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Looking Back on a Conversation¹

Raymonde April, Michèle Waquant, and Chantal Boulanger

The exhibition Migration areas brings together two artists whose artistic and personal journeys have crossed for more than thirty years. Raymonde April works mostly in photography, but also in film and video. Her work, which could be described as reflexive, is located at the crossroads of documentary and fiction and proposes transparent photographic representations, thereby reducing the distance between the images and their subjects. Born in Rivière-du-Loup, she has lived in Montreal since 1981. Michèle Waquant works in video and photography in addition to being a painter and a writer. In her work, by suspending time and paying close attention to the world, she creates affective encounters between people and things. Born in Quebec City, she has lived in Paris since 1980.

Chantal Boulanger, director, Centre d'expositions de Baie-Saint-Paul

Chantal Boulanger. In proposing this two-person exhibition, my intuition was that it seemed to be an opportunity for demonstrating the resonances that I have always felt in both your working methods. Going against the grain, I wonder how your collaboration modulated your ideas in elaborating a common project. In this exhibition, you don't create joint works, of course, but you have used already existing images to create relationships which suggest unexpected similarities between your artistic practices. Can you describe your selection process ?

Michèle Waquant. Our proposal was designed for Baie-Saint-Paul where, for my part, I didn't see myself exhibiting my work without contextualizing it. The fact that I live in France led me to question what I could do that would make sense in such a setting in Quebec. I wanted the viewer to realize the extent to which artworks are rooted and have a source. This was equally clear to Raymonde, and we began to reflect on what has shaped us, on our surroundings, and on what has made us what we are today. We sought out where we came from. Although the exhibition was first shown in Quimper in January 2005 at the invitation of

Dominique Abensour, this was merely a matter of scheduling. It had been conceived for Baie-Saint-Paul where it opened in April 2005.

C.B. In this sense, the approach you developed together reinvests both your productions. In the end, something came out of the idea of a two-person show that gave form, in another way, to my initial intuition.

Raymonde April. If you consider the images in *Fonds*, for example, the images that I gathered while thinking of Michèle, these are addressed to her. This exploration of my archives was meant for her, in thinking about her way of working.

C.B. As recipient...

R.A. As recipient and as partner. Your invitation always seemed to me to stem from the fact that Michèle and I have known each other a long time, that we share a long history of commitment, of friends in common, of travels, and of being photographers also. We said that if we ever undertook a project together, it would contain something of all these elements and of ourselves vis-à-vis this journey, because we have often served as a model for each other. The thing that stimulated me most was trying to perceive how she works and how we are different.

C.B. Is that the most important point in the end?

R.A. I think it's quite present. In this kind of common project, the components become connected while also remaining autonomous; properly speaking, no fusion takes place. We began thinking about the project during the summer of 2003 in Quebec, and then in February 2004 Michèle came to see me in New York where I was in residence for six months. This was when we really began working on the project. Michèle was familiar with my exploring of my archives, which I have been doing for nearly ten years: the film *Tout embrasser* and the video on my father, out of which a book was produced, *Soleils couchants*. We thought about the connections in our lives and our work. We had both arrived at that stage of our work where, after having accumulated, collected, and classified, we were looking at the images we had already created and we were concerned not to let pass the moment to look retrospectively at our work so that we would avoid repeating ourselves. The mass of images we have accumulated is very rich, but it also carries a weight. You have to take stock and be able to stop and look at what you have already done.

I still had all my pictures... I could use them like found images. I didn't see the need to create more.

M.W. We wanted to see how our pictures might co-exist in this sort of dialogue... We wanted them to speak to each other and bear witness to our individual journeys but also to our thirty-year friendship. We tried to find moments when our paths crossed and moments when they separated. And we agreed to focus our energy on the photography and video that we both practice, in order to realize how this work was gradually structured and established, in each of our lives and in our art.

