

Silences and Parodies in the East – West Feminist Dialogue

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Identity¹ as a problem

This is an attempt to consider the question of feminist identity, understood as adequate participation in the respective discursive community on its part understood as one “sharing knowledge, beliefs, values and communicative strategies”² from the perspective of that community’s newly enlarged East European membership.

The East European striving for identity, national identity in the cases of the separate countries, can among other things be seen as a resistance to identities imposed from the outside: the West or the East, depending on the priorities of global politics at the (historical) moment. Since the early 1990s, Eastern Europe appears to have been struggling in an identity paradox: it wants to be like the West: part of Europe, of European structures, of European economy, and it also wants to be itself, something it was not allowed to be for almost 50 years. This has in a number of cases turned into a kind of schizophrenic stance, with manifestations like belligerent nationalisms and other monstrosities.

The appropriation of feminism as identity on the part of some East European women seems problematic in an analogous way. The tendency towards feminism seems to be part of the recoil from the East-imposed ‘socialist-internationalist’ identity of the Iron Curtain period, which did not amount to much more than a facade hiding imperial hegemony, and was therefore parodic,³ itself. As Eastern Europe is now again in a peripheral position,

1 For the purposes of this discussion I place the emphasis in the concept of identity as a matter of subjective choice.

2 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: the Theory and Politics of Irony*, London 1994, 91.

3 Here and further on I focus on one discursive, rather than aesthetic aspect of parody – its duplicitous – double-voiced, double-faced nature. Dictionary definitions of parody point out two main elements: a) ‘copying the style’, ridicule, an intention to amuse; b) weak and unsuccessful – or exaggerated imitation. Even though I am aware of the importance of such elements as intentionality and/or mockery

this time facing west, the same parodic mechanism is still at work, so there is now the danger of the feminist identity being accepted here as another (parodic) facade – one among many – to please our new ‘Big Brother’, the West. Another aspect or ‘layer’ of this possibility for parody is that acceptance is in this case very relative: in fact most of the acceptance – statistically speaking – is rejection. (The number of people who accept feminism is negligible in comparison to the number of those who reject it.) To this, the general tendency of our society to distort/corrupt values imported from outside even more than those inherited from its own past should be added.

I see being a feminist as a way of assuming a subject position, one of acting, struggling, participating in the distribution of power on both the personal and social level. The feminist position can therefore be considered a dissident position, but what does being a dissident mean in a society like ours which has most of the outward attributes of democracy, plus a lot of ‘freedom’ – and even privileges – for women on paper? There seems to be a connection between the ‘normalcy’⁴ of a society and the feminist protest/struggle. Well, post-communist society is anything but ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’. Bulgarian society⁵ for example has been regressing for most of the last fifteen years and the transition has not reached much further than a split economy with at least three levels: the remains of socialist economy, the accompanying ‘shadow’ or ‘grey’ economy and the meagre sprouts of market economy. The distribution of power is also abnormal, respectively. There is a surface, which is more or less visible, while being disproportionately small in comparison to what is happening underneath, away from the public gaze. Hypocrisy and demagoguery, instead of diminishing, have acquired truly gigantic proportions, and on all levels of life it is hardly possible to tell the real from the sham – an absurdity of existence that defies generalisation, theorising, or definition because of its amorphousness and fluidity. So for many of us everyday life seems to take place somewhere between uncertain realities, on the teetering edge of sanity. Almost everything in our society is counterfeit; absurdity is the essence of our lives. (Bulgaria may be an extreme case in that but it certainly is not an isolated case.) Yet, we try to speak/write, rationalise, and even theorise this reality, the result often approa-

in the mechanism of parody, I think that they are not always necessary, i. e. a parodic effect can, and often does appear where it was not wanted. The element of intentionality (mockery) can thus be added or taken out at will by whoever chooses to interpret a situation as parodic – and this is a possibility I sometimes take advantage of to disregard that element in my discussion.

- 4 I am here using the term ‘normal’ in a way which has been very widespread in the political discourse in this part of the world since the time of ‘perestroika’ (the late 1980ies), and usually envisages the political stability and material prosperity of the West.
- 5 Most of my comments on East European societies are, naturally, based on my experience of Bulgaria. I am aware of the differences between the different East European societies and the danger of generalising, but I am also aware of something I would call *diverse similitude*, which enables me to take the risk and hope for the best. On the one hand, I am part of a tendency in doing this, the fact that this is often done is itself worthy of attention. On the other hand, I have good reason for being self-conscious about it: there is no way, really, of drawing the line between the commonalities and differences in the East European experience, but if one insists on talking about *experiences* one has to face the relativistic quicksand.

ching parody – the theoriser can hardly predict exactly where the reality will stray from the text. Thus the whole project of attempting to speak about reality can acquire a parodic dimension, intended or not.

