

Pictures from the Margins: Disability and Difference in Post-Socialist Art

Olia Bueva, Indiana University

Introduction

The struggles for equitable and respectful representation have been at the center of disability movements' efforts in post-Socialist states, affecting disabled men's and women's experiences and encounters in society. In mass media and art people whose bodies deviate from the norm have remained largely invisible or marginalized through reductive social and cultural stereotypes. For women the struggle for respectful and inclusive representation has been especially urgent due to their more frequent subjection to stereotypes representing women with disabilities as deviations from particular sets of normative femininity (Nead 1992:77).

This analysis involves a study of a diverse body of works by East-European and some Western artists that can be conceived of as examples possibly forming an inclusive representational system that acknowledges difference and creates representational space for women (variously identified and diversely socially located) whose bodies deviate from the cultural norm and who are rarely portrayed as beautiful, feminine or desirable. While much of the work discusses disability in the post-Socialist context, the notion of disability here is conceptualized very broadly and includes diverse, differently embodied persons, who traditionally are excluded from representations conferring beauty and aesthetics. This paper examines diverse representations of various bodies' transgressions of the classical ideal, including those bodies transformed by age, disease, excessive fat, as well as those "disfigured" by amputations or limited mobility. Following Rosemarie Garland Thomson's (1996, 2000, 2009) approach to understanding disability, in the paper representations of persons that are classified as disabled (e.g. impaired or "handicapped") share the discursive representational space with those "disfigured" by scars, deformities, age, etc., who were deemed in-valid for signifying aesthetically pleasing corporeality.

This discussion draws particular attention to the activist potential of authoritative cultural spaces of display, such as the gallery or the museum, which as a critical space of social agency can and have been effectively mobilized in challenging medicalized and individualized ways of seeing disability and corporeal difference (Sandell 2006) by subverting cultural assumptions of aesthetics, normative embodiment and hegemonic femininity. Museums, as cultural sites possessing constitutive and generative power (i.e. the potential to shape, rather than simply reflect social relations and realities), have historically often reproduced and shaped dominant (negative) understandings of difference, by excluding and marginalizing (through elision) or by constructing representations that are reductive, essentializing, discriminatory or oppressive (Sandell 2006:139). Considering the productive potential of authoritative public spaces of display, a radical rethinking of museums and galleries as spaces for social agency would inform new activist strategies to employ exhibition-making and representation to construct new respectful narratives of disability as a meaningful element of humanity. Thus, museums might also operate as sites of intervention that "confront, undercut, or reshape dominant regimes of representation that underpin and inform contemporary attitudes towards disability" (Sandell 2006:139). Acknowledging the importance and mediating power of images and the insufficiency of empowering artistic representations of female corporeal difference, this project attempts to

locate, analyze and contextualize art works from various post-Socialist states that could potentially serve as a foundation and inspiration for a respectful and inclusive representational regime.

Representing Disability in Post-Socialism

Representations of disability mediate the relations between people with disabilities and able-bodied people, affecting and shaping the ways that marginalized and structurally constrained persons with disabilities are able to negotiate their positions in society (see Sandell 2010; Barnes 1992). Conceived as constitutive and reflective of the various ways of seeing and talking about disability (Sandell and Dodd: 3), cultural representations of difference and impairment are a critical site for activism and social advocacy for various actors invested in transforming social relations and cultural constructs that normalize the intricate mechanisms of exclusion pervasive in post-Socialist societies. In a context of divergent competing interests between the state, market, people with disabilities community and other social actors, representations and cultural constructions of disability play a critical role in the ways that advocacy groups are able to legitimate claims and mobilize support for improving the economic and social status of persons with disabilities.

The post-Socialist collective archetypal image of a disabled person in popular media and collective imaginary was, to a large extent, informed by Soviet portrayals of disability, especially in literature and film, which generally featured representations of men with impairments who, through moral virtue and stoicism, despite their physical deficiency, managed to overcome restricted mobility and social stigma associated with disability (Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov 2006:229-230). In positive portrayals of persons with physical impairments, disability often rhetorically overlapped with the loss and subsequent recovery of acceptable masculinity, leaving women with disabilities at the margins of public portrayals of corporeal difference. The Soviet representational regime—in which people with disabilities body was troped as deficient, but capable of transcending lack of mobility through moral virtue, physical endurance and political engagement—traditionally excluded positive or respectful representations of women with disabilities, since femininity and disability occupied the same discursive space, and both often were associated with pity, personal tragedy, pain and inadequacy (Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov 2006:230).

These stereotypical representations of persons with disabilities as either recipients of charity or venerable heroes (Phillips 2011:152) have significantly informed the repertoires of disability in the post-Socialist representational economy. Analyzing the Ukrainian media – one of the principle sites where people encounter representations of people with disabilities, anthropologist Sarah D. Phillips identifies four main, at times overlapping genres of portraying disability: the Symbolic, which employs disability as a lens to shed light on social problems; the Sensational, characterized by grotesque representations, focusing on the “shocking details” of one person’s physical and intellectual anomalies; the Critical, articulating disability in context of social inequalities and wrongs which evidence the state’s inadequacy in defending the rights of marginalized groups; and the Personalizing, using personal profiles of persons with disabilities to construct individual, yet relatable narratives of difference, marginalization or overcoming (Phillips 2011:147-152). While these genres are not always negative, the sensationalizing visual rhetoric and at times melodramatic portrayal of disability, cutting across all registers of the representational idioms in post-Socialist media, reproduce reductive and stereotypical cultural

constructions of disability that propagate and normalize dichotomous conceptions of corporeal normativity and difference. Embedded in these diverse accounts of disability are contrasting visual tropes ranging from pitiable to heroic that populate the discursive space of people with disabilities body with at times contradictory and at times overlapping semiotic connections between disability and personal tragedy, failed masculinity or femininity, helplessness, immaturity and dependence on charity and benevolence of others.

The gender dimensions of these representations are clearly rendered in Iarskaia-Smirnova's and Phillips's discussions, which find that that women are more likely to be portrayed as recipients of charity and victims of personal or familial tragedy. While men are more likely to figure as activists or public actors that have managed to overcome the barriers posed by their limited mobility (e.g. disability rights activists or paralympic athletes), with few exceptions, representations of women with disabilities mostly dwell on personal misfortune and emphasize themes of lost or found love, failed or fulfilled motherhood (Phillips 2011:151). Positioned and examined primarily in the context of the private sphere or familial relationships, women with disabilities in popular media rarely figure as independent, politically involved agents—a feature that reifies the discursive overlap between popular constructions of disability and femininity, both associated with physical frailty and dependence. Although this connection, constructed through media profiles of women with disabilities, in some regards alleviates the stigma of disability and the implied status of dependence on state welfare, it further delegitimizes women's claims to employment and motherhood: gendered expectations and attitudinal and structural barriers translate into very limited job opportunities and concomitant questioning of their roles as adequate reproducers and care-givers (Iarskaia-Smirnova 2009: 71-72; Phillips 2011:180-182).

The overall disabling collective image of impaired women is also complicated by the increased popularity of nationalism and neofamilialism, which configure women primarily as reproducers of the nation, thus rhetorically placing women with disabilities outside the realms of acceptable citizenship. Considering the politics of gender in post-Socialist Eastern Europe, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000a, 2000b) argue that constraints on reproduction (though in this case not normative, but rather symbolic) serve to define who is a proper member of the state's populace: "citizens" are in many cases recognized as deserving of that title, and of the set of attendant "rights," by their display of particular forms of state-sanctioned, legally acceptable, usually reproductive sexuality. And conversely, the reproduction of citizens is seen as beneficial, judicious and necessary for the future, while the reproduction of those not recognized as such is seen as dangerous, out of control and polluting (Gal and Kligman 2000a:23). Thrust to the margins of society by nationalist, profamilialist rhetoric, in post-Socialist states women with disabilities increasingly find themselves in a double bind: scrutinized as acceptable reproducers, they do not conform to the ideal model of proper citizenship; then they are further marginalized by an overall disabling socio-economic environment.

The post-Communist social politics—in part informed by marketization, the spread of neoliberal ideals and neo-familialism—bring the divergent interests of citizens with and without disabilities upfront, simultaneously complicating the gender dynamic in terms of access to social services and opportunities that people with disabilities have. Globalization and neoliberal reforms in Eastern Europe and Russia resulted in a radical rearticulating of state-citizen relations in post-Socialist states, disproportionately affecting the more vulnerable segments of society, including people with disabilities. The neoliberal project in Eastern Europe led to a significant shrinking of social safety nets and the privatization of responsibilities previously allocated to the

state or other collectives, radically transforming the role of the state as the principal provider of goods and services and guarantor of access to healthcare, leaving citizens without support systems that were previously in place (Phillips 2011:6).

While practically all persons with disabilities were rendered vulnerable by the overall marketization and economic liberalization, women with disabilities in post-Socialist states were especially adversely affected by the shift in social politics. Iarskaia-Smirnova's analysis of the hardships and social stigma that women with disabilities encounter in Russia demonstrates that the allocation of financial aid to persons with disabilities is informed by ideological presuppositions about the "worth" of disabled recipients of assistance and services: the system of economic redistribution in Russia demonstrates a clear privileging of war veterans or those disabled as a result of work-related injuries (who are predominantly male), while women are systematically disadvantaged in the sphere of social security. According to the same study, women are also significantly discriminated against on the job market due to specific restrictions and systems of benefits that the employer has to contend with, as well as stereotypical perceptions of women with disabilities as unfit for work (Iarskaia-Smirnova 2009).