To make our two journeys apparent, we had the intuition of a geographical and historical cartography. And as we progressed, this proposition increasingly focused on the idea of the St. Lawrence River. We decided to take into account the physical and mental geography that unites Baie-Saint-Paul on the north shore of the river with Raymonde, who was born in Rivière-du-Loup on the south shore just across the river, and me from Quebec City and having also lived in Cap-Rouge. It's not a metaphor, but rather a geographical fact upon which the idea of journey and direction is superimposed. A river has an upstream and a downstream. It starts at the source and flows to the sea; it has an inherent idea of direction. And taking into account all the tributaries that make it grow in size, if we expand this idea, it carries the weight of the past and moves toward the future. It's so close to an artist's life that this is where we found the common ground for our two-person show.

R.A. It's like the time line when you are editing. The time line that starts at one point and moves toward another point, becoming complicated by ramifications, repetitions, and superimpositions. The river's movement is a movement of transition toward something else.

M.W. My imaginary sees the river as an omnipresent landscape. It's not without cause that I make videos. Video is a river, it's a flux, like life.

A Geography

M.W. Following this story of the river, we arrived at the idea of cartography to bring into focus the form of the exhibition. We wanted to place two parallel life lines on the walls of the gallery, one on top of the other, like two currents encircling the space, with places where the lines would meet and vertical extensions of more personal developments. These two horizontals would be intersected by large images taken from our respective personal collections, like privileged moments when an idea crystallizes and acquires the status of a

work of art. We wanted these large images to be joined in such a way that they spoke to each other. *Fonds photographique* attests to our methods for creating images and the exhibition reveals this.

R.A. By creating pairs of images taken from *Fonds* and printed in large format, we were very careful not to create hierarchies, narration, similarities, or complementarities, nor did we want to create oppositions. In short, not too much complicity or similarity, and no antagonism—an equilibrium that is difficult to find. We had equidistant images in mind. We had to suggest virtualities but we also had to avoid overdetermining a meaning that would block the viewer's reading of the work.

It seems to me that in each pairing there is a suspended moment, a third route. Even if there are resonances, these remain in the background. This part of the project we really did carry out together. But because of these large-format pictures (we had each made fifteen) we had to revise our idea of horizontal lines, because when we spread everything out in the gallery in Quimper, we realized that the space they occupied did not enable us, in the way we had imagined, to juxtapose them with small-format pictures. We had to react very quickly, which led us to arrange all these images on a platform by regrouping them in side-by-side columns. It's a *body of work* that ranges from 1980, the year Michèle left Quebec for France, to 2004.

C.B. With respect to these large formats, *Fonds* is like a kind of mould that you've flattened out.

M.W. Like what is underneath, what nourishes... It has all levels of images: intimate photos, documentary photos, and in my case images shot while scouting locations for video projects, and images on which I based paintings.

C.B. This description reminds me of the way the Quebec landscape is laid out: land is distributed in parallel rows along both sides of the river with perpendicular roads.

M.W. Geography designates a physical territory, but it is also mental, and in this sense, it is tied to memory. These two axes are interconnected. The map gradually takes shape by laying out a certain story, which has a certain geography. Our work took shape slowly in this overlapping process. What interested me most, and at the same time troubled me about this process, was finding myself on ground that Raymonde had incorporated into her practice for some time now, and which because of our common project, cast me into a different and unfamiliar reading of my images. I can't find the right expression to describe this.

R.A. A kind of attentive and retrospective examination of already existing images.

M.W. An observation.

R.A. Yes, an observation...

M.W. This is what gradually led us to the idea of migration, because of our travels, my life in France, and the fact that we see each other only occasionally. And observation is probably what most ties us together—this manner of being in the world, of looking at the world.

R.A. To evoke migration is also to designate zones, travels, and round trips that correspond, in the exhibition, to our different approaches. And, you and I have a great curiosity for birds and animals.

M.W. The title reflects the fact the exhibitions are also in migration...

R.A. Yes, this comes back to what you were saying at the beginning of the interview, that we took contextualization into account. Exhibiting my work in France and exhibiting your work in Baie-Saint-Paul. Each of us foreigners in different places. And the exhibition at VOX will bring us together again in Montreal. It has a symbolic quality, doesn't it?