Parody

While at the basis of parody there is, according to Linda Hutcheon, “textual doubling”,⁶ the East European experience is pervaded by an ‘experiential doubling’, where almost every fact of life has a hidden, dangerous more often than not, undercurrent of meaning. Practically anything one can think of may fail to function according to expectations, to an extent hardly believable outside in the ‘normal’ world. Almost nothing of this is funny (the potential for a humorous effect which groups parody with other discursive practices like paradox, for example, is important to emphasise here), yet it often evokes humorous reactions of a probably self-preserving survivalist nature: “Parody has been used to further a politics of despair”.⁷ Parodying, much like assuming a feminist position, seems to imply the appropriation of power, a motion directed out of marginality, and a challenge to hierarchies.⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin looks upon irony – and that can be said to hold true for the whole cluster of discursive practices that rely on detachment and/or doubling – as “a means of overcoming a situation, of rising above it, a means of liberation from deadlock situations”.⁹ This is what in my opinion makes such practices a suitable approach for a position of powerlessness like ours. However, in our everyday lives, although we – East European women – may sometimes function as parodists, we are being caught up all the time in the trap of a reality which is actually parody – that is, when we make the mistake of assuming any normalcy on the part of the system. It seems that this functioning as parodists is easily transferred to our position in the feminist discursive community. It should also be noted that the possibility of parodying on the part of its East European membership seems a potentially fruitful one for the community in that while “there is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices”¹⁰ parody may also contain “a critical dimension in its marking of difference at the heart of similarity”.¹¹

6 Hutcheon, *Edge*, see note 2, 4.

7 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, London 1993, 146.

8 Parody also works in this respect in ways similar to those of other ironic practices – satire, pastiche etc. I have sometimes taken the liberty to use the terms interchangeably mostly because of the similarities in the effects produced.

9 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorcestva* [The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation], Moscow 1979, 279; my translation.

10 Butler, *Trouble*, see note 7, 146.

11 Hutcheon, *Edge*, see note 2, 4.

Feminism as identity

The way feminism as identity and self-subjectification is adopted by East European women does require problematisation. For the purposes of this discussion I think it unnecessary to go into the identity/subjectivity debates. However, like Judith Butler, I see identity as agency in terms of performativity, while at the same time keeping in mind its potential to work as restriction, as repressive of differences per se, as “repressive closure”.¹² I also find Allison Weir’s formulation of the collective feminist identity helpful:

Our collective identity as feminists can be formulated in terms of a collective capacity to interpret and articulate collective needs, to set collective goals, through a continual process of dialogue based on a commitment to the inclusion of all voices. This, of course, depends on an ability to understand language as a medium of shared understanding and dialogue, of the articulation of difference, and not only as a force of deception and oppression.¹³

‘Who are the East European feminists?’, seems to be a question intricately connected with the fact of their absent ‘voice(s)’ and the necessity for them to borrow, adopt, or appropriate voices to render their reality and experience explicable and thus come out of the silence which their marginality imposes on them. Voice in Bakhtinian terms is understood as a “discursive marker for [the hero’s, R. M.] *autonomy* [my accentuation, R. M.]; the hero functions with his own discourse, his own voice ...”¹⁴ Insofar as Bakhtinian theory tends to transcend the boundaries between the world of fiction and that of everyday communication, the connection between autonomy (own voice) and subjectivity (active position) that he makes seems relevant here, especially as he implants in his discussion of the fictional ‘hero’ the element of manipulation (on the part of the author¹⁵). I am using the term voice for convenience, to indicate a combination of:

1. Active position – which implies choice, that is, self-subjectification.
2. Awareness of an identity, of belonging to a discursive community – in this case the feminist one.
3. Awareness of the performativity of speaking – which implies looking upon it as a politically important act.

Thus the silences of East European feminists and their problematic voices can be seen from a number of different perspectives. Many of these silences are part of a set of inner tensions and contradictions inherent in the notion of ‘feminisms’, and have to do with the

¹² Alison Weir, *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity*, London 1996, 123.

¹³ Weir, *Logics*, see note 12, 132.

¹⁴ Bakhtin, *Eстетика*, see note 9, 289.

