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**IMPLIED
AND DIRECT**
REMARKS ON
FEMINO-WORLDS
OF MARIA
PINIŃSKA-BEREŚ
AND EWA PARTUM¹



In place of introduction

The proposed, and discussed here, works of art by notable artists: a sculptor and a performer Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931–1999) and an installation artist, performer and conceptualist Ewa Partum (born in 1945) may be treated as model, since 1960s, examples of thrusting through the masculine domination shell in arts. Through the strength and consequence of the free presentation of their femino-worlds they seem to stand out against a quite tenebrous background of the Polish neo-vanguard. As previously with Alina Szapocznikow or, which is still valid, with Natalia LL (to name only two outstanding figures of the Polish art), we observe the discussed artists' novelty in the method of using artistic messages, as well as courage in tearing up bonds which make it difficult for women-artists to be freely active. For Pinińska-Bereś, entangled in the opposition between convention and contestation, it became important to refer to the depth of her own mind (not without the inspiration of psychoanalysis), showed through implied subject allusions. For Ewa Partum, who is consciously releasing herself from masculinist easements,

it was and it is significantly important to combine direct corporeal presence with ideas strongly critical towards stereotypes that block artistic freedom. Since 1960s the activity of both artists has fitted into the growing trend of showing the roles of women in ancient and modern art. In 1971 an art historian Linda Nochlin asked the important question: why were there no great women-artists?². The answer would be at least double. Firstly, despite the presence of talented women painters or representatives of other areas, patriarchal obstacles blocked the emergence of outstanding artists on the first line of artistic achievements. Secondly, the authors of historical reviews focused in their works on a hierarchical pyramid with genius men at the top, almost completely omitting the femino-worlds. In 1981 Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker pointed out at the patriarchal disregard of artworks by women artists in the major works like *The Story of Art* by Ernest Gombrich (1950) or the first edition of *History of Art* by Horst Waldemar Janson (1962).

This discriminative point of view regarding old artists translated into an attitude towards modernist artists. In 1975 Whitney Chadwick justifiably pointed out that surrealism, despite a huge focus on the issue of *overwhelming and inspiring love*, did not revoke the old stereotypes³. The surrealist artists showed various forms of eroticism referring also to what in 1936 was described by Maurice Heine, when in place of the stereotype of 'deviation' he proposed 'a paraesthesia tree' with a wide range of branches for the varieties of psychosexual behaviours⁴. However, with very open proposals giving 'domination to the feminine principle over creation in general', this direction was based both on the 'castration' thinking of Sigmund Freud, and the fostering of the ninetieth-century clichés of perceiving women. Such was the case because when opening to matters of the other sex, *surrealists [...] were enslaved with the patriarchal view of life oriented towards the masculine point of view*⁵. With today's attitude one could

discuss the degree of submissiveness of women-surrealists towards possessive men artists / colleagues. And at the same time, one could confirm that their works are important not only for feminism but are interesting for us also as significant universal and cross-gender role models (or even notwithstanding gender). But on a daily basis women artists experienced the 'glass ceiling'. It existed also in the internally egalitarianized neo-vanguard teams and, although the situation turns to the favour of women-artists, the said 'ceiling' did not omit the historically important 2nd Cracow Group (since 1957). As Anna Markowska wrote, notable and radical women artists in that dominated by men quivering spider's net of relations had a *secondary role*⁶, despite everything. And it regarded, among others, also Pinińska-Bereś, member of that Group from 1979.

Implied

While regarding the works by Pinińska-Bereś one was wondering what share there was of 'the feminine issues', or proto-feminism, or even proto-postfeminism. Other things were discussed about her art, too. The artist was written about by, among others: Izabela Kowalczyk⁷, Ewa Małgorzata Tatar⁸, Jerzy Hanusek⁹, Agata Jakubowska¹⁰, Kalliopi Minioudaki¹¹. Making a selection of the issues concerning Pinińska's art that I mention here, I would like to emphasize a few of her big decisions. In 1957 for the first time she had used pink, which, combined with white, was to give character to her pastel works till the end of her life. Her abandoning of statuary works in 1961 opened the trope of entering radical transformations of expanded sculpture, and, further, the area of performance. The issue of *gender* is merged with that problem and results from it in its original form which depended on reaching for personal experiences. Moreover, elements of eroticism, present in her works on many layers, would be closely combined with these two issues.



