Mapping Experience in Polish and Russian Women's Writing

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Edited by

Marja Rytkönen, Kirsi Kurkijärvi,
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PREFACE

This volume represents the "final report" of the research project *Generation, National Identity, the Body: Polish and Russian Women's Writing in Transformation* (PURU, www.womenswriting.fi) affiliated to the University of Tampere, Finland, School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies. *Mapping Experience* is the third "experiment" conducted by the PURU research group on what happens to feminist literary theories and concepts when applied in the post-socialist East European context, or the context of the so-called *second world.* The first experiment was the anthology of essays *Masquerade and Femininity* edited by Urszula Chowaniec, Ursula Phillips and Marja Rytkönen (2008) and based on a conference held at the University of Tampere in 2006. The volume investigated the concepts of *masquerade* and *gender performativity/ performance* in the constructions of femininities in Russian and Polish women's writing from the 19th to the 21st centuries. The second experiment *Poland Under Feminist Eyes* (2009)—the first issue of the journal *Women's Writing Online (WWoL)* based on papers from the seminar held at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies in November 2008—focused on Polish culture and literature and showed what happens when these are examined through the feminist lens. The seminar was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Centre for East European Language Based Area Studies (CEELBAS) and the Polish Cultural Institute in London. The current volume *Mapping Experience in Polish and Russian Women's Writing* continues to engage the comparative approach to East European experiences and to investigate subjectivities situated in Russian and Polish culture and literature.

The project that comes to an end with this volume was realized with the help of the enthusiastic and inspiring atmosphere at the Department of Russian Language and Culture, University of Tampere. The ground for developing the project was prepared and systematically cultivated by Professor Arja Rosenholm, aka the leader of the "Tampere School" in Russian studies. We thank Arja warmly for her generous encouragement, support, and guidance during this project. Other members of staff of the School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies whom we wish to thank include: Docent Irina Savkina, project coordinator Sirje Lällä, Polina Koski MA, Lecturer in Polish Karina Mucha, and University

amanuensis Tiina Harjula. We would also like to thank our colleagues and supporters at the Jagiellonian University and the Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski University in Kraków, Poland. We have also enjoyed our collaboration with the "Turku School" of feminist literary studies in the form of annual seminars held in Turku and Tampere. We would like to thank Professor Päivi Lappalainen, Kati Launis and Viola Parenté-Čapkova of the Department of Finnish Literature at the University of Turku for sharing with us their views and discussions on Finnish women's writing.

Most of the essays presented in this volume are based on the papers given at the conference *Mapping Experience* held at the University of Tampere in 2008. We thank all those who participated in the conference and in the discussions but whose papers could not be included in this volume: Nataliia Botkina, Olga Demidova, Samanta Gorzelniak, Olga Kulbakina, Irina Martianova, Maria Mikhailova, Małgorzata Radkiewicz, Arja Rosenholm, Elena Sokol, and Elżbieta Wiącek. We also wish to thank Professors Grażyna Borkowska and Irina Zherebkina for contributing their essays to this volume, although they were not able to participate in the conference.

The articles by Evgeniia Stroganova and Irina Zherebkina were translated by Marja Rytkönen. Irina Savkina's was translated by Kirsi Kurkijärvi and Agnieszka Mrozik's by Ursula Phillips. We are most grateful to Ursula Phillips for the English language editing of the whole volume

Last but not least we wish to express our gratitude to the Emil Aaltonen Foundation for awarding our project a generous three-year grant and thus making possible the research, as well as the organization of and attendance at the various seminars and conferences.

As this project and the preparation of the book draw to a close, we recall with pleasure all the people we have met and with whom we have discussed our ideas at numerous seminars, conferences and symposia. We look forward to conducting new experiments on women's writing in the future.

August 2010
Tampere— Helsinki—Kraków—London

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INTRODUCTION

MAPPING CONCEPTS: "EXPERIENCE" AND WOMEN'S WRITING IN POLAND AND RUSSIA

URSZULA CHOWANIEC, KIRSI KURKIJÄRVI AND MARJA RYTKÖNEN

"Experience" has been intensely contested as an analytical concept in studies advocating a poststructuralist perception of meaning and language—a well-known example being Joan W. Scott's criticism of the term in her article "The Evidence of Experience" (1991), where Scott insists on the discursive nature of experience or, in other words, that discourse, language, and textuality precede experience and not vice versa. Since then the poststructuralist take on experience has been claimed to be too simplistic, because it constructs a dichotomy between discourse and reality (Jay 1998, 62; Pickering 1997, 208–246). Indeed, "experience," as many scholars have noted, is one of the most intricate and controversial concepts, intersected by various discourses and approaches: philosophical, sociological, anthropological and psychological. This multitude of voices, perspectives and methodologies in depicting human experience undoubtedly sheds light on the complexity of human existence. At the same time, however, the multiplicity of theories does not help us to get our heads around the following theoretical questions: what is an experience, and how can it be explained? We wonder whether it might be possible to arrive at a definition of experience, which would prove useful to the endeavour of this volume, namely to map Russian and Polish women's writing within the larger cartographies of feminisms and literatures across cultures.

The main objective of this Introduction is to look at *experience* from the viewpoint of the theoretical and conceptual discussions and debates surrounding it and thus pave the way to introducing the articles in our volume *Mapping Experience*, all of which analyse actual literary texts by Polish and Russian women writers and their representations of *lived*

experiences in different historical locations and periods of time. We discuss the notion of *human experience* and the problems associated with its use in humanistic, especially literary studies. We discuss *female experience* as explicated by feminist scholars, first by questioning the fallacy of the objectivity of historical research, and then by finding it to be too monolithic and hence silencing of crucial differences between and within women. Our aim is to bring out the differences in women's experiences across time, space and culture, without essentializing these experiences into a transhistorical, abstract concept of "Woman." We see the contested and open character of the concept of experience as fruitful ground for discussing women's writing in Eastern Europe through a feminist and gender approach.[1]