The overall precarious position of women with disabilities in post-Socialist contexts is further complicated and amplified by a pervasive and aggressive sexualization and commodification of female bodies and sex in popular media. Discussing the emergence of pornography in post-Socialist Russia as industry and genre, Eliot Borenstein argues that the "pornographication of the mainstream" (term used by Brian McNair to describe the process of imagery once considered exclusively pornographic trickling down into everyday culture) in Russia was simultaneous with the (re)appearance of pornography as a distinct category. Since there was no time lag between the arrival of porn and the pornographication of culture at large, pornography became a privileged locus for worries about cultural change (2008: 56). In the context of the allegorical function of this genre in the national system of symbols and meanings as well as the traditional gendering of national(ist) discourses in Russia, pornography in Russia significantly reflected and overlapped with nationalist rhetoric regarding the country's loss of superpower status. Inherent to this gendered dynamic, "even a cursory glance at Russian porn confirms an almost ritualistic objectification and subordination of women, but when the men who produced these words and images reflected on their work, it was the Russian male whom they presented as weak and embattled. In the textual and visual two-dimensional world of the Russian pornographic magazine, Russian men saw themselves fighting back against national and sexual humiliation" (Borenstein 2008: 63). Embedded in the gendered distribution of social roles and functions, women, as meaningful social and cultural agents, and their individual experiences as citizens, are rendered contingent and ultimately irrelevant to the construction of the national narrative of self-perception and representation.

The rise of nationalist rhetoric and this distinctly gendered function of female bodies in the post-Socialist national imaginary have fundamentally impacted women's (disabled as well as able-bodied) possibilities for meaningful agency as cultural and socio-economic subjects. The new post-Socialist socio-economic, cultural and symbolic landscapes have increasingly created barriers for women's opportunities for meaningful agency and full citizenship, oftentimes articulating normative femininity in reductive and highly traditional and prescriptive terms, positioning them as either embodiments of culturally acceptable (reproductive and desirable) femininity or metaphorical receptacles of social ills and anxieties (the broken, permeable body of the woman in a pornographic image). The relatively rigid configuration of the boundaries of normative femininity in the post-Socialist context suggests a discursive overlap and

interconnectedness between issues of representation of femininity and disability, confirming Garland Thomson's assertion that "a firm boundary between "disabled" and "nondisabled" women cannot be meaningfully drawn" (1997: 27). Consequently, the issues of representation of disabled femininity have to necessarily address and question culturally constructed formations of gender and hegemonic femininity. The frequent discursive equation of women's disability with the loss of acceptable femininity are evident in cultural perceptions of impairment or corporeal difference and the harsh socio-economic realities that women have to face in day-to-day encounters with society. In part constitutive of the pervasive inequalities characteristic to post-Socialist societies, the gender dynamics in representations of female disability in popular culture often locate women with disabilities outside the realm of acceptable citizenship and femininity, compromising their position as social actors and negatively influencing their ability to articulate and legitimate their claim for recognition and access to employment opportunities, economic security and social services.

Disability and/as Inequality: the Violence of the Margins

The exploration of the potential collective archetypal image of a disabled body in popular media and collective imaginary in Russia and Ukraine, which locates people with disabilities on the margins of culture and society, marked by his or her insurmountable lack due to deficient corporeality, demonstrates that *representation matters*. The broader struggle of disability rights groups in Eastern Europe includes discussions around representations and public portrayals of people with disabilities' bodies (see Iarskaia-Smirnova 2009; Phillips 2011), which, while having diffuse and difficult-to-trace effects on the public discourse around disability, in many ways influenced people with disabilities' lives and determined the ways in which they were able to engage with the world. The struggle to influence dominant representations of disability as either a mark of deviance, personal tragedy or overcoming impairment, pervasive in post-Socialist media (Phillips 2011:147-154), is part of a larger initiative amongst disability rights groups and disability studies scholars to change popular cultural conceptions of disability. Aware of characteristic oscillation between "enfreakment"¹ and utter invisibility of differently embodied persons in the spheres of representation traditionally associated with beauty and aesthetics, various disability rights advocacy groups strive to provide accounts of disability as typical or ordinary (Phillips 2011:152-153; Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov 2009:230-231), conceptualizing disability as a form of identity, and emphasizing the humanity and individual experience of embodiment. Concerns about portrayals of disability are evident in the growing number of various public performances, art exhibitions, happenings and public commentaries, which by making explicit and meaningful the existing relations and deep similarities between the able-bodied and people with disabilities in experiencing life and embodiment, emphasize the individual worth of persons with disabilities and attempt to assert their worth as citizens. Among the most prominent and publicized events are the international disability film festivals like *Breaking Down Barriers* (Moscow), which feature diverse visual accounts about disability through different genres and various cultural contexts; art exhibitions like *Photos that Do Not Suffice* (Moscow) that present original, emotional and nuanced narratives of disability; and yearly beauty contests, sports and dancing competitions. An almost total absence of Russian and East European artists from these cultural events and a pronounced marginalization and almost complete invisibility of women at these initiatives are some of the alarming features of the contemporary post-Socialist art scene. With few exceptions, most exhibitions and festivals

exploring disability are dominated by foreign artists, while local representations of disability continue to be informed by old Soviet films and literature and the contemporary media.

The current politics of representation, constructed through the competing and mutually constitutive discourses of popular conceptions of disability and the awareness-raising work of disability rights groups, are, in part, informed by the previously mentioned shift towards marketization and spread of neoliberal ideals. The social model of disability, which defines disability in terms of social oppression, social relations and social barriers (Shakespeare 2006, Altman 2001, Williams 2001), is in tension with neoliberalism and calls for meaningful social change and re-conceptualization of the role of the state and society in insuring equal access and providing equal opportunity for participation. While provoking significant resistance due to its ideological overlap with the Soviet state-imposed functional approach (Phillips 2011:83), the social model conceives of disability as socially constructed and related to pervasive and deep-rooted inequalities, and normalized by social relations that articulate normativity and privilege by creating various taxonomies signifying difference and stabilizing the rigid boundary between able-bodiedness and disability. Discussing disability as a rhetorical structure that sustains the intricate systems of exclusions and power relations that reify the able-bodied/disabled binary, Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that the disabled body, constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and marked by insurmountable otherness, becomes a repository of social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity (Garland Thomson 1997: 6). The various taxonomies created to define and describe corporeal difference sustain the dichotomy between normal and deviant corporeality by comparing individual bodies to a set of unstated, but determining norms, arising from cultural expectations of how human beings should look and act (Garland Thomson 1997:6-7). Consequently, the meanings attributed to disabled bodies are informed by social relationships in which “one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others. Representation thus simultaneously buttresses an embodied version of normative identity and shapes a narrative of corporeal difference that excludes those whose bodies or behaviors do not conform” (Garland Thomson 1997:7).

The constructed nature and the embedded power asymmetry of dominant representational economies that conceived of disability in terms of deviance have been historically normalized and reified by the politics and poetics of museums’ exhibition practices, which articulated traditional old master representations of the body as a corporeal ideal, structuring popular understandings of what was perceived as beautiful, desirable and whole. In view of the ostensibly self-evident value of cultural ideals of body normativity, inclusive, diverse and respectful representations of disability must necessarily make legible the power dynamic and gendered components of classical constructions of aesthetics and ideal corporeality, engaging with the classical canon in a way that interrogates and subverts the normative nature of traditional Aristotelian conception of beauty.

The formation of evaluative frameworks of normative embodiment, based on cultural dichotomies, are premised on the articulation of the disabled body as inevitably marked and contrasted with the “normal” body, conceived as universal. This dichotomous articulation of difference reifies Cartesian formulations of identity, where disability is emphatically corporeal and overwhelmingly defined by its lack while able-bodiedness transcends the limits of corporeality. The Cartesian principle, characteristic to dominant ways of conceiving disability, is intrinsic to various traditional discourses of the body in western culture, especially classical

high art, where the nude (traditionally female) connotes “Art,” symbolizing a representational idiom and cultural canon with distinct and clearly defined aesthetic parameters. In classic art, the body of the object of representation (typically gendered female) is rhetorically separated from the mind and personal character, the artist (traditionally gendered male) being the sole producer of meaning.

The issue of corporeal norm in art is especially critical for investigating gender dynamics in representing difference, making classical representations of the female body a rich terrain for locating similarities and intersections between normativity, articulated through societal representations of corporeal deviance, and the classical female nude, which transcends corporeality and erases difference and diversity of embodiments of femininity. In the classical representational canon the articulation of notions of aesthetics and female beauty is concomitantly accompanied by an annihilation of female subjectivity, whereby individual experience of embodiment, personhood and character become irrelevant to the representation, the contours of a beautiful female body being continuously examined and evaluated against an artistic ideal. Exploring the trajectory of the specific aesthetic norms structuring the representation of the female body in western art, Lynda Nead argues that the pivotal feature in the construction of the nude is corporeal containment, realized through strategic and canonized deployment of forms, conventions and poses that metaphorically regulate and structure the body (1992:5-12). Modeled after the Aristotelian aesthetic of classical ideals of symmetry and definite form, the western language of aesthetics articulates the nude as sealed and static, with fixed limits of corporeality, displaying and discursively reproducing the boundaries dividing the inside from the outside, the subject from the object, and the mind from the body (Nead 1992:6-14).

