



# Ordinary Trauma

## *Twenty-One Disabled Women Surviving the 1989 Polish Transformation*

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the Polish disability memoirs in *Cierpieniem pisane: Pamiętniki kobiet niepełnosprawnych* (Written through Suffering: Disabled Women's Memoirs), published in 1991. *Written through Suffering* consists of twenty-one short memoirs submitted as a response to a memoir competition organized around the theme "I am a Disabled Woman" in 1990. Published two years after the first democratic elections, which took place in Poland in June 1989, this anthology shows that contrary to the mainstream narrative in Poland, Western Europe, and the US, 1989 did not bring about a revolution or any dramatic change for disabled women. Women's memoirs included in this collection question the teleological narrative of linear progression from state socialism to democracy and capitalism and point to the uneven distribution of newly acquired rights.

**KEYWORDS:** disability, memoirs, Poland, socialism, postsocialism, transformation

The Polish transformation of 1989 remains a contested topic among scholars, politicians, journalists, and the public. Right-wing politicians claim that the changes that began that year were "unfinished" and did not fully "decommunize" the country, thus producing the social and political problems of today. The left are also deeply disappointed with the transformation, due to the resulting economic and social inequities. Only the liberal parties—the views of which are representative of many segments of present-day Polish society—think of the events of 1989 as a triumph. Moreover, many analysts view the political and economic transition as a teleological progression from state socialism to capitalism. I understand transformation as a temporary period: the previous, socialist system was, in many ways, gone in 1989, but the new democratic and capitalist one was not yet fully implemented. In official discourse and in historiography the transformation has an unclear periodization. While the beginning is clearly defined, it is harder to determine its ending.<sup>1</sup> In this article, when I use the words "transformation" and "transition" I mean the period of 1989–1991.



Through an analysis of *Cierpieniem pisane: Pamiętniki kobiet niepełnosprawnych*<sup>2</sup> (Written through Suffering: Disabled Women's Memoirs), a 1991 collection of twenty-one memoirs by disabled women, this article presents an alternative way of conceptualizing the 1989 political transformation and challenges the dominant understandings among political parties and society as a whole. These memoirs by disabled women resist official interpretations of the transformation, whether critical, revisionist, or laudatory, and show that for disabled women the political changes of 1989 had little effect, representing only a continuation of the exclusion and poverty they had suffered throughout their lives. Therefore, rather than a revolution, I argue that the political and economic transformations constituted what Lauren Berlant has termed a "crisis ordinariness"<sup>3</sup> for disabled subjects.

Scholars have studied transformation discourses and contested narratives of the transformation as a success and as a linear progression from state socialism to capitalism.<sup>4</sup> This article looks at the transformation through the lens of disability studies and disability memoirs in particular. It places the voices of disabled women center stage, in order to render visible those who were made invisible during the transformation, and it uses disability as a departure point for reconsidering the postsocialist transformation. My methodology involves close reading as well as discourse analysis and historical contextualization of the memoirs. Following Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer's "Introduction: Cripistemologies," I recognize the importance of placing crip and disabled at the beginning of the production of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this article validates embodied forms of knowledge and pays attention to knowledge about the transformation that has been ignored by academics, journalists, and politicians. In other words, I recognize the intellectual and affective labor invested in the creation of these memoirs and use them as historical material. And, while I discuss academic and journalistic accounts of the transformation, I privilege disability life writing. This perspective enables a novel retelling of the 1989 transformation: as an event that did not matter and changed little, despite the statement of a major liberal newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Electoral Newspaper), founded in May 1989, that proclaimed "Goodbye old, welcome new" ("Nic już nie będzie tak jak dawniej") in June 1989.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, focusing on *Written through Suffering* reveals the complex and often contradictory workings of time: while the transformation was generally understood as an accelerated period of economic and political reform, an intense moment of "catching up with the West," it was simultaneously a period of "crisis ordinariness" and sluggishness, causing delays in receiving necessary support and access to resources for the authors of this collection.

Disability serves as a major power differential. In *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman argue that "gender is a crucial feature of the postsocialist transformations."<sup>7</sup> Lynne Haney, in *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary*, notes that "[p]olitical sociologists of Eastern Europe, or 'transitologists' as they often call themselves, tend to adhere to a bifurcated model that breaks the region's history into the clearly demarcated periods of 'state socialism' and 'welfare capitalism.'"<sup>8</sup> Haney adopts a different approach, resisting "grand narratives of systemic transition, preferring instead to study the dynamics of change within a particular social arena."<sup>9</sup> In a widely influential Polish book, *Świat bez kobiet* (A World without Women), the Polish academic and feminist Agnieszka Graff claims that in

order to recognize itself as a state, a state apparatus needs to subjugate a particular social group. In postsocialist Poland, Graff argues, this group proved to be women.<sup>10</sup> Despite their attention to gender and women's experiences in Eastern Europe during the time of "transition,"<sup>11</sup> Haney, Kligman, Gal, and Graff do not consider disability as an analysis category, nor do they study the intersections of gender and disability and thus the ways in which disabled women survived this systemic change. My analysis intersects with and expands on their work, and I argue that the political and economic changes in Poland during 1989 and the early 1990s were neither gender- nor disability-neutral, and that disability, as much as gender, was an element within the transformation processes. Simultaneously attending to disability and gender reveals that disabled women were not triumphant about the transition, and that in fact, it had little effect on the authors of these memoirs.

