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Arousing Sensitivity, or Permanent Celebration

Since the onset of her art career Joanna Przybyła, a sculptress, draughtswoman, photographer, and finally composer, has sought out signs-matters-structures which she has analysed by dissection, via the stratification of their underlying structure into nearly separate elements (old trees, drawn records and sounds). She has combined them, rendering them on paper, on the ground or unfolding in space, in order to further transmit them into the micro-structures made possible by photography, focusing attention on the beauty of a single fibre of wood, scratch or sound. She tenderly embraced them, like the strings of a most delicate instrument, with the gaze of a still photograph, in order to further transmit them into a motion picture.

Joanna Przybyła is an artist of multiple talents. They surfaced very early, when she started learning in her native town of Racibórz, actively participating in arts and music classes, which she continued studying at the same time in the Arts High School and the State School of Music of the Second Degree in Opole. This autonomous decision of her education pursuits implied her further activities and the perception of the multidimensional nature of art. It moreover demonstrated a profound determination arising from the need to get ever closer to art, whose magic captivated young Przybyła's imagination. As she herself has admitted a number of times in interviews, the simultaneous fascination with both these areas was immensely intense and provided her with a feeling of a permanent celebration, excitement really, of experiencing something unprecedented. The time of her studies at the Poznań State Higher School of Fine Arts (1979–1984) was a period of intense work. She managed to overcome the patterns of earlier education and stereotypical imagery and to supplement these with her own discoveries. She also gradually uncovered the fundamental truths and sources of inspiration, which situation Przybyła describes herself in an example: "My professor of drawing [Prof. Jarosław Kozłowski] valued the most a work of art which cannot be fully explained and documented. These views were summed up in his own book, which included one of William Shakespeare's works. It contained empty pages with no words but only sparsely scattered full-stops and commas. As a young student I may not have fully comprehended his intentions, although intuitively they were close to my heart. Today I

comprehend more. For me this comprehension is inseparable from art”¹. Her interests soon shifted to primordial forms of nature, which she discovered during many hours of wandering around the Drawska Forest, which became her studio, a *topos* that determined the artist’s value hierarchy, her way of seeing things at the micro and macro level. “Joanna ‘soaks up’ the forest and acquires humility in the face of values ... The activities related to absorbing, soaking up, observing, and learning nature are the most significant elements of the creative process”². Thanks to her lessons in nature, the artist has fully succumbed to the process of humanisation, consistently constructing values which invariably drew upon nature and art.

The artist has been fascinated by voice, whose power escapes any scale; the traditional divisions are immaterial when, according to Przybyła, we analyse the vibrations and timbre of an individual artist’s voice. Hence her intensive singing lessons in the choir of the Opole Philharmonics, somewhat instead of piano lessons. She saw the potential of freely shaping this natural instrument, which was to be fully taken advantage of in the subsequent years of her activity. She took efforts to shift from the visual to the acoustic and auditory sensations.

During the maturation period of her artistic stance, Przybyła’s formal experiments coincided with her sports fascinations. *Banquet* (1986), one of her first solo exhibitions, invoked – like the work itself – the terminology of an obstacle used in horse riding competitions. The sculptress made an installation composed of hardboards piled up like an obstacle on a course. The surfaces of the boards featured drawings of grooves that looked like scars on a smooth plane. She placed waste material on another board and tools beneath it. The wall was a ground onto which she applied pieces of plywood, with the image-drawing continued on the floor. Another installation design, *Drawing* (1987), continued and extended the preceding work. A monumental installation composed of wood planks, dividing the gallery diagonally, was extended in a drawing and a reflection in a glass pane. The expressive elements of drawing in white and black were part of the structure of the planks and the black and flat wall played the role of a “mirror”³. The artist’s gesture showed the openness of her own intention. She proved the infinity of “reflections” of a drawing and the

¹ J. Przybyła, the artist’s statement, February 2011.

² A. Rottenberg, “Joanna Przybyła”, in: *Dialog*, Fundacja Egit, Warszawa 1989, p. 53.

³ Galerie PWSSP. Galeria On, *Zeszyty Artystyczne*, Poznań 1988, no. 1, p. 183.

potentialities of the material used, merging at the same time two concepts: of the creation process and of the final work.

Przybyła's "enchanting power of making things happen"⁴ became noticeable enough to help her face the challenge of realising the work *Reserve* (1988) for the exhibition *Sculpture in the Garden* (1988), held in the garden of the Zamoyski Palace in Warsaw. The venue was important not only because of its location but first of all due to the direct reference to the 1957 show held under the very same motto, a watershed event for Polish sculpture of that time. Back then, it had summed up the then ideas of an individual creation of space and shaping new landscapes through art. The exhibition, referred to over 30 years later, through the selection of the artists (including those participating in the 1957 show) of different generations and different art stances, attempted to find traces allowing the determination of a new sculpture paradigm and ways of comprehending the function of art in the face of revaluating previous positions and a radical systemic shift. In this "debate" Przybyła sided with emotions expressed by means of organic forms. Her work *Reserve* was composed of three parts, one of which lay on the ground and the two others stood vertically around it. An ossified trunk of a black oak tree, lifted out of the Vistula River after World War II, condensed energy, intertwined ideas and emotions, and was a potent relic that emitted the power of unification. The artist placed the two other elements composed of tree fragments next to it, as guards. One of these forms, split from top to bottom, was later joined by hefty metal clasps through which single fibres dropped. The other one was pieced together by turning out the inside sections. The sculptress's action once again symbolically referred the viewer to another dimension, indicating a process of life which the dead tree fragments impart to one another. Paradoxically, what is apparently lifeless teems with vitality, which may be metaphorically referred to national history, which, like a phoenix from the ashes...

