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11 Publicizing Vulnerability

Motherhood and Affect in Joanna Rajkowska's Post-2011 Art

Justyna Wierzchowska

In the imaginary, maternal continuity is what guarantees identity. [...] The imaginary of the work of art, that is really the most extraordinary and the most unsettling imitation of the mother-child dependence. [It is] its substitution and its displacement towards a limit which is fascinating because inhuman.

(Julia Kristeva, Interview with Françoise Collin)¹

Freedom does not reside in transgression [...] but [...] in the capacity to begin.

(Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood Today')

Introduction

Joanna Rajkowska's art engages with troubling themes: historical trauma, physicality, and pain. For almost twenty years, the artist has been working in public spaces, producing works that generate strong and often unexpected responses through their attentiveness to conflict, lack, or suffering, matters that are often deemed unspeakable. In her artistic practice, Rajkowska (born 1968), one of the most recognized and acclaimed Polish artists today, produces site-specific installations that enter 'the order of public space [and] visibility' as a territory in which we 'stabilize or destabilize meanings that organize collective imagination' (Stokfiszewski 2010: 173).² On the one hand, then, she forms part of a broader tendency in Polish art as represented by Krzysztof Wodiczko, Paweł Althamer, Artur Żmijewski, and Antoni Libera, who also practise social criticism. On the other hand, she can be associated with the 'affective turn',³ as her art originates from singular pre-linguistic stirrings of the body, even as these are ultimately interpolated into collective traumas and aporias. Typically, Rajkowska introduces into public places blatantly displaced objects that by their unexpectedness and seductiveness work directly on the sensorial spectrum of the viewer. Yet while her earlier projects, such as *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue*, *Oxygenator*, and *Minaret*,⁴ address unprocessed areas of Polish history and politics,

Rajkowska has more recently shifted her focus to more intimate subjects, having been profoundly affected by the birth and subsequent illness of her daughter, who was diagnosed with bilateral eye cancer when she was nine months old. In 2015, the artist declared:

Ever more clearly and consciously, I am limiting the focus of my art. And I want to use intimacy and the fact that I'm a mother. That I'm a woman, that I have a child. [...] That she's sick. That we have to cope with that, that she has to cope with that. And I use all of that in public projects.

(Krytyka Polityczna 2014)

Since 2011, Rajkowska has produced four pieces that overtly address her daughter's condition: *Peterborough Child* (2012), *Forcing a Miracle* (2012), *All Seeing Eye* (2013), and *Rosa's Passage* (2013). In this private yet public art, life, love, hope, and death intertwine. Here, art stems from an autobiographical, embodied, relational experience and involves a challenge to traditional understandings of subjectivity as self-contained and transparent. In this chapter, I focus on three of the above installations in order to explore the ways in which the artist conflates the artistic and the maternal in an act of confrontation, support, and hope in the face of what Karl Jaspers (1919) has called a limit situation, that is to say, a traumatic yet transformative moment in which the subject loses, then remakes itself.

Mothering, Art, and Affect

Motherhood studies has long been preoccupied by matters of relationality and affect, which are often linked to the question of ethics (Gilligan 1982; Ruddick 1989; Irigaray 1993; Clément and Kristeva 2001, orig. 1981; Baraitser 2009; Kristeva and Vanier 2012). At the same time, the field of affect theory highlights the role embodied and sensual responses play in the construction of subjectivity (Tomkins 1962, 1963, 1991; Braidotti 1994). Art is crucial to both sets of debates, as it powerfully engages with corporeality, affect, and sensoriness (see Walsh 2013; Best 2014). Yet mothering, one of the most embodied and affective human experiences, remains underrepresented in aesthetics (see Liss 2009). For example, the otherwise imposing anthology *Feminism-Art-Theory* (Robinson 2001) makes no mention of the maternal experience as a possible field of aesthetic and academic reflection. While artist Mary Kelly's installation *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1976) marked a sea change in the aesthetic conceptualization of mothering, maternal experience is nonetheless still largely invisible within art praxis and art theory. A major reason for this is the cultural matricide that informs

the constitution of Western subjectivity (Kristeva 1987; Irigaray 1993). The maternal subject, a crucial site of affectiveness and relationality, subverts the Cartesian paradigm (*cogito ergo sum*) and poses interpretative difficulties.

