NEW PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES FOR WORKING WITH WOMEN
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" - You know, I was thinking of you the day before yesterday.

- Really? How nice! Why did you think of me?

- Well, look. I've been poor all my life, although I was never so poor before as I have been during these last ten years. I've always had to struggle to put food in my children's mouths, and even though sometimes I get tired of struggling so hard, I go on, and I try to be strong. But there's one thing, just one thing that drives me crazy, and that's when I wake up in the morning and I don't even have a scrap of bread to give my children. And that happened to me on Wednesday.

- And why did you think of me?

- Because there was no one I could ask for help, no one I could ask for bread or money. I was going crazy. And then ... I thought of you, Alcira. I remembered about relaxing and how you say that if you can relax, you can think better. So then I went back to bed. It was really hard for me to do it but I did the relaxation exercise, and as soon as I had, I remembered my comadre who lives a ways off ... and I went there and she gave me some bread."

(Leontina is 50 years old, short, dark, thin, has an angular face and has lost all her teeth. She has been running a community soup kitchen for the past six years, is from the southern part of the country, has lived in Santiago for almost 30 years, has five children and several grandchildren. They all live together, sharing their poverty.)
FOREWORD

Since the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women, in 1975, numerous initiatives have been mounted in Latin America and the Caribbean by the Governments as well as by non-governmental organizations and social organizations of the region in order to explore the complex ways in which women participate in society. In some cases the focus has been on social or political participation, while in others attention has centered on organizational issues, popular education or creativity. In recent years, studies and activities have also been undertaken with a view to incorporating the dimension of gender into broader spheres of action. By the same token, a greater amount of attention has clearly been devoted to women in sectoral analyses as well.

An enormous number of groups are studying this issue; many of them are concerned with ideological questions, and these groups often become involved in traditional spheres of political activity. Some of them take a feminist perspective, while others concentrate on improving the living conditions of low-income sectors or on popular education. Although it would be very difficult to describe them all and impossible to evaluate all their activities, many of them provide us with insights which enhance our perception of reality and with new variables to be taken into consideration in the design of social policies.

Since most of these study groups are primarily action-oriented, the professionals working in these areas have failed to address the issue of how to systematize their activities and have thus hindered the transmission of what has been learned. As a result, there is a widening gap between those who are producing the information and analyses (who are somewhat removed from the reality of the day-to-day situation) and those who might be said to be working with that reality, but who do not manage to transmit what they have learned about it. Nonetheless, the contributions that have been made to our understanding of qualitative dimensions of the issue and the development of innovative methodologies have not only enriched the efforts of those who are working with women, but have also opened up a vast array of new possibilities for action-oriented research involving low-income sectors in general. The different type of sensitization experienced by the participants in this process has engendered new types of interactive dynamics within these groups and in their relationship
with society as a whole, thereby permitting them to move into spheres in which women had not participated before.

Although backstopping these types of activities is not a regular part of ECLAC's work, the Commission has provided support for such initiatives on some occasions, especially when they have been of methodological interest. Indeed, many of the new methodologies do, in fact, warrant attention and dissemination, and could help to bridge the gap between theory and action, and between the generation of new information and its application.

Expressive body movement/dance appears to be an extremely valuable tool for group work. The work being done by Alcira Mujica is, of course, based on her vast experience and training, but it is also based on a great capacity to give of herself and a strong commitment to the groups with which she works. These characteristics appear to be essential to the success of some of the participatory methodologies being used in action-oriented research, and they should therefore be explicitly defined in some way when these activities are being systematized and evaluated. For this reason, an interview with the group leader has been included in the annex to this publication in order to provide the reader with as much background information on this technique as possible.

* See, for example, Participación de la mujer en actividades comunitarias: estudio de casos (E/CEPAL/R.322/Rev.1), ECLAC, Santiago, Chile, 1982.
INTRODUCTION

This study draws upon a series of activities conducted between 1982 and 1986 in Guayaquil, Ecuador, but it primarily describes activities which were carried out between 1986 and 1989 in Santiago, Chile.

The idea of using the technique known as "expressive body movement" as a means of fostering the growth, development and participation of women in marginal sectors arose out of the conviction that the language of movement entails much more than just creating forms in space according to the possibilities and limitations of the human body.

This language involves a very profound form of communication and prompts us to question our way of being, of feeling, of acting, thereby promoting behavioural changes.

Certainly the body's expressive possibilities are endless, and the achievement of excellence in terms of performance and creativity can, if it transcends us, become art. It is also true, however, that art can arise out of changes in the behaviour of individuals which lead to social change.

A baseline analysis of the situation in the most seriously disadvantaged sectors revealed:
- severe oppression;
- unsatisfied basic needs;
- individual, psychological and social needs which were not being met.

Women, in particular, are also confronted by a strongly chauvinistic society and by authoritarianism and violence on the part of their husbands or partners, which makes them withdraw further into themselves and away from the community.

The activities conducted in Chile with women from low-income sectors were sponsored by the Vicaría de la Solidaridad of the northern zone of Santiago.

The expressive body movement workshop was generally offered when the organizations concerned requested an activity "which gives us strength to go on living".

During these sessions the women gradually learn how to relax and how to become aware of each part of their bodies, and they thus discover that they are capable of expressing their sorrows and their joys through dance. They establish a link between themselves and the earth that gives them access to the energy flowing from its centre and to a tangible means of generating their own positive energy, which they can then share with the group.
As each woman begins, through the expressive body movement exercises, to show who she really is—with all her fears, doubts, insecurities, joys and sorrows—she gains a different, deeper and genuine awareness of herself and of the other women in the group.

An observation of these groups at work and the comments of the participants themselves confirm that, by the conclusion of such a workshop, the women value themselves more, the way they move and hold themselves has changed notably, they have changed behavioural habits, and they are able to express their emotions. Another important achievement is the establishment of genuine bonds of friendship among the women, perhaps as a result of the fact that they have truly given of themselves to the group and have shown themselves to each other as they really are.

This signals the emergence of what might be termed an affective culture which enables each of its members to regain their sensitivity and retain the ability to feel emotions. The pleasure of watching the mountains as the landscape changes with the seasons and as their hue changes with the play of sunlight on the peaks, of smelling the flowers which herald the coming of Spring, of watching a bird in flight, of taking joy from the first hesitant steps of a child, of looking deeply into the eyes of those we love—these are perhaps forgotten emotions.

Perhaps emotions are one of the few things available to the poor.

The following study is divided into five sections which are structured in such a way as to make these experiential activities intelligible to those interested in learning about this technique with a view to the possibility of employing it to add another dimension to popular education programmes.

The study begins with an explanation of the language of expressive body movement/dance. This is followed by a methodological discussion which emphasizes the fact that this methodology can also be applied to other types of groups, whether composed of men or of both sexes. The third chapter provides a working guide which, as its name suggests, is a flexible outline of the steps followed in this activity. The fourth chapter concerns the role of the group leader and the leader's commitment to the participants. Emphasis is placed on the need for professionalism in this type of effort, since, as the study demonstrates, working with the body prompts strong emotions which have an impact on the body itself. These effects have to be processed before the participants can achieve the ability to express emotions with their bodies. Hence, no matter how simple an exercise may seem, if it is directed by someone who is not qualified in this area, it may do considerable, and in some cases perhaps irreparable, damage.

