Walking the Wall: Global Flâneuse with Local Dilemmas

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Introduction: Traveling Identity

It is quite special for me to write about global flânerie while reflecting on two distinct events: a physical act of unpacking in my new place and an extended celebration of my personal and artistic staggering from the Eastern to the Western Worlds. The first special circumstance presents a deceivably simple and mundane act of unpacking my belongings in a rental house in Sarasota, Florida, where I moved on August 15, 2009. After leaving Montreal in September 2006, and having worked and traveled as a post-doctoral fellow in Philadelphia and Berlin, I realized that this is my thirteenth "home" since I left Canada. Living with and from suitcases has already become my specialty since I defected Poland during the summer of 1988, simply walking away from a student trip in Florence, Italy. At that time, I was not able to critically reflect on my new emerging identity as it was inserting itself into an international and global economy. I was simply too close to my own immigrant experience, coping primarily with the questions of survival: "What and when am I going to eat? Where am I going to sleep?" These questions underscored a political and economic schism that I was feeling right in my body, the body that needed food and rest, and simultaneously, the body perceived as a cast off subject, an abject thrown into the promising Western World. Italy offered different living and legal situations controlled by diverse rules that were all new to me, a person born and brought up "behind the iron curtain." During the immigration time, I was learning how to be patient when facing numerous cultural and political challenges while negotiating my Eastern-European identity, flavored by my parents' exilic history. My mother was born into a Tartar-Muslim family in Vilnus; my father was a child of Polish parents who adopted Ukraine as their homeland. Yet in 1939, because of the consequential historical moment, their families were exiled from their

homes to find themselves estranged and terrified in Nazi-occupied Poland. Perhaps my state of exile was always already inscribed in the history of my family and somehow helped me to face the challenges of globalization.

Interestingly, even though my walking away from a student trip happened in Florence, I never had the pleasure to enjoy walking around this enchanting Renaissance city. My short promenade led from the Baptistery, (where I intensely prayed while making a decision of walking away from Poland), to a house of a young Italian actress whom I met during an alternative Gardzienice Theatre Workshop in Poland, the summer before. I still wonder how we managed to communicate since at that time I spoke only Polish and my Florentine friend (I believe her name was Francesca) spoke only Italian. I was keeping a scrupulous diary during the entire trip, and the notebook became one of the most precious items that traveled with my humble belongings to Canada. During one of the multiple apartment moves, I lost this priceless diary that now would answer many of my questions regarding that unforgettable summer of 1988.

As I unpack my numerous boxes, crates, pieces of luggage, suitcases and bags (most of which were not opened since August 2006), the fragmented notes, faded photos, and broken objects fall out unexpectedly, piercing me with their potent and layered history. All these items belong to me, although many ended up in my possession while traveling in mysterious and rhizomatic ways throughout the East and West—Africa, North America, Middle East and Asia. All those objects "throw me out of balance" and slow down my actual unpacking. The sharp division between global and local emerges as I unwrap an African mask, cast glass boomerangs, undeveloped film negatives, and letters guaranteeing love beyond any national and cultural borders, declaring passionate promises now as faded as the lover's words on the page. This is not a simple act of moving into a new place. This is the thirteenth test (taking only *the last three years* into consideration) to find my own place and space. I believe that the global flâneuse is supposed to face and accept all sorts of difficulties and challenges. Shall I accept this layered personal, artistic and professional moving around the world in high hopes of reconciling my dwelling within and beyond the shifting abodes?

The second distinct event that still resonates within me refers to the twenty-year anniversary of defecting from Poland while in Italy. My

Fig. 1. Former border watchtower, now LU Exhibiting Space in Berlin, Germany. Photograph: Kinga Araya.

