Polish-born artist Ewa Partum is considered a pioneer of Central-Eastern European feminist art produced within the conceptual idiom. Her work can also be divided chronologically into Polish (1965-82), West Berlin (1982-1989) and transnational (from 1989) periods. Karolina Majewska-Güde articulates the historical alterity of Ewa Partum’s works in their various locations and the specificity of the positions from which Partum’s art was interpreted and disseminated. At the same time, the book engages with the art histories of the Central and Eastern European neo-avant-gardes focusing on the issue of narrative strategies of CEE art history.

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I started this project under the supervision of Professor Piotr Piotrowski, who died in 2015. In his absence his writings became my dialogue partners. With this book I would like to pay homage to his memory.
Introduction: An Atlas of Ewa Partum’s Artistic Practice

“Nothing in the etymology of the word history, deriving from the Greek verb ἱστορέω (to know through research), suggests that the past should be the exclusive focus of what constitutes, in essence, an enquiry-driven record and truth-orientated narrativisation of events, relations and processes in human society.” – Angela Dimitrakaki

“History is a question not just of the reception and the transmission of a work, but also of the history that was the condition for this continued reception.” – Howard Caygill

“History cannot be reduced to a manageable block of information; it has to be grasped itself as a complex of processes and relationships.” – Griselda Pollock

“The researcher, male or female, is never outside the cultural, political and economic conditions that allow for only certain questions to be formulated.” – Elspeth Probyn

Opening the Archive

Polish-born artist Ewa Partum is considered a pioneer of Eastern European feminist art produced within the idiom of conceptualism. Her work belongs to two discursive formations: the historical neo-avant-garde that emerged during the 1960s, and contemporary art as accompanied by its own temporal and semantic transition after 1989. Partum's work can also be spatially and chronologically divided into Polish (1965–82), West Berlin (from 1982–89) and contemporary/global (1989 onward) periods. Partum herself established a double continuity in her work, identifying her practice as conceptual (from 1965) and feminist (from 1974). Her work follows a trajectory from a deconstruction of the protocols of medium specificity to a later reconstruction of the same by introducing an active body as a visual component, agent and constitutive element of her feminist performances.

Partum's retrospective exhibition in Karlsruhe in 2001, a double solo exhibition in Gdańsk and Warsaw in 2006, and a more recent presentation in Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź in 2015/16, with their accompanying catalogues, constituted particular moments of the reopening and transformation of the artist's archive. Unlike the many meticulously preserved archives of Eastern European neo-avant-garde artists concerned with the problem of self-historicization, Partum's archive – containing primary and secondary sources such as photographic documentation of artworks and ephemeral projects, correspondence, books, artworks, reviews, critical texts, original manuscripts and photocopies, covering the period of time from 1965 to the present – is fragmentary and fluid. It incorporates the Galeria Adres archive run by Partum between 1972 and 1977 as well as material related to her artistic practice; however, the boundaries between both sets of materials are flexible. Although there are many traces of Partum's activities aiming at the organization and systematization of the material, the state of Partum's archive is determined by the

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5 I refer to the concept of self-historicization as proposed by Zdenka Badovinac, who writes that self-historicization involves “contextualizing one’s own work in one’s own local tradition” and that it is “an informal system of historicization practiced by artists who, due to the absence of any suitable collective history, are themselves compelled to search for their own historical/interpretative context.” See Badovinac, Zdenka: “Neues Slowenisches Museum: An Essay on Institutional Critique and the Production of Institution” in Kunsttexte.de E-Journal für Kunst- und Bildgeschichte, no. 3, 2014, p. 5, https://doi.org/10.18452/7563.
artist’s attitude as articulated in one of her works that “the act of thinking is an act of art”\textsuperscript{6} rather than an act of making. This means that, for Partum, the photographic works, mail art poems, documentation of her actions, letter set and cardboard cut-out letters used in her performances, and even the performative events themselves, merely constitute forms of art notations.

The material gathered in the archive was collected by the artist as both an accumulation of traces of her artistic practice and as a source for the practice itself. For that reason, every return to the archive performed by the artist or by curators or researchers is an intervention that restructures it. This process parallels the very procedure of historicization of Partum’s practice. A curator of Partum’s first Polish retrospective exhibition, Aneta Szyłak, pointed to this condition of the practice of historicization: “we want and must return to the artists’ archives and, by striving to possess, we perform rearrangements between the work and its notation.”\textsuperscript{7} Therefore, the task of the historicization of Partum’s practice, to which this book aspires, also means the transformation of it.

From the correspondence preserved in Ewa Partum’s archive, we can reconstruct the process of the opening of the archive as one that is, to a certain extent, controlled by the artist who selects materials, makes them available, translates them, and also proposes certain conceptual connections. The researchers who have accessed the archive on various occasions have been driven by the need to learn about Partum’s practice. My own approach to the material gathered by Partum has been governed by two objectives: not only to find the history in the archive, but also to find the history of the archive.\textsuperscript{8}

\section*{Horizontal Monograph}

The political changes of 1989 resulted in a methodological shift in the art history of former-socialist Europe. Post-1989 scholarship challenged not only pre-determined historical hierarchies and canons but also narrative strategies of national and “universal” art histories. It also opened the possibility of retrospectively narrating

\textsuperscript{6} The Act of Thinking Is an Act of Art \textsuperscript{6} is the title of Ewa Partum’s work realized in 1989 at the Abstract Book event organized in West Berlin by the artist collective Der Kongreß.