The Activist Years

C.B. In the history of your journeys comes the question of La Chambre Blanche in Quebec City and of your involvement in an artists' collective. Is this where you met?

R.A. We've known each other since university and were active together in a first collective called Comme Galerie in Quebec City. This is where Michèle and I had our first exhibition together. That was in 1974... I have pictures of this in my album no. 37!

C.B. Did this involvement affect your work?

M.W. At La Chambre Blanche, everyone thought about their project with respect to the issues that we raised together. But in fact, there were two La Chambre Blanche. The first was founded by Fabienne Bilodeau and Raymonde. In the beginning, it was a place for producing

and disseminating photography. This is where I learned photography with Raymonde. The following year, we had the idea of pursuing this experience by opening it up to all sorts of artistic practices, and thanks to the dues paid by our forty members, we rented space in Quebec City's lower town where we devised major events like *L'Objet fugitif* and *Danse actuelle*, which led us beyond the specificity of our individual projects. Alongside these projects an artistic environment was established, and we had to understand the issues at stake in this opening, to contextualize our personal research. For me, this was decisive. I worked on *Bulletin*, and this is when I began writing as a way of prompting discussion about our activities, about defending our ideas and analysing our objectives. It was a time of achieving awareness and of free speech.

R.A. My work benefited greatly from La Chambre Blanche, which was a true laboratory for experience because of the field of experimentation that it generated, and also because of my role as co-director. We threw ourselves very energetically and radically into our activities, and we had a very public and strategic position in the context of that time. Unlike Michèle, I did not contribute theoretically to the socio-political debates, but positioned myself with respect to the entire artistic community both in Quebec and outside Quebec.

C.B. Parallel to these experimental acts, to these reflexive activities, there was also a militant component to our commitment in those days. This was when I met you both and when I also realized the need in Quebec City for a place where we could introduce and debate issues in contemporary art, collectively and outside of institutions.

R.A. It was a matter of equipping ourselves with the tools for disseminating our work outside of institutional networks. Our centre was part of a nascent network of "parallel galleries" across Quebec and in the rest of Canada. At first, we operated only on members' dues, and then gradually we began receiving subsidies from government programs. In the 1980s, the number of "parallel galleries" multiplied, they became "artist-run centres" that played an important role in the dissemination of visual and media art. And La Chambre Blanche still exists in Quebec City...

Genealogy

C.B. How did you move from the idea of geography to that of genealogy, which is not self-evident? I admit this was something in your proposal that startled me. Is it possible to say that geography, when it is subjected to history, also implies a return to the past?

R.A. In reflecting on the origin of our images, we began to search the personal side of our histories. Undoubtedly, because Michèle had just begun to go through a large collection of family letters and pictures, the idea of genealogy quickly arose, and we naturally added this dimension to our exploration, to this journey upstream from our present-day work in order to put it into perspective. This is how we had the idea of *Albums* made up of family photos. We developed them separately because they are different histories, but in the exhibition, this becomes a true two-person project because we chose identical scrapbooks.

My forty albums begin around 1878 with a small handwritten notebook that I reproduce in its entirety in my album no. 1. They end in the 1980s around the time when *Fonds photographique* begins. Michèle's albums begin in 1860 and go to 2002. Just as she incorporated into her albums reproductions of works found in the Musée du Québec, I included photographs taken by my father and referred to music in the form of reproductions of album covers: the music my father liked (Bach, Beethoven, Schubert), music I listened to as a student (Ferré, Dylan, Billie Holiday), and the 78 rpm records I inherited from my aunt Rolande. My final albums are made up of my first photographs, in 1973-74.

M.W. We try to establish the map gradually, its meaning derives from a history. *Albums* is an extension of *Fonds*, a consequence of the very form we had imagined. After a while, more and more historically remote elements resurface. For example, the collection of family pictures that I became keeper of after my mother's death became important to me at that moment because I was engaged in this kind of undertaking. All those images that constructed me without my realizing it released in me a movement of acknowledgement, and I felt the need to find a form for them.

