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Artists experiencing immigration:
How we view our artistic expression in the context of dramatic change

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A Thesis

in

The Department

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Abstract

Artists experiencing immigration:

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The guiding questions of my research relate the notions of identity, displacement and art. As artists, what are our particular ways of addressing the issue of identity in the context of immigration? What are our strategies of relocation and empowerment? What are the implications for art education?

To answer these questions I gathered and analyzed the life-narratives of three recent immigrant women artists. Included in this analysis are reflections related to my own immigration. Focusing on the artists' accounts, I have explored the relationship between the experience of displacement and the (re)construction of identity. I have looked at the ways by which visual narrative has been used as a strategy of empowerment.

This thesis began with my early reading of work by D. Polkinghorne whose idea is that narrative is one of the forms of expressiveness through which life events are conjoined into coherent, meaningful, unified themes. I have been inspired by some authors' recent views on narrative, such as those of D.P. McAdams, M. Freeman,

G.A.M. Widdershoven. These authors consider storytelling as the primary and most natural mode of organizing human experience and knowledge. Within this context, I have entertained the notion that displacement exists concurrently with a loss of meaning in one's life. Displacement can be interpreted as an identity crisis; one which puts into question, and at times suspends, the possibility of telling a coherent story thus allowing the storyteller to be a powerful, creative agent. Such a crisis is based on both the actual break from previous cultural affiliations and on the marginalization and fragmentation of the story due to prejudicial forms of listening or refusal to listen.

Following the artists' stories and inspired by voices in the academy, particularly bell hooks and Marianne Hirsch, I have suggested that overcoming crisis (relocating) does not simply mean suspending displacement; rather it is through a transformation of its meaning and means - from a site of deprivation to a site of resistance - that we arrive to articulate presence and to inhabit our own stories. Both dialogue as a form of solidarity between storyteller and listener, and art-making are presented here as sites of the immigrants' recovery, creativity and resistance.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my co-participants, the artists: Carolina, Jarmila and Kinga.

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Introduction

Searching for a Story

Paradise lost, 1995

Why this overall feeling of sorrow and shame? I live in isolation and I feel dispossessed. To which of my belongings was my pride attached? My mother-tongue, a history of myself in a certain landscape, all those immaterial things like the gaze of the other telling me that *I am*? Everything is there, nothing is here.

Double self-portrait, 1995

Where am I? Who is this *Other* I cannot define yet recognize as myself? Will I ever get to see its' face?

Loss, 1996

I feel suspended and split between then/there - the locus of memory - and now/here - a space where liberation is translated by loss. Everything here looks fragmented, including my artworks. I struggle to identify a path to support these recent works but it occurs to

me that unity is an impossible goal and my unifying effort leads nowhere. Pages in my notebook are covered with symbols and key words. I understand that what brings my recent artworks together *is* my existence. Through this artwork I can re-establish my visual and verbal vocabulary. I mark words and I try to translate them into English and mathematics. I explore the idea of dialogue as a solution for translation.

In a dialogue with my husband, I try to transpose my existential experience into mathematical terms. I charge numbers with psychological meaning: Zero is associated with chaos and loss but it is also the point of origin, the beginning. One is associated with unity, identity, plenitude and sense of belonging. A movement from zero to one means growth, integration and reconnection. Inversely, a movement from one to zero means disintegration or dislocation. Infinity is an ideal state and incorporates both zero and one, as it does in the theory of the small infinity in mathematics which allows the consideration of a two-directional U-curve stage-graded hypothesis where zero becomes one and one becomes zero (as articulated in the image). Chaos becomes infinity.

At the center of this work I reproduced the architectural plan of a Romanian monastery. Many self-defining memories are related to this place. The text-dialogue is printed outside the enclosed space of this memory.

While completing this artwork I realized one of the paradoxes of my existence. It is

not that I have lost my center or myself but that my center is a moving point. It is *out there*.

In-Placement Series, 1996

I feel totally displaced and fragmented. I have to sit down and try to assemble my scattered self into *one*:

1. What is the meaning of "my place"? I imagine myself as a point outside a circle. I know that I have to be at the center of this circle in order to regain my place. Once inside, I can look at myself as a place, from above and from the side. The place becomes a platform, a landing area. It is a magnet for all exterior sounds and images. I feel secure. My place is inside of me and I am inside my place.

2. What/where is my place? Can I visualize this place as a sort of self-defining synthesizing memory? I have found this small landscape -- a mono-print created by my father. This image always reminded me the hills of his village and, by extension, the landscape of my native land and of my childhood. It is a luminous memory, repeated in a dark echo, a negative. My place is an imaginary land defined by duality, defined by my state of in-between-ness.

3 I am floating: no ties, no gravity. My whole past is denied by this lightness of being. Who am I under this new, unrecognizable appearance? Where shall I land? I look at myself as I am - deprived of any support, despoiled of my old clothes -- and I feel more and more forceful in my new nudity. I am my own seed, my own land, my own culture. I can land within myself and offer myself as a landing area. I remember. I dialogue.

Traveler, 1997

Why are these same memories haunting me again and again? They are at once luminous images and black holes. What kind of story do they tell? The past is a traveler's house larger than its carrier. Have I left or have I fallen out of my past?

I see myself more and more as a traveler between different worlds, between imaginary and physical lands – a traveler within myself. Now I can see stories of oppression in many of my memories and I realize that I did not fall from paradise. I have decided to leave an unreliable context and to meet my new self.

Cycle, 1997

Working on the traveler theme, I focus on the idea of cyclic development. This work is imagined as a growing system, it takes the shape of a body. The body stands for the

self. The third phase of the cycle is a cocoon that carries inside a new and mysterious beginning.

There is another aspect I noticed while working on the three Cycle pieces: my insistence on "the back element." What does the back mean in this context? Looking for the red thread, I find writings from my adolescence and self-portraits from the back. It occurs to me that in my recent works the back is a new way of representing myself.

Series of backs, 1998

I come to realize that the back symbolizes the past – a pun, it shows what is behind me. It is also a protective shell. But what intrigues me most is this announced yet undisclosed presence. I cannot be easily identified from the back. Can I look at myself from the back? Do I know myself from the back? Can I use this *other* image to re-present myself? The back symbolizes my own otherness.

Traveler, 1998-1999

I travel through my memories, re-interpreting these significant moments of my existence towards the self-to-be. Who is this new self that I remember and re-configure through images? Who is this self that I am now projecting? I am no longer lost. I have

become a decided migrant. Distance feeds my (self)awareness. Otherness is my vehicle.

Dialogue, 1998-1999

As I am sitting with other women artists and talk about issues of mutual concern – our lives in immigration and our art in the context of our lives -- I feel the intensity of our connection and the power of the knowledge we are constructing through dialogue. As we sit one in front of the other, we construct a space -- the container of our dialogue. This space-container that becomes a standpoint for our moving ahead resonates in my mind with the other space of in-between-ness that can become the resource of the migrant's existence.

Offering, 1999

I understand that what we shape through dialogue about our experiences of immigration is a locus of being where we constantly exchange positions from storytellers to listeners and back to storytellers and where we learn to articulate ourselves and to (re)construct our voices.

I envision a material gift standing for an immaterial offering for women engaged in dialogue: a pigtail – a story. I can tell you a story about girlhood and one of the first

rituals of change: cutting a pigtail, then carrying it in a suitcase and offering it to listeners and storytellers who make a difference in our lives.

Tracing the Story

I immigrated to Canada in 1994. I belong to a generation of young Romanians who, having to live under a dictatorial regime in the margins of imperialist powers, nurtured the dream of crossing borders. In this sense immigration was my free choice. But in another sense, it was also forced upon me by political and economic circumstances. My new life in Canada has been marked by profound contradictory feelings of loss and liberation, confusion and heightened self-awareness. Not only did I move from studio arts into art education, but, as I mentioned, I moved *here* from another continent, from a radically different cultural and political context and speaking a different language. Re-thinking myself in a new place did not happened easily, nor quickly. Two years after my arrival to Canada, I still had the impression my story did not contain me. I was physically here while all my self-defining memories were left in Romania. This paradoxical position made me feel the opposite of a traveler. I was stuck in-between an irrelevant past self and a not-yet-relevant present self. In reaction, I called myself an immigrant, meaning that I did not belong and publicly acknowledging my non-position, my misplacement. I saw myself outside the center, or in displacement, but in my comfortable moments I felt doubly-placed or doubly-centered. Regardless of my uneasy positioning, I kept playing

with images, a form of language that I consider open and in a sense, universal. Thus, I began to explore my *other* story or my story as *other*, in and through art.

In order to be able to figure out my new story I asked exploratory questions: How did the crossing of borders happen? How did I find my place in a new context? Then, I specified and (re-)defined terms: What is the meaning of my place and in relation to that, what is the meaning of displacement? In what kind of crossings was (am) I engaged?

My deepest need was to be able to answer the 'why' questions: Why did I leave? Why do I feel the way I feel? Why do I make art? Mark Freeman (1994) explains that upon determining "why" we may find ourselves in the position to achieve a renewed understanding of the phenomena before us. Re-interpreting the past is how we make sense of our existence; this sense, in turn, allows as to take a stance in our present lives and to make projects for the future.

By putting my new existence on display I wanted to translate the experience of crossing borders for myself as well as for a so-perceived distant viewer. During the last four years my viewers/listeners have been mainly students and professors in art education but through them I have consciously addressed the larger audience that is the host society. In order to open the dialogue, I presented my viewer with a history in both images and words. Meanwhile, I engaged in other kinds of dialogues with "soul-mates"--

women artists who have recently immigrated to Canada. I positioned myself as a viewer/listener of their stories and in so doing, I realized that my experience was shared by a large segment of the host society. I understood that unless I/we have a story to tell and a listener or a viewer to acknowledge it without prejudice, I/we can hardly find the means to survive without feeling shattered. The great acts of communicating the self through art and through dialogue with other women immigrants helped me to heal my loss, to make sense of my new existence and to bring myself into a new beginning.

Stories Are Worth Telling

We meet others and we meet ourselves through storytelling. Our identities are shaped in the process of telling and listening to stories. Indeed, from a narrative perspective, identity is defined as a life story. As Dan McAdams (1997) puts it:

> If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. If I want to know myself, to gain insight into my own life, then I, too, must come to know my story....It is a story I continue to revise, and tell to myself (and sometimes to others) as I go on living. (p.11)

Stories help us understand reality and give a context for our actions in the world. They empower the narrator by the very fact that they represent a form of control over an

otherwise fragmented and chaotic reality. Stories help us (re-)position ourselves: in passing on traditions, they offer a ground for the listener; as reactions against tradition, against an external locus of control, stories bring with them a voice that can empower the marginal.

Self-defining stories can be deeply generative for both the storyteller and the listener, but talking (writing, painting, etc.) about ourselves does not bring about transformation unless we find a narrative theme to bridge the past and the present and to originate a (new) life project -- a cause.

The artists interviewed for this thesis found various ways to translate themselves, to voice the unspeakable or to give voice to the marginal. As for myself, the present research together with my artistic inquiry have been my most important supportive "cause". By using the term cause in this context I want to emphasize my solidarity with other people living in immigration. Indeed, my research began with the need to find the "we," a community of shared experiences in a world that has lost its coherency. Connecting with other artists has helped me to overcome isolation and to gain perspective over my immediate experience. Through dialogue, we have been able to re-position ourselves and our artistic work. We have also been able to re-consider our roles as artists in particular cultural contexts and more largely in contemporary society.

Chapter I

Theoretical background

Identity and narrative

Self-defining narratives form the core of this thesis. Looking at the issue of identity in the context of immigration, I am preoccupied with the individual's sense of self, her autobiography. I am concerned with how artists make meaning and not whether their life histories are fictional or they correspond to an objective reality. Both the phenomenological attention to individual experience and the narrative view inspire my research. However these lines of inquiry are re-positioned within a postmodern context that values local narratives, yet turns against the belief in objective reality or essential (universal) truth. In my understanding of the phenomenological-narrative perspective, what people tell about their own lives is true as long as it uncovers personal meaning and it is considered in relationship to the context in which meaning is formed. The purpose of this section is to position my research and to set up a net of theoretical arguments to support future chapters dealing with methodology (gathering and analyzing data).

Widdershoven (1994) maintains the concept of narrative is salient in present-day philosophy and in the human sciences. Distinct from other models of identity and development –mechanistic and organismic-- the notion of narrative is seen as playing a special role within contemporary (developmental) psychology, in that it offers a

non-individualistic and non-progressive image of human existence. He explains:

> Within the narrative model, development is seen as a qualitative change in narrative structure. Human development thus implies a fundamental change in the pattern organizing a person's expressions. . . . Development is not independent of its interpretation. Developmental steps are made explicit in interpretations and they cannot exist without them. (p.110)

Concurring with this view there is a recent conceptualization of identity as an imaginary vision of completion that is to be refigured endlessly in line with various experiences that are to come one's way through the course of one's life (Freeman, 1994). According to another tenant of this view, identity is an internalized narrative integration of past, present, and future that provides life with a sense of unity. Identity is a life-story (McAdams, 1997).

Somewhat parallel to this view, but certainly informing one another, there is the definition of identity as an intersection, a positioning or a production. These new conceptualizations focus on the conflicting non-homogenous sites (histories or cultures) within which our stories come to life. Stuart Hall (1990) argues for a conceptualization of identity that is not grounded in archeology but in re-telling the past. Hall refers specifically to the phenomenon of displacement when he argues that articulating identity

means "imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation" (p.224) and that " identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past" (p.225).

Contemporary life, regulated by dramatic displacements and frequent relocations cannot easily sustain the traditional model of identity in which, as Madan Sarup (1996) explains, all the dynamics (class, gender, race) operate simultaneously to produce a coherent, unified, fixed identity. The more recent or more relevant models, according to the same author, define identity as a process constructed within both psychological and sociological conditions.

At first sight, McAdams' case for unity or coherence in the life-story (and in identity) appears to be contradicted by immigrant artists' insistence on a fragmented life-account. However, the artists I interviewed do not talk about non-stories (or about the impossibility to tell coherent stories). Instead, they insist on the essentially open character of their stories.

Like the other participants in the project, having experienced dramatic personal and cultural shifts, I am uncomfortable with any unquestioned or totalizing argument for unity. Yet the same experience of dramatic change, supported by readings into postmodern and feminist thought and by dialogue with immigrant artists, taught me that

turning against unity is a turn against closure, a measure of evading oppression. This turn is oriented towards installing presence within a language of difference which is also a language of solidarity. Although we might purposefully and strategically stick with our refusal to unity, in real life or when asked to talk about our life, we moreover have stories to tell. These multiple fragmented self-defining stories of our being and becoming in different cultural contexts are usually configured in coherent accounts. The idea of a "fragmented existence" itself may be a theme linking disparate events of a story.

The very fact that the immigrant artists interviewed had willingly joined my research knowing that I will ask for life and work narratives proves in my view that they were outside confusion or hopeless fragmentation. They already had meaningful stories to tell and the desire to make new sense of their experiences of dramatic change and their art while re-telling their life-stories. In this sense, I agree with Mark Freeman (1994) when he argues:

> To make sense of a text, whether it is the text of one's past or some other one, is precisely a process of creating a framework, an interpretative context within which relevant information may be placed; it is, again, a going beyond this information, an attempt to confer a measure of order and coherence upon it. (p.30)

In an article treating the issue of development in the arts, Mark Freeman (1994b) refers

specifically to a postmodernist dilemma. Taking an artist as example, the author argues that "although this painter can think in a postmodern way about philosophy and art, he finds he cannot think that way about himself; he cannot think about his own being without a center, a foundation" (p.160). This center or foundation lies, in my view, with the theme(s) of the life-story and in this context with the images or characters with which we come to identify – imago, in McAdams' terms. The artist's role represents a life-organizing image/theme.

