second-hand garments that Julia often uses in photo sessions sabotaged the possibility of fashion photography's functioning as a style handbook.

Finally, the ironic content of the images was aided by their technical execution. While at first sight the photographs appeared free from obvious defects, the pictures were also free of the kind of emphasis that a strategically placed lightening can produce: the glorious aura of backlighting or the dramatic shadows of low angle lighting. The camera refused to flatter, its gaze direct and cold, eyes of an evaluating client rather than an admiring fan. The model in turn glared back. Rather than being flirtatious and seducing, her look had more of a "So what?" attitude.

In the end, the finished images as they appeared in the pages of *Capital Light* winked and nodded, and admitted that there is such a thing as glamour but destabilized it by suggesting an alternative: female beauty that is complicated by the model's diegetic attitude, her glare back at the camera and the incongruence between the innocence of the dress and the provocation of the pose. The pictures bore the mark of what professionals referred to as "trashy" aesthetics. The images created and subverted expectations, mixed

high and low, featured garments that themselves were considered "trashy," and made use of less than flattering lighting and camera angles.[39]

One of the key characteristics of "trashy" aesthetics is its refusal to represent beauty in a straightforward and unproblematic manner. In trashy pictures, the models may be far off the center of the frame and their bodies may appear chopped off by seemingly bad cropping, their limbs, heads and sometimes half of the torso missing. The images might be grainy, too bright or too dark. They may also involve seemingly inappropriate juxtapositions, such as those of a formal attire presented by a model in a squatting pose more appropriate for sports clothing than for an evening dress. If one part of the image suggests a particular mood or occasion, another part of the photograph subverts it. Trashy pictures are the kind of pictures that fail to meet a conventional standard of quality and beauty. When family pictures from a wedding or from a vacation trip look "trashy," they end up in the trash bin instead of in the family album.

This particular aesthetics is one of the means by which the elite in-the-making polemicaly engages several sets of norms: the photographic conventions favored by mainstream Bulgarian women's magazines, the ideals of beauty and the consumption habits of the kept women of the nouveaux riches, and what is understood by the elite in-the-making as a mainstream preference for a conventional and straightforward femininity and sex appeal. Trashy aesthetics as exemplified by this photo shoot are ironic in that they acknowledge a series of norms and expectations to which the emergent elite refers with the shorthand of the English word *glamour* and then proceeds to question them and to propose an alternative.

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[39] The trashy aesthetics of this photo session are relatively subdued, in part because of the more mainstream character of *Kapital Light* as compared to *Edno*.

In the Bulgarian post-socialist context, "glamour" as a concept used by the elite in-the-making stands in a direct relationship to changing gender relations and ideals of femininity after the end of socialism. An emphasis on traditional femininity became apparent in the first years after 1989. A post-socialist patriarchal turn relegated women to a sphere of domesticity and privacy. Western scholars and feminists saw the end of socialism as an opportunity for women's liberation from the "double burden" of domestic work and paid employment, and hoped that this will bring about the emergence of a strong feminist movement (Einhorn 1993, Watson 1997). However, instead of embracing feminist liberation as imagined in the West, many Eastern Europeans returned to traditional ideas of femininity prioritizing innate differences between the sexes and the cultivation of attractive personal appearance (cf. Einhorn 1993, Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000, and Todorova 1993). In this context, care for the self and a "re-sexualization" of the socialist asexual female body was combined with an aspiration to the standards of conventional gender roles.

Since 1989, Bulgaria witnessed a revitalization of the ideal of traditional female beauty, sexualization and even hyper-sexualization of the female body. The visual markers of this hypersexualization included an aesthetic of a high artificiality (hair dyes in emphatic black or blond; heavy and, some would argue, excessive make up, and in general, appearances that flaunt rather than hide the time and money spent on them). This also included a literalist understanding of sex appeal: very short skirts, very deep-cut blouses, very high heels. These are some of the defining characteristics of what the editors of *Edno* referred to as "glamour." Stereotypically, glamour in some of its more extreme emanations is seen as the provenance of the female stars of the *chalga* music

industry, and of the wives and girlfriends of the criminal nouveaux riches (with an imputed overlap between the two categories). (Fig. 2)

Fig. 2. The pop-folk star Maria. http://spisanie.lichna-drama.com/uploads/images/large/maria111.jpg, accessed 11-02-2009

Fig. 3. The pop-folk star Maria. http://www.slava.bg/images/content/86/maria-06-cd-face-ii-off.jpg, accessed 11-02-2009

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The elite in-the-making explicitly objected to this norm of "glamour" and to concomitant stereotypical gender roles associated with it. An article in the very first issue of *Edno* described sarcastically several social types from which the elite in-the-making clearly wanted to differentiate itself (Droumeva 2002). One of them was "the girl"—a superficial young female in a flashy tacky garb concerned only with the color of her nails and with the goal of finding a wealthy husband. The exaggerated description clearly indicted the way in which the stereotype of this particular "fashion other" is used to define and redefine the identity of the elite in-the-making, and so it is worth citing here in its entirety:

"The Girl"

She doesn't allow anyone to see her without makeup. Personalized for her, hell is a place without a single mirror, but with tons of men who fail to turn after her, and tons of women who have the same tube top. Her role models have measures 90-60-90 centimeters and a fine skin. It's very important that everyone notices of what kind of car she gets out and on what model cell phone she SMSs and composes jingles.

She reads a lot: magazines about fashion and beauty, and love novels. "Titanic" is in the top-ten of her favorite movies.

If the average woman uses three kilos of lipstick for the span of her life, the Girl uses at least six. She repeatedly tells her mother on the phone that she hasn't been born to wash a man's socks. Flirts habitually. Studies foreign languages in order to know what to say if someone asks her 'Voulez-vous couchez avec moi.' From the men in her life, she demands huge bouquets of red roses, candlelight dinners and their checkbooks.

If the movie of her life has a happy ending, it is cocktails, receptions and charity dinners. If the ending is sad, her husband beats her, she washes his socks and sends her daughter to modeling classes.

Style: *Tight fitting jeans with embroideries, shiny threads and sequin, ankle-boots with needle-point heels, short skirts and tank tops, a small purse and large earrings, perfect makeup, dyed hair, nail polish with dots, stars or stripes; top achievement: Paola Apsi* (an expensive boutique in Sofia). *(...)*
Conversations: *strictly about consumption; men, cosmetics, who with whom, cellulite, liposuction, silicon implants* (Droumeva 2002).[40]

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[40] The article contains similar descriptions of several more "fashion others" but because of space limitations, here I focus only on "the girl." The other characters include the "art-type," an aspiring young intellectual who wears dirty, worn-out clothes, lives in poverty but refuses to get a job because of his philosophical convictions; "the bureaucrat," a middle-aged man with a pot-belly, a checkered beige shirt, a wide and short neck-tie, in a word a sorry survival of socialism appropriately living in home with cobwebs

"The Girl" stands here for the hyper-sexualized, hyper-feminine stereotype of a particular kind of a post-socialist woman. The article thus links ostentatious sexual appeal, an aesthetics of high artificiality (as exemplified by the six kilos of lipstick and the preoccupation with liposuction and silicon implants) with the categories of both the kept women of nouveaux riches, who spend their evenings at "cocktails, receptions, and charity dinners," and of poor girls emulating their style in the hope to escaping their mother's fate of domestic violence and "washing a man's socks." It suggests that glamour, while linked to class and particular aspirations to wealth and success, serves as a normative ideal for women across the social spectrum. Like the aesthetics of Julia's photo shoots, this text engages polemically questions of beauty, style and gender.

Notably, trashy aesthetics is also elitist and is most commonly found in the pages of publications that target the emergent elite. They are usually rejected by more mainstream commercial publications, another factor that helps to make the elite in-the-making recognizable by virtue of its specific aesthetic preferences. In the words of Vasil Germanov, a freelance photographer who often shots for *Edno* but also for many other Bulgarian magazines, from the cheapest to the most expensive ones, *Edno* is unique in its love for defect as an effect:

> When I shoot for *Edno* I can allow myself to produce an image that is not lighted perfectly well. Even if the quality of picture is not perfect, they will like it. I mean if the technique is not perfect. Because in a frame of a poor quality they find the artistry of things.(...) For example, for the mass commercial magazines, you need to produce images that are appropriate for a mass magazine and that will be understood by all. It needs to be commercial, cheerful, happy, optimistic, well lighted. Everything needs to be clearly visible, all the details. In commercial

on the wall; and finally, "the yuppie," the capitalist reincarnation of the bureaucrat, slightly neurotic, highly productive, and very fake, all the way from his carefully calculated smile to a healthful façade that hides stress-induced binges on alcohol and cocaine.

magazines like this it is important to see every detail of the garment. In contrast, magazines like *Edno* allow you to be more of an artist.

Importantly, trashy images take away from the fashion model the privilege of being the single focus of the picture. Instead they draw attention to the photographic process, to the supposed unpremeditated character of the captured moment, or to an intentional incongruence, a puzzle within the image. The photographer is able to switch emphasis from the subject matter of the depiction to the artistry involved in producing the image. The "artistry" is no longer transparent, a mere medium for the reproduction of reality on page, but rather is included in the image's content and is presented for reflection on its own right. Defects take away the transparency of the image and draw attention to the technique of its production. The content is no longer just the model or her garments, but also the vision of the creative team. In trashy images, beauty is not about straightforward visual appeal and often demands cerebral as well as visual effort in appreciating it. The incongruence of juxtaposition gives the viewer pause and creates a space for reflection. It precludes easy assimilation of the image and demands an active effort of deciphering and appreciation. This aesthetics subverts popular expectations and the conventions of fashion photography. In this, trashy aesthetics is also elitist in that it is intentionally opaque and unappealing to mass audiences.

Making Difference Felt: Trashy Aesthetics and Personal Appearance

My field notes on June 13, 2006, contain a description of some of the self-styling preferences of Martin, one of *Edno's* editors:

> Martin has been growing a new hairstyle lately: his hair is still very short but it now features a lock at the crown of the head that is several centimeters longer than the rest and that reminds me of a Native American scalplock hairstyle, or

else of Bristish punks from the 1980s. Earlier in the week, Martin had on shorts with relatively tight legs that reached down to the knees and a thick metal chain dangling from his pocket to a belt loop. He wore a tight-fitting striped button-down shirt with short sleeves for a look that mixed the skater with the punk and had a distinctly 1980s flavor. The other day he again had the big metal chain but this time it was attached to black pants, also with very tight legs, and a black t-shirt, also very tight: kind of gothic, kind of punk...

On June 26, 2006, I wrote a description of an outfit worn by the editor-in-chief:

The editor-in-chief wore today (...) a vest, like one from a three-piece suit, made out of black and soft textile. An interesting detail--it had no back but instead featured two elastic stripes like suspenders that crossed diagonally and held the whole garment together. The rest was jeans and a peach colored t-shirt. Also—a beige baseball hat. And she had pink Converse shoes on!

As these descriptions demonstrate, the unique stylistic preferences of the elite in-the-making revealed themselves not only in magazine photo shoots but also in the ways in which they styled their everyday personal appearance. In the outfits of people like Martin, the editor-in-chief, and other members of the emergent elite, each element is a reference to a style, a time period, a way of life. The elements come together to produce a collage. The elite in-the-making's preferred modes of self-styling are ironic in that they take elements of other established and recognizable styles, and mix and match them in a way that suggests a whole new alternative. Furthermore, by refusing to treat the various styles reverentially and to see them as norms to be followed rather than revised, these men and women also refuse to give any single style the authority of a norm, and appear to be making fun of each and all at the same time. The resulting look produces a new option in the stylistic universe of the city, or, to echo Bakhtin, a new speech type in the existing stylistic heteroglossia of the city. This style is available for all people to see, on the street, in the bus, or in a coffee-shop, and it produces a visceral *experience* of difference in onlookers. Furthermore, its ironic overtones are likely to annoy some and to please

others. The difference between these two kinds of emotional responses is a line that separates those who are in from those who are out, the insiders from the outsiders. I will first examine the ways in which the elite in-the-making engages existing stylistic options and will then turn to a specific example of the way in which irony and style functioned as boundary maintenance mechanisms in Sofia.

If the various recognizable stylistic options in a society can be said to resemble the various dialects, jargons and other speech types of Bakhtin's heteroglossia , then women and men from the elite in-the-making destabilize the links that hold these styles together and engage with them polemically. Bakhtin's heteroglossia suggests that at any given time, there is "an internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purposes of the day" and more. Similarly, there exist in any context at any given time recognizable and parallel trends and currents in style, heteroglossia of stylistic options, which are linked to class, status and particular occupations, but not only. Studies which take consumption and objects as the means to cultivate new identities in the conditions of late modernity (for example, Miller 1998) take into account that people choose from sets of options that are available to them, but do not ask how these options come into existence, how new styles are brought into being. I suggest that the elite in-the-making provides a glimpse of this process. It introduces in the Bulgarian context a particular new way of self-styling by destabilizing the links that hold together the elements of existing styles, and by combining and juxtaposing these elements in new and unexpected ways.

In the outfits of people like Martin and the editor-in-chief, each garment is a reference to a style, a time period, a way of life. The waistcoat speaks to the formal male three-piece suit; the baseball hat to American sports and later the American hip-hop scene. On the body of the wearer as though on a canvas the baseball hat is juxtaposed to the vest is juxtaposed to the pink Converse shoes, and the very juxtaposition makes a statement. It makes visible a particular attitude to dress: irreverence, courage and confidence; readiness to experiment and innovate. The editor-in-chief's ensemble reconfigures familiar elements in an unfamiliar way and in the end produces a *recognizably* unusual look, at least on the Bulgarian scene. This kind of mixing and matching, with various geographic variations and preferences for one or another kind of emphasis, is not new around the globe but I examine this transnational connection later.

The unexpected and, at first sight, inappropriate, juxtaposition of elements that do not normally go together creates the effect of parodying every one of the contexts to which individual elements refer. When the appearances of the elite in-the-making ironize styles that others take very seriously, like the grooming for glamour, they have the power to annoy, irritate and basically produce the very *visceral recognition of difference.* This kind of emotional reaction took place repeatedly over the course of my fieldwork. For example, one cold winter night, I met my Bulgarian friend Elena and suggested that we find a place to have a coffee or a drink on Shishman, a street dotted by the bars, shops and galleries especially favored by the emergent elite. Elena does not fit the profile of a member of the emergent elite. She works in middle management for an international trade company, loves reading the women's magazine *Eva* and is just not fond *Edno*. Once I looked through a random issue of *Edno* with her. She came to visit me at home,

carefully made-up, hair blow-dried in luxuriant curves, a short skirt and high heels. She found herself unable to relate to most of the pictures, the purposefully messy hairdos, the combination of soccer shorts with heels. She did not like the styles or the photography: "I mean look at these rags. No comment. Can you even tell what she is wearing? You can't see her shirt, just some tiny shorts. I am not impressed. Or here…" She pointed to another picture — "shalwars, like a gypsy from the ghetto. You can't even tell exactly what it is. This is precisely what I don't like about this magazine. I understand that here they want to show action, movement, but the picture is out of focus; it's blurry. It's disgusting." Considering her reaction to *Edno's* images which contradict conventional ideals of beauty and elegance, of femininity and masculinity, it is not surprising that she felt uncomfortable in the usual hangout spots of the emergent elite.