Ewa Partum, performance of *Women, the marriage is against you!*, 1980 ←

Ewa Partum, *Change*, 1974 ↘

Ewa Partum, *Ost-West Schatten (East-West Shadow)*, Berlin 1984 ✓



In the early 1950s Pinińska was a conscientious student of a creative, but also a bit goblinish educator, while definitely an outstanding monumental artist, Xawery Dunikowski. From the second half of the 1950s she is already active in the mill of the Cracow confraternity of artists. She develops her attitude of a 'woman artist': she takes part in competitions, wins awards. She is present in the artists' association (ZPAP), but she quickly chooses radicalism of contemporary art – the one from the cave of Krzysztofory and in the orbit of the 2nd Cracow Group. From 1957 (for her whole life) she is a wife of an outstanding sculptor Jerzy Bereś and in the dialogue with him she combines ambitions of an artist with the conventional role of a wife and a mother. Her character encompasses also a mental trauma from her childhood. As she described, she had been touched by a series of traumatic events when she was a little girl. With roots in an aristocratic and ultra-catholic family, she had had to live through the death of her beloved father in Katyń in 1940, disregard during the war and totalitarianism after 1945 'with a small window vent slightly opened to the freedom of culture' (mainly from 1955). In the difficult time of the falsified reality, the very entering the artistic world had become a kind of escape. But that had seemed not to be enough for Maria. She had been looking for even more explicit enclave to be able to show the problems that nagged her.

One may recall here the 'flow theory' by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Although statements of the author refer to extreme situations, they may partially apply here. *When difficulties take away from us [...] the ability to act, we need to make sure that we control the situation. We do it through finding a new direction in investing mental energy which stays out of reach of external powers*¹². What applies here is the definition of her own creative work repeated by Pinińska multiple times – her work as "an asylum", in the double meaning of the word. On the one hand, these are attempts to run away from personal trauma and grey

sub-reality around, and on the other – a deeper focus on the ‘flow’ towards the search for her own individuality. And here clashes occur: the artistic world which she entered, with the aggregation of masculinist egotisms, was far from the imagined environment which would immediately appreciate new proposals, in particular if they were created by a woman. The confraternity allowed into its closed circle some ‘gaps’ for wives or partners of those who ‘counted’. But Bereś – Maria’s husband – although radical and strong in his art, was only at the stage of entering this artistic community himself.

Thus, Pinińska’s feeling of her own searches not being appreciated, and even ignored, was accompanied by evoking ‘ghosts of childhood’ and girliness, which, when referring to the depth of own sex, caused the need to use various allusions with subtexts of psychoanalytical penetration of the *id* sphere. If on that creative road (mainly at an earlier stage) there are visible waves of inspiration from surrealism, they appear through manipulating certain motives, taking over the subject character of spatial objects, which speak about a difficult position of a woman entrapped by patriarchal conventions. Leading the audience to the feeling of these shackles being broken became in fact the main sense of the formally simple but narration-wise rich works of the artist.

On the road of Pinińska’s autonomous solutions there are brutalist *Rotundy* (1963) of cement that weights quilted fabrics. These phallic structures open up ‘androgenically’ to hidden, among others, threads of female physicality – with the feeling of being closed, shackled, and the motive of bells ringing with an order to come. However, there is also the impression of ‘being open despite being closed’. These works in terms of iconography refer to rotundas and castles in the paintings by Remedios Varo. And the strongly compressed delicate duvet is as monumentalized soft fur from the objects by Meret Oppenheim, where it was set against hard porcelain

(*Obiekt*, 1936). In that context also *Gorsety* (1966 – 1967) have a metaphorical nature – presenting what, for many reasons, squeezes us and may be in a more general sense perceived as a gender-biased pressure of women's perception in the eyes of men. Analogies to this kind of layers put on the body and changing its nature may be found, for example, in the creativity of Toyen (Marie Čermínová) at the end of the 1930s.

The sculptures created by Pinińska in the 1970s as 'psycho-objects' (the works called by the author 'psycho-furniture' become their variations in a narrower scope) no longer have the previous roughness of materials. The references to surrealism also loosen up. Painted precisely with the use of antiseptic white and more and more manifest emphasis of pink as *the author's colour*⁴³ (still in the 1960s often rejected by modernists as close to kitsch) they approach the poetics of pop art, accepting the relativism of taste. It can be said that the artist is courageous in contesting the aesthetics dominant in her colleagues' works. Here appears an ironic play with degrees of softness or hardness, as in Claes Oldenburg's works since 1957 or in *Materace* by Marta Minujin from 1962.

In her everyday life Maria was full of elegance and pedantic, took care of her hair, make up or outfit. In her utterances she was calm and created a certain distance, even towards people she knew. Those methods of modelling the looks and behaviour, felt as 'mental corsets' sometimes lead to satisfaction, however, they often 'squeeze' and limit. Therefore, it became clear that she 'was tearing up the shackles' in her performance in response to that squeezing and was open to the flow of new ideas (in this case the pro-freedom endeavours of women). She did not suppress her subconscious thoughts and did not hesitate to comment on her not always positive situation as a wife, a mother, an artist heckled by her colleagues. The authenticity of her art depends on that – with her expression being veiled in all

moderating layers of the form and the artistic convention, and with a subtle arrangement of the composition in space, the use of liquid shapes, the cosmetics of colours (including lipstick or blusher) – she expressed her sarcasm at the same time. She was also able to shout her objection against unfairness when she experienced it, express her indignation at being treated like a subordinate person, which happened more than once.