## The Memoirs

The collection *Written through Suffering* is the result of a memoir competition entitled "I am a Disabled Woman," organized in 1990 by Lublin's Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in conjunction with a Polish NGO, Towarzystwo do Walki z Kalectwem (the Society for the Struggle with Impairment).<sup>12</sup> More than three hundred women from across the country responded, and, in 1991, twenty-one short memoirs were published anonymously in an edited volume (only half the memoirs met the competition criteria; the remaining submissions were words of support for the competition, requests for help, or submissions whose authors did not provide their names, "one of the competition requirements"<sup>13</sup>). Though it is hard to assess the extent to which the collection represents disabled women more broadly in Poland at this time, it is important to keep in mind that three hundred women responded to the call and that many submitted requests for various forms of support. The competition was organized one year after the first democratic elections in the country, and the collection was published two years later. I will discuss these memoirs in depth, as the collection has received little attention. Apart from an introduction by the editor, Maria Chodkowska, this article appears to be the first in-depth analysis of *Written through Suffering*. This volume also merits attention because, as Susan Wendell has stated, "disabled people's knowledge is dismissed as trivial, complaining, mundane (or bizarre), *less than* that of a dominant group."<sup>14</sup> This article will challenge the—often unconscious—notion that disabled knowledge has less value than knowledge generated by people without disabilities.

Topics in the collection include acquiring disability (the majority of authors lived with acquired rather than congenital disabilities), poverty, difficulties accessing education and health care services, hunger, and abuse by parents and spouses. There are also stories of motherhood and work. The memoirs are by women with physical and sensory disabilities; although depression and anxiety are mentioned, none of the authors identify as mentally disabled and thus the issues of mental, intellectual, and developmental disabilities are not addressed.

In my research, I could find no information on how the memoirs that met the criteria for inclusion were assessed, or who made these decisions.<sup>15</sup> The collection was pub-

lished by the Catholic publishing house PAX. Via email, Maria Chodkowska informed me that the choice of publisher was somewhat random, with an acquaintance putting her in touch with an editor from PAX after they had received little interest from other publishers.<sup>16</sup> The cover photograph shows Pope John Paul II talking to, or perhaps blessing, an elderly woman standing next to a wheelchair. The 1991 publication date coincided with John Paul II's visit to Olsztyn, where he met a group of disabled and ill children. As a copy of the memoirs was gifted to the Pope, it was thought a good idea to put his photograph on the cover.<sup>17</sup>

## Living as Surviving

The entangled dynamic of gender and disability guides my analysis in this section. If, at times, I put gender expectations, for example in terms of motherhood and domestic obligations, more centrally, it cannot be forgotten that these experiences were not separated from the authors' disabled embodiment. Consequently, the argument in this section emphasizes the inseparability of gender and disability and their co-constitutive dynamic. I describe and analyze the ways in which disabled women internalized societal values and tried to live up to the expectations of nondisabled society, and how not only gender and disability, but also their economic and marital status and their access to employment, structured their life trajectories. As a result, I do not approach either of these identities and experiences as supplementary and do not highlight a single identification to the exclusion of others.<sup>18</sup> Instead, I explore the intersection of identifications to reveal the multifaceted ways in which the authors of the memoirs suffered societal exclusion, but at the same time attempted to negotiate their place in society.

Almost all (if not all) the accounts originate from working-class women who identify their lives as a struggle for survival. Although the memoirs were written in 1990 and 1991, and there are references to the post-1989 situation, the focus is mainly life in pre-1989 Poland, an officially classless society that had pledged to redistribute resources as needed. However, these disabled women describe living in abject poverty. The socialist state did provide services that benefitted a few. One author stated that "my achievements, education, and social position were enabled by—so criticized today [in post-1989 Poland]—state benefits and programs. Otherwise, I would not have been able to afford it financially, I was too poor."<sup>19</sup> However, state benefits were not enough for most authors and they had to find other ways to make a living.

The 1952 Polish Constitution, revised in 1976, declared that "work shall be the right, the duty, and a matter of honor for every citizen."<sup>20</sup> This promise remained unfulfilled for disabled subjects. The 1984 report *Sytuacja ludzi niepełnosprawnych i stan rehabilitacji w PRL* (The Situation of Disabled People and the Condition of Rehabilitation in the Polish People's Republic) emphasized that employment was understood both by the medical services and the government as the most desirable form of rehabilitation for disabled people, and yet there were not enough jobs for employees with disabilities.<sup>21</sup> There was a lack of jobs for disabled people in the sheltered workshops<sup>22</sup> as well as in the "regular" places.<sup>23</sup> The aforementioned report clearly states that "the realization of the right to work for all disabled people is not possible due to the shortage

of available jobs."<sup>24</sup> Disability as a category of analysis enables us to see how Polish socialist law suspended itself in certain situations. Work, in other words, was not—no matter the socialist pledge—accessible to everyone.

Despite difficulties with finding employment, the majority of authors had to continue work for some time before receiving disability benefits, and held poorly paid, often custodial jobs (many disabled employees held jobs that did not match their often-higher qualifications<sup>25</sup>). One was employed at a workshop for blind people and wrote fondly about the experience making her “very happy. The workshop offers me vacations, trips, health care, and only now—nearing the end of my life—I have started to live. I feel that I am needed now . . . and I am not lonely anymore. . . . Better late than never.”<sup>26</sup> This quotation underlines the advantages of working in the company of other disabled people. For this woman, work was not only a necessity but a source of joy and pleasurable interactions. However, this was the only author within the collection employed in such an environment, indicating how scarce these jobs were and continued to be during the time these memoirs were written. Work was both a physical and psychological burden for the majority of these women, but despite advice from doctors to give up their jobs, this was not an option: work was a financial necessity.<sup>27</sup> *The Situation of Disabled People and the Condition of Rehabilitation in the Polish People’s Republic* stated that because of the narrow legal understandings of disability, there were disabled people who were not entitled to disability benefits or any other kind of social support.<sup>28</sup> As disability benefits were rare and inadequate—an average monthly wage was over two times higher than disability benefits<sup>29</sup>—these women who secured jobs continued to work in hostile environments that often exacerbated health issues.

