

Inter
Art actuel



Art actuel in Quebec City Some Elements to Understand Its Origin

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ART ACTUEL IN QUEBEC CITY

SOME ELEMENTS TO UNDERSTAND ITS ORIGIN

BY JEAN-CLAUDE ST-HILAIRE*

If one follows the media related to the commemoration of Quebec City, the National Capital's 400 years of existence, one can at times be reminded of the glorious rivalry opposing, in a recent past, the Colisée and the Forum. The heart-breaks of the one are the deserts of the other. The Cap Diamant remains solid, navigates in troubled water and stays in control, for better or worse. I was listening recently to an interview with one of the organizers of the festivities, commenting on the prejudice which prevails towards the city, only by mentioning the term *Old Capital*, as if it was slightly behind if one compares it to the fast speed modernism of the metropole.

Everybody knows that barouches are slow pace vehicles.

It is earlier, precisely in 1977, that Quebec's visual art community affirmed a will for change, an image shift. The attempt took the form of a manifesto signed by roughly 15 people, which was great. But it was seen as if nothing happened for the people making decisions. This political action was following the creation of ARG, and witnessed the humble beginnings of *La chambre blanche*. Since then, the energy and dynamic output deployed in the city has remained the true response to this will for change launched by a group of few artists.

To remember this "taking charge" of Quebec City's visual and cultural spaces, it is not so much 400 years that we need to examine, but rather 30 years grounded in the solidarity of the various groups which have worked endlessly to build an artistic community. A community that has given, to this day, a place to all forms of expressions. The great collaboration between all agents, far from being perilous as elsewhere, is now a way of functioning. That makes the city more dynamic. The international endeavors deployed by many artists centers allowed the milieu, earlier on, to see and to be seen, here as much as elsewhere. This irresistible opening culminated when Quebec City, under the leadership of mayor Jean-Paul L'Allier, used creativity as a Troy horse to make sure that the whole Saint-Roch area would be revitalized.

Few of the milestones of this adventure have such names: l'Atelier

des réalisations graphiques (l'ARG, now called Engramme), the Galerie Jolliet, Galerie Comme, La chambre blanche, the review *Intervention* (now called *Inter, art actuel*), CKRL-MF, Le Lieu, the gallery l'Anse-aux-Barques, the centers for artists VU, Obscure, L'Œil de Poisson, Théâtre Repère, Folie/Culture, the Folles Alliées, La Bande Vidéo, La Maison Jaune, Regart (in Lévis), the îlot Fleurie, Radio Basse-Ville, Arbo Cyber theater (?), Recto-Verso, Avatar, and the gallery Rouje. It would be illusory to contemplate being exhaustive about these attempts and experiences in Quebec City, over the last 30 years. I will therefore only articulate what could be considered as the "genesis" of *art actuel* in Quebec City. That corresponds to the first 10 years of what has been above introduced.

It is important to add to this the fact that outside entities and groups, which are associated with particular spaces as such, a number of art collectives also practiced in Quebec City. Their group dynamics are important, to mention a few of them: the collective Inter/Le Lieu, Doyon/Demers, Réparation de poésie, Doyon-Rivest, les Fermières Obsédées, BGL, or, namely, the Causes perdues. The importance of the artists' collectives would deserve a full and exhaustive article.

It is as a participant and a witness of these changes that I write these lines. They cannot be neutral, because I was part of it. I have been a founding member of some of these groups, and I have participated to a few of these activities and manifestations. At the same time, I have been teaching aesthetics and history at the CEGEP Sainte-Foy, contributing further to the development of many artists which have, in their own way, nourished the milieu's dynamics. I will therefore not engage directly with the works, but rather with a few group of artists allowing the works to be seen, here and around the world.

At the beginning of the seventies, contemporary art in Quebec had the name Galerie Jolliet. It was one of the rare private attempts daring to exhibit a different type of art. It was also far from Old Quebec's scene with its landscapes, Châteaux and little cats by the thousands altogether epitomized by Trésor's Street. Staged directly at the center of the Place-Royale, the Galerie Jolliet exhibited sculpture and abstract painting of all sizes. After trying for several years to seduce a difficult market, Montreal was considered as a step forward.

The Musée du Québec showed, on occasions, few local artists and

rarely included in its program, *art as it was happening*. It is fair to acknowledge that the Musée du Québec opened a gallery in 1976 (La Galerie du Musée or l'Anse-aux-Barques) solely dedicated to contemporary art where it was possible to see a variety of contemporary arts. Considering various aspects, this gallery has been the most important contribution to the Musée du Québec to Quebec City's art actuel scene, even if it closed its doors twenty years ago. Many artists were able to exhibit there, and the space was one of the most visited by the artistic community.