In recent years discussions surrounding the concept of the "second world," that is, Eastern Europe, have problematized the divisions and borders between "East" and "West" in dominant cultural and social theories. Among the most intriguing questions within the incipient investigations into this area is whether we could or even should approach the former socialist and Soviet states as "postcolonial." It is argued that contemporary postcolonial theory is based on a dichotomy between the "West" and the "East," where the former denotes Europe and the United States, and the latter—the rest of the world (Kalinowska 2004; see also Chioni Moore 2001; Thompson 2000). Scholars have rightly noted that this dualism has produced a significant gap in research: "Colonial and postcolonial theorists' bipolar worldview has precluded any examination of the vast territories 'in-between', the region known traditionally as Eastern Europe" (Kalinowska 2004, 1). The emerging research shows that postcolonial theory may bring new, innovative approaches to the experiences of the people living in this region.[2] Although postcolonial

[1] As Nanette Funk (1993) and Hana Havelková (1993) point out, the application of so-called Western feminist categories by postcommunist women has been difficult because the categories of "emancipation," "equality," or "feminism," for instance, had different meanings in East and West. The application of the concept of "gender," which does not exist in many East European languages, was more successful because it created a "linguistic free space" without pejorative connotations (Funk 1993, 86). However, in the Russian context, for example, it has also been received as an alien, foreign import. On the re-evaluation of East-West dialogue on feminist and gender studies see Funk's article "Fifteen Years of the East-West Dialogue" (2006), where the author comes to a cautiously positive conclusion.

[2] Biljana Kašić (2004, 478) points out that the division of the "world" into the first, second and third worlds also corroborates the dominance of the "West" over the various "Easts."

theory does not appear widely in the articles of this volume, the idea that this part of the world needs to be considered from a specific, historical and cultural point of view in European history is important to them.

Another much debated and by now more established topic relating to Eastern Europe has been the role of feminism and the women's movement in these countries. The accursed question has been whether feminism is applicable to East European cultures and societies or whether it is a "Western" import and as such completely alien to this part of the world (Marsh 2009; Adlam 2009; Voronina 2009). The use of the past tense ("has been") here is symptomatic, since it has now become clear that the question is about something else, namely, that Russian feminist theory, for instance, "has emerged from its own conditions and history, and followed a trajectory that was almost wholly contrary to that of Western feminism," as Carol Adlam concludes in her article on the emergence and development of Russian gender studies in the 1990s (2009, 168). The different traditions of feminism(s) in Eastern Europe have also become evident. Scholars have pointed out that feminism came earlier to Poland than to Russia; that the "first wave" of Polish feminism took place 1800–1830; that it has its own history predating the communist period; and that Polish feminist theory continues to be practised in the 21st century. Contrary to Western "academic" feminism, the contemporary Polish feminist movement is actively taking part in current political life in Poland (Marsh 2009, 38–39; 40; see also Chowaniec 2009).

The editors of this book invite readers to look at women's writing from a cross-cultural feminist point of view.[3] The underlying idea of this volume is to subject this part of the world—the second world, Eastern Europe—to serious scrutiny in order to detect similarities and differences *not* to establish them as *ontological* others in relation to the West[4] or to each other, but to testify to their *historical, cultural, and social* specificities. This is by no means a new endeavour: there exists a rich

[3] On cross-cultural feminism see Mohanty (2006), for instance the statement: "In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because *no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining*. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully" (2006, 226, italics added).

[4] By "West" we mean the various philosophical, social and economic structures and institutions that have affected the development of the so-called first world in contrast to third world or second world countries.

body of research on writing by women in both areas.[5] However, cross-cultural research into women writers has so far been scarce.[6] In our view this may result in the mystification of particular national cultures and their specificities. One of the aims of our project has been to demystify the unique character of Russia as the "other" of Europe. By contrasting and comparing it with the Polish case, the project aims to show that many processes that have taken place in Russian women's writing, have also taken place in Polish women's writing (and probably also in other East European, former socialist countries).

The experiences of patriarchy, imperialism, socialism, totalitarianism, postsocialism and neoliberalism in the former socialist, East European countries need to be worked through. The editors and contributors of this volume are interested, first and foremost, in the lives and representations of particular writers and their historicized experiences, which are approached from the viewpoint of feminist and gender studies. These historicized experiences are analysed through different literary sources: narrative fiction, memoirs, letters, autobiographical writings, interviews, poems, and documentary texts. The historical and literary sources form a database of "other knowledge," by which is also meant "silent" or "weak" knowledge.[7]

In the various methodologies and theories of experience two fundamental approaches may be observed. Both seem to have their origins

[5] See, for example, the overview of research on Russian and Polish women's writing in Chowaniec, Phillips and Rytkönen (2008, 8–27).

[6] Comparative studies on gender in the postsocialist world have been published in English since the early 1990s, for example Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (eds.), *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, London: Routledge, 1993. Comparative literary studies on Slavic/postcommunist literatures published recently in English include Janaszek-Ivaničková 2007; Kalinowska 2004; Chitnis 2005 and Chernetsky 2007.

[7] This "other knowledge," as pointed out by Ulla-Maija Peltonen in her article "Boundless Experience: Perspectives on Other Knowledge" ("Rajaton kokemus–näkökulmia toiseen tietoon," 2009, 16–21), challenges the so-called official knowledge. Individuals carry with them knowledge that may be difficult to explain or interpret. It can be inscribed in different narratives, memories, autobiographical texts and interviews as "particular, experiential, situated, wondering, revealing and contemplating" knowledge (Hänninen, Sakari, Jouko Karjalainen and Tuukka Lahti, *Toinen tieto. Kirjoituksia huono-osaisuuden tunnistamisesta.* Helsinki, 2005, 3–4; cited in Peltonen 2009, 17).

in the early modern humanistic perspective.[8] The first sees "experience" as a methodological tactic for understanding the world, approached by means of the human mind, and for explaining it through clear categories. In fact, this approach assumes that it is impossible to know things-in-themselves (as the Kantian critique of metaphysics tries to prove). The world may be described through its structure, explained through experiment rather than experience. The poststructuralist's claim that there is nothing outside the text—the Derridian "il n'y a pas de hors-texte," as formulated in his concept of textualism[9]—is the crucial consequence of such thinking.