\textsuperscript{8} I paraphrase Piotr Juszkiewicz, who writes about his reading of historical critical texts as a search for the history of a critical discourse and the search for the history within this discourse. See Juszkiewicz, Piotr: Od rozkoszy historiozofii do ‘gry w nic’. Polska krytyka artystyczna czasu odwilży, Poznań 2006, p. 49.
East-Central European or, respectively, Eastern European art history. In recent years historical investigations have moved away from questions about the “voice”9 of Eastern European art history, which can be always performed as authentic, towards language (terminology) and narrative strategies of art histories and their political grammars.10 How to speak, to whom one speaks and under what conditions one speaks: these are the core questions of recent East-Central European art history, which this book also strives to pursue as it concentrates on Ewa Partum’s artistic practice.

Historicizing Ewa Partum’s work means working across many different locations – places and spaces understood as differently constructed and experienced social and political realms. Thus my inquiry focuses not only on the semantic shift within Ewa Partum’s practice from autonomous conceptual art to socially engaged feminist art but also on the relocation of this practice and its redistribution from the socialist East to the capitalist West (Berlin) and, subsequently, to/in the contemporary global art world. I propose to articulate these trajectories within a non-linear narrative focusing not on the reconstruction of an uninterrupted chronology but rather on the circulation of certain ideas, objects, strategies and knowledges and their local reconfigurations in altered geopolitical contexts. I propose analysing Partum’s artistic practice within a framework inspired by a heterogeneous concept of horizontal art history.

This choice is determined by the imperative to follow a method that is not imposed on but arises from the object of study.11 Insofar as the work of Ewa Partum has been produced, distributed and interpreted in three distinctive semantical, ideological and institutional spaces, the perspective of horizontal art history – with its central notions of the \textit{parallax effect} (localization of meanings) and \textit{framing} – remains particularly valuable.12 Moreover, it promises to “overcome a commitment to

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9 Two voices of European art history were discussed by Hans Belting in his publication \textit{Art History After Modernism}, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 61.

10 Current concerns of East-Central European art history include: projects that reconsider cultural production from the Cold War period beyond the dichotomy of official and non-official culture, focused instead on interrelations of art fields beyond the paradigm of two circles of culture; projects focused on recovering local traditions of internationalism, decolonisation and alternative conceptions of globality; and research on postnational art histories in the context of nascent nationalism.

11 This concept of history relates to Walter Benjamin’s experiential concept of historical knowledge where history is understood not as an experience of but rather with the past. See Caygill 2004, pp. 89–95.

vertical relations and enables the pursuit of a (feminist) art history that prioritizes the horizontal axis.”

Horizontal art history is understood here neither as a methodology to be applied nor as a rigid program to follow. Rather, it can be conceptualized as an operating system that must constantly be updated and further developed by the user: a conceptual tool that enables us to detect and expose silences and aporias within art-historical narratives.

The constitutive notions of horizontal art history as proposed by Polish scholar Piotr Piotrowski are indebted to the vocabulary of postcolonial studies and diachronic analysis of cultural transfers within culture zones that deploy the notions of culture margins, circulation, and transnational and critical geography, as well as to feminist retroactive art history understood not as a strategy of inserting marginalized names into the hegemonic narrative but as an attempt to change an existing paradigm. Within the horizontal paradigm, a static spatial dualism of periphery and centre is replaced by a dynamic model focused on the set of relations between centres and plural margins, as well as margin-to-margin relations. This perspective enables the mapping of a set of dynamic relations between Ewa

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13 Dimitrakaki 2013, p. 41.
16 See, for instance, Pollock 1988.
Partum’s work and the times and places from which she has operated and from which her art is being redistributed and interpreted.\textsuperscript{18}

This book attempts to respond to two paradigms of horizontal art history: the postulate to revisit and rewrite a set of art-historical concepts (such as institutional critique) that, according to Piotrowski, would lead to provincializing Western art history; and secondly, to create a narrative that focuses on performative locality and transnational connections, especially those that omit overrepresented centres. The task of such an art history is to reconstruct the topography of the local and translocal circulations of concepts and knowledges. While Piotrowski applied and exercised his method within a transnational comparative study of East-Central European neo-avant-garde and contemporary art,\textsuperscript{19} here I am working towards adapting his narrative model to the format of a monographic study.

From the outset of art history, a monographic focus on the sovereign (male) artist was one of the main tasks of the discipline.\textsuperscript{20} Within the horizontal paradigm, a monograph is decentralized as a genre and assumes the form of an atlas: a set of articulations connected to each other in a non-linear but problem-centred way.\textsuperscript{21} As a multi-perspectival whole, the atlas constitutes an enfolding multiplicity; it is conceived as an interrogation that undermines the notion of completed history and also stays away from the notion of art perceived as an individual mythology. An atlas of Partum’s practice represents a revelatory rather than celebratory art history: it does not aim to reveal the place of Partum’s art in art history, but it points to the mechanisms that guarantee that place in particular circumstances of the post-1989 period. The main heroine of this non-linear, problematic mapping is thus not the

\textsuperscript{18} According to Piotrowski, horizontal art history should articulate “a triangle of problems: the strategies of the local cultural policies of the authorities; the local artistic traditions and varieties of the mythologization of culture; and the universalist ambitions of the local cultures attempting to find compensation for the traumatic reality experience.” See Piotrowski 2001, p. 22.


\textsuperscript{20} For a historical overview of a monograph as an art historical genre, see Guercio, Gabriele: Art as Existence: The Artist’s Monograph and Its Projects, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009. Guercio describes the areas defined by monograph legacy as: ‘The life-and-work dialectic; the view of the artist as a ‘who’ reflected and engendered within the artworks; the focus on the singular existence; the surmise of a continuum among the objects of creation, the sphere of living, and reality at large.” Guercio p. 284.

artist and her intentionality but the artistic practice in constant movement between its historical alterity and its interpretative presences.