The neoclassicist representational canon (derivative from classical or old master art) and traditional art criticism is discursively rooted in the civilizational rhetoric of Enlightenment, which stabilizes the distinctions between the cultured and the profane. Intrinsic to that taxonomy, the neoclassicist aesthetic also distinguishes between nude and naked, where differences between the two categories are conceptualized in terms of lack and vulnerability versus containment and regulation, presenting the naked body as “huddled and defenseless” and the nude as “clothed with art” (Nead 1992:14). Nead argues that in classical art the nude transcends corporality by means of a unified formal language (*ibid.*, 22), forming and solidifying the “frame” around the field of art, culture and acceptable artistic expression. The civilizational thrust and regulatory function of the classical representational canon results in the reproduction of pervasive gendered dichotomies that articulate civilization and aesthetics by means of constructing the inassimilable category of “other”—the unshapely unfeminine naked body, cast outside culture and artistic representation—thus propagating the exclusion and invisibility of those bodies marked as deviating from the ideal. By placing the naked body (marked by corporeal identity and individual experience of embodiment) outside the realm of cultural representation, classical art connotes difference and diversity as inassimilable and irrelevant to the project of art (Nead 1992:19, 22, 27). In the context of the overwhelming resonance and authority of classical representational regimes, women with diseased, disabled or obese bodies are unfit for representation precisely because of their gender: by embodying difference, they transgress the acceptable and fixed bounds of femininity encapsulated by the nude. Thus, society and the classical representational canon render the body of the disabled woman, marked by difference, doubly unfit, casting it outside the realm of acceptable femininity and subjecthood.

In this context of normalized and entrenched mechanisms of exclusion embedded in the culturally accepted evaluative frameworks, the issues of femininity and disability have to be

considered and deconstructed in tandem. As mentioned in the previous section, Garland Thomson argues that cultural narratives of femininity and disability often discursively overlap, being “inextricably entangled in patriarchal culture, as Aristotle’s equation of women with disabled men illustrates” (1997: 27). Garland Thomson suggests that, historically, practices of femininity have configured female bodies similarly to disability, in that the disciplinary regimes of feminine beauty often obscure the seemingly self-evident categories of “normal” and “pathological”: the nineteenth century ideal of upper-class female beauty – pale skin, emaciated body, wide eyes – strikingly parallels symptoms of tuberculosis, just as the cult of thinness today mimics the appearance of disease (1997: 27).

Related to this binary, the Aristotelian female ideal overlapped with the nineteenth century scientific discourse of the body, which conceived the anatomical scale of beauty as simultaneously one of pathology: “the further a female body departed from absolute beauty, the more “abnormal” it became” (1997: 28). As one manifestation of the unbeautiful woman, the figure of the woman with disabilities disrupts the oppositional paradigms of disabled and non-disabled femininity. Consequently, while experiences of disabled and able-bodied women in society can be vastly different and contingent (both within and outside/between the two categories), the discursive overlap of the two groups in the cultural vernacular suggests the paramount interconnectedness of issues of gender and hegemonic femininity with female disability, evidencing the pivotal role of interrogating representations and cultural constructions of gender in contexts of resituating and reconstructing portrayals of disability in empowering ways.

Of Gods and Freaks: Women outside the Gaze and Bodies in Transition

The classical aesthetic ideal and the Cartesian conception of the body are a fundamental component of the Eastern European cultural episteme, informing the ways that concepts of beauty and normative embodiment are constructed. Legible to across geographies on both sides of the phantasmal Iron curtain, the defining elements of the classical and neoclassicist representational canon have been internalized and theorized as to a large degree constitutive of art in Russia and Eastern Europe. Forming a critical component of interpretational frames used in assigning value, Aristotelian aesthetics and classical ideals of femininity significantly overlap with ideas of aesthetically pleasing, desirable female corporeality.

In conjunction with relatively rigid configurations of hegemonic femininity, cultural ideals of beauty and aesthetics render women in post-Socialist states particularly vulnerable to stigmatization and marginalization. According to Sarah D. Phillips, in Ukraine, parallel to the revival of traditional norms of femininity, globalization and increasing emphasis on consumption as a marker of success and identity, Barbie, as the embodiment of desirable standards of beauty and sexuality, has become a one of the most influential models of femininity. Phillips argues that standards of beauty, which emphasize physical appearance and possession of a perfect body as a measure of women’s worth, are “especially problematic for women with disabilities, whose different physique and limitations in movement place them well outside the range of what is considered beautiful and desirable, or even acceptable” (Phillips 2011:181).

Concomitant with the culturally normalized practices of marginalizing disfigured women and subjecting them to disabling and reductive stereotypes, the overt and emphatic sexualization of female bodies in the post-Socialist representational landscape widens the culturally constructed gap between normalcy and deviance. As noted, analyzing the evolution of the

discourse of sex in post-Socialist Russia, Eliot Borenstein argues that after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian culture in all its manifestations has become thoroughly and overtly sexualized. While most evident in “lowbrow” media, sex and erotic imagery have become integral to print media, radio and television programming through advertising, where “scantly clad women moan the names of the latest indispensable consumer gadget” (2000: 55). Blatant sexualization of the media along with commodification and normalization of erotic imagery in public discourse further problematize issues of disabled visibility, implicitly resulting in female disabled bodies’ symbolic oscillation between exclusion and “enfreakment.” Traditionally viewed as not ideal reproducers or embodiment of desirable or even acceptable femininity, women with disabilities’ sexuality is either marginalized and excluded as unacceptable and deviant or, alternatively, fetishized and incorporated into the booming and rapidly expanding representational idiom of pornography.

Embedded in the operational logic of representational canons and gendered public perceptions of disability, women in post-Socialist societies have been subject to multiple forms of discrimination, cast into the margins of society and public visibility by the multiple mechanisms of exclusion, these legitimated by ostensibly self-evident and naturalized assumptions about disability and gender embedded in post-Socialist imaginings of the social contract. The fact that representation matters and that the dominant representational canons are gendered, disproportionally affecting women’s experience of disability and difference, speaks of the incommensurability of current representational regimes in post-Socialist states and the urgency in transforming popular perceptions of women with disabilities through representations that make visible the constructed nature of disability and reductive articulations of femininity. By critiquing classical conceptions of beauty and asserting the volatility and constructed nature of gender, contemporary feminist art has the potential to subvert gender expectations, creating terrains for inclusive representational economies that recognize difference and conceptualize the body as inscribed by culture and in a state of continuous redefinition and change.

Thus, progressive representations of disability are inevitably concerned with gender as a social construct, challenging not only public perceptions of able-bodiedness, but also conceptions of normative femininity and sexuality, strategically deploying reductive and patriarchal articulations of desirable womanhood to subvert exploitative representations of women and to create spaces for difference, individual experience of embodiment and subjectivity. Corporeal difference, conceived broadly, can constitute a distinct position and subjectivity that can be used to create alternative narratives of corporeality and femininity, opening cultural spaces for rethinking beauty and able-bodiedness (Phillips 2011:168-169). In view of the intrinsic discursive connections between disability and femininity a radical rethinking of the representations of disability involves a visual re-conceptualization of issues of gender and femininity in the post-Socialist cultural imaginary as a whole.

The complex and often uneven effort of feminist artists in post-Socialist spaces to transform cultural constructions of gender repertoires and social relations between men and women has to a large degree been informed by their resistance to cultural stereotypes produced by the overlapping and mutually constitutive influence of the previously discussed classical ideals of aesthetics and femininity and the pervasive commodification and sexualization of female bodies in popular media. For instance, Russian feminist artist Elena Kovylyna’s (b. 1971) performance *Pick a Girl* (2006), where viewers are asked to remove the surgical needles used by the artist to affix magazine images of pin-up girls directly into her body, can be seen as representative of the popular trends in post-Socialist contemporary feminist art, which frequently

politicizes the sexualized and exploited female bodies in popular culture.² Inspired by Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, the title of the project ("*Snimite devochku*") implicitly suggests the action of "picking up" a prostitute. Reacting to certain socio-political realities in Russia, specifically blatant sexualization of post-Socialist culture and commodification of sex, Kovylyna makes explicit the connection between representation and individual experience of corporeal pain: collapsing the abstract, gratuitously sexualized object of representation and corporeal pain of the artist's performative body, she attempts to reconstruct the individual subjectivity of the cut-out pinups hitherto invisible and symbolically removed.

Evident in Kovylyna's work and characteristic to many other feminist artists in post-Socialist states, progressive gender-conscious art works react to and resist the power dynamics produced by classical aesthetics, local constructions of gender normativity, and sexualization of culture, thus significantly overlapping with western methodologies of feminist art. While *Pick a Girl* is in dialogue with Yoko Ono's famous piece, it also reacts to the social and cultural realities of post-Socialism: commenting on the social context of the piece, Kovylyna explicitly connected the piece with experiences of gender and sexuality in Russia, suggesting that "the spectre of communism became a spectre of prostitution" (kovylyna.com).