Consequently, even though the individualist awareness of the mature modernist subject in the secular world makes experience unattainable, mainly because of the impossibility of its translation into a common language, the affective, emotional realm of the experience would still seem possible there, where the ordered, pragmatic, rationalist mind does not reach (a sphere where instead of pragmatic and cognitive drives, the affective curiosity, or feelings, come into play). Such an experience would go beyond the control of human language, and human aesthetic activity. In this sense, experience would be something that "happens" rather than something "which is experienced," and would take place beyond the borders that are inscribed into the modernist project (Zaidler-Janiszewska 2006, 14; Bauman 1991). Another approach to experience is to admit that there *is* a way to capture or to disclose experiences such as feelings or emotional sensations. The idea of emotion is opposed here to Reason and opens up a way of talking about experience in terms of what is authentic, real and direct. Ewa Kraskowska's writing about experience and gender refers to William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794), which are a fine illustration of these two ways of thinking about our question: one is direct, even naïve, and the other is deliberate, put through the machine of interpretation (Kraskowska 2007). The problem, however, appears when direct experience is translated into language. How can the pre-discursive, direct experience resist the discourse of language, which is, in fact, the discourse of Reason? In this sense, the advocates of Reason may admit—and they often do—that there might be something beyond language, but that such a metaphysical theory can never be translated into language.[10]

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[8] Stretching as far back to the philosophy of Montaigne and Bacon, as seen by the Polish literary theorist Ryszard Nycz in his text entitled *Modernity and Experience* (*Nowoczesność i doświadczenie*, 2006); see also Kraskowska 2007.

[9] One interesting criticism of his standpoint can be found in Callinicos 1989.

[10] This is because deconstruction or "textualism does not deny the existence of extra-discursive objects, it denies our abilities to know these objects. For such

Thus the questions that arise are as inevitable as they are familiar: Is "experience" something that appears when we "talk" the world, when we put it into narratives? Or is it something that happens to us before language? If so, can we understand it without the ordering, categorizing and stereotyping that language brings? Can we talk about experience—as a pre-discursive event—in any other way than via the discourse of Reason? If not, do we actually have any contact with the pre-discursive? These questions lead us to the psychoanalytical approach, to the speaking being (subject) and to the limits of knowing. If, according to Lacan (1982, 159), "[t]he unconscious presupposes that *in* the speaking being there is something, somewhere, which knows more than he [or she] does" then this "knowing-place" is not identical with the self: "It is a map of the speaking being that is beyond its own grasp as other," as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988, 259) puts it. The speaking, writing being, or self, is at once constituted and displaced by the very act of speaking and writing, which, when understood as socio-cultural and historical assemblage or as the collective constituting of the subject, would produce the materiality preceding consciousness (Spivak 1988, 259).

The two different approaches to "experience"—as "knowledge" gained through empirical testing, or as emotional, affective, corporeal perception of the world—can be seen to be inscribed in the etymology of the notion of "experience" in different languages. The very word *experience* comes into European languages from the Latin *experientia*, which indicates the act of trying (from *experient-*, *experiens*, and present participle of *experiri*, to try). It also contains the Greek word *peira*, evident in the words *empiric*, *empirical*, and from which the German word *Furcht* and English *fear*—associated with danger, sudden threat—are derived. Nevertheless, another line of the etymological investigation leads us to the word *per* (as in the Greek word *pereo*—to move towards), meaning: *going through*, which would rather suggest the psychological dimension of experience: an event which does not confront the subject from outside, but from inside. The German notion of *Erfahrung* has the meaning of experience gained in practice or through routine, life experience that makes one wiser, knowledge gained through experience; it is derived from the verb *erfahren* originally meaning "to travel through" and then "to learn." The notion of *Erlebnis* may have the meaning of a specific experience that impresses the subject in a certain way (a sad, powerful, deep, overwhelming and so on, experience). It is derived from the verb *leben*, "to live," which is also

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knowledge would seem to require some reliable mode of access to that object" (Callinicos 1989, 76).

connected with *Leib*, "the body."[11] Thus it may be seen to be associated with bodily perceptions and with living through a specific period of time.[12] Both notions have been actively used and discussed by philosophers of the modern era; *Erfahrung* is associated with positivist, neo-Kantian philosophical notions, which Wilhelm Dilthey contrasted to *Erlebnis* identified as "inner lived experience" (Jay 1998, 48). Interestingly, the Polish *doświadczyć/doświadczać* (perfective and imperfective forms), the commonly used words for "to experience," mean "to be a witness," to *świadczyć* (witness) the events.[13] There are also the Polish words *przeżyć/przeżywać* that mean "to live through, experience," whereas the Russian *опыт*, is derived from the verb *пытать*, "to ask, inquire," and *пытаться*, "to probe, to try" (for further examination of the concept see Savkina's article in this volume). Russian also has the notion of *переживание* ("feeling," "emotional experience"), which is connected to the verb *жить*, "to live."[14]

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[11] The etymological connection between *Leib* and *leben* is mentioned in *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Kluge 2002). See the entry on *leben:* "Ausgangsbedeutung ist also etwa 'fortbestehen, bleiben'," in which a connection is made between *Leib* and *leben.*

[12] For instance, in the Finnish language (the mother tongue of two of the editors of this volume) the equivalents of *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* are *kokemus* and *elämys*, respectively. *Kokemus* is related to the verb *kokea*, originally meaning "to try, to test," then "to experience." *Elämys* is derived from the verb *elää*, "to live."

[13] The main meanings of experience in the English language are: 1. direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge; 2. the fact or state of having been affected by or gained knowledge through direct observation or participation; 3. practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity, 4. the length of such participation; 5. the conscious events that make up an individual life; 6. the events that make up the conscious past of a community or nation or humankind generally; 7. something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through; 8. the act or process of directly perceiving events or reality. Among the main words that are entangled in all the definitions of experience are: participation, observation, consciousness and the personal. These words outline the different fields in which the notion of experience can be scrutinized: from the empirical and pragmatic through the phenomenological to psychoanalytical approaches. These fields divide also the range of synonyms we use for experience respectively, as experience in the empirical and pragmatic approach would be to observe, to get to know, to have; in the phenomenological—to see, to live, and in the psychoanalytical—to feel, to undergo. See *Webster´s Online Dictionary*, http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definitions/Experience [Accessed July 1, 2010].

[14] On the etymology of Russian words see *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Vasmer 1955).