¹⁵ The issue of ‘authorship of the discourse’ in the feminist community is also relevant here.

problem of reconciling feminism as a desired (group) identity and Eastern Europe as another group identity, both wanted and unwanted (?). Such silences work to disrupt/subvert discourses in ways, which are similar to the mechanisms of parody.

What enables this operation seems to be connected, at least in part, with the absurdity dominating our societies, with the fact that what we are living through is – or tries to be – two (maybe even more?) historical/cultural epochs: the post-modern and the modern, or post-industrial and early capitalism, at the same time.

Silences

The silences of the West speaking of Eastern Europe seem to a great extent to result from gaps in communication and information: the ‘Second World’¹⁶ is hardly transparent from the perspective of the West among others, for historical (it was ‘closed’ for the preceding 50 years), technical (like bad infrastructure), and other reasons. In the East – West feminist dialogue therefore the speaking often needs to be about the East European experience – that is what is different and important – but the Western speakers/writers hardly have a reliable way of either knowing or making out much of it, really. Added to this is the necessity to generalise: generalizing seems to add validity but it can also serve as a source of parodic effects.

The production of meaning in the interpretation of the East European experience is another source of parodic effects. The inevitability of erasing (probably significant) differences in the process of analysis, while attributing meanings on the basis of limited knowledge, creates favourable conditions for the lapsing of discourses into parodic practices. Even though they are hardly ever intentional, this does not in my opinion undermine the legitimacy of using the terms.

There are also the silences of Third World¹⁷ feminists in their dialogue with those from the First World: East European feminism is absent, although – or maybe because – its presence in the global feminist community deconstructs the convenient First World – Third World dichotomy, with imperialism in between. However, the main concern of Third World feminists that “the international feminist agenda does not address imperialism”¹⁸ seems to some extent to be relevant to the case of Eastern Europe as well. The writings of

16 During socialism somehow it was taken for granted that if the ‘First World’ contained the developed capitalist countries, and the ‘Third World’ – the developing ones, then we should be located somewhere in between.

17 The mutual “oblivion” of Third World Feminists of Eastern Europe and East European feminists of the Third World is from the theoretical perspective a very interesting issue, so much so that it really deserves special attention – and another text.

18 Cheryl Johnson-Odim, *Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism*, in: Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1991, 315–327, 316; cf. also Chandra Mohanty, *Under Western*

Third World feminists contain arguments pertinent to the margin – centre discussion about feminism, namely, wariness that the West is imposing discursive strategies: “Western feminists writing on women in the Third World must be considered in the context of the global hegemony of Western scholarship – i. e. the production, publication, distribution and consumption of information and ideas.”¹⁹

The dichotomy ‘West – Third World’ from Chandra Mohanty’s argumentation can easily be replaced with ‘West – The Rest of the World’, but she does not choose to do so. Mohanty also talks about “discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, i. e. the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse.”²⁰ Discursive strategies are understood very broadly to include research topics and choice of methodology.²¹ There is also apprehensiveness about the resulting possibility for misrepresentation. While there is an analogy in the positions of Third and Second World feminists – and women in general, for that matter – there are also differences the discussion of which goes beyond the scope of this paper. Third World Feminists argue their important differences, and describe their specific experiences, pretending we do not exist, while we on our part do very much the same thing. The question “Why do we pretend not to notice each other?” may not be an easy one to answer.

There are the silences of the societies/political elites which have ‘other priorities’ to talk about. Women ‘are not an issue’. Ironically, as ‘talking’ (about problems) is more often than not seen as the opposite of acting (to solve them), especially on the part of those in power, and is therefore attributed a kind of negative performativity, this silence has a dubious significance. We have learned to suspect something fishy in any issue that gets a lot of coverage: those who talk in order to manipulate, politicians and the press in particular, are not trusted or esteemed. A good example in point could be the way the authorities in Bulgaria handled their obligation to report to the UN on the status of women in 1998. The text of the report was written by a person at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose job has to do with foreign affairs, not with women. Then some women’s organisations were invited for a discussion at such short notice that only very few people could participate. Nevertheless, the participants had some very serious objections to the text. But when they insisted on having their proposals and editions included, they were told the report had to be submitted in a few days and no further editing was possible. The text, surprisingly, after so many years, contained some familiar (from the old communist days) rhetoric of the type ‘the problems of women are solved, everyone can relax’. A similar rhetoric

Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses, in: *ibid.*, 51–80. Amrita Basu, Introduction, in: Amrita Basu and C. Elizabeth McGrory eds., *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women’s Movements in Global Perspective*, Boulder 1995, 1–21.