Pinińska's *Psychoobiekty*, mainly from 1969–1975, constitute a world of outstanding forms with often calligraphed (as if by a school student) titles or succinct comments. Those are sometimes manifests of suppressed life behind a screen, showing a woman as a subject of men's consumption (*Uczta*, 1968) or being a shadow of a man (*Tratwa*, 1969). These may also be lips parted 'in a smile expected from a woman', appearing when you open the rubbish bin flap in *Keep smiling* (1972). A particularly nasty masculinist question: *Czy kobieta jest człowiekiem?* (1973) ('*Is the woman a human being?*') stands out, placed on a graceful female chest 'sealed' with many images of lips and a commercial tag featuring the production and expiry dates. In her works, so different from the average nature of the art of those times, Pinińska was, however, accompanied by her female colleagues from various countries whose works of art could not have been known to her back then, but which from today's point of view we see as created in a similar style of irony, sarcasm, as well as similarly being a reflection of the feeling of being unappreciated, revealing 'a hidden agenda', making use of kitsch elements and featuring a commercialized figure of a woman. In my opinion, the works of Pinińska from those times are in fact flagships of postmodernism (!) – against the opinion of Jerzy Janusek, who energetically opposes such categorisation – such as the photographs, paintings, sculptures or installations of Kiki Kogelnik, Evelyne Axell, Judy Chicago, Martha Rosler, Jana Želibská, and others.

Presenting her performances between 1976 and 1996, the artist appeared tightly covered in a studied outfit (often in white), which was a certain version of unhesitating abandonment of corsets. In the extreme contrast against the manifestations of her husband Jerzy, who presented coarseness and nudity, Maria demonstrated not so much her body, as conventions of hustle and bustle of housework or, for example, of nature, all combined with elegance. Most often she added far-reaching comments to those actions. For example, by washing cloths with letters forming the word 'feminism' in *The Washing* (1980), she demonstrated a specific form of self-defence against being classified, although for representatives of the pro-women movement there is feminist thinking in her works. In the famous *List-latawiec* (1976) with the slogan 'I am sorry I was, I am' she emphasized a full protest against the way how she used to be treated. She never missed a chance in the majority of actions to unfold an original banner, demonstrating both the flow and the enclave of her existence that thanks to her art she could draw up for herself. Maria Hussakowska also wrote about the performances of Maria Pinińska-Bereś that they meaningfully emphasized the objection against 'non-locality'¹⁴, namely a completely post-modernist detachment from obsessive universalism. This artist each time marked her territory in space (see: her furniture, interiors, little rooms, etc.), which became, even if for a little bit, her exclusive property in the difficult world.

From the very beginning the erotic references present in the artist's works after 1974 gained a particular importance as additional building blocks of forms. The accents brought out in many various ways: lips, breasts, vaginal or phallic allusions – lived their own lives. Closed or opened, with suggested movements or change of proportions, or multiplied, those organic elements, although with allusions to eroticism, are never part of a literally understood sexuality. Rather, even if these intimacies are sometimes highlighted, then

for the sake of balance the artist veiled them in interpretations far from hedonism. On the one hand, a studied and fully refined form and colour appeared, which may be understood as more or less erotic. On the other hand, most often these motives are accompanied with a bad memory, ironic distance, sarcasm, comment – e.g. treating sex as a mechanical action. The most meaningful in that sense is *Maszynka miłości* (1969), constructed as a mill, with ‘painfully’ internal organs of a woman and, externally, a light windmill of gambling legs. *Moje łóżce na wyspie* (1985) is clearly stigmatized with a threat. *Wersalka* (1986) features a crooked mattress. Several times appear allusions to a recurrent wave of breast, mangle of intimacies, being imprisoned in a closet; what is wedged and what barely liberates itself.

The duality of interpretations of these ambiguous images, although beautiful in their form, in some works approaches what is included in multi-phallic works of Louise Bourgeois or Yayoi Kusama. However, as opposed to the intentionally excessive American and Japanese artists, in the works of the Pole the interpretation is sometimes shifted more towards appearance-attraction and immediately towards an ironic reference to the secret of this topic. Maria seems to know it, which she suggests through the elements of her unique works, that find their place in our art in the same rank as the works of Alina Szapocznikow or Katarzyna Kozyra. I would personally think that the works by Pinińska include *e r o t i c i s m w i t h o u t e r o t i c i s m*. Instead of hedonism, as shown by many other male and female artists, Maria seems to suggest that in the area of desires and intimacies it is more about a refuge than taking a bath in the sea of adventures.

Since 1993, busy with creating the series of *Infanty*, the artist makes her odyssey in the journey towards what interested her 30 years before. Headless figures of monumentalized princesses, like rotundas from the past, hide, e.g. their bells under layers of heavy,

hard and bell-shaped dresses. The richness of references to Diego Velazquez, but also to the fate of an infanta enslaved with the rigours of the etiquette, refers equally to the very artist bound by the life with a corset of aristocratic etiquette entangled in the extravagances of the bohemia. The works by Pinińska-Bereś, underestimated in Poland, have occasionally appeared in major international exhibitions since 1970s. Recently, they have gone through some kind of revival, which is proved by the presence of these multi-layer works in the great and breakthrough exhibition *The World Goes Pop* in the London's Tate Modern¹⁵.