The artist confronted the natural order with the literal aspect of our civilisation, which she expressively proved in the exhibition *Cathedral II* (1991) at Krzysztofory Gallery, whose natural interior elements and fragments of architecture, i.e. architrave, made up the entire installation. Its power of ascetic agency was augmented by the brick barrel vaulting of the gallery cellars, the venue of the installation. Fragments of Przybyła's work were carved by

⁴ M. Rosiak, "Lokalny uniwersalizm – uniwersalna lokalność", *Zeszyty Artystyczne*, no. 8, Poznań 1995, p. 129.

time and joined together, “emitting energy in an act of aesthetic mis-en-scène”⁵. Przybyła made it plain once more that all forms have their source in the world of nature; it exists in time and space, is energetic and powerful and is the author of infinite and unlimited creativity. “It is as if the order, history and fate of a tree encapsulated the order, history and fate of the world. A tree becomes in this sense a witness and symbol of the inevitable processes”⁶. Sculptures placed in the gallery left a visible trace of colour and smell and, concretised by the artist’s radical decision, they became energising objects.

Joanna Przybyła’s monumental works were part of the oeuvre of the generation of artists who, faced with the transformation of the political and economic system of the late 1980s in Poland, determined individually the language of artistic expression, divergent from the convention of official topoi of the preceding period. No doubt her work was not esoteric; on the contrary, the mass of the tree trunks and chops of oak tree or beech, spread in the open space of a garden and *The Cathedral* (1989) in the enclosed space of a garage in the Manhattan in Łódź or at Krzysztofory Gallery, along with a slightly later installation *Horizon XII* (1996) in the Sculpture Center in New York (1996) seemed to subversively imply authorship excluding female participation, but still the universal nature of the message eliminated any problem. The author, commenting on the issue of archaeology in art, through which her actions were seen, proved this by posing the following question: “Does it not close the gap which is still habitable?”. She added: “While these are discreet activities, they relate to really significant issues”⁷, thus relating them to the self-consciousness of being. Przybyła treats the process of creating sculptures as the formation of thoughts concurrent with the modelling of spatial conditions; she tries to found her system of action on the laws of nature and on the intellect.

In one of her texts on Przybyła’s sculptures, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth wrote about an apparent “correspondence to the ethos of male creation”, signalling her “radical departure from an

⁵ H.G. Golinski, “UN-VOLLKOMMEN. Kunst als Reflexion des Nichtkönnens. Ein nicht objektiver Katalogbeitrag. NIE-DOSKONAŁE. Sztuka jako refleksja nieumiejętności. Nieobiektywny przyczynek do katalogu”, in: *Unvollkommen. Die aktuelle Kunstszene in Polen*, Museum Bochum, Bochum 1993.

⁶ M. Rosiak, “Rezerwat Joanna Przybyła / Joanna Przybyła’s Nature Reserve”, in: *Joanna Przybyła*, Galeria Miejska Arsenał, Poznań 1994.

⁷ J. Przybyła, “Czy sztuka może rzeczywiście przetrwać wszelkie niedoskonałe systemy?”, in: *Rzeźba Polska: Archeologia a twórczość*, year 1990–1991, ed. J. Berdyszak, Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej w Orońsku, Orońsko 1995, Vol. 2, p. 39.

authorial gesture and restraint in the creation of an aesthetic object”⁸. In conclusion, she observed that highlighting the natural character of wood implies an escape from culture, “fuelled by a mistrust of values and immutable social codes”⁹. The artist’s focusing her thinking on the axiological horizon through the rawness of the tree matter used became a vociferous call for values. The use of fragments of felled old trees and her own experience helped the artist shift to the stage of morality play of sorts. To her, art became a mediator, an intermediary between the old and what reality has brought in. The message of the individual works can be found in the simple and honest treatment of the subject matter, which is combined with the ambiguity of references. The contrasting merger of divergent elements of matter, shape or colour, made her sculptures convey brutal and lyrical messages at the same time. The area of formal solutions became an area of freedom, which for Joseph Beuys, the author of the *Theory of Sculpture*, was symbolic of free and self-regulating thinking, acting and creating, unbridled by collective stereotypes¹⁰. Przybyła’s oeuvre was seen as aesthetically unambiguously classified. This opinion stemmed from automatic associations merging the “attributes” of nature with their sanctifying power of message (immunity of sorts), but the artist has managed to move beyond the pattern of synonymous identification. The rapture over the surrounding world attributed to her and the character of her art, conducive to contemplation, was a spontaneous reception of a message stemming straight from nature. With time, the artist has acquired an inner equilibrium arising from the obvious process of amassing and developing knowledge and of an essayist perception of phenomena she has discovered in her daily reality.