recent art exhibition in Berlin entitled *Ten Steps* commemorates the event in video, photo and audio artworks. What was particularly special for me was the fact that my summer exhibition was in the former Border Watchtower—*Grenzwachturm Schlesischer Busch*—now transformed into an art gallery. This tall and narrow building, with impossibly vertical stairs up to the second floor, once stood right at the border of East and West Berlin. Its history refers to a peculiar non-place, and it was indeed the most appropriate building to house my itinerary artworks. The exact twenty-year anniversary of walking away from Poland was in 2008 when I was in Berlin and decided to walk along the ruins of the Berlin Wall for ten consecutive days with actual and virtual walkers. It became my longest and most engaging walking artwork to date, and its personal and theoretical multilingual discussions on walking and exilic experiences accompanied by art, documents, and objects, emphasizes the global and local tensions. The video documentation's introductory narration is accompanied by the wobbling images of me walking around the former Refugee Camp in Rome, taken in the summer of 2008. Its suggestive narrative sets the context of the *Walking the Wall* performance and our discussion on global flânerie.

Due to extraordinary personal circumstances and my anti-communist activities, I was not allowed to travel abroad. Upon a special request and a personal written guarantee that I would return to Poland, the local police authorities granted me my passport and I obtained a tourist visa. I was ready for my first student trip to Italy. Once in Florence, against all odds and restrictions imposed upon me, I decided to exercise my freedom and simply walked away from our bus. I left everything behind. Somehow I knew that I would not be given another chance. This was my time. The next day I hitchhiked to Rome, where I joined a group of young, Polish immigrants living in a tall building behind *Largo di Boccea,* now the ruins of a once supervised and overpopulated refugee camp. It was during my Italian immigration that I composed my first short poems, entitled *Dziesiec Krokow - Ten Steps*. At that time I had no idea that I was already dealing with my two artistic tropes, *walking* and *talking*, which have been accompanying me on my creative journeys.

Krok pierwszy

Nie mam pojecia jak sie pisze A
Z jedna krzywa nozka czy dwiema
B jest jeszcze trudniejsze
(to kilkugodzinne studium
w ciemnych skryptoriach labiryntu sredniowiecznego)
Ty zas mowisz
Ze alfabet nie istnieje
Wymysl diabla spod litery
Z (Araya, 1989)

(My free translation):

First Step

I have no idea how to write A
With one crocket leg or two
B is even more difficult
(it is a time consuming studium
in the dark scriptoria of medieval labyrinths)
And you say that alphabet does not exist
That it is a devilish trickery under the letter
Z

I remember how anxious I was upon returning to Europe in 2007. I was wondering how I could honor this special time that marked the twenty-year anniversary of my walking away from Poland. Initially, I did not plan to walk 160 km along the site of the Berlin Wall, yet it turned out to be the signature work of my post-doctoral fellowship at the ICI Institute for Cultural Inquiry in Berlin, Germany. After executing my 2008 walking performance in Berlin I experienced a strange case of iconoclasm towards my own images. What was I afraid of? And did the act of walking affect this iconoclasm in some way and if so, how? I believe that the physical impossibility of walking in Sarasota, Florida, the activity that I truly cherish, was one of the major reasons of my unexpected iconoclasm that shocked me to my bones. I will come back to the challenges of

Figure. 2. Performing Exile: Walking the Wall, performance in Berlin, 2008. Photograph: Kinga Araya.

walking in this typically "car city" later on in this essay.

My walk along the former Berlin Wall was not a predictable performance artwork. It was filled with intense *logos* and *pathos*. It was about meditating on my slow transformation from an Eastern European subject, who wanted to assert herself as a freestanding and creative subject in the West. It was about falling down and getting up because of my political, linguistic, and cultural unfitness within Italian and Canadian laws concerning immigration and citizenship. It was about the un-measurable weight of living twenty years in the shadow of the iron curtain and twenty years in the West. (Araya, 2009).

Etymology of the Words Flâneur and Flâneuse and their Cultural Contexts

In order to contextualize my *walking* and *talking* artworks within global flânerie, it is important to refer to the etymology of the word "flâneur" and its gendered counterpart, "flâneuse." In her informative essay, "The Invisible Flâneur," Elizabeth Wilson presents a feminist critique of gendered modernist spaces, examining the phenomenon of the flâneur in