Direct

The works of Ewa Partum are works of art which combatively and provocatively demonstrate the views of the artist-woman, tracing the margins or frames of art, always with a self-reflection, with 'the touch of the artist' and with radically feminist messages. Initially underestimated (and often disregarded), she gradually saw her works shown in important exhibitions, her proposals repeatedly analysed and interpreted. Here in my subjective selection I am highlighting the presence of texts of, among others, the male and female authors such as Marek Ławrynowicz¹⁶, Angelika Stephen¹⁷, Gisłind Nabakowski¹⁸, Grzegorz Dziamski¹⁹, Clare Gormley²⁰, Ewa Majewska²¹. Relatively early, since 1960s, the artist has turned her back to 'perceptual' art and since then she has been shaping 'conceptual'²² works of art, giving priority to declarations, catalogues of examples or instructions, as if documenting (often not without irony) the underlying ideas. As early as in 1965 she performed actions which included tracing around the contours of her own body and photographed them.

A constant *désintéressement* of the artist towards the canonized hierarchies of objectivized and aesthetized art occurred at the end of the artist's studies in the Warsaw Academy. Her diploma exam in

1970 became a scandal. Ewa rented two paintings by Tadeusz Kantor from *Multipart* (where the painter assumed the viewers' participation in completing the works' composition). These were the paintings with crushed umbrellas, painted totally white. Parodying the intentions of the author, Ewa 'used' the paintings, covering them in white and black paper and added those assemblages to the set of her own works. After a witty presentation of her diploma project the commission evaluated the diploma at a very high level. Then Ewa cut the paper and everyone was confused to see that these were not her works. It became clear that the degree candidate suggested something that everyone knew but did not talk about: that the Academy grants degrees for plagiarisms (!). In the text accompanying the exam, entitled *Nowe źródła intelektualnych wzruszeń*, the artist included a sentence with her program slogans, significant also during the subsequent years: *Artistic actions like negation, selection, elimination, disapproval of art, giving up art, constitute the possibility*²⁵.

Since then, with a total departure from the "Gumby" status of a perceptual artist, Ewa Partum has repeatedly adopted a critical and conceptual attitude. And she has started to use ready-made products, performances, photographs, installations, films, printouts, etc. only as an exemplification of this attitude. In this radical approach she is sometimes met with hostility by both supporters of objectivized art, and communist officials. Here is an example: in a remarkable for the whole Polish conceptual art installation, entitled *Legalność przestrzeni* (1971), she asked quite awkward questions by means of squeezed prohibitory traffic signs and boards with texts that banned various actions. The traffic signs and boards were showed metonymically in the Freedom Square (sic!). No wonder that this exhibition was not allowed to be shown in that very place for a long time. Leaving beyond the enchanted area of the exhibition hall and referring to the concept of social context, *Legalność przestrzeni* was also going



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills*, 1977 ←

Cindy Sherman, *Centerfolds*, 1981 ↓



beyond the stereotype of a work of art, as it made partial use of real prohibitory traffic signs. In a similar sense one may define another radical act of crossing the 'frames of art'. In almost twenty films, in a whole series of installations, multiples, *mail art* dispatch actions and in the non-commercial Adres Gallery she ran (1972–1977) she developed what Benjamin Buchloh described as *a transfer from traditional artistic production to institutional criticism*²⁴. Each work that appeared in that mini-centre or left it, outlines the issue of the very principle of presentation, or posed questions regarding the scope of the artistic message. Here it should be added that until 1973 that gallery was located in a club of visual artists and when its activity started to be very much disliked by 'workshop artists' and clerks, it was banned by law. However, Ewa for the next four years continued the work of the Adres Gallery in her apartment. This, as a matter of fact, miniature gallery, through the artist's wide connections with the whole world, gained in various countries a reputation of an 'enormous' centre of creation and distribution, although it was run by one person in a small room. Today, it is considered to be a model and an exceptional example of an 'authorial gallery' – an alternative form of presenting art opposed to mainstream art, subject to censorship and influenced by the authorities.

Already from the end of the 1960s, owing to her lively interest in poetry, Ewa Partum noticed that the structure of narrative poems wore out, even if they were labelled 'concrete poetry'. Expressing her scepticism, she started to destroy and split texts into smallest units, not losing the purpose of *guaranteeing such message that would not turn into chaos*²⁵. She seemed to conduct her anarchized work on poetry in three areas at the same time. Firstly – she 'studied' poems analytically, trying to see what is on 'their other side'. Therefore, already at the end of the 1960s, there appeared proposals of aleatoric usage of words which, introduced in new contexts, somehow in motion and not without the

support of the audience, kept on changing their meaning. Secondly, as a visual poet, often demonstrating rather the visible process of creating poems than their finished content, she criticised the criteria of what poetry is. She, therefore, fulfilled the postulates of meta-poetry, questioning the official definitions²⁶. Thirdly and lastly, in the 1970s she developed various actions with texts, letters or syllables, imprints of lips, in the frame of a large family and more and more 'private' or even intimate actions defined as *poem by Ewa*.