In this chapter, I bring together affect theory with the work of motherhood-studies scholars to ask the following questions: How can public art engage with the theme of maternity? How can artistic projects explore and encourage vulnerability? How can art foster engagements with others? Affect theory, introduced in the 1960s by psychologist Silvan Tomkins, defines human beings as irreducibly corporeal and imbued with subliminal, visceral intensities and resonances that are constitutive of their engagements with the world (see Tomkins 1962, 1963; Massumi 1987; Leys 2011). As will become clear, I view Rajkowska's maternal art as 'a praxis that does not explore or illustrate the personal, but [rather constitutes a site] through which the personal takes place' (Baraitser 2009: 12). I want to focus on the way the three projects mirror the artist's maternal experience of coming into contact with an otherness that is terrifying and incalculable, but that nonetheless provokes a sustained relationship that is constantly reaffirmed. If one follows Julia Kristeva's understanding of the child as one's 'first other' (Kristeva and Vanier 2012: 132), then Rajkowska's art can be read as a powerful platform through which to conceive such otherness and to understand the mother as permanently challenged in her sense of selfhood: constantly attuning herself to the ever-changing condition of the child.

I also build on Andrea Liss's (2009: xix) attempt to consider art as capable of conceiving 'new social projects that think (m)otherwise', by engaging in the notions of 'interdependence, intersubjectivity, and the maternal self'. Rajkowska challenges the limits of traditionally understood subjectivity in an attempt to open up new social and ethical possibilities informed by the mother's confrontation with her child's vulnerability. Her art invokes the barely tolerable experience of mothering a critically ill child, recalling Samuel Beckett's 'I must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on' (cited in Baraitser 2009: 13). Crucially, in her artistic practice, Rajkowska suspends physical and mental divides, and merges the producer/work of art/spectator triad to the point of the subject's temporary dissolution. As I will show, she aims to wring the spectators from their self-centred repetition compulsions in order to open them up to an experience which – like mothering itself – 'is impossible to anticipate in advance' (Baraitser 2009: 19). I am thus interested in the ways in which Rajkowska's art can be read as a social critique that renders the maternal subject prototypical for a new type of social contract that would acknowledge the condition of a mother who goes on loving her child in a limit situation, and, indeed, the universal state of vulnerability.

Peterborough Child

Joanna Rajkowska's daughter, Rosa, was born in Berlin in 2011.⁵ The cancer diagnosis that came nine months later was followed by six rounds of chemotherapy that took a heavy toll on the baby. For her mother, these months gave rise to a 'tension that tightens the lips, causing paralysis' and an indescribable stress that caused her to 'lose touch with [her] own body, turning [her] into pure fear'. She was 'constantly thinking about death, about the extinguishing of life, about dust', and she realized that there is 'no pain like the pain a mother can experience' (Rajkowska 2013: 148, 149). While Rosa was hovering between life and death, Rajkowska decided to confront her own fear through art, in order to 'visualize [it], locate it and try to turn it into a chakra – a place of focused, accumulated energy' (152). This is the genesis of *Peterborough Child*, an installation in which Rajkowska translates her fear into an unusual representation of her daughter's condition (Figures 11.1 and 11.2). Rajkowska, now based partly in the UK (Rosa's father is British), engages here with the British context and landscape: first intended for the central and north part of Peterborough (the so-called CAN-Do area), the piece was placed in Bourn, Cambridgeshire, in 2015, following local protests at the original site. *Peterborough Child* is an 'artificial archaeological site' that contains 'synthetic remains of an unknown bronze age child placed in the ground as if a real dig had unearthed this surprising find' (Chatfield 2015). The information plaque that Rajkowska made to accompany the installation explains that the girl suffered from a very rare genetic mutation that produced a form of eye cancer, namely the exact type Rosa was suffering. Significantly, the plaque continues:

It is thought that a child like this was valued by the community and was considered to have shamanic powers. The site of her burial was carefully chosen to ensure it brought blessings to the land. Evidence of her special status can be seen in the objects her grave contains [...] [that] seem to be invocations. Apparently, the donations continued throughout the centuries, as the most recent objects date from our times.