For me, imagination is composed of various strata in which we are immersed. There are also different levels of meaning. For example, four of my thirty-one albums are devoted to works in the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. I lived in Quebec City and I was often taken to visit the museum when I was little. In the context of the exhibition, it seemed to me indispensable to bear witness to the importance of my childhood contact with Quebec art and which determined my relationship to art. The works of Joseph Légaré, Zacharie Vincent and so many other painters, many of them local and self-taught, had an effect on me similar to the effect that Raymonde's father's photographs had on her. These are foundational images.

C.B. Can you say how you were marked by these artists? How did this influence the way you work?

M.W. It was my first relationship with those things that merited preservation. At the time, this museum contained paintings, religious statues, a birch bark canoe that took up an entire hall space, a bear standing on its hind legs... The relationship to a bygone world that had made us what we are and that had been displayed and preserved with great respect. There was also a feeling of grandeur, like in a church. Curiously, years later at La Chambre Blanche, Fabienne Bilodeau and I produced a report for “saving” this museum. In 1979, it was unthinkable for me that we could lose this museum that had positioned me on the path of art and to see it transformed into a vague concept of an ecological museum, “Le Musée de l’Homme d’ici.”

C.B. Indeed, there was discussion about transforming it into a sort of general museum of Quebec culture that would have included both art and every facet of social life.

M.W. What I’m saying here will seem contradictory, because this project seems to return to the museum of my childhood, except that, well, in the interval there has been the passage of time. My studies and artistic practice have taught me that art cannot serve as illustration of culture. It is an autonomous part of the great space of imagination. Nevertheless, we didn’t preach sacrifice, we demanded two museums. And we were proved right, the city was enriched by having an art museum and a museum of civilization.

C.B. All this research might be seen as being a quest for identity. Was this also an element of your common project?

M.W. When the family collections became a part of our project, they enabled us to mark out some of the main themes of our work. The albums we created grew in number. I visited Raymonde in the summer of 2004, at the Cacouna chalet on the river bank just across from Baie-Saint-Paul, with an initial grouping of my family photos. In the course of classifying hundreds of photos, I realized that I come from a family of pictures. There were six generations, from the nineteenth century until 2002... There is only one picture of my paternal great-grandmother, but everyone from my direct family is represented: father, mother, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great grandparents. For some of them, there are pictures ranging from birth until death.

C.B. It’s rare for people to have so many pictures going so far back.

M.W. Part of my family, on my father’s side, lived in France. The first pictures date from 1860, thirty years after the discovery of photography. They are not narratives as such, but from these pictures comes an understanding that we never come from nowhere—perhaps this

is the true meaning of identity. We are shaped by everything around us, and indelibly so during childhood. And essentially, we are shaped by family histories, by stories we believe to be true but that are obviously the fruit of inevitable reinterpretations. Through all these photographs, what is most striking is the manner in which these people present themselves to the camera's lens. Seen over six generations, this discovery led me to rethink my own way of photographing.

C.B. Michèle speaks of a plunge into the past and the archives in which we can recognize a quest for identity. In your case Raymonde, this is less assertive.

R.A. There are fewer people in my family. On my father's side, there are very few descendants, it's a branch that is almost extinct. But because my father took photographs and had a darkroom, I inherited a great number of pictures of the same people, sometimes in duplicate copies. My grandfather April's house, on rue Alexandre (in Rivière-du-Loup), continually returns. Its façade serves as a backdrop to countless portraits. And this family of raconteurs took evident pleasure in posing and storytelling. On my mother's side, family members were more numerous but more dispersed: I found fewer pictures, and I found them later. In this sense, what I have is more concentrated than what Michèle has. And I still visit continually the landscape that I come from. I left it behind one day, but I return to it frequently.

C.B. Did you feel the need for a historical revisiting before this project? I had not imagined at all that I'd see these types of references in your exhibition.

R.A. In terms of my work, there is a logic to such a going back in time. I've been reflecting on the archives for more than ten years. My film *Tout embrasser*, which uses 517 images made since I began working, is a good example. Before that, I had designed two public art projects, *La fortune* and *Le monde des images*, which used old negatives that came from my family. My book *Soleils couchants* already spoke of my father's relationship to music, to landscape, to this kind of mental space tied to memory and in which we find ourselves when faced with familiar landscapes... So when Michèle and I spoke about this project, this idea didn't spring out of nowhere. It was being prepared in different forms. This project may be the one that has crystallized this quest. The most important thing about the work I've undertaken with Michèle was being able to take this plunge into my archives in parallel with her own exploration.