The *Tree of Good and Evil* (1989) and *The Tree of Life* (1992) are sculptures which once again attempted a mediation with reality in order to “reunite fragments of old trees felled by the wind ... Perhaps they recall their old-time participation in the whole”¹¹. A discovered pine trunk with the roots intact and the tree fragments fished out of a river were a natural accompaniment to the table and chair placed at their end. Przybyła, intending to saturate her actions in space with new significations, introduced another element of a relation of nature

⁸ E. Lajer-Burchard, “Dziennik Warszawski”, *Magazyn Sztuki*, no. 5, 1995, p. 107.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ See: P. Restany, “Beuys. The Defence of Nature”, *Natura/Cultura*, April 1987.

¹¹ 8 Janvier 1992. “Interview with Joanna Przybyła by Anna M. Leśniewska”, in: *Joanna Przybyła, Christine Wilmes*, Atelier 340, Bruxelles 1992, p. 29.

towards something. In this case these were everyday objects, attributes of a home. The space of the table marks the space of the dialogue of the human being on his scale. Its placement in the open air introduced the relation of the human being to nature, and the time and place supplement the significant context of origin of the above sculptures. The Tree of Good and Evil was shown in the venue of the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf at the Polish-German show *Dialog*, while The Tree of Life during her scholarship at the Omi International Arts Center in New York (USA), thanks to the grant of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. The former work is an emblematic opening to the new social reality, created thanks to the transformations taking place in Poland after the regaining of freedom; it also responds to the attendant challenges of the necessity of dialogue indispensable in interpersonal communication at each level of perception or awareness of the interlocutors. The other work is the quintessence of the intimate, of a personal reflection focusing on life with each and every aspect of human existence which, although flimsy, is part and parcel of nature, whose rhythm determines our being. The artist, by breathing life into forms, showed works expressive of references to nature through various relations.

Another experience Przybyła addressed was the work of Piet Mondrian. During her individual exhibition funded by the Henry Moore Foundation in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, composed of the Bretton Hall Estate, the artist made an installation titled *Hommage à Piet Mondrian* (1995). She chose as the venue of her project an ideally horizontal meadow which became the background of a magnificent drawing made up of a 250-year-old beech tree. Its resplendent branches were separated from the trunk and placed on the ground so that they retained the shape of the branching out boughs. This action in no way resembled that of a crane, which uprooted the remaining bare trunk. A similarly brutal interference into the inner tree structure took place when a hydraulic wedge split it in half. Przybyła's reconstruction of an 18th-century tree took place under the supervision of an arborist. This showed that the process of departure must have its order and proper setting and demonstrated the importance of the historical aspect of nature, which became an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Bretton Hall Estate. When the tree was ultimately moved, pegs were installed slightly above the natural drawing and between the pegs was installed a blue string which created a mesh with a rigorous rhythm of horizontal and vertical lines. "I was fascinated by the background of the large meadow limited by irregular straight lines. I thought of the sculpture as a drawing in space, linking lines delineated by someone many

years before during the designing of the park”¹². The use of a system of dividing the plane of the drawing by means of a mesh has its long history in art, which no doubt contributed to the discovery of the proper perspective and the attendant proportions in the drawing. What mattered for Przybyła, however, was the message arising from Mondrian’s reflections, expressed in the search for a way of reaching a dynamic equilibrium of horizontal and vertical lines, leading to absolute unity, albeit unattainable in nature.

Piet Mondrian sensed that life turns its back on the natural world and the individual, focused on his or her inner self, sees the world in abstract terms of human consciousness. As Mondrian wrote, “the modern man, while still a unity of body, mind and soul, has another kind of awareness; all in which his or her life is expressed today has a different form, which in its essence is more abstract”¹³. Art, which for him was a pure representation of thoughts, may only express them in abstract forms, and will thus express the universal principle of being in an abstract image based on a grid of intersecting straight lines and an interplay of rectangular sections filled with colour and non-colour. “Neo-plasticism, stressed the founder of this current, cannot use forms from the natural, concrete reality, although they will all the same determine or at least incorporate the universal element. Neo-plasticism will not take into account the individual in appearance, i.e. natural form and colour. On the contrary, it should find its expression in the abstraction of form and colour, i.e. in the straight line and clearly defined basic colour”¹⁴. In this way the painting was to reflect life at its most profound, the way Mondrian saw it. Przybyła’s reference to linear compositions and her following the discipline of the grid lines expressed her understanding of the “linear processes of development and decay in nature”¹⁵. During the work on the installation, a film footage, *Reconstruction of the Tree. Process*, was recorded, which accompanied the action of recreating the tree in time. It was both a documentary and a description of a multifaceted action, a sequence of successive changes which were trivial or imperceptible to us, yet significant for the ecosystem of the natural environment of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. In turn, in the artistic sense the footage helped enrich the message for the recipients’ senses,

¹² J. Przybyła, “Hommage à Piet Mondrian”, in: *Hommage à Piet Mondrian*, in: Joanna Przybyła. *Interior*, Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Zachęta, Warszawa 1996, p. 50.

¹³ Quoted after M. Seuphor, *Piet Mondrian. Sa vie, son oeuvre*, Paris 1956.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ J. Przybyła, *Hommage...*, op. cit., p. 50.

which could not possibly be taken at once, requiring attentive consideration and revealing the magic of the work.