The narrative view counteracts, without necessarily contradicting, those who argue that ours is an age of fragmentation that transforms and is further supported by flexible, tentative and impermanent identities. Robert Lifton, psychiatrist, disciple, colleague and later theoretical adversary of Erik Erikson, launched the notion of the protean self to characterize the new historical style of self-in-process. A commentator of the debate between Erikson and Lifton explains: "For where change was once a transitional stage to a regained equilibrium in line with ancient tradition, change is now self-sustaining" (Friedman, 1996, p.142). Erikson replied to such radical conceptualizations by saying that identity was a useful notion, a vessel that held or contained the constant shifts of the self. Moreover he expressed the debate in terms of Identity versus Identity confusion. Erikson is known to have long emphasized the idea that one gained a full sense of "I" or selfhood only through trusting rapport with another.

My interpretation is placed somewhere in-between opposite views. The artists interviewed themselves appear to fluctuate in their statements. Ironically, they tell coherent accounts about incoherence, instabillity and incompletion. In recounting their multiple experiences of displacement, they appear as powerful inhabitants of their own stories as well as highly adaptive persons. It is important to note here that change is not simply a result of their random shift in and out of different cultural contexts. Here, Erikson's observations are most enlightening, for, as he argued, a person does not achieve a sense of identity through an indefinite adaptation to the demands of social change (Friedman, 1996). The artists I had interviewed lead committed, and at the same time, widely open lives. Having experienced the dramatic change of immigration, they have become highly aware of power relationships; they have come to define borders and to negotiate their identities within such borders. In this context, art can be taken as a (visual) self-defining narrative through which individuals dialogue with themselves and address others, thus articulating speech and re-constructing their identity.

Chapter II

Articulating Terms:

Displacement and Relocation in Relation to Personal Experience

As I look at links between artistic expression and autobiography, that is, between art and the lived experience of immigration, I reflect upon the issue of identity that supports the processes of redefinition or reinvention of self in changing contexts. In this research, I examine identity in relation to the notions of displacement and relocation. Displacement can be identified, depending on the context, as culture shock, identity crisis or trauma. Relocation stands for integration, re-connection, identity resolution or recovery.

Displacement

The diversity and the rapidly shifting contexts of contemporary life coupled with our increased awareness and freedom to talk about our personal experiences of change have opened the door for accounts on displacement both in the academia and in domestic life. Psychologists studying the phenomenon of cultural contact (e.g. Furnham&Bochner, 1986; Pederson, 1995) have suggested the notion of culture shock can be used to describe radical change in human life. Some studies of this genre have articulated strategies of coping and prevention and have provided training models based on learning and communication theories (e.g. Furnham & Bochner's "learning skills approach").

While such studies may help us to "categorize" experience, and perhaps better control the flow of events, the issue of displacement goes further than coping skills in literature and philosophy. Displacement (immigration/exile) has become the archetypal condition of contemporary lives (Hoffman, 1989, p.197). The displacement experience puts us in a relative (but not necessarily relativist) position that is neither inside, nor outside. This position of in-between-ness, indeed, this uneasiness of being, casts us in what Homi Bhabha (1990) calls "a position of liminality." Rooted in separation, molded on absence, displacement announces a break or a crisis. Although clearly a traumatic experience, -- otherwise it would be simply called change -- displacement cannot simply be reduced to a negation. To encompass the complexity of this experience, we need to use ambivalent descriptors. "Exile", writes Madan Sarup (1996), "can be deadening, but it can also be very creative. It can be an affliction but...also a transfiguration – it can be a resource" (p.6). Just how displacement becomes a resource is a question that guided me throughout the theoretical literature and the live accounts of the artists.

Relocation

I visualize all our spiritual or cognitive pursuits as journeys constituted of multiple relocations. I acknowledge that immigration implies particular changes, but I believe that we can find important links amongst our ways of dealing with life-changes in general.

With a new understanding of cultures within cultures or the notion of culture as a network of competing systems rather than a homogenous system of symbols, meanings and norms of conduct, we can consider our movements in and out of different communities as cultural relocations, following more or less dramatic displacements.

Although always considered in relation to a break, relocation does not necessarily imply an established or fixed position reached at some point after the break. I use the term relocation to name a process of change and not a fixed result of that change. I refer to relocation as a negotiable positioning rather than as an established location. It involves both the definitions and decisions of the person relocating and those of other people or institutions setting borders that delimit one's place. When I engage in relocation, I become highly aware of power relationships and shifting borders.

As a process that is neither unidirectional nor linear, relocation announces a return. It is not an absolute return, but a sort of homecoming, as Sarup points out, "[Homecoming is] ... an arrival that is significant because it is after a long absence or an arduous heroic journey" (p.2).

Relocation involves a great deal of personal choice. It is a purposeful change. Speaking about her decision to walk (to cross borders) the artist Kinga Araya (Personal comunication, 1998) argues that we are saved by our decisions. It is not so much whether

we take good or bad decisions but that we seize the opportunity. I would go further by observing that we gain power from the very fact of having to take our own decisions. It means that we take control, thus acting in opposition to an internal or external adversity. This act of empowerment is tied to the issue of identity formation whereby we come to grips with ourselves by making choices. Writing on the issue of identity formation, William Killpatrick (1975) argues that, "choice is the point at which a man gives up what he could be and chooses what he will be" (p.43).

What is common to all experiences of relocation is a complex, often abrupt shift marked by our separation from what used to be our dominant mode of living. Drawing from Erikson, Ruthellen Josselson (1995) discusses the relational aspect of identity and explains that changing contexts in adult life is a developmental resolution: "[Development] is built on a critical disjunction with one's group and on the effort to search for another group whose rituals and symbolic life are more compatible with aspects of the self" (p.100). Moreover, this project drives us into a perpetual quest, a life-long walk into the labyrinth. We use the notion of developmental project or life-story to map the roads and to contain the pains and joys of our intricate trip. According to Mark Freeman (1994): "Development has to do with expanding one's own being-in and relatedness-to the world" (p.163). Development also deals with "challenging tradition and the power structure that legitimated it and gaining a developmental momentum through adversarial relation to it" (p.160).

Chapter III

Developing methodology

Interview as a conversation

Interacting with people through interviews constructs particular situations. Such interaction is based on a theme of mutual interest where knowledge evolves or is reconstructed through dialogue. Kvale (1996) offers a detailed and extensive perspective on qualitative research interviewing. This author explains that a research interview in the conversational mode has a sequence of themes as well as suggested questions to be covered. Yet at the same time there is an openness to changes which allows a follow up to the stories told by the subjects. Furthermore, the degree of structure, openness of purpose and character of interviews vary.

The type of interview that I considered appropriate for my research was the open conversation where specific themes and research problems are considered without a predetermined sequence or formulation of questions. For this research I considered it necessary that the subjects themselves establish a flow, a sequence, and points of interest in their narrative. My role was to introduce the topic, to listen attentively and carefully to keep the participant within the topic. This type of exploratory interviewing seeks mainly the description of the phenomena in discussion. In terms of this thesis, the phenomenon refers to immigration as lived experience and, in this context, to the

concrete art works. Interpretation of phenomena or works is solicited toward the end of the interviewing session and in relation to specific issues that came up in our interaction.

I am also inspired by research conceived within the phenomenological-narrative perspective. Drawing from Paul Ricoeur, Margery Franklin (1989) emphasizes that narrative accounts involve two interconnected dimensions: one chronological and the other thematic-interpretive. Franklin explains that by showing the relationships between parts, thematic patterns are constructed in addition to sequential ordering. Selection of ideas to be linked is guided by ideas about meaningful configurations; formation of meaningful patterns may lead to a re-selection of events for the temporarily ordered sequence (p. 257). This dynamic is relevant for both the interview situation when the artist tells his or her story and for my subsequent interpretation of the text.

Concerning the procedure, I keep in mind Seidman (1991) who suggests a sequence of three 90-minute interviewing sessions with each artist. I have modified this procedure to suit each particular case.

Participants and Procedure

I have talked about the immigration experience with six women artists. This began in 1997 when I conducted a first series of interviews with Irina, Artemis and Anna as part of

1997 when I conducted a first series of interviews with Irina, Artemis and Anna as part of a pilot project. In 1998-1999 I interviewed Carolina, Kinga and Jarmila following the thesis proposal. Only the recent interviews will be presented in detail. There are important and individual reasons for doing so. Perhaps the most important reason resides in the general context of the later interviews. I gained more experience in interviewing, more confidence in the relevance of my topic and more clarity in articulating its terms. Although providing rich accounts, the early interviews make the analysis a rather difficult task. Irina abandoned the artistic practice for a profitable and stable job, a situation which, if taken into account could alter the core of my research and would necessitate another interview in order for the information to be properly integrated. Artemis, another artist interviewed as part of my pilot project, provided a lengthy and in-depth account of her immigration experience. Her works have been documented in detail. However, Artemis has decided lately to use her artworks as a basis for her own thesis and has expressed the desire to present her works in her own way. The third artist in my pilot project was Anna whose interview was only partially preserved which makes a weak basis for analysis. These are the main reasons for deciding to keep the early interviews in the background while emphasizing the most recent ones.

Once I decided I needed to interview women artists "like myself" and to dialogue with them to learn from each other, I began using different research methods. I went to Artexte (Center for Contemporary Art) to look for women artists who had immigrated to

Canada within the last 10 or 15 years and who currently work on issues related to displacement. The fact that I could not find the information I needed made me conclude that women "like myself" also means emerging artists or women who are engaged in academic studies. It might mean women fighting on their own to re-shape their identity and to promote their art. Or it might simply means recent immigrants who perform art when other demanding chores allow them. Individuals in these categories either do not know about Artexte or do not have enough documents to open a file there.

I began to search for galleries with a history of presenting emerging artists from different cultural backgrounds. I contacted the personnel of a few galleries in Montreal (i.e. Observatoire 4, La Centrale, Circa) asking for information about women artists working on cultural identity or immigration-related issues. I also went through the galleries' files but I could not find exactly what I was looking for. One succesful contact was the director of Art Depot Gallery. Without knowing that her gallery had burned to ashes a year ago, I sent a letter via electronic mail. Carolina Echeverria answered promptly and offered her participation in the project, not as a director, but as an artist.

In the meantime, I was given access to the art history department files at Concordia. With Dr. Loren Lerner's help, I looked through the information available on contemporary Canadian artists of different cultural origins. At first, I selected Kinga Araya because her age, the year of immigration to Canada and topics covered by her work

matched my basic interviewing requirements. I was somewhat discouraged by the fact that she no longer lived in Canada. She was continuing her Ph.D studies in the United States. However, I was so impressed with her video work that I decided to contact her via e-mail to talk about her work and discuss the possibility of an interview. After a few conversations, her solo-exhibition "Discipline" showing in Toronto provided the occasion for a meeting. In December of 1998, Kinga traveled from Lubbock, Texas to perform at the opening of her show while I traveled from Montreal to see the exhibition and to meet the artist. Due to time constraints on both sides, there was a single 90-minute interview. However, during the following months we continued to write each other.

The third artist, Jarmila Kavena, called me in response to an open letter I had posted in the graduate studio department at Concordia. When she first talked to me, Jarmila mentioned that although she is not a recent immigrant (she came to Canada eighteen years ago) she still feels very much displaced. I welcomed her initiative to participate in the research and we decided to meet the next day. Two interviews followed.

I kept the 90-minute format while adapting the structure of the interview to each particular situation. Carolina and Jarmila accepted this sequence but other artists (Kinga and those interviewed during my pilot project) either expressed a concern with time or felt their stories were completed during our first or second conversation. As I described earlier, we did find various ways to complete the interviews. Dialoguing through

electronic mail was one method. Also, the artists revised the interview transcripts and I seized the opportunity to deepen my understanding of their work by reading some of their writings.

One last aspect worth mentioning here concerns changes in my interviewing style. As I gained experience in interviewing, a renewed understanding of the essentially dialogical dimension of these meetings emerged. All these interviews, circumscribed by the themes of displacement or under the metaphor of crossing borders, used a narrative approach to explore strategies of relocation and artistic expression. In my inquiry I tried to follow as much as possible the participant's own terms while also trying to engage the artist in a translation of theoretical terms. Looking for key-words, listening without prejudice and giving as much space as possible to the participant's account were helpful suggestions from both Kvale and Seidman. In addition, these authors raised my awareness of the role of body language in the interview. They also taught me to wait rather than to interrupt a participant when pausing or searching for the right words. In contrast to Seidman who emphasizes that the interviewing relationship is an essentially unequal one with the interviewer conducting every step of the interview to move the participant in more depth, Kvale underlines the dialogical nature of the interview. That is, knowledge is constructed in the interaction between interviewer and participant. During my early interviews I introduced the topic leaving as much space as possible to the interviewee's account. In subsequent meetings, I tried to identify and follow each participant's key-terms. I ended

up answering questions about my own experience of displacement, thus transforming the interview into a lively dialogue. This is not to say that I forgot the parameters set by the particular context of our meeting, but I did notice a change in my approach. From a more distanced and uneasy intruder in someone else's life, I – the researcher-- became a participant in a conversation on a theme of mutual concern.

Chapter IV

Creative Encounters with the Unfamiliar

Carolina Echeverria: "The Journey of Really Coming Here"

I met Carolina through the internet. I was considering different sites housing artists from different cultural backgrounds when I found a 1996 invitation to the "Art-Depot" gallery for a show called "The Ethnic Vote". I remembered I had attended the opening, a very animated evening with dancers and poets entertaining the crowd. Two years following the event, I decided to use the e-mail address at the bottom of the invitation card and to contact the director of the gallery, Carolina Echeverria. The answer was friendly and open. The good news was that Carolina, being an immigrant artist herself, wanted to be interviewed. She was just preparing for her first solo-show in her native country. The bad news was that the gallery no longer existed. The gallery, along with Carolina's studio, had been recently lost in a fire. The artist was now working at home. Since Carolina's home was undergoing renovations, we arranged an interview at a neighboring apartment owned by one of her relatives.

We arranged the details of our meeting by phone. Armed with my minuscule tape-recorder and my camera, I showed up at her door on November 3, 1999. The room was full of Carolina's artworks. There was a large figurative painting and three of her latest dresses-sculptures -- Lilith, Eve and The Angel. While I began to look at her works,

Carolina asked me about my interview procedure. I answered that the general idea was to talk about her artworks in the context of her life and to arrange past works in some kind of a sequence, be it chronological or thematic. I invited her to begin by recalling a moment during her passage from one culture to another. As soon as we sat on the couch, Carolina started telling her story rapidly, openly and with no apparent need for questions or other kind of help.