First we entered the bar *Blaze.* "Mhm! No." Elena put it plainly. Her nose wrinkled and conclusively settled the matter. "It's too smoky in here. Let's go some place else." But her disapproving glances at the crowded tables, the women with trainers and the men with hoodies, showed that ventilation was not the only problem. Some of the customers in turn stared back and seemingly disapproved of Elena's elegant black coat, tailored in the waist and streaming down to her ankles in heavy folds. This time she was not wearing the high-heeled boots that usually sway her hips, but with high heels or no heels, Elena's femininity was obviously a serious business, no winks, no shadow of a doubt, and definitely no room for hoodies or trainers. In fact, at the time she owned no sports shoes of any kind at all and made fun of me for having become "Americanized" when I put on mine. The contrast between her appearance and the appearances of the

women in *Blaze* was in plain view for all to see and most importantly to *feel* the difference. Elena *felt* it and felt an outsider. We quickly walked out of the *Blaze*.

At *Bilkova,* another bar just a block away, with even more regular clientele than *Blaze,* the ritual of staring, judging and so maintaining a sense of who is welcome and who is not even more pronounced. Every time the entrance door opens, sets of eyes lined along the bar turn to the door to see and evaluate who has entered. On that evening, I did not even suggest visiting *Bilkova* because I already knew that Elena would probably like it even less than *Blaze.* Looking and being looked at magnified the visceral experience of difference between the serious glamour of women like Elena and the ironic juxtapositions in the appearance of women from the elite in-the-making. In similar encounters in various places around the city, the existence of the emergent elite was being felt by others. The ironic appearances provide the means to produce an experience of difference rather than merely to claim it. In this irony is performative in that it helps to produce that which it defines: an exclusive social segment of "cool" people, the elite in the making.

Another friend, Iskra, summarized this power of irony to draw boundaries between insiders and outsiders well. At the time, Iskra worked as a sales assistant in a large chain grocery store, earned about twice the minimum wage, spoke no English and did not fit the profile of the well-educated, well-traveled, and well-earning reader of *Edno.* One day she visited me at home and picked up a random issue of *Edno* lying on my coffee table. While I made coffee in the kitchen, she looked at the magazine and five minutes later, she slammed it back on the coffee table. She had had enough of it: "This is just annoying! I mean the way it's written, the pictures, it makes you feel like the people who write the magazine are members of a cool people's club and you are not."

Thanks to its ability to produce strong emotional reactions, to separate people into insiders and outsiders, and polemically engage various stylistic alternatives, the irony of the elite in-the-making, serves as its visual marker, a visceral emblem that makes its presence knowable on the media market as well as on the street. Outsiders clearly recognized the preferences of the emergent elite as distinct from their own. People *felt* the irony as it drove them either to annoyance and anger, if they were outsiders; or to expressions of approval such as a smile and a wink, if they were on the inside.[41]

Importantly, this was part and parcel of the elite in-the-making's modernizing ambitions. Members of this segment saw their own fashion preferences as a marker of progress and as representative of fashion trends in world centers of fashion, such as London, Paris and New York. For Bulgaria to even begin to catch up with these places, it was considered crucial that Bulgarians gain exposure to ideas of style and beauty other than those of literal glamour. It was hoped that the example of elite in-the-making may encourage Bulgarians to become more thoughtful and creative in matters of style and taste.

Intentional pursuit of exclusivity

The editors of *Edno* were not oblivious to the fact that their magazine often provoked strong negative reactions in readers. They were aware that the trashy aesthetics of photo shoots and the sarcastic texts often had an alienating effect. Still, this was not a

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[41] It possible to experience both at the same time: to get the joke in a clothing ensemble, enjoy the wittiness behind it, but fail to find it aesthetically pleasing or appealing to wear. This describes my personal reaction to many of the outfits I saw, and while I can not think of too many other people who have reacted in the same why, I think this demonstrates the possibility of a gray area between or a partial (non)-belonging to the two categories.

cause for concern but instead was interpreted as a confirmation that the majority of Bulgarians lag behind in matters of taste and fashion. The boundary maintenance effect of their aesthetic preferences was celebrated as one of the ways to sort out the "cool" people and people who count from those who do not. Readers who were critical were often dismissed as ignorant and as outsiders whose opinions do not count, and the editorial staff went to great lengths to procure texts that had just the right registrar of irony and sarcasm.

For example, in 2005, the magazine commissioned a series of focus groups to determine how to improve *Edno's* position on the media market. Victoria Vassileva, who at the time was one of *Edno's* veteran writers and editors, gave me her take on one of the focus groups: "Did you see that woman with the heavy makeup, the hair that was dyed blue-black, and that gaudy blouse? Well, she just completely wasn't getting the magazine. She hated it because she just couldn't get it. See, I don't care what people like that think. They are not *my people.* I am not writing for people like that. They can never get *Edno.*" Victoria and the staff members were fully aware of *Edno's* controversial image and the negative reactions that it caused in some, but they did not care. In their minds there was a clear division between people, who were *their people* and who "would get" them, and others that would not because they just were not the right kind of people, not the target audience. Victoria's emphasis on the appearance of the focus group participant, her straightforward and emphatic femininity marked by the heavy makeup, the unnaturally black hair color, and the flashy outfit, reveals the ways in which personal taste was seen as indicative of one's credibility on issues that went well beyond style.

Furthermore, the ability to "get" the magazine's irony and even more to generate it in images and texts was seen as something with which one was born. It was not considered a marker of one's social position like personal background, education or aspirations. I was told that the ability to "write well," that is, to write in the correct ironic register, was something that cannot be learned: "you either have it, or you don't." The ability to write ironically served as a particularly privileged claim to distinction: it translated into talent and an innate quality. Claims such as "you either have it, or you don't" made it seem that the writers who can represent the position of the emergent elite are the most gifted of all Bulgarian writers.

In 2005 and 2006, *Edno* was severely understaffed of editors and staff writers. It had trouble finding contributors that it liked and was constantly scouting for new voices, which even included an open competition with cash prices. Still, the editors were unsatisfied by the submissions and repeatedly complained that "in Bulgaria there is just a scarcity of good writers." I was told by outsiders and insiders alike that the magazine is "very picky" about the kind of writing that it likes. While editors complained about the lack of talent, what was missing in reality was a large pool of writers that shared the perspective of the magazine and, by extension, of the emergent elite.

"Good writers" were expected to offer not only an engaging style, vivid description, clarity, and good grammar, but also irony and sarcasm. This became especially obvious during an editorial meeting attended by an external expert, a historian of the medieval Balkans, who had been invited to contribute a new perspective on a thematic issue dealing with Bulgaria's uneasy relationship to Europe. As requested, the professor tapped into his academic knowledge for examples that demonstrate the ways in

which Bulgaria has been poorly represented or overlooked in the writing of historic western writers or in the contemporary treatment of historical phenomena. However, each of these suggestions was rejected by the editor-in-chief, who finally explained: "All of this is very interesting but our readers will not be interested. I understand it's only natural for you to go back to Byzantium but try to enter a different frame of mind. Think of sarcasm and lifestyle. References to the past will work but they must be in the register of sarcasm and lifestyle." In other words, a good writer had to be able to "enter the frame of mind" of the elite in-the-making, *Edno*'s target audience. He or she ought to be able to constantly engage in *polemics* about how things should be: what constitutes good taste and what does not, what is agreeable and what is not, what is the correct way of interpreting the phenomena and trends that unfold in the contemporary Bulgarian context and what is not. Irony and sarcasm provided an especially auspicious way of doing this, and so were being intentionally sought out.

Finally, the purpose of establishing authority and expertise could be served by the personal appearances of the elite in-the-making. On a sunny morning in March, I made the rounds with Milena, one of *Edno*'s freelance stylists, to collect garments for a photo shoot. Milena wore brown oblique stockings with a shiny metallic hue and beige ballerina shoes. She had a short jeans skirt adorned with a thick leader belt and a necklace of her design, a coconut that was cut in half and attached to a leather strip. The self-made necklace, the loose strings hanging from the hem of the skirt, the unusual stockings: all of these elements added to Milena's appearance the hint of a sabotage of the conventional norms of a clean and put-together look. Milena clearly stood out among the morning business crowd on the street and drew curious looks from passers-bys, especially other

women. Some of the glances were discrete and curious, while others scornful and clearly meant to show disapproval. This did not go unnoticed by Milena: "They can stare all they want," she said. "In Bulgaria, the more they stare at you, the more you know that you did something right. They don't understanding anything, but maybe if they stare, they will learn." Like Victoria Vassileva, who dismissed the opinion of the focus-group participant as irrelevant, so Milena dismissed the glares of passers-by as ignorant and so confirming her own access to specialized knowledge of style that was unavailable to them.

Milena was especially proud of the stockings, a vintage Yves Saint Laurent, 10 years old and given to her by her mentor at the Arts Academy, herself a fashion designer. However, the significance of this garment was not readily visible since no logo or any other visual mark signified it. This shows the kind of advanced knowledge to which the emergent elite lay claim through fashion and style, and also the exclusivity which is pursued through it. Only people like Milena, with personal connections to designers and fashionistas, and with the specialized, cultivated knowledge of style, knew what was truly valuable beyond the mass-produced and readily available mainstream. Milena's words that onlookers might actually learn something from staring at her demonstrates that she did see herself as a trendsetter and someone in the know. The stares of other women seemed to confirm the opinion of *Edno's* staff, that Bulgarians have no taste, no style and no fashion.

Notably, the acquisition of this kind of specialized knowledge was not a matter only of personal initiative, curiosity and knowledge. The cultivation of the recognizable fashion preferences of the emergent elite is not a matter simply of "talent" and of "having an eye" for style. Rather it required access to resources that were not readily available. It

involved knowing where to look for inspiration and how to obtain clothes and accessories which are either too expensive or in short supply because of the limitations of the Bulgarian market. This takes me to my next point: the importance of particular kinds of transnational connections and the ways in which they help to generate the exclusivity of the emergent elite, which I will examine in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: A Transnational Imaginary

One day Dragomir Spassov, a young Bulgarian fashion photographer with a successful private studio, told me that even though he has never lived outside of the two Bulgarian cities of Stara Zagora and Sofia, he feels as though he does not really live in Bulgaria:

> Basically, I hardly live here [*in Bulgaria*]...Because I don't like the reality here, I live mostly at my house, use the internet as a source [*he said* copc *making the English word Bulgarian*] of information and communication and go to places, where I know that I will not be reached by things that I don't like or if they catch up with me that it will be only for a short while. I avoid close encounters because the paradigm [*of thought*] of most people here does not correspond to mine. (...) Because of this I don't feel like I really live here.

A tall and lean man in his early 30s, with thick-rimmed glasses and a latest model cell phone, Dragomir belongs to the cultural elite in-the-making. At the time of my research, Dragomir was one of the more successful members of this social segment and was known in industry circles as part of *Bliss Studio*,[42] a company registered in his and his business partner's name, which had recently become one of the best paid and most sought out providers of photographic services in Bulgaria. Dragomir and his partner Simeon Levi, or Drago and Moni as they are known among friends and colleagues, are widely respected for their talent and technical skills, and are praised for their ability to satisfy a wide range of clients: from large corporate customers such as Coca Cola that ensure the profitability of *Bliss Studio* to cutting-edge photography that the duo practices more out of "love for the photographic art" than in the hope of profit. Notably, Drago and Moni got their very first professional assignments at the life-style magazine *Edno*.

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[42] *Bliss Studio's* website is http://www.blissworx.com.

The story of Moni and Drago is exemplary of the successful career trajectory to which so many young creative professionals in Bulgaria aspire. Drago's statement is also highly indicative of the ways in which professional success for young creative professionals in Bulgaria is entangled with transnational connections, actual and imagined. He said that he "hardly lives" in Bulgaria, even though in his entire life he had not lived anywhere else, because his daily life, like the lives of other members of the elite in-the-making, is profoundly informed by an imagination of a world beyond Bulgaria's borders that guides his movements through the city, his spending, and his professional work. This imaginary brings places like London, New York and Paris to bear on life in Sofia and constantly compares life in Bulgaria to "rival ways of life" (Beck 2002:18). More importantly, as I will show in this chapter, a transnational imaginary of this kind is directly linked to how the elite in-the-making understands artistic talent.

People like Drago usually speak of talent as a nearly mystical quality, a personal authorial vision that cannot be explained but that is the greatest capital of those who claim to have it and the greatest accusation against those that are criticized for not having it. The word implies a natural proclivity and an inalienable skill, with which some are lucky to be born and others are not. However, as the discussion of the supposed "scarcity of talent" among Bulgarian writers in the previous chapter demonstrates, the word talent actually implies more than just the ability to create vivid images and successfully communicate important points with words or by other expressive means. The possession of a natural gift for words, images, and other kinds of creative expression is important, but the concept of "talent" as used by the emergent elite also contains one other and

crucial ingredient: the ability to subscribe and live up to a particular standard of artistic merit which is usually described as "world quality."

In this chapter, I suggest that the notions of "talent," "world quality" and the elite in-the-making's transnational imaginary are closely related, and that together they provide means for members of the elite in-the-making to augment their prestige and professional standing individually and as group. At first sight the terms may appear to be about universal and objective values, and to be divorced from practical struggles for power and prestige; however, in reality they simultaneously capitalize on and mask the unique privileges of the members of the elite in-the-making. As Drago's statement demonstrates, "talent" and "world quality" are directly linked to a conceptual and embodied understanding, an imaginary, of cutting-edge foreign ways of life and of artistic work. This cutting-edge transnational imaginary is produced through practices which are enabled by practical privileges such as elite education, foreign language competence, technical skills, and opportunities for professional travel. These are not equally available to all Bulgarians or even to all members of the emergent elite, and the people who have best access to these privileges have also a greater chance, first, of being admitted to the elite in-the-making, and, second, of being recognized as some of its more talented members. In this way the transnational imaginary of cutting-edge culture and style serves as a factor of stratification. First, it separates members of the emergent elite from non-members; second, it produces gradations of proficiency and talent within the elite in-the-making and so provides the terms through which members compete with each other for recognition and for commissions.

In considering the transnational imaginary of the emergent elite, it is important to take into account an apparent paradox. One of the usual culprits for Bulgarians' imputed "backwardness" (изостаналост), according to the people I talked to, was that Bulgarians are too isolated. For example, their lack of "good" fashion taste was blamed on their lack of exposure to the way people dress and style themselves elsewhere in the world. Bulgarians' inordinate pride in their architecture, cuisine, and various other categories marked as "typically Bulgarian" was attributed to their insufficient travels abroad and the fact that they simply have not seen that the same architecture and food is to be found all over the Balkan Peninsula and in the Middle East. Yet these observations contradict the facts of a mass emigration that took place after in 1989. In the absence of reliable statistics, estimates place the number of emigrants at one to two million people out of the total Bulgarian population of seven and a half million. Many more transverse the countries of Europe and the Middle East as migrant workers. The friends and families of emigrants and migrants travel regularly for visits of various lengths, including extended visits in which family members provide support for the care of Bulgarian children residing abroad. Finally, tourism, in the form of organized excursions or individual travels, takes hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians abroad each year. In a word, if before 1989, Bulgarians were indeed subjected to an international isolation and severe travel restrictions, the situation has changed drastically in the last 20 years. Despite of the pervasiveness of this mobility, members of the emergent elite seemingly fail to notice it.