Despite the ostensible transnationalism of Kovylyna's piece, *Pick a Girl* is semantically multivalent and diversely legible in different contexts. Though it is reasonable to read the piece as another one in a series of critiques of prostitution and commodification of the female body, in view of the long history of symbolic and metonymical functions that the body of the prostitute acquired in Russian cultural mythology, *Pick a Girl* can be interpreted as commentary on the new symbolic function that the figure of the prostitute has been burdened with. Eliot Borenstein argues that the symbolic post-Soviet prostitute has become "a sign of Russian national humiliation – of the desperation of a country forced to sell off its natural and spiritual resources to unscrupulous clients from other lands" (2008: 79). At the same time, "despite this pervasive feminization of the country on the symbolic level ... the Russian prostitute symbolized national humiliation as male, rather than female experience" (2008: 79-80). In the context of the pervasive objectification (real and symbolic) of the female body, Kovylyna's work can be interpreted as an attempt to insert female subjectivity into the predominantly male national narrative. By juxtaposing the real, embodied girl and the inanimate cut-out girls for "pick up," the artist calls attention to the fact that in the post-Socialist representational landscape women, as agents, have been silenced and have become irrelevant to the narrative, serving as abject receptacles of national anxieties and fears of humiliation.

Similarly, the works and writings of the Russian feminist artist Anna Alchuk (1955-2008) engage with the works and discourses of classical as well as contemporary feminist art, while explicitly calling attention to and commenting on the women's social and economic positions and experiences in contemporary Russian society. Working from a distinctly feminist position and asserting the close interrelation between what is often labeled as western feminist discourse and real lived experiences of women in Russia, her works avoid ghettoization by engaging with feminist art theory used across "eastern" and "western" art contexts, while actively calling attention to the local gender dynamics.³ The artist's photo series *Double Game* (1995), consisting of sixteen pairs of photographs of a man and a woman in identical clothing assuming identical poses, arranged in a particular order, show "a gradual shift from extreme 'femininity' via androgyny to extreme 'masculinity'" (Alchuk 2011:227). Intertextually referencing Cindy Sherman's representations (as well as perceptions and experiences) of gender and femininity as emphatically performative, Alchuk's project makes visible "how the photographic medium,

props, makeup, and clothing all helped to deconstruct the capital-F femininity and capital-M masculinity” (Alchuk 2011:227), but by using distinctly post-Socialist cultural markers, parodying the “chap and nasty pornography of the perestroika period” (ibid., 228).

A precursor to *Double Game*, the artist’s earlier installation *A Maiden’s Toy* (1994), consists of six photographs of the torsos of six male authors of the Moscow art scene, modeled after the famous image of Venus de Milo, and the sculpture of Venus’s head, positioned in front of the images and contemplating the headless, armless male bodies. Evident in the gendered repositioning of the viewer’s gaze and object of contemplation, the artist attempts to satirically reverse the gaze through a humorous gender inversion of the dynamic characteristic to the Russian contemporary art scene. The artist notes that while the technique of self-“exotization” or self-“othering” was a typical trend in the 1990s conceptual art scene, which promoted cultural self-display “from the outside,” a similar deconstruction of the gaze involving gender reversal provoked significant resistance and unease from both the viewership as well as the male participants in the project (Alchiuk 2011:227).

While *A Maiden’s Toy* evidences the pervasive cultural authority of not only classical and neoclassicist ideals of feminine beauty but also the embedded and culturally internalized gendered dynamic of producing and consuming art, the project also serves as an important critique of the cultural constructions of and discursive overlaps between acceptable repertoires of femininity and disability. The intertextually referenced *Venus de Milo*, in Alchuk’s work functioning simultaneously as a feminine ideal and amputee (in Alchuk’s words “a defenseless female body with no arms to cover her nakedness”), in a situation of gender reversal reveals the hitherto obscured and ostensibly self-evident cultural construction of ideal femininity in art, where defenselessness and passivity have historically become a desired feature of the female object of representation. The rhetorical overlap between disability (a cultural construction here, alas, not scrutinized) and femininity, along with questioning the gendered process of consuming art, demonstrates the utter absence of female subjectivity and agency in the production of meanings in relation to art. Echoing Borenstein’s assertion that the female body in the post-Socialist sexualized cultural imaginary functions exclusively as a symbol of male nationalist anxieties and fears of loss of masculinity (Borenstein 2008:63), Alchuk’s piece directs the viewer’s attention to the cultural construction of ideal femininity as defenseless, objectified and incapable of producing meaning. The reversal of the gaze, however, does not dismantle the voyeurism and exploitation; rather, it disrupts the previously normalized narrative ties: as Liudmila Bredihina notes, in the pseudo-museum space of Alchuk’s installation, the “‘carriers of meaning’—women are not willing to, and ‘producers of meaning’—men cannot function in a traditional fashion.⁴” By subverting the gendered dynamic of the representational canon, Alchuk’s project scrutinizes the typical representation of women in the post-Socialist context as abstract carriers of meaning, deprived of individual voice and subjectivity.

The pervasive discursive and semiotic overlaps between disability and femininity in the post-Socialist representational economy strongly suggest that socially engaged art needs to necessarily address issues of culturally normalized and socially reproduced constructions of acceptable femininity and disability and difference simultaneously and as mutually constitutive. Asserting that mass culture is masculine by definition, aiming to “pervade our consciousness with the idea that its symbolic images are natural,” Anna Alchuk argues that the role of the artist is to constantly challenge that notion (2011:232). Discussing the reductiveness and violence of the Cartesian conceptualization of the body as explicitly separate from the mind, Elizabeth Grosz argues that developing alternative accounts of the body that defy its containment within the

spheres of biology and life sciences, would allow for alternative ways of thinking outside the binary frameworks that the knowledges of the body traditionally operate in (Grosz 1994:20-24). A conscious departure from medicalized conceptions of normality is evident in Veronika Bromova's work, which frequently employs transition and transformation as the crucial visual trope to destabilize assumptions of body integrity and portray embodiments of difference.

Bromova (b. 1966) is a Czech artist who explores issues of gender and difference by using photography (which confers a level of realism) and computer alteration to create representations that are suggestive of a reality, but are not quite real. Her work thus creates a visual world of a super-reality that does not exist parallel to the real world, but is produced by the penetrating gaze of the artist who sees beyond the visible. Thus the super-reality constructed in Bromova's works is not an imaginary surrealist space, but a visual narrative created through deconstruction of social relations and stereotypical representations, the supernatural element functioning as a trope for defamiliarization. In Bromova's works, irregular bodies that challenge Aristotelian aesthetics and ideas of body integrity subvert ideas of the unambiguous finality of transformation, thus opening new subjectivities, boundaries of physicality, corporeality, and widening repertoires of performance of gender.



Bromova's *Girls Too* (1994) is an exploration of corporeality at the borderlines of containment, a discussion of the body as being non-orientable, like the Mobius strip. The conical arrangements of color planes in the image suggest finite movement. This terminality is counterbalanced by the anti-climatic arrangement of bodies that form a separate integral structure, destabilizing the overall direction of the flux. The sensuousness and sexual tension produced by the all-engulfing clash of red, blue and black creates an ambiguous space where Aristotelian containment is transgressed by multiple

meshing of sexual, cultural and aesthetic signifiers, where sources of contamination are deliberately scattered. The source of trespass and nature of the transformation is unclear: is the starting point a woman or a man? Instead the tension of the figures and the space they inhabit suggests an anti-progression, a continuous state of non-linear flux.

Mary Douglas suggests that, the body's boundaries cannot be separated from the work of other social and cultural boundaries. Consequently, "any structure of ideas is vulnerable at the margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its especially vulnerable points" (Douglas 2002:121). The bodily deviation and ambiguity in *Girls Too* is a playful transgression of social boundaries, a troubling of a dichotomous conceptualization of the body, which articulates transition not as a teleology, but a state of being, a different kind of corporeal self-sufficiency and integrity. The clash of bodies and colors does not erase sensuousness and sexuality: the perspective that the figures form suggests movement and change, but the ambiguity and hybridity of the starting point defies the familiar teleology of transformation of

one defined form into its opposite or, alternatively, evolution from conventional “A” to “B.” The figure escapes polarity through flux without crossing over.

While these works do not display disability as such, they are critical interventions in the representational landscape in Eastern Europe that push against the boundaries of accepted femininity. In Bromova’s representation the body displays an awareness and tension with the classical canonic nudes, characterized by conventional, rigid and finite boundaries. The bodies in the discussed pieces, deliberately marked as inassimilable into the classical ideal, interrogate the supposedly “universal” and self-evident authority of Aristotelian aesthetics of the sealed, finitely gendered and sexed body. The subversive and open-ended articulations of femininity and sex in these works, while invoking the formal features of classical art, interrupt its function of assigning aesthetic value. Though the bodies portrayed in *Girls Too* are not mutilated or impaired, they occupy the same discursive space as the bodies of persons with disabilities, carrying the weight of reductive and violent cultural articulations of gender, beauty and worth. The attention to this discursive overlap does not mean to trivialize the experience of disability, but rather call attention to the gendered nature and breadth of mechanisms of exclusions embedded in the dominant representations of the female body. Bromova’s work in this context functions on several levels, demonstrating subversive and strategic ways of using classical art to undermine the traditional aesthetics in post-Socialist contemporary feminist art, emphasizing gender as a critical site of deconstruction, and creating new open-ended ways of seeing and conceiving of beauty and embodiment.

The Body of Disease

In the 1960s and 70s, the diseased female body, whose site of visibility was hitherto usually limited to medical atlases, became a popular and powerful subject in feminist art. Reflecting on the rhetorical overlap between desirable femininity and health, Lynda Nead argues that the images of the “imperfect” or incomplete female body can only be managed within consumer culture by rendering them invisible, or by subjecting them to generalized stereotypical narratives (1992:77). Aware of such stereotypes and omissions, feminist artists like Mary Duffy, Jo Spence and Hannah Wilke used body and performance art to confront issues of gender, able-bodiedness and representation. Mobilizing the representational potential of body art, feminist artists in post-Socialist states continue to use the body and performance to produce resonant, emotional and personal accounts of disease and difference.