Disability, here, did not contradict productivity; on the contrary, disability required these women to work. The state provided insufficient work programs and benefits, and disabled women, who often had no one to depend on and had dependents themselves, particularly children, were forced to find work. Scholars Beth Linker and Nancy Hirschmann have argued that in the context of disability, citizenship is grounded in one’s work and productivity.<sup>30</sup> *Written through Suffering* shows that looking at citizenship and its relationship with work and productivity through the lens of disability complicates general understandings of what it means to be a citizen. These Polish disabled women worked and wanted to belong to a working community, yet their participation in the labor force was fraught, since there were not enough jobs and, what is more, employment did not guarantee their belonging to society or the rights of citizenship. Linker and Hirschmann describe citizenship as “a matter of entitlement, obligation, and belonging.”<sup>31</sup> This collection of memoirs by Polish disabled women demonstrates that citizenship is also a matter of disability and gender. The intersection of these two embodied social identities, connected with the state’s failure to provide good jobs for disabled subjects (for as the collection attests, the majority of available jobs were poorly paid and physically taxing, and as such did not provide one with dignity), resulted in an uneven access to citizenship rights and equality.

Having children, for some disabled women, was a way of “rehabilitating” their disabilities and assuming the normative role of a woman. For the majority of authors in this collection, motherhood brought the most happiness, but even this was fraught with heartache and pain. Nearly all the disabled women authors had at least one

child, but with motherhood came considerable apprehension, even before their children were born. Prospective mothers with congenital disabilities worried that their children would inherit their conditions. This desire for disability's absence must have been, at least partially, reinforced by material and social conditions. One author described lying awake all night in the hospital, praying, asking, and demanding from God that her child be "normal."<sup>32</sup> One blind woman had gone against medical advice to have her baby, as she believed that only a family with children was a real family. She thanked God that she gave birth to a "healthy son that did not inherit my blindness. There was a risk, but I am happy I took it."<sup>33</sup> These and other passages in the memoirs make it clear that these disabled women, even those without children, unequivocally identified womanhood with motherhood. They perceived motherhood as a woman's destiny, and believed that a family without children was not a true family. At the same time, they approached reproduction of disability as a harm both to the child and the family.

Disabled women's understanding of family might point to Polish socialism's investment in traditional conceptualizations of family and feminine roles. Studies by Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, Padraic Kenney, Malgorzata Fidelis, and others have confirmed that motherhood remained a defining and normative experience for women in socialist Poland.<sup>34</sup> These feelings were so strong that some disabled women decided to have children against medical and familial advice. The decision to have children was therefore an act of will: for an able-bodied woman under state socialism, bearing children was an expected life trajectory; for a disabled woman, it was a matter of exercising agency. However, it is striking that these disabled women did not want to have disabled children and embraced narrow understandings of "normality." While this may reflect the internalization of eugenic and ableist values upheld during the period of state socialism, it may simply be a hope that by not having to struggle so much to survive, nondisabled children would have a "better life." Many of these authors appear to identify disability with suffering and cannot divorce the experience of being disabled from unhappiness and hardship.

The intersection of gender and disability and the social exclusion at the center of the collection does not leave room for descriptions of disability pride.<sup>35</sup> Neither do the memoirs depict any group identification that could translate into a movement or organized solidarity, even though the authors, as individuals, appear to identify as disabled women. Most do not know other disabled people and display no interest in meeting any. With the possible exception of sheltered workshops, disabled women rarely had a chance to forge relations with other disabled women. Most remained isolated from the sites in which disability relationships and communities have been known to form. The authors did not live in institutions and only visited hospitals on a temporary basis. To a certain extent, they could not afford to spend longer periods of time within institutions: parents needed help with household tasks and rearing siblings and, later in life, they needed to take care of their own children and husbands. The gendered expectations that were placed upon them were not modified because of their disability.

Disability did not prohibit the authors of *Written through Suffering* from performing household duties and care work. Disability, in other words, did not redefine do-

mesticity in this context.<sup>36</sup> Domesticity resisted the subversive potential of disability; rather, disability became integrated into preexisting patterns of homemaking. Disabled women often combined taking care of children, husbands, and elderly parents with work outside the home. This work could take longer and be harder than it would for a nondisabled person, and even produce physical pain; nevertheless, they usually performed all these duties with little help and with little choice. The dominant models of both womanhood and homemaking did not change because of disability. On the contrary, homemaking and taking care of parents and families shaped these authors' experiences of disability.

These memoir authors identified as both women and disabled persons. One woman openly embraced her "sick" identity, believing that it provided her with "a deeper understanding of life . . . I would not be able to learn how to be healthy now. What would I be like if I were not sick?"<sup>37</sup> This important, but solitary analysis posits disability as a condition that is learned. Without fully explaining her rationale, the author also stated that health could be performed, though she believed she would not be able to learn healthiness at that point of her life. Disability produced suffering, but also "a deeper understanding" of the world. This interpretation of sickness and disability cannot be detached from Catholicism, in which suffering is viewed as an uplifting, redemptive experience, determined by God.

Many memoir authors refer to God as the main authority figure and a potential force behind any improvement in their lives. As previously mentioned, Pope John Paul II is shown on the cover, and he is the only person connected with the Catholic Church discussed in the memoirs. Mostly the authors focus on God, often invoking him in the final paragraphs of their entries. These recurring comments about God and religion, largely absent in disability memoirs published in Poland during the 1970s and 1980s, reflect both the deep roots of Polish Catholicism and changes in publishing laws during the transition.<sup>38</sup> In some cases, mentioning God appears to help the authors accept their situation. One stated that through God, every suffering was "beautiful and makes sense."<sup>39</sup> The author of the memoir "To że urodziłam się chora dało mi głębsze spojrzenie na życie" (The Fact That I Was Born Ill Gave Me a Deeper Understanding of Life) interpreted the injustices she suffered as a challenge from God, with happiness depending on how people approached problems, whether "as a wall that stops us, or a test given to us by God that we need to pass as well as possible."<sup>40</sup> One author stated that God was the only reason disabled people did not commit suicide.<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, another stated that her faith had helped her survive.<sup>42</sup> These direct appeals and references to God appear to show, perhaps unintentionally, the tension between the Church as an institution that was not a viable outlet or comfort for these women's grievances and suffering, and the authors' need for faith and spirituality.