The discussion here aims to shed light on this paradox by suggesting that only some kinds of travel count as legitimate in the eyes of members of the emergent elite. Later in the paper, I will contrast the journeys of two Bulgarian women to make the point

that the travel that counts most is the travel that produces knowledge and habits which in Bulgaria can convert into status within the milieu of the elite in-the-making. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Drago's example, one does not even need to leave the country to be properly mobile. One can cultivate the relevant kinds of global connections and knowledge that participate in the making of the transnational imaginary from the comfort of one's home, in front of the computer screen or with the help of foreign objects delivered to Bulgaria, such as foreign magazines or garments. The internet and actual material objects serve as the vehicles for the travel of information, ideas and aesthetics (Appadurai 1996).

To clarify, the transnational imaginary is focused on art, culture and lifestyle originating in the centers of centers of normative modernity, which include most prominently the countries of Western Europe, but also of North America and sometimes places like Australia and Japan. More specifically, the idea of world quality takes as its standard not just any lifestyle practices and artistic work produced in these geographic locations, but only cultural production that is usually labeled as cool, cutting-edge and avant-garde in its native context. The definition of talent which operates among members of the emergent elite requires that local creative expression recognizes such foreign cutting-edge trends as an aspirational norm and strives to live up to this norm without engaging in simple imitation or copying.

The young Bulgarian culture producers sometimes use the words "cool" (куул or готин), "elite" (елитен), avant-garde (авант-гарден) or underground (ъндъргаунд) to describe the foreign trends and products that they like. However, the question of what exactly constitutes the avant-garde and the cool is not more settled in Bulgaria than it is

elsewhere. Whether a specific work, an author or a trend is "cool" is always a subject of debate and of discussion. It is matter of opinions pitched against each other, and the outcome of the conflict often depends on how the authority and credentials of their holders measure up against each other.

In the sections below, I will first show how the elite in-the-making's ideas of talent and world quality are connected to a transnational imaginary. I will specify how I use the term transnational imaginary, and the ways in which the imagination is linked both to specific practices and to material objects. I will then examine how social privilege plays out in the practices through which the transnational imaginary is cultivated and specifically the ways in which various ways of looking, searching for information, and traveling internationally separate the members of elite in-the-making from other Bulgarians and the more from the less "talented" culture producers. Following that, I will investigate how the transnational imaginary is reproduced by examining how an infatuation with foreign models, inspiration and imitation play out in the actual making of creative work. I will look at the making of *Edno* to show that the magazine is not only one of the means through which the elite in-the-making enacts and cultivates its transnational imaginary (by choosing to buy, read and talk about it) but also that as a material product it constitutes one of the material embodiments of this imaginary.

World quality, talent and the transnational imaginary

Over and over in interviews, in editorial meetings, and in the media, members of the elite in-the-making lamented the failings of Bulgarian art, culture and design and declared them to be "substandard" and of poor quality. Alternately, when well done,

many local products were dismissed imitations or "copies" (*копия*) of specific foreign models. I repeatedly heard accusations of "shameless theft" of ideas, designs and execution. A series of conversations with Victor Marinov, a writer and editor for *Edno,* is exemplary in this respect.

One day he informed me that "the problem actually is that Bulgarian pop culture does not exist." This disturbing news was delivered to me in Café Rouge, a trendy Sofia establishment in the heart of town. Victor took another bite of his pesto and cheese sandwich, and went on: "There are no traditions, no original work. The kinds of traditions that we have in that respect are the Estrada and the cinema of the 1980s, and you know what that is like." I got a raised eyebrows look and understood that it is crucial to immediately show disgust.

> As far as art goes....maybe we have some great artists but they have long left the country. So in fact the only thing that thrives is chalga.[43] Yes, unfortunately that is true. Only chalga operates through some approximation of Western practices, even though it is not original and borrows heavily from other Balkan music. Let's face it, it plainly steals. However, at the same time, what we call the intelligent (*Bulgarian*) pop culture also steals. They steal songs, samples, concert performances.

Accusations of theft went beyond the domain of cultural production. Victor was especially upset about what he saw as a wholesale theft of garment design. Victor is lean and elegant, and puts a lot of thought in the clothes he wears. He often writes about fashion and practices what he preaches. One of his favorite garments used to be a jacket by the local brand Capasca. Incidentally, the brand is also fairly expensive. The Bulgarian origin of the garment apparently made it especially appealing because for Victor original, good quality Bulgarian production in any field, in music, fashion, art, or literature matters

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[43] This is an extremely popular music genre also called pop-folk. It is discussed in greater detail in the previous chapters.

a great deal. Victor thought that Capasca's garments were of "world quality" (световно

качество) until a painful disappointment qualified his enthusiasm:

> So this summer, I'm in X [*large European capital*]. I'm wearing my nice jacket
> from Capasca, and I am strutting proudly knowing that no one else in London will
> have the same jacket. And then I enter H&M, and I see my jacket on the hanger,
> lines and lines of it. I mean the same fabric, the same color, the buttons, the
> pockets. Everything is literally the same, you know what I mean. And then I see
> another of Capasca's items for sale there too… And you know, H&M was not
> "inspired" by Capasca. Capasca got "inspired" by H&M! (…)

Victor used to like the brand Capasca because it offered original products in "good taste"

that he could wear in a fashion capital like X without embarrassment. At the time, Victor

was on assignment for *Edno,* and he purposefully sought to immerse himself in the kinds

of foreign crowds that he saw as counterparts of his Sofia milieu. The Bulgarian product

had been designed so well that he thought it would allow him to blend in the world of the

British underground imperceptibly. He thought that his jacket was an original product

that was sufficiently close to the standards of world fashion. Ironically, he found out that

it was *too* close to the quality of a global brand. It was identical with it.

Bulgarian production, when spared accusations of "theft" and "stealing," was in

turn often labeled as substandard. Kalioan Radev, the owner of a music agency and a

respected contributor of several publications for art and culture, *Edno* being one of them,

elaborated this point:

> This is the problem here [*in Bulgaria*]. Everything that is being made is "pseudo"
> [*culture*]. (….) For the last 50 years, it is the same in literature and in film. Even if
> you take the films from the 1980s, the comedies and all the others that are really
> popular—they just make you sad. You can tell that the lighting, the camera work,
> everything was done by people who are not very skilled.

Statements like this establish the lack of a valuable local creative tradition and

dismiss local cultural production, past and present. In judging Bulgarian film production,

Kaloian does not appear to be taking into account that films made in the 1980s may easily appear as inferior to contemporary films in part because of technological advances in the last twenty years. He also does not consider the ways in which Bulgarian filmmakers may have been limited by the possibly inferior quality of their equipment in comparison to that of filmmakers in the West at the same time. Instead the arguably inferior quality of Bulgarian cultural production is attributed entirely to the poor skills and abilities of the Bulgarian professionals.

Kaloian explained that a product is of good quality when "it has currency outside of Bulgaria; when it has value outside of the Bulgarian context; when it has value other than the kind of emotional and sentimental value that these old films have for Bulgarians today." Kaloian's and Victor's comments indicate that artistic quality is measured in part by the distance of the cultural product from standards of quality that operate beyond Bulgaria's borders. One's work should not be too close to the trend-setting original because this would be theft or imitation; one's work should also be not too far from it because one risks producing something else altogether, something parochial and globally irrelevant, such as chalga, for example. The model needs to be kept close enough to serve as a recognizable reference but also be kept clearly distinct. Original are those works that reproduce successfully already existing standards without copying the models literally; and talent is measured in part by one's skill to thread the fine line between being too close or too far from the imagined foreign standards of quality. Members of the emergent elite spend a lot of time discussing the finer distinctions between imitation, inspiration and originality, and I will return to these terms at the end of this chapter. For now, it is important that judgments of quality and talent are directly linked to the imaginary of

foreign currents of cutting-edge art, culture and style. A closer look at this imaginary is the focus of the next section.

Transnational imaginary of cutting-edge art, culture and style

As it will become apparent in the sections below, members of the creative elite draw personal and professional inspiration from a wide array of sources. Street fashion in Tokyo and in New York; the French "dance theater" of Pierre Regal and the design provocations of the Seoul-born, Sao-Paolo-raised, former Saatchi & Saatchi art director and present New-York-resident Ji Lee; the exploits of British graffiti artist Banksy and the latest exhibits at the Tate Modern; the Carl Lagerfeld collection for H&M and the latest photo-shoot of the American fashion and art photographer Steven Klein: all of these are seen as related and relevant. The latest trends in visual arts, literature, architecture and fashion are all seen not as parts of disparate spheres of activity but as related and legitimate domains of interest and inquiry. They are brought together by the emergent elite's interest in aesthetics and specifically in the aesthetics of what is usually described as late modernity and post-modernity. Words like irony, fragmentation, juxtaposition, provocation, the challenging of the high/low culture division all describe the characteristics of the expressive forms that capture the imagination of the elite in-the-making. Taken together, these various foreign cultural products form a picture of contemporary cutting-edge global art and culture, and provide the parameters according to which the emergent elite situates Bulgaria in the world and situates itself in Bulgaria. Bulgaria's position as marginal and backward is reaffirmed by the scarcity of such expressive forms locally and by the lack of appreciation for them in the Bulgarian society

at large. The emergent elite in turn assumes the place of a singular local representative of the latest global currents. This fascination with the global aesthetics of late modernity informs not only the emergent elite's abstract understanding of its place in the worlds, but also its daily life.

To return to the conversation with which this chapter started, members of the emergent elite live in their own "bubble" within the city. To paraphrase Drago, they design their daily lives so that they will "not be reached by things that [they] don't like, and if these things catch up with [them], it will be only for a short while." If at all possible, members of the emergent elite take jobs that allow them to work with like-minded people and often commission work to each other; they shop in stores that they call "alternative," often owned by friends and acquaintances that cater to their fashion preferences; choose to read magazines, such as *Edno,* that are made by people like them and for them. They frequent coffee-shops and bars that live up to their standards of quality interior design, such as the *Opera Café,* an establishment with a sleek minimalist black and white décor, where Drago suggested meeting for an interview. And they make a point to avoid places that fail to meet these standards, as for example the Women's Market *(Zhenskia Pazar),* a smelly sprawl of hundreds of outdoor stalls in the heart of Sofia that sell everything from vegetables to dirt-cheap Chinese and Turkish-made clothes and electronics. The air there is thick with the haggling, clamor and chaos of an Oriental bazaar, and constitutes the exact opposite of the restrained quiet elegance of the *Opera Café.*

In other words, the taste and aesthetics preferences of the emergent elite have their expression in physical places, such as coffee-shops and stores, and in material

objects, such as clothes and magazines like *Edno*. On one hand, these material substantiations of the imaginary reflect the preferences of the emergent elite. On the other, they provide some of the locally available means through which the imaginary is cultivated and maintained. They are a product of the imaginary and simultaneously help to produce it. The practical ways of inhabiting the city, spending money, making choices, and styling the self together with practices of looking, traveling, and systematically seeking out exposure to images of foreign art, culture and design, all suggest that the transnational engagement of the elite in-the-making is a function not just of the imagination as a mental, cerebral phenomenon, but also of practices that are grounded in the body, the senses and the material world. And this is why the term imaginary is especially well-suited to describe it.

The word imaginary as used by social scientists refers to an understanding of the social world that is both conceptual and embodied. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, one of the leading theorists of the imaginary, provides an especially concise definition of the term: "the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (2002:106). For Taylor as well as for other writers[44] this understanding of social existence is not a "theoretical description" divorced from practice but rather is embedded in an implicit and embodied knowledge, an "unstructured and

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[44] For example, Benedict Anderson (1991) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984). For Anderson, the ability to imagine oneself as connected to others through practices enabled by print capitalism (such as the reading of newspapers in distinct languages) has the ability to produce a sense of fervent national belonging for which it is worth dying (1981). And for Bourdieu, aesthetic preferences and the lifestyles that they shape (including practices and particular ways of inhabiting the body) perpetuate and, indeed, make seem unavoidable a social world that is marked by inequality and gradations of social distinction.

inarticulate understanding of our whole situation" (107) that is produced in part through our physical inhabiting of the world, through practices, and through our interaction with the material environment and with other people.

Part of the emergent elite's engagement with the world beyond Bulgaria's borders is explicit and frequently reflected upon. Agents intentionally seek to present themselves as local representatives of the latest global trends. Another part of it is implicit and embodied: as with most matters of taste and aesthetics, the emergent elite's understanding of what constitutes "good taste" and "good quality" is often difficult to verbalize and seemingly emanates directly from the senses rather than from conscious reflection. The aesthetic judgments do not usually involve an explicit comparison between, let's say, the properties of a specific work of art and a mental list of categories of the "cutting-edge." Rather judgments are seemingly spontaneous and a matter of "gut feeling." This reflects Bourdieu's observation that artistic taste among members of the privileged social classes is cultivated through "repeated contact with the work (or with works of the same class)" (1968:207); that it is result of one's opportunity to "unconsciously absorb the rules of the art – including those that are not explicitly known to the master himself—by giving himself up to it, excluding analysis (…) so the art lover can, by abandoning himself in some way to the work, interiorize the principles and rules of its construction without their ever being brought to his consciousness and formulated as such" (1968:208).

While for Bourdieu, the particular cultivation of aesthetic taste is significant as characteristic of the habitus of the upper classes, in this particular case, I describe the elite in-the-making's focus on global cutting-edge aesthetics less as a part of its *habitus*

and more an imaginary in order to emphasize the conscious intent behind its cultivation. While for a member of the wealthy French upper class, the exposure to art is routine and as matter-of-fact as looking at the paintings in his or her familial home, for the members of the emergent elite, exposure to the latest developments in global cutting-edge art and style is the result of intentional pursuit carried out often with difficulty and at a significant cost. The concept of the imaginary accommodates this emphasis on explicit and intentional self-cultivation better than the habitus while maintaining the habitus' emphasis on practice and embodiment. According to Taylor, a part of the imaginary is available for explicit and conscious reflection. He suggests that the imaginary "is both factual and 'normative'; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice" and these usually can be verbalized (2002:106). Similarly, the emergent elite has an explicit understanding of lacks and lags that supposedly characterize Bulgarian art and culture, and the kinds of work required by individual agents to transcend them. The cultivation of the transnational imaginary is simultaneously a project of personal growth and development.

Notably, my use of the term imaginary is also narrower than that of Taylor. Taylor uses the term to talk about phenomena of much larger scale: entire societies and the preconditions of modernity. In his words, the imaginary is "what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society" (Taylor 2002:91). My goal here is more modest. I narrow down the scope of the term to talk not about a society but about a social segment; I zoom in from the conditions of modernity to the conditions for change in the Bulgarian field of art and culture.