Cultural background and motives for leaving

Carolina came to Montreal from Chile in 1986 through marriage with a Canadian of Jewish origin. She began her artistic training in her country of origin, but completed her Bachelor in Fine Arts in Montreal at Concordia University. Since then, she has developed a consistent body of work; both paintings and sculptural pieces. She has participated in various local and international art exhibitions. For two years she rented space for a gallery where, as a director, she promoted artists from different cultural backgrounds, especially recent immigrants. The gallery was only a part of her varied social and political activities. Carolina is now in her thirties and a full-fledged artist looking forward to returning to academia to complete a Masters of Fine Arts degree.

Her love for a man, who later became her husband, was the beginning of a story which radically changed Carolina's family plans and cultural perspective. She recounts,

"At age 21, I made a major switch in my family, dropped the fiancé, dropped the university, dropped everything and came to Canada with this guy whom I met for only five days". But it wasn't just the love for this man that spurred the crossing of borders; it followed a crisis in her life. While in Chile, Carolina realized she no longer shared the views of the people surrounding her. She no longer accepted playing the game on their terms. A fervent Catholic working in the shanty towns with the nuns, she wanted to be a nun herself. She discovered that she was too "bourgeois" for that kind of life but equally too socially conscious to be satisfied with her bourgeois position. She engaged in political debates against the dictatorship and began to realize the risks involved in her activities. Carolina also wanted to study fine arts. For two years she complied with her family's desires and enrolled in a prestigious school to study design where she felt totally out of place. Betrothed to her grandmother's choice for husband, she felt embarrassed thinking of the material aspects that were going to tie her down for life. Carolina began to drastically criticize the society in which she lived. She welcomed the freedom figured by this foreign love and the unknown territory that awaited her. As she puts it, "when I came here I thought that finally I was going to do what I wanted to do." In listening to her story I understood how she moved to "the place that fits my ideas or at least, the place where I don't have to leave because of my ideas."

Overcoming the difficulties of immigration

Once in Canada, Carolina realized the huge difficulties of dealing with a new language

and the unfamiliar cultural traditions and diverse ideas in the context of her studies. Her self-perception was altered dramatically by this new cultural contact:

> The language for me was devastating. I was a very articulate person in Spanish.... Then I came here and I became this moron who could not write three words without.making ten mistakes. I couldn't get my ideas across. This is the immigrant thing: suddenly, you become this child and people look at you thinking that maybe you are not well in your head. People speak to you louder assuming that you will understand better. I had to find a way to communicate that would express my intellectual abilities because I knew that [the English] language just wasn't it.

Another conflict surfaced for Carolina as well. A communication problem sparked during contact with a teacher at school. She disagreed with a feminist teacher who did not like her paintings because they exhibited stout women with large breasts. The student-artist was completely infuriated:

> The teacher just couldn't understand where I was coming from. She would not put herself on my side of the map. I came from the Latin-American healthy women's image....Maybe this teacher should have taken the time to read about Latin-American feminism. Her judgements were just too quick, too easy. They were inflicting prejudice.

Another episode, related to Carlina's desire to sell paintings, occurred. While she studied painting she produced a lot of works, many of which were sold. This practice was scorned by some of her teachers. She experienced a conflict between feeling repressed and self-defensive -- between feeling denied and needing to affirm herself:

> My painting became almost like a closet issue.... Teachers should be inspiring, they should grade according to some kind of facts, it cannot be based on personal taste. That was my biggest disappointment. All these things together, the pressure of being so self-conscious about my painting, the struggle for language-- I was really trying to find something – out of all these came the dresses [sculptures].

At a deeper level, it is a conflict stemming from Carolina's search for a personal voice and closely linked to the development of her personal idiom. Margery Franklin (1989) explains in her studies of the development of women's artistic work the term "personal idiom"as follows:

> On one level the medium is what is done to the material....On another level, the medium is a set of processes for using the elements or forms produced. at the first level. It is this second level that becomes a personal idiom. (p.268)

According to this researcher, the process of forging a personal idiom represents a

qualitative reorganization, "a shift in modes of working and the rapid expansion of thematic material" (p.266). Carolina's description of her new art (the dresses) is consistent with Franklin's view:

> I remember being in the studio trying to do a painting. I was so frustrated that I grabbed the wire and I started putting it around my body and I came up with this first dress. Then I put stones in it and it was so visceral and so weird! And when this thing came out and I put it on the wall, I said: Wow, I've never seen something like this in my life, I don't know from where it comes! Then, I called the dress Garment for Survival. I did a series: they were supposed to be garments that women immigrants would wear between body and soul to protect them from the hardness of immigration. I thought I was going to work on these armors and this work will make my life easier.

Through her new art, Carolina was able to forge a new language and indeed a standpoint from which her existence could be re-articulated.

Carolina's description of the creation of the first dress suggests the realization of a significant if not the first step in her process of resolving an identity crisis. It appears like a revelation, like a (re-)figuration, through her art of the powers and potentialities of the displaced self.

The displacement experience forms the foundation of Carolina's art, and indeed, the condition of her new life. The dresses immediately became her public voice, functioning quite literally as garments for survival. For each significant step in her life, there is a dress to mark the change and to give it a shape. It is an issue of control. Self-portraits then? Yes, but more, they are facets of a shifting portrait of the many faces of life in immigration. As she puts it, "I wanted to do a physical representation of those changes: my changing beliefs about marriage, about sexuality, about religion, about materialism, about womanhood, and motherhood and domesticity".

Issues of continuity and change in Carolina's "dresses"

The works for which Carolina is best known are the dresses: sculptural pieces sometimes exhibited as parts of an installation. Highly eclectic, the dresses are made out of various materials, particularly metal wire and all kinds of collectibles and found objects. The fine metallic skeleton is often constructed on a tailor's mannequin. The handwork is very refined and the dresses resemble enormous jewels.

The titles of Carolina's dresses give us a sense of the particularity and significance of life changes in the context of immigration. First come the Garments of Survival which is composed of the Self-portrait, the Wedding Dress and the Maternity Dress. In dealing with changes in her spiritual life, Carolina later created a Conversion Dress, a Seduction

Dress and another garment as part of the installation How Women Go to Heaven. The diversity of materials and symbolic references displayed in these pieces expresses cultural shifts and new affiliations. As she recounts, "I started dealing with the religious aspects of the immigration process when I began appreciating the different religions around me. I could recognize common points in each of them". Furthermore, when talking about particular objects she uses in her dresses, Carolina explains religious symbols are brought in from her Chilean Catholic past. The nails, crucifixes and hair come from Christianity:

> I remember that my world was full of crucifixes and I am still very attracted by the image of Jesus on the cross.... From all those years of being a Catholic I kept images of things that were carried around: nails, hear and hearts.

The Conversion Dress marks a significant shift of her views on religion. No longer a church affiliate, she is quick to seize the political side of any religious institution. As she puts it, " I do not belong to any church because they are all trying to promote their own group interests. I am Jewish out of cultural and sentimental reasons".

Her most recent artistic adventure (November 1998) -- the first exhibition in her native country -- is a twist in what she terms "my journey of really coming here". She views the show in Chile as a closure engendering a new beginning. Carolina states, "Before I wanted to show that I am coming from there, now I go there to show who I

have become". This show does not represent a return or a re-connection with the country of origin, but expresses Carolina's new critical stance regarding her Chilean past and religious beliefs in general. Her intention is to re-create Genesis and juxtapose her eclectic views to the Chilean Catholic traditions.

Inseparable from one another, displacement and relocation, in Carolina's terms, an uprooting and re-rooting, define the immigrant's journey:

> I have been doing a lot of up-rooting, that's when you are mourning for something....It takes quite a while to acknowledge that you don't live anymore where you think you live. It's been a time of preserving the roots so they don't die, so they don't get too cold. I needed to feel secure with what I have left and what I gave up. Somehow through art you can give immortality to these things. [Now] my past is protected.

The reachable goal of her journey of relocation -- "the journey of really coming here" -- is the re-connection with herself, with the world and the ability to accept changes. Carolina explains:

> You are here. You stop this constant nagging and complaining....You are here and there are no more introductions or reasons for why you are here. This happens when your roots are well preserved and when you understand that they don't have to look

the same as when you brought them here.

The artist as activist:

From recording change into working for social change

Carolina's dresses refer to changes in the immigrant's life, as well as to changing perceptions in women's lives. For instance, in her Conversion and her Seduction Dress, she re-directs religious references to launch a feminist message. The hair, on one hand, comes from her Catholic memories but here it is exhibited as part of the woman's body, standing as a provocative element. The artist carefully constructs a powerful feminine image:

> I have been always upset by the way in which women have been portrayed by men, like a food basket. I said that every time I am going to expose a woman she will be more powerful than the viewer.... I don't want the viewer to be a voyeur. She is not an object, she is who she wants to be.

Thus, Carolina's work not only records changing beliefs; the work is consciously directed to bring about an empowering experience for women. In so doing, it creates channels for personal voice.

Part of this new phase in her life in immigration is her social work. I talk here about the gallery adventure, although there are other small scale but equally important activities in which she has been engaged. Starting a gallery business was literally a survival issue -- a financial solution for her life in immigration. But there was a lot more involved in the creation of the gallery such as her drive to affiliate with a greater community and to find a mission through political action. As Carolina explains, "I wanted to have a gallery where immigrant artists would have a first chance to show, to break through". Indeed, following her program, Carolina had set the stage for a series of shows dealing with cross-cultural, social and political issues. The shows culminated with "The Ethnic Vote". Artists were invited to respond to the ex-leader of the separatist movement, Jacques Parizeau, who had asserted that his failure to win the elections could be attributed to Quebec's ethnic minorities. Through this show, Carolina articulates her position both as member of the larger community of "ethnics" and as political activist:

> I wanted to take advantage of the fact that somebody put a name on this gray group of people, somebody called them something. Even if it was upsetting, it opened the light. We are a big group of people who do not share either side of this political debate.

Furthermore, Carolina finds that the term "ethnic" has pejorative connotations. It names while it diminishes or marginalizes immigrants in opposition to a rather small

mainstream group that unrealistically perceives itself as the host society. From the position of a so called "ethnic", she struggles to have her voice heard without distortion. She perceives the mass-media acknowledgement and validation of the show she directed and her public interviews as successful outcomes of her political action, "It was a real breakthrough for me. To me, it supposed to be a recognition in terms of my opinion. I am no longer lost in ethnic land" .

Following the destruction of the gallery in a fire, Carolina returned to art-making. Putting her works into perspective, the artist is now able to articulate her active role:

> I find that with my first dress I have found a voice to get through....Then I got the reaction of viewers and I started to make the audience part of my creation. Now I feel on top of the horse, I am becoming the artist who seriously takes my role by consciously mirroring the society that I inhabit.

Carolina's story suggests that in the process of solving an identity crisis and articulating personal voice, one necessary step is to recognize our affiliation to a certain real and/or symbolic community.

> [You need] to identify yourself with a particular situation or particular group or society, with people who are living like you. Then you feel that you are not an idiot

because you cannot handle language. People who cannot see beyond our accent or our skin, they are the prejudice – it's their problem. First of all [identification] is important in terms of self-esteem. You connect to your own self and you get back your pride.

Jarmila Kavena: "The Grand Adventure"

Jarmila is presently completing her Master in Fine Arts at Concordia University. After years of struggling with the difficulties of immigration and coming from a commercial art background Jarmila has found her place in fine art. She explores new avenues in printmaking by introducing a third dimension to her prints or by literally transforming them into sculptures (cast metal). The artist is fascinated with the idea of transformation or process as perpetual movement. Her new images are directly linked the world of the foundry.

Cultural background and motives for leaving

In 1981 Jarmila and her husband had decided to leave communist Czechoslovakia and, with that goal in mind, they obtained an approval to enroll in a trip to Cuba. Their secret plan was to interrupt the journey in Montreal where they knew the plane would stop to refuel. Jarmila remembers it as a terrifying journey – she was afraid that Czech authorities would find out her true intentions. However this plan was worth the risks. Jarmila points out that the primary goal of her journey was not to solve economical or political problems; after all, she left the country with one American dollar in her pocket. The goal was to break the wall and expand her possibilities for knowledge. As she explains, "At home, we were very comfortable....but it was like a golden cage. I was not allowed to

travel and it was very difficult to get books [from outside]. We were extremely curious to know what was behind the wall".

Jarmila was aware that her move outside the wall would forever separate her from home. She was willing to undertake a journey of no-return because the home she was planning to leave had already begun to crumble. Jarmila complained of a loss of meaning in her life. Although she had a well paying job as a designer for architecture, she felt increasingly disconnected from what she was doing:

> After five years I realized that I had only blueprints but nothing in my life, none of my ideas. I think the realization was very important.... I felt I was selling my soul for that job full of deadlines. When I came to Canada I knew I was going to study art.

Thus Jarmila sought a solution to her problem in art(-making). Although still envisioned as a future project, art was directly connected to both the idea of escaping from "the golden cage" and the need to bring more meaning into her life.

Overcoming the difficulties of immigration

Jarmila and her husband obtained their status as refugees and established themselves in Montreal. The passage into the Western world was experienced as culture shock. Jarmila

remembers her first confrontation was not with people but with the huge quantity of things that she couldn't recognize nor afford, nor really value. Her problem with the foreign language completed the picture. Coming from the former Soviet communist block, and not having had any opportunity to learn foreign languages at home (except for Russian), Jarmila found it extremely difficult to move ahead. She understood right away that she couldn't enter the fine art school because of language and financial barriers. She decided to follow her husband to Ontario where he had found a job as an engineer in a foundry. There, she worked a few small jobs but continued to feel isolated. She remembers, "I was living in such a small circle – that's how we'll probably always live. It was just me, my husband and my son and we saw little opportunities for socializing". Around this time she began reading life-stories -- stories of success and literature for self-improvement. Besides developing her vocabulary and her "odd pronunciation", Jarmila took these books as her first guides into the values and traditions of the host society. She learned about positive thinking. Armed with better understanding and financial support, she decided to re-connect with what she used to do in Czechoslovakia, but her new jobs in illustration and advertising design didn't make her happy. She was alone, lacking direction and a sense of agency in her life. She remembered that she came to Canada with the desire to study fine art but that immigration had taken her off track. It was finally time to start "the grand adventure". Ten years after her arrival in Canada, Jarmila made the commitment to being an artist and she enrolled in the undergraduate Fine Arts program at Concordia. However, the grand adventure truly started towards the end

of her undergraduate studies when she began to relate her work to her experience of change and to articulate her own artistic vocabulary.

Jarmila does not acknowldge her early works and attitudes as part of the life-narrative for they did not connect her with her past and did not open gates for the future. After a visit to Czechoslovakia, she created a work symbolizing her roots. "I was thinking about where I come from, who I am and why I left". But the artwork was not important because, "I didn't know the next step... At that time I was just contemplating but I didn't go further. I didn't make any research...I didn't have any project for the future".

A new story began with her discovery of Russian philosophers (Gurdjieff and Ouspenski) and a series of works titled Black Drawings. Jarmila was at a point where, having set her goals, she could make connections and use these philosophies as guides for life. Moving beyond a predominantly negative stance, Jarmila started to articulate a new position:

> I began to see myself more like other people. Before I thought that something was wrong with me; I was different; I couldn't learn languages; I couldn't express myself fast enough; I was completely shattered. People would listen to my accent and they would think that I don't understand and they would talk to me like I was a stupid

person....Reading those philosophies I learned to be more critical to people.