The notion of an atlas emphasizes the performativity of framing and a contingency of interpretation: meanings are produced by asking particular questions. Thus, each chapter can be understood as a different question posed from a contemporary perspective towards Partum’s practice. If the act of interpretation is always an act of violence, the fragmentation achieved by the atlas structure is an act of curating: taking care of the object of study by approaching it carefully from different directions but not subsuming it. Therefore, the chronological narrative is disturbed due to its verticality and canon-making orientation as well as its centre–periphery dynamic, which is based on the concepts of diffusion and influence. At the same time, a preposterous interpretation, i.e. the procedure of situating works of art in ahistorical discursive contexts, is avoided for its tendency to exploit and exhaust an artwork by stabilizing it in a context that is not historically grounded. Avoiding a sequential historical narrative enables us not only to focus on ruptures and gaps but also to develop multiple narratives that expose both a certain disposition within Partum’s practice and its reception. Paradoxically, it also allows for disclosure of the continuity of this artistic practice in different spatial and material conditions beyond the fossilized “progress, loss, and return” narrative models identified by Clare Hemmings in the context of Western feminist storytelling as dominant – and which do not account for the complexities of the past.

The notion of an atlas refers to the material grounding of art history: it is a format of “historical-geographical materialism understood as an open-ended and dialectical mode of inquiry.” It follows the “spatial turn” in art history, a paradigm fuelled by the desire to write an inclusive non-hierarchical art history that incorporates marginalized locations and focuses on the circulation of materials, people and ideas rather than on a limited number of canonized objects and actors. This approach also emphasizes “questions of cultural encounters and exchanges as circulations.”

Spatial art history draws on theories of critical relational geography understood as “a mode of rethinking the relations between subjects and places away from the

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organizing principles of the law of the state that controls privileged inclusions and exclusions.\textsuperscript{26}

David Harvey argues that in the current global condition, in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication, place-bound identities have become more important rather than less.\textsuperscript{27} Piotrowski’s concept of horizontal art history is grounded precisely in such a recognition that “the place as an identity label has not disappeared but has acquired a new meaning.”\textsuperscript{28} Thus one of the main categories of horizontal art history remains the notion of “local” and “location”. Piotrowski approached the notion of “local” as not essentialized but conceptualized in performative terms – as constituted in the process of communication.

Considering the spatio-temporal significance of the local, Elspeth Probyn defined “local” as “directly issuing from or related to a particular time.”\textsuperscript{29} The author also distinguishes between “locale” and “location”, defining “locale” as a place that is the setting for a particular event: “A place understood as both a discursive and non-discursive arrangement that holds a [gendered] event.”\textsuperscript{30} The non-discursive “locales” into which Partum’s practice expands include the art academy, an artist’s home, galleries, museums, and the public space; discursive locales include transnational concepts of “conceptual art”, “feminist art” and “global contemporary art” as well as “the West” and “the East”. Finally, Probyn defines a “location” as fixing statements in relation to other already sanctioned statements. Thus, location delineates “what we might hold as knowable and, following Foucault, renders certain experiences true and scientific while excluding others.”\textsuperscript{31} Within this framework, the West and the East can be defined as specific geographical, economic and political discursive locales of connections and separate locations of knowledge production. Probyn argues that to bring these metaphors down to earth it is necessary to consider both “the construction of sites and the methods of researching sites”\textsuperscript{32} – in other words: “Instead of imploding the historical and the situational into a simulated issue, we have to look at the construction of locale”.\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{27} Harvey, David: “From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Conditions of Postmodernity” in Bird, Jon et al. (eds.): \textit{Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change}, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 3–29, p. 4.
\bibitem{28} Piotrowski 2010, p. 214.
\bibitem{30} Ibid.
\bibitem{31} Probyn 1990, p. 178.
\bibitem{32} Ibid., p. 177.
\bibitem{33} Ibid., p. 186.
\end{thebibliography}
Discursive locales such as Eastern Europe, East-Central Europe/Central and Eastern Europe, and the West are “historically determined constructs that cannot be absolutized”, as they are “produced in the interpretation processes” in ever-changing historical circumstances. In the critical discourse on contemporary transnational cosmopolitan artistic practices, these terms are often irrelevant and replaced by the categories of the global South and North. They are nevertheless still relevant and effective in the case of artistic practices in socialist Europe.

Some of the approaches and concepts I will be discussing in the following chapters certainly ossify the notion of Eastern Europe. This tendency among regional art and cultural historians is an integral part of a particular historical moment related to the changes initiated in 1989. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this position can be described as “strategic essentialism” – a certain necessary step on the way to something more complex. On the other hand, it can also be related

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34 In this context, Amy Bryzgel emphasizes that binaries such as East and West “are easily exploded when we realize the dependence of the dominant of the pair for its existence.” See Bryzgel, Amy: Performing the East: Performance Art in Russia, Latvia and Poland since 1980, London: I. B. Tauris, 2013, p. 14.


to the persistence of the condition described by Beáta Hock and Anu Allas as “intimately linked to the region’s location at the margins of the European core and the concomitant exposure to ‘epistemic violence’.”\(^\text{37}\)

Such a radical insistence on a divide between Western and Eastern Europe that exceeds sociopolitical differences towards the current condition of knowledge production was advocated by Piotrowski, who argued that “the terms of the language of interpretation and institutional discourse are still Western”\(^\text{38}\) and “to analyse the world (so also Central and Eastern European art and its historiography), we still must rely on Western tradition of academic or intellectual discourse.”\(^\text{39}\) But, according to him, “to realize this is the beginning of the questioning and critique.”\(^\text{40}\)

Similarly, Boris Buden, writing from the perspective of critique of the “culturalization of historical reality” of “post-communist transition” argues that “now the East, after having been defeated politically and appropriated economically, can also be conquered epistemically and colonized culturally. The first task is assumed by the Western academy, particularly disciplines like the so-called area studies.”\(^\text{41}\)