One final note on my choice of the adjective transnational versus cosmopolitan. The term transnational is often used in the social scientific literature in reference to phenomena of human migration and diaspora (for example, see Vertovec (2009) and the contributions to Wilson's and Dissanayake's edited volume (1996)). Here I use the term in its more general meaning of "sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges among non-state actors based across national borders—businesses, non-government-organizations, and individuals sharing the same interests" (Vertovec 2009:3). In contrast, the terms cosmopolitan and cosmopolitanism are usually used in instances when one can speak of desire for or a sense of belonging to a global community that may be based on our shared humanity (theorizations of this trajectory are usually linked to Kant as its forefather), shared political interests or moral causes (Rapport 2007; Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Wardle 2000). Cosmopolitanism is usually distinguished from transnationalism on the grounds that the latter designates connections that cross national boundaries and belongings without necessarily being linked to ideas of a unified community.

In the Bulgarian case, it is appropriate to describe the imaginary of the emergent elite as transnational and not as cosmopolitan because while it evokes the idea of a global body of cutting-edge creative professionals, they are not seen as members of a single community united by a common agenda or interests. The Bulgarian emergent elite is also not interested in the mobilization of this community for political or other goals, nor does it exhibit and impetus for the strengthening, augmenting, or in any way promoting it. Rather, the elite in-the-making sees this imagined global creative stratum as its international counterpart and natural ally, an amorphous and dispersed body of other culture producers, whose recognition it hopes to gain and benefit from locally. The

emergent elite's modest ambitions reflect its peripheral status: it aspires to be recognized as a member of this stratum by both other Bulgarians and by foreign colleagues. The foreign culture producers are the elite in-the-making's imagined ideal audience, whose opinion carry special weight.

Notably, to call someone's work "non-Bulgarian" or to say that it could appear on the pages of a foreign magazine is the ultimate compliment. The global aesthetic currents with which the emergent elite identifies itself are obscure and unfamiliar to most Bulgarians, and so allow the young culture producers to claim an even greater and more "advanced" knowledge of an imagined superior foreign world and especially of a superior "Europe," superiority which is disputed by precious few in Bulgaria. With these theoretical clarifications and caveats out of the way, I will next examine the specific practices, ways of looking and of travel through which the elite in-the-making's transnational imaginary of global cutting-edge aesthetics is produced.

Not everyone can know: exclusivity and mobility without travel

The transnational imaginary of the emergent elite is both discerning and exclusive. It is discerning in that it selectively focuses only on what it is deemed to be cutting-edge and avant-garde. It is exclusive in that it is cultivated through practices that require privileges not available to all Bulgarians and not equally available to all members of the elite in-the-making. One's ability to enter the milieu and to receive the recognition of its members depends on one's practical ability to access specific sources of information and inspiration. Issues of access include, first, practicalities such as having disposable income, computer and internet connection, and, second, the knowledge of

where to look for information and inspiration. Both of these factors influence the extend

to which one would be able to cultivate the right kind of transnational imaginary without

leaving Bulgaria.

Foreign magazines and the internet are some of the most important sources of

information about international cutting-edge fashion and style. In talking to stylists and

photographers, it became apparent that *looking* at foreign magazines and websites, and

knowing where to look are essential to their expertise. For example, Vasko Germanov, a

freelance photographer who regularly shoots for *Edno,* explained that his way of work,

his methods and aesthetics, are largely inspired by foreign models:

> I buy magazines, I browse internet all day long. (…) I have not traveled much but
> I have not let myself go. I am on the internet day and night. In any free minute I
> have, I review this set of websites that I follow in each field, in commercial as
> well as in independent photography. And not only photography. Illustrations, art,
> art directors, graphic designers. All of this interests me, there is no other way.
> Otherwise I will have to settle for the masses and become a part of them.

In order to cultivate a creative vision that stands out from the "masses," people like

Vasko need to meet a series requirements. First, they need to have an easy and regular

access to a computer and a reliable, and fast internet connection. Second, and more

importantly, they need advanced knowledge of a Western European language, preferably

English. And finally, they need to *know* where on the internet to look for information,

which sites to go to and how to navigate the enormous wealth of materials available on

the World Wide Web in order to sift out those that carry most symbolic weight among the

elite in-the-making. Each of these requirements constitutes a potential obstacle to

belonging to the exclusive club of the emergent elite.

While personal computers and the internet have become widely available in

Bulgaria, they are still not universal and require some disposable income. More

importantly, only some Bulgarians are competent in foreign languages. One of the best sources of foreign language education in Bulgaria traditionally are the elite secondary schools specializing in the study of English, German, French, and sometimes Spanish. Most members of the emergent elite graduated from these schools and have advanced knowledge of at least one Western European language and often of two. As sons and daughters of well-educated parents who recognize the importance of foreign language competence and good education, who have been willing to pay for private lessons to meet the stringent entrance exams for the best high schools and universities, and who often to found travel or other opportunities for their children, the members of the elite in-the-making by virtue of their linguistic and overall competence in navigating foreign language environments have available to them internet sources of information that are unavailable to Bulgarians with lesser language skills or with knowledge of Russian or another Eastern European language only.

Finally, in addition to having access to the internet and having the necessary linguistic competence, members of the emergent elite also need to *know* where on the internet to *look,* be able to pass judgment on what one finds there, and to be able designate some the styles and designs as fashion-forward and of world quality. Following a circular logic, to cultivate the cosmopolitan imaginary of the elite in-the-making, one needs to already be in possession of some of the distinctions and judgments that characterize it. The same applies not only to internet use but also to access to other sources of information, such as foreign publications. For example, some highly respected foreign art and culture magazines are not available for purchase in Bulgaria. One needs to

know in advance the name and kind of magazine one needs before asking a friend or a relative to ship it from abroad.

To complicate things even further, the knowledge about specific sources of information may be kept as a trade secret. Some websites are widely frequented by the elite in-the-making, such as Vogue's online edition, style.com, or the pages of established prominent fashion-forward designers, photographers, illustrators and more. Steven Klein and Alexander McQueen are two prominent examples. However, in addition to these well-known sites, professionals often have their own lists of favorite pages that are "less commercial" and so more obscure. Since "looking" and being informed before everyone else is directly related to one's professional advantage, people can be hesitant about disclosing the names of these sites. Some examples include hintmag.com, a New York fashion portal, and Japanesestreets.com, which as the name suggests specializes in images of street fashion from Japan.

To sum up, knowing where to look for creative inspiration requires some disposable income, foreign language competence, as well as the knowledge of *where* to look for information and *how* to evaluate it. While these are some of the pre-conditions for membership in the emergent elite, in order to stand out professionally in this social milieu, one needs to do more than meet these basic requirements. A successful professional reputation and recognition of "talent" benefits especially from the possession of foreign credentials. Julia, *Edno's* fashion editor and highly respected stylist, summed up this nicely:

> So-and-so thinks that because he has a subscription to *V-men* and *i-D* and has read
> 4-5 issues of foreign magazines, he will produce work of the same quality as what
> he sees there. But it doesn't work like this. (....) I always try to think of
> something new myself, to make it myself.

Significantly, Julia lived in one of the world fashion capitals for fourteen years. Even though she does not bring up this fact in the excerpt, it comes up repeatedly in conversations. It is also one of the first things that I learned about her from others. Her work as a stylist as well as her personal style are seen as organic and somehow more authentic than those acquired by stylists who learn their craft mostly through foreign media and with little professional experience abroad. As I will show later, travel allows one to grow professionally because it is seen as providing an opportunity to acquire an embodied knowledge of the cutting-edge, the fashion-forward and the avant-garde. This knowledge is substantiated with diplomas, certificates and other lines on the resume, and, more importantly, it is seen as resulting from a qualitative change in the traveler and his or her authorial voice. The right kind of travel places the future experts of style in foreign professional and social contexts and allows them not just to learn about but to embody standards of work that are imagined as superior. Bulgarians who learn about the latest fashion trends through the mediation of foreign magazines and the internet, rather than first-hand, by inhabiting the streets of world fashion capitals such as Milano, Paris and London, or by studying in foreign fashion and design schools, simply cannot lay claim to the same kinds of competence and original vision as Julia does.

Two kinds of travel

Foreign education, internships and professional experience are also the kinds of opportunities that people from less privileged social backgrounds find to be especially difficult to obtain. Foreign professional experience, framed as a matter of personal achievement and talent, in fact often is linked to the relative privilege in which one is

born. It constitutes one of the factors that ensure that the emergent elite remains a relatively exclusive social club, entry into which is supported by the possession of specific economic and cultural capital. To expand on this point, I will tell the story of two journeys: one that failed to produce kind of the professional cache needed for a sustained professional improvement, and another that successfully obtained it. I will contrast the two journeys to comment on the ways in which social inequality is glossed over in local imaginaries and success stories. The examples below also illustrate the point that when the emergent elite complains that Bulgarians do not travel enough, they have in mind the kind of travel that is available only to the more privileged social strata. These complaints gloss over social inequality and help to render the authority of the emergent elite as a matter of choice and personal insight, rather than of social priviledge.

Setting: Popovo, Bulgaria

I learned about the details of Daniela's travels in an unusual way. One day my mother said, "I have a gift for you. It's somebody else's diary."

"This is an odd gift" I said.

Odd, to say the least. If it was the diary of a long-gone relative, it wouldn't have been so strange. It seems slightly more acceptable to poke around in the private past of one's predecessors because you can claim it as your own. But the author of the diary in question was alive and well, and wasn't a relative at all. Daniela is a neighbor of my grandmother in the town of Popovo. She is a 45-year old with strong hands and a short red hair in a metallic hue.

My mother explained that when she saw Daniela on her last visit to Popovo, Daniela volunteered the notebook. She climbed the stairs up to my grandmother's house, her diary in hand, the mermaid on the cover slightly creased and folded over, and asked my mother whether she thought that I would like to write about it. Daniela apparently said that if I was interested I could "use" the diary any way I saw fit and asked that I give it back when I was done. I can't help but wonder why Daniela did this, and I have not seen her since to ask. As far as I can remember she and I never talked about anthropology or my research. Daniela must have considered the content of the notebook important and must have thought that I was a likely candidate to tell other people about it.

On my grandmother's street, Daniela is a star. She is considered to have demonstrated an amazing amount of courage, endurance, and independence, and has earned the respect of friends and neighbors. I should explain that the town of Popovo has practically no claim to fame. During the years of socialism, Popovo at least had enough industry to provide the majority of its residents with we might call today "a middle-class" existence. After socialism ended, plants closed down one by one, and the town started to shrink and to grow older. Of its former 30, 000 residents, probably no more than 15, 000 remain today. The younger people flocked en masse to larger cities. Daniela was not in a position to start over, however. She had two teenagers to feed and a useless ex-husband, who drank all of his unemployment money before she could track him down and demand child support. So she cleaned as many offices or plants as she could find still in business, and took out loan after loan to cover what the custodial pay would not. One day, she decided that she had had enough and paid someone to take her to Naples and find her a job.

Daniela crossed the border in a van full of women like her, all of them instructed to tell the border guards that they were related to each other and that they were going to a wedding in Italy. She arrived in the vicinity of Naples with enough money only for a pack of cigarettes and a pair of Chinese flip-flops because hers fell apart on the way. Being the last one on the van, Daniela was ominously told by the driver that at 40 years of age she was lucky to be "so old" or else she might have been employed in a "more profitable" line of work. The driver dropped her off in front of a big house with a garden and stables, and waited around long enough to translate that from this point on Daniela was in charge of all the housework, of cleaning and feeding the horses and hens, and of tending the garden. He then showed her to her room inside the house and left. Daniela spoke no Italian, ate what her employer gave her, and got her first €500 pay at the end of the month. From that she subtracted money to pay for the food and cigarettes that the employer had provided, and saved the rest to pay off debts incurred for the services of the driver and his gang.

The diary tells me that Daniela coped with the first days, weeks, and months in Italy, one task at a time. When she was too tired or did not have time to write, her daily entries resemble crossed off to-do lists: "*5.6-Thursday. Today same as yesterday. Until noon I weeded the garden. After 1 pm, in the house, did laundry, washed, scrubbed, and so on for I do not know how long. I cried again.*" Crying is listed as a task as regular as the feeding of the farm stock.

To friends and neighbors, the account of Daniela's vulnerability, of her isolation and the sadness that transpired when she told the stories of her trip was a testimony to her initiative and determination to take her life in her own hands and to provide for her

children, whom she left behind alone to look after each other and to live on the money that she started sending regularly two-months after she left. Daniela is seen as a successful woman by virtue of having achieved her personal goals of settling her debts, supporting her family and paying for a proper prom for her daughter. As she learned how to navigate the black job market in Naples, she set and achieved new goals: to renovate the kitchen of the Popovo apartment, buy a new water heater, save for retirement.

To the staff of the many new Bulgarian NGOs specializing in human rights, Daniela's story might be an example of human trafficking that potentially could have ended much worse than it did. I have attended more than one academic and NGO seminar on the rights of women and the poor. Stories such as Daniela's are interpreted either as examples of victimization by lawlessness, poverty and free-rein capitalism in Eastern Europe, which indeed they are, or, more rarely, as one of the few available options for female empowerment. Daniela never used words such as human trafficking or victimization, and judging by the pride with which demonstrates her growing mastery of Italian, I would guess that if she had to, she would prefer to say that she was empowered rather than victimized. She says she would do it all over again if she had to, but I imagine she would like it even better if she did not have to do it at all.

Economically Daniela is better off today than she has ever been before. But to continue to earn she must continue to reside in Italy, because all five years of work and life in Naples have not improved her chances at finding a job in Bulgaria that pays any better than the custodial work she did before. This is the case for many other Bulgarians, who go abroad for work but whose foreign experience does little to improve their

prospects back home. Quite the opposite is true for the young woman whose travels I will recount next.

Setting: Sofia, Bulgaria

"She is only 28 years old, but she is already part of history, the history of the profession of the stylist in Bulgaria", this is how Radio Bulgaria introduced Sanda Klincheva to its listeners in October 2006 (Krusteva 2006). Several other newspapers and magazines chimed in with articles and interviews, and helped to establish that in the world of Bulgarian fashion and style Sandra's name had become important.

I met Sandra in her capacity as a former fashion editor for *Edno*. As I shuffled through the first autumn leaves in the Zaimov Park on my way to meet her for a first time, I rehearsed the kinds of things that might be appropriate to say in front of someone who is part of history. But Sandra did not act as a *prima donna*. She smiled frequently and spoke directly into my voice recorder to make sure that I get a good interview.