The Black Drawings represent Jarmila's first exploration of her " inner state of mind". Working on this large series and rearranging fragments to form a new image, the artist was able to put her life concerns into perspective and to resolve tension:

> I was somehow documenting the confusion in my life; perhaps not documenting it but solving it through my work. I was taking pictures of my husband's body and I made large series. There was a black square running through the drawing. In the middle of the series I realized that everything had to be completely dismantled and then put together in a new order. Something like forget everything and start anew.

Thus, "the grand adventure" began. The adventure refers to the pleasure and the freedom to explore without fear, which is linked to the confidence in her personal vocabulary. Also, it refers to a developmental resolution where we begin to see ourselves as part of a story. As she puts it:

> The story comes when you find points of connection. It's about development....But you have to have the language to be able to express it. Before I thought that I had really lost my chance to do art and I didn't have the language and I didn't have listeners at all.

The frustration of not being able to express herself and to be understood, of not being able to envision projects for the future and thus to resolve feelings of displacement, gave way to a feeling of empowerment. Not only did the immigrant express her lived experience in art but she had found a solution to her problems:

> Whatever problem I encounter I just have nobody to talk to so I put it in my work. It works that way. Art is something [cathartic], it's also growing, it's changing, it's adventurous. Even though I suffer, I get somewhere. Maybe I wouldn't otherwise.

Issues of transformation in Jarmila's recent work

Resulting from an intersection of significant events – her feelings of displacement, her philosophical readings, her husband's health problems in the foundry and the influence of an artist teacher who opened students to the beauty of industrial sites -- the Black Drawings guided the artist to the foundry. Changing her medium to encaustic she continued to do black works. She was fascinated by the new environment and she experienced a dramatic change in her approach to art. Darkness and the foundry became magic mirrors upon which the artist projected the shifting meanings of her life:

> All I saw was like a metaphor for life. [Looking at the tools and objects in the foundry] I was trying to figure out if I can be attached to something, if I can change, if

I can see something that I didn't see before.

The foundry was also felt as a connection with her (Czech) past because it was part of her family history. She explains, "My husband used to work and still works in the foundry and we have constantly talked about it. The more I am using him or his work as a resource the more I feel connected to my origins".

Side by side with a decentered world, the foundry becomes a parable for a centered universe to which the displaced artist attaches herself. She recounts:

> It's a universe and a high-tech place but because my husband is the plant manager, he knows everybody personally. He tells me their stories....We don't have any social life and I don't have many friends, so it's really about knowing people there.

Attached to the foundry, but not really part of it, the artist explores this wonderland and uses industrial processes as a resource for her work. At the same time she chooses to frame her artistic process, one which would otherwise be torn apart by too many choices and disparities. The artist argues:

> I am aware that freedom is given by limitations. When you can choose from everything it's very depressing. In the foundry the materials are limited by the logic of the process and I limit myself to those materials. I can always have more

information about how it's made and how it's used.

"It's about process", Jarmila keeps repeating. Her work and her story refuse closure or explanation of meaning. Yet she acknowledges that hers is a story in transition, about transition and that transition may take a long time. She chooses to concentrate on process and in so doing, to move with flow:

> I am not trying to do something about. I am going with the process completely. Process refers to manufacturing things but on the other side means development growing and going forward. Practically, I am working in the foundry in a process of duplication but on the other side I am using it as language. It talks about growth.

Her account allows us to see a direction for this growth: towards finding the way here and finding the way in art. It is a movement inward through the reconfiguration of self and outward "to achieving greater synergy with other people". Both seem to be closely linked by the desire to find a language, to communicate the self. This project is complicated by the artist's life in a foreign language.

The artist as alchemist: From silence to speech

Jarmila believes that talking about the meaning of her works would close the process

of interpretation and would render the viewer passive. Furthermore, articulating herself as a story would contradict the never-ending process of inner change. She apparently chooses silence. However, if we try to contextualize her account, we can begin to see the foundation of her beliefs.

Two large contexts define Jarmila's recent work: the foundry and the art school, both real sites yet telling different stories. The foundry may be taken as the universe in movement and the figuration of the artist's becoming identity. The school represents a rather contradictory place where the displaced artist negotiates her identity. In the context of the foundry the artist is the alchemist transforming materials and transforming herself in the process:

> When I look into the philosophy of alchemy, I see that alchemists were transforming materials while also trying to transform themselves by putting male and female parts together. [My work] is about putting things together and about seeing the self [myself] from different angles.

Always in movement and transformation, yet secured by (personal) history, the foundry, the artistic process and the self represent "moving points of attachment". Mentioning a principle of Zen philosophy, "it's good to firmly attach yourself to a moving point ", she refers to her own processes of re-figuring herself:

I like this idea of moving because it's not good to stagnate but on the other hand it's good to be attached to something.... Identity is not something fixed.... If you see it as a process you keep moving with it.

Jarmila's school accounts show that silence, or the unwillingness to explain meaning, are part of a provisional artist statement that is deeply rooted in her personal experience of displacement. In light of her story we can begin to see the shifting meaning of her refusal to talk -- at times strategic silence, at others, statement against repression and intrusion. Both are ways to resist erasure. She explains:

I am trying to stay away from interpretation because of my language. I have so much trouble with it. We have huge juries in printmaking and lots of people do not follow very well my speech. Because they don't understand it makes them irritable. They don't like that.

Her story allows us to perceive other instances of estrangement and to further understand how they are transformed through artistic practice.:

For an entire year I have really tried to be silent and I actually did work that would remind me of that: burned fingers, which in my language means that I have touched something that I shouldn't have. It happened a few times in my life--to realize that I

shouldn't have said anything.

Displaced student-artist learns to manipulate silence

> [When the story is not understood] it's a feeling of frustration. It's useless to try to explain because the understanding is not coming, so it's really demeaning. It hurts a lot. So, I am trying to use silence as a tool.

Teachers can break silence without prejudice. Jarmila recalls she felt "pushed" and "forced" by one of her professors to write stories about her past. But the process was worthwhile for at least two reasons. First because, as she explains, "I went back just remembering things. For eighteen years I was completely blocked. I didn't have any access to my past. It was a strange state". Second, the teacher "offered herself as a listener" in this way validating the student's identity.

These accounts put the accent on the immigrant's linguistic displacement. It is worth noting at this point that Jarmila recognizes that the notion of displacement encompasses her experience of immigration. However, the word as such remains exterior to her thought processes precisely because of her reticence to use English words to explain her experience. She expresses her fear of forgetting English words. As a solution to this linguistic dilemma, Jarmila has developed a personal pictorial writing to help her

remember ideas related to her art. If we read beyond her sketchbook notes, her recent works appear as a complex form of pictorial writing. Instead of using words to control the flow of experience and to communicate her thoughts, the artist uses images to remind herself her own experiences and to connect with viewers in the absence of words. Here she assumes responsibility, "It is my fault if I cannot make myself understood through the work. People should get the story through the work". Also, she believes she can establish the communication by addressing universal issues and by acknowledging the communicational potential of symbols she uses in her work: "The more I can address universal issues, the more I feel that I have space for my personal story" .

Her life and artistic account seem to focus on the "moving point" that can be assimilated with the (im)migrant's identity. In this context, accepting change, documenting the process and moving with the process is the road to a greater integration of self in the world. "To firmly attach yourself to a moving point" suggests the grand and contradictory project of the immigrant's life.

Arriving at the end of this series of interviews, Jamila envisions the possibility of a new story, one which is no longer contained by the notion of displacement, but by the desire "to make myself needed" and "to achieve synergy with other people":

I think this is one of my problems. I constantly struggle with being alone as an artist.

I always work alone in my room. It's a question of breaking the concept and moving over.... Now I am more aware of this situation, so the question is how to achieve synergy with other people. We need other people but we don't want to feel that. I want to feel that other people need me. Something like a symbiosis.

Through my artistic work, studying all these years, I think I prepared myself for something else, something which would be my next stage....I am looking forward to solve this important problem: to see what is my role.

Kinga Araya: "The constant walk"

Kinga began studying art history in Poland at the Catholic University of Lublin but left the country during her first year. While in Italy, she survived on small jobs and began studying the Italian language. She emigrated to Canada and completed two Bachelor degrees simultaneously – one in Art History and the other in Fine Arts -- and a minor in Italian Literature at the University of Ottawa. She continued with her MFA at York University in Toronto and then moved to the United States, to Lubbock, Texas to complete a Ph.D in Interdisciplinary Studies. She is presently preparing to return to Canada for a continuation of her Ph.D at Concordia University.

The artist is concerned with issues of personal displacement and the politics of Speech and Walking. She creates what she terms "spectacular sculpture" -- video and sculptural works combined with performance. Her artistic language is very intense, moreover ironic, expressed in sober and minimal ways. Kinga has exhibited in Canada and Poland. She is currently preparing an exhibition in Montreal, at Observatoire 4.

I was profoundly touched by Kinga's video-works and decided to contact the artist through electronic mail. I presented my ideas for research and also invited her to participate. Her answer was positive, saying that she was working on a closely related topic. We entertained quite intense conversations on screen. The occasion for meeting

was provided by Kinga's solo-show Discipline at Pekao Gallery in Toronto. I arranged my schedule to allow a few meetings with the artist.

Once I arrived in Toronto, I realized my long winter trip coupled with other personal problems had created an unsettling situation. Kinga, herself, was very busy. She could not meet with me right away. Neither of us could provide a quiet place for the interview so we agreed to have a single meeting in a café her last day in Toronto. When we arrived there, we were both tense. Kinga was obviously ready to talk. She was very conscious of the fact that her words were being recorded. She moved closer to the tape recorder articulating each word while carefully constructing her account. She seemed to address a larger audience of which I was only a part.

My present account is based on the interviewing text, the first chapter (Initiation) of her unpublished MFA thesis, my viewing of slides of her works and two performances on video (Orthoepic Exercise and Peripatetic Exercise). Also, my comments have been influenced by our e-mail conversations.

Cultural background and motives for leaving

Kinga acknowledges that the first move out of Poland was her most dramatic dislocation, but quickly points out she has struggled with imposed displacement since childhood. Too often she had been reminded that she was not a wanted child. Moreover

she perceived herself as different than her siblings or peers. The tension at home was one of the primary reasons for her decision to leave: " I wanted to be away because I couldn't identify with what my parents called home" .

Anchored in this early representation of the world, and resulting from a cluster of decisions taken against what was forbidden or refused to her, Kinga weaves her story in-between fronts, assaulting adversity and evading its oppressive and limiting grip. Although interrupted by Kinga's leave, this story can be traced back to Poland. There, she wanted to become an actress but her parents, both scientists, opposed the idea. Secretly, she performed during highschool, and later tried to get into theater school without any parental support. After four unsuccessful attempts, Kinga realized that although she was a good candidate, it was extremely difficult to compete with 200 girls for 10 places. She had to change her mind and "to make a kind of compromise". This is how she got into art history at one of the best universities in Poland. While still in her first year, she participated in a trip to Rome organized by the university. While visiting Florence after seeing paintings at Galeria Uffizzi, Kinga decided to walk off the bus and never returned to the students' camp. She recalls:

> I had nothing. Well, I had my two feet, well formed and a good pair of shoes. I had that one dollar, which I still keep, by the way... . It wasn't a calculated economical decision; it was the necessity to walk.

Kinga places great importance on both the mysterious side of her walk, "the necessity to walk", and on her decision to leave everything behind and continue to walk. Till this day, she has kept looking back to that first walk, reflecting on its significance and drawing from its source:

> The more I am thinking about my work, I realize that I can locate its beginning with the first performance I have done. At that time I did not recognize it as a performance per se....I just decided to walk. I don't know exactly why it happened, it's part of a mystery, something that I cannot verbalize because it's beyond language control.

Paradoxically defined in opposition to sense or language control, mystery engenders the possibility of (or the impossibility of not) articulating an adversarial self. Furthermore, suspending adversity, mystery contains the significant moment of transition into a new world of being, a re-figuration of self as the hero of its own story. Here I refer to the subject's active involvement in shaping one's own life, which is contained by the notion of agency. I agree with Cooley's (1996) feminist and narrative framing of the question of agency as "becoming the subject of one's own story and having the capacity for creative engagement" (p.17).

Kinga remembers the mysteriously intense moments announcing her decision to leave. The decision to walk opened the possibility of a new life-story while the insistence on mystery allowed the life story to remain open and to generate new meanings, and

personal shifts.

At that time a 22 year old woman, I had a vague or perhaps "mythical" idea about what immigration meant. The harsh reality, however, hit me right on, at the beginning of my itinerant journey.

Choosing the kind of walk -- at that moment, the walk out of a closed or oppressive environment -- empowered the searcher and framed her actions in the world:

> To me it was searching for that core, searching for who I am and what I want to be. I guess that meant that I would have more control over who I am than I had when I was in Poland.

Overcoming the difficulties of immigration

It seemed that for once, the intensely personal decision had already "saved" the immigrant by marking her journey with a sense of accomplishment -- a first victory against adversity. However, the road was mined with unexpected hardships, as she recounts:

> My deflection from Poland ...was certainly the greatest displacement or dislocation

or relocation that have happened to me until now. I am talking not only about geographical translocation (from Poland to Italy), but also about significant cultural shifts.

Kinga mentions hard jobs in Italy, suspending the possibility of intellectual engagement due to physical exhaustion. At the same time, she disputes her right to work, a dispute stemming from the immigrant's need to be accepted and validated by the host society. This right was too often denied to her while in Canada. The immigrant's presence and self-image form between the lines of rejection. It is here, in her displacement experience that she finds the energy to keep walking:

When I was accorded the status of landed immigrant in 1990, without my knowledge and without any consultation with me, [the authorities] inscribed in my official documents, under occupation, the words new worker. After 6 years of intense research and interviews, I still couldn't find a job...[In labeling me as a new worker] I think they wanted me to clean the floors or something like that....I can't work physically anymore and I think I can do a much better job. I was so mad about this constant rejection....At some point I just packed my things and got back to Italy where I immediately found a job-- working illegally, of course. Here I couldn't [I wasn't allowed to] even baby-sit.

Deeply marked by tension between the need for affirmation and the sense of external restriction, Kinga chose the academy (and theory) as the ground for her unsettled path. Towards the fourth year of her six years of undergraduate studies, she began to move slowly from theory into art making. She recounts, this move was supported by a new commitment, "I had a strong feeling about this decision. It was like planning to have a child; it was a serious vocation that was taking an incredible responsibility.... I knew that once with me it will never leave me". Art-making provided Kinga with a way to make sense, to control and to communicate her complex walk:

> My walk became more and more complicated, so art is just a natural outcome of my walk. I am just realizing the power of that experience [the first walk]. It happened like things should naturally happen. Then, if you want to make a difference, you make art or something else as long as it is significant.

Kinga's early works were "direct responses to the situation [she] found herself in". Art became a way to talk back, an early and powerful form of speech she uses to affirm her position of resistance. My interpretation is inspired here by observations made by bell hooks (1990) in an autobiographical text entitled: "Talking back". The writer explains that "the initial act of talking back outside home was an empowering experience. It was the first of many acts of defiant speech that would make possible for me to emerge as independent thinker and writer" (p.340).