Reflection on the structural unity of the arts harks back to the ancient Pythagoreans and their musical metaphor of the universe based on three spheres: of the order of life (*musica universalis*), of the heavenly bodies (*musica mundana*) and of the sounds of musical instruments (*musica instrumentalis*)¹⁶. The discovery of the laws of nature inherent in music was addressed in the works by French Baroque composer and music theoretician Jean-Philippe Rameau. His underlying assumption was to determine the foundations of a model of sound development on the basis of a natural harmonic sequence, the way the Pythagoreans saw it. This tradition was continued in the 20th c. among others in the aesthetic idea contained in the commentary for the composition *Cosmos I* by Stefan Kisielewski, to which the musician appended an atom model. Kisielewski believed that music exists in nature objectively, as a potentiality, which the composer discovers rather than creates. "Bringing out of nature, it transmits from the potential to the actual, being at the same time subject to the general laws that govern cosmos and atom"¹⁷.

An interest in the presence of the visual arts in music is a phenomenon which includes actions with a drawing as the starting point for a sound work, definitely rejecting classical notation for the sake of graphic symbols that stimulate the artist's imagination and intuition and are based on synesthetic associations. Przybyła has come to treat drawing as a guideline, a music score, with voice being the only, leading instrument. Ever since 2009, the artist has shared time between Berlin and Poznań, where she lives and works, making radical attempts to move beyond the visual medium and entering the area of the transmedia. We can moreover observe a process of de-objectification through the reduction to elementary forms of lines, shapes and their inner and mutual transformations towards a de-materialisation expressed via sound, which is nothing else but drawing, stemming from the depth of space which only an artist can discover. The first impetus to stir and as a consequence to fully liberate her music creation was the sound of the bells from a nearby school; the bells were located on the axis of her Berlin studio. The loud bells arranged her

¹⁶ J. James, *The Music of the Spheres. Music, Science, and the Natural Order of the Universe*, New York, Grove Press 1993, p. 31.

¹⁷ J. Szerszenowicz, "Pejzażysta Cage: strategie mimetyzmu. Spojrzenie na świat uszami człowieka ze wzgórza", in: *John Cage. Człowiek. Dzieło. Paradoks*, ed. M. Chołoniewski, B. Bogunia, Kraków 2014, p. 29.

day, literally and figuratively. This constantly present musical aspect of space, with its recurrent energy, has become something necessary and indispensable. "Let us imagine a single toll of a bell, which lasts until it grows silent. Our sense of hearing will never be able to capture the moment when the sounds dies down and enters the zone of silence. In this way unlimited space appears"¹⁸. Przybyła began work on the language of expression responding directly to the emotional impulse of sounds, which has become her means of expression, fully confirming the necessity of interpretation; the previous modes of expression no longer sufficed. The establishment by the US scholar Rosalind Krauss of a universal category of an "extended field" facilitated the entry of a new creative existence of Przybyła into the phono-sphere of art, which the artist combines with movement, or stage gesture. All the senses are involved in reception and the active recipient receives in the extreme, something we are unable to capture in a category. "My relation with the viewer is based on the expectation that art will become a spark which will set off his or her own creativity"¹⁹. Sound has become the vehicle of consciousness, a link with the artist's gesture. Przybyła has for a long time jotted down her intimate reflections on staff paper, recording major quotes from the books she has read, adding photographs or their fragments. Ultimately, musical notations arise, first the working sketches and finally compositions ready to be performed, which rely on the imagination and ingenuity of the instrumentalists, both sound engineers and professional performers, e.g. in.: *Movement VII* (2012) and *Diminuendo, Part I; II* (2012).

When trying to find justification for Przybyła's artistic activity, Alicja Kępińska indicated the "physical aspect of experience", which she directly linked to the artist's comment: "I like to paint as powerfully as I can"²⁰. This potent emotive statement was a perfect illustration of the tension inherent in artistic decisions: "trying to say something about it [art], the artists themselves often refer not to art but to the life events that have fed it. It is in life that they find its surface and justification"²¹. In the case of Joanna Przybyła, the reference to the past included her active, physical participation in horse riding classes on the one hand, and on the

¹⁸ J. Przybyła, an artists comment, February 2011.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ *Galerie PWSSP. Galeria On, Zeszyty Artystyczne*, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Sztuk Plastycznych w Poznaniu, Poznań 1988, no. 1, p. 183.

²¹ K. Kępińska, "Dyskretna lekcja pokory. Czy można jeszcze porozumieć się z naturą? Discreet lesson in humility: Can we still come to terms with nature?", *Projekt*, no. 5, 1989, p. 36.

other hand in piano lessons, choir rehearsals, voice projection classes and also her fascination with the unlimited resonance of the voice, which became a synchronic experience both in an individual and collective aspect.

Although Przybyła has attempted a number of experiments, the conviction of the primary community of order is an inviolable imperative of her actions. She is adamantly of the opinion that art, like science, is supposed to prepare human beings for being in this world, i.e. is to represent the way the world operates, which is obviously convergent with the vision of John Cage, of whom the artist is a staunch follower: "Art imitates nature in the way it operates"²². The above statement is based on Zen philosophy, which treats the world as the simultaneous existence of all phenomena. The order of events is not a matter of overriding laws but of human activity; it is humans who choose the events that interest them and arrange them in a sequence aiming at the satori, or awakening, a timeless radical opening up which leads "the human beings to the state which should be seen as normal and natural, in a higher order ... It is a re-discovery and awareness of our true nature: it is enlightenment which reveals under the layer of our ignorance and lack of awareness a deeper reality, which has always existed and will always exist, irrespective of the accidental nature of life. The satori in its consequence leads to a totally new perception of the world and life"²³. In the face of this system of values, the "empty" photographs filled with a smear of piercing light and sounds unrecorded in "scores of signs" foreshadow another work, an area of potentiality, which Cage defined as follows: "I derive pleasure from not changing the sounds reaching me from different directions of space; Marcel Duchamp called this 'sound sculpture, musical sculpture'"²⁴.