(Rajkowska 2013: 152–53)

In *Peterborough Child*, we find a confusion of the beautiful and the abject, and of life and death, as well as an interplay between different subjectivities. Rajkowska's collaborator on the project, Georgina Chatfield (2015), describes the piece as 'beautiful', 'visceral', and 'emotive', claiming that it offers a 'direct line to our humanity and fragility'. Significantly, in *Peterborough Child*, interpretatively rich reversals take place. The dreadfulness of cancer is neutralized, even undone, as the disease is granted a special, almost divine status. Chatfield (2015) gives



Figure 11.1



Figure 11.2

an almost pastoral account of the work, affectively disavowing the artificiality of the skeletal remains: ‘a beautiful piece resting quietly in the woodland with an open grassed area to the front and rough flinty path leading the way. Aerated via an elevated glass covering, the child is open to the elements and immersed in the Cambridgeshire countryside. [...] A loved little girl’. *Peterborough Child* thus blurs the boundaries between representation and life, seducing the viewer into an existentially and epistemologically confusing experience: the disease immortalizes the child, and the visual beauty of the piece muffles the drama that is being represented. This confusion is reflected in Chatfield’s words, when she claims that *Peterborough Child*, when located in Bourn, both ‘came to rest’ and was ‘reborn’. What is more, in a diary entry following her daughter’s blood transfusion, Rajkowska (2013: 151) fantasizes about extending the project into the urban space. She envisions the town of Peterborough as a living organism, its inhabitants blending in with ‘white and red cells’, the pavements, roads, and paths becoming ‘the cardiovascular system’, as ‘vast blood cells, warm and pulsating with light [...] become public objects, city devices, accessible to all’. This extraordinary vision of merging the bodily with the urban can be read as a phenomenology of maternal affect, which bursts the subject open. Rajkowska anthropomorphizes the urban landscape, which she renders a public representation of the (or Rosa’s?) blood system. She thereby performatively diffuses her anguish in the physical structure of the town.

This blurring takes on another dimension, however: the shamanic girl of *Peterborough Child* seems to be conflated with the artist, who on numerous occasions has described herself as shamanic (Rajkowska 2013: 230, 235–36). This allows one to think along the lines of transgenerational mother-daughter subjectivity, raising fundamental questions concerning the mother’s agency and her separateness/inseparability. Pointedly, in a diary entry of 2011, Rajkowska (2013: 137) gives a fantasized account of physically entering her daughter: ‘I suddenly found myself inside Rosa, in the year 2031’. Concurrently, on numerous occasions, the artist recalls her will to ‘become’ or ‘enter’ her deceased mother. In 2009, Rajkowska turned her wish into the art project *Basia*, which involved her walking the streets of Świecie for hours, pretending to be her mother.⁶ She has also publicly declared that her mother was a central presence in her life and ‘an absolutely key figure’ in her art (University College London 2014). Both in her art and in her public statements, Rajkowska thus refers to a largely unprocessed and unrepresented connection between mothers and daughters (see Rich 1986: 218–55, orig. 1976; Hirsch 1989; Irigaray 1991), challenging not only mental but also physical divisions between these subjects. Her art thus illustrates Jung’s claim that ‘Every mother contains her daughter within herself, and every daughter her mother. [...] Every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter’ (Jung 1969 in

Hirsch 1981: 209). In *Peterborough Child*, in particular, Rajkowska attends to the maternal fear of being born and giving birth in a limit situation marked by damage and vulnerability. In this way, she problematizes the intactness and stability of the maternal subject, highlighting the insanity that can arise in a situation that goes beyond the mother's mental and affective capacity.

Forcing a Miracle

In *Forcing a Miracle*, Rajkowska similarly conflates affective extremes, bridges the divide between subjects, and activates a non-human agent in her cause. The project comes from the artist's 'dramatic urge' to 'squeeze the air, to hug something that does not exist' (Rajkowska 2013: 161). Performed in London, in a field in Regent's Park close to the Frieze Art Fair, *Forcing a Miracle* produced an illusion of the ground smoking, creating a site for 'reflection, encounter and imagination' (Figure 11.3) (Davies-Crook 2012).

Again bringing together the allure of art, affectivity, and destabilization or disorientation, the artist highlights the 'seductive power of the visual image which is more convincing than any sort of verbal debate'. She goes on to underscore 'the essential element of unfamiliarity', which would 'put people in a situation where they don't know what to do with themselves' (Rajkowska 2013: 160, 266).⁷ Rosi Braidotti notes comparably that 'de-familiarization is a sobering process by which the



Figure 11.3

knowing subject evolves from the normative vision of the self he or she has become accustomed to' and experiences his or her subjectivity as a 'situated corporeal location [...], a negotiable, transversal, affective space' that is worked out 'in interaction with others' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012: 35, 29, 34). *Forcing a Miracle* subscribes to this logic, as spectators are immersed in a sensory experience that offers a 'very individual, yet collective performance' (Davies-Crook 2012). Here again, Rajkowska seductively drags her viewers into abjection, capitalizing on Sylvan Tomkins's observations that 'nothing can be the subject of our attention unless and until it has triggered affect' and that 'affects mutualize [where] cognitive constructs do not' (in Nathanson 1997: 3, 5). By immersing the viewers in the mesmerizing illusion of burning soil, the artist makes affective responses her ally as she thematizes her traumatizing maternal experience in a public space.