Performance or body art, as a medium and genre, radically rethinks the traditional power dynamic specific to the production of the nude, where the artist and the viewer, both traditionally gendered male, create visual representations and examine the object of representation, usually gendered female. In traditional old master painting canon, the nude genre presumes the presence of a male artist as the principal protagonist who, though always missing from the painting, is manifest through the regulating and disciplining effect of his gaze (Berger 1972). The classical painting also is structured around the frame, used to shore up the female body, regulating the process of viewing and display, disciplining the viewer gaze and contouring the body of the nude, determining its interaction with the objects surrounding it. Invoking Derrida’s discussion of the discourse on the frame, Lynda Nead argues that the definition of limits and frames determines not simply the meaning of art, but meaning as such (1992:7), where the frame symbolically fixes the limits of corporeality and acceptable femininity. In conjunction with style and convention, the frame functions to “seal orifices [of the body] and to prevent marginal matter

from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other” (Nead 1992:6).

In this context, the power relations specific to the process of creating and viewing the art, the regulating function of style and frame, and the clear distinction between the artist and object of representation determine the terms of engagement between the artist, the represented model and the viewer, establishing not only the style of representation but also what constitutes embodiment that is acceptable for public display. Performance or body art became one of the most prominent mediums in feminist art precisely because it deconstructs and transforms the power relations characteristic to classical art production and viewing. Amelia Jones argues that body art practices “enact subjects in passionate and convulsive relationships (often explicitly sexual) and thus exacerbate, perform, and/or negotiate the dislocating effects of social and private experience in the late capitalist, postcolonial Western world” (1998:1). For Jones body art is a set of performative practices that through “intersubjective engagement, instantiate the dislocation of the Cartesian subject of modernism” (1998:1). By transforming the relationship between the object of representation and the artist by collapsing the two categories and by allowing the performer/object of representation the possibility to stare back, body art can potentially create a space where the female body is in the position to produce meaning and assert its own subjectivity.

Similar to Western performance/body art, the beginning of body art in Eastern Europe goes back to the 1960s. Along with greater pan-European artistic influence, such as performative practices in the works of Dadaists, Duchamp and Pollock, the development of East European body art was in part informed by the rich tradition of Russian futurists and Constructivists as well as the multiple local avant-garde movements from the beginning of the century (Badovinac 1999:13-14). Since levels of political repression and social isolation in Communist states varied, the visibility of and access to body art in various states was to different degrees limited, remaining confined to spaces bordering between public and private. For instance, in the 1970s and 80s, in Yugoslavia body art was relatively less isolated, and a significant culture of actions and rituals also developed in private apartments in Moscow, particularly in its suburbs (Badovinac 1999:14). While displays of body art in Russia and Eastern Europe were generally confined to the local art scenes, the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 90s saw an introduction of eastern body art to the western art world, generally dictated by mostly male Russian artists, especially Erik Bulatov, Ilya Kabakov and Komar and Melamid, the representative type of eastern art being formed in the general atmosphere of the transition of art from modernist universalism to post-modernist particularism and, inherent to it, cultural identity politics (Badovinac 1999:14-15).

Despite the overall greater visibility of male artists in the landscape of East European and Russian body art, body art became the preferred genre of feminist artists in the east during communism and especially after the collapse of the iron curtain. Displaying embodiment contrasting with the asexual and androgynous body of socialist realism, the ritual body of Marna Abramovic, the cosmological bodies of Natalia LL and Teresa Murak, the intimate body of Sanja Ivecovic, the erotic body of Vlasta Delimar, the body of Egle Rakauskaite, treated with honey and fat, or the disease-exhausted body of Katarzyna Kozyra, all represent the “liberation of the body,” pointing, perhaps indirectly, to “an active relationship with both society and nature” (Badovinac 1999:16). The principal subversive function of feminist body art in Eastern Europe was the deliberate departure from the collective, abstract and ideologically burdened body, and

an emphatic favoring of representing autonomous and individualized accounts of personal experience of embodiment.

Body and performance art remains a preferred genre of Russian and East European artists, creating important opportunities to establish a dialogue with mainstream dominant culture (Kovylyna 2000:30-31). In the "Red Stocking" feminist art manifesto, Elena Kovylyna declares that in Russia actionism and performance are the most adequate and resonant genres of art, requiring relatively little time and money investment, allowing artists to react to diverse situations and contexts with unparalleled speed and precision, and leaving few traces and possibilities for documentation and incrimination. Asserting that all material objects are subject to aging and have limited relevance across space and time, Kovylyna argues that in contemporary society the body is the principal representational tool in the arsenal of the feminist artist: "the performative image, created corporeally and procedurally, directly translates the particularity (individual corporeal experience) of the female view: the body, mediated through movement, and the gesture authentically reflects the subjective world of the woman... the body, transformed through performance into an art-body, simultaneously becomes the image and the representation, the inside and the outside, the object and the subject" (Kovylyna 2000:30-31).

Due to its unique power to reassert female subjectivity and individualize embodiment, and since the experience of illness is emphatically corporeal, body art frequently has been used to portray disease, pain and loss in feminist art across various geographies. Hannah Wilke's (1940-1993) series *Intra-Venus*, a shocking and emotional visual narrative of her experience being treated for cancer that shows the artist's body under the grip of disease, is an impressive example of the strategic use of what Amelia Jones calls "radical narcissism." Jones argues that in narcissism the distances between the artist and the object of representation are explicitly collapsed such that "the image is the self," and the "borders of the frames of identity are imploded" (Jones 1998:180). The images of Wilke's disease transform the traditional process of art production and viewing by transgressing the Cartesian dualism between the body (object of representation) and the artist (the producer of the meaning associated with the represented body), strategically connecting, using Neads's terms, the "inside" with the "outside," placing her own experience of embodiment center-stage.

Katarzyna Kozyra's (born in 1963 in Warsaw, Poland) series *Olympias* (1996), where the theme of disease, body decay and putridity intersect with desire and sexuality, employs an approach similar to Wilke's narcissism, intentionally collapsing the division between the artist and the model. The project *Olympias* consists of three large photographs accompanied by a video recording of Kozyra's lymphoma-inflicted body during a chemotherapy treatment. In the video the eye of the camera fluctuates from slow to neurotic, connoting fear, helplessness and violence; the artist's body accepts the inflicted pain and violence in order to live. The first photograph portrays Kozyra, bold and visibly affected by cancer, as Manet's Olympia; the second shows her lying nude in a classical pose on a hospital bed with the figure of a doctor standing behind it; the third one depicts an old woman, sitting on an undone bed.



The deliberate reference to Manet's *Olympia* functions on multiple levels, invoking the modernist system of meanings to critique and ultimately subvert the modernist representational economy. Manet's *Olympia*, a radically realistic depiction of a nude courtesan, was critiqued for blatantly displaying intersections between art, class and sexuality, which were scandalous for the expectations of the French salon in 1860. Contrasting traditional classical nudes, which obscured and diluted sexuality and avoided any marks that would signify social status, Manet overtly displayed the model's occupation, making explicit her class and sexuality. However, the blatant commodification of sex and working class identity in Manet's *Olympia* remain subversive only to the formal components of the classical art, leaving the position of the woman as lacking subjectivity and object of the viewer's gaze intact.

Kozyra invokes Manet's work precisely due to its revolutionary role in transforming the western representational idiom, but does so to insert herself and her personal experience of pain and embodiment in the representation. Olympia-Kozyra, embodying the artist and the model, returns the gaze not as an object of desire, but as the artist, who makes explicit and visible the formerly obscured eye of the viewer, indicating reciprocity of staring. Along with deliberate insertion of subjectivity, Kozyra's self-representation adds another layer of meaning to the sexualized and classed Manet's *Olympia*: the concentration camp aesthetic placed in a visual context that has been historically interpreted to evoke desire and sexuality makes visible the seams on the modern construction of acceptable and desirable femininity. While according to critics Manet's *Olympia* walks the thin line between nudity and nakedness, Kozyra is blatantly naked, subverting the containment of cohesive classical style. By citing Manet's infamous work, the poses and the environment in the photographs clearly evoke sexuality and desire, which violently clash with the realistically displayed visibly and radically imperfect bodies.

The rhetorical connection between the components of the project communicates an anxiety related to the loss of control over the body, as well as desire to face and interrogate the stigma of possessing a body marked by disease and decay. Commenting on the experience of being a cancer patient, Kozyra mentioned in an interview that she was bound to medical care, depending on it "like a dog." Becoming a patient required an utter release of all control over the body (Olkowski 2007:14-15), resulting in a Cartesian separation of the body from the mind of the individual person. Kozyra's careful documentation of experience of disease and treatment through creative reenactment of Olympia in the hospital presents a wrenching performance of pain and struggle to regain control over her body through a public vivisection of self, which centers the embodied experience of the diseased woman in society, where a sick body ceases being an object of desire and is symbolically confined to and articulated through medicine. By interweaving the medicalized and objectified bodies of illness and decay with the sexualized body of Olympia, Kozyra makes visible the process of objectification occurring when the body becomes subject to medical classification or an object of sexual desire.