Duchamp's idea of the sculpture sonore totally sensitises the artist to the sounds of the immediate environment, rejecting all conventional frameworks for the sake of a complete experience of the world, being a token of life with all the aspects of its impact, to which Joanna Przybyła is open. The variety of vehicles and forms of presentations she uses to participate in a multifaceted game of their significations arises from the elusiveness of notions preceding the ultimate form. The risk of fragmentary readings of her intentions and

²² J. Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work", in: "Silence", Weasleyan University Press: Middletown, CT, 1996.

²³ J. Evola, "O istocie Zen", <http://tradycjonalizm.net/juliussevola/zen.htm> [access date: 1.02.2005].

²⁴ J. Szerszenowicz, *Pejzażysta Cage...*, op. cit., p. 40.

sources of inspiration is actually negligible. Przybyła uses photographic documentation and performance to finally come up with a video. Her sound record, acting concurrently, unifies the convention of the work. Most of the photographs or videos are records made in light, in full brightness which envelops the white canvases or sheets of Japanese paper, reacting to the breath of a person standing by or a blow of air, setting it in slow motion (Japanese Paper [2012]). The entire visual and acoustic message may be interpreted as an allegory of vanity, provoking reflection on the fragility of everything around us, making up a truly unistic composition, the unity of form and the “silence” of the sound. The artist creates a unique music, which need not be heard to the same extent by everyone, which is yet full of ascetic inspiration and intuition. Whiteness is the colour which fills up her immediate environment, or the space of the studio, the place where she works and lives. Whiteness, a non-colour according to Mondrian, a result of a perfect combination of all the colours of the spectrum, symbolises completeness and a synthesis of what is separate. In a sense, it is more than colour, as it corresponds to a spiritual centre²⁵. Its therapeutic property has a direct impact on the psyche; perfect whiteness is motivating and urges one to take action. It is in order to point out what its presence meant in alchemy, where brightening up or whitening indicated that a given matter is in the process of transforming into a philosopher’s stone, or a substance composed of the four basic elements: earth, water, air, and fire, a quintessence (Latin *quintaessentia*), the fifth element, pure form, the unity of the four elements. Whiteness used by Przybyła provides her works with a uniform character and moreover marks a totally annexed space where the spiritual essence permeated the senses and satiates with its inspiring power. The combination takes place in the zone which is materially indeterminate, unlimited, through mutual permeation, which makes up the integral unity of the spatial work.

“Respecting the viewer’s individual perception, I wish to discretely awaken his or her sensitivity, drawing attention to simple phenomena, which often seem obvious until we let their magic appear. For example, an observation of a light projection changing the optics of space”²⁶. The artist furnished her works with titles e.g. borrowed from the Bible (The Tree of Good and Evil), introducing the terminology used in reference to forms of environmental protection (Reserve) or architectural terms (Cathedral), revealing the overlapping or even

²⁵ See: R. Guénon, *Le Roi du monde*, Paris 1958.

²⁶ J. Przybyła, the artist’s statement, April 2013.

simultaneity of different phenomena. Like the authors of medieval cathedrals, Przybyła created completely indivisible places, proclamations of faith in the natural power of the elements, with a special role of light, the crucial element of a “live projection”, a spectacle that focuses the power of the place. She has created sculptures which not so much fill up but change particular venues, almost saturate all which so ambiguously links objects and places. The spatial arrangements composed of fragments of torn tree trunks and destroyed tree branches became tantamount to the ideal of natural beauty, playing the role of “conceptual extensions of the natural world, rather than artefacts of nature in the realm of art”²⁷.

Przybyła’s installations arranged and later recorded in varying light conditions and documented in black-and-white photographs are an attempt to demonstrate the energy of light in space. “Instruments for watching light”, as the artist calls them, have become a manner of expressing emotions that go far beyond sculptures, into thinking by means of light, influencing other realms of artistic creation. Preparation of installations both in the cosy space of the studio and in large, open interiors, merged with the natural rhythm of the time of day, month, year, stems from the dialogue of the author with the immediate reality (Light VII [2010], Effloresce [2011]).