What is more, by making the soil her medium, Rajkowska aligns the maternal with the non-human, at the same time drawing on the symbolic connotations of earth as motherly, a gesture that, in the words of Braidotti, 'explodes the boundaries of humanism at skin level' (in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012: 35). Rajkowska (2013: 266–67, 161) explains:

With this project I wanted the ground not only to breathe; I wanted it to burn. When you have a child that in her devilish innocence and joy is losing her eyesight, you burn – you literally burn your tissues from inside. I wanted to reenact it in soil. I wanted London to burn and cry with me. [...] I needed a field of incenses [*sic*]. I wanted tens of thousands of burning incense sticks to activate the ground, so that everything would gently but firmly raise aloft this one thought that I had – for Rosa to survive, for her to see, for her eyes to be saved. At the same time, I felt myself turning into such a field, that the fear in me was burning everything inside.

The merging with the soil (a powerful, two-fold metaphor for the maternal and the deadly) yet again dialectically links life and death, as Rajkowska's wish to help Rosa is coupled with her attempt to work through the death of her own mother, a theme that she discusses in one of her public appearances (University College London 2014). This doubly transgenerational bonding of life and death makes it impossible to fantasize the body as immortal and immune to damage (see Gatens 1996: 53). Again, it is crucial that it is through a point of damage or vulnerability that Rajkowska imaginatively enters her daughter's (and mother's) experience of the world. Her gesture points to the shattering paradox of motherhood: having a child sentences the child to death. This is the basic condition of every mother, yet facing one's child's critical disease makes it more tangible. Thus, *Forcing a Miracle* can be read as

an amplified representation of maternal love, that is, love for what is vulnerable and mortal. Moreover, through her simultaneous merging with her mother and her daughter, Rajkowska (2013: 139) confronts her own death; she notes: ‘you are closer to the limits of mortality when bringing life into the world’. If one agrees with Julia Kristeva’s assertion that humanism as a coherent philosophy ‘is not able to come to terms with the vulnerability that is inscribed in the very nature of living beings, human beings in particular’ (Kristeva and Vanier 2012: 20), then here again, Rajkowska goes beyond humanism. Kristeva also argues that vulnerability has direct political implications, as any attempt to fashion a new social contract ‘will only come about through the promotion of a type of humanism that makes the vulnerability of the human person thematic for the first time in history’ (in Roderick 2014). As both an established artist and a mother, Rajkowska encourages through *Forcing a Miracle* public recognition of vulnerability as foundational for a new kind of ethical sociality.

Rosa’s Passage

Rosa’s Passage, executed in a small courtyard in central Łódź, Poland, ultimately universalizes Rajkowska’s maternal experience, dismantling subjectivity and entering the realm of the inhuman. By covering the façades of buildings with ‘hundreds of thousands of broken mirror pieces set in a meticulous way in floral, circular, spiral arrangements’ (Krytyka Polityczna 2014), Rajkowska visualizes her daughter’s way of seeing. In this piece, the buildings’ surfaces become ‘an architectural skin’ (Skłodowska 2015) that dematerializes – annihilates, in fact – all possible divisions between the viewer, the viewed objects, and vision itself:

I was powered by the joy that Rosa can see – we don’t know how, but she does. This delight, however, produced an image of defect, of imperfect vision, its fragmentariness, an image that resists all attempts to unite. [...] My impulse was to [...] transform [the buildings] into the retina, eye fundus, and thus make them disappear, dematerialize. I followed the trail of the ‘immateriality’ of seeing. The seeing subject is filled with sight, becomes what it sees.

(Skłodowska 2015)

This epistemological and ontological collapse of all divisions (we see the buildings, the buildings see us, while in fact we see our own, damaged, sight) again results in blurring and dissolution, evoking the maternal condition and universalizing the experience of vulnerability (Figure 11.4).

