A Round Bar of Wood or The Daily Practice of Independence
An Introduction to the work of André Cadere

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THE AGENT
The name André Cadere first came through some of my older artist friends in Toronto, then, during my brief stay in Paris, amongst my small circle of friends. Gradually, hearsay around his work and activity began to exert a fascination on me. Yet, in spite of my curiosity, critical literature on this artist is limited save for one rather comprehensive and beautifully produced catalogue published in 1992. Today Cadere remains virtually unknown outside of France. I understand that almost no one from my generation has even heard of him.

Last year I began teaching at York University and found a copy of the aforementioned catalogue that had been sitting on the library shelf since its publication. I was the first to sign it out. While it has been sometime since I contemplated writing about Cadere's work, I am finally prompted to take on the task for the sake of my students. The reason behind the fact that Cadere's work is out of sync with his and our times, I believe, has much to do with his intensely focused struggle for artistic independence. It is an accomplishment that will serve us well as a model for the future.

Originally from Romania, André Cadere arrived and practiced in Paris in the late 1960s until he died of cancer at 37 in 1978. A rich, adventurous and burgeoning international career spanned this ten-year period. Between 1970 and his death, Cadere's work can be succinctly summarized as being focused on the implementation of his work—what he called a "round bar of wood," a stick that is an assemblage of coloured segments. This entailed an almost evangelical undertaking to make the work available, or in Cadere's term, to make it "seen" in any number of potential contexts, such as the streets of Paris or in a passage way in an art museum, and not limited to being simply "exhibited" within the gallery system. As it is, the stick is completely complicit with Cadere's life, given that he is often seen carrying it, to the extent that it had become an extension of his personality.

Cadere's implementation of the stick included walks, public exhibitions, interventions, graffiti, lectures and finally writings towards the end of his life. Even though these diverse secondary activities designed to insert the work into the (art) world are generally taken upon as typical promotional routines, in Cadere's case they are in fact critical manoeuvres that demonstrate the multivalent character of the work. In the course of Cadere's promenade, first beginning around Paris, then in other parts of Europe and New York, a great number of intersections, conflicts and connections between the work and the art world were established and thwarted. For as we shall see, the artist's unequivocal objective to make the work seen had necessarily implicated, and on many instances even subverted, the operations and protocols of the art establishment.

Today, almost thirty years after his death, Cadere's currency lies precisely in his forging of new trajectories of contention, ones that refused institutional circumscription by passing through and complicating the defined territories of sculpture, painting, relational practice and institutional critique.

A ROUND BAR OF WOOD
Bernard Marcelis in the Cadere catalogue explained that "a "Round Bar of Wood" is composed of wooden segments of which the length is equal to their diameter. The segments, hand painted in different colours, are assembled according to a system of permutations that incorporates each time (and) one error. In every round bar of wood, there are four variables which make each piece different. These are colour, permutation, size and error. The permutations establish the number of segments and therefore the length of the work.

The error that is produced by the inversion of two segments is meant to highlight, through contrast, the system within which it is embedded. The work's innocuous appearance is evidence of artisanal craft procedure.

When the logic of the work was worked out around 1970, it was fulfilled at its inception. It is clear that its internal logic is designed to seal the work against any anticipated interest in artistic evolution and public reaction. Cadere's own words testified to that effect. "The only goal of my work is to be seen, which means that reactions of indifference, hostility or love are of no interest whatever. I do not collect those sentiments of the public. My sole position is to present all my work in order to show what I do."

MILIEU AND THE DAILY PRACTICE OF INDEPENDENCE
Cadere's early exercise in painting provided a critical point of departure with respect to the formulation of the later work. For it is precisely through citing the most essential concerns of the medium that Cadere succeeded in defining the round bar of wood as being apart from painting. Unlike painting, Cadere stated, the stick has neither front, back nor sides; it is thus liberated from traditional painting's dependence on the wall, and, as an extension, the art institution as support. The repercussion of such a statement fuelled an on-going debate between Cadere and Daniel Buren. Although both relied on an anonymous system to structure the work, Cadere criticized Buren's work as still being mired in the conventional economy of the art institution. Here, Cadere was evidently seeking an even greater sense of independence from the history, economy and power relations that still sustained the critical and financial support of his most radical peers.

Within the fertile intellectual climate of late 1960s Paris, one could identify Cadere's manoeuvrings as very much in tune with a
number of radical positions. The institutional critique performed by
his work is not unlike that of Buren and Toroni except that they did not share with Cadere the steadfast
desire to be an outsider with respect to the institution. If one
can easily say of this work that I produce it and that I show it, the
one being the complement of the other, all of it constituting an
everyday and ungraspable
activity... On that note, Cadere was also aligned to other seminal
radical writers and artists then
active in Paris, figures such as
Henri Lefebvre and the Situationist
International, for example, who
identified the quotidian and the
unique strategy of the outsider as the site of radical
spiritual and political transformation.

Originating from the outside,
Cadere began to infiltrate the art
system. For example, he would
sometimes enter a gallery during his
daily walk and simply leave a stick there, or arrive at the
other artists' opening, I concluded
Cadere's activities to be prompted by an act of faith. For his uncompro-
mising and "disruptive" position promised almost no reward other
then hostility from the establish-
ment. No doubt art practices aimed to
retain an uneasy dialectic between
his self-posed marginal status and
the necessity to "participate" in the
art system. It was a question of
personal and artistic freedom. In
order for Cadere's operation to be
effective, it would have meant that
the stick's dependence on the art
world as support and legitimation,
be it the gallery wall, the artist's
lecture or exhibition structure, was
only provisional and not binding.
According to Cadere's own words
"It is important to practice this inde-
dependence everyday." This state-
ment, I think, provides the ethical
imperative for Cadere the man and
not merely the artist.

In a public lecture Cadere stated,
"...there are museums and galleries,
particular places for looking at art. If
we do not take them into considera-
tion, our position is illusory. The
power of these institutions is first
the power of selection. We are not in
a free situation. If it is not