the context of the empowered male figure, while the female stroller, the flâneuse, is presented as a powerless walker not only in modern, but also in postmodern public spaces. Wilson provides a useful etymology of the word *flâneur*. The fact that the origins of the word are uncertain yet the first dictionary definitions support the gendered meaning of flâneur is critical for Wilson. She claims that the 19th-century *Larousse Encyclopaedia* already had two gendered entries: flâneur and flâneuse. The latter denotes "a kind of reclining chair […] it looks like an extended deck chair, and welcomes its occupant with womanly passivity" (Wilson, 1996, p.76). Wilson's feminist reading of the 19th-century origins and social functions of the flâneur make her examine the identity of the modern stroller as a typically masculine activity of "loitering, frittering away of time" (Wilson, 1996, p. 62). The flâneur presents as the male figure in the Parisian metropolis whose favorite activities consist of disinterested walking around Paris and observing the urban marvels and the crowd. Wilson follows a historical development of the term *flâneur* by examining its earliest literary uses in the novels by Balzac, Zola, Proust, and Dickens in which the male city strollers play the main literary characters. Further, she examines in greater depth an anonymous French pamphlet from 1806 that introduces the figure of the flâneur in the context of Bonaparte's era. A passage from the pamphlet, *Le Flâneur au salon ou M.Bon-Homme: examin joyeux des tableaux, mele de vaudevilles,* exhibits some of the key characteristics of the flâneur that will become critical in the later creative and critical writings about the strolling urban figure by Baudelaire and Benjamin:

> No one knows how M. Bonhomme [the flâneur] supports himself, but he is said to be a rentier, seemingly set free from familial, landowning or mercantile responsibilities, to roam Paris at will. The flâneur spends most of his day simply looking at the urban spectacle; he observes in particular new inventions: for example he stops in Place Louis XIV to examine the signals of the marine telegraph, although he

> understands nothing about them (Wilson, 1996, p. 62).

Wilson explains that M. Bonhomme engages in aesthetic activities because either he was an artist or he associated himself with the artists in the modern public spaces of the salons, boulevards, arcades, cafes, bars, theaters and brothels. M. Bonhomme, however, seems to perform a marginal flânerie. He is a solitary stroller with a blasé attitude towards the modern city.

When we compare the most recent dictionary entries of the word *flâneur*, we find striking similarities with the 19th-century *Larousse* definitions of the same French word. Along with the literary quotations of the literary uses of flâneur, the eight volume *Tresor de la langue Francaise-Dictionaire de la langue du XIX et du XXe siecle* offers two main definitions of the word that describe walking in the city as a rather disinterested, care-free strolling about town. More specifically, *flâner*, as a transitive verb, is first defined as "avancer lentement et sans direction précise," and the second meaning denotes "perdre son temps; se complaire dans l'inaction, dans le farniente" (p. 953). Further, under the entry *flâneuse* there is a simple explanation of "celui, celle, ce qui flâne", as well as the definition of *flâneuse* as a "long chair" already quoted by Wilson: "siege pliant en bois ou en osier pouvant faire office de chaise longue" (p. 953). The latter definition of *flâneuse* as "chaise longue" does not come from the 19th-century entry; it is quoted after Sandry-Carr's publication in 1963. By comparison, the *Oxford English Dictionary* from 1989 has a much shorter entry of the word *flâneur,* and the definition of *flâneuse* does not appear at all. The noun *flânerie* is defined as "the disposition or practice of an idler or lounger", and *flâneur* as "a lounger or saunterer, an idle man about town" (p. 1003).

The flâneur presents a new performing identity that was born in rapidly changing mid-19th century Paris restructured by Baron Georges Haussmann. As a chief administrator in Paris, appointed by the Napoleon III, Haussmann not only widened the existing streets of Paris and built twenty-two new boulevards, but also modernized the whole city plan, producing great traffic

arteries, the sewer system, and the impressive construction for the *Exposition Universelle* of 1867. The 19th-century architectural transformations were made at a high cost by destroying most of old Paris and its living social structures. While on one hand, Paris proudly showed off its enhanced architecture, streets, and boulevards, on the other hand, a growing number of homeless (qua: walkers), dispossessed people were pushed away from the cleaned-up, public spaces of the modern city that started to become an estranged space for its own inhabitants.