Born and raised in Sofia, she grew up in the center of town and not in one of the outlying suburbs of crummy socialist living blocks. Her father is an engineer and her mother a long-time employee of the American embassy. Sandra moved to London after high school and earned a degree in fashion design from the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. Her first job was in Asia, in Hong Kong and then in Singapore where she taught in Lasalle College of the Arts. Not fond enough of life in Asia to settle there, Sandra decided to return to Bulgaria. She shrugged her shoulders and told me that she became the fashion editor of *Edno* "coincidentally and very quickly " as soon as she came back to Sofia. When she got tired of the job a few years later, the magazine

experience served as a trampoline and opened opportunities for work in other magazines, in advertisement, in theater and film. Sandra's debut as a theater costume designer earned her a nomination for the Bulgarian equivalent of the Tony awards, the Askeer. She started teaching at the Bulgarian Art Academy and gradually came to enjoy professional recognition and media attention.

Journalists repeatedly describe Sandra as the "real" thing: a "real stylist" in a country where supposedly many people want to be called stylists but very few have what it takes to earn this title (*ViewSofia 2008*). One interviewer explains that Sandra's *alma mater,* the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, is "the *real* place to study fashion" (2005, italics mine). Sandra's authenticity as a stylist is thus grounded in foreign credentials, her diploma and teaching experience. More substantively, it is a reflection of an embodied knowledge of style that is best obtained through travel and first-hand exposure. This is what separates a true stylist from a wannabe.

Sandra seemingly believes that she got the job at the magazine *Edno* as a matter of luck, or as she put it, "coincidentally and very quickly." However, this certainly would not look like a coincidence to the recent graduates from the Bulgarian Arts Academy, who work hard to become freelance contributors to the magazine but who do not get hired on staff even when a job opening presents itself. The truth is that as Sandra returned from London and Singapore, she brought back a CV and an aura of embodied knowledge that all too predictably landed her a job in a magazine which is preoccupied with the latest global trends in art and style. And since new trends and standards are seen as originating beyond Bulgaria's borders, Sandra's foreign credentials provided a perfect match.

The contrast between Daniela and Sandra reveals not only that disparate

mobilities produce disparate effects on one's life chances back home, but also that there

exists a regularity in who gets to travel how. Sandra's successful journey started out from

a family that was not particularly wealthy but that was significantly better off than

Daniela's. Sandra's parents were able to provide support in terms of money and

inspiration. Radio Bulgaria recounts that Sandra's love for fashion dates back to her

childhood and the American *Vogue,* to which her mother was a subscriber (Krusteva

2006). In the 1980s and 1990s, very few Bulgarian families had the privilege of a

subscription to an expensive foreign magazine like *Vogue*, and this is still case today.

Clearly, the mother's employment in the American embassy was crucial in providing this

and other opportunities for inspiration and growth of her daughter's talent and career. In

contrast, Daniela's parents worked on a collective farm near Popovo all their lives.

Daniela's age and family situation, her debts and lack of prospects in Bulgaria all resulted

in a journey to Italy that similarly failed to offer the prospects that would have been

available to someone like Sandra.

In other words, not only taste but also travel help to set the parameters of social

inequality in post-socialist Bulgaria. By drawing attention to Sandra's familial

background, I do not question her abilities and professionalism. However, I suggest that

when the media and the culture producers from the elite in-the-making praise an

imaginary of a cosmopolitan style and culture, and praise the people who acquire it first-

hand through travel, education and other foreign experience, they overlook the social

disparities that affect one's chances to lay claim on having talent and to embody a

knowledge of superior professional standards.

The productive powers of the transnational imagination: two magazines

Previous sections examined how the transnational imaginary of the emergent elite is produced: the practices and privileges that go into its making. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will examine how this imaginary participates directly in creative practice and how it informs the making of local cultural products. I will focus on the life-style magazine *Edno* as one of the material products that embody the imaginary of its creators and that later in turn participate in the production of the imaginary of its consumers.

In *Edno's* office, several foreign magazines enjoy special respect. Among them most prominently feature the British *i-D* and *Dazed and Confused*. Since they are not available for purchase in Bulgaria, the editors buy them when they travel abroad or ask friends and relatives on the road to buy them. These two magazines are most frequently mentioned as successful examples of what *Edno* is trying to do on the Bulgarian scene. They and the other foreign magazines described below function as material vehicles for the global travel of images and style. The editors' preference for publications such as *i-D* and *Dazed and Confused* and their lack of interest in magazines such as *Elle* and *Harper's Bazaar*, for instance, is related to their focus on the cutting edge. They selectively seek out some magazines and not others, and base their standards of "world quality" on foreign cultural products that are designated as elite and avant-garde. Since its very inception *Edno* explicitly adopted the concept of the elite connoisseur magazine, such as *i-D*, and next I will look closer at some of the connections between the two publications.

Most people who professionally work in fashion and design would have heard

of *i-D*.[45] Published monthly in London, the magazine first appeared in 1980 and offered a cocktail of music, fashion, art and design that gave birth of the term "style magazine." The making of *i-D* was guided by several unique principles which distinguished it from most fashion magazines at the time. It insisted that fashion innovation occurs no longer in the elite designers' studios but right on the street. Taking advantage of the spectacular fashion of the punk era, magazine photographers took out to the streets and collected images of random passers-by in impressive dress. Today the magazine continues to give preference to photo sessions that feature ordinary people rather than professional models.

Since its very inception, *i-D* was not afraid to be controversial and radical. The fashion designer Paul Smith, who was involved with the magazine in its early years, says: "We wanted to be a bit more individual and wanted to do things in a way that has to do with self-expression and not with a big corporate plot ... *i-D* ... was trying to be different, to be individual" (Lipman 2004). In other words, the magazine had a complex relationship to the market: trying to stay away from practices of styles and modes of representation tagged as "corporate" and commercial while competing for readers in the commercial marketplace. Not surprisingly, the image of being "non-commercial" has a particular commercial appeal.

In addition to featuring street fashion and non-professional models, *i-D* was experimental in another respect: graphics and photography. In the words of the BBC narrator, its layout was "messy," "lively," and "created the illusion of fast news." Many people found it confusing and nearly "illegible." It's photography was "irreverent": "The

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[45] Despite of *i-D's* significance in the media world, little has been written about it by social scientists. For example, it is featured briefly in a study of the British fashion industry (McRobbie 1998) and of youth club culture (Thornton 1996). The information presented here draws on a BBC documentary celebrating 25 years since the magazine's first issue (Lipman 2004) as well as on brief research and informal interviews which I conducted in London in 2008.

emphasis was on anti-photography. It was much more about information, content and the individual than about pretty pictures" (Lipman 2004).

By the 1990s, the magazine had built a reputation for launching new careers and styles. It took special pride in "discovering celebrities before they were famous and trends before they were everywhere," including promoting the budding careers of Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen (Lipman 2004). Around the same time, concerns over its financial survival intensified as other publications began to write about street fashion (such as *Style, The Sunday Review, The Observer Magazine)* and helped to make *i-D* less exclusive. *i-D* re-oriented towards high-fashion and became a "must-have bible for people in the know," in the words of fashion designer Husein Cheleyan (Lipman 2004). Today *i-D* is regarded as a required reading for industry people, while at the same time being also routinely criticized for being pretentious and for alienating readers. In a word, *i-D,* through all of its transformations over the years, has positioned itself on the border between counterculture and high culture, between youth fashion and high fashion. It has been a part of a trend that places the cutting-edge at the point where distinctions between high culture and popular culture become increasingly blurred. It has marketed itself as a reading for people "in-the-know" about the latest in matters of style, fashion and culture.

A very similar ambition guides the people who make *Edno.* The extensive similarities between *i-D* and *Edno* are probably already becoming apparent to the reader. As described in the previous chapters, *Edno* regards experimentation in image and design as its trademark. It takes pride in shunning "pretty pictures" (as discussed in previous chapters) and favors what editors refer to as "trashy aesthetics." As discussed in chapter

one and like *i-D, Edno* is not afraid of being controversial in images and text. Its editorial board is fully aware of the magazine's alienating effect on large segments of the Bulgarian audiences but takes this as evidence of its special status and its appeal to people "in-the-know" about what is "cool" and cutting-edge. *Edno* also aspires to the position of a trend-setter who spots new trends and new stars before they have become ubiquitous.

Edno explicitly models itself on *i-D* and other similar publications. Since the very beginning, knowledge about the right kinds of foreign magazines was essential. The magazine was founded by three young journalists (including Assen Assenov, *Edno's* current producer and majority owner) with promising futures and virtually no experience in magazine making. They all worked for *Capital*, the weekly newspaper for politics and economics, and had brief stints in TV but virtually no magazine experience. With a basic idea of what kind of magazine they wanted to create, their inspiration came largely from foreign magazines. This was reflected in the choice of the first art editor of the magazine, Dimityr Slavchev. He was chosen in part because of his taste for specific foreign publications. In the words of one of the founders:

> Dimityr is an architect and a friend of Assen and me. And Assen said, you will not believe whom I am planning to entrust with the [making of the] visual side of the magazine. And I really did not believe it at first [when he said] that he meant Mitaka [brief for Dimityr]. Because he is so far removed from any journalism at all. His only contact point is the magazine *Wallpaper* and all the other magazines that he religiously buys once a month. Dimityr had to be taught journalism and media literacy, and all of us had to learn what it is to make a magazine.

In other words, even more than a practical know-how in magazine journalism, the founders of *Edno* valued in their staff the possession of the right kind of vision and taste, and these were often cultivated with the help of foreign magazines such as *Wallpaper* and

i-D. This particular fascination of *Edno's* founders left its imprint not just on the founding of the magazine, but continued to play an important role in its day-to-day production in the years to come.

During editorial meetings, photo shoots, and regular discussions about the purpose of the magazine, examples from *i-D* and other similar magazines were consistently brought up, debated, and used in brainstorming. The editors had such intimate familiarity with these publications that they were able to identify the influences of specific photo sessions, stylists or photographers on the work of their colleagues at *Edno* and other publications. They even raised accusations that so-and-so had "stolen an entire photo shoot" by reproducing too closely the styling or the background of photo session that they had seen in *i-D* or another magazine.

When in the spring of 2006, some of *Edno's* editors were asked to develop a new structure and new layout of the magazine, they locked themselves up for a weekend in one of the editor's apartments with "piles and piles" of foreign magazines (among them *i-D, Dazed and Confused, Wallpaper,* the Italian *V-Men*) to read and come up with suggestions. During an editorial meeting to discuss some of these suggestions, they hotly debated the question of cover design. *i-D* was singled out as one especially successful example of how covers can be made to represent consistently the identity of the magazine. Cover images for *i-D* always feature a wink: portraits of people with one eye open and the other one closed or hidden behind a hat or a lock of hair. This corresponds to *i-D's* logo, which flipped on its side, can be read as a stylized graph of a wink, the D standing in for the mouth, and the "i" (never capital) for the two eyes, one closed and one open (Figure 1). While *Edno*'s editors were not able to come up with a similar concept

for their covers, they all agreed that *i-D's* idea provides an excellent example of what to look for.

Fig. 1. *i-D,* "The After Dark Issue," No. 245, July 2004.

The transnational imaginary at work: imitation, inspiration and originality

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the skill of treading the fine line between being too close or too far from the imagined foreign standards of quality is one of the essential components of "talent" and artistic ability. Any lesser stylist might copy a foreign photo session, but only a true expert knows how to make something original that looks as though it could be published in one of the revered foreign magazines: the British *i-D, Another Magazine,* and *Wallpaper,* and the Italian *Vogue,* among others. Julia and *Edno*'s staff and pool of freelancers present themselves as experts and as conduits of taste capable of keeping not too close to and not too far from the original photo shoots, styling, and photo editing of the magazines that inspire them. Julia defends her own professional legitimacy in terms of producing original work that is inspired by worthwhile models:

> Yes, it's true that I look at tons of magazines and shops, and I make mental notes of the things I like but the purpose of this is to develop my personal taste in order to produce something original. Producing original work is the most important thing to me. The rest is copying.

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Similarly to individual members of the emergent elite, the magazine *Edno also* takes special pride in being original. "We don't steal"— I heard this many times from Victor and other members of *Edno's* staff. Other magazines sometimes reprint images from the internet or from foreign media without paying royalties. Until recently it was also quite common (and it still is in some cheaper publications) to see articles with credits such as: "Based on materials from the foreign press." This could mean that the text has been compiled from several other articles or that it simply has been translated and reprinted *in toto. Edno* makes every effort to distance itself from such practices by trying to publish as much original texts and photography as possible. When reprint takes place, official permissions are always obtained.

In practice the making of original photo shoots makes creative use of "mental notes," actual images from foreign magazines and websites, and improvisation. Let's take for example the production of the beauty photo shoot titled "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" and published in *Edno's* April 2005 issue. The photo session named poetically after Sallinger's short story, was a "beauty" photo shoot, that is, a series of shots that feature makeup and hair styles, rather than clothes. The following ingredients went into its making:

- the guidance of the art director Alex, of Mexican-Italian descent, a recent arrival from Hong Kong, where he worked before taking the job at *Edno,* and with a rudimentary knowledge of Bulgarian.

- a list of five summer 2006 fashion trends listed on the *Vogue's* website style.com, which inspired Alex's idea for the photo session: aristocratic, crazy, animal, print and artisan.

- a printout of the five main makeup trends for summer 2006 from the website of

  MAC cosmetics (Fig. 2);

- an issue of the magazine *Quest* for July/August 2005;

- an issue of the German magazine *Hekmag* fall/winter 2005-06, which Alex

  purchased either in Paris or in Hong Kong (he could not remember where but was

  certain that the magazine is not available for sale in Bulgaria);

- the expertise of the makeup artist Nick and the hairstylist Vania, the photographer

  Vasko and the models Gabriella and Kristina.

The goal: to interpret and introduce summer 2006 fashion trends through make up and

hairstyle.
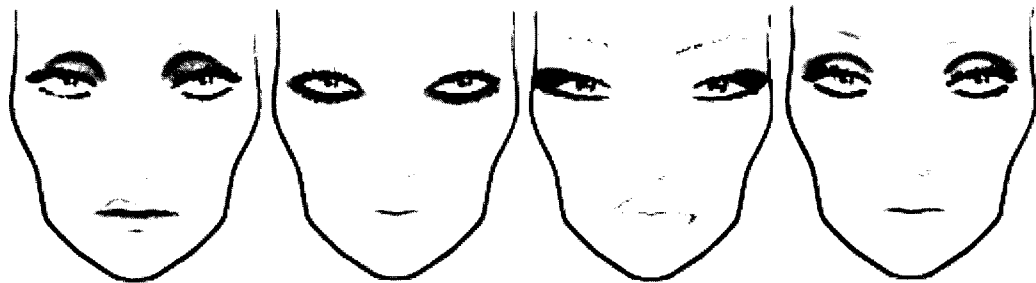
Fig. 2

At eight o'clock at night, the long table and white chairs in the magazine's

conference room were pushed to the side to make room for the tripod, camera, studio

lights and reflectors. Vasko navigated the tight space adjusting the equipment, while Nick

and Vania prepared the models using the conference table as a beauty salon counter. Alex

distributed instructions. Vania looked at the MAC print outs, dipped into her makeup

case filled with professional MAC cosmetics and precisely reproduced each look. These

were not the latest MAC products meant to generate the 2006 looks but served the purpose well enough. In contrast Nick's job required more creativity.