19 Mohanty, *Eyes*, see note 18, 55.

20 Mohanty, *Eyes*, see note 18, 55.

21 See Marnia Lazreg, *Feminism and Difference: the Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria*, in: Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox-Keller eds., *Conflicts in Feminism*, London 1990, 81–102.

was used several years later to justify the refusal of those in power to even discuss specific legislation on sex discrimination, with the explanation that the law should only deal with discrimination in general.

More silences are caused by neo-conservative tendencies – traditionalist (also nationalist, even religious fundamentalist) discourses are dominant on a number of levels in post-communist society.

Various stop-gap strategies on the part of the authorities, aimed at underprivileged groups, do not recognise women as disadvantaged in a special way; the absent gender awareness in these societies implies a disregard for the gender aspect of any of their innumerable social problems.

Our gangster-dominated society is itself a parody of free society, an ironic side effect of openness and liberalism, and one result of which is for example the closing of state boundaries in the West in attempts to keep us out. Also, this is a macho society with the respective system of values and ways of achieving them in which the sexism of language pervades spheres much wider than language itself.

Women's self-imposed silences need also to be mentioned here – women themselves have 'different priorities' – like surviving in a civil war, or in a crumbling economy, for example.

The silences of the East European feminists are in many cases influenced by the necessity for feminism in their respective countries to struggle against a set of negative images. Bulgarian women politicians never miss a chance to declare they are not feminists, which ought to suggest they want no confrontation and should not be considered a threat to men. Thus the implied meaning of feminism appears as synonymous with extremism. It seems also important that it tends to be seen as something foreign, imported or borrowed, depending on the perspective.²²

So the East European feminist lives in an environment of silences: enforced, self-imposed and imagined.

The silences *when* East European women/feminists do talk indicate gaps in the (feminist) discourse. The East European feminist does not usually declare her feminist position at home because of the negative images of feminism in the society. On the other hand, she does not have the language to do it with – her society/culture 'does not speak feminist' while feminism does not speak 'East European'.

22 An interesting indicator is the way in which the term *gender* is borrowed in a transliterated form in Bulgarian public discourses, in particular that of the politicians and people in authority positions. This borrowing is done under the pressure of international institutions – the UN, the European Union – and whenever the term surfaces in the public/political space the fact of this pressure gets emphasised, the implication of its foreignness looms large and thus enhances the conviction that gender issues – and talking about them – are something imported, foreign to our reality.

The missing theory

The (virtually) absent feminist movement of Eastern Europe is an important factor for the absence of a specific discourse developed to meet the needs of such a movement.

Thus, East Europeans tend to talk (write) about their experience even when they talk about theory. A typical example: at an international event where the discussion was supposed to address theoretical problems of gender representation in East European cultures 70 of the 90 minutes allotted to the topic were unexpectedly diverted into a heated argument about the significance of the image of the woman on the tractor during socialism.

As the theory in question is mostly 'Western', there is a gap between the theory and the experience which often remains unfilled. The fact that Western theory is not only based on Western experience, but also deeply rooted in it needs also to be emphasised here.

'Speaking feminist' in the national political environment simply does not happen.

'Speaking feminist' in the national academic community tends to cause problems with acceptability, because of being different; this is looked upon as politicised/deviant discourse (as opposed to 'neutral', 'objective', etc.) and so has to overcome resistance. On the other hand, there is undoubtedly a need to implant feminist theory in this context and serious efforts are devoted to meeting this need all over the region.

The gaps in the theory (of feminism), especially the social aspects of it

The cultural specificity of the dominant feminist discourses as an access limiting factor tends to result in parodic/ironic discursive practices – this is also a consequence of the necessity to 'experientialise' the discourse which has *already* been theorised. East European feminism, instead of developing the natural way – from the grass roots (the gradually growing mass social movement) to the theory, seems to have reversed the process: by 'translating' feminist theory we hope to help our societies develop gender awareness and everything that goes with it.