The final chapter sets forth some of the statements made by the women themselves, since their personal impressions are ultimately the best yardstick for evaluating this technique.

All of the statements are word-for-word quotations (which were taped or provided in response to a request for a written evaluation) or very nearly so (some were noted down by the group leader in a notebook or on a scrap of paper as she rode home after a class,
defying the lurches and sudden stops of the buses which cross the city
at, without exception, breakneck speed).

The photographs were taken while the women were working and are
entirely spontaneous glimpses of the forms they etched in space.

It has been difficult to set down a systematic account in these
pages of such a dynamic experience in which it is very difficult to
know what will happen next. But this is precisely the beauty of it,
what makes it so enriching and rewarding. One learns so much, so that
others may learn too. One feels even more, and the emotions are
powerful.

The main objective of this study is to allow those who read its
pages to grasp the essence of this technique, which is simply the
awakening in all of us an awareness of the necessity of recovering our
own bodies, of letting the body live, express itself, and speak in its
own language so that it can tell us all it knows and all it remembers.
I. The Language of Expressive Body Movement/Dance

There is no doubt about the fact that many people, if not almost all, are not deeply in touch with their body's make-up and are usually only aware of one or another of its parts when that part hurts, bothers them or is injured.

It is also true that the rules laid down by society engender a certain rigidity in the way we see and use our bodies because we are not allowed to give full expression to affection or emotions.

The combination of these two factors suggests that our feelings are negated as a consequence of the negation of movement. I feel an emotion less strongly because I would not have any way to express that emotion. It is impossible to determine just how great an influence this type of physical inhibition has on each person's emotional capacity, but it is clear that it does have a considerable effect.

Expressive body movement is one of the techniques which can be used to counteract this inhibition, and it is the most effective among them because it is in itself a language. The language of the body is manifested and perceived on various levels simultaneously because it integrates a human being's physical, affective and intellectual spheres.

As people learn this discipline, they achieve a progressively more profound mastery over their physical selves. The means by which they attain this mastery are a growing awareness and sensitivity and the resulting command over their bodies that allow them to attain the expressiveness, freedom and ability to communicate which they seek.

At the same time, the individual's heightened sensitivity transcends and is reflected in all of his or her activities.

The focal point of the work is the body, and the body is conceived of as an "integrated person", i.e., as a unit whose feelings, psyche, social self and movements are inseparable, a person as a source of creativity, as an instrument and as the one who plays that instrument.

The human being/body which is both a part of its environment and a product of that environment is the source of the image that motivates and creates its dance and the force that moves it to action. It is also the instrument that gives expression to this motivational image, which is embodied in the body, as well as being the player of that instrument, since the body itself dances. Each person performs his or her dance with their body in order to communicate with others through the language of the body.
In this concept of dance as a language, the body—or, in other words, the whole person—is preeminent because the body is the source of the will to dance, of the sensation and emotion of dancing, and of the images generated by the body and expressed in and with that body.

Each person has his or her own dance and it is therefore an intrinsic part of the person. It is an individual language that offers unending possibilities for creativity and communication unhindered by language barriers.

The first thing that anybody discovers about him or herself is the body, precisely because each person is a body and has a body. A person who does not accept their corporeality is unable to accept him or herself in a profound sense.

The body is the vehicle of life; however, this day-to-day, wordless language—the first spoken by each human being—is gradually forgotten as a person becomes intellectualized.

The intellect takes over the body, limiting it to the faintest possible forms of expression. The dialectics of power are played out in the body itself as we take heed of society's dictum that we should use our minds to enslave our bodies. Psychiatry says that the body is a reflection of the soul. If this is true, then if we stretch our body, we stretch our soul; if we move our body, we move our soul; and if we allow it to express itself, we are allowing our soul to speak.

Despite all this potential, this sort of de-corporealization causes the human being to forget his or her body's capacity to feel and to express itself and to gradually lose the ability to communicate with others by non-verbal means.

This intrinsic language of mankind is what came to be known in the 1950s, in Argentina, as expressive body movement and what is now known as expressive body movement/dance.

A deep belief in the need to revive this language as a means of rediscovering ourselves, knowing ourselves, accepting ourselves, assuming responsibility for ourselves and hence becoming self-directed is the basis for the proposed methodology which will be discussed, in this case as applied to working with low-income women, in the following pages.
II. METHODOLOGY

A. OBJECTIVES

1. Medium-term objectives

By the third month of work (approximately 20 hours), the participants can be expected to have worked through a process of reflection concerning the changes that are called for in order to overcome the situation to which they as women are being subjected and to have become capable of valuing themselves as people and as social beings. An appreciation on the part of the community of the contribution which the women can make to that community is a necessary consequence of this process.

2. Short-term objectives

a) Knowledge and use of relaxation techniques

Teaching of the basic techniques which will enable the women to relax, at first under the direction of the instructor and later on their own. The idea is to create a need to relax so that the women will incorporate the techniques and make their use a permanent part of their lives.

b) Rediscovery and sensitization of the body

This involves "fine tuning" the body to its senses. These senses are not confined to sight, touch and hearing, but also include their integration with a perception of the body's weight, elasticity, capacity for movement, etc.

c) Mastery of the body

Through an increasingly deep knowledge of the body and its conscious training.
d) **Capacity to express emotions, memories, sensations**

The women learn to use the body's expressive and creative capacities in order to externalize ideas and feelings.

e) **Use and interpretation of non-verbal communication**

This involves learning to understand the language of gestures and movements and to express ideas without the use of words.

f) **Capacity to establish genuine group communication**

Through the use of the only genuine, true language—that of non-verbal communication.

g) **Acceptance and re-valuation of self**

The aim is for the women to become surer of themselves as a result of their achievement of the above objectives, which entail loving oneself, valuing oneself and adopting a different form of social behaviour.

h) **Capacity to form permanent groups**

As they work to complete a task to which they have made a commitment, the women establish bonds of friendship which in turn create a need in them to form or maintain stable working groups.

**B. STAGES**

The basic steps to be followed in the process of expressive body movement are:

Gaining an awareness of the body in order to permit its progressive sensitization.

Learning to use the body's capacity for movement and its expressive and creative capabilities in order to achieve the ability to externalize ideas and feelings.

1. **Sensitization**

a) **Internal image**

The first goal is for the participants to gain an awareness of their bodies through what we call the "internal image", which is the
mental imaging of the body as a whole and each of its parts, its bone structure, musculature, volume, position in space, etc.

This image differs from a visual image perceived through the sense of sight because it involves using the capacity of the cerebral cortex for non-visual imaging and perception.

The method used to develop this awareness involves one mental exercise which is performed while the person is in a motionless position and another which is based on the ability to perceive the body by means of slight movements of joints and muscles and the sensations which these movements produce, carried to a conscious level.

A consciousness and knowledge of the body increase its possibilities of movement and expression.