For the first frame, he was instructed to reproduce a hairstyle from a photograph in *Quest* magazine for Gabriella. Like the *Quest* model's, Gabriella's hair was the color of fresh honey, soft and smooth. Still it lacked the length or the thickness to produce the desired voluminous look. Or else, as Nick guessed, the *Quest* hairstylist used a massive hair extension that was not available to him. So Nick looked for a solution. He pulled all of Gabriela's hair to the front, and then proceeded to braid it on one side of her face and wrap it around neatly, while puffing up the hair on the other side to make it look bushy and wild. In the end, Gabriela's style resembled that of the model, and Alex was satisfied.

The hairstyle for the next frame was based on *Heckmag,* and that was reproduced smoothly as well. However, the image that Alex had prepared for the third shot posed an insurmountable problem. Unsuccessfully, Nick tried several times to recreate a picture from the magazine, and in the end gave up. So Alex thought for a minute and came up with an alternative hairstyle for which there was no picture to look at. He struggled to explain it to Nick, who spoke some English but not enough to understand Alex completely. Alex gestured, and mimicked and looked for translation until he mentioned the key word: Farah Fawcett. The light of comprehension surfaced on Nick's face, and he needed no more explanations. The image of the Charlie's angel from the late 1970s that both the art director and the hair stylist had in their heads bridged the linguistic gap. Nick vigorously blow-dried Kristina's brown hair away from the face. Her hair went so far back that it began to resemble a horse mane or a cowboy hat. "I like this," said Alex as the Farah Fawcett resemblance gradually faded and something new emerged. "Keep

going." At the end, the Farrah Fawcett inspiration was still vaguely recognizable in the 1980's look of the style but was redone and updated. Everyone in the room was impressed, and this became the opening shot for the photo session.

Precise reproduction of makeup, more or less precise approximation of hairstyles mixed with experimentation and improvisation on the spot produced the looks for the beauty session of the May 2006 issue. Fragments of looks borrowed or inspired from foreign magazines were brought together and recombined in an idea created by Alex and were further modified during the photo shoot itself. In the end even the styles that most closely approximated the original fragments on which they were modeled had a very different overall look. For example, even though Gabriella and the *Quest* model looked surprisingly alike, the photographs themselves were very different. The original showed the model and a child, full size, in a ghostly forest cleaning enveloped by faint fog and cut through by railroad tracks. In contrast, Gabriella's photograph, and all other images from the beauty session, were full-face photographs, top of the shoulders and up on a well-lit up plain white background.

I asked how common it is to look at images from other magazines or from a website. Did they think that this might be considered stealing in any way? The hairstylist and makeup artist did not appear bothered by my suggestion. They said that this is a common practice in other magazines where they have worked and that this is also the case abroad. One of the models seemed to disagree about foreign artists reproducing particular styles from pictures but perhaps because she sensed that she would be in the minority, she quickly dropped the subject. I came to the conclusion that none of the people participating in this photo session thought that they were stealing or imitating

other people's work because the final result did not imitate another photo session whole-sale. Rather it borrowed bits and pieces from here and from there, recombined them creatively and added completely new elements. The successful reworking and mixing of separate fragments is held together by a vision, a glue that not only organizes the fragments but also fills in the gaps between the incongruent edges of fragments and produces a coherent whole. This vision is what separates an original from a copy, and a talented professional from a mere impostor.

To sum up, the significance of the elite in-the-making's transnational imaginary and the related constructions of talent and world quality are important to consider for several reasons. They are part and parcel of attitudes and recognizable aesthetic preferences through which the emergent elite forms a recognizable social segment. The idea of world quality successfully capitalizes on the specific social privileges of the elite in-the-making. Most members of the elite in-the-making have high cultural capital of unique constitution. Educated in some of the best schools and universities in the country, proficient in one and often more than one Western European languages, well-traveled, and with extensive foreign connections, the members of the emergent elite have the opportunity to cultivate a unique relationship to the centers of normative modernity and to an imagined "Europe" in particular. They are better positioned than most other Bulgarians to claim a sense of belonging to global currents of avant-garde art, culture and style, and their desire to impose the standard of imagined world quality as the dominant norm seeks to shift judgments of artistic quality in their favor.

The elite in-the-making's transnational imaginary and the related definitions of talent and world quality provide some of the means through which the elite in-the-making

seeks to establish itself as more up-to-date and more in tune with the present age than

factions of the intelligentsia, and especially than the cultural establishment, with which it

competes both for state funding and for prestige. The ideal of world quality is explicitly

and polemically opposed to what the elite in-the-making sees as the dominant tendency to

assess Bulgarian art and culture by their ability to reflect national uniqueness and to

contribute to a national cannon of artistic production. In the media, in personal

discussions, and in day-to-day creative work, the elite in-the-making insists that the

works of art that are usually celebrated as canonical achievements of Bulgarian culture

enjoy such high esteem only because they are measured against the body of Bulgarian

cultural production, instead of against the highest achievements in world culture. The

elite in-the-making insists that if Bulgaria is to make an international contribution,

Bulgarian artists need to measure up not to the inferior work of their local colleagues,

which dooms them to parochialism, but to the best and most current examples in the

centers of normative modernity. By promoting the idea of a "world quality" as the

dominant standard for evaluating artistic merit, the elite in-the-making strives to relegate

the current cultural establishment to insignificance as parochial and peripheral, and to

gain for itself the recognition and respect reserved for the cultural elite.

Chapter Six: National Inferiority Complex or the Politics of Cultural Production at the Doorstep of Europe

One day Irina Hristova, a former editor of *Edno* and a successful Bulgarian journalist in one of the national dailies, told me about her exasperation with a recent article in the popular newspaper *Trud*. The text was by Anton Donchev,[46] a famous Bulgarian writer, who adamantly argued that education in Bulgarian language and literature was more important than ever. He dismissed suggestions that children need to begin studying English from an early age and was hostile to the idea that today's youngsters prefer to read Terry Pratchett instead of Bulgarian children's classics. To Irina's dismay, Donchev insisted that "we [*Bulgarians*] need to have our Bulgarian passports close to our hearts when we enter the EU" and made his argument in "this nasty, jingoist, awful rhetoric." Irina said she "got scared" after reading his text because it made her realize that this rhetoric is hugely popular in Bulgaria. She pointed out that such opinions are a trademark of the newspaper *Trud*, and that, sadly, *Trud* has one of the highest circulations in the country: "Thousands of people vote for these ideas every day when they spend their money to buy *Trud*. These are ideas that I don't agree with, and I don't support. This is not *my Bulgaria.*"

This paper investigates how members of the emergent elite like Irina negotiated the tension between Bulgarian national identity and European belonging on the eve of Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007. I suggest that these men and women enunciate a direct critique of nationalism and through it, an oblique critique of the

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[46] Anton Donchev (b. 1930) is one of the best known living Bulgarian writers, who came to prominence in the 1960s. He wrote his most famous work *Time of Violence* (Време Разделно) in 1964, a vivid account of violent Ottoman islamization in the 17th century in what is today Southern Bulgaria. The book was made into a feature film in the 1980s and enjoyed huge popularity.

cultural establishment, invested as it is in a valorization of the past, tradition, and the nation. As an alternative to nationalist pre-occupations, the new generation proposes a pro-European orientation and presents itself as an agent of Europeanization and progress.

As I will show below, Bulgarians historically have had an uneasy relationship to "Europe," have imagined it as a standard of progress and modernity, and have spent much time worrying that they fail to live up to it. (I put "Europe" in quotation marks to distinguish the continent from the way people imagine it and attribute to it symbolic meanings.) In this way, "Europe" impacts the Bulgarian context not just through actual political and economic interactions with specific European countries or the EU but also as a concept that can be strategically mobilized by social agents to improve their life chances.

Because Bulgarians are not unique in their anxiety with respect to an imagined "Europe," this investigation relates to other cultural contexts that exhibit a similar sense of inferiority with respect to the normative modernity of an imagined elsewhere. Notably, this investigation strategically draws on two different levels of the meaning of 'culture': one in the anthropological sense of the term as traits and habits peculiar to one group of people, and the other in the sense of literature, arts, music and other such artistic and intellectual products. While these two kinds of culture are normally considered to be the subjects of study of separate disciplines, this ethnographic account links the two levels of analysis in order to shed light on each.

Next, I show that there was an increase in nationalist sentiment in the years immediately before Bulgaria's EU accession. Then I examine ethnographically how the elite-in-the-making elaborates its critique of nationalism by looking at what people like

Irina call the "national inferiority complex." Specifically, I look at a series of editorial

meetings and debates on the subject of nationalism and the "national inferiority complex"

that took place at the offices of the magazine for art, culture and lifestyle *Edno*. As a

mouthpiece for the emergent elite, *Edno* provides a unique opportunity to study how the

sentiments of this social segment are elaborated discursively.

It is important to keep in mind that the members of the emergent elite work hard

to improve their prospects for the future by presenting themselves as already "European"

and so more competent and more progressive than other Bulgarians. Members of this

segment recognize that they are uniquely positioned to benefit from emphasizing their

connection to an imagined "Europe," and they pursue this strategy to their advantage. As

Bourdieu's analyses (1984) would lead one to expect, taste and lifestyle in Bulgaria mask

social inequality. However, unlike the case of twentieth-century French society as

Bourdieu describes it, distinction in Bulgaria is produced on the basis of practices and

standards that are not autochthonic. The standards of good taste and refinement, which in

France may be set by the upper class and anxiously approximated by the middle classes,

originate in Bulgaria not indigenously with a local elite but through emulation and import

from the centers of normative modernity. Being polished, well-mannered, and well-

dressed testifies to personal merit not only as an expression of one's good taste but also

as evidence of one's being versed in superior "European" knowledge and practices. As

supposedly already "European," the men and women from the emergent elite insist that

they are uniquely capable to lead other Bulgarians on the road to "Europe" and so to a

better future for the entire nation.

Notably, the emergent elite does not couch discussions of 'Europe' and

nationalism in the plain terms of self-interest and concern over personal futures. It manifests a genuine concern over Bulgaria's future and honestly believes that it is advocating the kind of change that will benefit all Bulgarians. However, members of the emergent elite are mistaken to assume that embracing imagined "European" standards of quality, thought and action will benefit all Bulgarians equally. They fail to acknowledge that Bulgarians with modest financial means, with low social and cultural capital, and with the sense of residing at the margins of society, even when they actually are not, may not be able or may not be willing to cultivate the same kind of transnational belonging. These people find themselves at the greatest distance from the aspired model of the upper classes and their emulation of an imagined Europe, and are most likely to reject aspirations to Europe and to embrace national history, tradition, Eastern Orthodoxy and nationalism as source of pride, value and self-respect. To them, the economic privileges, the prestige and status that can be acquired by symbolically aligning oneself with Europe may be practically out of reach, and so instead they are likely to embrace what is already available: their national identity, "making virtue out of necessity" (Bourdieu 1984:72).

Proud to be Bulgarian: national sentiment after 1989

The transnational orientation of the emergent elite outlined above contrasted with the growing significance of Bulgarian national identity in the years before Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007.[47] The resurgence of national pride can be considered along two interconnected lines of investigation: on one hand, the society at

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[47] The Bulgarian case is not exceptional, and a similar rise of nationalism in response to EU membership has been documented in other countries as well. For example, Douglas Holmes demonstrates that regional and national identities gain increasing importance elsewhere in Europe in part as a reaction against the perceived threat of European unification and the alienation associated with modernity (Holmes 2000).

large and its political mobilization, and, on the other, the intelligentsia and cultural elite.

In conversations with young Bulgarian journalists, writers, photographers and artists, I was repeatedly informed about a new threat facing Bulgaria. Supposedly too many Bulgarians were falling into the trap of populit nationalism. Blinded by ungrounded national pride, they failed to examine critically the actual reasons for Bulgaria's economic and political troubles. In 2005, Irina Hristova explained that this trend intensified after the year 2000:

> I noticed this a year or two ago after I came back to Bulgaria [*from an extended internship in the United States*]. When I came back one of the first things that I saw was the huge number of Bulgarian flags everywhere in Sofia. This is a usual sight in the States, where every car, every yard, not to mention every public building…flags are everywhere. But I had not seen anything like this in Bulgaria before. And I thought, God, what has happened? Why did people all of a sudden feel the need to declare [*their national feelings*]?

In statements like these, Irina and other members of the elite in-the making pointed out that national sentiment, from the moderate to the more radical varieties, had become especially prominent in the decade before Bulgaria's accession to the EU. One significant symptom of this phenomenon was the emergence of the radically nationalist political party Ataka (Attack). Ataka was formed in 2004 and within months managed to collect enough electoral support to win 14 out of 239 seats in parliament. Members of the elite in-the-making generally considered Ataka to be too extreme to play a significant role in the political life of the country, yet were concerned about the party's potential to breathe even more tension into the ethnic relations between Bulgarians and the Turkish and Roma minorities. Irina was worried that the resurgence of national pride can easily turn into aggression; in her words, "They [*the supporters of Ataka*] promote very, very dangerous attitudes. They are very dangerous and people are buying into it."

Like many of the other young culture producers, Irina thought that the resurgence

of national sentiment was related to two factors: one, Bulgarians' anxiety about the

consequences of EU membership; and second, the ripeness of the historical moment: a

sense that after the exigencies of the 1990s crisis, in the relative stability after the year

2000,[48] people finally got a chance to reflect on questions other than survival. In Irina's

words, they needed "some kind of confidence" and the "motivation of being part of a

common project, and its name is New Bulgarian Society."

Segments of the Bulgarian intelligentsia similarly showed a greater interest in

matters of national identity. Roumen Daskalov identifies a general resurgence of the

nationalist cause among the Bulgarian intelligentsia since the end of socialism. Analyzing

the context of falling state subsidies, declining standards of living and diminishing

prestige of intellectuals after 1989, Daskalov characterizes the intelligentsia's condition

as one of a "moral crisis": "disorientation and confusion follow from the deterioration of

its economic position, the loss of social prestige and public credibility, and the general

crisis of ideology. (...) The intelligentsia, therefore, lacks credible objectives and values

on which to build a new group identity and a public role. In an effort to regain prestige,

part of the intelligentsia has taken recourse in nationalism again" (Daskalov 1996:83).

In private conversations, the members of the elite in-the-making held the

intelligentsia as partially responsible for the resurgence of popular nationalism. They also

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[48] Like other Central and Eastern European countries, in the early 1990s Bulgaria was plagued by the economic hardships of the post-socialist transition including high inflation, high unemployment, and rapid deterioration of all social services. One indicator of the dimensions of the economic crisis is the decline in GDP. According to the UN, if the 1990 Bulgarian GDP is set to mark 100%, in 1991 it declined to 88.8%, in 1992 to 81.8%, in 1993 to 80.6%, in 1994 to 82.1%, in 1995 to 83.8%, in 1996 to 74.7%, and in 1997 to 70.6%. While the GDP of Central European post-socialist countries reversed this trend and began to grow in 1997, in Bulgaria the opposite was true, and 1996 and 1997 marked the years of the deepest economic crisis (Kalinova and Baeva 2006:310).Things started to change in 2001, and the Bulgarian economy entered a period of greater stability and gradual growth. The per capita GDP in 2002 reached $1,978, the highest since 1989 and continued to grow (429).

repeatedly singled out prominent intellectuals who were seen as fostering a more radical nationalism. This included Bojidar Dimitrov, former director of the Bulgarian National Museum of History and host of the program "Bulgarian Memory" (Памет Българска) on the Bulgarian state TV channel;[49] Georgi Bakalov, a historian of the Balkans and Byzantium, former dean of the Faculty of History of Sofia University and a public intellectual; and Georgi Kitov, officially celebrated for a series of sensational discoveries in the field of Thracian archeology but also criticized for his unconventional field methods (including the use of earth moving equipment at archeological sites) and for promoting an interpretation of his findings well above their actual significance (Martin 2008).