C.B. Does this also enable you to confirm the aesthetic choices you have always made, or is this not important? Can the ways in which you privilege reality be seen as deriving in part from this? In the past, there have been a lot of images in your work of characters tied to the landscape, this has been in your work for a long time.

R.A. Here, there's a difference: I stand aside more, I try to remain in the background, to let the images speak. For some time now, I have placed a lot of trust in a "neutral" level of photography in which the fixed images embody and reveal something that exists apart from me. But of course in the end, when you look at the entire sequence of *Albums* and the structure of *Fonds*, I'm right there in the middle of it all.

C.B. Yes, but at the same time, I think we're far from autobiography. A personification of all these people emerges. For someone who doesn't know you, there's nothing about the pictures in *Fonds* to indicate that it's so intimate.

R.A. Even so, *Fonds* and *Albums* have a similar purpose. And in *Albums*, I made the choice of using "I," of writing in the first person: "Here is my father, here is my grandmother, here..." Even if the underlying motivation for establishing this body of work seems clear and easy to understand, this project was very demanding on a personal level. I was constantly in doubt as to its relevance and interest for outsiders. For me, this research is essential, but it is not necessarily artistic. Obviously, anyone can do the same thing. But in saying this, the artistic gesture is named in a more tenuous and more fragile manner. Here there is no fiction, none at all. It's documentary, at least in my intention, regardless of what people construct out of the pictures when they look at them. All these pictures are real, they have been experienced, nothing has been invented. I think this is the exhibition's strongest message.

For *Inconsciencies* and *Zwin Zwin*, the issues are different. These projects are independent of our collaboration, they are very personal works. But for the rest, for this entire mass of images shown here, we truly did consciously decide to do something at the boundaries of art: something historical, documentary, and highly referential. These pictures are intended for a public who isn't necessarily familiar with our work. It's quite audacious and I'm very happy with the results.

C.B. Yet people who know your work will search for a link with what you have both done elsewhere.

R.A. From the outset, in the section of *Fonds photographique* that concerns me, a viewer who knows my work will recognize familiar figures. Since 1981, my entire family has been

constantly represented in my work: my father, my mother, my grandmother, my two sisters, my brother, their children. There is also my chosen family: Serge, Marcel, Jean-Charles, Gérald, Fabienne. . . Everything is held together by landscapes, scenes, paintings. Certainly for me, there is a part of chronological journey that is inscribed and continuous in my artistic practice. (...)

When I was finished, I felt a great sadness. Perhaps it was a fear of finding myself alone. For months and months all these ghosts accompanied me, and then they were gone. And the evocative force of these found pictures continues to trouble me. In fact, Michèle and I have the impression of having undertaken a very demanding job of mourning. But at the same time, it is also liberating, because it was completely engrossing and a little obsessive. As an artist, you recognize the madness and disequilibrium present in artistic creation—you investigate shadowy zones with precaution, the most unstable and fragile aspects of yourself. Even for people close to me, it may have seemed bizarre to see me devote so much time to classifying these personal archives.

Transmission

C.B. All these photos could have remained in your families.

R.A. Something fundamental arose with these pictures of our family histories—it was that this memory is so quickly dispersed! You become aware of death, of disappearance, of loss. You find yourself at the heart of the question of transmission, of the terrible attempt to keep things alive.

M.W. If this material is not given form, it loses its meaning. Whatever is not given form disappears. For the most part, I wasn't familiar with the pictures in my albums; they didn't exist until I had classified them. They didn't exist for anyone, because the people who could have given them names are dead for the most part. This too, is what it is to be an artist: to transmit, to give something a transmittable form.

R.A. All members of a family have a right to the heritage of pictures. But who is going to devote the time required to give them a shape? I too believe that giving shape to these images is essential to allow them to continue to exist.