This brief etymological and semantic survey identifies the general semantic fields of experience: one is cognitive, associated with (objective) knowledge (practical confrontation with something endangering the subject) and the other is the affective realm of (subjective) experience, where the subject is going through something and changes emotionally rather than in terms of her intercommunicative knowledge and vision of the world. A third sense and understanding of experience was envisioned by Walter Benjamin in his search for "true experience"—as explicated by Martin Jay (1998, 47–61)—which would defy and transcend the dichotomy between subject and object, emotion and knowledge. Benjamin considered that both the Kantian *Erfahrung* and Diltheyan *Erlebnis* had omitted the crucial sphere of religious experience, which was seen by him to transcend these dichotomies (Jay 1998, 50). The privileged site of that experience was to be found in language, which was to be understood not just as a communicative tool to reveal feelings and thoughts, but as a site "[w]here the divine word manifests itself ontologically, prior to the subjective conventionalism of human name-giving" (Jay 1998, 51). Although this "divine language" of Benjamin might deliver a utopian project, it is possible to trace this "third way" of experience in the secular language of the modern novel and the narrative technique of *erlebte Rede,* as Jay suggests (1998, 53–61).[15]

The ideas of Benjamin and Jay emphasize that, indeed, when speaking of language and communication, the question is not one of a monologist expression of one's thoughts and experiences; neither is it about a rational consciousness in control of itself, but rather a dialogical process, with "more than one subject inhabiting the same space" (Jay 1998, 60). Thus, instead of a dualistic approach to "experience" (objective/subjective, rational/emotional, language/body, difference/sameness and so on), we would like to promote a dialogical approach to experience as an ongoing, changing process, as does Teresa de Lauretis.[16] We also believe that to

[15] The literary technique of *erlebte Rede,* or free indirect discourse, is a combination of the direct and indirect report of a character's words and thoughts by the narrator. *Erlebte Rede* entails clearly both the narrator and character and their different views, but it is often not obvious who is talking: the narrator or the character. See Tammi and Tommola (2003) on free indirect discourse. The literary technique called *skaz* in Russian is close to this concept (see, e.g., Lönnqvist 1989).

[16] "For each person [...] subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction—which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective,

look for the experience in women's writing is to look not only for something that is common to female experience, but also for what is different in linguistic performances contingent on different times, spaces, cultural and social constellations.

Although experience as an analytical category in feminist theory became caught in the dichotomy between discourse and experience, unity and difference—and thus, seemed to disappear from critical discourse—it has been pointed out that grounding feminist epistemology in female experience (of sexuality) has been an important constituent of feminist theory, most notably in feminist standpoint theory (Ramazanoglu 2002, 125),[17] and that "experience" has been a "latent" constituent in the wide range of studies on historical memory, body and subjectivity (Canning 2006, xi; 102–103; 112). Thus, according to Kathleen Canning (2006, 112), "experience" is a "lurking key word" in studies on "history and memory," which frequently use, but rarely theorize the concept of "lived experience." In a similar vein, investigations into the history and representation of the body from the viewpoint of different disciplines (medicine, gender/women's studies, literature and history) largely remain silent on the theoretical implications of the concept of "experience" (Canning 2006, 115). Also, as a key concept of cultural studies, subjectivity is linked with the concepts of body and memory, and thus, with the concept of "experience."[18] In this way we share Canning's view

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engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world" (Lauretis 1984, 159).

[17] Rosi Braidotti (2007, 69) points out in her article "Feminist Epistemology After Postmodernism" that "feminist standpoint theory" or humanist feminism (Harding 1991) has moved on with the new generation of scholars and their rethinking of feminist theory. Thus, the need now is to overcome the nature-culture binary and to dissolve "the obsolete opposition essentialism-constructivism." According to Braidotti, there are three groups of these scholars: so-called third-wave feminists who focus on the history of feminist theory and on the generational differences; Deleuzian feminists who stress the importance of radical immanence and the vital materialism of Deleuze and Guattari; and the scholars of feminist science and technology studies.

[18] See Toril Moi's essay "What Is a Woman?" where she discusses—following Simone de Beauvoir—the "body as situation" as a fundamental situation of the subject in the world, and that this situation always "enters lived experience": "The situation is not coextensive with lived experience, nor reducible to it. In many ways 'lived experience' designates the whole of a person's subjectivity. More particularly the term describes the way an individual makes sense of her situation and actions. Because the concept also comprises my freedom, my lived experience is not wholly determined by the various situations I may be part of. Rather lived

that the category of experience, especially in historical studies, has been revived not in its previous sense of naïve, self-present and authentic experience, but in the sense that these studies have sought to "historicize the category of experience itself" (2006, 120).

Female experience as theorized by scholars of Russian women's writing of the late and post-Soviet period is constructed and discussed in a quite different social, political and cultural context than was the case in Western women's writing of the 1970s–80s (Zherebkina 2003).[19] The feminist philosopher, and one of the contributors to this volume, Irina Zherebkina discusses the concept of "female experience" (женский опыт) in her influential book *The Gendered 90s, or The Phallus Does Not Exist* (Гендерные 90-е, или фаллоса не существует) and asks whether the meaning of this notion in Russian women's writing of the 1980s and 90s differs from its meaning in the classic feminist literary criticism of the 1970s and 80s.[20] At first glance, it does not, writes Zherebkina. The women writers of the late and post-Soviet period strategically and intentionally stress their *femaleness* and their *female experience* as different from male writers and men's literature, grounding their strategy

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experience is, as it were, sedimented over time through my interactions with the world and thus itself becomes part of my situatedness" (Moi 1999, 63). See also Heinämaa 1997 and 1999 and the chapters by Phillips and Kurkijärvi in this volume.

[19] The writers to whom Zherebkina refers in her article include Liudmila Petrushevskaia, Svetlana Vasilenko, Mariia Arbatova, Marina Palei, Ol'ga Tatarina, Elena Tarasova, Nina Gorlanova, Larisa Vaneeva and Irina Polianskaia.