As this brief list demonstrates, the discontent of the elite in-the-making was directed at public figures in positions of influence and power. The young culture producers vigorously argued that these people deserve neither public recognition nor support in the form of titles, state funding or high-profile jobs. Usually, specific names were mentioned only in private conversations. This is in part a function of the small size of the Bulgarian field of cultural production where the price for personal feuds made public is exceedingly high. Furthermore, the prestige of such important figures increases the likelihood that public criticism could alienate rather than attract supporters. Instead of attacking specific individuals the elite in-the-making chose to attack their ideas and beliefs.

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[49] Notably, in the summer of 2009, Dimitrov was appointed by the newly elected Prime Minister Bojko Borisov as a minister without portfolio in charge of the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad. This appointment seems to confirm the belief of the emergent elite that nationalism, the cultural establishment, and a preferential access to power go hand-in-hand in the post-socialist context.

Carving out a niche: newcomers to the field of cultural production

The logic by which the elite in the making avoids launching direct criticism of established cultural figures but freely attacks their ideas follows Pierre Bourdieu's observation that one's position in the field of cultural production is determined by two related kinds of variables (Bourdieu 1993). On one hand is an individual's opinion on matters such as the purposes of art and culture, standards of artistic quality, the importance of art's ability to address the masses versus the elites, and, in a word, one's opinion on matters concerning artistic philosophy. On the other hand is one's institutional affiliation and the opportunities that it affords; personal connections and influence, and in short, one's access to power. As Bourdieu demonstrates, the second kind of variables plays an important role in determining an individual's or a group's relationship to the first kind of options. As the Bulgarian elite in-the-making competes with the cultural establishment and mobilizes questions of national identity, it openly attacks only the first aspect of its opponents' position, but hidden within is an attack on their prestige and professional standing.

The elite in-the-making is comprised by a younger generation of culture producers: younger in physical age (predominantly in their 30s as compared to members of the cultural elite in their 50s and 60s) as well as in terms of their position in the Bulgarian field of cultural production. They have relatively little access to positions of power and prestige, and even less access to state funding for culture, which is the main source of support for creative works that have limited popular appeal. In the 1990s, the emergent elite had access to foreign financial support, but with the impending accession to the European Union and the implied end of the post-socialist transition, this funding dried up.

To improve their position, the members of the elite in-the-making, as with any newcomers to the field of cultural production, face the challenge of "occupy(ing) a distinct, distinctive position of high social standing" and to do this, "they must assert their difference, get it known and recognized ('make a name for themselves'), by endeavoring to impose new modes of thought and expression, out of key with the prevailing modes of thought and with the doxa" (Bourdieu 1993:58).

In other words, the elite in-the-making needs to create a recognizable identity, to create a new *position* for itself in a field which as of yet has little space for it. The complex negotiation of national and European identity in which this segment is engaged is an essential component of the cultivation of this new distinct position. Members of the elite in-the-making are largely of the opinion that state funding and state cultural priorities give preference to authors and works that are "outdated," "parochial" and "smack of socialist aesthetics" as one of the editors of *Edno* put it. Additionally, the state is criticized for failing to recognize the value of culture beyond its connection to the nation.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Bulgarian literary and art criticism historically is deeply implicated in debates about whether or not the merit of an artistic work is augmented by its ability to represent unique national characteristics and by discussions about the merits of works that employ 'ours' or 'foreign' (*svoe* and *chuzhdo*) subjects and means of expression (Igov 2000; Moser 1972; Slavov 1981). As the elite in-the-making seeks to improve its own position, to gain access to state funding and to positions of influence, it seeks to communicate the point that there is a problem with the current state of affairs. It insists that judgments of artistic merit need to be emancipated from the

existing preoccupation with national identity and the concomitant fixations on the past, and on national heroes, myths, and symbols. Importantly, the elite in-the-making advocates change not only as a way to improve the quality of Bulgarian cultural production but much more as a way to improve Bulgaria's position as whole. It insists that because Bulgarians' pay an inordinate attention to the past and indulge in myths about previous achievements, they fail to see how their own faults in the present prevent them from achieving their full potential and improving their current situation, their standard of living and their international image.

A national inferiority complex?

Until the fall of 2005, I had not heard anyone in Bulgaria talk about a "national inferiority complex." There had been plenty of lay pseudo-psychological talk, and it is common to say that this or that person is *kompleksar, kompleksiran* or has *kompleks za malocennost,* an "inferiority complex." However, as I sat in on the editorial meetings of the magazine *Edno,* I heard for the first time the words applied to all Bulgarians. The magazine was in the process of preparing a special issue on the "national inferiority complex." As fieldwork progressed, it became apparent that the term enjoys significant popularity among members of the elite in-the-making but was rarely used outside of it. During personal interviews and the magazine's editorial meetings, the term was defined as describing Bulgarians' experience of being deficient, backward and lagging with respect to Europe. Just like a person who lacks self-confidence and tries to compensate by acting important and all-knowing, Bulgarians supposedly come up with stories and myths about their own greatness in order to deal with a sense of inferiority. The main

problem with this was arguably the excessive way in which Bulgarians dealt with the sense of lagging behind "Europe" in most aspects of life. Even though the elite in-the-making did not use the words excess and exaggeration *per se*, this was the organizing theme of their complaints: an excess of national pride that blinds people to the roots of their actual problems; an exaggerated greatness attributed to Bulgarian history, and an overblown sense of national achievement in all areas of life, and especially in art and culture.

In personal conversations, young culture producers outside of the magazine repeatedly showed their aggravation from stereotypes such as the beauty of Bulgarian women, the stamina of Bulgarian men, the long and glorious Bulgarian history, the supposedly exceptional nature, yoghurt, cuisine, and architecture in Bulgaria. As Irina put it:

> Here [in Bulgaria] there is this particular pride, it is even an aggression,
> when it comes to what are really stereotypes, clichés with which we think
> about ourselves. It's funny when I listen to people, even friends, when they
> are in international company and no matter how intelligent they are, they
> still end up talking about how Bulgarian men are great lovers, the women
> are beautiful, the yoghurt, the nature... There is no point to use these things
> to excuse ourselves or to boast or anything.

Like the editors of *Edno,* Irina thought that Bulgarians tell exaggerated stereotypes about themselves, myths that are meant to "excuse" them and to compensate for their sense of being deficient and lagging in comparison with the rest of Europe.

Historically, Bulgarian national identity has been shaped by the unequal nature of its interaction with the industrial, capitalist West (for example, see Kiossev 1999). Even a quick review of social scientific literature demonstrates that Bulgarians are not unique in having the experience of failing to meet an imagined standard of civilization and

progress. Many scholars have examined the worry over "backwardness" in Southern and

Eastern European states (Bakic-Hayden 1995; Faubion 1993; Green 2005; Herzfeld 1987;

Verdery 1991), and have demonstrated that Eastern Europe and the Balkans have been

discursively constructed by Western European travelers and writers as Europe's other

(Todorova 1997; Wolff 1994).[50] The Bulgarian case reveals a resemblance to colonial

and post-colonial contexts as well as to parts of the world, such as Greece or Russia,

which have not been *de jure* European colonies. In many of these instances, the anxiety is

born out of actual experiences of a power inequality from which Europe emerges as

setting the standard of normative modernity, deviations from which are necessarily

valued as inferior. The encounters between the normative modernity of Europe and its

external others produce a belief on both sides that those who are different, less or not

modern at all, are also deficient, lacking, inappropriate and lagging. As Webb Keane

points out, the term modernity has not only a descriptive and analytic dimension but also

a moral one (Keane 2007).

By this assessment, "Europe" figures as a powerful mental concept and the

precise way in which it functions can be theorized in various ways: as a symbol, as an

element of the social imagination (Taylor 2002) or even in psychoanalytic terms (Kiossev

1999).[51] The precise mechanism through which 'Europe' comes to exercise such an

impressive grasp on the minds of people who experience themselves as improperly

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[50] In some authors' views, Balkan and Eastern European "backwardness" is consistent with Said's definition of Orientalism ((Neuburger 2006); others see it as a parallel but regionally specific form (Todorova 1997) The scope of the issue reaches beyond the European and Asian continents as demonstrated by James Ferguson's recent study of a Zambian electronic magazine. The magazine's writers searched for the flaws of the Zambian national character that cause and perpetuate the country's third-world status (Ferguson 2006).

[51] Notably Herzfeld explicitly cautions that the use of a psychoanalytical approach in theorizing the relationship between Europe and its margins may echo dismissive attitudes originating in the West and re-inscribe the unequal relationship between center and periphery (Herzfeld 1987:65).

modern is beyond the purposes of this paper. However, it is important to establish that this fascination exists and that the elite in-the-making is both affected by it and strategically mobilizes it to its own advantage.

For many in Bulgaria, the discursively constructed 'Europe' conflates the countries of the Cold War Western Europe, their history and traditions since the Middle Ages, and the European Union today. The idea of Europe encompasses ideals of economic prosperity, political system that operates without glitches or corruption, personal refinement in terms of manners and self-presentation, and cultural achievements in music, the arts, literature and philosophy among others, all of which are frequently linked to a long-lasting history of affluence and political independence of Western European countries.

"Europe" is part and parcel of the official construction of Bulgarian national identity after 1989. Tim Pilbrow's research on Bulgarian public schools demonstrates that "European models" are explicitly drawn upon to validate Bulgarian culture and history and that all textbook material is presented as "affirming the European-ness of Bulgarian culture through time" (Pilbrow 2005:129). The official history curriculum of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education for the 1995-96 school year defines the goal of history education as: "the formation of national historical pride ... through outlining phenomena, processes and events that demonstrate the inseparability of Bulgaria from European cultural values, the values of European civilization" (MONT 1995:10 in Pilbrow 2005:128). The ideal Bulgarian, according to this line of thought, matches the image of the ideal "European." The elite in-the-making readily embraces this paradox in order to launch a critique of the resurgence of national sentiment.

In the next section I look at specific ethnographic examples of the ways in which this critique is elaborated through a careful selection and presentation of opinions and viewpoints that support the position of the emergent elite, and through strategic dismissal of those that do not. During the production of *Edno*'s national complex issue (also referred to by the magazine staff as "the Narcissist issue" in keeping with their psychoanalytic slant on this matter), the editors' choice of what to publish and what not to resulted in the rejection of articles that valorize the national past and its frozen forms in the present, and in the selection of texts that advocate change. The editors elaborated a criticism of the cultural establishment's preoccupation with national pride and sought to expose it as harmful without attacking specific individuals directly.

Reflections I: Bulgaria in 'European' mirrors

On a sparkling October afternoon in 2005, I sat around the oval white table in the conference room of *Edno* with the producer of the magazine, the editor-in-chief, several staff editors, a guest editor, who managed this issue because the magazine was temporarily short-handed, and an external consultant, a young professor in Byzantine history. As I came to understand during this and six more editorial meetings in which the issue was brainstormed, debated, expanded and shrunk until it took its final shape in December, the presence of a professional historian was indicative of the subversive intentions of the magazine's staff from the very beginning. This expert, a member of a new generation of Bulgarian academics, was enlisted to help bring to the ground what was seen as the "hot air balloon" of nationalism's mythical take on history. The issue's goal was to show that Bulgaria's image in the mirror of nationalism was distorted and

'Europe' was summoned to help with this.

Maria, an editor for *Edno*, described the purpose of the issue like this: "We are headed for Europe, and we want to see what we look like in other people's mirrors. We [*Bulgarians*] think we are great, but they [*Europeans*] think we are exotic. There is a potential conflict in this, and we want to analyze it." She added that the magazine needed "to find some [*foreign*] people who know the country well, like it and like good friends can honestly tell you: now this is just shit." The editor's resort to obscenity, using the more vulgar of several alternative words that could have been used, vividly made the point that "Europeans'" honest opinion of Bulgaria would be far from flattering. These texts were supposed to reveal Bulgarians' flaws and to help to fix them.

In the past, *Edno* had already published articles and thematic issues examining how Bulgaria appears to foreigners and to Bulgarian émigrés, and in this *Edno* was not an exception on the media market. *Edno's* national complex issue is just one example of a proliferation of newspaper articles, TV programs and radio shows with a similarly intense focus on mirroring gazes: a constant stare in changing mirrors which collectively were expected to deliver the truth about Bulgarians. [52]

The external perspective in the 'national complex issue' was meant as a corrective for Bulgarians' flawed image of themselves. The foreign gazes were being summoned to

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[52] Some prominent examples include the program *Drugata Bulgaria (The Other Bulgaria)*, a popular documentary series airing on the broadcast television station BTV which showcased Bulgarians who have become "successful" abroad i.e. who have exited the paradigmatic immigrant hardship of pizza delivery and other unskilled jobs, and have achieved a measure of professional recognition and a middle class status. Host of this program until 2008 was Georgi Toshev, one of the founders of *Edno*. The highly respected weekly newspaper *Kapital* ran a column called "Bulgaria, a Dirty Word" about the views and experiences of Bulgarians living abroad, also authored by another of Edno's founders. ATV 1 show Dalekogled (Telescope) aired on the state broadcast channel Kanal 1 and specialized in brief (three to five minute long) interviews with trans-local people: foreigners living in Bulgaria, Bulgarians living abroad and children of Bulgarian emigrants sent home with the grandparents. All interviews focused on how Bulgaria appears to foreigners and how foreigners see Bulgarians abroad. Until the end of the program in 2005, Dalekogled was the pet product of the publisher and part owner of *Edno*, Assen Assenov.

deliver an "objective" truth about the merit of being Bulgarian. Importantly, in the end it turned out that "objective" were only those views with which the editors themselves agreed. When the articles did not make the point that the Bulgarian editors wanted to make, they were scrapped. Having failed to collect enough foreign texts to organize a thematic cluster, even the approved texts were not included, and the issue came out containing only articles by Bulgarian writers.

In the weeks following the first editorial meeting for the national complex issue, commissioned texts started to trickle in. Two articles from foreign contributors appealed to the editors immediately because they were seen as appropriately recognizing Bulgarian flaws that can and should be changed. This fit well with the agenda of many young culture producers to make Bulgarians aware of their weaknesses so that they can fix them. The two authors treated Bulgaria not as an exotic distant other but as a friend that should be critiqued for his own good.