Those '*poems*' were already examples of the extended field of poetry. In *Obszar zagospodarowany wyobraźnią* (1970) the artist placed particular words inside closed forms lit from the inside. When they were touched by the audience, there appeared *other possibilities of the form*, each time *images demanding creation* were induced²⁷. In the works dating back to 1971 various parts of texts from the so called great literature (e.g. from *Ulysses* by James Joyce) were subject to a variant mix of words in line with the declaration that *using a language for artistic purposes does not have to be conditioned with necessity to be subordinate to a grammatical system*²⁸. That method was also used in 2006 during her performance in the Tate Modern in London when she scattered thousands of white letters from one page of Joyce's novel in the Hall of Turbines. The audience put them on their own bodies, formed words and sentences, continued to scatter them.

In the series of works from 1971 attention was drawn to *Obszar na licencji poetyckiej* in the Warsaw Poetry Office of the then Ewa's husband – Andrzej Partum. It featured a set of loose paper white letters, popular in the communist times, because they were used by apparatchiks to form propaganda slogans. Scattered around the floor, they were spread by visitors whose shoes had been covered with glue smeared on the doormat. Trampling the work of art, scattering its elements around the city – all that meant openness and aleatoricism, but also a kind of anarchistic fiasco of the propaganda. It was also

a denial of such art (or poetry) which would be limited by an excessively static form. In a brilliant exhibition in the Museum of Art in Łódź (1972) several dozens of alphabets of loose letters scattered around the floor (later spread further by visitors) were accompanied by black letters hung from the ceiling and making up the texts: 'the same as', 'more or less the same as', giving hints as to what happens with the letters. The installation was accompanied by a small manifest, which included an attempt to create art *without a fixed form, without a fixed place in the collections and without a predetermined duration*. The above sentences referred to the museum context of that installation, which was supplemented with numerous letters scattered around in the museum's garden. In the context of nature, they *raised reflections similar to poetic record*²⁹.

During The Dreamers' Meeting in Elbląg (1971) – an important manifestation of ephemeral art – Ewa Partum, in an ironic reference to Eduard Manet, presented a cloth laid in a picnic environment with the note: The Luncheon on the Grass. The same text was painted on the grass next to the cloth. That metonymic work of art evoked vast associations through the text displayed in the landscape. In the installation presented in the Adres Gallery, entitled *Wieża Eiffel'a. Obecność wysokości* (1972) the artist referred to the generally known work of architecture. Under the text there were three balls of string: the smallest featured a section of the famous tower, the second was a bigger part of this section, and the largest presented the whole height of the tower and constituted *existence ripped out from reality only for the purpose of art*³⁰. In those folded strings a double enigma was key: hiding the true height in the length suggested by the thickness of the balls and the introduction of the whole-part relation.

In 1973, among many *mail art* actions, Ewa sent out declarations in different languages: If you want to say something, speak the language of the language (as if in reference to the special role of

the double language declarations in her presentations). In the Kino-Laboratorium (Cinema-Laboratory) festival in Elbląg several people were to read out the text in many languages at the same time. It was another manifestation of eliminating objectivization, as well as creating, together with the readers, a particular language rustle, taking away the nature of an excessively pushy diktat from the read instructions. *Kino tautologiczne*, from the beginning of the 1970s, was also dialogical, but the 'dialogue' was conducted by the language of the camera. During the work *film by Ewa* (*Nie mówię, nie widzę, nie słyszę*) (*I do not speak, I do not see, I do not hear*), the camera accumulated the accounts about blocking particular senses. The same ideas as in films were also communicated by the artist through sequences of photographs, descriptions of actions, artistic books, mail dispatches. Something that was an individual invention could receive various systems of messages developed as variants.

Her game with frames of creativity after having totally negated the subjectively treated works of art, is situated by Ewa Partum against a new backdrop of a wide spectre of 'instruction art' with almost endless possibilities of its exemplification. In other *poems by Ewa* the functions of shorter or longer poems are taken over by actions with objects and small mailing actions. The artist replaced letters as a manner of poetic records with cassette tapes, colourful cards, books, multiples, envelopes and other ready-made products stuck to surfaces, which if considered to be *poems by Ewa*, were combined by the artist with letters and text declarations. Postcards associating colours of the cardboard to the current ideas of Ewa Partum were at the same time a long series of examples of 'art postal' (to use a term by Ray Johnson).

In these changeable territories of poetry, the artist started to give a special role to lip imprints. The whole range of imprints of her own lips recorded as negatives by a special lipstick brought in

a remarkable directness of what was previously quite impersonal in letters or printed declarations. Each imprint becomes unique, and, moreover, is also important in later productions of the artist, as an element of extended action-installation proposals. At the starting point those were either traces of 'woman's lips' (the artist wrote 'my touch is a touch of woman'), or imprints of lips which pronounce syllables forming words or sentences. Robin Crozier noted enthusiastically that the postal declaration of 'a touch of a woman' accompanying traces of the artist's lips, that he received from her in the frame of *mail art*, was complemented with a red rose, given personally by her during his visit to Warsaw³¹.