[20] "The term 'experience' was first emphasised by feminist activists and in early feminist consciousness-raising groups. It is most likely to have entered feminist theory via these radical feminist groups. The feminist usage is derived from the tendency of radical groups of that period to employ crude and sometimes incorrect versions of Marxist theory. Marx had argued that the proletariat saw the world under a condition of 'false consciousness' insofar as it accepted the point of view of the bourgeoisie. Early feminists reasoned by analogy that women saw the world from the male point of view. Like the proletariat who mistook bourgeois opinion for truth, women also mistook the biased, male perspective for truth and reality. The process of consciousness-raising was a way for women to share their experiences and to reinterpret them from a female, and ultimately a feminist, perspective. 'Experience' is linked to the idea that the 'personal is political' in that the female experience occurred in the realm of the private or personal (e.g. in the home, the kitchen, the bedroom). Both imply that political action would have to take a new form and could no longer be limited to passing just laws. 'Experience' quickly became one of the core concepts of feminist theory, and formed the basis for feminist epistemology" (See entry "experience" by Judith Grand in Code 2000, 188–189).

in the observation that the writing about women of prominent Russian male authors lacks a real understanding of female (bodily) experience. However, according to Zherebkina, if the construction of "female experience" by classical feminist theory is based on the repression of the female in patriarchal culture *and* on self-sufficient female subjectivity (as in the notion of *jouissance féminine*), then the post-Soviet construction of female experience is based only on the former: the repression of the female (Zherebkina 2003, 62).

The main differences between the post-Soviet construction of female experience and classic feminist theory are as follows: 1) The aim of the Western feminist movement and feminist philosophy was to make personal matters count as political matters, whereas late and post-Soviet women's writing was aimed primarily against the public, politicized role of women as defined by the state as "happy, working Soviet mothers"; thus, according to Zherebkina, women writers strive to make the private *even more* private, a process in which they see the possibility of representing the female according to social reality.[21] And 2) Western feminist theory strove to liberate women from biological essentialism (that is from the concept of the natural predetermination of women to the family and their reproductive sexuality), whereas late and post-Soviet women writers do exactly the opposite: they represent the female in biological and physiological terms, that is, in the terms of the formerly forbidden instincts, needs, drives and so on. The reason for this strategy, according to Zherebkina, is a reaction against the official Soviet representation of sex/gender in its performative social roles. What is more, in the late post-Soviet women's writing, as Zherebkina notes, "the female body is represented in the unbearable conditions of physical survival in the social spaces of pain, such as the hospital ward, operating-room, maternity hospital, abortion clinic" (Zherebkina 2003, 63–64).

These characteristics of women's writing in the late and post-Soviet period may be interpreted as symptoms of the traumatic experience of systemic sexual violence. Thus, in this writing, it is not a question of the discursive or stylistic practices of the representation of gender, but, as Zherebkina and along with her other scholars of Russian women's writing of the 1980s–90s have observed, of the *biological* difference of the point of view (Parnell 2000, 159–161; Rovenskaia 2004).

The key issues of female experience in Eastern Europe are related to trauma and memory. The question is often, as indicated by Zherebkina,

[21] See also Havelková's (1993, 92–93) discussion of the significance of family and the private sphere for Czech women during the communist regime.

about the traumatic experience of sexual violence in the "social spaces of pain." It is also a question of the trauma related to the Soviet invasion during and after World War II in the former Soviet states. This is indicated by women's writing in post-Soviet Latvia (Meshkova 2003) and by the vivid example of the Finnish author Sofi Oksanen's (b. 1977) award-winning novel *The Purge* (translation 2009, orig. *Puhdistus*, 2008)[22] in which readers witness issues linked to the Soviet occupation of Estonia in the 1940s and 50s allegorically—through the trauma caused by the sexual violence and abuse suffered by the main female character and by the sexual abuse of women in contemporary Europe in the form of trafficking in women and girls.

Trauma studies raise a distinctive set of questions associated with explorations of "experience." The basis of Western trauma studies lies in the Holocaust, but the theories have offered a fitting framework for a variety of different studies that approach other collective traumatic and extreme experiences, such as wars, conflicts and catastrophes. What is more, in our neo-liberal era global mass culture binds together a growing number of people who have unavoidably been confronted by the traumatic events of the Holocaust, the Gulag, wars, nuclear catastrophes, natural catastrophes and terrorist attacks (Trubina 2009, 904). Most often trauma studies draw upon psychology and define trauma as an unuttered, latent, belated and repetitive experience.[23] Whereas experience seems to escape definition, because it is everywhere and part of the "common sense," trauma escapes words and representation; it is "lacking" and seems to be nowhere in particular. In the words of Elena Trubina: "trauma remains in our culture as the sign of the impossibility of full understanding, concentrating within itself the truth of 'what happened,' escaping the mediation and assimilation by a collective or individual worldview" (2009, 906). This leads to a paradoxical situation where a literary researcher, for example, who is exploring the relationship between literary texts and trauma, has to pay attention to the traces of the unarticulated, repressed

[22] The novel is based on Oksanen's play of the same title (2007) and received the most prestigious literary award in Finland for the category of novel, the Finlandia prize, in 2008. Oksanen has also co-edited, with the Estonian author and director Imbi Paju, an anthology of articles on Estonian history during the Soviet occupation *Behind It All Was Fear (Kaiken takana oli pelko*, 2009).

[23] See Cathy Caruth (1995, 1996); Paul Connerton (1989); Jenny Edkins (2003); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D. (1992); Leigh Gilmore (2000); Nicola King (2000); Dominick LaCapra (2001, 2004); Elaine Scarry (1985) and Anne Whitehead (2004).

and silenced in the text.[24] Cathy Caruth, in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, identifies the most profound challenge of trauma, when she states:

> If traumatic experience, as Freud indicates suggestively, is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs, then these texts, each in its turn, ask what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness (Caruth 1996, 5).

On the other hand, writing can be seen as a process of "working through" the trauma, thus indicating that writing, and other art forms as well, can give the trauma a place and form. Literature as such can be seen as a witness and testimony to traumatic events and experience (Felman and Laub 1992, xviii).

Dominick LaCapra approaches trauma though the concepts of "working through" and "acting out." Working through is a memory process whereby "one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one (or one's people) back then which is related to, but not identical with, here and now," whereas "In acting out the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed" (2001, 66, 70). In the context of traumatic experience it may also be helpful to look at the traditional division of experience into *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* through their relationship to the concepts of working through and acting out. In this connection the former may be seen as an unintegrated experience, such as trauma, whereas the latter might be a relatively integrated experience, indicating that *Erlebnis* could be connected to acting out and *Erfahrung* to the processes of working through. In terms of memory *Erfahrung* may also be described as a more analytical and distanced memory of the event whereas *Erlebnis* is a present, lived experience. A traumatic experience "stays" in the stage of a present experience. The connection between traumatic experience and memory is that the "traumatic memory carries the experience into the present and future in that the events are compulsively relived or re-experienced" (LaCapra 2004, 54–56).