The topic of pain recurs in complex ways throughout the memoirs, with many authors discussing the impossibility of its alleviation. One described being unable to sleep at night as her medications had little effect. She expected to "start using a wheelchair soon. I cannot afford to have surgery."<sup>43</sup> This short fragment highlights the ways in which social conditions and lack of access to medical services exacerbate pain. A woman with a motor disability that was not apparent to most people she met

concluded her memoir by stating that she felt “like every other normal human being, no one ever looks at my legs. Even though the pain sometimes makes me cry, I do not show it around other people.”<sup>44</sup> This pain was a constant element in her life, which could neither be alleviated nor explained to other people. Additionally, it functioned as a sensation of both individualization and isolation. Pain, whether the result of disability or sickness, is clearly exacerbated by societal indifference. An author who suffered from chronic fatigue stated that no one understood how she could “experience exhaustion as a result of getting dressed or washing.”<sup>45</sup> However, pain is also a product of scarce resources and a lack of surgical options. One author described how her suffering from poorly manufactured and incorrectly fitted prosthetics in postwar Poland<sup>46</sup> was due to prewar medical experts retiring and not being replaced.<sup>47</sup> Historical circumstances—a lack of doctors and high-quality materials for the production of prosthetics during the early 1950s—were responsible for her pain. Pain emerges as a complex experience produced by societal, historical, and material circumstances; disability itself; and the relationship between a body and the world.

“Suffering” in the collection’s title refers not only to the pain authors had to endure, but also to the extraordinary violence inflicted on disabled bodies, often by the people closest to them. To a certain extent, the collection is composed of images of violence: of parents who beat and abused their daughters to punish them for having a disability, and husbands who raped, tormented, and beat their disabled wives. These depictions of brutality are not followed by help or intervention. The violence these disabled women experienced often went unnoticed by others and remained largely unpunished. Consequently, disabled women’s bodies become texts bearing the violent stamp of cultural expectations they do not meet: violated because parents had expected an able-bodied boy or because a husband was ashamed of his wife’s deafness. These forms of violence are rooted in heteropatriarchal, ableist understandings of fit, attractive, and useful bodies.

What is particularly striking here is the social acceptance of familial violence, testifying to the state’s abandonment of disabled women. Their lives, in other words, constitute an example of “bare life”:<sup>48</sup> life that remains unprotected, beyond the realm of law. Disability and gender made these women’s lives unworthy of protection. Violence against disabled women was practically state-sanctioned: the memoirs rarely refer to any kind of help, and in the few instances where women brought charges against their husbands, they were either acquitted or given extremely short sentences.<sup>49</sup> Historian Barbara Klich-Kluczevska writes that nondisabled women victims of domestic violence received similar treatment from the courts: the husbands who beat them got, usually, very short sentences (for example, six months). After the imprisonment, in most cases, the perpetrators returned home.<sup>50</sup> Klich-Kluczevska adds that under state socialism “the Polish state institutions left the victims without real support”<sup>51</sup> and that despite the presence of the topic of domestic violence in expert and public discussions of the 1970s and 1980s, the problem remained a private one throughout the period of state socialism in Poland.<sup>52</sup> Her analysis emphasizes the social acceptance of domestic abuse.<sup>53</sup> As a result, violence against disabled women can be understood as part of a continuum of violence against women that was pervasive, normalized, and in most cases unpunished.

Domestic violence and the state abandonment experienced by disabled women during the period of state socialism did not end with the political transformation of 1989. *Written through Suffering* reveals that the shift from state socialism to capitalism did not secure citizenship rights for disabled women. By citizenship rights, I do not mean the more explicit rights, such as suffrage and legal protection, but rather, in a broader sense, the right to access state resources, gain recognition as a subject, and be included in the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the polity.<sup>54</sup> This collection shows that women's citizenship was not grounded in the domestic sphere or in participation in the labor force, and that it was a second-class citizenship. The political situation of 1989–1991 reinforced and continued expectations of both women's domesticity and their social exclusion, and hence did not establish a break from state socialism.

## Writing Trauma

The memoirs do not reproduce official historical periodization. In this collection, the entire scope of the Polish People's Republic, which officially started in 1948 and ended in 1989, is presented as an ongoing crisis. There is no mention of the landmark periods and events in Polish socialist history: Stalinism between 1948 and 1956; the Thaw after Stalin's death; the series of student demonstrations demanding democratic rights in 1968 and the coeval antisemitic campaign and expulsion of Polish Jews; the workers' strike in the north of Poland in 1970 in response to major price increases; Edward Gierk replacing Władysław Gomułka as First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party in 1970; or the establishment of the Workers' Defense Committee in 1976, following the brutal suppression of protests in a number of Polish cities. The authors do not refer to the strikes of 1980, triggered by further price increases, the subsequent legalization of the "Solidarność" (Solidarity) Independent Self-Governing Trade Union, or the introduction of martial law between 1981 and 1983. There is no mention of the 1989 elections and the first democratic government under Tadeusz Mazowiecki, established in August of that year. However, the authors do discuss their own lives in a normative, linear fashion. Perhaps it is the interconnection of gender and disability that leads them to cast themselves out of history, to discursively depoliticize their lives and focus on the private.

None of these events, often presented in historical and sociological analyses of Poland as "unprecedented" catastrophes,<sup>55</sup> constituted an "unprecedented" crisis in the authors' lives. For example, the only reference to the events of 1981 in the entire collection appears in the context of an author's problems continuing education as a disabled teenage girl: she had graduated from primary school that year, but as "people were busy with other things, they did not concern themselves with one girl's education."<sup>56</sup> It is apparent that she has privileged her own experience here, embedding the historical catastrophes in the ordinary. While it might not be unusual for a teenage girl to center her own experiences, all the other memoirists, some of them adults in 1981, silenced the introduction of martial law too (and it had serious social, economic, and political consequences). The logic that recognizes only some events as "unprecedented" results in negating a crisis that has no clear-cut beginning and end.