De Gustibus Non Disputandum (1995) was the first work (after the so called "first walk performance") Kinga had discussed. In 1995 she created a complete costume out of her official letters of rejection and actually wore the outfit choosing a governmental employment center as her main target. "I specifically showed this new worker status on my clothing". The piece was not simply about rejection; rather, it was an active enactment of how we come to define ourselves against rejection. The artist appears to have constructed her definition as an interrogation -- who defines whom and on whose terms? -- thus inverting the power relationship and elevating herself from the position of victim of adversity. Here she describes the work:

> I had a whole outfit with official letters and my name written upon it. It was exposing so much. Nothing could be hidden because you could see the name of people andtheir signature....Those were my personal belongings; they were addressed to me. I am showing publicly what is personal. [They were] official letters of rejection formulated in the same way but coming from different places....

In talking about her works, Kinga underlines their irreducible significance -- each work was crucial in its time:

> I don't feel that [De Gustibus Non Disputandum] was my beginning of art making, something silly or incoherent. I see my recent works as just different actions....The first piece had its own effect – people were reading me in the street because I looked

like a big newspaper walking. I still wear this clothing from time to time in Lubbock....I still wear my message, I just keep walking.

Kinga is quick to avoid any developmental and progressive/oppressive turn in our discussion. Yet her story, or the story we have constructed through dialogue, like any story, is necessarily a selection of events/works within a dominant theme – here, The Walk. It is through this unrestricted, or beyond-restriction, or "constant" walk, that Kinga has articulated speech or presence. Art-making has provided the nomad with the finest tool for shaping, and indeed, for surviving her intricate walk: "We can touch the bottom, but then we get up. Art does it beautifully. If it's good art, it will transcend the here and now to take you up" .

The politics of Speech and Walking in Kinga's recent works

"I think I am shifting from displacement as such to explore it through the tropes of Walking and Speech", says Kinga. After seeing her works and in light of her words, we can speculate about the slow and uneven movement of Kinga's creative process from an insistence on adversity and displacement (e.g. the early De Gustibus Non Disputandum, 1995 and Memorabilia, 1997 where she treated the theme of rejection while juxtaposing two contradictory narratives) to an exploration of the possibility of a new language that would "reconcile" without erasing the profoundly conflicting nature of our nomadic lives.

Since our walk will be always restricted, Kinga asks:

> What kind of walk can we, should we, or shall we develop? Then how that walk would look like? I am interested in creating another walk, another language, another communication tool.

In this context, the artist talks about two of her recent works (Orthoepic Exercise/ Device and Peripatetic Exercise/Device), part of her 1998 MFA thesis exhibition and re-contextualized in the Discipline show. The Peripatetic Device is used in a performance where Kinga stands in precarious equilibrium on two steel hemispheres imprinted with the shape of her feet. She insists on playing the violin, an attempt frequently interrupted by her losing stability. As a sculpture, this piece is composed of the two hemispheres and a musical stand. In the Orthoepic Exercise, the artist wears a steel helmet. A 2-metre long steel "tongue" protrudes from her mouth, stands in the air horizontally, supported in the middle by a metallic device. The far side of the "tongue" is pointed—a sword. In this posture, Kinga carefully moves in circle. We only hear the sound of her dragging steps.

In these works we see "materialized" the tropes of Walking and Speech. Kinga explains, " Investigation becomes more walking/movement/displacement. But movement is not necessarily walking in the street; rather it is a walk off – concentrating on that which is not dominant or privileged discourse". In her (visual) investigation of the

immigrant's condition, the walk/movement/displacement deterritorializes presence through consistent interruptions of speech (the violin play) or violations of speech (the steel tongue). Kinga uses the terms deterritorialization and reterritorialization which she has borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatari' s seminal text: "What is a minor literature". Yet, as Kinga suggests on numerous occasions – the previous quote is an example -- the walk also re-territorializes or re-inscribes Speech, for we save ourselves by what we choose as a "walk" and many times, the possibility of speech is opened by "a walk off" or by a walk resisting interruption or adversity, "a constant walk."

The artist formulates her new project as a question of being (presence/speech). The "constant walk" suggests becoming, rather than being, a movement between despair and hope, between constant interruption of presence and resistance or insistence on presence. Furthermore, the nomad's walk designates the determination to cross boundaries, to break the location of being. Kinga describes her personal quest, and indeed, the paradoxical condition of the immigrant when she refers to another work (Modus Vivendi) as: "Speaking simultaneously four languages and trying to find myself in-between".

Through her works (especially De Gustibus Non Disputandum, Memorabilia and the later Orthoepic Exercise), the artist appears to raise the possibility of dialogue or the reconciliation between two adversaries – subject and object, authority and authorized, center and margin. In the Orthoepic Exercise, while pointing her steel tongue-sword to the viewer, Kinga launches her irresistible, frightening invitation, something close to the

Christian precept: "If you want to understand me, walk in my shoes" . Thus, the announced dialogue seems to be conditioned by one's answer to the question: Tongue or sword? Partners or adversaries? Kinga's visual discourse in Orthoepic Exercise challenges us to think that dialogue irrevocably changes individual narratives and holds the potential of transforming adversaries into partners. We can also interpret the steel object coming from, or intruding, Kinga's mouth as a tool – language, but not mother tongue and not (yet) dialogue. In using it we forge our presence, something that Kinga imagines as an "impossible warrior" total engagement. This absolute "being with" explodes the boundary between Self and Other.

The artist as warrior : Creating another communication tool

As we have seen, two interconnected themes define Kinga's recent works: Walking and Speech. At times wounded or slowed down and moving in a closed circle (Orthoepic Exercise) "the constant walk" is a peculiarly active walk – a battle. One of the main aims of this battle is speech (being, presence). The condition for speech is dialogue or successful communication. Displacement (either imposed or chosen in resistance to dominance) is marked by the need to communicate and the will to surpass territorial and/or linguistic barriers. As she argues: "I am interested in creating another walk, another language, another communication tool". In Kinga's case, communication (which can be seen as a sort of reterritorialization) appears to be established through a

deterritorialization of (visual) language -- "concentrating on that which is not dominant or privileged discourse"-- while figuring "a primal, elemental language by which we all communicate". Although essentially open, the "we" is clearly defined:

> It is very interesting that people who are deeply moved by my works – and I had people who cried including one of my professors – are not Canadians; they come from different countries or from some kind of segregated minorities; they speak two or three languages and English is not their first language....So, that's the best reward I get because I am drawing on personal experience but it is not the only source and it's not the dominant source. I think it is about the desire to connect to anyone who is sensitive and curious, who wants to investigate and questions his or her very raison d'etre.

In this context, the immigrant/nomad defines herself as a survivor, while the artist takes on the appearance and the role of a warrior:

> We are based on what we went through and immigration was certainly not an easy experience. It has almost intensified my artistic process. [The question of who we are] is pointed towards that [immigration], like my tongue, but nothing really bad happened to me.... I am actually a survivor or a winner. I am a warrior, that's why I wear the mask [in the Orthoepic Device]. Artists are warriors and I am ready to fight

and I am learning how to fight and up until now I can say that I fought successfully.

The artist's battles, like the immigrant's, are multiple and difficult: financial support, visibility, and, as suggested by Kinga, overcoming not only personal crisis but taking on the burden of an entire culture in crisis. At the core of this battle however is the desire to connect , convincingly formulated in Kinga's account as a shifting positioning -- between we and them, margin and center.

Chapter V

Theory influencing my interpretation of artists' accounts

In my interpretation of stories, different texts intersect: my personal account, other artists' accounts and theoretical readings. I came to make sense of these texts as I went through the process of writing my thesis. In this section, I draw upon recent readings that have influenced my interpretation, in an attempt to illuminate, even though briefly, the transformative process undergone by the women I interviewed.

In listening to artists' voices and to my own, I understand that overcoming the major identity crisis brought about by territorial/cultural/linguistic displacement can be viewed as a transition from silence into language or speech, from a feeling of deprivation into greater awareness and agency. This transition is the process of relocation or homecoming – the affirmation of identity. It means moving into a new, more relevant story, one that fits our needs and expectations; a story that gains recognition from listeners, is filled with confidence and is open to change. Such transition is never smooth and depends not only on our personal histories and acquired skills, but on our listeners and on the availability of sites for dialogue. If our identities are life-stories, then our stories require non-prejudicial forms of listening to allow us to integrate them in the narratives of the host culture. We have become aware that we do not have to wait for the integration to happen but that we have to constantly negotiate space for our stories. We have learned that our stories are

constructed both in response to adversity and through dialogue with meaningful others. Art-making, as a means to convey stories, proved to be an extremely powerful and adaptable communication tool. Peter London (1989), the art teacher admirably described this quality:

> The end of art is not art, but communication, or better still communion, breaking of the solitariness and silence of one dimension of ourselves and making contact with the "other". That other may be intra psychic...or it may be inter psychic...or even transpersonal (oneself touching the universe). (p.74)

Visual narrative is important when dealing with linguistic and other forms of displacement. Immigrant artists' self-defining narratives taught me that drawing upon the personal experience of displacement and documenting one's past is part of a project of translation; translating the Other within ourselves -- our coming into language -- and translating ourselves in a foreign cultural code. Such process can never be complete or successful for it relies on a disjunction from a symbolic origin, a symbolic(or imaginary) state of wholeness which is our experience of belonging to a native territory/language/ history

An artist interviewed during my pilot project, Artemis, had experienced three major cultural displacements. She explained how she created continuity in her life: "Je rends

touchable ce que je ne peux plus avoir. Je construis une nouvelle realité a travers le passé, car je veux continuer".

Carolina, a Chilean born artist, talked of how she had surpassed the conflict stemming from cultural differences through the use of visual language. During the interview she said that she began with recording and securing her past in painting. She entered a conflict with dominant cultural practices, but through art, and later through social action, she forged a powerful voice of her own. This transformative process was based on her affiliation with the larger community of women and immigrants. She recognized both the importance of continually reaffirming difference (as she did in the Canadian Fine Art School and through her last exhibition in Chile) while also opening up to change: being able to establish new connections with the culture of her past as well as with the host culture.

Kinga, a Polish born artist, moving in and out Italy, Canada and the United States, recognized the paramount role of personal decisions in the re-construction of identity. She based her life and work account on her decision to walk out of Poland and break with an oppressive past. Insisting on the importance of her "constant walk" she has become a nomad with a message.

Jarmila, who emigrated from Czechoslovakia, talked of an early and quite long period

of isolation she experienced. She felt disconnected and silenced. She could not find listeners for her stories, and felt the stories were too inadequate to tell. Acknowledging her affiliation to the fine art world, and later, her integration of personal experience in her artistic work, empowered her. She also referred to prejudicial forms of listening that partially provoked her refusal to explain the meaning of her works. Her silence appears to act as a means of resistance to closure or erasure. In the absence of words or explanations, art stands as her public speech, allowing her to be recognized and valued for who she is.

A transformative pattern is suggested by the editor Angelika Bammer (1994) in her introduction to a collection of essays on displacement, from "marking and recording absence and loss" to "inscribing presence" (p.xiv). I agree with Bammer when she argues this process is not a progressive sequence but a tensioned double-move. The relationship between the two terms forms the foundation of the never-ending reconstruction of presence from absence. It also opens up the possibility of deconstruction, of denouncing absence, in a constituted presence.

All the interviews (the artist's stories) presented here, bring light into this relationship between the experience of displacement and the re-construction of identity, which was sensitively described by Angelika Bammer as a double-move. Two of the artists interviewed (Carolina and Artemis) directly addressed this issue. They talked of

their art as a space of mourning transformed into a space of recovery, the standpoint from which they articulate and indeed, negotiate presence. To Carolina, Jarmila and Kinga, art is a language that in crucial moments becomes a form of talking back.

I found great support for my interpretation in the radical feminist writings of bell hooks (1990). She suggests a transformative pattern in our experience and our mode of understanding our own marginality or oppression from a site of deprivation into a site of resistance. This transformation is in our control. She urges us to be aware and to value our difference; to remain in permanent (mental) contact with our personal history and our lived experience and to critically appraise the cultures in which we move. To consider them as sites of conflict in which we have the right and indeed, the mission to talk back, to speak out our difference. She argues, "Understanding marginality as position of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people" (p.343). Such empowering transformation was vividly and spontaneously expressed by each artist participating in this research.

Marianne Hirsch, feminist writer and educator who emigrated with her Jewish family from Romania to Austria and to the United States while still an adolescent, juxtaposes her displacement and relocation experiences to Eva Hoffman's autobiographical account Lost in Translation. Criticizing Hoffman's nostalgic view, Hirsch (1994) talks instead about her multiple displacements within her native country as well as in countries and cultures

to which she moved. Her observations have been influential in my interpretation of artists' stories in as much as they fit my own experience of displacement and my dialogic encounters with other women artists.

As I am interested in women's experiences of immigration, I endorse Hirsch's theoretical observations on this issue. She views displacement as a strategy of survival. In learning to value our difference, we acclimate to an unfamiliar territory while reinforcing our possibility for speech. Crucial to our survival is not only the commitment to difference or marginality, but in our finding points of connection, identification or affiliation. Hirsh (1994) talks of multiple such points, culminating with her affiliation to feminism. As she puts it: "Things really come together when I am able to incorporate female/feminist bonding into my work as well as in my life" (p.85). She goes on to describe this "coming to feminism" as a "story of affiliations and collaborations" where dialogic encounters, as well as critical practice, support the construction of voice and the adoption of voice on behalf of women – a feminist cause. Hirsch's observation that "[r]elationship becomes the place of relocation, the substitute for assimilation" (p.85), supports the basic purpose of my research and is echoed in different degrees and contexts by the artists' interviewed. For instance, Kinga spoke of development (or rather against development as linear progress) in terms of a multidirectional change "up, down, left, right" depending on her various relationships with authorities, professors, students, other friends-artists. Her account suggests that at the core of this non-progressive

developmental process there are life-sustaining, re-locating dialogues with her viewers, with professors and with theoretical texts.

Marianne Hirsch's "space of relation and relocation" which is also a space of difference and critical awareness" and bell hooks' "space of recovery and resistance" are both healthy grounds for our experience of displacement. This is what explains in part the paradox of the immigrant's life, which has been termed by Homi Bhabha as "liminal space" or by Marianne Hirsch as the "home on the border". Kinga articulated this paradox in one of our last conversations. In response to my expressed concern with writing useful conclusions for art educators, she replied, "Tell them that I am a happy displaced person".

Chapter VI

Conclusions

Linking life-stories to education

Returning now to two of my most ardent questions: how does displacement become a resource in the immigrant's life? and how do we negotiate our identities without exchanging their intrinsic marginality? I find the answers must be provisional and partial. Furthermore, their target shifts from one audience (i.e. members of the host society, my professors, other art educators) to another (i.e. immigrant women, students and/or artists, and to possible others). The attempt to find answers or solutions from real narratives is most enlightening because it anchors our actions, be they our strategies of survival, art-making or art teaching, in the ground of the lived experience.

As a woman student-artist in my country, many times I felt displaced – so much so that I could not find the words to frame my feelings and talk back. I also recognize moments of connection and true dialogue, veritable rites of initiation into the domain of art and my own self-to-be.

As a graduate student in an English-language university I have felt displaced many times, not because I was not able to understand the issues at stake or to verbalize my displacement but because I could not be contained by the dominant discourse, by its

applauded history and acknowledged traditions. I was refused entrance and I refused entrance. I was silenced and I chose silence. Those were the moments when I became Other. Strangely, in reading dominant discourses on otherness, I felt lost and confused – I was made the other of Other, of their other.