One of the poems in this series, dating back to 1973, was a result of an action filmed and documented with photos and indexed appendices. In this action Ewa put one word *LOVE* composed of loose letters into an envelope where she wrote that she is 'happy making love to the envelope', which she sealed with a 'loving' imprint of her own lips. Sent out as an invitation to the exhibition *Change* in 1974, the card with a declaration printed in golden font *My current idea is a golden idea* developed the element of discussion with remote recipients who could have different associations with the meaning of that sentence, depending on the context. That declaration was, moreover, a dialogue with a great character of the 20th century art – Yves Klein – although such reference was indirect, through an allusion to the ideological treatment of the golden colour by that artist. The card included also an irony of the Midas' change of creative invention into gold and in this way became a self-critical comment. Still another reference to important authorities was included in *Autobiografia* (1971–1974), which was actually an inscription sewn onto a canvas: *EWA PARTUM*, composed micrographically from the surnames of the most prominent thinkers, writers and artists, who somehow determined the horizons of the author's world of ideas. This inscription comes to life in the following

years, e.g., during her wedding in Berlin in 1985, playing the role of 'a carpet' for the newlyweds.

The above-mentioned *Change* (1974) has a fundamental meaning in the creative life of the artist. It featured a wider inclusion of her own body, as well as developed references to feminist manifestation through the body. During the performance a make-up artist changed half of the artist's face to make it look a lot older. The print-outs of photographs from that action, distributed later as posters titled *Portrety emfatyczne*, emphasized the directness of the dilemma of existential self-identification and references to the stereotypes of the so-called 'good' look of a woman (as a consequence and towards aesthetics in general). The manifest element of the passage of time included in it has, as a matter of fact, a double connection with liberation, as it bares the absurdity of the way one sex sees the other.

In this releasing from shackles, revealing or undressing, Ewa Partum consistently moves forward, tautologically reaching nudity. She makes her own body one of the discourse alphabets. Nudity was manifested, among others, in the project *Change – My Problem Is a Problem of a Woman* in 1979 in the Artforum Gallery in Łódź. In that performance make-up artists changed the appearance of the artist's body making it 'older'. In 1980, not without being exposed to hostile comments, in the Small Gallery of ZPAF in Warsaw, the naked artist presented the text *Samoidentyfikacja*, which commented on her own exhibition of photo-collages under that title. She then declared that *she will perform naked in her art, until the position of women-artists in the market of art and in museums reaches the same prestige as of men-artists*⁵². The very exhibition featured photos from various places in Warsaw with photos of naked Ewa Partum fitted into them. From that time until 1992, in a series of very meaningful performances, the artist appeared naked in various contexts of feminist references (as when she presented the attitude of a woman attacking the institution of marriage) or with other conceptual references.

In 1980 during the Festival of Women's Art in O.N. Gallery in Poznań, Ewa for the first time developed in the performance the idea of *Women, being married is against you*, which is presented as a two-step liberation through cutting the foil packaging, and later the wedding dress, and, while naked, delivering a declaration against the false romanticism of a wedding dress as a 'trap' of patriarchy. Ewa's real marriage to W. in Berlin in 1985 was a kind of a break from this approach (the groom cuts the foil and both of them in their wedding outfits are wrapped in a carpet signed 'Ewa Partum', made up from names of great people from various ages that were important to her). However, the dress from that wedding is later cut up by the artist emerging from it during the spectacular performance *Flamenco w bieli* in 1992. The performance celebrated the 60th birthday anniversary of Vostell in Malpartida.

The second round of nude performances Ewa starts in 1981 with three versions of a critical idea *Stupid Woman* (one would like to say 'a little woman'). The artist appears in these actions naked, attractive in her nude act, with amazingly colourful little lights, with the sounds of intoxicating music, spraying enchanting scents, giving dollars to men and using other props of 'beauty', 'youth' and 'wealth'. Therefore, she does what is expected from women in the world of masculinist domination. These actions include author's manifests, materials referring to sex, love, marriage, liberation. A vast audience is sometimes touched or even shocked. Being so different from the oppressed background of grey Poland in those years, these performances encountered a total news blackout by censorship, although to a certain degree they were 'tolerated' as private events.

In December 1981 there were very sad gestures of the Polish government which banned Solidarity and introduced martial law. Ewa, wanting to emphasize her support for the oppressed members of the association, presented her performance *Hommage à Solidarność*

in 1982. Among notations with syllables symbolized by imprints of lips the naked artist wrote the word 'Solidarity'. It was a document of a bold action organized in the underground gallery Czyszczenie Dywanów in Łódź. Taking a risk, but also not losing the logics of her own creativity, Ewa Partum with her velvet lips and own nudity presented a protest against brutal violence and paternalistic militarization. It was similar also in her other performances with the imprints of lips: each time the negative trace becomes a document of the perpetuating moment, but also another manifest of the criticism of the criteria. When after subsequent refusals of issuing her passport Ewa finally manages to leave for Western Berlin in 1983 (she has lived there ever since), in the 1980s and many times afterwards she uses imprints of her lips. For example, in 1995 during a funeral of an acquainted great artist Wolf Vostell she drops into his grave white letters with black lips' imprints forming a sentence 'Art in grief'. In 1999 in her work *Millenium* she documents each day until 1st of January 2000 with imprints of blue lips.