The first attempt in Quebec City was meant to gather few artists under the initiative of ARG (Atelier de réalisations graphiques):

"In 1972, Marc Dugas (professor at Laval University) and a group of artists from Quebec City founded the Atelier de Réalisations Graphiques by gathering the necessary equipments to serve the creation of original works in etchings. In 1973, by providing and creating a space to exhibit, the association becomes the first integrated center offering the diffusion of contemporary art in Quebec".

It is important to remember that engravings and etchings require costly large machines and tools. At the time, this economic consideration forced creators to be together in order to divide the expenses and costs of operations of such workshops. In Montreal, Graff was founded in 1966, for the same reasons. The first vocation of this type of workshop was to implement a functional milieu to create and further control the diffusion of works on paper produced on site.

At the time, the École des Arts visuels of Laval University played an important role, because a network of young practitioners was created around Marc Dugas. It is indeed in the Saint-Jean-Baptiste area, directly on Saint-Jean Street, that all changes started to show their signs. In 1974-1975, third year students at the École des arts had imagined that they could create in a space that would be "like a gallery", hence the name *Comme Galerie*. Each of the group had to give minimum funds (around 40\$, if my memory is correct), as if it was a cooperative. The space was available for each individual, for an exhibit and, in most case in a duo during the complete school year. The objectives were indeed very simple: breaking away from the University and manage to be able to exhibit in the "real" world. This opportunity was unique

at Laval's University. It proved to be successful during 2 years². At the end of the school year 1975-1976, some of the graduating students decided not to give up on Comme Galerie, namely Odette Ducasse, Joëlle Morosoli, Douglas Derasp and Marc Morel. And because of common interests Mona Desgagné, Michel Labbé and myself decided to join them, all of us forming at last the core of Comme Galerie³. Labbé was teaching painting at the École des arts visuels and was just finishing his master's degree at the Pratt Institute in New York City. During that year, André Riverin and Richard Martel joined the team. It goes without saying that this second move of the galerie was completely autonomous from Laval's University and that Michel Labbé created a pressure free environment.

At her workplace, Odette Ducasse was able to get a little grant from Canada-Jeunesse and some private sponsorship to pay for the artists' tools and materials. The Galerie Comme wanted to be a space dedicated to production and exhibition. By production, we meant working on location, thanks to a small and rudimentary wood workshop in the basement of the Galerie. There was also another room, much cleaner, at the back. Galerie Comme was also located on St-Jean Street, just in from of the ARG. And we could find, few doors down the Galerie Comme, the first version of La chambre blanche. Run energetically by Raymonde April, Fabienne Bilodeau, Daniel Tremblay and Serge Murphy, this "Youth-Canada at work" was a photography workshop with a small space for exhibitions. There were also giving photography classes. And to sum up, in the same year the Atelier-Galerie opened few doors down by André Bécot⁴. It is that same Bécot⁴ who would occupy the space of the Galerie Comme, the following year. The Saint-Jean-Baptiste neighborhood suddenly became the place visited by many artists, as they were meeting regularly, according to the programs offered by these four centers for artists.

In the spring of 1977, Yves Robillard authored a text focusing on Galerie Comme and the Saint-Jean-Baptiste area in Quebec City, in which he declared the following: "I rapidly understood that for them the life of the neighborhood was essential, that they didn't want to have Quebec City transformed by sky-scrapers and that they wanted, above everything, to live collectively, also manifest by its contacts with the population. At last, they wanted

to feel included when, in Montreal, they refer to art in the province of Quebec."⁵

On the one hand, Jean Royer dared mentioning the Galerie Comme, on one occasion in the newspaper *Le soleil*. That is surprising considering that this daily newspaper was the only one covering the arts in the city at the time: "The Galerie Comme is not a galerie like others, there is no commercial endeavors but only a taste for creativity, research and communication with the world."⁶

One comment appeared in the review *Vie des arts* on my first solo exhibit and was signed by Jean Tourangeau⁷. These texts by Yves Robillard, Jean Royer and few other little texts were the only traces in the media, left by the Galerie Comme during its lifetime. And needless to say, none of the texts were making the distinction between the two stages of the center for artists.

This shift in the Galerie's finality was motivated by common links, which were not aesthetics. It was about friendships and a need to change the structures. It was obvious that the Galerie took the place of a driving force. The members organized one event. It was a thematic exhibit named *Velourama*, designed to make fun of these painting on velvet. That exhibit turned out to be a real happening on its opening night.