It took me quite a long time, through illuminating readings and more inclusive teaching strategies, to understand that in fact, the dominant discourse also contained me -- I was this Other, too. It took me some time to understand that when I discuss otherness, I am forced to change my "natural" position -- at the center of the margins – and join a center that is not mine and that confines me to the margins, while lending me a portion of its space and language. At the same time, I acknowledge that my "true" voice is in great measure forged by dominant discourses in the academic milieu.

Moreover, my "true" voice comes to life in dialogue with people and texts. As I move along the stories, hearing the artists' voices and my own, I understand that my thesis-story is about displacement and relocation just as it is about erasure/deprivation and resistance -- strategies of relocation as well as strategies of resistance. To relocate we need to find points of attachment, to search for new cultural affiliations and to discover new forms of solidarity and communication. Yet through our resistance or decided marginality we take control over who we are and we elevate ourselves from the oppressive or restrictive forces lying in the dominant discourse. Constructing discursive

space outside such restrictive forces, bell hooks (1990) voices some of our most important concerns:

> I am speaking from a place in the margins where I am different – where I see things differently. Speaking from the margins. Speaking in resistance....Silenced. We fear those who speak about us who do not speak to us and with us. We know what it is like to be silenced. We know that the forces that silence us because they never want us to speak differ from forces that say speak, tell me your story. Only do not speak in the voice of resistance. Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain. (p 343)

Both forces that bell hooks identifies act to silence the immigrant, dilute her speech or even deny her the possibility of speech. In light of these remarks, it becomes obvious that the voices of the women I had interviewed emerged from such sites of oppression, but belong now to powerful, active beings.

In telling their stories, these women did not take me or you, the reader/ listener/ viewer, as a therapist in whose room they could discharge their pains; nor did they take me as just another intruder in their world. Knowing I would tell their stories, they have welcomed me and blessed me with an enormous (almost frightening) amount of confidence. I am fully aware their stories will always be in-the-making and that my

interpretation is partial, personal and influenced by readings that I came across. I feel, in many ways, the artist's accounts surpass the limits of my present voice, the limits of this research and sometimes the limits imposed by the English linguistic code. Yet my interpretation is rooted in the common ground of our existence as women, immigrants, students and artists. In dialoguing and constructing our solidarity, we become each other's teachers. The teaching activity itself is transformed in this process from an unequal power relationship to an essentially open process of exchange where storyteller and listener frequently exchange roles, negotiate meanings and move beyond adversity into solidarity.

The interview as a conversation on a theme of mutual concern can be connected to the teacher-student relationship or the teaching-learning situation as a site for the construction of knowledge. "To understand the world from the other's perspective" – a well known phenomenological precept— can be relocated in a postmodern and feminist conversational space where we co-author each other's stories and construct valuable knowledge in-between.

Bearing in mind the stories presented here and the two questions explored earlier in this chapter, we can finally cut the discourse to the point and move into a last and conclusive question: What can we, as art teachers, do to support the immigrant student in her process of relocation?

Thoughts on art education

I have argued throughout this thesis that relocation is an ideal state. As we try to reach it, we learn the road is more important, and in a sense more real, than an absolute location. Relocation is also a metaphor for learning: learning to travel between cultures and clusters of information; learning to forge presence; learning to critically appraise this presence by understanding its conflicting and impermanent nature.

I have selected a few ideas about art education that unfold directly from the content of my thesis: the role of dialogical and narrative encounters in the education of immigrant students; the relatedness and separation in the reconstruction of identity; the difference between challenge and displacement/erasure in educational practice; the role of critical thinking in the education of immigrant students; and finally, traveling as a metaphor for teaching and learning. I have touched upon these issues, formulating general observations which would have to be adapted and developed when dealing with specific age groups, populations and institutional contexts. My thoughts are directed to immigrant students. I venture to say that they apply to culturally different students in general, for any culture appears different when juxtaposed to another.

Crucial to the students' relocation is the classroom/studio as a site of dialogical encounters. Telling self-defining stories through both verbal and visual narratives and

listening to/viewing such stories form the core of such meetings. Telling stories and listening to stories are symbolic as well as real acts of healing and inclusion. Non-prejudicial forms of listening/reading students' art means giving full support to individual narratives, while also raising awareness of the cultural contexts in which such stories arise.

I believe it is important that we support students' affiliations with cultural communities of the present and of the past while also forging cultural difference. Teachers' efforts to keep a balance between the affiliation theme and the cultivation of difference in the classroom is supported by feminist research on identity. Ruthellen Josselson (1992), building on Erikson's research on identity and writing from a feminist perspective, urges us to balance individualism and relatedness. She criticizes the Western culture for its obsession with self-reliance and independence. Her observations resonate for me particularly when juxtaposed to the drama of immigration and the so-called multicultural society to which we have come to be a part. I am thinking of people arriving here from totally different cultural contexts; people who may be isolated from their families and friends; new-comers in a society that hardly values outsiders' narratives if they do not speak in terms already accepted by the host. Josselson observes:

> As society becomes more individualistic and places less value on human interconnection except as a means of productivity, psychological (as well as physical)

space for meeting becomes scarcer. There are few places in which we find each other now, little time for being with. (p.12)

Classrooms, and especially art classes, can offer such sites for dialogue, where we can forge connective practices, explore and implement collaborative projects. Josselson explains the fundamental role of relatedness in the process of identity formation. The loss and longing for relationships and true dialogical encounters may debilitate many immigrant stories and may hinder the process of relocation, forcing our stories to remain stories of deprivation. Josselson argues that "our needs for relatedness make us vulnerable to rejection and to the possible shameful exposure of our neediness, especially in a culture that so values self-reliance and independence" (p.14). She continues, "Relatedness and individuality are not dichotomous. Action takes place only within a relational matrix; the self is realized through others; development concerns both maintaining our ties to others and differentiating from them" (p.15).

Josselson explains that greater responsiveness and availability in and to relationships remold the self. Teachers' awareness of the role of identification and affiliation in the (re)formation of identity is of primal importance. As we strive to construct knowledge with the student, we also guide students to cross familiar barriers or individual boundaries, to meet the Other, to confront unfamiliar narratives and construct new knowledge through dialogue. As Josselson puts it, "Our experiences with others teach us

something about ourselves as well. We must always revise our inner model of ourselves in light of our interpersonal experience. We know and realize ourselves only in, through and with others" (p.19).

Affiliation and identification are essential to relocation. As art teachers, we can set the stage for students' search for and affirmation of family narratives, of narratives of a larger cultural space, through art. We can explore students' personal imago-s and find artists or other cultural heralds to support and extend students' personal narratives. If we truly believe in being with, then we are called to explore the possibilities of a collaborative curriculum within the educational institutions that frame our work.

To facilitate the process of relocation, it is equally important to forge individuality and difference through exposure to unfamiliar narratives and cultural practices. Dialogues with the unfamiliar are always confrontational in the beginning. As teachers, we have to learn to discern challenge from imposed displacement or erasure. Fostering challenge is a positive teaching strategy. Stephen Brookfield (1990) noted in The Skillful Teacher, that "students remember as transformative, those learning episodes in which some element of challenge was involved" (p.60). But challenge, as a teaching strategy, is accountable only when controlled by supportive action that constantly strengthens the student's self-confidence. Through challenge, the student articulates voice.

In contrast to challenge, displacement occurs when teachers do not account for the student's subjectivity or lived experience. As teachers, we have to be mindful of our students' means of resistance to assimilation or erasure, as well as to our own disruptive teaching practices. Erasure may be inflicted because of teaching practices that are settled in the teacher's cultural assumptions rather than anchored in dialogue with the students. As we have seen in Carolina's and Jarmila's cases, such teachers break students' stories in prejudicial ways. A pedagogy of erasure avoids real dialogue, is oriented to assimilating students' narratives to some form of dominant or privileged discourse while silencing or distorting students' voices.

Critical thinking is also pivotal for a teaching practice devoted to facilitating the student's relocation. As Brookfield (1990) puts it, "In learning critical thinking, people make explicit some assumptions on which their habitual ways of thinking and acting have been based and then begin to discard some of these assumptions and to reframe others to fit their experience of reality" (p.52). Brookfield uses the metaphor of home and abroad to describe the process of incremental fluctuation. Students are dislocated from the comfort of settled beliefs, travel enthusiastically towards a new territory and then experience the anxiety of unfamiliar ways of thinking and acting. However, upon going back home, students realize that they are no longer satisfied with their previous assumptions and the process of moving abroad (forward) begins again.

In learning that beliefs are not absolute but contextual, in learning to observe and critique such contexts, students become better equipped for cultural traveling. It is important and reassuring to understand that our journeys lead to a tale to be told upon returning home and that home is within us. It is always in construction and always there to be restored.

I conclude this reflection with a quote from Steinar Kvale (1996), the researcher who guided me through my journey of reconnection with women artists. The interviewer-traveler persona may designate the art teacher and, at times, the immigrant student-artist:

> The interviewer-traveler wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with people encountered. The traveler explores the many domains of the country, as unknown territory or with maps, roaming freely around the territory. The traveler may also deliberately seek specific sites or topics by following a method, with the original Greek meaning of "a route that leads to the goal." The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their stories of their lived worlds, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as "wandering together with"....The journey may not lead to new knowledge; the traveler might change as well....The journey might instigate a process of reflection that leads the interviewer to new ways of self-understanding, as well as

uncovering previously taken-for-granted values and customs in the traveler's home country. (p.4)

The metaphor of the traveler is particularly relevant for teaching art. If we understand art as an open concept then in learning through and about art, we will be always moved to unfamiliar grounds. As a basic human activity, art also allows us to make these foreign grounds ours, because we transform them by using basic, enjoyable human means: marks, symbols, stories. Exploring the territories of art with the student, we both engage in purposeful relocations. Not only do we learn through dialogue about an open concept, we also learn through art about ourselves, about our ways of making sense.

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APPENDIX A

Sample of Statement of Informed Consent Form

Statement of Informed Consent

As a graduate student in Art Education at Concordia University, I gather art and life narratives centered on the issue of identity in the context of dramatic change. I interview women artists immigrants. The interviews are tape-recorded, then transcribed. Participants have the right to review the interview text, to add or to correct information. As a researcher, I reserve the right to interpret the data.

I interviewed the artist _____, on_____

at_____

The initial informed consent has been lost. Therefore, I request your permission to use the interview text in my Master's Thesis titled "Artists experiencing immigration: How we view our artistic expression in the context of dramatic change". The interviews may be used in future research for academic and educational purposes.