In 1980s (mainly in Germany) there are performances organized with wide ideas behind, in which naked Ewa strongly emphasizes her beliefs, not even for a moment resigning from her critical conceptual reflection. In the 'Orwell year' 1984 in several projects she refers to the Berlin wall – including the performance *Ost-West Schatten* ('East-West Shadow'). The naked artist with her arms spread wide holds the letters 'O' and 'W', casting her shadow on the wall which 'goes' like a sundial from East to West. A strong transition between two worlds! In 1989 in Bahnhof Westend in Berlin during her performance *Gedankenakt ist ein Kunstakt* ('The act of thought is the act of art'), using one of the most famous sentences of Immanuel Kant (with the passage: '... the starry sky above me...'), she recites and divides this text into separate letters, which she then sticks to her naked body from the bottom up, until she fills her mouth with the letters and

keeps silent. One may add here that the act by Ewa was taken over by two other acts (the act of thinking and the act of art).

As befits a radical supporter of eliminating the subject 'contamination of art', Ewa is constantly spreading the slogan 'Minimum esthetics!'. As if to emphasize this attitude to layering entailed in that activity, she demonstrated burning the word 'esthetics' in Polish, German and Spanish version, in various contexts (since 1988). The very act of burning is sometimes ironically, and for camouflage reasons, very 'esthetic', using a scenic fire or refined scents. But the effect confirms the artist's assumptions that 'esthetics is the ash of art', just as a single work of art is only 'the ash of the idea'. Therefore, it is the ashes collected sometimes after burning of the slogan 'esthetics' that become a real, grey and black documentation, and the so-called wonderful impressions of the audience in the action-destruction are elusive like smoke. In 2000, in the installation in the Berlin Gallery Rafael Vostell, Ewa formed the word 'ESTHETIK' with red poinsettia flowers from Mexico, standing on grey ash collected from the stoves of Berlin houses. Next to it – on a wall – there is a slogan painted 'Politics passes, art stays'. This work is especially valid today when we are attacked by populisms, post-truths, fake news. When we are disgusted, we think better of art itself.

Finally, having achieved wide recognition of her main artistic postulates and those related to feminist ideas, in the recent years Ewa has been invited to dozens of important exhibitions all over the world. And she has not lost her attitude of not subjecting herself to the warmth of the *status quo*. Each of her new works brings a piece of criticism and a dose of subversion. That is how the originality of the femino-world titled EWA PARTUM is doing.