The installation forces one to merge with the abject (the imagined effect of damaged sight), but such abjection yet again comes in the guise of visually seductive art. The piece aims to dislodge ‘self-centeredness’,



Figure 11.4

encouraging us to ‘ced[e] the ground to the thing that stands before us’ in an act of ‘unselfing’ (Scarry 1999: 111–13). Or, as Zbigniew Brzoza puts it, ‘the spectator is to dematerialize in order to materialize on the other side’ (cited in Powalisz 2014). *Rosa’s Passage*, like a seductive whirlpool, draws one into an unwelcome, profoundly disconcerting confrontation with one’s own vulnerability. Rajkowska explains: ‘I thought of the inhuman aspect of the disease. [...] Disease is a mistake, a defect, a territory of instinctual exclusion, a territory of the other. Cancer embodies contemporary fear of the unknown’ (Skłodowska 2015). By cunningly pulling spectators inside an overwhelming visual representation of cancer, Rajkowska yet again invokes the ‘limits of being, fear of definite lack, threat of physical or psychical death’ (Kristeva and

Vanier 2012: 38–39). Rajkowska strikingly illustrates Kristeva’s claim that ‘my encounter with my own mortality defines the level of pleasure and unpleasure in my encounter with the otherness of others’ (Kristeva and Vanier 44). Similar to *Forcing a Miracle*, her gesture points to a void in the social contract, which, according to Kristeva, treats damage as a ‘narcissistic wound or castration’ and a threat to a society focused on ‘achieving goals’ and ‘consumption’ (19, 21). By immersing her spectators in a panopticon of cancerous vision, she sets the stage for the Kristevan encounter of ‘my weaknesses with the weaknesses of others’ (44). This, in turn, may prompt the viewers to realize that their own and others’ awareness of mortality is necessary to engage in ‘genuine attachment[s]’ (45). Thus, *Rosa’s Passage* can be read as a powerful critique of the reproduction of a subjectivity that represses vulnerability and thus bars the formation of genuine relationships. The piece becomes a manifesto for a new social contract, an argument reinforced by Rajkowska’s (2013: 225) claim: ‘I’m nothing more than a midwife for social potential, social possibilities’. Here again, the artist acts on two levels: as a self-aware intermediary for a new social arrangement and as the mother of an ill child.

As is the case with *Peterborough Child* and *Forcing a Miracle*, *Rosa’s Passage* is underpinned by Rajkowska’s individual despair over her troubled maternal experience. By replicating her daughter’s damaged vision, Rajkowska plays with the Winnicottian notion of the mother as the child’s developmental mirror. According to Winnicott (2005: 150–51, orig. 1971), at a certain point, the baby ‘takes a look around’ and sees the mother’s face as a reflection of himself or herself. Winnicott believes that in individual emotional development, ‘the precursor of the mirror is the mother’s face’, as the mother’s role is to give back to the baby ‘the baby’s own self’ (149, 158). In other words, as Andrea Liss (2009: 25) puts it, the mother ‘serve[s] as a mirror for the infant’s uninterrupted sense of wholeness’, since the ‘mother’s body is coded as the site of specularization and assurance for the child’. *Rosa’s Passage* both materially and symbolically reconstructs the child’s fractured vision, pointing to the drama of a mother and her child who cannot unproblematically see her. Rajkowska explains: ‘I wanted to help [my daughter] with this project. To complete that which is happening in the back of her eyes. [...] This project is really about immersing in vision, in a moment of clarity that she can still see, against the odds’ (Krytyka Polityczna 2014). Rajkowska, then, mourns the fact of having been deprived of the expected joys of early motherhood, when a mother provides the baby with the Winnicottian (1960) ‘holding environment’. At the same time, she creates a setting in which all are immersed in a phantasm of Rosa’s sight. In this vision, all become(s) Rosa, and Rosa becomes all. By making this dramatic gesture through public art, Rajkowska ‘looks into the face of

what is unbearable' (Kristeva and Vanier 2012: 49), making vulnerability a common, albeit not necessarily willed, experience.

Like her previous projects, *Rosa's Passage* involves mergings, as implied by the word 'passage'. The word suggests a transformative experience: for the city of Łódź (the courtyard forms a passage between the historical Piotrkowska Street and the modern Manufaktura shopping and cultural complex), for Rosa (as it illustrates her path from not seeing to seeing), for Rajkowska-the-mother (with her hope that her daughter may see), and for Rajkowska-the-artist (the project is an artistic sublimation of her motherly experience). As in the case of *Peterborough Child* and *Forcing a Miracle*, it may also prove transformative for the audience, who turn a damaged gaze on themselves, becoming the viewer and the viewed, and merging with the surroundings; thus, it universalizes vulnerability. In this way, in *Rosa's Passage*, the post- or extra-human blending of the disease with the landscape becomes a cosmic vision of the individual facing his or her ultimate vulnerability.