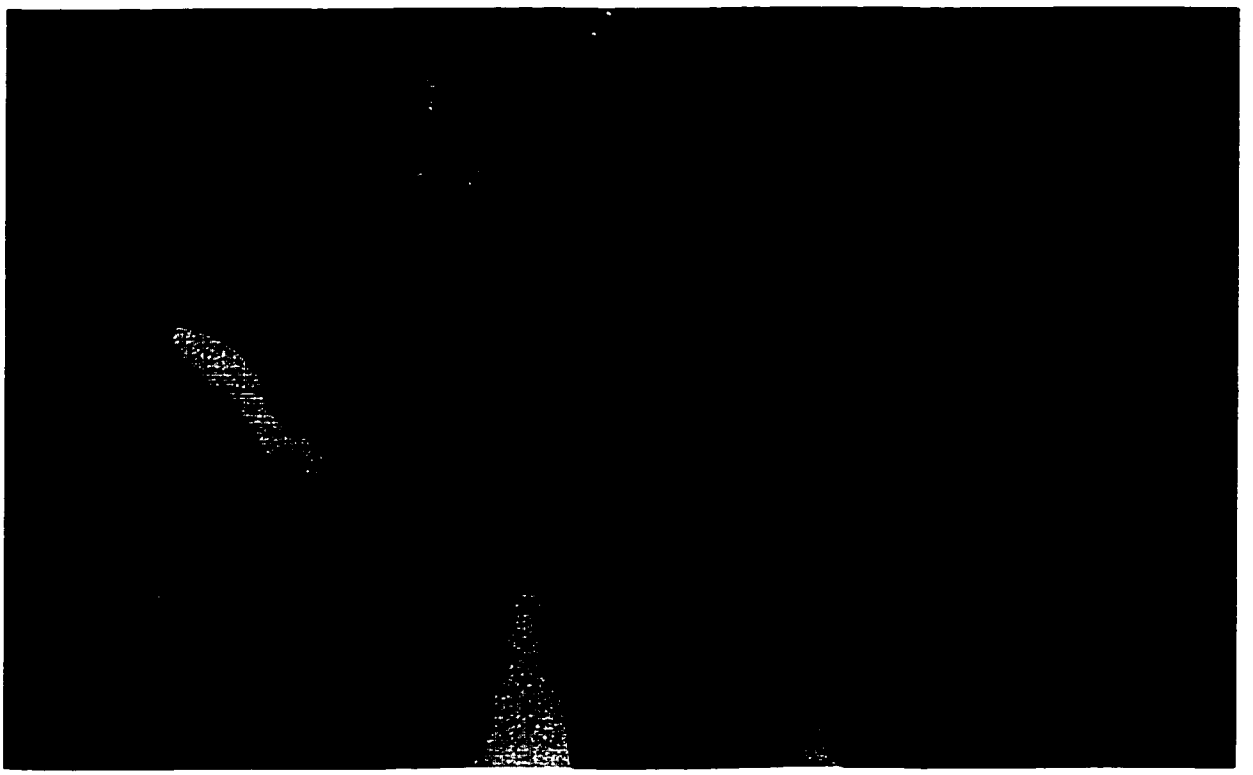
Interviewer_____

Participant_____

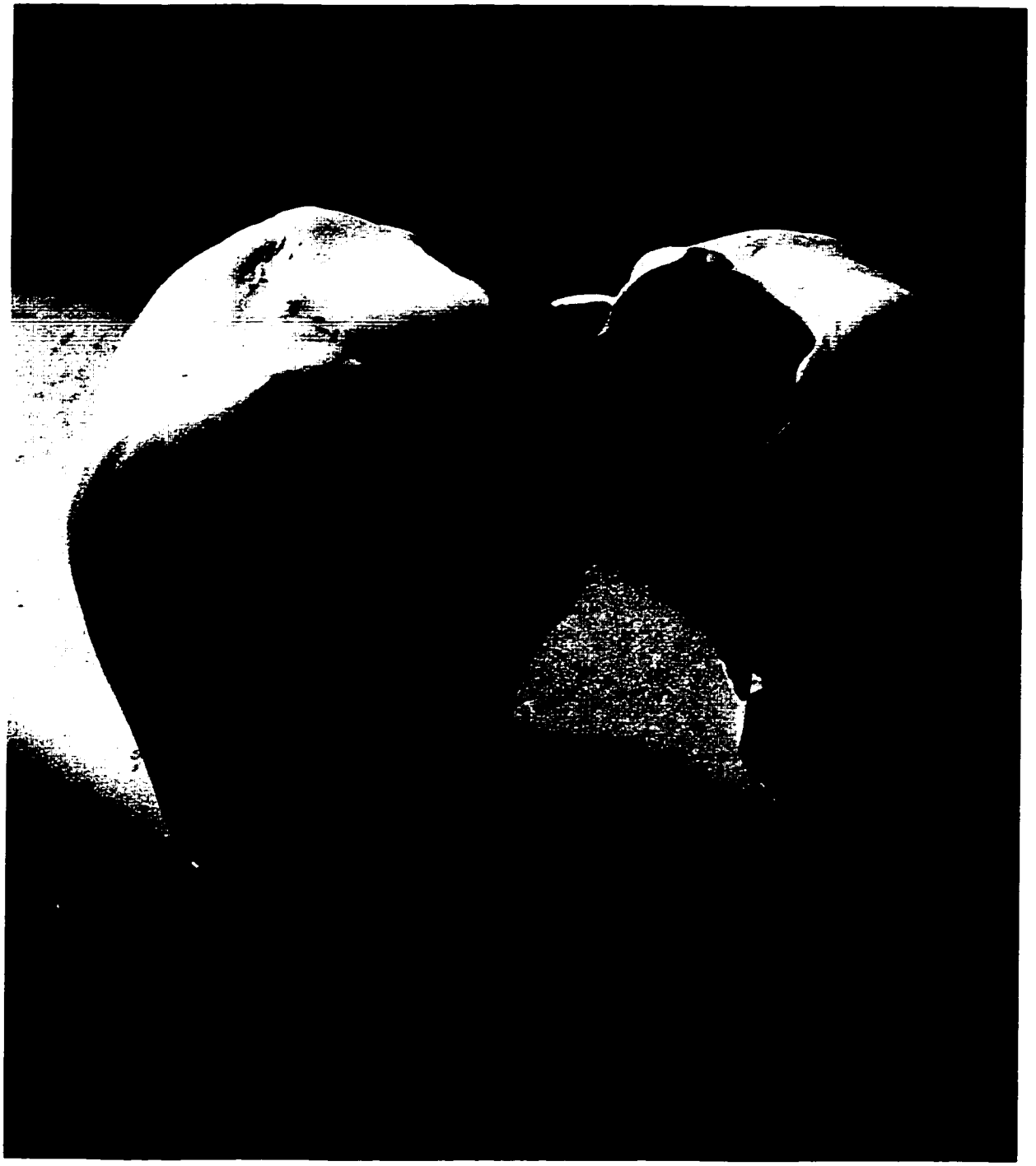
Date_____

APPENDIX B

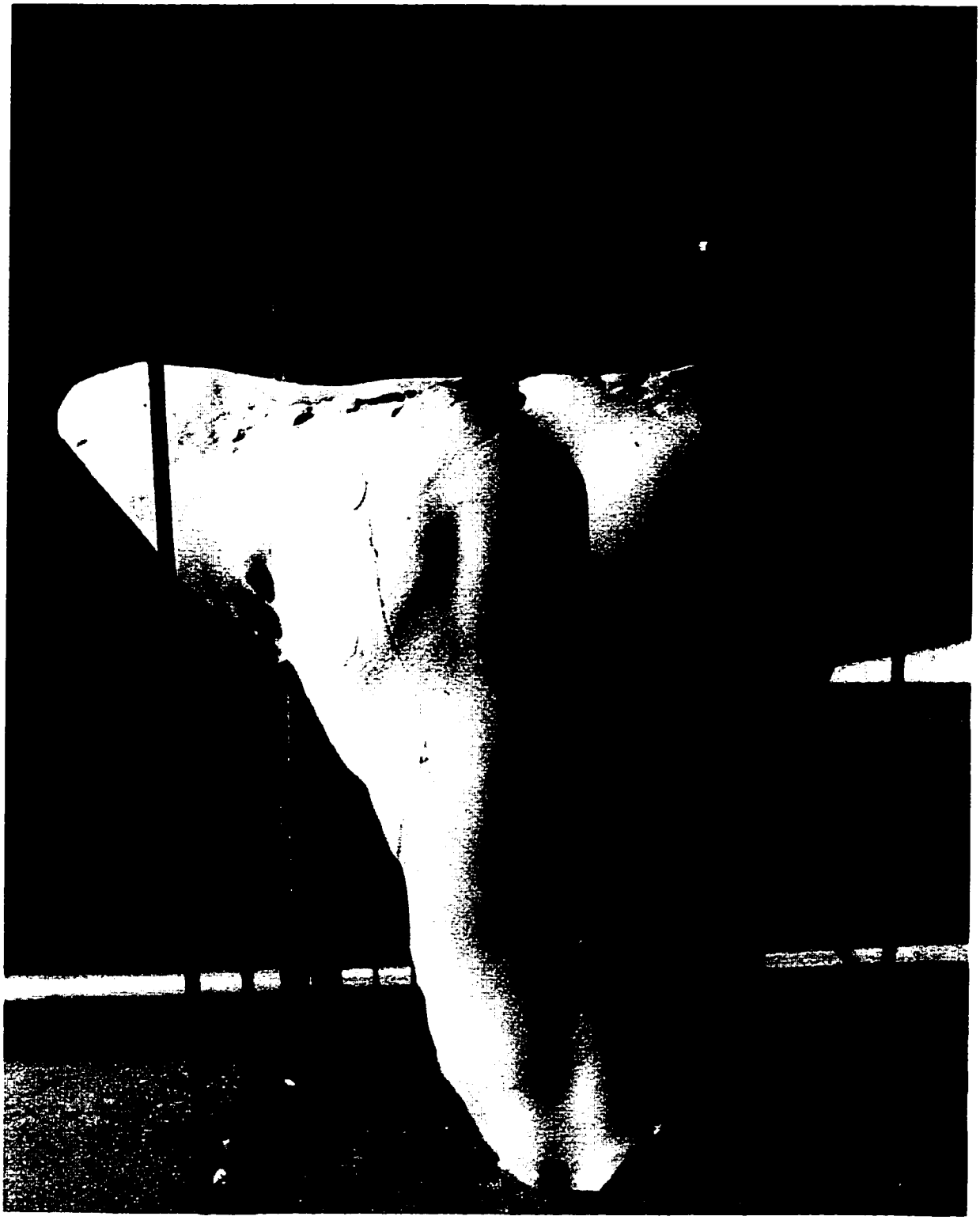
Samples of the Author's Art work



OFFERING, 1999.
Unglazed stoneware and human hair.
Human size.

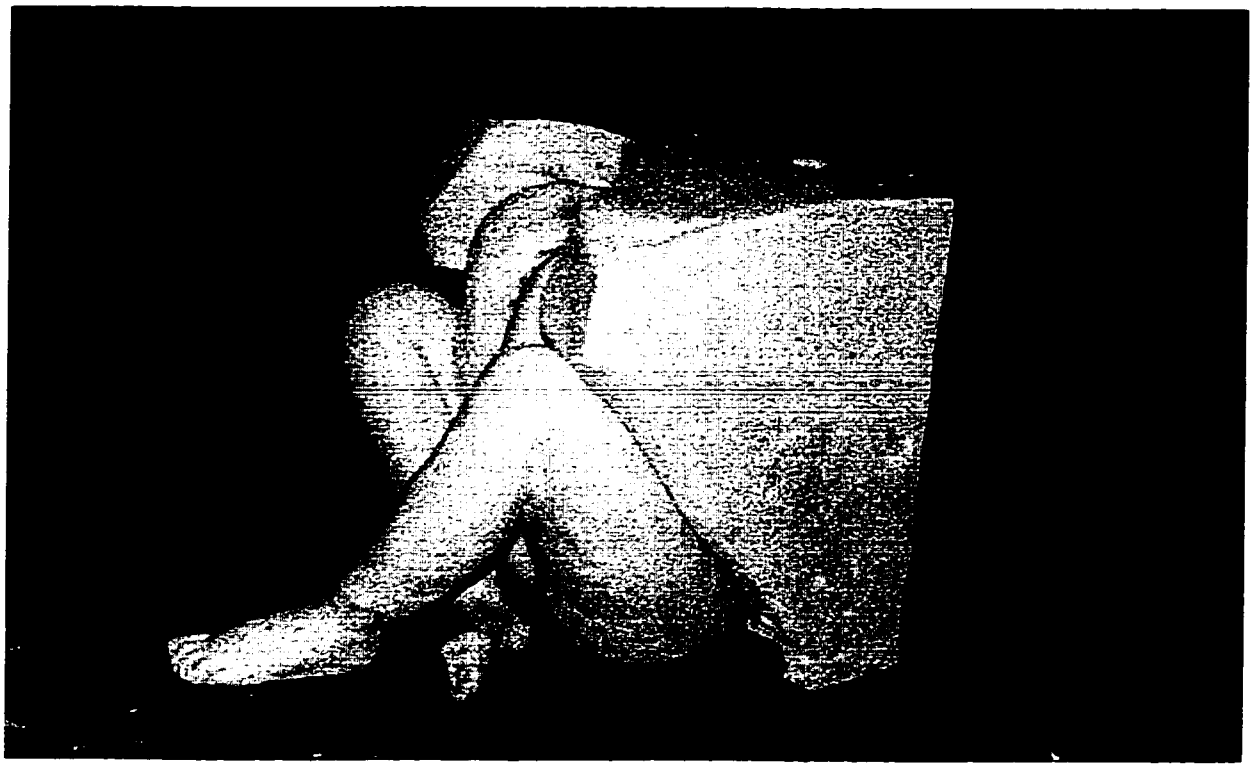


*DIALOGUE, **1999**.*
Unglazed stoneware.
*Size of each piece: **30/30** cm.*

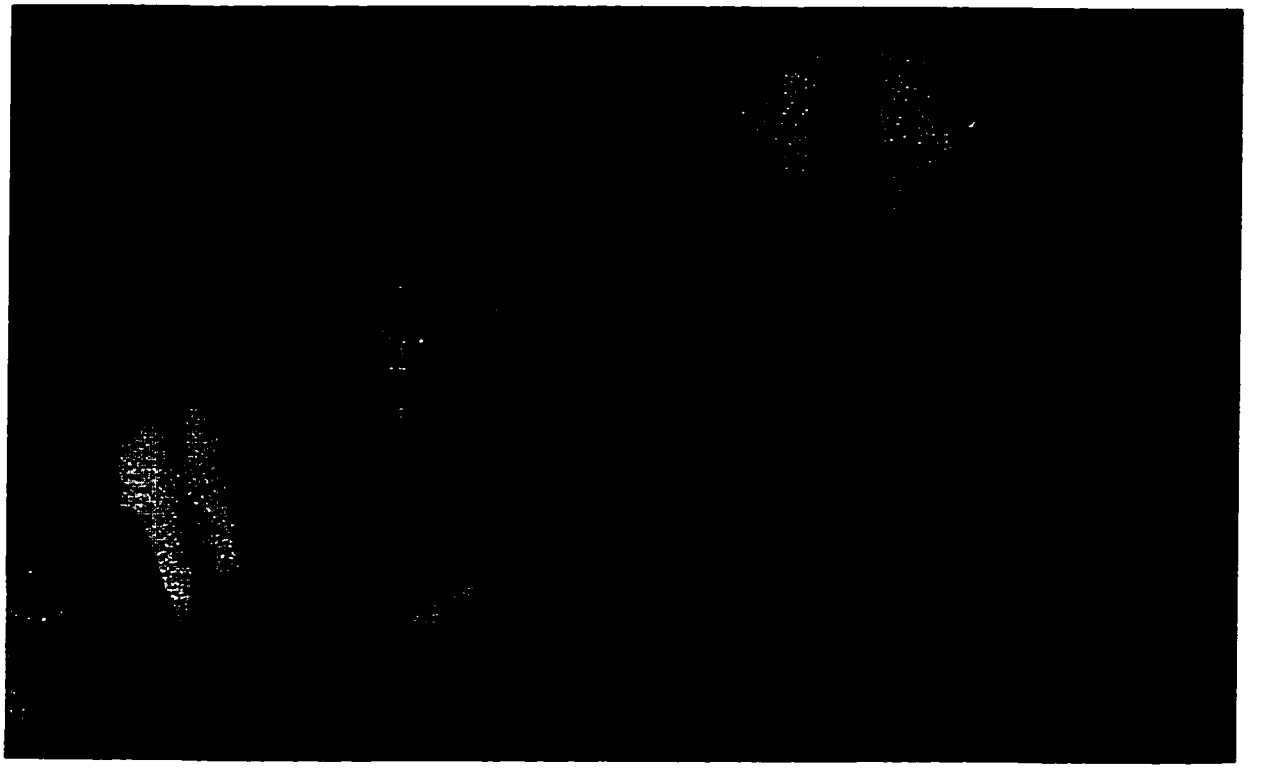


TRAVELLER, 1999.
Unglazed stoneware.
Back (human size) and metal cage.

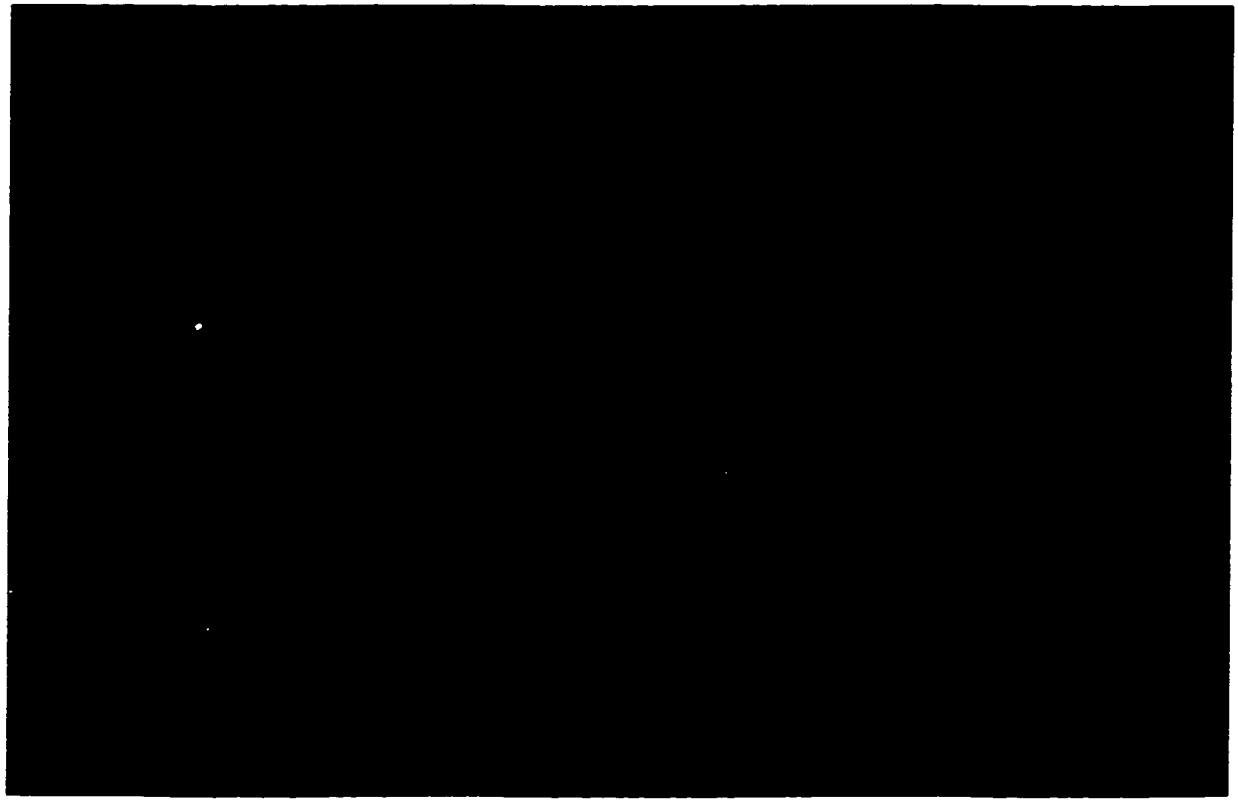
CYCLE, 1997.
Unglazed stoneware and wooden table.
Size: each sculpture piece approx. 30/30cm.