It is important to create a silent environment so as to protect the participants insofar as possible from external auditory stimuli that would distract their attention during this time of self-encounter.

b) **Utilization of external stimuli**

This involves the use of tactile, visual and auditory stimuli, whether self-generated or produced by another. The tactile stimuli are received from the sensations produced by the passive or active contact of any portion of the body's surface with other parts of the body, with other bodies or with an external object or surface.

The visual stimuli are received through the observation of the forms taken by one's own or other people's bodies and those of the animate and inanimate components of the surrounding environment.

c) **The world of sound**

Music is possibly the most important external stimulus for movement at all levels.

Music can serve either as a motivation in and of itself or as an accompaniment to the guidelines provided by the group leader concerning the type of work to be done. It helps to create a certain kind of environment and to establish a given energy level.

Here we have a combination of two powerful forms of expression: music and expressive body movement. The former plays a motivational and guiding role in the activity by creating an atmosphere, setting a tone, determining the energy level, etc., as well as generating a chain reaction of hearing-feeling-doing. Music which has free rhythmic forms and structures provides each individual with greater freedom for concentration and action.

Music which has very clearly defined rhythmic forms, structures and schemes tends to capture people's attention and drag them along with it.
Silence spontaneously generates stillness; under these conditions one very rarely sees an increase in movement and energy, although, with special training, this is possible.

Obviously, since music is such a powerful force, it is very important to take care in selecting the music to be used. Indeed, in the course of a work session, special attention should also be paid to the combination of musical styles that are employed and to the choice of the style or styles as they relate to the socio-cultural characteristics of the group in question.

This means that, although no given type of music—such as classical music, for example—need be excluded, the composers should be more carefully selected if the cultural level of the group is low. It is easier to work with Vivaldi than with Bartok. In any event, this is by no means an ironclad rule, and the choice of music will depend on the ideas and intentions of the instructor, as well as on how the group's attitudes may change in the course of the activity.

2. Use of the body to externalize ideas and feelings

From the very outset, expressive body movement seeks to add expressiveness to movement. It enables a person to create a rich, comprehensive, flexible language of one's own based on one's own life experiences and feelings.

Unlike other disciplines, it does not seek to impart models or patterns of movement, which makes it attractive even to those who do not intend to make use of it as a professional activity.

From the very start, any person watching this process, which begins with a sensorial form of introspection, can perceive a message even if none has been sent intentionally.

C. APPLICATION TO OTHER GROUPS

This methodology can be applied to different types of groups provided that the necessary adjustments and changes are made beforehand. The following examples may illustrate how this is done.

1. Group of educators (male and female)

The first objective of the methodology applied in this case is to achieve a fuller development of the educator as a person, which necessarily contributes to the teaching/learning process.

Secondly, the methodology seeks to reinforce communication with the student through the use of body language and to motivate the educator to implement active techniques that will, insofar as the rigid structure of the curricula permits, allow the child to experience the course content through his or her senses.
The application of a methodology designed specifically for this purpose would permit expressive body movement techniques to be incorporated into the educational process in the schools so that the students would learn both with their intellect and their bodies.

Examples of such techniques include having very young children act out, in a dance, what the germination of a seed means to them or having older children interpret a poem with their bodies.

Such techniques would greatly enrich the educational process, but the characteristics of present curricula and the set number of class hours devoted to each subject make this a very remote possibility at the present time. However, in some countries the ministries of education have permitted experimentation with the introduction of expressive body movement as a course subject.

The great majority of the teachers taking part in such workshops confess that they have difficulty communicating with their students. They often liken their university training to a protective shell, saying it is the only thing that gives them enough confidence to face 30 or 40 students per course within the context of a highly verticalized system of work which smothers creativity.

_Statements made by educators_ (in workshops conducted between 1987 and 1989 with the sponsorship of the Teachers Association of Chile)

"It is the first time that I have felt my body" (Patty, 1989, physical education teacher).

"After this experience it will be easy for me to get to know my students and to get them to express all the valuable potential they have hidden in them" (Ema, 1989).

"Even though I stand up in front of many classes each day, I realized, as I went through the workshop, that I didn't show myself, that I was hiding my face, my body. Then I said to myself: This is me. Let them see me!" (Carmina, 1987).

"Thank you for letting me go on one of the first dates I've ever had with my body ... rediscovering my body has been a rediscovery of a playful type of joy that I had lost in the Arcadia of childhood, years and years ago" (Ricardo, 1989, teacher of philosophy).

"I couldn't understand why my body always felt so tired out. I got to know my body again, and I have discovered that it is hiding a great sadness which has been building up for years" (Ana, 1987).

"I have come to realize the value of each little part of me, of my traits. I recovered my self-esteem" (Paulina, 1988).

"I got in touch with my Chile, with my Latin America, and I felt happy to have been born and raised in Latin America" (Viviana, 1989).

"... and I discovered that I'm not just my brain, that my body is here to make me feel and express love, the pain of death, anger, happiness, everything" (Jorge, 1988).
"From now on I won't just try to see that my pre-schoolers learn the rudiments of writing and reading and develop certain habits. I'll try to go beyond that in order to help them develop into men and women who can think and feel deeply" (Sara, 1987).

"It's important to regain our bodies in this materialistic and so de-humanized society we live in" (Susana, 1989).

"I discovered a different type of beauty in the faces of the other people in the group, a beauty of the soul, but given as a gift to each one for a time of re-encounter" (Eva, 1987).

2. Group of children (boys and girls over 7 years of age)

The first language of each human being is movement, beginning with the fetus. In the first months of life, children become progressively more active as they discover and play with their bodies. Children have a natural and spontaneous love of music and dance. They are plastic, creative, imaginative, sensitive.

The purpose of an expressive body movement/dance workshop is to prevent these inherent characteristics from being lost and to help develop them further in what is the children's first encounter with art. Their sense of music develops as the children incorporate the concepts of rhythm, becoming able to interpret with their movements different styles of music, ranging from classical to folk or contemporary music.

The children gain an idea of the spatial dimension, penetrating space with their movements at the same time that they incorporate the concepts of form, balance, composition.

Guidance is provided concerning their movements in order to help the body become comfortable, to achieve correct posture, while they are also given total freedom to be creative during the improvisational exercises.

*Personal impressions of the children*

"I learned things that I know I won't forget when I'm big" (Valentina, 1987, 9 years old).

"I didn't tell my feet to move. They moved by themselves because of the music" (Laura, 1987, 8 years old).

"I felt something like an electric current run through my arms, but no, it was a different type of current, and I felt younger, newer" (Gonzalo, 1988, 9 years old).

"My hands are tingling, it's the energy that the other kids gave me" (Sebastián, 1987, 9 years old).

"I would recommend it to all children" (Victoria, 1988, 9 years old).
3. Groups of victims and/or family members of victims of human rights violations

Usually such groups meet to analyse and resolve technical or legal problems, but they do not talk about the participants' emotional state, their life experiences, etc.

The aim here is for the participants to use their bodies to express their pain and emotions as a catharsis. It is almost a form of therapy, in that through their rediscovery of self they become able to live with what they have gone through without hiding from it, to accept it and capitalize upon it as a life experience.

Organizations which provide psychological treatment for such people admit that in many cases it proves impossible to progress very far with their treatment because the patient develops a block which prevents the therapist from getting at the problem.