Other close relationships were formed in parallel with another group of artists, generating an important phenomenon in Quebec City. Around Gilles Arteau, then a philosophy professor at the CEGEP Limoilou, a pedagogical enterprise having no equivalent took place in the creation of an interdisciplinary department opened to music, collage, photography, media and cinema studies. This unique experience captured an irresistible energy and allowed new contacts based on the usage of various mediums. After few years of somewhat risky and radical experimentations (if one look at the institutional criteria) the administration decided to close it.

From this "multi-department" came out the sounds of Bruit TTV, a group exploring deconstructive music as an aesthetic, playing improvised jazz as much as alternative and avant-garde music. We will discuss this issue later on.

During these years, there was an uncommon drive in the music world. Three CEGEP of the area and Laval University had strong programs. Jazz, blues, as much as rock and experimental music were common

and presented for no money. It is for sure that the success of CKRL-MF, the very first francophone student radio in North America resulted from this creative output.

The Conservatoire d'art dramatique was also prolific, forming actors and scenographers: creating theatres, a number of theater groups, experimentations and collective creations. Quebec City imposed itself for a long time in this respect, which I don't know much about. One would need a specialist to write about the energy of this milieu.

We can add to this, the importance of cinema and of the Cinema Quartier, which was simply a must. We could see everything there. It seems as if all was very good and coming from all over the world. In Limoilou, *La boîte à films* was proposing a movie for only a dollar, movies that would be on again and again. We were witnessing a cultural bulimia, particular to the generation that put the Parti Québécois in power.

This beautiful youth was ready. The place was ready.

In the winter of 1977, meetings were abundant at the Galerie Comme, and the idea of a manifest was the evidence. This text, reproduced in its totality in the appendix, was conscious of the role the State had to play on Quebec City's cultural sphere. In fact, it was the voice that claimed the importance of *art actuel* in a city that did not yet have a world heritage. The poor coverage of contemporary art was a given. The manifest was proposing a larger grouping of cultural organizations. At last, it was an attempt to integrate the art and the artist in the social realm. This manifest was sent to the medias and to Pierre Lachapelle, then the director of the Arts at Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Quebec. Today, when I think of this action, it seems to me really naïve. Nothing changed at the provincial level, to be sure, and the grant coming from the federal was cancelled.

The lamented review *dérives* has an interview realized by Jean Tourangeau with Odette Ducasse and myself. It recalls the Galerie Comme's post-mortem. This interview was doing an autopsy of its failures, suggesting some ideas for the future, some ideas that were considering the institutional sides of the experience at the Galerie Comme, discussed as follows:

J.C. S-H. *We are thinking more in terms of a network – to inform in particular – based on a cooperation between visual artists and more diversified possibilities. The local*

aspect is important, but so is publishing in the constant hopes to open it and make people know about it... Artists produce. This discussion allows them to come out of the closet. The underground is over.

O.D. *We think of a more organized core, and from that, an opening at the periphery. A center, very effective, would give full freedom to its members. The costs contingencies would be eliminated by rotation. We would not have a limited group, but identical formations making all types of writings possible instead. At last, this would end by not exhibiting, by going further towards something else. It is the links that create opening. And the problem of identification would be resolved by the same relations that created the movement⁸.*

In this interview, it is said that the Quebec City's milieu has not tried to interfere with the Galerie Comme, because of its fear to enter politics. The manifest, at first written to give a sense of wholeness to Quebec city's artistic community ended up being the realization of few individuals.

June 23rd 1977 was the last memorable opening at the Galerie Comme. It was dedicated to Joëlle Morosoli. The following year, all energies were now focusing, exclusively, or almost, towards La chambre blanche, in its second version, which was opening new spaces on Christophe-Colomb Street E., at the bottom of the hill in Saint-Roch. The popular vocation of animation in photography, defended in the first place by La chambre blanche, was further transformed into self-managed centers for artists. The terms *galerie parallèle* was used abundantly at the time. It formed a more important grouping of artists, roughly 40, all motivated by the development of a lively artistic space in Quebec City. La chambre blanche took an amazing step forwards. The first years were intense because it was the only space in the city that was not interested in printing techniques. It was nonetheless opened to all forms of new art by putting together exhibitions, installations and performances – not to mention concerts of improvised music, video viewings and meeting with artists visiting the city.

La chambre blanche became the place in town. Bruit TTV did numbers of presentations there and many events and collective exhibits took place during these years as well. Please note that *Objet fugitif* (1979) and *Féministe toi-même, féministe quand même* (1980) were among the most successful.