In their essay on the postnational turn and postnational solidarity in Eastern European art, Maja and Reuben Fowkes reflect upon the notion of Eastern Europe from the contemporary post-transitional perspective and provide a way to use this term productively. They argue that “[l]ike the art created under its name, Eastern Europe has itself migrated over the last two decades, losing political relevance as the original geopolitical designation of the Eastern Bloc fades into history. The transformations brought by the accession of even ex-Soviet republics into the European Union and NATO has emptied the old term Eastern Europe of its contested political significance, but perhaps made it a more open and productive category in other ways. [...] An Eastern Europe which is no longer defined by Soviet control, but only by differentiated historical experience of socialism.”\(^\text{42}\) The authors call this a liberated concept of Eastern Europe.


\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.


In this book I use the historical notions of Eastern Europe/East-Central Europe in combination with the binary of East and West. If maintained, this binary delineates a set of specific geographical, historical, economic and sociopolitical differences “encompassing the economic and social boundaries between European countries that experienced single-party state socialism [that] the rest of Europe and North America did not.”

However, it must be emphasized that the East–West distinction is constructed as asymmetrical. Rastko Močnik defines this asymmetry in terms of the hierarchical order between the West – which is a non-space – and all local spaces that are to be measured against the West conceptualized as a norm. Also Andrea Dimitrakaki, who proposes that the West and the East are “materially grounded and ideologically express divisions”, emphasizes certain incompatibility between both categories. She refers to the “process of manufacturing Eastern Europe as an ideological tale of otherness in ongoing, hegemonic global political narratives.” The East is historicized as exceptional and particular, “always intensely local and always having its own story to tell.” As Dimitrakaki argues, this “allegeable authentic identity” marketed within the post-socialist condition inscribes itself into the neoliberal logic of competition. This logic of exception “serves to return Eastern Europe to its point of origin, as either a heroic or denigrated otherness – as exotic yet tamed.”

Apart from functioning as a political or ideological concept reinscribed within the current condition of neoliberal global capitalism, the otherness of the socialist part of Europe has also been experienced historically; it can therefore be studied as a lived experience that has determined artistic practices. One of the operating concepts used within recent East-Central European art history to define the conditions of this experience is the notion of the “close Other” introduced into regional art history by Bojana Pejić. Whereas the identity of the “real Other” is determined by the colonization strategy of the metropolis and developed in a state of tension between its own local tradition and the metropolis, Pejić argues that the identity of the “close Other” is created by an act of marginalization by the metropolis. This concept was rephrased within the framework of recent studies that focus on semi-

45 Dimitrakaki 2013, p. 71.
46 Ibid., p. 72.
47 Ibid.
48 The term “close Other” was introduced by Bojana Pejić in her essay “The Dialectics of Normality” in Pejić, Bojana/ Elliott, David (eds.): After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist
peripheral colonization, i.e. the relationship of East-Central European countries to the processes of decolonization from the position of being an “internal Other”.⁴⁹ This historical situatedness of the former Eastern Bloc countries and their relationship with “the West” are also often explained through the metaphor of self-colonization and the notion of “hegemony without domination”.⁵⁰ Alexander Kiossev states that it was merely “social imagination” that played a key role throughout the process of self-colonization that “took place beyond colonial realities – military occupation, political dominance, administrative rule, and economic exploitation.”⁵¹

Social imagination also played an important role in the process of artists in the Eastern Bloc establishing a relationship with art created in the West. Piotr Piotrowski has insisted that “perceiving art as European was a psychological remedy for artists under communism – for the attempts of the Soviet Union to impose its cultural model.”⁵² He argues that although the meanings of Eastern European artworks differ from those made in the West, Eastern European art was developing within the orbit of Western culture. Even if the East became an object of the modernist universalism of the West during the Cold War – the universalism that was a tool of the expansion of the West and a manifestation of its imperialism – the East itself perceived the West as universal. Piotrowski concludes that Western art has been perceived as a universal art “that merely demanded a politics of assimilation, an incorporation or a resistance.”⁵³ Effectively, the minor, i.e. Eastern European, art “appears always mediated by the major” (i.e. Western) art.⁵⁴

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⁵¹ Ibid. Kiossev continues: “Supported and reproduced by everyone, such commonly shared notions encourage individuals in imagining participations in communities and processes beyond the limited horizon of their immediate experience whereas primary groups are stimulated to perceive themselves as being a part of larger and sometimes unfathomable societies – nations, races, classes, historic periods, and even ‘humankind’ acting upon ‘the world stage’ and producing ‘world history’.”
⁵² Piotrowski 2010, p. 213.
⁵³ Piotrowski 2012, p. 22.
Consequently, if for the contemporary decolonial thinkers the West becomes a dead interlocutor and their task is to overcome Europe and engage with “border thinking” instead of sharp dichotomies such as East and West, historians concerned with the art and culture developed during the Cold War period in what was then socialist Europe still have to keep open the problem of the historical relation between former Eastern and Western Blocs – not only to maintain or rearticulate the difference between the colonized and colonial Europe but also to reconstruct the unique historical episteme: a condition of the production of culture in socialist Europe that could be described as the East looking at the West not look at the East.

In his proposal to approach this condition of “close Otherness” historically within the paradigm of horizontal art history – the art history which is “polyphonic, multidimensional and free of geographical hierarchies” – Piotrowski emphasizes the necessity of a global perspective. In this book I will advocate a perspective inspired by the critical vocabulary developed within “minor transnational” discourse developed as an answer to a reductive rendering of transnationality and as a reaction to “the compulsory mediation by the mainstream for all forms of cultural production and interrelations among different minority communities.”