As was already mentioned, because feminist theory has developed outside Eastern Europe it rarely – or with questionable adequacy – problematises the specifically East European (female) experience, or other 'other' experiences for that matter. There is always the question, of course, whether there is a specific experience. Ironically, there also arises the question: If there actually is one, who is to say it is specific? Who has the representational authority? Is it the people that are living through it? They have no tools of their own to explain it – they need to borrow those tools from the West. The West has developed the language and the politically determined discursive strategies, the system of talking about female experience, which claims the universality of this experience: feminist theory. Western feminists, however, can (with some exceptions, of course) have only a vicarious and therefore limited knowledge of the East European experience. So, while both sides are in a position of questionable adequacy where speaking/representation authority is concer-

ned, they are also in a position of questionable legitimacy. Besides, both positions are more-than-one-dimensional, and this fact affords a really impressive multitude of opportunities for displacement (misplacement?) of voices, for ambiguities, ironies, problematic interpretations etc.

Thus for example when East European feminists speak 'outward' – that is, to the West (and whenever they speak out – outward – they speak *(in)to* the West, the West is what they look up to, rely on, hope to be integrated into), they assume a representative function. So in many cases they speak/produce texts in a narrative mode, with the purpose to present, inform, show, and fill the information gaps with facts. The problem of necessary generalisation is important here. And along with generalisation come the accompanying potentialities for distortion, 'two-speak', mockery (intentional or not), the mere playing up – or down – of facts to please a particular audience, the personal prejudices or limitations of the speakers/authors, the possibility – and temptation – to present as fact what may be simply opinion, the possibility that with the act of 'speaking out' an East European feminist is claiming more power, not only for East European feminism, but for herself as well. Thus one of the first instances I can recall of a Bulgarian feminist speaking out to the West in the early 90s put forth the idea that the anticommunist image of communism in Bulgaria was a woman. She based her claim on two satirical songs from 1990²³ in which two male authors likened parting with communism to walking out of a marriage with a hateful nagging wife. That image never surfaced after that, which was understandable, in view of the fact that even the word 'communism' is masculine in Bulgarian (the word 'party' is feminine, though), not to mention the growth in the awareness, as it receded into the past, of the paternalistic nature of what was referred to as communist society. This was therefore a simple case of excessive generalisation. However, it caused a lot of interest on the part of Western feminists. As a result the author got quite a few invitations to various parts of the world/West. The possibility to travel in the West was at that time a very valuable commodity. It still is for some people, to a great extent, though not so easily earned. I also need to point out in connection with this example the parodic potential of such situations: the ironically dubious image of gullible westerners and crafty East Europeans who capitalise on the information gaps does get evoked.

Perhaps I should also mention here that in writing this text I cannot help realising that I seem to be myself an example in support of my own point. I am very keenly aware of the rapid widening of the differences among the East European countries, and therefore the possibility that I may be distorting facts. Sometimes I can see the distortion as I am ma-

23 At that time, some pop musicians, swept with the euphoria of the huge rallies, or maybe just giving vent to their own long suppressed anti-communist feelings, wrote songs and performed them in the squares. Some of them became hits, interestingly enough, first and foremost because of their political message. In the two most popular ones the male performers contemptuously addressed the Communist Party as a nagging wife they had really had enough of. In one song the man was asking for "one last waltz" (a hint at the coming elections), and in the other – straightforwardly – for divorce.

king it, yet I choose to leave it the way it is, especially if it suits my discursive purposes at the moment. What I, a relative novice and outsider in feminism say may, for all I know, sound absurdly naïve or in some other way ridiculous, maybe simply because of the limitations of my English, to people from what I could call 'the feminist theoretical establishment'. 'Am I producing a parody?' is perhaps not as interesting a question here as 'Should I try to be?' Could the feminist community, the imagined global one, benefit from that? Could a situation like this, or the potential for it, prove to be a vessel where notions like 'legitimacy', 'authority/authorship', 'establishment', with their inherent duality of power distribution, could dissolve and disappear? If yes, will feminists from all countries live happily ever after? If such a harmony is achievable, is it productive?

Borrowing feminism

In Eastern Europe societies tend to look upon feminism as something borrowed, even where women's movements have had a longer tradition and more public prominence than in Bulgaria. The irony of borrowing is that we need to borrow not only the discourses but the practices of the feminist movement: consciousness raising, gender awareness, etc. Borrowing social practice has proved historically problematic; on the other hand, it is and has been taking place everywhere and seems to be inherent in the very idea of historical development.

Another consequence of the absent feminist movement in Eastern Europe that is worth mentioning is the 'individual feminist' – the East European figure of dubious status culturally as well as politically, who can be seen as a parodic phenomenon herself, illustrating the oxymoronic cultural blending of an activist without activities, representative without representation, other without same(s), both desired and undesired, different but similar.