In working with the body, memories come to the surface unbidden and are released through dance with the help of music and the guidance and encouragement provided by the group leader.

It is a good technique to use in tandem with psychological treatment; generally the combination of the two methodologies requires a joint effort on the part of the therapist and the specialist in expressive body movement.

Personal experiences of members of the group

"... I was able to remember how they had tortured my legs and I could even hear the voice of my torturer. I had never thought back on this before. When the memories would start to come back to me, I would shy away from them. Now I feel alive because I know that I can live with my memories" (Patricia, member of the Association of Relatives of Persons Executed for Political Reasons, and former political prisoner, 1988).

"... and I imagined that it was the clothing of my dead friend whose funeral rites I couldn't go to. I picked up his clothing during the exercise and I felt that it was the first time I was able to mourn him. I feel at peace" (Cecilia, member of the Association of Relatives of Persons Executed for Political Reasons, 1988).

"I thought about myself as a woman and I realized that I can't go on being "the widow of". I have to be myself and think of myself, of my life from here on out" (Verónica, member of the Association of Relatives of Missing Detainees, 1988).
III. WORKING GUIDE

A. SESSIONS

Frequency: Option 1: Two 90-minute sessions per week
            Option 2: One 120-minute session per week
            (Experience has shown that participants tend to favour the second option)

Number of hours: Ideally: Six months (48 to 50 hours)
                    Good results: Four months (30 to 32 hours)
                    More limited results: Three months (24 hours)

Expressive body movement can be regarded as a rewarding and healthful activity which can be engaged in by everyone throughout their lifetime. In the case of low-income women, however, this possibility may be unrealistic.

Location

Ideally, the room should be spacious and independent, and heated if the sessions are being held during the winter (the relaxation exercises may be unsuccessful if the room is very cold). It is often difficult to find a location that fulfills all of these requirements, but it is possible to adapt to the existing conditions and still achieve equally good results.

(One possibility is to begin with warm-up, movement and breathing exercises before moving on to the relaxation exercise.)

Clothing

Clothing should be loose (jogging suits) and the exercises are performed either barefoot or with very flexible shoes or slippers. The women do not always have appropriate clothing, in which case a second-best solution must be sought.
B. SESSIONAL WORKING GUIDE

Each session follows a more or less set pattern (all the times shown are approximate):

- Deep relaxation (10-12 minutes)
- Physical conditioning exercises (25-30 minutes)
- Expressive body movement (this component is described in paragraphs a, b and c, below) (60 minutes)
- Discussion of the exercises (20 minutes)

a) Lying down on the floor, eyes closed, the women work through the parts of the body from the feet up, naming its various parts and moving each slightly as they do so in order to relax it. They then stretch deeply, open their eyes and sit up. This is a quite basic technique which can be modified in various ways.

b) The exercises are designed to loosen up tense muscles, flex the joints and enable the women to stretch and bend a little further each time. Emphasis is placed on becoming aware of the body’s axis (the spinal column) as a basis for correcting poor posture. It is important for the women to think about each exercise as they perform it, identifying the group of muscles that they are working with so that they will gradually discover the pleasure of moving and stretching.

c) The expressive body movement component has three main facets:

i) Exploration of self. The objective here is for the women to become aware of their own bodies in order to integrate its components.
   This approach involves the division of the body into the following zones or segments:
   + hands and arms
   + legs and feet
   + trunk
   + head
   One or more sessions is devoted to each segment. The starting point is always the internal image, and the basic aim is to perceive the sensations originating from it.

Proposed technique

After the women have summoned up the internal image, the group leader may:
- Ask them questions about what they do with that part of the body, what pleasant or unpleasant sensations they perceive, whether or not they are always aware of that part of their body, if they like it or dislike it, if they use it to caress others, if they allow
others to caress it. Throughout this exercise the women are in a relaxed, comfortable position with their eyes closed.

- Suggest that, with their eyes still closed, the women use their sense of touch in order to explore the part of the body they are working with.

- Suggest that they explore the different ways in which they can move the joints in that segment of the body. Movement with that part of the body (eyes closed).

- Play music and propose that they dance, emphasizing the body segment which they are working with. It is important to stress that they need to integrate the entire body even though their movements are emanating from a particular part of the body.

Statements made by participants

"I have rheumatism in my arms and I thought that I wouldn't be able to do the exercise, but I forgot all about the pain. This seems to get rid of rheumatism" (Ramona, District of Renca, 1987, Segment on hands and arms).

"I felt very moved when I hugged myself. I remember that my mother didn't have time to hug me. It's hard for me to hug my children or my husband. I'm not a person who likes to touch or be touched much. But I'm going to have to change, aren't I? Because it must be good for my children for me to hug them, don't you think? (Rosa, District of Conchalí, 1989. She is referring to an exercise done during the segment on hands and arms in which the women are asked to hug themselves).

"I never take care of my legs. I hadn't realized that I love them. I hugged them a lot. They're pretty" (Margarita, District of Conchalí, 1989, Segment on legs and feet).

Segment on the head. Awareness and discovery of the head and face, followed by an exploration of those of the other women in the group, one by one:

"I had never studied the head and face of another person in that way, not even those of my teenage girls" (Sofía, District of Renca, 1988).

"I felt that the other women were ready to share, that's why I was able to touch them, because a thing like that, with other women, if someone had told me about something like that before, I wouldn't have wanted to do it. It was a wonderful experience, I feel really moved" (Pily, District of Conchalí, 1989).

"I looked deep into all the other women's eyes and then I hugged each one really hard" (Alicia, District of Conchalí, 1989).

ii) Communication. The objective is to develop the ability to perceive "the other" in order to interact and inter-communicate with that other.
This process can be gradually interspersed with the exploration of self by proposing, for example, that the women explore the same body segment of the other women or through an improvisational exercise in which they blend their movements with those of the other women. These exercises can be done by all members of the group together or the women can be divided into groups of two, three, etc.

**Comments made by participants about their experiences**

"... and I was able to feel what the other women were feeling" (Maria, District of Conchalí, 1989).

"I thought it was going to be hard to "communicate" without words, but it was easy, it happened without even trying, and you feel so good" (Patricia, District of Renca, 1987).

### iii) Expression

As noted earlier, this process is designed to lead up to a point where the women can express themselves through their bodies. As they develop their perceptiveness, sensitivity, imagination and capacity for movement, their expressive capabilities will increase and will become richer and wider-reaching. Music, images, situations, objects, moods, etc., are used as sources of motivation.

An attempt should be made to organize the activity in such a way that it will have a clearly defined beginning, central component and end. The group leader indicates whether the exercises are to be performed individually, in pairs or in groups.

**Experiences of the participants**

In one of the exercises, the women are asked to explore the space around them, to imagine that they have found something there, and to try to express, through movement, what they have found:

"I just saw flowers of all different colors. It must be because I love flowers" (Sofia, District of Renca, 1987).

"I found jewellery, necklaces, and I put all of them on. I don't know why I saw these things, things I'll never have" (Elizabeth, District of Renca, 1987).