[24] Dori Laub writes that the listener to the trauma "needs to know that the trauma survivor who is bearing witness has no prior knowledge, no comprehension and no memory of what happened. That he or she profoundly fears such knowledge, shrinks away from it and is apt to close off at any moment, when facing it" (Felman and Laub 1992, 58).

Shoshana Felman describes the historic trauma of World War II as "a trauma we consider the watershed of our times and which the book [*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*] will come to view not as an event encapsulated in the past, but history which is essentially *not over*, a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities" (1992, xiv). Trauma and extreme experience will be explored in this volume in the context of "the Great Patriotic War" in Soviet women's writing, but not only (see the articles by Kirsi Kurkijärvi and Renata Ingbrant).

Trauma studies pay attention also to the relationship between witnessing and the potential for working through a trauma through art, and for passing on the trauma through culture. Psychoanalysis has recognized "that one does not have to possess or *own* the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it" (Felman 1992, 15, emphasis in the text). Dori Laub (1992, 57) adds that the trauma is not witnessed until the emergence of the narrative in which the event is born, and as a consequence can be "known." The role of the listener plays an important role here: the listener, hearer or reader of the trauma is a medium for the narrative and becomes a co-owner of the traumatic event. The motives of witnessing and testimony are transferred to the literary text itself, for example in war writing the motive of bearing witness to the events is very strong. When interviewed, the war writers often support this point themselves by describing their willingness or even feeling of obligation to write a testimony of the events which they have been through. According to LaCapra,

> One might argue that narratives in fiction may also involve truth claims on a structural or general level by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving a plausible "feel" for experience and emotion which might be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods (LaCapra 2001, 13).

Often there may be plenty of historical data about the events while the trauma experienced by people remains unrecorded. The above quotation also points out that fictional writing may also be bound, and almost certainly in the cases when it touches upon collective traumas, to truth claims about the events. Margot Norris raises the question of historical facticity in connection with war writing in her book *War Writing in the Twentieth Century*, and how it has affected the construction of war literature:

> At the same time, concern with fiction's inability to match the "truth value" of historical facticity tends to privilege writing that has testimonial power—the memoir, the diary, the letter, the poetry and fiction of the soldier—as we see in the writing of Erich Maria Remarque and the trench poets, for example (Norris 2000, 22).

Felman writes "that testimony is the literary—or discursive—mode par excellence of our times, and that our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony" (1992, 5). In the traditional legal sense testimony is needed when facts are unclear and *truth* is called into question. The need for testimony after World War II—known in Russia as "the Great Patriotic War"—and the crises of truth connected with it in contemporary cultural narratives, goes beyond the aims and questions of the legal testimony. In war writing the crisis can be seen in the tendency towards testimonial forms of writing.

Many Soviet and Russian women writers who have dealt with the Great Patriotic War in their works have explicitly expressed their desire to *bear witness to women's lives* and experiences. Natal'ia Baranskaia's (1908–2004) book *Remembrance Day* (День Поминовения, 1989) describes the lives of seven women before, during and after World War II. The writer notes in an interview that she wanted to write particularly about women at the home front, and adds: "If I can express one tenth of my feelings about the war and my experiences during the war in my novel, then I will have succeeded, then people must understand what our war was, and they will understand how it lives in our emotions" (Monks 1988, 33, 32). Svetlana Aleksievich, born in 1948, takes the role of a "listener" to the war trauma of Soviet women. She describes her motivation in collecting interviews with ordinary Soviet women about the war for her book *War's Unwomanly Face* (У войны не женское лицо, first published 1985):

> But men wrote about men—that was clear straight away. All we know about war is told in a "man's voice." We are all prisoners of "male" images and "male" sensations of war. "Men's" words. Women stay silent. [...] Even the ones who served at the front. If they suddenly start talking, they do not tell about their own war, but of someone else's war that is foreign to them. They follow the male canon (Aleksievich, 2005, 4).[25]

[25] Here reference is made to a Russian language web publication of the book that can be found at Aleksievich's official site: http://www.alexievich.info/books Ru.html [Accessed September 26, 2010, translation by Kirsi Kurkijärvi].

Emilia Alekseevna Nikolaeva, a female partisan interviewed by Aleksievich tells about her fear that no one will learn about her experiences during the war and underlines the need for testimony: "I've had it on my mind all these years. I would wake up in the night and lie with my eyes open. It occurred to me sometimes that I would carry it all into my grave and that nobody would ever learn about it; the thought filled me with fear" (Aleksievich, no year).[26] Even though Dori Laub writes about the destructiveness of the "unwitnessed trauma" in connection with the particular case of the Holocaust, the above excerpt shows that in other cases too the most painful trauma is the one that is unwitnessed (Felman and Laub 1992, 80–82).

To reread women's writing is to rediscover the forgotten, the blank spaces of hidden female experience; it is therefore crucial—aesthetically, but also historically, politically, socially—to recognize (or to map) the most important orientation points in women's writing. The project of mapping female experience emphasizes, on the one hand, the connection with the others (especially other women) and the continuity between generations. This continuum can be seen in philosophical categories as the development of the individual subject, but also in a historical and political sense—especially in the context of Polish and Russian women's writing taken together—as a result of the specific national, political, and historical development of the position of women in postcommunist settings.

The question could be posed, then, as to whether mapping experience is possible *only* in so far as we believe in the perfectly ordered and clean, predictable and describable world, disciplined in human's terms, where everything appears rational, where everything is, in fact, a result of human aesthetic acts.[27] Polish philosopher Agata Bielik-Robson claims in her book *Other Modernity* (2000) that this is the world that the Enlightenment dreamed about: the world of nature under human control, of liberation from the rules established by tradition, religion and the past; of the secular subject, of constant progress, namely the world described by Jürgen Habermas in his somewhat optimistic lecture *The Unfinished Project of Modernity*.[28] Habermas thinks that an aesthetic consciousness which rebels

[26] *War's Unwomanly Face*. Here the reference is made to an English translation of the book published at Aleksievich's official site: http://www.alexievich.info/booksEN.html [Accessed September 26, 2010].

[27] We refer to the interesting book on modernist subjectivity by Agata Bielik-Robson 2000.