Charles Baudelaire gave us not only an account on what constitutes modernity, but also the characteristics of the modern hero. In "The Painter of Modern Life," Baudelaire introduces a figure of the *flâneur* exemplified by the artistic endeavor of a genius. He defines him in the following way:

> observer, philosopher, *flâneur*—call him what you will; but whatever words you use in trying to define this kind of artist, you will certainly be led to bestow upon him some adjective which you could not apply to the painter of eternal, or at least more lasting things, of heroic or religious subjects (Baudelaire, 1964, p. 4).

The modern painter then is concerned with both eternal and fugitive beauty. He is an empowered "man of the crowd," a "great traveler and cosmopolitan" who observes life unfolding around him with the curiosity of a child. The flâneur's activities of examining Parisian life while moving through the city support the discourses of power of the 19th-century society of the spectacle. The question of who could visually scrutinize the modern world became an important socio-political issue. Baudelaire's *flâneur*, a "prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 9), represents a privileged figure of 19th-century public life because he can define space by his anonymous and carefree mobility through the city. Nevertheless, a flâneur has no real social or political power. In his persistent homeless walks, he spies *in* and *out* of the urban frame and keeps moving. Benjamin states that, "it

takes a heroic constitution to live through modernism" (p. 74). The German critic also refers to Jules Laforgue's text about Baudelaire, quoting that he was the first to speak "as someone condemned" to live in Paris (Benjamin, 1999, p. 55). Baudelaire describes the characteristics of a dispossessed flâneur and a modern hero in a decadent way, wearing "the black suite and the frock" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 77). A modern hero then, a socially powerless artistic figure, an intellectual, is dressed in black as if he were mourning something essential and disappearing from his life: the very originality and liveliness of modernity. It is critical that it is by the means of walking, the most humble human experience, that the city stroller becomes aware of the "fragility of modern existence" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 77).

In his critical analysis of the Baudelairean modern world, Benjamin scrutinizes the experience of the flâneur as a discontinuous and rhapsodic performance. He examines several figures that complement the figure of the flâneur, exemplified in the Baudelairean literary heroes of the apache, the dandy, the detective, the conspirator and of such social outcasts as the prostitute and the ragpicker (the homeless person). Out of the six flâneur's alter egos there is only one female character, a prostitute, in French called *peripateticienne*, the one who walks the city. The Parisian world of the *demimonde* presents one of the most complex features of socio-historically understood modernity. From Baudelaire and Benjamin, we learn that modernity in the last exhaustive years of the *fin de siècle* was obsessed with the female body. In numerous theoretical discourses as well as in the artistic and literary representations, the female nude was very desirable to the ruling white, heterosexual bourgeois class. In assuring the pleasure of looking, *scopophilia*, the bourgeoisie had not only to be surrounded by prostitutes and their images, but also had to have the power of controlling the situation. In a detailed study of Manet's painting of a well-known Parisian prostitute, *Olympia,* for example, T. J. Clark refers to the social and controlled "necessity" of making the prostitutes circulate throughout the modern city (Clark, 1984, p.103). In a complex, sexually charged socio-historical discourse, a prostitute became one of the dispossessed

walking symbols of the commercialized and commodified modern city.

Both Baudelaire and Benjamin knew that the development of the modern metropolis was paid for dearly with the massive commercialization of every possible product. The limits of modern transactions were set as high as the sale of Paris' own inhabitants. This situation is exemplified by the growing business of buying and selling the services of the prostitute-peripateticienne. She was becoming a desirable and salable modern object, and she had to remain "an invisible flâneur." However, Baudelaire glorifies the prostitute as the muse of the modern poet in many of his poems. He writes, "holy prostitution of the sound which gives itself wholly, poetry and charity, to the unexpected that appears, to the unknown that passes" (Baudelaire, 1964, p.56). Other so-called fallen women, or women "in revolt against society" (Baudelaire, 1964, p.37), such as lesbian, single, and independent women, became a source of fascination for Baudelaire. Exalted by her imagined mythical power and freedom, Baudelaire writes that the "lesbian is the heroine of modernism because she combines with a historical ideal the greatness of the ancient world" (Baudelaire, 1964, p. 90).