In another exercise, the women are asked to repeat a made-up word (e.g., "pacarruca") over and over again while each woman allows the anger she feels about a given situation to fill her mind and body. Still repeating the same word and movements, they then try to rid themselves of the anger by changing the intensity with which they say it, the rhythm, etc.:
"I felt really angry about this situation that just keeps on getting worse, because you don't have any right to make progress. But I feel calmer now. You just have to keep on struggling" (Odette, District of Renca, 1987).

"My husband has made me suffer a lot and I don't dare face up to him because I'm afraid he'll hit me. Now I've gotten it off my chest; I yelled "pacarruca" at him lots and lots of times. I feel lighter" (María, District of Conchali, 1989).

In another exercise the women are asked to think what animal they would have liked to be if they hadn't been born as a human being and to act it out:

"A turtle, because a turtle can hide in his shell so that nobody can step on him" (Margarita, District of Renca, 1987).

"A lioness. They take care of their young, they're courageous and they demand and get respect" (Elizabeth, District of Renca, 1987).

In another exercise, an object (e.g., a chair) is used as a basis for individual improvisations. The women may take the object for what it is or can imagine it is something or someone else:

"I saw the chair as three friends of mine who have died. I saw them very clearly and right up close" (Pily, District of Conchali, 1989).

"I danced the materially and spiritually unattainable" (Isabel, District of Conchali, 1989).

"I danced something beautiful, as if the chair were something very beautiful, and I danced to it. That's why I went on and on. It was very long" (Sonia, District of Conchali, 1989).

"For me it was injustice, that's why I stood on top of the chair so angrily. I almost wanted to break it" (Margarita, District of Conchali, 1989).

In another exercise, a length of cloth is placed on the floor and the women improvise with it:

"I felt that I was in Curacavi, which is where I'm from, and I remembered when I was with the nuns there. They used to have us dance. I hadn't danced since then until now" (Rosa, District of Conchali, 1988).

"For me it was the symbol of freedom, a flag that united us all" (Alicia, District of Conchali, 1989).

(Note: Many different kinds of objects or elements can be used in these exercises. The type of element to be used will depend on the subject of the exercise, the feelings which the group leader wishes
to elicit, etc. In circumstances such as those of this experience, in which the workshops for the various districts were held in each district's chapel, it is necessary to make use of whatever elements are at hand — one can always find a chair — or to bring objects that can be easily carried to the site of the workshop (e.g., a scrap of cloth). It is helpful to take advantage of all the resources a given location offers: benches, pillars, windows, etc., which, when combined with an appropriate guideline, can serve as a theme for improvisation.)
IV. THE ROLE AND COMMITMENT OF THE GROUP LEADER

The role of the group leader needs to be analysed from two different standpoints. One of these might be termed the leader's technical role, while the other refers to the leader's emotional commitment to the activity and to the group.

A. TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The first step should be to undertake an objective analysis of the group in question in terms of the members' ages, gender, educational level, place of origin, participation in social or political organizations, socioeconomic status, etc. This should be done during an initial gathering, preferably before the workshop begins.

A second type of analysis must be carried out during the course of the workshop. This analysis concerns the emotional state of the group members, which is a function of their individual experiences, all of which, however, have the common denominator of poverty.

Although the groups are of differing degrees of poverty, just as their educational levels also differ, all of them lack the most basic elements to satisfy their needs for housing, food, health services and education, in addition to being exposed to ongoing risks.

The bad living conditions associated with extreme poverty are compounded by the circumstance of being a woman in such a chauvinistic society as that of Chile. This trait is even more marked in the lower-income sectors.

Chilean women's developmental deprivation and the deterioration of their self-image is an ongoing phenomenon compounded by a total disregard of their rights.

During the workshops they often reached the conclusion that "the body's purpose is to suffer". They take no time for themselves; their lives are entirely taken up with caring for their husbands, children and homes.

Those organizations which have been formed by these women provide some service, and when these women take part in workshops, the tend to choose one involving a craft or trade activity which is the source
of some sort of product that will to some extent justify the few hours each week that they were away from the home.

All these factors should be borne in mind when planning an expressive body movement workshop in a low-income community.

The guidelines given by the group leader must be perfectly adapted to the participants' needs and to their characteristics as individuals and as a group.

The group must be guided through its work gradually and carefully, and care must be taken to ensure that no stage is skipped over, since this could result in the failure of the following stages. The women must not be hurried in any way; each group must be given the time it needs to mature as a group in order not to disrupt or distort the process.

The same approach produces considerably different results in different groups, and each step in the process must therefore be carefully evaluated before going on to the next.

Success in achieving the proposed objectives will largely depend on the careful planning of a gradual learning process and on the perceptiveness of the group leader in discerning how gradual it needs to be in a given case.

Relaxation exercises play a crucial role in the workshops. The aim is to help the women learn to identify the parts of their body in which tension accumulates and to teach them simple relaxation techniques which they can then internalize and use on a permanent basis.

The exercises also tend to have therapeutic effects (the movement of joints to prevent stiffness, improvement of circulation, the correction of poor posture, the strengthening of the various muscle groups, stretching, etc.).

The idea is for relaxation to become a need, for the women to stretch their bodies and take pleasure in movement while being aware of the group or groups of muscles they are using.

Both the relaxation and the physical exercises should be carefully directed and paced when working with very poor women, since the fact that they are poorly fed and usually tired decreases their physical stamina. Indeed, they may even fall asleep during the relaxation exercises.

In the course of this experience, less and less emphasis has been placed on the more technically complicated exercises which were initially designed with a view to the achievement of progressively more harmonious movements. This is because it has been found that, by focusing on the relaxation exercises and the women's discovery of their own bodies and their possibilities in terms of movement, the women are able to achieve aesthetically pleasing and technically correct movements and positions.

The physical location of the group leader is very important during improvisational work. The leader should try to stay in the background and should never provide examples of movements or interpretations because this may prompt the women to imitate her and thereby curb the women's creativity.
Awakening a person's senses and perceptiveness does not require an external model, but rather sensitive guidance, provided in a clear and precise fashion, by someone who knows the method, who has used it and who continues to use it as a part of their lifestyle.

B. THE EMOTIONAL COMMITMENT

The group leader should have a clear understanding of the fact that she is a part of the process so that she will have a direct commitment to and involvement in it.

It is essential that the leader be sure that she has made the correct choice in deciding to work with people from low-income sectors, which has its own characteristics and difficulties which distinguish it from work undertaken with other sectors of the population. She must also have a clear understanding of the people she works with, and of whom each is as a person, so that she will neither underestimate nor idealize them.

The most essential element, however, is for the group leader to be sure of herself and to be who she is, not to act in any way that is not natural for her, because otherwise the activity may be a resounding failure. The extent to which women in low-income sectors will learn to trust the group leader will largely depend on her authenticity, on how secure she is as a person, and on how much of herself she gives to the group. This is a lengthy process involving an ongoing, day-by-day effort to achieve a progressively greater degree of coherence in all spheres of life so as to overcome one's own internal contradictions.

When she first meets with a group of low-income women, the group leader is clearly an "outside agent", and there are very obvious differences between them which are quickly seen by the group. The women will inevitably analyse the attitude of this outside agent in the course of their work, which, it bears repeating, is nothing more than a reflection of "who she is".