Conclusion

In her psychobiographical art practice (see Best 2014: 8), Joanna Rajkowska is 'subjectively alive and struggling', and her art is 'what she does with how she feels' (Kraemer 1996: 769, 768). She works from within a Merleau-Pontyan 'space of human subjectivity [...] produced by embodied or lived experience' (1962, cited in Baraitser 2009: 13), which is relational and marked by a point of damage. Rajkowska's daughter pieces replicate by proxy the condition of a mother who first comes to love her child and then goes on in the face of a limit situation. The formal diversity of Rajkowska's daughter art documents the artist's continuous effort to fashion new ways of symbolizing what cannot be fully symbolized by intricately engaging her expressive potential both as a mother and as an artist. Thus, *Peterborough Child*, *Forcing a Miracle*, and *Rosa's Passage*, by conflating the artistic and the maternal, constitute what Leigh Gilmore – possibly alluding to Jaspers's limit situations – calls limit-cases. Gilmore's limit-cases concern trauma, the self, and representation. While they involve the 'coincidence of trauma and self-representation', they also indicate the existence of 'a self who can differ from the identity trauma imposes' (Gilmore 2001: 129, 133). Gilmore thus points to the processes through which subjects engage with difficulty, noting: 'The knowing subject works with dissonant materials, marked by trauma, and organizes them into a form of knowledge' (134). Rajkowska is a 'knowing subject' in this sense: on the one hand, she produces dissonant works that reveal the fractured character of her traumatic maternal experience; on the other hand, by entering public space in a self-aware artistic gesture, she makes these works manifestos for a new social

contract. She breaks through the barrier of subjectivity, entering the liminal space of transgenerational mother-daughter cathexis, one that welcomes a ‘relational thinking beyond the concept of hybridity’ (Emel and Neo 2015: 3). What is more, as I have shown, Rajkowska not only traverses the subject-subject barrier, she also aims at a monistic merging of different entities, engaging spectators in a sensory experience that invalidates ‘rational’ logic and succumbs to the logic of maternal passion, fear, and hope.

Crucially, and controversially, the artist manipulates her viewers by making her works seductive and abject at the same time. She declares that her aim is to produce a ‘vision that is so powerful people succumb to it, want to succumb to it’ (Rajkowska 2013: 225). When they do, however, they come to realize that the driving force behind this otherwise seductive art is the potentially critical disease of a child. In this way, the artist lures her viewers into a profoundly unsettling existential experience that they may not be willing or ready to confront. Rajkowska’s hope is that the affective responsiveness of the viewer’s body will trigger his or her acknowledgement of vulnerability as emblematic of the human condition, and that this acknowledgement can become the basis for new social rituals, maybe even for a new social contract.

Notes

- 1 Collin 1985: 23, cited in Moi 1986: 14.
- 2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are my own.
- 3 Patricia Clough links this ‘turn’ to a ‘focus on the body’ and an ‘exploration of emotions’ (cited in Hardt 2007: ix). Rajkowska (2013: 219) indeed gives a very physical and animalistic account of the embodied origin of her art: ‘I’m like a dog that, having picked up a scent, heads in the right direction and digs up a decent bone. But if I lose the scent, I lose myself completely’.
- 4 I discuss these three installations, which are renowned in Poland, in Wierzchowska 2011.
- 5 In 2011, Rajkowska produced two pieces that directly link the birth of Rosa to the Polish-German past: *Born in Berlin* and *Letter to Rosa*. Highly problematic, the projects were made before the artist knew her daughter was ill, and thus I am not discussing them here.
- 6 Rajkowska’s mother died in 2006 in a psychiatric institution in Świecie, a fact that seems central to the artist’s sensibility and artistic practice. She states: ‘All of my life I have been afraid of my mother. All the projects which were conceived for her are in fact expressions of fear regarding her history, illness, psychoses’ (Rajkowska 2013: 254). In an interview by Monika Powalisz (2014), Rajkowska explains that in her project *Basia*, she pretended to be her institutionalized mother in order to jump ‘into a black hole to get herself out of it’ or to ‘escape the fear of a total loss – the loss of herself, her [own] identity’.
- 7 Rajkowska (2010: 32) writes: ‘If a new element turns up and redefines the whole image, we immediately begin to struggle in order to somehow assimilate it. We are accompanied by memory work, we are also emotionally moved. I am interested in those several seconds of disbelief’.

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