There is an important transition for some unemployed and marginal Parisian walkers who become part of the new bourgeoisie. Benjamin quotes Rattier's utopic novel from 1857 entitled *Paris n'existe plus* that describes the modern city as a place where making rapid social changes in the city dwellers is possible, because of the rapid economic and political modifications happening in the metropolis. In particular, Rattier says:

> The *flâneur* who we used to encounter on the sidewalks and in front of the shop-windows, this nonentity, this constant rubberneck, this inconsequential type who was always in search of cheap emotions and knew about nothing but cobblestones, fiacres, and gas lanterns has now become a farmer, a vintner, a linen manufacturer, a sugar refiner, and a steel magnate (Benjamin, 1973, p. 54).

Analyzing one of Baudelaire's poems from *Les Fleurs du mal*, Benjamin interprets the Parisian crowd as anonymous and detached, but also as inspirational for the poet-flâneur. There is a serious preoccupation with the paradoxical entrapment of the flâneur in the metropolitan transient sites that produced him and with the same sites that also started to erase the flâneur's individuality. Benjamin calls a modern flâneur an accomplice who takes part in the overpowering urban spectacle. The phenomenon of the modern city acquires the quality of what defies human physical and psychical limits. In other words, the city becomes an artistic locality where individuals have strong aesthetic feelings. In that powerful sublime spectacle, however, the identity of the modern flâneur seems to be threatened by the very fact that he is one among many. Benjamin argues that the modern stroller finally acquires a commodity value that renders him grotesque. In critically summarizing Baudelaire's writing on the modern hero and his alter egos, Benjamin observes that the "*flâneur*, apache, dandy and ragpicker were so many roles to him [the flâneur]. For the modern hero is no hero, he acts hero. Heroic modernism turns out to be a tragedy in which the hero's part is available" (Benjamin, 1973, p. 97).

Flânerie: From Local to Global to Local

There are at least two critical aspects regarding the dialectics of global and local flânerie. They are often present in my artworks that dialogue with the phenomenon of *walking* and *talking* in between countries, cultures and languages. First of all, since globalization maps the world unevenly, it often stands in opposition to local and individual experiences. The fact that uneven distribution of economy created different types of "worlds" is not a surprise. The thicks and thins of global economy made many citizens exiles in their own countries. Since many of them cannot participate in the mainstream politics and economy, they are forced to live and work in a

Figure 4. Exercising with princess headgear (adjustable), performance, Montreal, 2001. Photograph: Kinga Araya.

place determined by larger power structures. They are people who can hardly relocate, travel, and work as they would prefer. Their localities, therefore, become the only world they know. There are many cultural examples of breaking away from the "local politics," often run by oppressive and totalitarian governments. Some of the great artists, who under diverse yet never easy circumstances, made an extraordinary transition from East to West, became critical cultural advocates for local and global worlds. Such artists who immediately come to my mind are Vera Frenkel, Ewa Partum, Marina Abramovic, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Jana Sterbak, and Christof Javacheff, amongst others. Their examples tell us that in order to become "global" one has to lift oneself above the "local" experience, even though the "local" remains a critical element that defines who the individual is and what itinerary he/she undertook to function in the West.

My argument is that the two positions, the global and the local, are still not reconciled because we are constantly reminded of our wanted or unwanted "locality," depending on the global situations. We do participate in a complex socio-political and cultural economy that divides East from West, the provincial city from the metropolis, and the first- from the third-world countries. I would like to quote two poignant examples of one's global unfitness within local contexts. One of them is from my conversation with Polish feminist and conceptual artist Ewa Partum in her Berlin apartment. While we were talking about the situation of women artists in the East and West, Partum told me that some of the Western curators claim that her artworks cannot be sold for the same price as other conceptual artists' works from the West because she is from the "East block." This "localizing statement" is particularly disturbing because Partum has been living in Berlin for over thirty years and has been producing significant body of works in the West.