Why is the concept of a global perspective not sufficient in this context? If we look at the collapse of the West–East divide as “another chapter in the general narrative of the restructuring of global industrialism that occurred in response to the economic crisis of the 1970s”, 1989 can be defined as “a crucial and concluding step in a global passage from one phase of capitalism to another, that is from state capitalism to the intercontinental economies of global capital.” This dystopian vision

58 Lionnet et al. 2013., p. 2.
of a globalization that refers to “an untrammelled financialization of the globe” points towards the penetration of cultures by capital that causes their reification and commodification rather than creates plural and non-hierarchical spatialities of exchange and communication. Thus, while referring to “the global art world” in the context of a redistribution of Partum’s practice, I point indeed to the Western centres of capital accumulation. The process of the global redistribution of Partum’s art does not indicate that it is recognizable internationally but rather that it is present in major Western collections such as London’s Tate Modern or the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

If “global” here is defined as the current condition of the globalization of capital experienced as culture, then “transnational” merely designates “the spaces and practices acted upon by border-crossing agents, be they dominant or marginal.” Nevertheless, the notion of transnationality can also be interpreted as the privileged perspective of the mobile transnational elite – and, as such, as advocating the enculturation of capital and human flows. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s counter-hegemonic concept of “minor transnationalism” attempts to counter the paradoxes of the transnational perspective and is conceived as “a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center.” The minor transnational perspective is a privileged position for the art historical narrative that involves an analysis of the process of transnational transitions, transfers across national boundaries and the redistribution of artistic practice within the current global condition. If “global” is defined merely in relation to “local”, a minor transnational perspective aims to reveal all the traceable and potential connections between the work of art and its space and place without privileging “local” dimension. Within art history, the minor transnational approach provides a framework for translating an art practice in terms of regional and broader networks and not focusing on the frame of national art history but also “acknowledging the national as a particular location.”

Piotrowski’s project of non-national art history, proceeding from his global perspective, is based upon the predicament that art history has to remain concerned with national difference “only when written in the micro perspective that cannot ignore the national subject.” Analogically, minor transnationalism conceptualizes

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63 Lionnet et al. 2013, p. 5.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
the subject that differs from the postcolonial, nomadic and flexible forms of citizenship and still considers the nation-state as a major and active mechanism that regulates people's lives and therefore influences their artistic practices. Thus, this perspective enables the articulation of “a bigger picture” without refraining from problematizing the relations of the subjects (artists) and practices (art) with the infrastructures of nation-states.

**Framing Ewa Partum’s Artistic Practice**

“Charting multiple cartographies should not be confused with ahistorical or essentialist strategies – many maps do not simply equate with any maps. – *Marsha Meskimmon*”

This book inscribes Ewa Partum’s practice onto multiple axes across a set of constructed binaries such as East/West; local (distribution)/global (redistribution); national/transnational; and historical alterity/interpretative presence. The subsequent chapters problematize and historicize Partum’s practice across the space delineated by those binaries while examining the tension between intensely local contexts (non-discursive locales) such as Poland in the 1970s and West Berlin in the 1980s and several transnational frameworks (discursive locales) such as the neo-avant-garde, conceptual and feminist art movements. The chapters have been conceptualized as frames that not only enable the articulation of local meanings of Partum’s artworks but also allow the mapping of the dynamic process of local and transnational movement of these meanings. The frames re-actualize Ewa Partum’s works within particular contexts understood not as given or objective facts but rather as actively constructed through the act of asking questions.

The concept of framing allows us to create a critical distance between the presentist perspective on Ewa Partum’s art (the “now” in which a question is asked) and the historical alterity of this artistic practice (the “then” of art production) and, in this process, to rethink the political dimension of Partum’s practice.

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67 Lionnet et al. 2013, p. 8.

on Partum’s artistic agency carries a risk of becoming a rigorous exegesis of Partum’s narrative. The aim here, however, is not to reconstruct the artist’s intentions behind certain works in order to recover her authority, but to emphasize and critically use the language with which the artist conceptually constructed her works. This *excavated language* is being used alongside contemporary theoretical models for an analysis of Partum’s intellectual and political pursuits. By drawing attention to Partum’s artistic agency, I am not trying to compensate for potential contradictions within this practice in order to present it as a coherent development of certain ideas. On the contrary, I give priority to the contradictions that are at the heart of this (and any other) artistic practice and propose a fragmented narrative that focuses on individual artworks.

Chapter 1, *Existing Cartographies*, maps major agents, locations, themes and geographical trajectories of the redistribution of Ewa Partum’s artistic practice. Interpretative and historicizing texts about Partum’s art practice are connected to the process of the institutional distribution and redistribution of her art. Most often, these texts under examination take the form of a catalogue essay or a review; on occasion, the narratives are constructed exclusively within a single article or exhibition. Considering the correlation between historicization and the institutional re/distribution of Partum’s art – namely the fact that the historicizing essays cannot be perceived as separate from the research exhibition projects – I recount the most significant moments in the recent history of the redistribution of Partum’s practice. In the second part of the chapter, I look closely at the main lines of argument and the problems related to interpreting Partum’s work.

Chapter 2, titled *Ewa Partum’s Critical Engagement with Art Infrastructures*, responds to the postulates formulated within the debate on art history produced in/from an East-Central European perspective – i.e. the need for terminological inventiveness and a rethinking of the vocabulary of East-Central European art history.

