

Eating the Mother **by Irina Aristarkhova**

In this presentation I will use an amazing work of performance artist Jess Dobkin *The Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar* (2006-2016) to theorize the mother / child relation as one of cannibalism. This particular formulation of cannibalism will challenge its established theorizing (Derrida, for example, or more recent notion of necrophilia), which has never considered gestation and viviparity, focusing only on Being as one toward death, and not as one who is born. In the work the artist served breast milk provided by donors to her audience members using an aesthetic of a hip bar. I will show video and images from the work's iteration in 2016. The questions prompted by Dobkin's performance, especially its hidden and non-spectacular elements, will be: What does it mean, to eat the mother? Do we all start as cannibals in order to be born? Is a medical term "autophagy" more appropriate rather than (self) cannibalism? What is the self and non-self in viviparity and human generation (is mother eating herself or the other eating her), philosophically speaking? I will argue that this is one form of cannibalism that has been practiced under the radar of human notions of transgression and taboo, and that the work of most recent artists, such as Jess Dobkin specifically, is transformational for our understanding of those terms.

Brief biographical notes

Irina Aristarkhova is the author of *Hospitality of the Matrix: Philosophy, Biomedicine, and Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2012) and Associate Professor of Art & Design, History of Art and Women's Studies at the Penny. W. Stamps School of Art & Design, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Prior to moving to the US, she led a Cyberarts Research Initiative at the National University of Singapore and taught at Lasalle College of the Arts.

She blogs at www.russianfeminist.com exploring issues of Soviet and post-Soviet culture from a comparative feminist perspective. Her writing has been translated into Romanian, German, Chinese, Dutch, Serbian, Slovenian, Portuguese and Greek.