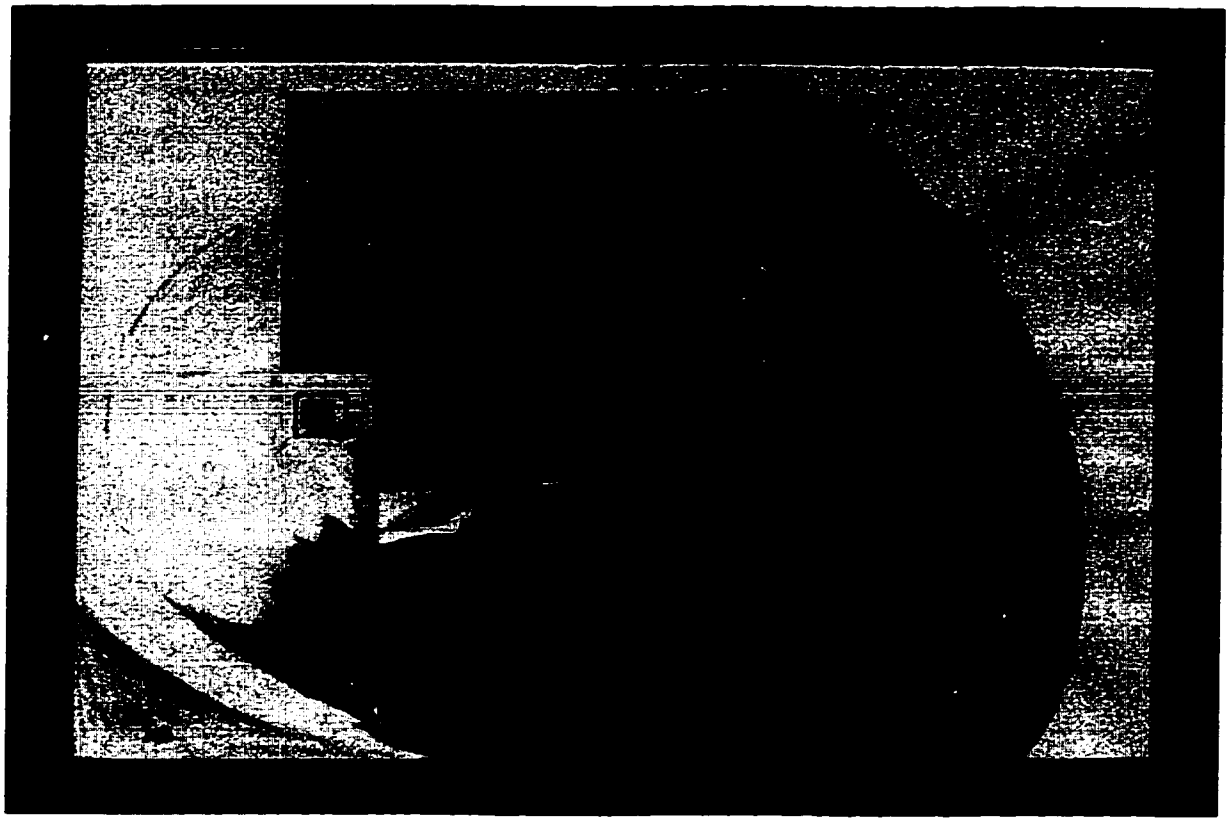
TRAVELLER, 1997.
Plaster of Paris.
Size: 30/30cm.



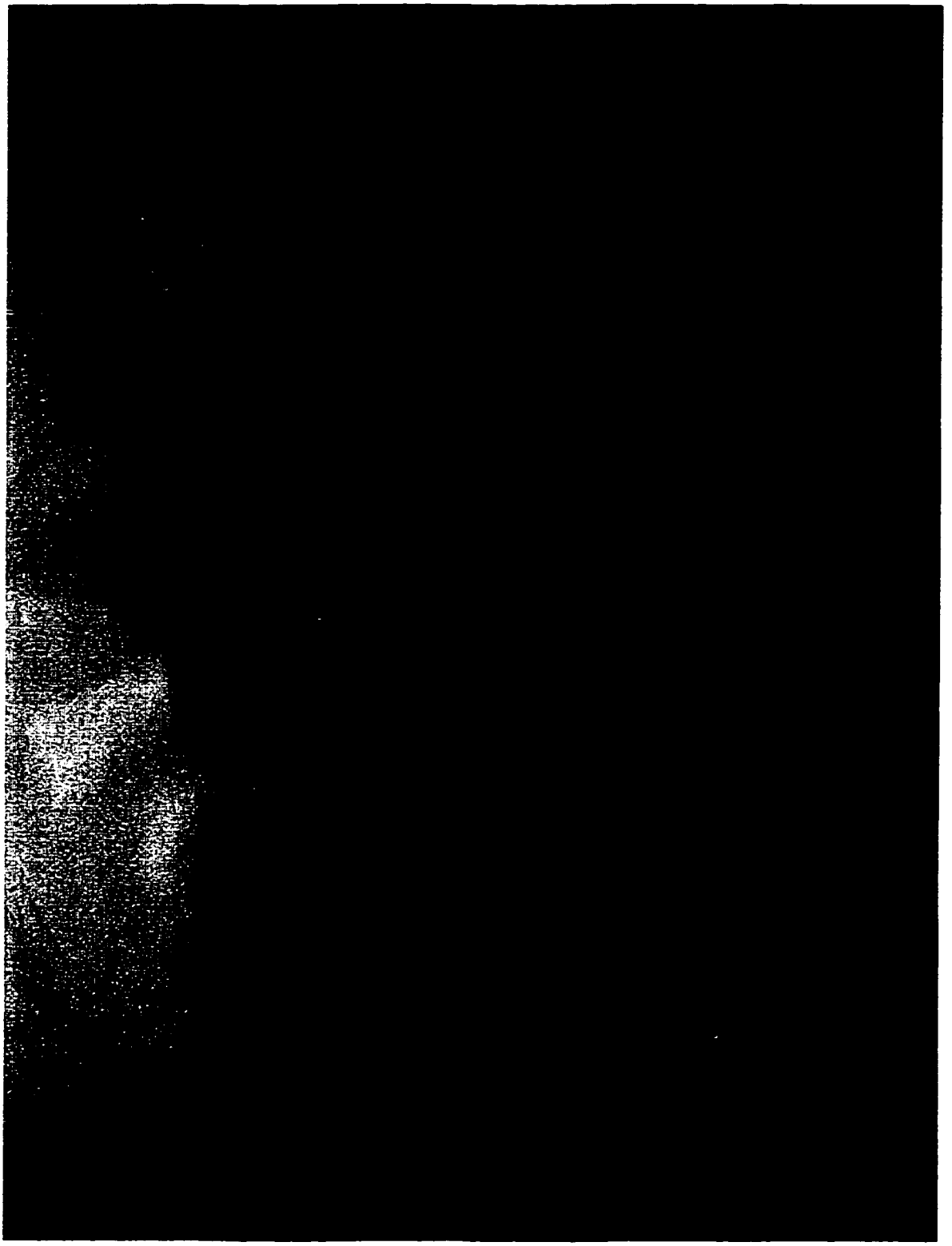
SERIES OF BACKS, 1998.
Plaster moulds and unglazed stoneware.
Human size.



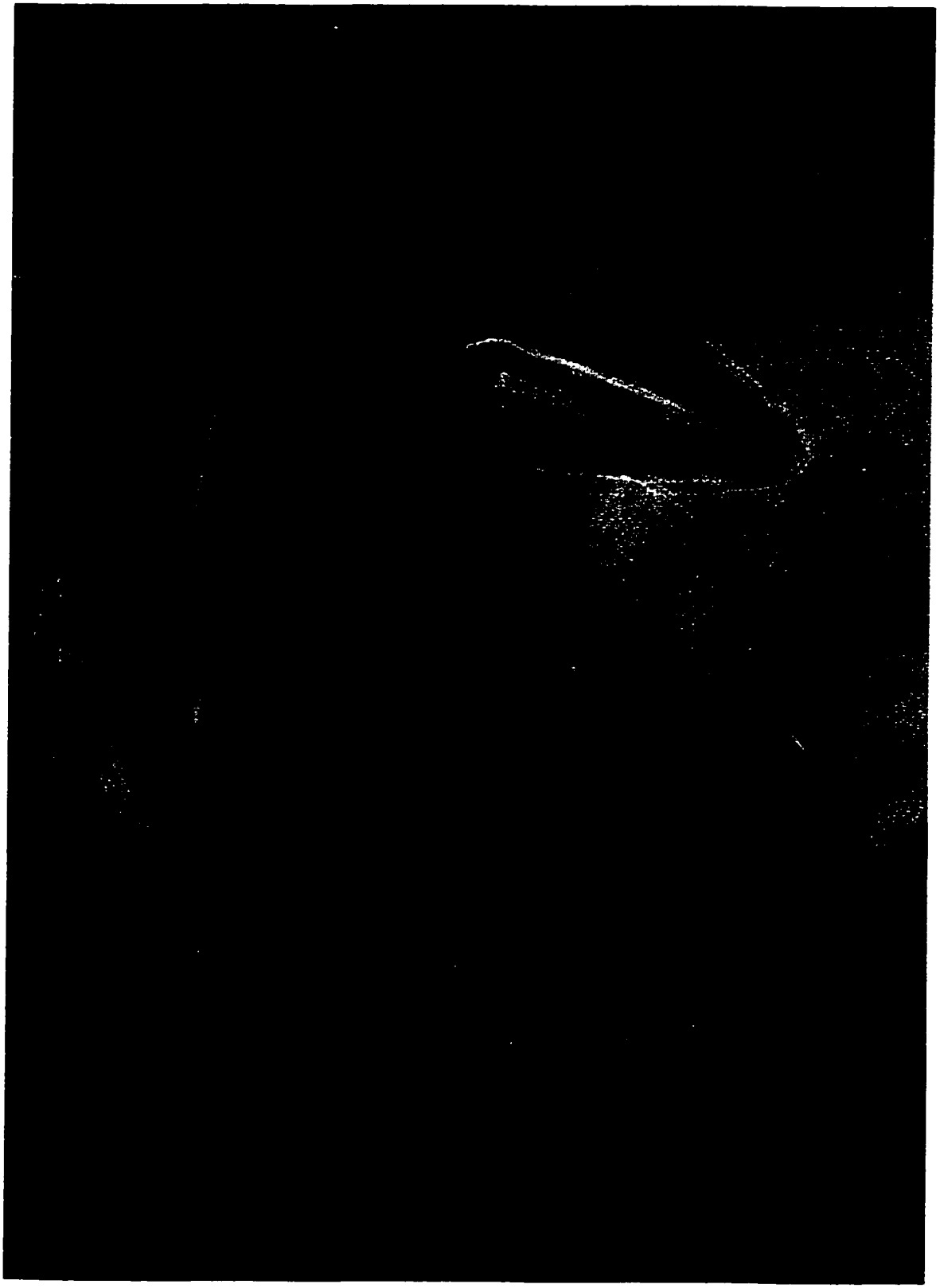
IN PLACEMENT SERIES (3), 1996.
Ink, dry pastel, charcoal, metallic paper, box-like wooden frame.
Size: 100/60cm.



IN PLACEMENT SERIES (2), 1996.
Ink, conté and scanned monoprint.
Size: A4 (excluding mounting).



PARADISE LOST, 1995.
Ink and dry pastel.
Size: 80/50cm.



DOUBLE SELF PORTRAIT, 1995.
Ink and dry pastel.
Size: 80/50cm.

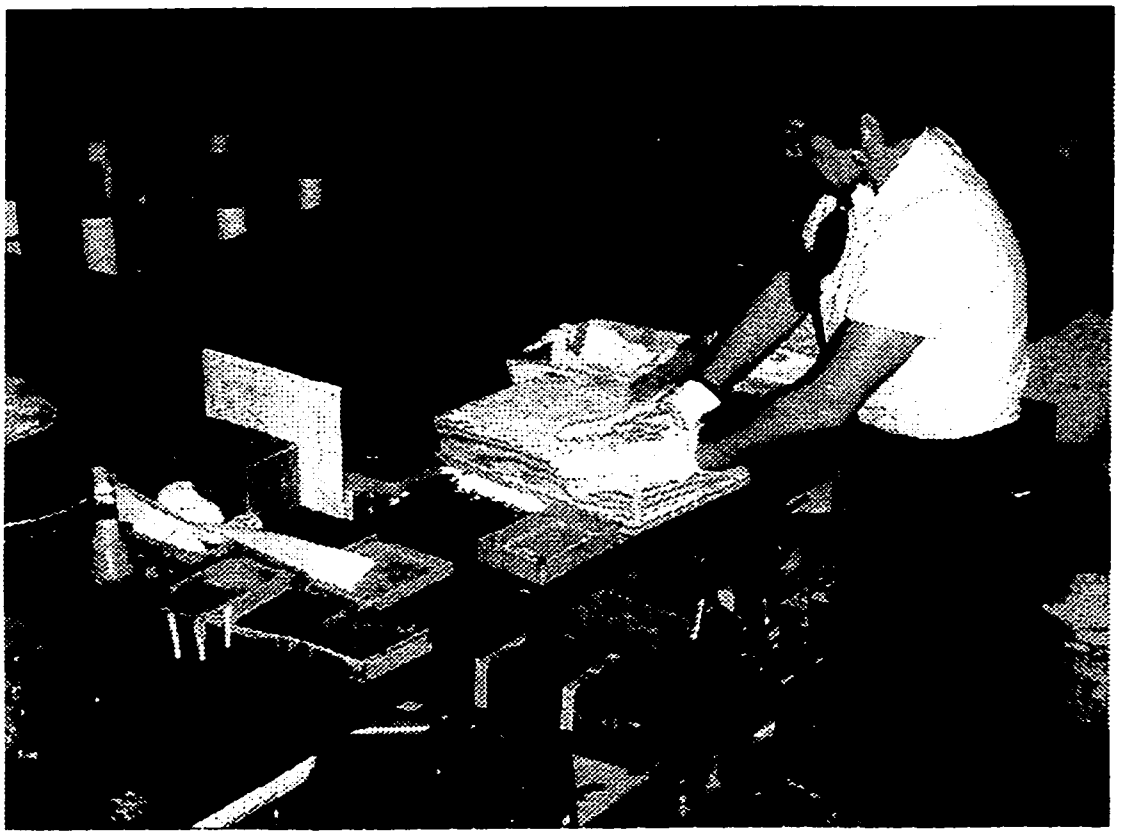
LOSS, 1996.
Text and architectural plan printed on Japanese paper.
Size: A4.

IN PLACEMENT SERIES (1), 1996.
Ink, conté and metallic paper collage.
Size: A4 (excluding mounting).

APPENDIX C

Photographs of Artists Interviewed

Cardine Echeverria and her "dresses"
Courtesy of the artist
(Photo: Michel Brunelle 1999)



Jarmila Kavena working in the foundry
Photo: Courtesy of the artist

ARAYA, Kinga
Orthoepic device. 1998. Cast iron.
Steel helmet & 2 m long cast "tongue." 24 kg.