In March 1978, the review *Intervention* published its first issue.

Of the group involved in Galerie Comme, Mona Desgagné, Richard Martel and myself were among the founding members. Patrick Altman, François Bégin, Diane-Jocelyne Côté, Guy Durand and Jean-Claude Gagnon completed the team. *Intervention* was a direct response to the ideas put forward by the manifest of the Galerie Comme, namely the poor coverage of contemporary art in the Quebec medias. The core of *Intervention*, composed of more critical individuals, was defending the idea of an art that would be more social, engaged and in touch with reality. Conceptual art, the political aspects of culture and the critique of institutions and thoughts of some European "situationists" were just few approaches helping to give direction to the collective's ways of doings.

At the beginning of the eighties, the movement that had given birth to La chambre blanche experienced its first difficult period. The works were presented. The general orientations of the program stirred upheavals. Few tensions occurred and caused fractions in the group. New entities instantly developed. The group forming the review *Intervention* became autonomous and started to act. Later on, it will be the moment of *Obscure* to come on the scene. It will be discussed later in this article.

The group around the review *Intervention* (which I have known since the beginning because I was part of it) elaborated a strong commitment to cultural drive. It also gave a space for the personal expression of all. The learning processes of an integrated discourse, in the cultural and artistic news, is long to come and has its own rules. One of the most important moment for *Intervention* has been the *Symposium international de sculpture environnementale*, which took place in Chicoutimi in 1980. Richard Martel was intimately associated to it with his role at the coordination of the artistic content and the administrative aspects of the event. The team of *Intervention* was able to benefit from what was called "explorations projects", to finance the symposium. This project would become the number 9, altogether about the event and supplying a set of slides. The documents was viewed for free in various learning institutions in Quebec.

To be so close to such an important event meant that ultimately things would not stay this way. Networking was crucial and contacts were made (only to mention

Montreal's artistic intelligentsia, Hervé Fisher and Alain Snyers representing the Parisian school of sociology, Pierre Restany, Klaus Rinke and other artists and theorists from other countries). They helped, with the experience learned by the team of *Intervention* in Chicoutimi, to organize key events in Quebec City in the fall of 1981: *Art et société*. There was few exhibits happening at the Musée du Québec and at the Gallery l'Anse-aux-Barques, a festival of performances was held at the Musée du Québec and at the Canadian Institute, some "performances-manceuvres" were also taking place in the streets. At last, an international conference, a jazz festival and the issue no 13 of *Intervention* was necessary to prepare the event and manage all these activities. A catalogue edited for the exhibit gave a summary of all social, political, more engaged practices in Quebec based on history. Of all the events which will take place later by Le Lieu, centre in art actuel, *Art et société* was one of the most celebrated, surely because of its content, means and tools, but also for the diversity of its facets. It is fair to think that this event (and its direct offspring) had a real impact on the culture scene in Quebec City. It contributed to the repositioning of the city in terms of its international audiences. In this occasion, Hervé Fisher insisted on elaborating a sociological project that would send him to jail for few hours. Alain Snyers was also at the event, imagining two most interesting urban "manœuvres".

It is the same Fisher whom, in 1982, created the necessary conditions to ensure that six artists from *Intervention* would participate at *documenta 7*, taking place in Kassel, Germany, thanks to the Office franco-allemand de la jeunesse (OFAL). This project was to participate to the first ten days of *documenta* and taking part in discussion workshops and creation oriented towards political art. This group was formed by Diane-Jocelyne Côté, Chantal Gaudreault, Louis Haché, Richard Martel, Jean-Claude St-Hilaire et Guy Durand. Fisher was collaborating with the Cairn group and other French artists. The Germans were under the guidance of Klaus Staack, close collaborator of Joseph Beuys. One can consider that this team of the review *Intervention* was the first step towards the creation of the collective Inter/Le Lieu, on a creation project. In fact, each of the participants had to create in Kassel: street performances, postings, manœuvres involving road signs and publications°...

The experiences of these first years of group work inevitably forced us to open a space, a physical space that could visually support what the review *Intervention* would defend and put forward. After we came back from Germany, such a space was much needed. It is in the fall of 1982 that the first Lieu, center in art actuel, opened its doors in a very small room located at 89 Saint-Jean Street, apartment 1 (and we liked the coincidence that it was 89.1, like the radio station CKRL-MF). The size of the room was decisive in orienting types of exhibits: installations and visual poetry. The review *Intervention* was produced in the same rooms. Gradually, it is during these years that the general idea defended by the group of artists collaborating to the review shifted from the political to the poetical. It is also important to mention the influence of Fluxus Robert Filliou in this historical moment. Filliou stayed for two years in Quebec City, between 1979 and 1981. He was a key element of the team. Pierre-André Arcand and Jean-Yves Fréchette, both of them teachers in literature and poetry at the CEGEP François-Xavier Garneau, became closer to the group of *Intervention*.