Consequently, *Written through Suffering* opposes “the positioning of crisis as a singular and exceptional event.”<sup>57</sup> In her 2011 book *Cruel Optimism*, the literary scholar and cultural theorist Lauren Berlant challenged the way that trauma theory “conventionally focuses on exceptional shock and data loss in the memory,”<sup>58</sup> and demonstrates that trauma and crisis do not constitute exceptions and, what is more, are not divorced from the ordinary. The crisis described by the authors of *Written through Suffering* is ongoing. The memoirs are a testament to the poverty, injustice, and violence experienced by disabled women. In many cases, being a disabled woman is inseparable from the hurt and injury perpetrated by their parents, husbands, and partners. Traumatic events—never identified as “traumatic” by the authors themselves—are often related as banal and normalized. Moreover, as one of the authors commented, “for us, the impaired, there has always been a crisis in Poland.”<sup>59</sup> Another stated that “we have a crisis in Poland now, but I remember an even bigger crisis we had when I was a child.”<sup>60</sup> It appears that disabled women living through the fall of state socialism in Poland did not experience a transformation, but rather “a crisis ordinariness.”

*Written through Suffering* constitutes a document of trauma. The collection belongs to the corpus of writing known as “social memoir,” a popular genre in interwar and postwar Poland, when memoir competitions were organized among various social groups, such as peasants, miners, and the unemployed. These competitions were a way of learning about the newly reestablished nation of 1918: through partitions, Poland had not existed as an independent country since 1772.<sup>61</sup> The memoir competitions also provided a space for people from marginalized groups to share their life stories. Therefore, it is feasible to think of the social memoir as a genre that democratizes writing and enables people representing various social groups to claim a voice and authority. Katherine Lebow, who has analyzed Polish memoirs from the interwar period, defines the genre of social memoir as a “form of grievance and complaint.”<sup>62</sup>

But *Written through Suffering* offers more than a testament to injustice and a chance to air grievances. The title of the collection rearticulates a discourse of Polish martyrology that centers on an individual’s sacrificial suffering for the nation. In Polish culture, this can provide redemption and is closely linked to the religious rhetoric of self-sacrifice. However, this disability life writing rejects the redemptive role of pain. The authors demonstrate that it is the state that inflicts violence and suffering upon disabled women: their trauma did not originate in disabled bodyminds, but from “the social structures that unequally distribute life chances and resources toward a livable life.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, the highly politicized language of suffering that historically refers to one’s public role as an insurgent or freedom fighter in Polish culture is here appropriated by disabled women to stress the political and social character of feminized and disabled trauma. This trauma is not exceptional, it is expected. As a result, the memoirs constitute a collective voice critical of violence, poverty, and state abandonment.

## Slow Transformation

On 4 June 1989, after forty-five years of socialist rule, the first “free” elections took place in Poland.<sup>64</sup> This liberation was not necessarily expected: many dissidents ac-

tive in the 1980s did not believe that the socialist system would end during their lifetime.<sup>65</sup> The Polish economist Tadeusz Kowalik has claimed that Solidarity's success was a surprise to both the government and the opposition.<sup>66</sup> The largest trade union in Eastern Europe, Solidarity had around ten million members at its peak in 1981.<sup>67</sup> As well as organizing mass protests in factories and other workplaces across the country in August 1980, the trade union formulated the "twenty-one postulates," a charter addressed to the ruling Polish United Workers' Party. These postulates did not include the abolishment of state socialism, but, among other demands, a day of rest on Saturdays, increased wages, improved working conditions in health care to ensure full medical care, and the introduction of the right to strike. A Norwegian academic, Johan Galtung, characterized the strikes of August 1980 as a "socialist revolution."<sup>68</sup> In December 1981, the period known as the "carnival of Solidarity" ended with the introduction of martial law. Many opposition leaders were imprisoned and those who managed to escape went underground. Although martial law was lifted in 1983, Solidarity did not regain its earlier power and popularity.

The 1980s were a time of heightened economic and political crises. With an ever-increasing cost of living, the relative prosperity of the previous decade vanished. The lifting of martial law in 1983 did not banish feelings of weariness, frustration, and hopelessness in literary texts, and the rather unexpected end of state socialism appears to have been the result of economic and political collapse. None of this can be found in *Written through Suffering*, even though the authors make references to the post-1989 situation, as I show below. Not a single author mentions whether she voted in June 1989. Similarly, there is no reference to the Round Table discussions that started in February 1989 and were broadcast on television, during which representatives of the government and opposition agreed that elections would be held that June. A reader of this collection could not discern whether the authors were members or supporters of the Party or Solidarity, or what they thought about the ongoing upheavals in Eastern Europe. This lack of reference to both internal and external events reflects the marginalization experienced by the anonymous disabled writers.

However, this does not mean that this era was not a time of joy and hope for the public as a whole. In a famous television clip, part of a public news broadcast on 28 October 1989, the Polish actress Joanna Szczepkowska announced with a smile, "[l]adies and gentlemen, on June 4, 1989, communism in Poland ended." Her joy is obvious. Additionally, her statement marked an ostensibly clear move from the "communist" past to a democratic future, a linear progression from state socialism to capitalism.<sup>69</sup> But the victorious tone present in Szczepkowska's voice and many other analyses is absent from *Written through Suffering*.

For the majority of these authors, there was no qualitative difference between before and after the transformation and, thus, the two periods merge in their writing. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the socialist past from the present—not socialist but not yet capitalist, a messy moment of transition.<sup>70</sup> A division between "then" and "now" appears in some memoirs, but both are characterized by violence, poverty, and the struggle to keep going. Clearly, this way of reporting, or rather overlooking, the 1989 political transformation challenges the mainstream Polish narrative that divides

national history into the “socialist” and “postsocialist” periods. The Polish historian Tomasz Żukowski has described this cleaving of Polish history:

There is no recognition of continuation between the two systems and thus the relationship between the present and the past gets erased. The question of “continuation” does not spark any interest, because it does not fit the collective fantasy. What is more, even historians give in to the pressure from the public discourse and emphasize the differences between the two systems.<sup>71</sup>

Disabled women do not follow this tendency; their embodied experiences tell them that there is simply no discontinuance between the “socialist” and early “postsocialist” periods, only a perpetual crisis marked by differing states of anxiety.