The presence of the medium of photography made it possible to re-scale her work or present selected fragments, introducing the various contexts of the works into the perception process. The photographs changed the relations between the objects and furnished new qualities, i.e. the intellectual work of a photographer who marks her individual existence not via a simple representation of the object-sculpture, but via creating a new work of art. Accordingly, we can enter a zone of free interpretations and overlapping comparisons which make up their own narrative. Through the presentation of sculptures and their reinterpretations in photographs, they have become a kind of medium between the spaces of signs, where the primary narrative coexists with the present interpretation. The videos record the state of matter in time, which supplements, like photographs, metaphorically rather than literally. I believe this precisely linguistic, stylistic measure taken from literature and used during the discussion of Przybyła’s art is appropriate here. As the

²⁷ J. Gear, “Przedłużenie natury: rzeźby Joanna Przybyła”, in: *Joanna Przybyła. Interior*, Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Zachęta, Warszawa 1996, p. 12.

artist has repeatedly indicated, introducing semantically foreign words and linking them syntactically, she created phrases whose meaning would differ from that of the individual terms. This way of self-expression by means of juxtaposing different contexts creates new ways of perception, as obvious as they are invisible. The works are an attempt to "reconcile with what nature has created", thanks to the use of "matter created by light, water, earth, and the changing seasons of the year"²⁸.

"Music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world. A tool of understanding. Today, no theorising accomplished through language or mathematics can suffice any longer."²⁹ Sound was the material of a 12-channel installation titled *A Moment of Silence* (2011), whose structure was composed of the tolling of bells and voice sounds at six-second delays. The Evangelical Church of St. John in Berlin was the venue of the world premiere of the composition. 16 loudspeakers were installed across the church to fully bring out the unique nature of the architecture. Przybyła's composition was created in collaboration with Berlin-based universities: Institut für Sprache und Kommunikation oraz Universität der Künste, and with the participation of Nathalie Claude, a singer and composer of film music, an alumnus of the Judy Davis Studio in Oakland, California³⁰. The singer's modulated voice (alto) and its resounding in various distances, the overlapping, invoking, and repeating other sounds, too, were the basic structural elements of the music composition. The church where the artist had her composition performed was treated like an interior of an instrument, a sound box, and the composition itself was an imaginary drawing of sound in space. Sound and its disappearance were the measure of distance in architecture, transcending its limits. The slow resonance of the sound until the moment we no longer know if this is still the sound of the composition or only the memory of the sound in our minds, when it delineated the vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines of a drawing thus created. The concert in the church was a variation on sequences, which augmented the impression of focus on and continuation of a motif, implying reception in terms of a dream and strict concentration. Przybyła, composing for sounds and human voice, offered her work to those who would interpret it, i.e. the sound engineers and the singer performing the

²⁸ D. Szaroszyk, K. Ferworn-Horawa, "Joanna Przybyła. Studium z natury", *Dobre Wnętrze*, no. 2, February 2002, p. 138.

²⁹ J. Attali, *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*, transl. B. Massami, Minneapolis 2003, p. 4.

composition, and therefore made her work in a way dependent on them, unfinished and mutable. Both the author and the performer were exposed to multi-sensory experiences related to the synesthetic sensation, which in Przybyła's art appeared concurrently with the first actions in the realm of sculpture. It consisted in invoking, via the material stimulus, the sensory experiences triggered by another stimulus, absent in the work at hand. A further step was the mutual impact of the elements inside the work's structure to finally facilitate the recipients' active generation of synesthetic processes.

Art, a reflection of genuine experience, has the features of originality and authenticity, whose forms are not man-made but natural; in the author's interpretation it is not a prop but an alphabet of an art language whose letters are constantly used to furnish many and varied experiences. Besides, the artist uses it judiciously, which can be called minimalism, to invoke a term of Claudio Silvestrin, an architect and sculptor of space collaborating with Przybyła; this minimalism captures a way of thinking which pursues the essence of things and responds to the visual noise, disorder and vulgarity³¹.

"At the beginning was light. Light reveals an object and its environment. When I construct the optics of space, I create a work of art where light is part of its construction. A line or an object becomes the instrument for understanding light"³².

Analysis of light is the essence of the ephemeral matter of Przybyła's oeuvre. The term photography is read in the simplest manner as a union of light and memory. Space which is saturated with light evokes the energy recorded in it, conjures up the spirit of a particular place, which fills up the tiniest fragments of reality and also encapsulates the awareness of the whole. It transmits metaphysical sensations, arouses the supra-sensory, which we willingly evoke, revealing a space saturated with personal experiences. It determines the message of what exists at the intersection of two worlds: the visible and the invisible one. It is by no means a coincidence that the artist invokes the first human artistic accomplishments in the history of art, the birth of consciousness, when all actions were determined solely by light and sign, which have remained immutable in their essence. All artistic experiences are triggered by the phenomenon of light, whose results are known yet whose essence remains incomprehensible, an unfathomable, autonomous quality. The

³¹ See M. Piekoszewski, "Strych z huśtawką", *Wysokie Obcasy*, no. 18, 5.05.2007, p. 42–46.

³² J. Przybyła, the artists statement, 2011.