As the work proceeds, there will be very intense, very emotional moments, brought on by situations in which the participants make a deep commitment by opening up and showing themselves as they truly are, no longer holding back anything but allowing all their emotions and sensitivity to come out in their movements. This comes about through a creative projection of their bodies in the space that surrounds them. At times, once a suggestion has been made, the atmosphere becomes charged with the energy of the women's unconditional sharing and total concentration, and what follows is an individual or collective demonstration of self which is so harmonious that in some cases it constitutes a choreography worthy of being performed before a vast audience. The most valuable aspect of all is that this interweaving of movement is a spontaneous creation made possible by the fact that the women have established total communication among themselves through the language of the body.
At other times, one senses the trembling of a leg or of lips as a woman strives to defy her shame or embarrassment about showing herself or revealing some physical limitation.

At such moments, how could one not tremble herself, but with emotion?

The changes come swiftly, and by the fourth or fifth session one sees women trying to deal with life in a new way, even though they have only just embarked upon the process of change. This process, which is fostered by the reinforcement provided by the group, is manifested in noticeable changes in the body: the women stand differently, walk differently, feel differently. The group leader must monitor these changes, which will be different in each individual.

The work is very rewarding, as are all creative endeavours, and at the end of the day one's body feels that wonderful form of tiredness which is borne of intense emotions.

C. FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED PROBLEMS

There are a number of factors which may hinder the normal progress of the classes. Some of these are objective factors, while others stem from the situation in which low-income women find themselves.

Among the former, one is the weather. When people are cold they are vulnerable to disease, especially bronchio-pulmonary ailments, and people who live in substandard housing and who lack proper clothing and heating to ward off the cold are particularly prone to such illnesses. Rain seeps into the houses and, in some sectors, the streets flood.

In such cases, absenteeism becomes a problem. The women don't have raingear to wear on their way to the workshop and, at times, simply are not willing to go out if the weather is bad. This is customary behaviour at all levels: they do not send their children to school when it is raining, and they often even fail to go to the community kitchen to get their ration of food.

Among the second category of factors, perhaps the main one is the difficulty of introducing an expressive body movement workshop in low-income sectors. Explaining what the workshop involves at an introductory meeting may prove to be unconvincing, since these are experiences that one has to live through. One way of encouraging people to participate may be to talk about the role which relaxation exercises play in the workshop; indeed, the women often call them "relaxation workshops".

The television is a major enemy. For some women it is hard to choose between the workshop and their favorite soap opera if they are scheduled at the same time.

Dependency on their husbands also sometimes causes women to be absent or to drop out of the workshop if their husbands "order" them not to engage in activities outside the home. Some of the women's husbands are particularly disapproving of this type of activity.
because, since it prompts the women to question themselves and their lives, they feel it weakens their authority and thereby jeopardizes their virility.

One of the problems encountered within the setting of the workshop itself may be a lack of heating. Only rarely is a heater available, and this hinders the relaxation exercises in particular. Another is that the rooms provided are often too small to work with large groups, and in such cases changes have to be made in the structure of the classes.

There are, however, ways of coping with these and other difficulties which may arise and of achieving the workshop's objectives despite them.

It is clear that the cause of all the above problems is the same: poverty. Poverty is the reason why these people have substandard living conditions and have so few educational and, hence, employment opportunities. In the case of women, these factors result in subjugation and a total absence of opportunities for personal development and active integration into processes of change.

It follows from the above that the questioning of oneself and one's life which is prompted by an expressive body movement workshop may help to mitigate poverty and its effects, as well as providing a woman with a span of time and a place all of her own, away from the home and all her domestic and other service-related commitments, which, prior to the workshop experience, were all she knew.
V. OTHER PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

A. MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN PROFESSIONALS, WOMEN WORKING OUTSIDE THE HOME AND HOUSEWIVES

Many groups are made up of women of differing occupations or professions, together, in some cases, with housewives. Institutions focusing on other aspects of the status of women also conduct workshops in which middle-class women participate.

These groups are formed on the basis of the workshop; the members of each group usually do not know each other before joining it and are of differing ages, occupations and even interests. Nonetheless, they do have a common denominator: a desire to share with other women, to seek out a place in which they can develop themselves and grow, or simply to find an opportunity to share with others as a way of alleviating their loneliness.

With these groups it is possible to undertake a deeper analysis of the participants' situations and outlooks and to suggest activities that call for a greater intellectual effort at a more abstract level.

These workshops have worked well at both the individual and group levels. The group serves as an important point of reference for its members, who often continue to work together after the workshop has ended, either by forming labour collectives or by gathering in order to analyse or discuss topics of interest to them.

Comments made by participants concerning their experiences

"When I started I felt that my life no longer had any purpose, it was like dying and then, little by little, I was reborn. Now I feel that there are so many wonderful things for me to do ..." (Gabriela, 1988).

"I feel that now I belong a little" (Virginia, 1988).

"I learned to value the women's group in emotional terms and was able to show myself for who I am, without shame" (Paula, 1989).

"The workshop doesn't end here; now comes the big step of making it part of my life" (María Soledad, 1989).
B. RURAL WOMEN

When working with rural women, the objectives are similar to those of workshops for low-income urban women. Their situations have a great deal in common, and here too the emphasis should be on helping them to recover their self-image and self-esteem and to reconcile their role as mothers and wives with their identity as women working outside the home, while at the same time giving them their own space.

The following statements by participants in various groups are presented here because their personal experiences are perhaps the most telling evidence as to a group leader's success in achieving the proposed objectives.

**Personal experiences of participants**

"You were right, this is nothing like regular exercises. It's really beautiful, you don't get tired. In fact, you relax" (Delia, District of Renca, 1987).

"I feel so much anger about my daughter's health. The hospital sets a date for her heart operation and then they always postpone it. We don't have the money to take her to a private doctor. I'm so mad, and I can't do anything about it. That's why I used the exercise to yell and shout. At least I got it off my chest a little" (Pilar, District of Renca, 1987).

"This workshop was really something different. Now I deal with things differently, I have a different attitude" (Paty, District of Renca, 1987).

"Now I stand up for my rights to my husband. I used to stay at home because he thought I should. Now I know that I can have my own opinions" (Elizabeth, District of Renca, 1987).

"I came to move my body, but I also felt like doing some thinking" (Sofía, District of Renca, 1987).

"Monday was different. I woke up thinking, 'today I have my expressive body movement class', because that's what you call it, don't you? I'd never tried anything like this before" (Rosa, District of Renca, 1987).

"My dream was a man without chains and a smiling child" (María, District of Conchali, 1988).

"I used to have a different idea of what it was to dance" (Leontina, District of Conchali, 1988).

"I felt like, how should I put it, like I was really giving something of myself. That's it! I gave of myself! I hurt all over from some really heavy work I had to do yesterday, and now I feel good, I don't even feel my body" (Ramona, District of Conchali, 1988).