*Written through Suffering* includes the statements: “it is difficult to write letters [to friends] now when there is no work, no enthusiasm, only impatience and anxiety”;<sup>72</sup> and, “the only thing I want is to work the way I used to. Is it too much to ask for? In competition with able-bodied women disabled women have no chance to get a job.”<sup>73</sup> It is possible to conclude that, if anything, the shift to capitalism became synonymous with a heightened state of anxiety and precarity due to rising unemployment and a worsening housing situation. In *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business and the Remaking of Labor*, Elizabeth Dunn claims that the transition initiated “a fundamental change in the nature of power in Eastern Europe,”<sup>74</sup> but judging from these disability memoirs, the shift did not entail a major transformation of state structures or forms of governmentality. The authors do not use the terms “socialism,” “communism,” or “capitalism,” any more than they name political leaders or activists. As previously argued, the refusal to mention major events and personalities may suggest that, for these disabled women, political change simply did not matter. Their deep sense of abandonment by the state—from long before 1989 and through the democratic elections—suggests why disabled women did not directly refer to the transformation, and thus how they disrupt the rigid historical dichotomy that relies on the juxtaposing of state socialism and capitalism.

Recent Polish publications on the transformation emphasize the speed with which the economic reforms were introduced, often referred to as “shock therapy.” In a 1994 interview, Deputy Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz stated that his goal had been “a swift and permanent implementation of the reforms, which I understood as indispensable should Poland enter the path of constant development.”<sup>75</sup> In his biography of Polish capitalism, *Zimna Trzydziestoletnia* (A Cold Thirty-Year-Old), the journalist Rafał Woś claimed that the government had initially intended to gradually implement reforms, but plans changed.<sup>76</sup> The reforms, which have often been referred to as a “leap into capitalism,”<sup>77</sup> have been described by the economist and activist Tadeusz Kowalik as “Thatcher’s notion of shock therapy.”<sup>78</sup> According to the architects of the transformation, this was an accelerated moment of introducing new capitalist reforms, practices, and discourses. In other words, there was no time left. However, Kowalik’s notion of speeding forward is entirely absent from *Written through Suffering*.

For disabled women, the capitalist transformation was synonymous with extended time: with waiting. They waited for the chance to access even scarcer and more

scattered medical therapies and facilities, for even longer than previously. The waiting time for government housing was also extended. As prices and demand escalated, one author was afraid she would no longer be able to afford her own apartment.<sup>79</sup> Thus, in some cases, the transformation did have an effect: it led to a deterioration in living conditions. To be a disabled woman in Poland in the early 1990s was to experience slowness on a regular basis, not speed. In this context, slowness does not heal, does not offer respite; on the contrary, it contributes to disabled women's suffering and weariness.<sup>80</sup> In *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next*, Katherine Verdery describes the seizure of time by socialist state governments, presenting as "the most obvious example" of this "the immobilization of bodies in food lines."<sup>81</sup> But while socialist states "compelled people's bodies into particular activities,"<sup>82</sup> it can be argued that the new Polish state deployed similar tactics toward disabled women. Waiting for access to resources was part of the temporal politics of the transformation period.

## Producing Disability Knowledge

This article challenges the traditional understanding of whose work counts as intellectual labor and knowledge. It posits disabled women as theorists of the 1989 Polish transformation. While it is important to analyze what disabled women say about the transition, it is equally important to pay attention to how this knowledge is produced. Disability knowledge is rarely created or brought together in university libraries or the halls of parliament buildings. According to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, this type of knowledge "emerges in the form of differing bodyminds moving through environments together."<sup>83</sup>

In *Signifying Bodies*, Thomas Couser notes that "to members of marginalized groups, autobiography may be the most accessible of literary genres . . . it seems to require only that one have a life—or at least, one considered worth narrating—and sufficient narrative skill to tell one's own story."<sup>84</sup> However, the accessibility of autobiography is illusory,<sup>85</sup> for the process of writing itself poses difficulties, at least for some, and can be physically and mentally exhausting. One author in *Writing through Suffering* doubted she had written what she wanted to "in a clear manner. Perhaps, my sentences are too long and there might be errors. I am sorry, but I have no patience to consult the dictionary. I wrote all of this myself, because despite my disabled hands, I can still do it."<sup>86</sup> Another described how it had taken her a whole summer to write her memoir, and it was only the "long deadline" that had enabled her to contribute.<sup>87</sup> The author of "Niepokoją mnie zachowania ludzi wobec siebie" (The Way People React to Each Other Scares Me) described her own fears:

I have no idea how I found the courage to participate in this competition. Maybe because I am expected to write, because I would never share these things orally. I apologize for the errors, ugly handwriting, but I write it myself. I hardly see anything, but I write it all by myself. I would never tell my family I participated in this competition. I write it when I am at home alone, I have been working on this for two months already.<sup>88</sup>

The recurring claim by authors that they had written the memoirs without assistance may imply that the activity of writing enables disabled women to reclaim their independence and agency. But writing about being a disabled woman could also be an embarrassing activity, as it was for the woman who would never tell her family what she was doing.<sup>89</sup> Equally striking are the confessions of how much time it takes the women to write; thus, their memoirs unmask writing as a practice that requires physical strength and patience. Perhaps their gender determines the apologies (addressed to whom? readers? competition organizers?) for the errors and handwriting. Attending to sections in which authors touch upon the writing process reveals that writing is neither a gender-neutral nor disability-neutral activity.