One of the stories was by a British author and took place in the Bulgarian hinterlands: two young British journalists in search of adventure on a third-class Bulgarian road get lost and eventually stumble upon a completely dilapidated shell of a monastery deep in the forest with only one monk in residence. And here the story gets especially curious: the monk proceeds to ask the foreigners to consider donating money to the monastery, makes them copy down the monastery's bank account number in case they should come upon other generous and philanthropic British citizens back home, and proposes having sex with them. The editor-in-chief thought that this story was perfect because it "painted a great picture of Bulgaria—slightly perverse and begging at the same time." This image contrasted dramatically with the way the editors thought that most

Bulgarians prefer to think of themselves. For example, the 'perversity' of a celibate monk soliciting same-sex intercourse with laymen clashes with the popular solemn image of the Orthodox Church and monasteries as places of worship and symbols of national identity. School textbooks and official accounts credit the Orthodoxy as a marker of Bulgarian national identity and emphasize the role of the Orthodox faith in preserving a sense of national belonging during the centuries of Ottoman dominance of Bulgarian lands. In an ironic contrast to the same-sex proposition described in the article, the Orthodox Church is one of more outspoken critics of gay rights in Bulgaria (for example, see Bulgarian Patriarchate 2009). Furthermore, the story clashed with the homophobic attitudes characteristic of many in Bulgaria as well as with stereotypes such as the proverbial sex-appeal of Bulgarian women and the stamina of Bulgarian men, images emphasizing a hyperheterosexuality as a national characteristic.

The editors similarly enjoyed reading the story entitled "Tolerance: My Ass." The article recounted how Bulgarians' famed hospitability extends only to light-skinned foreigners and how if you happen to be dark-skinned and may be mistaken for a Roma, you are likely to encounter not only hostility from regular Bulgarians but also police abuse, which actually happened to this particular British author. This article articulated well a point that was repeatedly discussed by the editors around the conference table: that Bulgarians as a whole are intolerant of difference and that the stereotypical Bulgarian hospitality is reserved only to people "who are like us."

Notably both of these stories were written by British authors, and while the inhabitants of the British Isles may readily recognize their homeland as distinctly different from the "Continent" and so as ambiguously "European," this distinction did not

seem to matter to the Bulgarian editors. In fact only a few months earlier, the magazine published "A British Issue" as part of its "European Project." This project includes the publication of a series of thematic issues each introducing Bulgarian readers to life in one European country. In the pages of the magazine and in the editors' imagination, "Europe" appeared as more homogenous than what citizens of European countries may think it is. Emphasis on homogeneity rather than heterogeneity demonstrates that the differences *between* Bulgaria and the countries to its west were considered to be more significant than the differences *among* these countries. The tendency to see Europe as more homogenous than it is for many of its inhabitants reveals that the elite in-the-making still sees "Europe" from the perspective of an outsider looking in.

With the exception of these two stories, the editors were rather unhappy with the rest of the foreign submissions. It became apparent that foreign writers were not making the point that they had been expected to make. During an editorial meeting, the editor Mladen read aloud an excerpt from one article whose faults he considered exemplary of several of the other texts:

> After the hustle and bustle of the big city, the experience of relaxing in this quiet old village was just unbelievable. It was as though I had been transported to another simpler time, where chickens roam the streets, smoke lazily finds its way upward from stone chimneys, and the owners chop wood or milk the goats in their yards. These places are the real Bulgaria, and it is precisely these quiet corners of the countryside that I recommend to foreign tourists.

Said Mladen, "The biggest irony about this statement is that it is meant without even a shade of irony." Heads around the conference table bobbed up and down in agreement. The article talked about the Bulgarian village as "the essential Bulgaria," the most beautiful and authentic part of the country. It was a pristine, romantic dream come true;

an authentic Bulgaria that foreigners looked for and found during their visits.

Edno's editors wanted to harp on, not celebrate, the symbolic distance between Bulgaria and the perceived centers of normative modernity in the West. For *Edno's* staff, the village was a synecdoche for Bulgaria's lag behind Western modernity in general and Europe in part. As the editor-in-chief commented, "Bulgaria is one big village if you think about it." She meant that all of Bulgaria is as backward and provincial as she thought the Bulgarian villages are. In contrast, the foreign contributors romanticized the Bulgarian village and offered what Sarah Green calls a "search for redemption in the margins" and "Euro-American modernity in its self-pitying mode: the sense of having lost something through being modern, usually something involving authenticity, and wanting to have it back" (Green 2005:3). The editors did not talk about the rejected article in these academic terms, but they recognized the author's lack of self-awareness of his own need for "redemption on the margins" in his earnest tone, "without even a shade of irony." This modernist nostalgia is a sentiment not only of foreign tourists but of many Bulgarians as well. In fact, it is a prominent feature of twentieth-century Bulgarian cultural production.

Ivan Elenkov points out that Bulgarian writers and artists since the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century felt conflicted about the influx of Western mores and ways of life and of new means of production (Elenkov 1994). They worried about the disintegration of traditional social relations that until independence in 1878 had been the uniform life conditions on Bulgarian lands. The patriarchal order and moralities of extended rural families living off the land were gradually giving way to individuals who increasingly conceived of themselves as autonomous agents. Even though the process of

urbanization had been gradual and relatively slow until 1945, it nevertheless provided a sufficient cause of concern for some Bulgarian intellectuals who saw the anonymity of cities as the threatening dark side of modernity. One general current of thought saw "traditional society as a cradle of ancient Bulgarian values," "an equivalent of originality" and "a synonym of an omnipresent uniqueness (самобитност)" (Elenkov 1994:19). These poets, writers, artists and public intellectuals aestheticized village life and folklore as aspects of life that are least contaminated by modernity and are uniquely Bulgarian, and the elite in-the-making saw the cultural establishment as the present-day heir of this line of thought. When *Edno's* editors reacted against the foreign author's image of village life as representative of "the real Bulgaria" they also reacted against a local current of thought that valorizes the past, national traditions and the village.

Articles by other foreign writers were dismissed for similar reasons: many "reinforce(d) the clichés" rather than challenging them or, alternately, had "a nostalgic pathos about how Bulgaria is changing and Sofia is becoming more and more like a usual European city." All of the rejected articles valued Bulgaria for its connection to the past, as a repository of previous ways of life that were valuable, first, because they contained something of modern Europe's own lost past, such as a rustic romance, and, second, because they represented an essential difference from Europe, such as the unique local character that Sofia and Bulgaria were supposedly gradually losing. Predictably, neither of these rationales settled well with the editors. Like other members of the emergent elite, the editors first wanted to put an end to a fixation on the past, and, second, wanted to emphasize the ways in which Bulgarians could become more "European" not the ways in which they are essentially different from "Europe." They sought to present "European"

perspectives that create an image of Europe as a close friend who can offer harsh but constructive criticism.

The magazine wanted to solicit the perspectives of foreign writers because as outsiders they were thought of being capable to offer an 'objective' view that would reveal the Bulgarian national myths for what they are: exaggerated stories. However, they found that the European writers may or may not offer a perspective that coincides with their own goals. The editors critically evaluated each image of Bulgaria in the foreign mirror and approved only those 'European' opinions that coincided with their own. The selected perspectives supported the emergent elite's position that change is necessary.

Reflections II: Bulgaria in local mirrors

When it became apparent that the magazine would not collect enough articles to create a thematic cluster around contributions from foreign authors, the editors changed course and solicited articles by Bulgarian authors instead. All of the accepted articles were by members of the emergent elite, which in part explains why these texts successfully made the point that the magazine wanted. An article by Bogdan Roussev provides a good example of the discursive strategy through which the position of prominent figures in the cultural establishment can be critiqued obliquely and safely (Roussev 2005). On the subject of Bulgaria's supposedly long history, Roussev remarks that depending on various accounts it ranges "on the average between 1,300 and 13,000 years" (Roussev 2005:62), a sarcastic comment on the efforts of various historians to establish that the Bulgarian state was founded much earlier than the official estimate of 681 AD. This opinion was common among members of the emergent elite. Many

considered even the official estimate of 1,300 years of Bulgarian history to be a stretch because for several centuries during this period Bulgaria was part first of the Byzantine and later of the Ottoman Empire: "These 1,300 years are [a myth] created by the propaganda machine of communism, but it is still alive and well. These 1,300 years include the 500 when... Bulgaria was a part of the Ottoman Empire. The schools don't teach you much about this time, do they? This period is actually included in the 1300 years; this is the funniest of all," said the publisher of *Edno* in a personal conversation.

Roussev's text was a tongue in cheek response to historians with strong nationalist fervor who were seen as especially afflicted by the national complex and who went to great lengths to prove that Bulgarians have always been "Europeans" and that at times they have even surpassed "Europe." Roussev's next sentence is exemplary: "...at the time when the Cro-Magnons were beating with sticks the last living Neanderthal to death, they [*the Bulgarians*] already had a writing system, had domesticated the dachshund and had mastered the art of macramé" (Roussev 2005:62).

The timeline as well as the ridiculousness of these achievements are clear exaggerations and resonate tellingly with a statement by Professor Bojidar Dimitrov, former head of the Bulgarian National Museum of History. A prolific author, he has published numerous popular history books with revealing titles such as *Bulgarians, the First Europeans* (2002) and *The Seven Ancient Civilizations in Bulgaria* (2005). In an interview for the Bulgarian online bulletin *Eastern Orthodox Catalogue "Pravoslavie,"* Dimitrov explains:

> In my book (*Bulgarians, the First Europeans*), I detail the list of the
> Bulgarian contributions to European civilization. These contributions give
> us the right to enter united Europe with a head raised up high and even with
> some superciliousness. After all, a highly developed civilization already

flourished on Bulgarian lands at the time when the ancestors of the bleak Brussels bureaucrats were still dressed in shabby pelts and were digging for edible roots in the turf swamps of Central Europe (Georgieva 2003).

The state of affairs of the "bleak Brussels bureaucrats" in this statement resonates with the developmental stage of Roussev's violent Cro-Magnons. The "developed civilization" on Bulgarian lands emerges in Roussev's article as the mastery not only of a writing system but also of the useless and so even more advanced arts of macramé and domestication of the dachshund. Here Roussev is not responding to this specific statement by Dimitrov. Rather he has identified the formulaic logic that informs such statements in general, made not only by Dimitrov but also by others in the cultural establishment, and offers a response that successfully resonates with all of them.

The skepticism of the elite in-the-making is related to Verdery's discussion of protochronism in Romania.[53] Protochronism designates the antecedence of local "developments that temporally preceded similar developments elsewhere;" that is, it claims that certain trends and discoveries originated in Romania before they did anywhere else in the world (1991:175). The elite in-the-making recognizes in Dimitrov's position the same purpose that characterized Romanian protochronists: "to counteract [people's] tendency to see themselves as backward, to overturn their image of their position in the world," so that people do not think of their homeland "as part of a periphery but as lying on the crossroads of the world's great civilizations" (1991:175). Verdery points out that debate over the validity of protochronism was one of the means through which factions of the Romanian socialist intelligentsia competed with each other for limited resources. While the term protochronism is not used in Bulgaria, the elite in-the-making's attack on what they call "the national inferiority complex" is part and parcel

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[53] I am grateful to Pamela Ballinger for bringing this point to my attention.

of a similar competitive struggle in post-socialist Bulgaria.

Notably in private conversations, the emergent elite recognizes that people like Dimitrov constitute one extreme end of the spectrum. However, the young men and women were equally dissatisfied with more mainstream readings of history as well, and their criticism of the official age of the Bulgarian state indicates this. Another article in the national complex issue by Dimityr Stoianovitch described the military campaigns and successes of King Simeon the First against the Byzantine empire as "the sick ambitions of a newly baptized ruler to become the emperor of Constantinople, who in the pursuit of this chimera destroys the human and material resources of his state and... so brings about the death of the first Bulgarian kingdom" (2005:72). Considering that Simeon's rule (893-927 AD) is commonly referred to as the Golden Age of the Bulgarian state, Stojanovitch's historical interpretation is in fact a dramatic departure from the popular understanding of this particular period.

While such criticism addresses national history, the elite in-the-making also advocates the need to rethink the Bulgarian literary and artistic pantheon on the grounds that pronouncements about 'great' Bulgarian authors are made solely on the basis of their national significance and without taking into account "world" and "European" standards of quality. As Julian Popov, a Bulgarian writer living in London, pointed out in his contribution to *Edno,* the Bulgarian literary classics are "an expression of the national complex" and are "like Russian cars: the same as the European prototypes but of lower quality. Their main goal was to show that we too can produce literature or cars" (2005:68).

Furthermore, authors such as Ivan Vazov and Aleko Konstantinov, who are held as

sacrosanct by the establishment and are cornerstones of public education, are accused of

cultivating the same sense that "we are not worth anything and the only way to overcome

this inferiority is to deny it," which today has led to the emergence and popular support

for the nationalist party Ataka (2005:68). Echoing the debate about public education with

which this paper started, Popov insists that such authors should continue to be part and

parcel of the curriculum but that they should be studied critically, "so that by looking at

them, we are enabled to see our own burden" and "recognize that Bulgarians' confidence

has been manipulated for decades "by writers like them" (2005:68). Bulgarians' alleged

inability to evaluate "objectively" their own cultural production in comparison to the art

and culture of the rest of the world prevents them from recognizing that local

achievements are neither exceptional nor unique. This failure is seen as both a root cause

for Bulgaria's status as only peripherally "European" and as perpetuated by the cultural

establishment, and the standards for artistic quality which it imposes. Similar arguments

were made in personal interviews with regard to Bulgarian cuisine, Renaissance

architecture, natural resources and much more.

All such statements make the point that Bulgaria's progress demands change and,

implicitly, that only the elite in-the-making is capable of delivering it, in part because it

alone is capable of recognizing the national inferiority complex as a problem. However,

even as the members of the emergent elite are adamant to make the point that they are

unaffected by the national complex, they continue to exist in the grip of a preoccupation

with an external normative Other to which Bulgaria fails to measure up. While their

opponents may indeed seek to compensate for a sense of inferiority through excessive

accounts of greatness, the elite in-the-making merely proposes a different way of dealing

with the perception of inferiority without seeking to eliminate it. They are not immune to the anxiety of people who experience themselves as inadequately modern. Notably, not everyone on *Edno*'s staff and not all of the magazine's readers agreed with the final tone and content of the Narcissist issue. Readers sent emails and letters disagreeing with specific articles. Some thought that the magazine was being too critical of Bulgarians and failed to acknowledge actual historical achievements. However, the disagreements were an issue of degree, not of principle.

The position of the emergent elite is part of its effort to advocate change in the field of cultural production and to present itself as the agent most capable to carry it out, thus increasing its chances to accede to positions of power and prominence. The demographic characteristics and cosmopolitan orientation of this segment make its strategy of advocating 'Europeanization' especially well suited to its profile. As the elite in-the-making seeks to improve its life chances through strategic discourse and self-presentation on various fronts, from lifestyle to cultural production, its criticism of nationalism is part and parcel of these efforts. In this particular instance, the emergent elite utilizes the idea of "Europe" as a way to delegitimize its opponents while continuing to uphold it as the aspirational standard of normative modernity.

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