She is (I am?) something that comes close to Rosi Braidotti's idea of a "nomadic subject", in that she can go in or out of her subject position – or in or out of her marginality, whenever she chooses to; she has a lot of choice, therefore a lot of power. Ironically, at the same time, she is a 'junior' in the establishment, metaphorically speaking she has a big neon 'L'-sign on her forehead.

East European feminists have difficulties in using the same voice when they are addressing a 'home' audience – non-feminist in most cases – and an outside, usually Western – feminist – audience. Thus, they always speak something translated, so there is always the possibility of speaking inadequately, of (unsuccessful) – potentially parodic – imitation. (Feminist discourse in Eastern Europe is also "reflected discourse" in Bakhtinian terms, one that is being implanted/transplanted, in short, imitated with varying degrees of success). When they speak to their own society, they translate the borrowed discourse, while when they speak to 'the outside', they translate the experience, both difficult, not to say impossible projects. In both cases the speech is double-voiced, as well as relatively inadequate, the probability of meanings being shifted – or lost, or misinterpreted, or miss-ren-

dered – is really very high. Thus, potentially, everything they speak can have a parodic effect, and often does. Parody in Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding (where Bakhtin is joined by Linda Hutcheon and others) is *double-voiced and vari-directional discourse*.²⁴ The East European feminist is thus one person speaking as more than one, she has a split (?) identity, which should – for the purposes of overcoming the communication gap – assume a different form when she is speaking to the West, when she is speaking to her own sexist post-communist society, when she is speaking to her fellow East European feminists, etc. Her discourse has a different (inward – outward) direction each time, and needs to sound different.

Thus the same – other relationship is really warped in this case: the foreignness of the East European feminist both at home and in the West is an additional significant aspect of her marginality. She is a two-faced figure straddling a double margin – that of the East (of her own society) and that of the West – from an East European perspective the West contains the 'centre' of feminism somewhere in itself. So she is a double other, desired and rejected, desiring and rejecting in the two directions she is facing. Hers is a double, maybe even multiple, marginality when compared to the positions of Western feminists in their own societies. Her ambiguity – also duality, and maybe even duplicity – is ironic (paradoxical) in its very nature, and therefore has a very interesting subverting constructive/deconstructive potential. She is capable of what Judith Butler calls "subversive repetition within signifying practices",²⁵ and is in the position to "repeat, redeploy and ... contest the philosophical grammar by which [her identity, R. M.] is both enabled and restricted".²⁶

Like the functioning of parody in texts/contexts, and its essence as manipulation of stereotypes, the two-sided operation of this phenomenon in the late nineties can be seen as deconstructive while serving to construct the 'health' of the feminist community, which could prove to be vital if it can prosper from diversity. The potential subversiveness of East European marginalities may thus result in productive developments in feminism both as social practice and theoretical discourse.

Subversion/deconstruction is what can be expected to occur (it usually does) on the boundaries between marginality and 'centrality' and, likewise, on the boundaries between 'serious' and parodic discourse – if there are any. The question of its desirability is perhaps worth mentioning: Is it wanted by the subverters – in this case, East European feminists? Is it useful for them in any political way? Such a question can hardly be answered unequivocally, as much of this subversion seems unintentional, spontaneous – most people are not aware of it. The logical further question of how they could profit from it at this point, except by obtaining a distinguishable voice, also seems an uneasy one.

24 Bakhtin, *Eстетика*, see note 9, 289.

25 Butler, *Trouble*, see note 7, 146.

26 Butler, *Trouble*, see note 7, 146.

A further interesting question is whether it is useful for the 'establishment', the target of the subversion? This seems more likely – as the fact of its occurrence indicates the vitality of the community, and can be seen as a sign of development.

The subversion of solidarity has to be constructive of alternative solidarities, otherwise the community may disintegrate. The irony in this case is that one can hardly observe any alternative groups – East European solidarity, or solidarities – springing up, are not noticeable on the horizon ...

The problem of how to generalise without generalising, how to analyse without involving power relations or how to justify deliberate blindness to them, does not seem to have found a solution in feminist cultural theory. In the writings of Third World feminists the potential for (cultural) imperialism on the part of Western feminism(s) has found a lot of anxious recognition and indignant criticism, but that amounts to nothing much more than appeals to analyse the experiences (of Third World women) *only* against the background of their specificity: at the level of the separate national, religious or cultural community, even at the local level. It remains to express the hope that Eastern Europe will take a different direction in its negotiation of an important place in the global feminist community.