If read against the pervasive "pornographication of the mainstream" and the concomitant denigration of women's rights (e.g. ban on abortion) in Poland brought about under the influence

of the political authority of the Catholic Church and nationalist ideology (all three based on the rhetorical exploitation of the collective and abstract figure under the guise of articulating popular narratives of national decay or rebirth), Kozyra's work evidences a deliberate politicization of the diseased and frail body. Intertextually invoking histories of artistic vanguard and radical defiance as well as exploitation and patriarchy through Manet's *Olympia*, and by positioning herself as both the subject and the object, the author reinserts herself in the narrative of femininity in art history and Polish post-Socialist culture. While in Communist Poland gender relations women were represented as "brave victims," responsible for the care and wellbeing of the family, performing a balancing act between professional work and motherhood, the post-1989 femininity was reframed to include ambitious and commodified sexuality (Gal and Kligman 2000b:12). Discussing the transformation of the concept of ideal femininity in Poland in the era of transition, Marody and Giza-Polezczuk argue that women were confronted with conflicting and, in many respects, opposite models of womanhood: one dictated by the canons of the Catholic Church and the Polish nationalist rhetoric, promoting women's roles as mothers and reproducers of the Polish nation and culture, and the other one related to the liberalization of the Polish economy and based on the image of the "new woman" pervasive in advertising-based, capitalist mass-media which envisions the new feminine ideal as individualist, financially successful and a good consumer (2000:171-174). In both formulations of femininity (attained either through reproduction or consumption), attractiveness is recognized as a key factor behind a woman's "success," both with men and in the labor markets; thus, although presenting different models of desirable womanhood, both formulations fix the boundaries of acceptable gender repertoires (Marody and Giza-Polezczuk 2000:169). Echoing Ukrainian ideals of feminine behavior (Berehynia and Barbie), Polish stereotypes of the female ideal center on women's roles as necessarily related to the needs and desires of men and the nation, symbolically excluding women who deviate from the norm of acceptable femininity and citizenship.

While subverting the Aristotelian aesthetic canon and transforming the subject/object relationship of the classical nude, Kozyra's project troubles the models of femininity characteristic to post-Socialist Poland. Resisting the objectification of the sexualized media sound-bite as well as utter de-individualization and exclusion from patriarchal nationalist discourses, Kozyra reenacts the trauma of disease, loss of control and acceptable femininity precisely to de-center the culturally normalized ideal of femininity promoted in Polish nationalism by giving disease and undesirable femininity a individual face, and a controversial one at that (Kozyra at the time of the project already had acquired the status of infamous, radical and controversial artist).

Kozyra's *Olympias* are a deliberate resistance to the collective "we" that both communist and nationalist rhetoric construct, as well as an overt defiance of the disabling "they," under which all the diseased, deformed and impaired bodies are often grouped. The individualized account of Kozyra's experience of dying, the realist documentation of her willful self-objectification and tacit agreement to being treated as meat in order to live, and her defiant stare back are evidence of her desire to find herself, to reassert herself in a body that is emphatically de-personalized and deprived of individuality in both medicine and society. Issues of embodiment and control raised by the artist in the context of the *Olympias* ostensibly acquire additional meanings if read against the post-Socialist shift in gender roles, specifically the reinstitution of the Polish Mother, an essentially conservative construct, accompanied by the rapid development of capitalist relations that provoked significant insecurities and anxieties in relation to the role and status of women in society. As Agnieszka Graff's analysis of the Polish

mass media suggests, the discussions of economic development and accession to the European Union in Polish press were frequently accompanied by a vilification of feminist ideology as well as construction of rhetorical links between successful capitalism and the traditional family (Graff 2008:202-203). In this new social context of harmonious coexistence of neoliberalism with conservatism, the “autonomous family,” resilient and capable of reproducing itself as capital became a metaphor for the desired state of the nation (ibid.). The diseased and frail body of the artist poignantly deviates from the culturally constructed feminine ideal, symbolically excluding her from acceptable Polish citizenship. In response to that symbolic exclusion and effective loss of control over her body, Kozyra, visually unattractive, frail and ostensibly non-reproductive, though emphatically gendered and sexualized, defiantly stares back, as if mockingly proving that even though not accepted as feminine as such, she is still a woman.

Theorizing disability in the context of social relations, Garland Thomson discusses Kant’s aesthetic theory “Critique of Judgment” as an instance of antipathy towards difference, based on Kant’s assertion that colors are beautiful only when they are “pure,” displaying a uniformity untroubled by foreign sensation. This abstract value system structures elements into pure and corrupt, legitimate and illicit, thus potentially legitimating ideologies that deem some people impure, unbeautiful, or unfit (1997: 33). Kozyra’s *Olympias* symbolically muddle the “Cartesian” colors of aesthetics and gender normativity, troubling the hierarchical divisions imposed by classical representational canons as well as culturally constructed ideals of body integrity and femininity. On the Meta-contexts of art history, gender and disability studies, Kozyra’s work works to dismantle and challenge the Aristotelian aesthetic ideal by creating visual narratives, consisting of the intertextually referenced nude, and the naked diseased body, often displayed and perceived as asexual, but here “clothed” with art *and* explicitly sexualized. Embedded in the construction of the object/subject relationship in the triptych, the reclamation of female agency and subjectivity, in traditional representational regimes oftentimes marginalized and repressed, here becomes the crux of the work, centered on a strategic breakdown of artist/model roles and boundaries. Following Garland Thomson’s argument about the frequent discursive overlap between femininity and disability in art and culture, Kozyra’s project reveals the power dynamic and mechanisms of exploitation and exclusion embedded in the interpretive frameworks intrinsic to classical representational paradigms. Olympia’s defiant stare and blatant sexuality disrupt the dichotomy between disability and able-bodiedness, sexual deviance and desirable femininity.

Grotesque and Carnavalesque: Worlds without Fixed Symbols

Discussing the complex semiotic transformation of the meaning of the body placed in the topsy-turvy of the symbolic system of the carnival, Mary Russo argues that a woman is especially vulnerable to public criticism and castigation for exposing her intimate self: “Making a spectacle of herself” (1986:213). A blatant performance of unruly femininity and a deliberate display of an irregular body, while unacceptable and obscene in mundane social interactions, can gain currency and function in empowering and transgressive ways when placed in the context of contemporary art, which creates new parallel worlds that purposefully obscure and blur the line between reality and performance. Constructing simultaneously capacious and flexible systems of symbols and meanings, art has the potential to subvert the modern semiotic systems that rigidly define normative corporeality and repertoires of femininity.

Jo Spence's (1934, London – 1992) series of photographs narrating her experience of corporeal deformity due to breast cancer and subsequent mastectomy borrow from the visual tropes of the carnivalesque, where the purpose of revealing and exposing the deformities of her body is to achieve the "catharsis of revelation," to demystify and unmask the injured body (Evans 2005:50). For Jo Spence the transgression of the boundaries of the private sphere, conceived as invisible to the public eye, involved the overcoming of persistent feeling of shame of her ugliness and being un-desired (Spence 1995:158) and realizing that the roots of her shame lie in the perception of disability in a bourgeois culture that wants to "repress the disturbing and the dirty" (Evans 2005:52). She exercises her agency by framing her socially and medically inscribed body as a space where she can "write back" (Evans 2005:54).

As Rosemarie Garland Thomson points out, disability does not merely designate a form of physical inferiority of a body, but rather "is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, similar to what we understand as the fictions of race and gender" (2000: 334). Artistic representations of disabled women's bodies are an important space for renegotiation of gender roles and redefinition of normalcy and beauty in post-Socialist culture. In feminist art the exploration of women's bodies affected by disease oftentimes is accomplished with the playful use of grotesque imagery. The reference to the culture of the carnivalesque in this case indicates the "loss of control and boundaries" (Russo 1986:213), removing the images of disability from the realm of the private sphere. The grotesque and carnivalesque representation transposes the body into the new semiotic system, traditionally interpreted as playful and subversive, which in turn allows for a reinterpretation of traditional ideals, roles and hierarchies.

Naturalist depictions of the body contain powerful symbolism that can be employed in redefinition of concepts of gender and normality. When discussing body margins (bodily refuse) as symbol of danger and power Mary Douglas (2002) points out that the body is a model that can stand in for any bonded system, including society, and that body symbolism is part of the common stock of symbols. Body orifices oftentimes symbolize the margins of society's identity, systems of belief, and structure. Since any structure of ideas is vulnerable at the margins, it is then logical that bodily secretions (which have traversed the boundary of the body) are framed within the same system of symbols and are coded as powerful and dangerous. In *Rabelais and his World* Bakhtin (1968:25) argues that the "grotesque image reflects a phenomenon of transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming." The grotesque body is an oozing, secreting body involved in the transformational processes of birth, growth, copulation and aging. It stands in contrast to the classical body of the "finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development" (Bakhtin 1968:25).

Discussing Bakhtin's concept of the carnival, Mary Russo argues that the categories of carnivalesque speech and spectacle contain the "protocols and styles of high culture in and from a position of debasement," the various tropes and disguises functioning to "resist, exaggerate and destabilize the distinctions that mark and maintain high culture and organized society. It is as if the carnivalesque body politic has ingested the entire corpus of high culture and, in its bloated irrepressible state, released it in fits and starts in all manner of recombination, inversion, mockery, and degradation" (Russo 1986:218). The carnival, containing the elements of hierarchies of high culture, creates a semiotic space that echoes the dominant culture while simultaneously debasing and subverting it, by playfully transforming meanings and relations between the signifiers and the signified, placing cultural taxonomies on the shaky grounds of semiotic whirlpools. The fluctuating meaning in this context can potentially be employed to re-

evaluate the disabled body through the carnivalesque's characteristic insurgency against normativity.