power of light conveys the highest values of spiritually intangible, is a symbol of life and happiness. Photographic installations are more than a sum total of the overlapping phenomena. Time is a dimension which brings together, links the dispersed fragments of the real and their multiple reflections; it creates unity. A fleeting and intimate atmosphere arises through the mutual relations of light, space and time. Each and every work, irrespective of its place of origin and intentions, is one and only, inscribed within the artist's own, personal world, significant through our participation. It remains an autonomous message, a kind of story which expresses the tension and the emotional state accompanying its creation. This phenomenon provokes the expression of emotions via gesture, corresponding to the rhythm of the sounds, transforming into dance almost. During the *Ankunft Neue Music* festival held in Berlin, Przybyła made *Tuning 1 – 7* (2014), creating music and arranging the space of a sound installation in collaboration with Japanese dancer and choreographer Emi Hariyama and instrumentalist Benedikt Bindewald. The drawing, delineated by means of the lines of individual wood planks, was the score read by the dancer as a record of a choreography, where her body became a moveable sculpture within a set space. Both the musician and the choreographer were inspired by Przybyła's installation and found there an impetus for expressing their own visions. Joint action helped visualise the mechanics of motion, in line with ideal fluidity, based on the harmony of the sublime sound and the austerity of the sculptor's material. This unique overlapping of energy led to a phenomenon of mutually-dependent experiences, implemented on the premises of the Berlin Hauptbahnhof station. Space contributes its own message via the work superimposed on it: the sound and sculpture installation shaped the interior and created a "operatic theatre". Przybyła explores the notion of place and non-place, "filled with poetic density in constant motion, replaces the constant object with dynamic matter, moving from the here and now towards 'someplace else', from the present to the future, from reality to artificiality, from life to art..."³³. By activating the creative energy she triggers a yet unknown composition, which can be made up of "merely one sound of pure emotion"³⁴. Artist Koji Kamoji fittingly defined, in the subtle succinctness of message of haiku poetry, the essence of the artist's actions, on the basis of paradox and aesthetic minimalism. "Each poem is an image, a sketch that records the present state of some section of the world to the fullest, as

³³ G. Dziamski, "Wołanie ziemi", *Artelier*, no. 2, 1993.

³⁴ K. Kamoji, "Dla Joanna", in: "Joanna Przybyła. Rysunki światłem dla Arvo Pärta", Galeria Foksal, Warszawa 2006.

it reflects its colour, music, smell even and the entire surrounding atmosphere, acting on the emotions of the poet and reader. As in *Zen* images [so-called *zenga*], where individual parts of the universe, like a tree or flower, or even a leaf, exist in isolation in a white and empty space, describing this world in the most succinct and exhaustive manner. A reference to painting is not a matter of coincidence since both aspects of art were created by the very same thought: the will to consciously experience the present moment”³⁵.

The process of artistic creation is the projection of ideas and experiences which means that a work of art created by the artist is an integral part of the space where and around which it operates. The complete extra-objective aspect of the work is made up of acts of individual perception, constantly enriched by one's own and the world's experience, by the exploration of dimensions of existence unlimited within the confines of life. Przybyła's work exists in time, moving from one stage to the next, laying bare more and more, including our self-perception. Joanna Przybyła, although she works intensively, does not impose her presence since she focuses on the potential of shaping the material of each kind of work, which according to her should only be released and augmented. The artist has a high degree of ability to reveal and impose form on matter since she lives in her own sensually rich world, which generates ever new challenges revealed in contact with the covert energy of nature. In the system of thought of Beuys, with whom the author identifies completely, they are as follows: warmth, love, cooperation, and freedom.

“In Joanna Przybyła's art the rational is constantly intermingled with the irrational, emotion with intellect. Discovering places still untouched by civilisation, having an impact not only because of their visual, but also acoustic dimension, nearly automatically necessitates a return to life of certain wholes. The unique material she processes conveys the overlapping signals triggered by nature. For her, wood is some kind of absolute, an irreplaceable component formulating the inner structure of her spatial projects. In the intention to capture and convey what is true and perfect in nature due to its simplicity”³⁶. Elaborating on this analysis of her oeuvre from 17 years ago, I can only add that she consistently transmits natural memory, penetrating both the vast areas of art and the spiritual dimensions of man,

³⁵ *Haiku*, transl. into Polish by A. Żuławska-Umeda, ELAY, Bielsko-Biała 2006.

³⁶ A.M. Leśniewska, “Z pokorą wobec natury (O twórczości Joanna Przybyła)”, *Format*, no. 28/29, 1998, p. 31.

in close collaboration with other artists, becoming a composer and director of a total performance, engaging all the senses, which she invariably trusts.

Contemporary culture seems to come close to sensory intimacy, although it equally intensively moves towards de-eroticising the relation between man and reality. The dichotomy stems from the experiencing individual, the world situated in the human body, constantly transformed under the impact of various stimuli.

An exhibition which, regrettably, remains only at the design stage, was a proposal for the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, made in collaboration with Claudio Silvestrin, *Raum* (2005). The project envisaged a total annexation of gallery space, whose walls, floor, doors, and bench were to be covered with cedar wood. The outside air let in through ground exchangers supposed to clean up and moisten it, was to activate the smell of the matter inside the gallery. "The relation between apparent emptiness of the interior and its form should not be seen as a state of exclusive opposites, but rather as two aspects of the same reality, which coexists and co-operate"³⁷. The minimalist project was supposed to activate the sense of smell. The first signal was to start an avalanche reaction of the other senses.

12 senses were identified on the basis of Rudolf Steiner's research: touch, life, motion, equilibrium, smell, taste, vision, temperature, hearing, language, notion, and subject (ego)³⁸. This extends our ken and the experience of perceiving objects and situations in reality becomes coherent and complete. The recognition of the ontologically primary status of "one's own body", which resulted in the recognition of perception (or rather different "perception behaviours") and the expressiveness correlated with it as the most fundamental experiences, offers the key to solving fundamental philosophical problems, as fittingly demonstrated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*³⁹. According to the French philosopher, the perception process cannot take place via a single sense but via the entire body⁴⁰, which as an indivisible, synergic whole "opens on a world of inner-

³⁷ J. Przybyła, C. Silvestrin, *Raum 2005*, http://www.joannaprzybyla.com/list_pl.html [access date: 30.01.2015]

³⁸ See: A. Soesman, *Our Twelve Senses: Wellspring of the Soul*, Stroud-Glos, 1998.

³⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Editions Gallimard, Paris 1945.

⁴⁰ See: M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia percepcji*, the Polish transl. M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński, Warszawa 2001, p. 246–264.

acting senses”⁴¹. “Our body can effortlessly combine the sensation of pain, coldness, warmth, taut muscles, joint movement, pleasant or unpleasant touch or even a loss of equilibrium with particular ‘appearances’ or states of things since this kind of combination is its inherent part”⁴². However, the sense of vision is the ordering sense which determines the direction of collaboration with the body; “vision reveals what touch already knows”⁴³. Again, Merleau-Ponty defined the course of mutual intermingling of visual experiences with other perceptions: “The senses communicate with one another, open up to the structure of things. When glass is broken with a crystal-clear sound, the sound seems to be contained in the visible glass and we see the brittleness and rigidity of the glass. We see the flexibility of steel, malleability of hot iron, hardness of the plane blade, and softness of the wood shavings. The shape of objects is not their geometric outline; it has something to do with their inherent nature and when it speaks to the eyesight, it simultaneously speaks to all our senses. The shape of the folds on a linen or cotton fabric allows us to see the delicate or coarse fibres, the coldness or warmth of the material ... We see the weight of a lump of iron entering sand, the fluidity of water, the viscosity of syrup”⁴⁴. According to Merleau-Ponty, the metaphysics of interpersonal relations begins at the moment of opening up to the other. The body is a vehicle of significance and touch helps read the significance. True interpersonal cognition is impossible without the bodily, its full reading taking place in the complete entry into space, its carnal experience.

Each encounter with a work of art implies a bodily interaction, stressed by Henry Moore, who wrote about the necessity of its identification: “This is precisely what a sculptor should do. He must try and constantly think about form and use it in the spatial fullness. He sees a strong shape in his mind: he thinks about it irrespective of its size, as if it was totally contained within the palm of his hand. He visualises in his mind the shape on all of its sides: when he looks at one side, he knows what the other one looks like; he identifies with its point of gravity, its mass, its weight; he is aware of its size and the space this shape will fill

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 266.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 255.

⁴³ J. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Chichester 2005, p. 283.

⁴⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia percepcji...*, op. cit., p. 250.

up"⁴⁵. The reading of Juani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* reveals, apart from the architecture of the eye, the simultaneous existence of the carnal architecture of muscles and skin and the one which takes into account the spheres of hearing, smell and taste. In turn, in reference to forms, including audio-visual performances, the text of the Finnish architect stresses the "significance of the haptic continuum"⁴⁶, urges one to develop a sensitivity which helps us define such artistic actions as a space of sculpture experienced phenomenologically. "In line with Edmund Husserl's notion of 'pure vision', an innocent and impartial encounter with phenomena, just like a painter looks at a landscape ... the architect imagines an existentially significant space"⁴⁷ he experiences by means of the senses. The human environment is affluent in all kinds of curios, composed of light, monochromatic and static, and others, which contribute to a new perception of the world. The shift of the focus from the metaphysics of abstraction to the abstract elements inherent in the perception of the environment opens up another area of creative penetration.

Creating her works, irrespective of the material used, over the three decades of her career Joanna Przybyła has trusted intuition rather than rational knowledge, since nature has played an instrumental role in developing her identity and sensitivity, offering many experiences which defined her approach to what she deems the most important, i.e. life in art and with art. Przybyła's oeuvre is evolutionary in nature, from works of art: sculptures, through process events, to interactive projects. She has walked the path from constructing a sculpture to its de-materialising, moving towards its atrophy and re-creation, using ephemeral means of expression: light and time. The artist seems to be creating a single sculpture, whose idea oscillates around nature or towards nature in a broad sense of the term, constantly extending the semantic field of the notion of sculpture. The work determines another axiological and semantic horizon of the emerging discourse. Through visual stimuli and acoustic effects which trigger sensory experiences, seen as perception, remembering, the artist constantly attempts to get to the essence, to the "primary states of things" which may be learned by sensory acts rather than by logical induction or

⁴⁵ H. Moore, "The Sculptor Speaks", in: *Henry Moore on Sculpture. A collection of the sculptor's writings and spoken words*, ed. P. James, London 1966, p. 62.

⁴⁶ G. Świtek, "Architektura i aporie dotyku", in: *Spektakle zmysłów*, ed. A. Wieczorkiewicz, M. Kostaszuk-Romanowska, Warszawa 2010, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Quoted after: J. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin...*, p. 119.

deduction⁴⁸. The audiovisual relation Joanna Przybyła creates, a kind of natural expression, is not autotelic but is a means of expression for another purpose, which awaits the recipient's active participation.

⁴⁸ W. Welsch, "Die Geburt der postmodern Philosophie aus dem Geist der modernen Kunst", in: *Ästhetisches Denken*, Philipp Reclam jun., Verlag Stuttgart 1993, p. 79–113.