69 In this context, the texts of a feminist philosopher Ewa Majewska stand out. Ewa Majewska interprets Ewa Partum’s art in the light of contemporary philosophical discourses and queer theory, referring to the writings of Jacques Rancière, Gerald Raunig, Jack Halberstam, Renate Lorenz and others. See, for instance, Majewska, Ewa: “Feminist Art of Failure, Ewa Partum and the Avant-garde of the Weak” in *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej*, no. 16, 2017. Other types of texts which not related to the exhibitions are comparative analyses that position Partum’s work among the artistic production of the 1970s, often with a reference to a particular medium; see, for instance, Rode, Dagmara: “Women’s Experimental Filmmaking in Poland in the 1970s and Early 1980s” in *Baltic Screen Media Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2015, pp. 31–43.

70 This postulate was formulated by Éva Forgács in her lecture “Art History’s One Blind Spot in East-Central Europe: Terminology”, delivered during the conference Rewriting Art History in Eastern Europe: Art History on the Disciplinary Map in East-Central Europe, at Moravian Gallery, Brno, 18–19 November 2010. See also a review by Ghiu, Daria: “Rewriting Art History
In it, I discuss Ewa Partum’s involvement in art infrastructures set within different spatial and temporal frameworks: socialist Poland in the mid-1960s and 1970s and in the decade that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, tracing her activities both in Germany and in Poland. I point to the particular events in Partum’s artistic biography of entering and re-entering local art scenes, and I analyse Partum’s practices and works that engaged directly with the protocols of the distribution and redistribution of her art. A substantial part of chapter 2 is devoted to new research on and interpretation of the Galeria Adres (1972–77). I delineate the history of the Galeria Adres, focusing on its specificity to particular locales and contexts while considering (1) its structure and artistic profile, (2) its transnational aspirations and strategies, and (3) Partum’s strategy of appropriating infrastructure as a part of her artistic practice. The exhibitions and publications organized at and by the Galeria Adres are also discussed.

The archive of the Galeria Adres has not been preserved in its entirety. My analysis has therefore been based on a close examination of the fragmentary remaining material, which includes correspondence, mail art works, books, catalogues, brochures, posters, scenarios and notes. I also refer to art historical texts and especially to Dorota Monkiewicz’s essay published in 2015 that constituted the first attempt at the historicization of the Galeria Adres activities. My knowledge about the gallery’s activities was also enriched through working on the exhibition *ewa partum. my gallery is an idea. galeria adres archive*, held in 2019 in Warsaw.73

In the last section of chapter 2, I read Partum’s practice in the context of the reconfigured post-1989 art world and its new formulas of art infrastructures, focusing on the phenomenon of the “curatorial” and its languages. The curatorial is not problematized here as a critical practice with its own set of cultural, educational and research strategies and theories, but rather as a set of protocols within the net of art infrastructures related to hegemonic position in the field of art. I examine the events in which Partum employed her practice as a critical tool that enabled

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71 At the beginning of the 1980s, Partum’s family sold the flat in Warsaw where she had left a considerable part of the Galeria Adres archive. All documents stored there were lost.


73 The exhibition *ewa partum. my gallery is an idea. galeria adres archive* was organized together with Berenika Partum at Galeria Studio in Warsaw and took place from 08 March to 02 June 2019. For more about the exhibition, see https://teatrstudio.pl/en/galeria/aktualnosci/ewa-partum-moja-galeria-jest-idea.
her to interfere with the process of its redistribution\textsuperscript{74} and with artworks that actively engaged with the procedure of rendering curatorial agency and its languages visible.

By framing fragments of Partum’s artistic practice within the discourse on art infrastructures, I intend to disclose the dialectical relation between Partum’s artistic production and its material, cultural and personal frameworks. I investigate the contexts and conditions of Partum’s art production and distribution and look closely at how this cultural practice has modified existing conditions. Therefore, I am concerned with the interpretation of works and events that informed rather than reflected upon the rituals and protocols of the existing art infrastructures.

In chapter 3, Ewa Partum’s Conceptual Art, I consider Partum’s works realized during the period identified by the artist as “conceptual.” I characterize various scenarios employed by Partum to identify her artistic practice with the conceptual label. My subject is therefore the historicization of the relationship between the unstable notion of “conceptual art/conceptualism” and Partum’s artistic strategies of identification with conceptualism. In the first part of the chapter I consider the problem of the historicization of Ewa Partum’s self-identification as a conceptual artist and the changing paradigms of historicization of conceptual art within national and global frameworks. I also investigate the geopolitical context of the reception of Western artistic models in Central and Eastern Europe and the crucial problem related to the concept of circulation, namely, “the limits of the reception of circulating ideas”.\textsuperscript{75}

In my reading of the conceptual/conceptualism label both within Partum’s practice and in its historicization, I propose to look at this notion from a perspective of circulation understood as the “condensation of temporal moments that allows one to move from the general and abstract (‘conceptual’) – ultimately the universal – towards the local, the contingent, the contextual.”\textsuperscript{76} I approach the notion of conceptual art within the imperatives “of a thicket of localities, complex relationalities and precise language,” as postulated by Monica Juneja in her deliberation on the notion of circulation in contemporary global art history.\textsuperscript{77} To that end, I consider

\textsuperscript{74} I focus here exclusively on artworks and I am not analysing Partum’s polemical correspondence or public statements, which often remain critical of contemporary exhibition strategies.

\textsuperscript{75} The question of these limits of reception was posed by Piotr Piotrowski in his essay “The Global NETwork: An Approach to Comparative Art History” in Kaufmann et al. (eds.) 2015, pp. 149–165, p. 164.

\textsuperscript{76} Juneja, Monica: “Circulation and Beyond: The Trajectories of Vision in Early Modern Eurasia” in Kaufman et al. (eds.) 2015, pp. 59–77, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 61. Juneja also writes about the inflammatory use of metaphors such as “hybridity” and “creolisation” which, due to the latent assumption of the existence of pure cultures, have limited explanatory potential. Circulation, on the contrary, “is an important entry point that
the circulation of the “conceptual label” within Polish historiography and, at the same time, appropriate the language used by Partum in her conceptual works.