[28] See *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, edited by Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèvres and Seyla Benhabib. Cambridge. MA: MIT Press, 1997.

against everything normative bestowed by tradition "explodes" the continuum of history. Habermas sees this rebellion as the maturity of modern men, liberated from any dependence.[29] In the domain of tradition, the past, history, is turned into the whims of free individuals. This turn towards the individual person, her feelings and her pretence to describe and explain (or aestheticize) the world makes her a free subject, disconnected from her own past, the historical continuum and historical communication, where the world was once "seized" in clear forms. Modern(ist) man is free in his aesthetic activity, he is, in fact, disenchanted with the world. Everything that happens to him is constantly new, unusual; he is driven by the need for a new adventure.

In recognition of such a position of the human subject, Giorgio Agamben declares the end of experience, because the unusual cannot be translated into experience, "for experience has its necessary correlation not in knowledge but in authority—that is to say, the power of words and narration."[30] Experience, in this approach, is guaranteed only by common language (by theories that explain the world), of which modern man is deprived. This is why he adds:

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[29] See Erik Oddvar Eriksen and Jarle Weigard, *Understanding Habermas: Communicative Action and Deliberative Democracy*, London: Continuum International Publishing, 2004.

[30] Agamben 2007 (1978), 16. Agamben searches for experience not in consciousness but in language: "Published in Italian in 1978, *Infancy and Histor*y constitutes one of Agamben's earliest attempts to grasp and articulate the implications of such an as [*sic*] experience of language as such. Consisting of a series of interconnected essays on concepts such as history, temporality, play, and gesture, *Infancy and Histor*y provides an importance [*sic*] entrance to Agamben's later work on politics and ethics, particularly in the eponymous essay of the edition on the concept of infancy understood as an experiment of language as such. In this, Agamben argues that the contemporary age is marked by the destruction or loss of experience, in which the banality of everyday life cannot be experienced per se but only undergone, a condition which is in part brought about by the rise of modern science and the split between the subject of experience and of the knowledge that it entails. Against this destruction of experience, which is also extended in modern philosophies of the subject such as Kant and Husserl, Agamben argues that the recuperation of experience entails a radical rethinking of experience as a question of language rather than of consciousness, since it is only in language that the subject has its site and origin. Infancy, then, conceptualizes an experience of being without language, not in a temporal or developmental sense of preceding the acquisition of language in childhood, but rather, as a condition of experience that precedes and continues to reside in any appropriation of language." *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/agamben.htm [Accessed June 13, 2010].

> The questions of experience can be approached nowadays only with an acknowledgement that it is no longer accessible to us. For just as modern man has been deprived of his biography, his experience has likewise been appropriated. Indeed, his incapacity to have and communicate experiences is perhaps one of the few self-certainties to which he can lay claim (Agamben 2007, 15).

Common knowledge and the past are the very conditions of experience, since it is—also etymologically—an event that confronts the subject with fear and uncertainty. In the new era, according to Agamben's way of thinking, since the modern subject is the creator of her own (auto)biography, she cannot be confronted with a sudden, unknown, threat (See Bielik-Robson 2000).

Here we need to come back to the idea of mapping. Drawing upon our analysis above, mapping experience—where mapping, in the modernist sense, means "colonizing the space"—would mean rationalizing, ordering human experiences, confining them within borders. In this sense maps may be equated with the apparatus of the state, social control, the map as a "colonized space" (Michel de Certeau).[31] The editors of this volume do not assume that the description and placement (ordering) of all the fields of human existence is possible and achievable, because the discourses in which we produce knowledge are ever changing, in transformation, and contingent. However, if we—just as in our investigation of the notion of experience—look for the hidden, the "inexpressible," for what is beyond the power of words and narration, we would have to look into the inconsistencies in the maps—to continue the metaphor of mapping—that is, into the gaps or blank places (see Neal 2007). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari express well such a beyond-the-modernist approach to maps in their *A Thousand Plateaus*:

> Make a map, not a tracing. […] The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back "to the same." The map has to do with

[31] De Certeau 1984. Important in this context is the sociological analysis of space by Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1984) and *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1991).

> performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged "competence" (Deleuze and Guattari 1992, 13–14).

Thus, the questions that arise in relation to mapping are connected with experience and the limits of knowing and knowledge. Understood in this way, mapping challenges the subject's knowledge and her language and is especially interesting in the literary investigation of women's writing, where the female subject—as an historically and culturally underrepresented subject—has been searching for a long time for an indirect way of expressing herself. The methods of mimicry, white ink, or palimpsest have always been at hand in women's literary activity. In this sense women's experiences have been doubly hidden from their socio-cultural position as women, and from the language that tends to organize, qualify and rationalize them.

Therefore, mapping experience in women's writing—as we bear in mind the modernist development of the notion and its position in the contemporary aestheticized world—becomes a revolutionary attempt to find a platform for communication and a language that might express the experience of the subjects. A (post)modernist subject with no past, with no metaphysics (Derrida's critique of the philosophy of presence), challenging the permanently new, realizing her interconnection with power and violence (Foucault), seeking comprehensive ecstasy (Bataille), without memory and with no melancholy that would allow her to contemplate past wisdom (see Bielik-Robson 2000),[32] is lost and uncomfortable in a world without any rules other than those she creates herself. Understood from this perspective, the mapping (of) experience in women's writing is an attempt to rediscover the past. It is actually a movement contrary to that in which the modernist subject tends to go—not forward, but backward—into the past, digging into language, searching for memory, searching for hidden hints, for earlier generations, and in so doing locating the generational turning points on our map. Moreover, mapping also goes against the modernist idea of the subject being constantly on the move,

[32] There are various interesting studies about melancholy. On the one hand there are philosophical and anthropological approaches to this notion as a category characteristic of "linear cultures. Melancholy never throws away anything" (Bielik-Robson 1998, 80). Melancholy is a positive feature; it is a guarantee of the memory and the identity of the members of a given culture. On the other hand, there is the psychoanalytical approach (Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva) in which melancholy is understood as a thread of the Self, as a possibility of slipping into the paralysing love of the lost object (see eg. Kristeva 1989).

because it requires positioning, even though it assumes a further move, but a move which can be planned.