The second example refers to my experiences of daily walks on North Tamiami Trail in Sarasota, right in the college neighborhood where I teach. I was told that this area is a known for its working street girls, apparently a prime pick-up and drop-off for the prostitutes. Since I do not have a driver's license, I can rely only on my two legs and a limited Sarasota public transportation. In other words, I have to walk about 15 minutes to get to school, and if I want to go downtown I can catch a bus or walk about forty minutes. I must confess that this is the first time in my

life that I experience the walking at its absolute limits. Every single time I make my necessary walks on North Tamiami Trail, I hear derogatory and sexist remarks from most of the male walkers, men on bikes, and some drivers who honk, slow down and look curiously at me. I do not provoke these men in any way, and yet they disturb my daily walks to and from work. My initial shock of finding myself in a public sphere that is so oppressive has helped me to understand how the 19th-century flâneuse might have felt when she was discouraged to walk alone in public spaces because they would be taken for *peripateticienne*. In such a difficult context where every walk on Tamiami Trail is read in a local discriminatory language, I wonder how much work one has to do to reach the global context. My walking on Tamiami Trail became such an unbearable personal experience that I decided to turn it into yet another performance artwork, *Walking Tamiami Trail* to be executed in the near future. In particular, I will be walking the urban part of a very long Tamiami Trail street (that joins Tampa in the North and Miami in the South). Some of the challenges of the socio-cultural limits of walking in Sarasota will be documented in video, audio and photography.

My most recent performance, *Walking the Wall*, and the subsequent video are also good examples of exposing this dialectic tension of local versus global. On the one hand, I was not allowed to travel abroad and was grounded to stay "at home;" on the other, I defied the absurdities of the Communist restrictions and simply walked away. Some of those artistic examples show us that the local plays an important, if not a critical role, in understanding the global.

Performing Walking and Talking

For me putting one foot in front of the other was never about becoming a global *flâneur* or a *flâneuse*, it was about survival. The compulsion of walking towards the West was filled with a mythic desire that "life is elsewhere," and I did not look back at the ruins of the iron curtain, a burden engraved in the silenced and humiliated faces of Polish citizens. I thought that my defection in Florence, Italy announced a pilgrimage towards the Promised Land; instead, I began my personal *art of fugue* that introduced many harmonic steps and transitions, all played intensely without breaks and stopping points. I was reminded too many times that I

was from the East, from Poland, therefore I was not fully autonomous and empowered as a subject. I never understood why this would have to be emphasized so many times, why the "local" has to be brought up when the "global" is supposed to go beyond the racial and national differentiation. Interestingly enough, my Eastern-European background was only an "issue" when the decisions about obtaining a job, entering certain scholarship and fellowship competitions, and freedom to travel presented themselves. However, once I obtained Canadian citizen status, the logistics of travel changed for me. Suddenly, travel became less humiliating, and I was passing the Western checkpoints much faster and without lengthy questions. When I opened my mouth, however, it was clear that English is not my first language, and things were getting complicated with procuring employment in Canada. One of my early videos entitled *ABC*, comments on that uneven global-local dialectics where even the judge, an official representative of the Canadian Law, acts in a discriminatory manner towards the immigrants. The narration of the story "B as in BULLSHIT," is recited very slowly. It goes as follows:

> In November of 1993 I had a special interview with a citizenship judge at the court of Canadian Citizenship in Ottawa. The oral interview regarding Canadian geography, history and politics was a condition *sine qua non* to obtain a Canadian citizenship status. The middle-aged woman judge dressed formally in a gown, greeted me and asked me to sit down. The interview started. The judge looked straight into my eye, protruded her face towards me and making exaggerated staccato pronunciation of every single word asked me: "Who—is—the—prime—minister—of—C-a-n-a-d-a?" (Araya, 1997).

My second premise is that those unpresentable, unspeakable, and yet unique "local" experiences are very valuable and they show us that there is much more to the image of the dominant and happy "global narrative." The tension between global and local lies in many great contemporary artworks that often take political and conceptual critique of the cultural *status quo*. Some of my artwork that address those issues more directly are *Peripatetic* and *Orthoepic Exercises*; *Walking Around*; *Octopus*;

Figure 5. Walking with arms, performance in Montreal, 2002. Photograph: Kinga Araya.

Grounded (I), (II); and *(III)*; *PolCan*, *Walking with Arms*; *Exercising with Princess Headgear (Adjustable*); and *Fifty-Five*.