Moreover, analysis of these fragments indicates that disability is not only a topic of the memoirs, but, importantly, a mode of their production. Disability determines a rhythm and pace of writing. The seemingly innocuous and cryptic phrase about writing, “when I am at home alone, I have been working on this for two months already,”<sup>90</sup> reveals that gender may also be a mode of production. The phrase forces a reader to ask whether it takes the author a long time to write because of her disability and the physical or emotional difficulties she struggles with, because, as a disabled person, she spends most of her time at home surrounded by family members; or is it because, as a woman, she spends most of her time at home taking care of others and thus is rarely alone? Although a definitive answer is impossible, this close reading reveals that not only are the memoirs concerned with disability and gender, but also that disability and gender are responsible for the way in which writing and knowledge are produced.

## Conclusion

*Written through Suffering* transgresses the dominant and victorious narrative of the 1989 transformation, which, in the words of the popular Polish sociologist, Piotr Sztompka, “constituted a major break in historical continuity, a complete and radical change at all levels of social life, for great masses of people.”<sup>91</sup> These memoirs force us to recognize continuities, rather than radical ruptures, and offer alternative ways—perhaps ones that more accurately fit people’s experiences—of conceptualizing the mainstream narrative about Polish transformation. Similarly, the employment of disability and gender as analytical tools enables one to ask whose perspectives are represented in the dominant historical accounts of political change. And, in a similar vein, reading *Written through Suffering* impels us to ask whose voices, in addition to those of disabled women, might also have been lost in the transformation narrative.

By focusing on the precarious ordinariness that these writers continued to experience, the memoirs contest boundaries between political and domestic spheres and present the family as a site of state-sanctioned violence. They also demarcate the domestic sphere as the primary context for these women’s lives. Disability does not threaten or redefine domesticity; it becomes integrated within the domestic realm. These authors inscribe pain into politics, but also inscribe themselves into a symbolic order from which they have been excluded. At the same time, the construction of the

autobiographical subject is an act of agency, one that enables these authors to counteract their abandonment and the forces of dehumanization, which did not end in 1989.

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### ◆ Notes

1. Magda Szcześniak writes that while it is generally assumed that the transformation started in 1989, many scholars point out that capitalist reforms had their beginnings earlier, in the late 1980s. The ending of the transformation period is even harder to determine: Szcześniak discusses the mid-1990s as the end, but emphasizes that the early 2000s could also be understood as the proper ending of the transformation. See Magda Szcześniak, *Normy widzialności: Tożsamość w czasach transformacji* [Norms of visibility: Identity during the transformation period] (Warsaw: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, 2016).

2. Maria Chodkowska, ed., *Cierpieniem pisane: Pamiętniki kobiet niepełnosprawnych* [Written through suffering: Disabled women's memoirs] (Olsztyn: Polskie Forum Chrześcijańsko-Demokratyczne, 1991).

3. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 10.

4. Szcześniak, *Normy widzialności*; Jane Hardy, *Poland's New Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2009); Anna Sosnowska, "Tu, Tam—Pomieszanie" [Here, there—A mess], *Studia Socjologiczne* [Sociological studies] 147, no. 4 (1997), 61–85.

5. Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, "Introduction: Cripistemologies," *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014), 127–147.

6. Adam Michnik, "Nic już nie będzie tak jak dawniej" [Goodbye old, welcome new], *Gazeta Wyborcza* [Electoral newspaper], 8 June 1989, 2.

7. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 14.

8. Lynne Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 5.

9. *Ibid.*, 6.

10. Agnieszka Graff, *Świat bez kobiet: Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym* [A world without woman: Gender in Polish public life] (Warsaw: W.A.B., 2001), 19.

11. Gal and Kligman note that transition is not an accurate term to describe the processes that took place in Eastern Europe in 1989. See Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender*, 110.

12. While from a disability studies perspective this name is problematic, it is important to remember that this organization, established in Poland in 1946, was the first to deal with dis-

ability issues. Perhaps the experience of World War II, with its military rhetoric and history of resistance, as well as the views of the pre- and postwar Polish Eugenics Society, informed the choice of name.

13. Maria Chodkowska, ed., *Kobieta niepełnosprawna: Socjopedagogiczne problemy postawy* [A disabled woman: Socio-pedagogical problems of behavior] (Lublin: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 1993), 16.

14. Susan Wendell, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability," *Hypatia* 4, no. 2 (1989), 104–124, here 120.

15. In email correspondence, the editor of the collection, Maria Chodkowska, stated, "it's been 30 years, I don't remember much from that period." Private email correspondence, 09/19/2021.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. My analysis of the gender and disability intersection is informed by feminist disability studies, in particular Ellen Samuels' *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender Race* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014).

19. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 44.

20. *Constitution of the Polish People's Republic: Adopted by the Legislative Diet on July 22, 1952* (Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1978), 22.

21. *Sytuacja ludzi niepełnosprawnych i stan rehabilitacji w PRL* [The situation of disabled people and the condition of rehabilitation in the Polish People's Republic] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Ossolińskich, 1984), 82, 89.

22. Sheltered workshops were workplaces for disabled people (however, they also employed nondisabled employees). This was quite a popular form of employment for disabled people during the period of state socialism. See Marcin Stasiak, *Polio w Polsce 1945–1989: Studium z historii niepełnosprawności* [Polio in Poland 1945–1989: A study of disability history] (Kraków: Universitas, 2021); Natalia Pamula, "Precarious Belonging: Blindness, Masculinity, and Work in Polish Young Adult Literature of the 1970s and 1980s," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 61, no. 12 (2019), 186–202.

23. *Sytuacja ludzi niepełnosprawnych*, 94, 116.

24. *Ibid.*, 116.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 110.

27. *Ibid.*, 103.

28. *Sytuacja ludzi niepełnosprawnych*, 88.

29. *Ibid.*, 56.

30. Nancy J. Hirschmann and Beth Linker, "Disability, Citizenship, and Belonging: A Critical Introduction," in *Civil Disabilities: Citizenship, Membership, and Belonging*, ed. Nancy J. Hirschmann and Beth Linker (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 1.