M.W. For me the issue is even more complicated because I want to speak directly to the two societies I was born of. By making this classification public, in one stroke I both claim my

belonging and demand it as well. And because there are ancestors and contemporaries right up until 2002, I express the persistence of this belonging. This is a very important social territory that is not solely individual.

R.A. I agree with Michèle, in the end it's not necessary to be one of the initiated to have a sense of the project's importance.

M.W. Transmission is part of an artist's commitment. The fabric of art weaves a mesh that covers many more aspects of life than merely the moment in which we live. I'm convinced of this. I think that all artists believe this also, or that in any event they don't escape it. It's inherent to art.

C.B. Is it a historical inscription, a universal heritage?

M.W. It's a transcultural mental geography in which another history exists, one that obeys its own proper chronology.

C.B. Isn't the viewer going to connect it much more to his or her own history?

M.W. And why not? Our aim wasn't to present an individual history that would be only personal and specific. We also wanted to share it, to offer it to the viewer...

R.A. By avoiding an overdetermination of subjectivity, we wanted precisely to leave openings that would allow others to enter.

C.B. To leave room for the viewer.

R.A. Of course, geographic belonging does not guarantee the possibility of identifying with a work of art. In Quebec, so much knowledge has not been inventoried, so many stories have not been written. I am committed to recognizing the artist that my father was—the artist that neither my aunt Rolande nor my aunt Raymonde ever became, and to make the viewer feel the great force of this inspiration in their lives.

M.W. And which was not for nothing, because you became an artist.

Inconsciences

I'd like to discuss the work that each of you have done individually for this exhibition. *Inconsciences* is a series of large-format inkjet images on matte paper—panoramic, coloured, and framed in white. Can you tell us, Raymonde, when and why you began this new work?

R.A. In July 2002 I bought a digital camera, just before going on vacation in Cacouna. I learned how to use it by photographing landscapes and all my usual subjects. I continued shooting in Montreal and during my stay in New York. That's where the form of the work came to me. I printed the images when I got back to Quebec.

C.B. This is the way you have always worked, but something has changed in the sequential effect you used. Is this because you have recently begun working in video?

R.A. I don't think video is the reason, because it's a technology that interests me more specifically for recording movement and sound together. But I see very interesting analogies between the two languages. I use Coolpix to make still pictures. It is flexible and lightweight enough for me to take many shots, and I keep almost all of them. When I view them, I look at them in series, like a slide projection, which produces a kind of animation.

C.B. How did the form take shape?

R.A. The project I gave myself when I was in New York was to gather the most immediate and non-composed images possible, with a more jarring and fragmentary temporality than usual. Digital photography lends itself to this approach—in fact, it may provoke it! I pursued this kind of impulsive and repetitive shooting, on the lookout for colour, construction, certain details of artworks, street images, nocturnal scenes. I wanted to create series that were very free and in which colour contrasts would also rebound onto contrasts of subjects, atmospheres, and geographies. I proceeded by way of oppositions and complementarities. I arranged the images in horizontal bands, a form I use quite frequently.

The title alludes to a certain state of awakening, just before observation, attention, and gaze so to speak. For me, the fact that everything is interspersed and mixed in together—real and imagined characters, works of art seen from the side, geographical sites, public spaces, animal museums, saturated colours—corresponds with a questioning related to unfamiliar settings and displacement.

C.B. Is this a specific moment in your work or do you plan to continue developing this idea?

R.A. I think that it's entirely connected to my stay in New York, to the period following the death of my father, when I felt the need to put everything into perspective and to alter my methods, my subjects. It also introduces ideas about contemplation and levels of representation: ancient and contemporary art as tools of knowledge, museums in large cities abroad, culture shock, childhood landscapes, the presence and absence of people we love...

Zwin Zwin

C.B. In the installation *Zwin Zwin* there is an anamorphic projection of a crow and three television sets at different heights where we see images of a great white owl, a barn owl, and a great horned owl in cages. In your videos, animals and nature often recur in a very particular treatment of temporality. Can you describe this?