As Tomáš Pospiszyl has argued, “conceptual art is one of the most fluid of the current international movements: it flows easily across borders, in all directions.”78 I am concerned here with the reconstruction of such flows and their vectors on the map of Partum’s practice. I consider how Partum’s practice was framed within local discourses on conceptual art but also how this practice was positioned towards transnational knowledges of conceptual art.

My argument is twofold: to consider the “conceptual” in the process of the historicization and self-historicization of Partum’s practice, and to interpret the strategies employed by the artist, such as tautology and repetition, in relation to this label in the context of what was available and aesthetically achievable in Partum’s location at the time. From there, I consider transgressive and conformist aspects of conceptualism understood as a phantasm of pure autonomous art. Finally, I define selected strategies of Partum as an internal critique of the hegemonic definition of conceptualism.

In Feminist Identifications in Ewa Partum’s Practice, chapter 4, Partum’s feminist art is recognized as a reverse of “latent feminism” and exposed as an unambiguous practice deriving from a critical analysis of the local social conditions and the personal experience of operating within the predominantly male art scene in Poland in the 1970s. In my analysis, I propose interpreting Partum’s feminist aesthetics as a series of context-based and situated feminist identifications. I demonstrate that Partum’s feminist art was grounded in the context of state-organized socialism and was not merely the reception of second-wave feminism by an artist from the periphery. I analyse the evolution of Partum’s feminist strategies in performances realized in pre- and post-1989 Berlin, and I trace the dynamics of the redistribution of Partum’s feminist practice.

Partum’s emancipatory feminist attitude has not manifested itself exclusively within her art. We can find traces of this attitude in Partum’s activities as an exhibition organizer and gallery owner (1972–77), which enabled her to participate in transnational art networks as well as to control the means of the presentation and distribution of her art. There are also subtle yet important traces of Partum’s feminist attitude in her archive: written evidence from male artists documenting her positive influence on their professional careers, such as a statement by Wolf Vostell

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confirming that it was Partum who introduced him to a prominent gallerist; or a
dedication in Andrzej Partum’s book of poetry, noting only attesting to the artist’s
affection but also to the fact that it was Ewa Partum who educated him as an artist.
It is not merely the existence of these statements that makes them documents of Partum's feminist consciousness, but rather the fact that Partum placed them
in her archive among photographic documentation of her projects, works of other
artists and international artistic correspondence.

In chapter 4, however, I am concerned exclusively with analysing Partum’s female
minist aesthetics. I focus on the works in which feminist content plays a structural
role, i.e. determines their meaning. I seek to define the conditions of Partum's sit-
tuated feminism and reconstruct the genealogy of her feminist aesthetics beyond a
diffusional paradigm that emphasizes the Western roots of second-wave feminism. Thus, I concentrate on articulating “the many interspaces that make any piece of art a unique item of knowledge” which “disappears behind the common notion of influence.”

In the first section of the chapter, I reconstruct the vocabulary of Partum's fe-
manship, referring to the notion of Self-Identification the artist introduced into her
practice in 1980, and I analyse the function of Partum's naked body in her actions,
photo collages and photographs. In order to determine the local meanings of Par-
tum's feminist aesthetic, I take into account specifics of Polish visual culture in the
1970s as well as the characteristics of the semi-public artistic sphere, structured by
tension between autonomy and engagement. In the following section, I analyse the
changes of Partum's artistic strategies in her self-reflective performances in West
Berlin, where Partum's body was used as a surface for drawing and writing. In these
actions, Partum's focus moved away from social issues towards conceptualizations
of subject/object relations as found in performance art. Subsequently, I point to the
shift within Partum's feminist practice after 1989 and I analyse her delegated per-
formance Pearls (2006) as the moment of identification with contemporary global
feminism.

In the final section of chapter 4, I consider the process of the contemporary
global redistribution of Partum's art within the framework of blockbuster feminist
exhibitions. If, for Partum, feminism constituted both a basis for her artistic prac-
tice (from 1978 onwards) and a means to explore a particular artistic subjectivity
(feminist artist), for the secondary audience, feminism became a major interpre-
tative framework of her work. However, feminism is a contested and pluralistic

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80 Bazin, Jérôme/ Glatigny, Pascal Dubourg/ Piotrowski, Piotr (eds.): Art beyond Borders: Artistic
Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989), Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016,
p. 3.
terrain, and I therefore investigate how Partum's situated feminism inscribed in her works differs from the feminisms of her contemporary interpreters.

In chapter 5, *The Spaces of the Political*, I present the “agoraphilic” disposition of Partum’s artistic practice and analyse her works realized in municipal public spaces in two non-discursive locales: in socialist Poland (repeated in post-socialist Poland) and in West Berlin. The chapter is structured as a case study juxtaposing two works, *The Legality of Space* and *Private Performance*; in it, I argue that Partum’s experience of working under the conditions of the centralized spectacle of real socialism in Poland sensitized the artist to the complex constellation between private and public and led her to explore the possibilities of situating her works in the actual public space in a subversive way.

One question I address is how Partum utilized geographically located physical space, such as a city square or municipal office, as the means to position her art within the public sphere. I aim to demonstrate how the space in Partum’s practice became the means – aside from her body – for situating her works of art politically.

In my analysis, I refer to theories of the oppositional public sphere and to contemporary deliberations on art in the public space to demonstrate that in her works in the public space, Partum worked towards establishing an experience-based oppositional public sphere.\(^{81}\) I focus on *The Legality of Space* (Poland, 1971) and *Private Performance* (West Berlin, 1985), two paradigmatic works realized in the public space, in order to define a set of tactics employed by the artist in both locations. This juxtaposition enables me to capture Partum’s transition from operating in a physical, urban space (or its simulation, as we also see in another work, *Self-Identification*) towards acting within the space of municipal offices and municipal rituals, both being actual locations of state power, which operates through bureaucratic procedures.