"This is the first time I've taken a class for myself and I feel whole because I've seen the beauty I had been hiding as a woman and I've realized that I can learn to get in touch with the other women's feelings" (Pily, District of Conchali, 1989).
"We got used to coming on Fridays because we came to get energized for the week. Now we've decided that we're going to keep on meeting anyway and we're going to try to do what you taught us" (Margarita, District of Conchalí, 1989).

"Think about our bodies? It had never occurred to me before" (Maria, District of Conchalí, 1989).

"When I first came to this workshop I was very lonely. I came and I found my companions and while I was here, I was able to forget my problems" (Alicia, District of Conchalí, 1989).

"I realize that this workshop is for me, so that I can grow. Sometimes I even worried about whether it was selfish" (Rosita, District of Conchalí, 1989).

"I want you to know that out of our group of 26 women, 13 of us formed another, this one. We ended up with this division after the workshop because we realized that you have to try to achieve things that aren't just material. We realized that many women came here because of self-interest or just to pass the time. We've been doing other activities for two weeks, and now we realize that we couldn't have done them with the other women. The group is smaller, it changed after the workshop, but we are confident in ourselves and we support each other" (Odette, District of Renca, 1987).
ANNEX

PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE GROUP LEADER

... The fact that the teacher never specifies a technique to be followed, a movement, a choreography, but rather gives guidelines that educate the body when the time comes for the expressive movement segment, and each person dances his or her own dance. Then there are ten bodies and ten different dances to the same music and with the same guideline.

How did it come about? I don't know exactly. It seems to me a little like a return to dance as it has been throughout history. Perhaps because of the rigidity of classical dance, because Isadora had the idea of taking off her ballet slippers, because she believed that it was truly a much more authentic form of expression. If in the beginning the first thing that man did was to dance, now the fetus dances. The first thing that man does is to dance, but never in shoes that are so strangely shaped as point shoes or half-point ballet slippers are. He dances barefoot. I think it is in a way an answer to the whole structure which the world is setting down for us. It is the counterpart.

This is how it was for me. I studied mathematics and was at university for five years, studying mathematics and physics, but then I would hurry off to dance and to take expressive body movement classes; that was the counterweight that gave me balance. That was my experience at least. Not the rigidity of classical dance, because the real me, what I had inside, could never come out. This gives every person, and of course everyone has an artist inside them, a chance to let that artist express himself.

... It is your body, the one you've been given, and they are your feelings. You are the instrument and the one who plays that instrument. It is the opportunity to let your creativity take wing. I see it as the logical outcome of the long road down which dance has traveled through history.

When did I make the change from dancing to teaching dance? When I realized just how much one could experience, just how much could be developed, the beauty that this artistic expression has. Then I decided it was important to transmit it. I've always been a teacher. Starting with my mother, with my grandmother ... I've always taught. It is an innate part of me. I think it is the only thing I truly know.
how to do. I thought that it would be a way for other people to see this beauty too, to become a part of that world which suddenly seems reserved just for a few: for those who started dancing as little children, for those who have had training, and it isn't like that. This is a discipline that anyone can take up at any point in his life. That's the beauty of it. You don't have to have any prior knowledge or a certain type of body. I started out by teaching the technique as a complement to other disciplines: students of acting, ballet students. It seems incredible, but some people who work with their body don't know how to use their body expressively. Not all ballet dancers can communicate what they are feeling. Singers, musicians, they are very rigid and don't manage to communicate with their audience because they don't let what they are feeling come out through their bodies. So that was how I started out. With children too. Actually, I started working with children, adults and teenagers, all at about the same time, as a complement to other types of training.

With the children, too, it was a very special thing. I started in Ecuador, where the children are just about at the bottom of the list. A house's furniture is more important than the children who live there. They only give the children material things, those who can. I felt it would be a good way to preserve their sensitivity, which wasn't being channeled into anything because they weren't given any opportunity.

Then everything changed dramatically when I came here to live, because rather than being a purely artistic discipline it took on a social dimension. This was also because I realized that the security that you get from knowing your own body transcends the body and spreads to other spheres. I saw that I had the capacity to deal with certain kinds of situations because I had that discipline and I've been practising it for a long time. Considering the situation of Latin American women, the enslavement and backwardness, I thought that this would be one more tool for helping them to step out into the world and confront it in a different way.

I'm interested in working with women in general: all women share a common reality; but I feel especially committed, perhaps in a more emotional sense, to women in low-income sectors. I feel that they have the least access to what society can give to women in general because the mere fact of not having economic resources limits them much more. In particular, I have seen that women in low-income sectors are more oppressed than other women, and I felt that this was a way of contributing to their development. It is a very personal thing; I feel much more comfortable working with low-income women because I see a very special warmth and quality in them. I have a kind of sensitivity for working with low-income women. This is my contribution. I always say that this is my way of being involved. I am not a politically-minded woman, but this is my form of political activity.

I also have experience in working with groups of both sexes. It's beautiful because there is also a very wonderful form of communication between the men and the women which is totally pure. They put aside all thought of seduction, all those very natural things that come up
in a relationship between men and women, and it is like the relationship among children, although actually with children too there are differences between the sexes, but at times it is like they are playing, like animals do, in the sense of it being natural. It is an encounter. Sometimes I see when their bodies come into contact. I don't know, heads with heads, and they start to play. You see one person use his head to caress someone else's, and they seem like two puppies. And then it makes no difference whether they are two men, two women, or a man and a woman. They also get over that whole thing about "not men with other men, not women with other women", because they find a different and more genuine form of communication.

I made a choice. Of course. It is a choice. At one time it was the children. Then I made a decision; it was my own thing, a process, things that happened to me personally, and I realized that it was necessary to transmit them to other women.

In one way or another these workshops serve many purposes. I have written down statements made by the women in which they describe how their relationship with their husbands changed, for example, how they hold themselves differently because they've found a sense of security, a love for themselves, that they didn't have before. This is what is so wonderful about this work; the process moves quickly during the first stage of self-discovery. Afterward it can be a lifelong process, but that first step, that first bit of progress, is a huge change. Sometimes the women are as if they were stuck, caught in a trap. Once they've tried this, they want to keep going, but that first step is hard to take, and you can't take it for them.

The motivational work is the most important and the most difficult. I don't do the motivational work, because now I work with another institution that sponsors my workshops. But the lack of motivation is always a problem, it comes up in all the workshops; it warrants an indepth analysis, because the causes haven't been identified.