Overview of the Mapping Experience in Russian and Polish Women's Writing

The volume encompasses eleven articles which discuss the critical views that Polish and Russian women writers have articulated with regard to constructions of femininity in the national imagination from the 19th to the 21st centuries. Major themes of the articles include women's experiences as writers in the 19th century; women's embodied experiences of a traumatic past; body and sexuality in the different ages of women; political and aesthetic discourses and femininity. Although the articles are arranged in chronological order, they do not form an absolute chronological or periodic continuum, i.e. from Romanticism to Postmodernism, although references to certain aesthetic periods are made. The authors of the articles reflect in detail on how the women writers and their literary texts represent different understandings and experiences in relation to dominant perceptions, for example, of the memory of war, of motherhood, of art and aesthetics, and so on. Readers are encouraged to seek parallels and continuities between the different historical times and spaces; between women's writing in Russia and Poland; between different scholarly approaches and aims. The first two articles in Part I "Authorship and Experience in 19th-century Russian and Polish Women's Writing," by Grażyna BORKOWSKA and Evgeniia STROGANOVA, address a historical time when women writers found themselves both among the privileged, educated classes in society as well as among the marginalized in the literary world, as women. Narcyza Żmichowska (1819–1876) and Elena Andreevna Gan (1814–1842) were both writers of the Romantic period who, each in their own way tackled the literary situation of their time and the constraints they had to face as writers. Borkowska notes in her article that Żmichowska "did not value writing in the way in which it was commonly rated in the Romantic period" and that she preferred live conversation or epistolary contact with her friends, allowing her and her female friends "to freely shape their own lives." Stroganova on the other hand, stresses that for Gan the experience of being under the tutelage of the prominent male editor Osip Senkovskii was a traumatic experience, which she discussed in her letters to friends and relatives. Whereas Stroganova stresses the traumatizing effect of Senkovskii's editorial interventions in Gan's texts, Borkowska notes the importance of the joy

and happiness that the community of female friends and conversations with them brought to Żmichowska, as testified by her letters.

The third article of Part I by Ursula PHILLIPS, in contrast to the two articles mentioned above, takes up the issue of *fiction*, quoting Eleanore Holveck‘s discussion of Simone de Beauvoir‘s perception of fiction “as an articulation of lived metaphysical experience,” and capable of “express[ing] the unity of experience‘, i.e. the many dimensions of the experience simultaneously: the psychological, emotional, metaphysical, social, political and ideological.” Thus, Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841–1910) created her cycle of stories *Gloria victis* about the experience of the January Insurrection of 1863–1864 in fictional form, instead of as memoirs, in order to communicate “her eye-witness account through the inclusion of strong partisan emotions.” Phillips argues, that Orzeszkowa in writing her experience of the Insurrection more than forty years after the event, resurrects not only political and national commemorative forces, but also, and perhaps even more so, her “younger self […] suppressed beneath the dominant discourse of insurrection memory and mourning.” Instead of the dominant discourses, there emerges a “relatively exciting and even joyous experience.”

Part II “Extreme and Silent Experiences: Trauma and Memory” brings in the issue of *historical memory* and the question of personal versus public memory. Renata INGBRANT‘S essay on Anna Świrszczyńska‘s (1909-1984) cycle of poems about the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 takes on board the notion of extreme experiences of pain and violence in women’s writing. As a survivor and eyewitness of the Uprising, Świrszczyńska has difficulty—like so many other witnesses of the war—to find an appropriate form of expression. It takes Świrszczyńska thirty years before she creates her best-known work, *Building the Barricade* (1974). Ingbrant argues in a similar vein to Phillips on Orzeszkowa, that the volume of poetry has remained controversial in Polish historical memory “due to its unconventional approach to [the Uprising] as it laid bare the ambiguity at the heart of the phenomenon of heroism and stood against the glorification of rebellion.” Ingbrant‘s application of Julia Kristeva‘s concept of the “abject” to Świrszczyńska‘s poem is thought-provoking. For Kristeva the decaying, excretory body is abject because it signifies our mortality—but for Świrszczyńska the mortal, abject body is perceived with motherly love, eternally linked to the experience of giving birth.

Discussion on the theme of war, extreme embodied experiences and controversy with regard to heroism continues in Kirsi KURKIJÄRVI‘S essay on Soviet women’s war writing. Official Soviet historical memory of World War II consists in the “preferred heroic, patriotic narratives on

the war." Kurkijärvi refers to the Belarusian writer Svetlana Aleksievich's book *The War's Unwomanly Face* where women who participated in the Great Patriotic War (World War II) testify to the difficulties they experienced after the war in dealing with and working through the trauma and tragedy of war. According to their accounts, although on the surface the lives of the women veterans continued as it had before the war, "[t]he body forgot more slowly." Kurkijärvi applies the concept of lived experience as presented in Toril Moi's interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's notion of the body as situation. "The location of the lived body has a significant role in the construction of the war experience and its memory," Kurkijärvi states, because it is the key to "silenced stories, forgotten in the regulated representations and cultural memory of war."

In the third article of Part II Marja RYTKÖNEN discusses the intricacies of remembering the Soviet period and experience from the post-Soviet perspective. Russian contemporary writer Nina Katerli (b. 1934) reads her mother's (who was a Soviet writer) letters and notes in order to find out what "*could and would have been*, had her mother decided not to conform to the official notions of what a Soviet writer should write about." The silent experiences—feelings and thoughts—can be heard in personal letters and diaries—albeit also under the surveillance of the authorities—as is demonstrated by Katerli's reading of her mother's personal accounts. Rytkönen addresses the question of post-Soviet historical memory in proximity to postcolonial memory "revealing" the repressed truths about the past. The issue of matrilineal memory, of the connection and communication of silent embodied knowledge between different generations of women seems to be a constituent feature of post-Soviet writing.

The issues of body and transformation take centre stage in Part III "Intersections of Body, Sexuality and Age" in the articles by Urszula CHOWANIEC and Irina SAVKINA, which discuss the different ages of women's experience, adolescence and old age, respectively. Chowaniec elaborates the notion of experience in the context of literary representations of menstruation in Polish culture. Texts by Irena Krzywicka (1899–1994) from the 1930s as well as by Olga Tokarczuk (b. 1962) and Izabela Filipiak (b. 1961) from the 1990s form the special focus in Chowaniec's analysis of the corporeal, cultural and social representations of menstruation as the "intimately social" experience of "becoming a woman." Chowaniec poses the question as to whether anything has changed in the actual experience and representation of menstruation in the 65 years that separate the appearance of these texts.