The questions I try to answer in this book include: In Partum’s practice, what was the function of art institutions? What did it mean to represent, use and perform the naked female body under state socialism in a country with a limited consumer culture, characterized by an absence of a feminist movement and a very limited presence of feminist art discourse? What did it mean to postulate the recognition of women, or to criticize the cultural lack of representation of women, in socialist Poland of the 1970s and early 1980s? What (and where) were the intellectual sources of Partum’s feminist performances and how did she formulate the feminist postulates in her statements?

Among these concerns, I also want to address the transfer of Partum’s artistic practice from socialist Poland to West Berlin, which must be seen as a process of re-

\(^{81}\) More recent social theories that deliberate on social space tend to avoid categorical divisions between private and public spheres, instead employing alternative notions of community or multitude. I will, however, maintain this division as an operative category.
signification and rearticulation of the meaning of her acting body in a new political, social and artistic context. How did Partum and her performances in West Berlin navigate these changes? How did she confront the realities of change and location? How does Partum's art function/perform transnationally? Does her work challenge and influence the prerequisites of the “received canon”? Or is it discursively reduced to a representation of already existing narratives? Do (Western) cultural discourses on global feminisms speak Partum's art, or does Partum's art “speak itself” through the exhibitions? How is “Partum” integrated into the art system via the curatorial discourse and how does she integrate herself as a “contemporary artist” via her recent works?

To conclude this introduction, I would like to mention the problem of my own situatedness in relation to the object of my research, as well as the language of my writings. The subject of the situated author often appears in recent historical writings. The reason for this is the recognition that the art historian cannot avoid a transferential relation with the subject of study, especially when she writes about the recent past.82

During my research, I have become Ewa Partum's assistant, a translator, often mediating in contacts with curators and exhibition organizers, travelling with the artist and being Partum's companion. I worked with the artist in the capacity of a curator. This partial position enabled me to have unlimited access to the artist's archive, which I had the pleasure not only of constantly revisiting during the course of the last years but also of rearranging and organizing. I have documented a selection of Ewa Partum's recent works and translated her emails and correspondence. I have conducted many informal conversations and several structured interviews with the artist. Therefore, the artist's intentionality and memory have also become a part of the research material.

However, I approached the subject of memory as a symptom rather than a transparent source of knowledge about the past, conceptualizing it within the framework offered by Dominick La Capra, who argues that memory – because of its lapses and tricks – is informative in that it represents the past object inaccurately.83 This view of memory prompted me to withhold from interviewing other actors in this reconstructed history: the agents of the redistribution of Partum's practice, namely, curators. Another reason for omitting oral histories was related to a delineation of the field of my research. I was not interested in the

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motivations of curators and researchers, or in their experiences, but merely in the
effects of their work – the transfer of Partum's practice from the margin towards
the centre. To that end, I carefully read their texts, as well as their professional
correspondence with the artists, and I searched for traces of their work in Partum's
archive and reconstructed their working methods.

My own procedure with respect to accessing the archive was based on com-
paring discursive material (documents, texts) and visual material with secondary
sources such as historical essays and reviews of Partum's art and the artist's own
commentary. In Partum's narrative, I did not search merely for a confirmation of
the facts; rather, I focused on reoccurring themes (such as marginalization, the
male avant-garde and feminist identification), words (tautology, idea, feminism),
artworks (*Self-Identification*, 1980) and cracks in the linear narrative (relations with
other female artists in Poland, reception in feminist circles in West Berlin).

To arrive at my engaged or partial position, i.e. to work for and with Ewa Par-
tum, was not something that happened by accident. Instead, it was a consequence
of my way of working, fuelled by the belief in the effectiveness of participatory re-
search and a partial perspective. It was also a consequence of the affective dimension
of art history as a discipline – ultimately, no art historian will devote many years of
work to write about an artist or art uninteresting to them. However, my ultimate
aim was not only to produce a monograph of Ewa Partum's art; I wanted to use
Ewa Partum's practice and the knowledge already existing about her work as the
lens through which I could observe and understand certain historical and current
tendencies and mechanisms that operate within art history itself.

In recent years, Partum's art has become an object of retroactive art history
– the history that incorporates people from the margins into the mainstream. I
wanted to investigate this process and narratives of (re)incorporation or retrieval
to expose the criteria and frameworks that led to the rejection and then to the
inclusion of Partum's practice into art history. I am aware that Ewa Partum belongs
among a small group of artists that entered – or are entering – the canon of art
history as non-Western and non-male – thus to reveal this mechanism was to reveal
the mechanism of art history itself.

The second problem to consider with regards to my own situatedness is the
language of my writings. Angela Dimitrakaki argues that to create a framework
that allows “maximum legibility” is to choose English and at the same time to ack-
nowledge “the hegemony of writing in English.”[^1] I do not understand, however,
my task to be one of “cultural translation”. This book does not follow the premise
of identity politics, of an “embedded” local art historian's identity and the trans-
ference of authentic expertise. Just as I do not have firsthand experience of Berlin
in the 1980s, I do not have direct experience of Poland in the 1970s. I do, however,

[^1]: Dimitrakaki 2013, p. 97.
have certain language competences necessary to access the source material and a personal experience of transnationality understood as moving and working across borders, as well as the experience of communicating in global English both professionally and with my friends and family. Therefore, this book is an exercise in transnational art history: an art history that acknowledges national, regional and global frameworks and contexts, understanding them as correlated and historically determined.