One of my earliest sculptural performances from 1998, entitled *Peripatetic Exercise,* challenges the notion of walking while wearing heavy shoes: two cast iron hemispheres with imprints of my feet in the middle of each. In spite of the difficulty of balancing in the shoes, I attempt at the same time to play the Vivaldi Concerto in A-minor (a piece I learned as a child). During *Orthoepic Exercise* I walk around the swivel pole with a two-meter long extension of my tongue inserted into my mouth. My beautifully threatening instrument for correct (*ortho*) speech (*orthoepy)* sets up conditions for the war of pronouncing the words rightly. For this piece I performed in the enclosed and unifying space of a soundproof studio. It was a non-place, where the emerging language of violin and metal met as I walked around the swivel pole followed by the squeaky sound of an iron tongue weighing twenty-four kilograms. *Exercising with Princess Headgear (Adjustable)* was performed in a public space as I was climbing Mount Royal in Montréal. Dressed in black, I wore a beautiful yet cumbersome and dangerous copper hat that weighed about ten kilograms. *Walking with Arms* was the fourth interpretation of my walking and took place in each of the four seasons in Montréal's Jarry Park. In this case the prostheses are made out of maple wood and leather. These paradoxical extensions of the arms do not facilitate bodily movement. On the contrary, they represent grotesque attachments that exemplify the very impossibility of undertaking any unrestrained journey through time and space. The four "walking" artworks refer to the notion of prosthetics and they open up areas of indeterminacy that speak not only about aesthetics and beauty, but also about power relations. They problematize a formation of the *self* that has always been inscribed within the most immediate local context of family and community, extending towards the larger context of national and global dilemmas. The only two performances that were both tested in Poland and Canada were *Grounded (I)* and *(II)*, performed with the third prosthetic leg, and *PolCan*, wobbling and falling down because of the impossible red and white shoes, walking to the slowed-down cadence of the Polish and Canadian national anthems. It was interesting for me to experience the

development and the reception of these art pieces in my homeland and in my adopted country, Canada. While I did not experience major differences in the execution of the pieces, performing in Poland was more emotionally charged and more people (along with the media) were interested in my personal and artistic reasons for "coming home" to perform. Those two performances shared in the local and global dialectics and helped me to connect two of my distinct experiences, Polish and Canadian.

Coda

My personal, artistic and intellectual displacements that took me from Europe to North American and made me *walk* between music, theatre, art history, comparative literature, and visual arts. I realized that I perform at my best while engaging in a variety of artistic practices ranging from drawing, painting, photography, video, sound, sculpture to performance and installation art. Most of my artworks produced since 1996 address the reclamation of the body through differing and deferring discourses on loss. Often arranged in an installation situation, my art engages in the discourse of power relations where the rights of *free speech* and unrestrained *movement* through space are put into question.

My theoretical and visual research performed in Poland, Italy, Canada, Germany and United States, welcomes variety of intellectual contributions that have been teaching me how to *walk* and *talk* responsibly, how to make culture in a different way. The theories that served as important source of inspiration for me such as the deconstructive philosophy of Jacques Derrida and the psychoanalytical and critical examinations of estranged and exilic "self" by Julia Kristeva and Edward Said remain important parts of making art and doing academic research. In a certain way, they already announced and participated in the dialectics of the global and the local. Writing from different academic perspectives, Derrida, Kristeva and Said forcefully argue that a stranger, an exile, a *cast off* subject, puts cultural politics into crisis because she performs in opposition to institutionalized and globalized culture. I believe that speaking from an interdisciplinary space composed of personal and universal stories offers a great possibility to challenge ourselves and ask more critically, *who we are* and *why we are where we are*. By insisting on building *walking* and *talking* prostheses in iron, glass, copper and wood, and walking the Berlin Wall, I aspire to seize the meaning of the *self* where the dichotomy of personal and

universal does not exist. Constantly performing as an estranged body that moves *in* and *out* of socio-political and cultural frames, I deliberately exercise my artistic language by trying to transgress local and global worlds and to make sense of our personal and artistic flânerie in the world that both promises and denies.

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