While Bakhtin's concept of the ambivalent and fluid grotesque body and the subversive nature of the carnival do not incorporate the aspect of gendered representations of female bodies, according to Tickner the images of transformations and processes specific to the female body as well as parody and role reversal are some of the main strategies of re-claiming and de-colonizing the woman's body in art. In this context, the deformed, diseased and transforming body, distinctly different from the monumental sculpted classical nude, can have important effects on dominant articulations of gender normativity by gaining new functions in the fictitious world of art. The playfulness and unrestrained and fluid nature of the carnivalesque and grotesque can become crucial means of creating spaces of transgression of social boundaries, gender roles and assumptions of normalcy and beauty.



Y. Solomko, "Baba Yaga," 2001.

Placing representation of corporeal difference in the fluid topsy-turvy world of the carnival and grotesque, the Ukrainian artist Yuri Solomko (b. 1962) engages with issues of disabled femininity and embodiment, redefining the hegemonic conceptions of the aesthetically pleasing and "able" body.⁵ His realistic and yet stylized photographs de-center the ontological function of the "classical nude" by using the tropes of traditional aesthetics in a way that echoes classical conceptions of beauty and corporeal integrity but, through radical ways of articulating body mobility and function, interrupt and re-shuffle the hierarchies of hegemonic cultural representations of femininity and beauty. *Regeneration* is a photographic series of portraits of Elena Chinka, a double amputee who lost parts of both her legs at the age of 23. The use of porcelain masks, mirror reflections and playful reversals of shapes and body parts suggests that the images draw heavily on the Venetian culture of the carnival. At the same time the use of classical rules of composition, color, light and shadow in the photographs are all evidence that the artist portrays the body according in the old master tradition, using Aristotelian aesthetics, but expanding, reframing and "clothing" Chinka's extraordinary body in the subversive culture

of carnivalesque with its characteristic articulation of bodies as in a state of perpetual motion and transition.

Indeed, Chinka's body finds and displays a new balance and mobility, signaling an alternative form of bodily integrity: in the photograph she is not presented as lacking or disabled; rather she expands the idea of body dexterity, function and shape. In the photograph of Chinka facing the viewer but with her back to him/her, the body inversion does not lead to body disintegration: instead it creates an alternative sense of balance, harmony and proportion. Using the tradition of carnivalesque which combines corporeal flux and deviation with aestheticism, Solomko's project redefines the traditional assumption of body integrity: the model is able to see with the back of her head, so her range of mobility and body function is expanded, rather than restricted. In Solomko's photographs Chinka's body and unruly femininity, displayed as extraordinary, beautiful and uniquely mobile, challenge reductive cultural articulations of corporeal normativity, beauty and integrity.

While undermining limiting and disabling conceptions of beauty and body integrity, the strategic manipulation of the classical aesthetic canon and the genre of carnivalesque also succeeds in troubling binary and reductive articulations of acceptable femininity pervasive in post-Communist Ukraine. Quoting Oksana Kis, Phillips argues that gender expectations for women in Ukraine are rooted in two fundamental images—Berehynia and Barbie. In the context of the Ukrainian independence movement and the rise of popularity of nationalist and neofamilialist discourses, Berehynia, a pagan goddess from ancient Slavic mythology, is a symbol of Ukrainian womanhood deployed to encourage women to engage in the natural and cultural reproduction of the nation, to devote themselves to the maternal role and foster the revival of the traditional Ukrainian family (Phillips 2011:180-181). Yet in the context of a globalizing market economy and the increasing emphasis on consumption, Berehynia competes with another model of womanhood: Barbie—a beautiful, sexy, charming toy for a man. Such rigid standards of femininity, focusing on either reproduction or outward attractiveness, are especially problematic for women with disabilities, whose different physique and limitations in movement often place them outside the range of what is considered beautiful or feminine (ibid.).

While Solomko's photographs of Chinka are far from Berehynia or Barbie, the subversive use of form and style as well as the intertextual reference of traditional ideals of femininity interrupts cultural narratives of femininity and disability, portraying Chinka as sexual, beautiful, mobile and whole. Playfully invoking the tradition of carnivalesque and grotesque, the *Regeneration* series troubles conventional articulations of gender normativity and aesthetics through defamiliarization⁶ (term coined by Viktor Shklovsky), making commonly encountered objects and phenomena, the value of which is hitherto interpreted as self-evident, seem unfamiliar and divorced from the fixed system of meanings of dominant culture. By controlling the process of perception through intertextuality and innovative use of style, Solomko's photographs present an alternative vision of beauty and bodily integrity that resists the stigma of the label "disability" and does not conform to the culturally accepted and normalized ideals of femininity.

Regeneration, thus, can be read as part of Ukrainian feminists' concerted effort to problematize and question the way that femininity and disability are conceived and represented. Discussing the state of feminist art in contemporary Ukraine, Tamara Zlobina considers the project "Tenderness" ("Nezhnost") curated by Lesia Ostrovskaia an openly feminist venture, and one of the more successful all-women, gender-conscious exhibitions that seriously engage with issues like hegemonic femininity and gender normativity in post-Socialism (Zlobina

2007:60). One of the principal goals of the exhibit, which consists of works by four artists (Margarita Zinetz and Alevtina Kohidze from Ukraine, Bogna Burska from Poland, and Nicoleta Markovic from Serbia), was to problematize cultural stereotypes associated with women and femininity in order to reassert women's positions as legitimate agents in constructing and interpreting culture, capable of articulating their subject positions (ibid.). The exhibit questions the associative semantics of coupling the words "tenderness" and "woman," which is likely to suggest and produce certain stereotypical associations such as "female tenderness," "tenderness and beauty," and "motherly tenderness and love." Such characteristic trivialization results in normalization and stabilization of semantic and associative boundaries of the concept of femininity (Zlobina 2007:60).



Especially interesting from the point of view of the interplay between aesthetics and disfigurement, the work *Algorithm* (2002) by the Polish artist Bogna Burska (b. 1974), a 12 photographs series that juxtaposes images of amputated limbs and flowers, produces a radically unfamiliar, yet visually striking and convincing associative narrative that disrupts the familiar semantic chains that blooming blossoms and bleeding wounds (viewed in isolation) would typically suggest.

When read against the pervasiveness of reductive and disabling stereotypes that dominate the genderscape in post-Socialist Ukraine, the public display of Bogna Burska's *Algorithm* and Yuri Solomko's *Regeneration* in the authoritative cultural space of the gallery destabilizes the boundary between disability and able-bodiedness, and troubles the fixed and culturally normalized meanings of concepts of beauty and femininity. By placing Chinka's extraordinary body in the topsy-turvy of the carnivalesque, and by disrupting the semantic bounds of femininity and tenderness, Solomko and Burska suggest a new strategy for activism in art that is centered on transforming the reductive and disabling representational regime that places "disfigured" women outside the realm of acceptable femininity.

In Conclusion: Towards a Discourse of Agency and Empowerment, or, the Potential of a Benevolent and Healing Eye

As discussed and seen in multiple cases, art can be a space of empowerment and renegotiation of gender identity. As Sarah D. Phillips (2011:165-169) points out, Elena Chinka's embodied performance redefines traditional conceptions of beauty, normality and body integrity and can potentially generate an open-ended and nuanced discussion of disability and disability experience. The phenomenal power of artistic representations lies in their ability to subvert,

expose and contest stereotypes by engaging with the viewers on an individual level, encouraging them to experience and “live in” other people bodies.

Art can also serve as an important place for self-exploration and re-imagining of self. Jo Spence, whose work engages with various aspects of and intersections between disease, femininity and normative corporeality, discusses photography as a healing art that proved therapeutic for her dealing with the pain and shame related to breast amputation. She describes phototherapy as a collaborative process of self discovery where the photographer plays the role of a non-judgmental benevolent healing eye, while the photographed person enacts and explores his/her subjectivities through photographic self-documentation. Jo Spence and Rosy Martin discuss “gazes” as something that helps control, objectify and mirror identities. Through internalization of powerful gazes people learn to see and differentiate themselves from others in terms of gender, race and sexuality. Phototherapy reconstructs those gazes (e.g. family, medicine, fashion, education etc), allowing them to access “private” information about their own subjectivity. In other words, phototherapy is a form of “phototheatre of self”: a safe space where the person can re-enact various discursive “gazes,” like those of the family, society, etc., thus reexamining and recognizing personal areas of resistance (Spence and Martin 1995:164-168). Photographs then become a space for personal redefinition, where the photographed person is an active subject of his/her personal history (ibid., 169).

Similarly, Rosemarie Garland Thomson discusses the stare as a potentially empowering experience for persons with disabilities, noting that “portraits can provide their subjects with an opportunity to deliberately engage with their viewers,” where direct “eye-to-eye” contact can potentially restructure the relationship between the viewer and the displayed body of the “deviant” subject (Garland Thomson 2009: 84-85). Thus, the viewer of Kozyra’s *Olympias* is locked in a moment of exchange, where the “abnormal” body on display stares back at the viewer, symbolically turning the eye on itself, demanding self-reflexivity of the voyeur. The collapse of the boundaries between the subject, object and viewer can transform the culture of viewing disability, reformulating the process of looking in terms of confronting personal assumptions and cultural norms.