M.W. When I make a video, I reflect a lot on the medium, on the act of framing that is one of confinement. What is in the frame excludes what is not in the frame, even if what is occurring outside it continues to operate. I think of the television set as a cage. The notion of confinement in the image is central to me, because long ago this constraint of the frame prevented me from devoting myself to painting. By going to live in France, by adopting video as my medium, I had to confront this. In Europe, where painting has incredible significance, I was fascinated by this question and I truly explored it in many ways; in drawing and painting of course, but especially in my video work.

C.B. So we can't speak of an anthropomorphic relationship to animals in your work.

M.W. No. *Zwin Zwin* is probably the video installation that is closest to my very first video, *Loups*, which was made up in part of a single half-hour shot of a cage of wolves at the Vincennes Zoo. Curiously, like the rest of the exhibition, here I am also returning to the source of an artistic practice. Once again, I address the question of the cage in a direct and absolutely radical manner. Its presence becomes a motif that I emphasize. The bird is confined inside the motif, embedded by the cage and the monitor. As in the choice of the title: *Zwin* is a bird refuge in northern Belgium, and I entitled the work *Zwin Zwin* to bring to mind "Sing Sing," that terrible prison (...).

But there are also more secret strata. The image of the great white owl, for example, is a reference. Great white owls appear often in my videos. For me, they have an emblematic

quality. In the same way that I used wolves and bears, or the cry of the loon. For me, the crow, the great horned owl, and the great white owl are totemic creatures—they express a geographically identifiable belonging to Quebec.

C.B. Curiously, the question of identity re-emerges here. One sees it throughout your work.

M.W. Anyone who analyses my videos from the point of view of belonging will find in all of them a moment when I say that I am Québécoise.

C.B. That's fascinating to see. And in the installation there are images of your father that are entirely relevant to what you've just said.

M.W. I conceived this installation for *Aires de migrations* in the context of our two-person project. I included my father's war pictures, images of which the existence I was unaware and that my brother mentioned to me when I was gathering material for *Albums*. My father never spoke much about the war. He immigrated to Canada in 1947. We knew he was in the Canadian army because that's how he met my mother who was his wartime pen pal. I learned all this mostly from my great aunt Simonne. And suddenly my father's war pictures appeared, very poor pictures in which we see practically nothing and of which I knew nothing. The fact that my father always felt treated like a foreigner, a situation I experienced in reverse in France... the trap of war, the cages where they lock up nocturnal predators on a preserve—all this is conjugated and synthesized in this video.

C.B. So you're saying there is a direct link to your exhibition project with Raymonde.

M.W. I speak about myself, about being a foreigner, about confinement, about historical events that change people's lives. But I give very little explanation in the installation itself. I let things exist. People will see a great horned owl, a great white owl, a barn owl, and a crow. The barn owl's gaze, a yellow eye against a white background, is in a direct line with the black eye of the crow, which reflects the landscape and in which war images are seen. The eye opens and closes like a shutter, like a camera lens. This is inscribed upon the form without discourse, without explanation.

Undoubtedly, it was this proximity to Raymonde's work and this gigantic stirring of memory that unleashed the need to introduce my father here. A two-fold movement: first a link to the subject of *Loups*, and then these superimposed images in the eye of the crow... Yes, I really think that the "retrospective" gesture undertaken with Raymonde led me to this installation.

R.A. I find it very significant also to see a great white owl in *Zwin Zwin*, like the one my father photographed... There are so many connections, it's crazy...

C.B. On that subject, Raymonde, what status do you give your father's photos in the exhibition?

R.A. In my series *Le monde des images* in 1999, I had already used numerous pictures lent to me by my father. When I showed him this work he laughed, but I think he was touched to have been cited. In *Aires de migrations*, the artistic status of his pictures is even more emphasized. These images from the 1950s—my mother in a red jacket, the zoo—were slides that we looked at in a viewer. When I was little, I thought of them as kind of iconic in a way, and I think that they are what initiated me to the photographic gaze. I discovered the more recent pictures—the eels, the dock, the great white owl, the vacationers in Florida—in 2001 after his death, and I was struck by their autonomy, their daring, their perfection. I wanted to exhibit them as works of art in their own right as a way of paying homage to this space of freedom that he preserved in his life and that he bequeathed to me...