I work with low-income women because that's the choice I made as a result of my own growth process and of what I've observed in the outside world. Actually, every day of my life I am defying the situation in which these women live. These women, these men, and these children. Some people say that this type of workshop helps to alleviate poverty. I don't know how much truth there is in that, but I try to get them to feel things that I feel are free: being able sometimes to look beyond their ramshackle houses and appreciate their surroundings, appreciate nature, and they really aren't aware of it. When we start to talk about this subject, they say, for example, "If I had money to travel, to think that we are Chilean, we love Chile so much, and we haven't seen Chile". They are right, but sometimes they also have the opportunity to walk and to look at the other side of the hill. Sometimes I make suggestions: "Go out with your children and take a walk. Breathe some fresh air, get some exercise and see what the other side of the hill looks like at a different time of day, and enjoy nature". The trouble is, of course, sometimes I hear myself saying this and I feel awful to be saying this when these women's lives are so terrible.
They have so many needs, their most basic needs are not being met, that sometimes it is really asking too much of them. Sometimes they tell me "we don't have time", and I argue with them when they say that. I tell them, "You have to make the time". Sometimes we do that exercise. Sometimes as a pretext I arrive and say: "Did you see? The mountains got their first snowfall of the year." "No, we hadn't noticed", they say. And then I try to get them to feel these things as a way of recapturing all those non-material things that we also lose. In the workshop we do an exercise that involves taking in the energy that flows from the centre of the earth. Then then discover how wonderful it is to work on the floor too, like little puppies, rubbing themselves against the floor hard, because it is a law of physics, it's true that you charge yourself with positive energy, because it is the energy that comes from the centre of the earth, from friction, just as bodies get charged with energy from friction, just like non-human bodies, our bodies also do. So then we do an exercise on this, and sometimes it seems to be pretty abstract language. I tell them, "The work I ask you to do at the beginning requires you to think in abstract terms, but I'm asking it of you anyway because I don't think you have to be especially gifted in order to think abstractly, and after all it is just an exercise", and they really do manage it. I have felt it along with them, when we hold hands and my hands are burning up, just like theirs, and it is because they generated energy and we are passing it along to each other.

It seems important to me to recapture these types of values, which have been totally lost. I don't know, maybe their dream is to have a color television set, rather than facing the sun and filling yourself with its energy.

I believe it is more important to be able to do without the color television set, but I know that they have very strong desires. I know it would take a lot of work and would be a long process, and it is like trying to go against the whole society. It is a very difficult path to take. I also understand that they want a color television set: they never go to the movies, they have no entertainment. In any case, it is possible to have a color television set and still enjoy nature too. The most beautiful thing about it is that they reveal themselves to each other in a different way. They always tell me this at the end of the workshop: "I already knew my comadre, we've been working together for years at the community kitchen, but now I've seen her in a different way". This is really important and it happens at all levels, not just in low-income sectors. To be able to know the other person. Then they try to have a different type of relationship with their children too. There is a lot of abuse and the children are hit a lot, so we work on this too. A different type of contact, a caress, and their relationships with their partners and their friends also start to change.

My work starts long before I go to give a class. I give my classes in the afternoons, but even though I have my whole programme planned out, in the morning I always prepare myself specifically for that afternoon's class. It takes me some time to choose the music, and
I plan exactly what work we're going to do that day. I build up certain expectations even though I don't want to. Sometimes I imagine how the group will express itself and sometimes how certain individuals will express themselves. I think, "If I say such-and-such to this woman or that, it's going to help her, it will be useful for her, or it is going to mean more to her". Sometimes I imagine things and then it turns out to be completely different. There is always another series of factors that influence the mood. If I am going to give a class and it is raining, for example, I think: "They'll come anyway, they won't come, how many will come?" If it's very cold, I think: "How many of them will be sick?", because these are things that happen. These are the factors that hamper the progress of the class sometimes, and they also compromise me, because I can't turn external factors into an abstraction. It bothers me if I have 12 women in a class and one day only five or six of them show up because the others are sick or because they didn't feel like it. The soap operas are a great enemy of any class that coincides with them. Each class also goes differently. Sometimes by the end of the class I'm tired out from having had to make such an effort to raise their spirits. They often are very depressed when they arrive because of personal problems or problems having to do with the community kitchen, if there are women in the class who work there. There are a lot of internal problems, and then you have to give them the strength so that they will feel like working. The workshop exercises are more or less set, but when it comes time to do improvisations, I give them the guidelines and they work with them. I always am really moved by what I see. It is very beautiful to see them use the space around them and let their creativity out. I sweat. Maybe teachers shouldn't get involved, but I haven't yet been able ... and I haven't tried to very hard.

Afterward we talk about how the work went, and that's beautiful too because in each class they go a little further, they gradually discover many things about themselves, they open up a little bit more each time, they tell me many things about themselves, things they haven't talked about for a long time, things they had never told the group before, and there is an opening up, but the main thing is that they are aware that they are becoming more sensitive, that they are capable of feeling more. They tell me, "You know, it's cold but I'm sweating", so then I explain to them that they're sweating because of the emotions they're feeling.

I always leave the workshops happy, very happy. I have my bad times too, and often I'm depressed when I arrive at the class, but there are always some days that I don't have to go, and if I'm depressed, I say to myself, "What a shame that I don't have to give a class today", because I get energized from sharing with them too. When they make an effort to lift their spirits, I lift my own spirits too, and I always leave the workshop happy, very happy, I would almost call it euphoric, and with the desire to share the experience, with a fellow teacher, if possible. I work entirely alone, and I really think that it would enrich the work a lot if it were possible to share it with other people who are doing the same thing, because we could
exchange ideas. But I've gotten used to working alone and I always write down what the women say, right there on the bus, so that I won't forget any of the details and so I can put it down just as they said it, using the words they used.

It's impossible to be precise. It's difficult to express with words the quality of what you receive in each encounter with poor women. These beautiful women, a beauty that comes from being authentic, transparent, from not being contaminated with the evils of a sick society full of consumerism, posing, superficial appearances. The best way to explain what it is all about would be to tell how many times I've gotten gooseflesh from seeing the women express their human warmth and total willingness to give of themselves, how many tears have run slowly down my cheeks, how many times a body, this body, has been filled with an infinite joy that I feel right here, in the solar plexus, and that makes you sweat and tremble and feel like laughing and crying at the same time.

At the end of each session the group forms a circle, with everybody holding hands and with their eyes closed, and we try to feel the energy that each one generates and can pass on to the others along the line formed by the closed circle. It is almost like an intense, very meaningful ritual in which a magnetic force is generated that keeps everybody connected even after they have stopped holding hands.

When they open their eyes and look at each other, they feel deeply moved. That's the communication that they achieve only because they have rediscovered the primitive language, the language that doesn't lie, the true language.

I have beautiful memories of each experience, of each woman. That afternoon in August as I was coming back from Renca, after having celebrated the end of the workshop, when we all drank yerba mate and ate sopapillas and listened to Odette speak. The mountains cooperated by being even more beautiful and they had asked the sun to dress them in pink.

What Charo achieved despite her almost obese body due to her diet of bread and rice.

Rosa's effort, conquering the terrible rheumatism in her arms.

The words of Leontina.

The women from the community kitchen of the housing project and the presentation of the letter and the "dove of peace", as they called the craftwork that marked the end of the workshop.

The tight hugs, the achievements, the changes in attitudes, there are so many occurrences that prove it is possible to start small individual revolutions that can then be collectivized, traveling along the path of art, re-finding oneself, recovering one's sensitivity, loving oneself a little bit more so that one will be able to love more deeply.

All of this generates energy, energy which provides the necessary force to open up the spaces where women have to be, the Chilean women living in its low-income sectors who have written an important chapter in the history of their people. Despite everything.
In one way or another I have tried to apply what I have learned with them in my relationship with my little girl. For example, we place a lot of importance on watching what happens with the day, the sun, the mountains. Each and every day my daughter gazes at the mountains with me. I get home from work and we go watch the day end before the sun hides its face ...