31. *Ibid.*, 10.

32. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 77.

33. *Ibid.*, 103.

34. Malgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Pdraic Kenney, "The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (1999), 399–425; Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, "Od neomatriarchatu do szpitala-pomnika Matki Polki: Ideologie macierzyństwa w dyskursach władzy i opozycji w Polsce (1945–1989)" [From neomatriarchy to a Polish Mother hospital-monument: Motherhood ideologies in the state and dissidents' discourses (1945–1989)], in *Niebezpieczne związki: Macierzyństwo, ojcostwo i polityka* [Dangerous liaisons:

Motherhood, parenthood, and politics], ed. Renata Hryciuk and Elżbieta Korolczuk (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2015).

35. This is a reference to the disability rights movement that originated in the West during the 1960s. In 1990, George Bush signed the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act and the first disability pride parade was held in Boston.

36. In the North American context, Michael Rembis writes that disability offers new ways of envisioning home, care, and family. See Michael Rembis, "Introduction," in *Disabling Domesticity*, ed. Michael Rembis, 1–23 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

37. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 25.

38. Writing openly about one's faith in God only became permissible after 1989. While authors of disability memoirs published in the 1970s and 1980s mention the Church as an institution with interest in the disabled population, and some write about their religious experiences and faith, these descriptions are usually short and succinct. See, for example, Anna Domańska, *Los w rękach twoich* [Your destiny is in your hands] (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1975); Eugenia Chajęcka, *Syn! Będzie szczęśliwa* [Son! She will be happy] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1988).

39. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 21.

40. *Ibid.*, 24.

41. *Ibid.*, 44.

42. *Ibid.*, 51.

43. *Ibid.*, 56.

44. *Ibid.*, 21.

45. *Ibid.*, 98.

46. *Ibid.*, 92.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 7.

49. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 72.

50. Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, *Rodzina, tabu i komunizm w Polsce 1956–1989* [Family, taboo, and communism in Poland 1956–1989] (Kraków: LIBRON, 2015), 215.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, 220.

54. Hirschmann and Linker, "Disability, Citizenship, and Belonging," 2.

55. Theodora Danylevich and Alyson Patsavas, "Introduction: Cripistemologies of Crisis: Emergent Knowledges for the Present," *Lateral: Journal for the Cultural Studies Association* 10, no. 1 (2021), <https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/introduction-emergent-knowledges-for-the-present-danylevich-patsavas/> (accessed 20 June 2022).

56. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 23.

57. Danylevich and Patsavas, "Introduction."

58. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10.

59. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 94.

60. *Ibid.*, 111.

61. The three partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795 divided the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth into the Austrian Partition, the Russian Partition, and the Prussian Partition. See Brian Porter-Szücs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

62. Katherine Lebow, "Autobiography as Complaint: Polish Social Memoir between the World Wars," *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* 6, no. 3 (2014), 13–25, here 13.

63. Angela Carter, "When Silence Said Everything: Reconceptualizing Trauma through Critical Disability Studies," *Lateral: Journal for the Cultural Studies Association* 10, no. 1 (2021), <https://csalateral.org/section/cripistemologies-of-crisis/when-silence-said-everything-reconceptualizing-trauma-through-critical-disability-studies-carter/> (accessed 20 June 2022).

64. The elections were not entirely free, as Solidarity had been allowed (in the Round Table agreement) "to run candidates in 161 seats—35 percent of the total—in the lower house (the Sejm), and for all 100 seats in the new upper house, the Senate." See Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 258.

65. Boris Buden, *Strefa przejścia: O końcu komunizmu* [Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus/Zone of transition: The end of postcommunism], trans. Michał Sutowski (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2012), 12.

66. Tadeusz Kowalik, *www.PolskaTransformacja.pl* (Warsaw: Muse, 2009), 19.

67. Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*.

68. Johan Galtung, "Is a Socialist Revolution under State Capitalism Possible?" *Journal of Peace Research* 17, no. 4 (1980), 281–290.

69. Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*.

70. Magda Szcześniak writes about the difficulty of deciding when the transformation period ended, but states that the period lasted a few years. See Szcześniak, *Normy widzialności*.

71. Tomasz Żukowski, "Lewica i PRL w dyskursie głównego nurtu" [The Left and the Polish People's Republic in the mainstream public discussion], in *Opowiedzieć PRL* [To narrate the Polish People's Republic], ed. Katarzyna Chmielewska and Grzegorz Wołowicz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytut Badań Literackich, 2011), 197.

72. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 43.

73. *Ibid.*, 47.

74. Elizabeth Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business and the Remaking of Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 6.

75. Teresa Torańska, *My* [Us] (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Most, 1994), 16.

76. Rafał Woś, *Zimna Trzydziestoletnia: Nieautoryzowana biografia polskiego kapitalizmu* [A cold thirty-year-old: An unauthorized biography of Polish capitalism] (Kraków: Mando, 2019), 10–47.

77. Kowalik, *www.PolskaTransformacja.pl*, 73.

78. *Ibid.*, 63.

79. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 34.

80. Margaret Price, "Time Harms: Disabled Faculty Navigating the Accommodations Loop," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021), 257–277.

81. Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 46.

82. *Ibid.*, 40.

83. Robert McRuer and Lisa Merri Johnson, "Proliferating Cripistemologies: A Virtual Roundtable," *Journal for Cultural and Literary Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014), 149–169, here 154.

84. G. Thomas Couser, *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 31.

85. Melanie Yergeau has described the difficulties that neurodiverse subjects can have composing a text. See Melanie Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

86. Chodkowska, *Cierpieniem pisane*, 82.

87. *Ibid.*, 67.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Ibid., 112.

90. Ibid.

91. Piotr Sztompka, "The Ambivalence of Social Change in Post-Communist Societies," in *Czy koniec socjalizmu? Polska transformacja w teoriach socjologicznych* [Polish transformation through the lens of sociological theories], ed. Anna Śliz and Marek S. Szczepański (Warsaw: Scholar, 2008), 36.