The analysis of various artistic representational strategies in the context of this paper also aims to uncover the social construction of reductive representations of disability and emphasize the activist potential of intertextual invocation of classical art canon to deliberately create visual aporias. These in turn force the text of the hegemonic representational economy to deconstruct itself, making visible the deep and violent mechanism of exclusion and power asymmetries sustained by the ostensibly self-evident and universal value of classical aesthetics. A new visual idiom cannot function on its own in a cultural vacuum, but must actively engage with the dominant representational economy. Thus, the project of constructing inclusive and respectful representations of women with disabilities is a complex but critical project that acknowledges and interrupts the complex and mutually constitutive discourses and cultural articulations of disability, femininity, aesthetics and social hierarchy.

Discussing the politics of representation of East European body artists on the Western art scene, Zdenka Badovinac quotes Peggy Phelan’s book *Unmarked – the Politics of Performance*, which explores the significance and the force of that which is not signified and therefore cannot be codified within the borders of the ideology of the visible. Critiquing the identity politics embedded in the post-Soviet representational idiom and the politics of visibility of East-European art in the West, Badovinac invokes Phelan’s problematization of the connection between representational visibility and political power, which have been a dominant force in

cultural theory in the past decades: “the conviction that greater visibility also means greater power is false. Such an observation could bring us to the rather comical conclusion that naked women rule the world. Power is located precisely in the irrepresentable,” (i.e. something that does not figure within the borders of the institutionalized and controlled) (Badovinac 1999:11).

Importantly, greater visibility of female disability does not necessarily imply rearticulating the representational canon in an enabling and respectful way: post-socialist media narratives suggest the opposite. Rather a radical rethinking of the representations should involve an active and meaningful engagement with the dominant visual economy and culture precisely to destabilize it with a strategic and subversive use of authoritative places of cultural display in radically new, activist modes that encourage alternative and respectful ways of seeing disability as a meaningful component or facet of humanity. Portraying shared and individualized modes of experiencing gender, corporeality, and difference, progressive representations of disability could potentially create alternative and diverse accounts of body integrity, beauty and normality, thereby broadening the dominant repertoires of femininity and able-bodiedness.

¹ The term refers to the discursive construction of people with physical disabilities as well as “other people whose bodies could be made to visually signify absolute alienness” into icons of inassimilable physical otherness (Garland Thomson 1997: 17). Having extensively used this term to investigate representations of disability in US art and culture, Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that enfreakment, as an intricate form of exploitation, reifies the difference corporeal “norm” and “aberration,” reinforcing the “onlookers’ common American identity, verified by a body that suddenly seemed by comparison ordinary, tractable, and standard” (ibid., 17). Garland Thomson uses the term especially to describe cultural meanings produced by freak shows and public spectacles involving people with disabilities and corporeal deformities.

² See <http://www.kovylyna.com/projects.php?cid=155&pg=3>, retrieved 4 November, 2011.

³ Diana Yeh provides an overview of Alchuk’s work at <http://www.culturebase.net/artist.php?1301>, retrieved 4 November, 2011.

⁴ <http://www.owl.ru/win/books/visualnie15p.htm>, retrieved 4 November, 2011.

⁵ See Phillips 2011(163-169) for further analysis of Solomko’s disability-inspired art.

⁶ A term coined by Viktor Shklovsky to denote a stylistic technique designed to remove objects and phenomena from the sphere of automatized perception. In *Art as Technique* Shklovsky argues that the purpose of art is to lead the reader “to a knowledge of a thing through an organ of sight instead of recognition. By ‘estranging’ objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and ‘laborious’” (Shklovsky 6). Thus, by taking objects, phenomena and behavior from the realm of the familiar, the literary text is able to enhance perception.

References

- Alchuk, Anna. 2011. "The Tactics and Strategy of Resisting Masculine Culture: A Long-Term Artistic Project." Gender Check: A Reader. Ed. Bojana Pejic. Koln: Walther Konig.
- Altman, Barbara M. 2001. "Disability definitions, models, classification schemes and applications." Handbook of Disability Studies. Eds. G.Albrecht, K.Seelman and M.Bury. *Thousand Oaks: Sage*.
- Badovinac, Zdenka, ed. 1999. "Body and the East." Body and the East: From the 1060s to the Present. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1968. Rabelais and His World. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bredihina, Liudmila. 2000. "Reprezentatsionnye Praktiki v ZhenskomIskestve." Zhenshina I Vizual'nye Znaki. Ed. Anna Alchuk. Moscow: Idea-Press.
- Berger, John. 1972. Ways of Seeing. London: Penguin Books.
- Borenstein, Eliot. 2008. Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.
2000. "About That: Deploying and Deploring Sex in Postsoviet Russia." *Studies in 20th Century Literature*. 24(1): 51-83.
- Douglas, Mary. 2002. Purity and Danger. London: Routledge Classics.
- Evans, Jessica. 2005. "Agaist Decorum! Jo Spence: a Voice on the Margins." Jo Spence: Beyond the Perfect Image. Photography, Subjectivity, Antagonism. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.
- Gal, Susan and Gail Kligman.
- 2000a. The Politics of Gender after Socialism: a Comparative-Historical Essay. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- 2000b. "Introduction." Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism. Ed. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Garland Thomson, Rosemarie.

1996. Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body. New York: New York University Press.

2000. "Staring Back: Self-Representations of Disabled Performance Artists." American Quarterly 52(2): 334-338

2002. "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography." Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities. Ed. Sharon L Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and, Rosemarie Garland Thomson. New York: Modern Language Association of America.

2009. Staring: How We Look. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2010. "Picturing People With Disability: Classical Portraiture as Reconstructive Narrative." Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum. Eds. Sandell, Richard, Jocelyn Dodd and Rosemarie Garland Thomson. London: Routledge.

Graff, Agnieszka. 2008. "The Land of Real Men and Real Women: Gender and EU Accession in Three Polish Weeklies." Global Empowerment of Women. Ed. Carolyn Elliott. New York: Routledge.

Grosz, Elizabeth. 1994. Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Iarskaia-Smirnova, Elena and Elmira Naberushkina. 2009. "Zhenshiny I Invalidnost': Ispytania na Prochnost'." *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovania* 5: 70-76.

Iarskaia-Smirnova, Elena and Pavel Romanov. 2006. Politika Invalidnosti: Sotsial'noe Grazhdanstvo Invalidov v Sovremennoi Rossii. Saratov: Nauchnaia Kniga.

Jones, Amelia. 1998. Body Art/ Performing the Subject. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.

Kovylin, Elena. 2000. "Manifest: Krasnyi Chiulok." *Khudozhestvennyi Zhurnal*. 30-31. www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx30/xx30014.htm.

Kowalkzyk, Izabela. 2009. "Interviews With Researchers. Poland: Izabela Kowalkzyk." Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe.

Kowalkzyk, Izabela. 2011 "Visualizing the Mythical Polish Mother." Gender Check: A Reader. Ed. Bojana Pejic. Koln: Walther Konig.

- Marody, Mira and Anna Giza-Polezczuk. 2000. "Changing Images of Identity in Poland: From the Self-Sacrificing to the Self-Inventing Woman?" Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism. Ed. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Nead, Lynda. 1992. The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality. New York: Routledge.
- Olkowsky, Dorothea. 2007. Katarzyna Kozyra: In Art Dreams Come True. Ed. Hanna Wróblewska. Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz.
- Phillips, Sarah D. 2011. Disability, Gender, and Sexuality in the Era of 'Posts.' Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Piotrowsi, Piotr. 2010. "Gender after the Wall." Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe. Ed. Morawska, Agnieszka, Boris Marte, Edelbert Kob, and Rainer Fuchs. Koln: Walther Konig.
- Roberts, John. 1998. The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Russo, Mary. 1986. "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory." Feminist Studies/ Critical Studies. Ed. Teresa de Laurentis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Sandell, Richard and Jocelyn Dodd. 2010. "Activist Practice." Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum. Eds. Sandell, Richard, Jocelyn Dodd and Rosemarie Garland Thomson. London: Routledge.
- Shakespeare, Tom. 2006. Disability Rights and Wrongs. London and New York: Routledge.
- Shklovsky, Viktor. 1991. Theory of Prose. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press.
- Spence, Jo and Rosy Martin. 1995. "Phototherapy: Psychic Realism as Healing Art." Cultural Sniping: the Art of Transgression. Ed. Jo Stanley and David Hevey. London: Routledge.
- Spence, Jo. 1995. "Could Do Better' ... Towards a Personal and Political Theatre of Self?" Cultural Sniping: the Art of Transgression. Ed. Jo Stanley and David Hevey. London: Routledge.
- Tickner, Lisa. 1987. "The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970." Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985. Ed. Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock. London: Pandora Press.
- Williams, Gareth. 2001. "Theorizing disability." Handbook of Disability Studies. Eds. G.Albrecht, K.Seelman and M.Bury. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Zlobina, Tamara. 2007. "Zhenskoe Iskustvo v Ukraine. Formirovanie Zhenskoi Subjectivnosti v Izmeniaiusheisia Kul'ture." *Gendernye Issledovania* 16: 50-67.
www.gender.univer.kharkov.ua/gurnal/16/04.pdf.

Images of works by Burska, Bromova, Kozyra, and Solomko are reproduced here with permission from the artists.