A Territory

C.B. I'd like to get at what underlies this project.

R.A. This project became so huge, it demanded so much energy! All the time spent gathering this material, all the emotional investment, all the work of decoding and deducing. For us, it was a year-long immersion in a maniacal, demanding, and mysterious activity... Michèle and I didn't have much of a chance to talk about it, we were so busy creating it, but we had the feeling of a job that never ended! The size of the project greatly exceeded our estimates! *Fonds photographique* is made up of about 250 pictures from each of us, and how many thousands of pictures in *Albums*, and how many hundreds left out—and to each of these we had to devote at least a few seconds of examination in order to make our choices! Since the project is different from the ones we are usually accustomed to, its success, or quite simply its existence as an autonomous object remains to be understood, to be defined.

C.B. Do you mean that you haven't yet removed yourselves from the process?

M.W. We had a little difficulty stepping back to gauge the real scope of the entire project. The work of bringing things together for the publication, of giving them captions, and this

conversation we're having now, all of this gives us the opportunity to distance ourselves from the project a little—something that I feel a strong need for at the moment.

C.B. If I were to try to sum up everything we have talked about, we could say that the basis of *Aires de migrations* is an examination of the method and origin of your work, that it is an exploration of the ways you construct images, which the viewer might be led into reading as a documentary exhibition. Do you think you took this into account?

R.A. For me, above all, this exhibition generates knowledge. To speak of it in these terms is to underscore a process that is constantly evolving.

M.W. I'm inclined to speak of the whole of virtualities that take form in the space of the exhibition. This happens in a powerful way with the large, connected photographs, for example, and is something that couldn't have been predicted, and that couldn't have been predetermined either. Even if we might have had an intuition—and this, moreover, is how we proceeded, by exchanging photos over the Internet, with each of us then making her choices—something previously unfamiliar to us arose and became meaningful.

C.B. In our discussion of each of the exhibition's components—*Albums*, *Fonds*, the large-format photos as well as *Inconsciencés* and *Zwin Zwin*—the issues appear to be quite clear. But the exhibition has its own proper form, one that must be addressed but whose central element is not easily characterized. The question of time, of temporality, seems to me to be one way that we might bring together all the components of the overall project. Does this reworking of your archives lead to this kind of analysis of your previous works?

R.A. Even though I was already individually engaged in this process, this exhibition forces me into a repositioning and proposes an adventure. In what is presented here, our double itinerary is continually redivided and becomes more complex as it takes stock of both the near and distant past, with personal pictures and found photos. It is a never-ending branching off, like in family photo albums where there is a paternal side and a maternal side, and for Michèle, the dual belonging to France and Quebec. The constant presence of the dual and its subdivisions fascinates me. The question of time, if predominant, is never of a unidirectional time. They are simultaneities within which the landscape is constantly changing, moving, and being reconstituted into possible and fluctuating directions. You're right to say that it is difficult to locate the central element of this exhibition. In fact, it's completely impossible! And so much the better.

M.W. That wasn't our goal.

R.A. Accepting duality gave us a great deal of mobility in our choices.

M.W. I see this exhibition as being close to my video work. In fact it has revealed lines of subterranean constructions. But, just like in digital editing, the route can be modified in numerous ways, by deciding to focus on such-and-such an image in order to highlight it, or to the contrary, to keep it in the background. This is what is at work in the book on the exhibition. For example, the two-person, large-format prints in the exhibition are found vis-à-vis other images in the book. Certain pairings have been modified. We have redeployed each element of the exhibition in the different space the book presents. But also, probably, because of time, the time that has passed in the case of what we have exhibited. This has nothing to do with better or worse. It's simply a case of other possibilities, other interpretations, other readings. In this sense, our quest stayed as close as possible to the very subject of memory itself and its way of evolving in combinations that are unexpected, unsettled, and yet always effective.

¹ Baie-Saint-Paul, Quebec, 16 April 2005.