- 1 These comments use large parts of my previous texts: *Azylum Marii*, [in catalogue:] *Maria Pinińska-Bereś. Imaginarium cielesności*, ed. A. Borowiec, M. Piłatowska, National Art Gallery, Sopot 2012 and *Rozbiór*, [in:] *Ewa Partum 1965–2001* [Polish edition of texts from the catalogue *Ewa Partum 1965–2001*, Badische Kunstverein, Karlsruhe 2001], ed. D. Monkiewicz, National Museum in Warsaw, 2006. Moreover, I refer directly to my other texts: *Żywy róż*, [introduction in catalogue:] *Maria Pinińska-Bereś*, Krzysztofory Gallery, Cracow 1983; *Kamień w wodę?*, [in catalogue:] *Maria Pinińska-Bereś. Obiekty z lat osiemdziesiątych*, Krzysztofory Gallery, Cracow 1988; *Ewa Partum krytyka kryteriów*, 'Arteon', 2001, No. 10.
- 2 L. Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, 'Art News', January, 1971 [Dlaczego nie było wielkich artystek?], transl. B. Limanowska, 'Ośka', 1999, No. 3(8).
- 3 W. Chadwick, *Eros or Thanatos – The Surrealist Cult of Love Reexamined*, 'Artforum', November, 1975, p. 46–56.
- 4 *Exposition Internationale du Surrealisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, Paris 1959–1960, [catalogue], p. 135.
- 5 W. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 56.
- 6 A. Markowska, *Artystki Grupy Krakowskiej*, [in:] Ewa Toniak (ed.), *Jestem artystką, we wszystkim co niepotrzebne. Kobiety i sztuka około 1968*, Neriton Publishing House, Warsaw 2010, p. 121.
- 7 Iza Kowalczyk dedicated to Pinińska-Bereś, among others, a part in the more general text: *Feminizm w sztuce polskich artystek*, www.oska.org.pl/biuletyn/6/64.pdf [accessed on 30.10.2011]. She wrote about the very artist in the text *Przestrzeń ucieleśniona* [in:] *Maria Pinińska-Bereś. Imaginarium cielesności*, op. cit.
- 8 See, among others, by that artist: *W poszukiwaniu ciała – w poszukiwaniu siebie. Wczesne realizacje rzeźbiarskie Marii Pinińskiej-Bereś*, 'Rzeźba Polska', t. 13, 2008; *(Nie) jestem feministką, ale...*, www.obieg.pl/teksty/4405, 13.10.2008, update of 15.02.2009, [accessed on 30.10.2011]; *Sztuka Marii Pinińska-Bereś i surrealistycznie rozumiana korporalność*, www.Intertekst.com/201_artykul.html, 18.03.2010 [accessed on 30.10.2011].
- 9 J. Hanusek, (b.t.), [in:] *Maria Pinińska-Bereś. Rzeźba*, [catalogue], Manhattan Gallery, Łódź 1996.
- 10 A. Jakubowska published texts about Pinińska-Bereś among others: *Ambiguous Liberation, The Early Works of Maria Pinińska-Bereś*, 'Konsthistorisk tidskrift/ Journal of Art History', vol. 83, No. 2, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2013.860913> [accessed on: 11.03.2014]; *Personalising the Global History of Pop Art. Alina Szapocznikow and Maria Pinińska-Bereś*, [in:] Annika Oehrner (ed.), *Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop*, 'Soderton Studies in Art History and Aesthetics', 2016.
- 11 K. Minioudaki; *Feminist Eruptions in Pop, Beyond Borders*, [in:] Jessica Morgan and Flavia Frigeri (ed.), *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Publishing, London 2015.
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- 14 M. Hussakowska, *Thing Pink*, [in:] *Maria Pinińska-Bereś 1931–1999*, op. cit., p. 17.
- 15 *The EY Exhibition: The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London 2015–2016.
- 16 M. Ławrynowicz, *Metapoezja Ewa Partum*, [catalogue], Galeria Krytyków, Warsaw 1981 (organization of the exhibition was withheld due to martial law).
- 17 A. Stepken, *Monografia twórczości*, [in:] *Ewa Partum 1965–2001*, op. cit.
- 18 G. Nabakowski, *Nieprzyjemne poczucie maskarady*, [in:] *Ewa Partum 1965–2001*, op. cit.
- 19 G. Dziamski, *Sztuka pisana ciąłem*, [in:] *Ewa Partum 1965–2001*, op. cit.

- 20 C. Gormley, *Ewa Partum Visual Poetry 2006, Case Study, Performance at Tate. Onto the Space of Art*, 'Tate Research Publication', 2016, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/case-studies/ewa-partum> [accessed on: 28.05.2018]
- 21 E. Majewska, *Ewa Partum albo feminizm, który nadchodzi*, [in:] M. Morzuch (red.), *ewa partum. nic nie zatrzyma idei sztuki*, [publication for the exhibition], Art Museum, Łódź 2014–2015.
- 22 I apply here a certain division into *perceptual and conceptual art*, applied by Sol LeWitt in his famous text *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, 'Artforum', R. 5, No. 10, 1967, p. 80.
- 23 E. Partum, *Nowe źródła intelektualnych wzruszeń*, [typescript], Warsaw 1970.
- 24 S. Melville, *Aspects* [in:] Anne Goldstein, Anne Rorimer (ed.), *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. 1995.
- 25 U. Eco, *Dzieło otwarte. Forma i nieokreśloność w poetykach współczesnych*, Warsaw 1973, p. 164.
- 26 M. Ławrynowicz, *Metapoezja Ewa Partum*, op. cit.
- 27 E. Partum, *Obszar zagospodarowany wyobraźnią*, [leaflet], Warsaw 1970.
- 28 M. Ławrynowicz, op. cit., p. 4.
- 29 Statement by Ewa Partum, as cited in: M. Ławrynowicz, op. cit., p. 5.
- 30 E. Partum, *Wieża Eiffel'a. Obecność wysokości*, [catalogue], Galeria Adres.
- 31 R. Janssen, R. Crozier, *TAMMail – Interview Project* (www version), ICM The Museum Library, London 1994.
- 32 As cited in: A. Stepken, *Monografia twórczości*, op. cit., p. 12.

Andrzej Kostołowski

Veiled and Direct. Remarks About the Feminine Worlds of Maria Pinińska-Bereś and Ewa Partum

The proposals of art by the internationally known: Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931–1999) and Ewa Partum (b. 1945) have been emerging since the 1960s and 1970s as the successive steps driving through the shell of masculine domination in art. Owing to the power and coherence of the liberation endeavours, both artists have worked out their own forms of creativity. Through the individuality of feminine approaches they manifested in their statements some sort of model message, and at the same time a uniqueness in the way of using artistic means of expression. For the sculpturess and “performeress” Pinińska-Bereś entangled in the multi-level dualism of the patriarchal domination and neo-avant-garde freedom, the method depended on showing psychoanalytically filtered depths through the veiled object allusions. For the relatively early emancipated and direct in her strong performances conceptual artist, Ewa Partum, the fusion of corporal presence with critical ideas was, and still is, important.

KEY WORDS:

FEMINISM, MASCULINISM, CORPOREALITY, PINK



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