It is in 1983 that Alain-Martin Richard, who had recently joined *Intervention*, guided the event *Le Marathon d'écriture*, which happened in the heart of Place-Fleur-de-Lys mall, during 76 hours. Alain-Martin was the first to honor what would become the collective Inter/Le Lieu.

And during this time, not to far from Le Lieu, the organization *Obscure* appeared. This new grouping of artists emerged at La chambre blanche and was composed of members of the interdisciplinary department of the CEGEP Limoilou. Gilles Arteau and Louis Ouellet were also on Bruit TTV. *Obscure's* actions were focusing mostly on the media aspects of sound expressions. This niche was still to be discussed and *Obscure* took this opportunity. By experimenting with codes, *Obscure* opened the way to the use of technology.

It is important to mention how important CKRL-MF was, at the turn of the eighties. This student radio had an organizational structure that was the first of its kind. It allowed an infinite range of propositions and opened the door to a discourse serving as an alternative cultural agent. For a long time, CKRL was the place to explore discoveries and experimentations on the radio. Their programming and shows of cultural interests have given a voice to collaborators involved in the milieu.

It was perfect in promoting new artistic activities in the media.

CKRL cut all ties with Laval University in 1984. Gilles Arteau was taking the station's command. Its move to Old Quebec also opened the way to few years of radio experimentations challenging the codes. It did so to the point of having no regular programming, radio programs moving from one time to the next on the programming schedule, daily.

The last centers in the network interested in *art actuel* also arrived on the scene. They were VU and L'Œil de Poisson, both of them dedicated to photography.

In 1982, the center VU began its activities. Comprised of many photo-graphers, its promotion of photo-graphy became well known in Quebec City. The works done by VU were also well respected because of their numerous catalogues, published early in the center's existence.

L'Œil de Poisson emerged in 1985, by the will of young artists to find a space for production and exhibition of their works in photography. Very rapidly, the direction was oriented towards varied productions, combining installations, exhibitions, performances and collective events. There was a special energy in that small space at the limit of Saint-Roch. All events, no matter how absurd, would have people come and participate.

Earlier on, La chambre blanche proposed events, exhibits with themes, evenings with performances, conferences and the likes... The organization lived through important changes. Many of its founders left Quebec City to pursue their careers in Montreal. The departure of Raymonde April, Fabienne Bilodeau, Serge Murphy, Jean Tourangeau, Cyril Reed and others created a void at this center trying to cope with this new situation. This mission will then allow various event productions in Quebec City. The gallery moved in 1988. This will mark the end of this first adaptation period.

The scale of Quebec City was perfect for this kind of collaboration. The critical mass of individuals that made this milieu possible was limited. For a better circulation of ideas and activities at a superior and more professional level, the energy had to be more focused. At the beginning, institutions were a few, but their impact was real. Before its face-lift, and its obsession with ratings, the Musée du Québec, thanks to l'Anse-Aux-Barques, had a strong hold on the city. The CEGEP's

various auditoriums were known by all. The professors' participation kept the pedagogical teams alert, and, in poetry at F.-X. Garneau (with Pierre-André Arcand and Jean-Yves Fréchette) in visual arts and photography in Sainte-Foy (with André Bécot, Jocelyn Gasse, Lucie Lefebvre, Alain-Martin Richard and myself), in sound in Limoilou (with Gilles Arteau and Louis Ouellet). Many professors of the Écoles des arts visuels, including Marc Dugas, Michel Labbé and Richard Mill, actively participated in this adventure from the beginning.

Looking at it from a distance, the frictions that caused the break up of the first group of La chambre blanche enabled the opening of modes of diffusion and artistic productions. Each of these groups occupied a territory with well-established boundaries. We saw that when the frictions disappeared, the maturity prevailing in the artists' communities and centers rapidly forced a collaboration that has since not ceased to grow. It is the most important aspect of this exercise in *art actuel* in Quebec City: the friendships and collaborations between the diverse groups make viable this fascinating adventure. This adventure of the art movements in the beautiful city of Quebec.

And what if, instead of humming and hawing, we would get together to celebrate the civil birth of our country, in our big village...? ■

Notes

- 1 Extract from Engramme, see on website www.meduse.org/engramme.
- 2 These two years have seen the emergence of a generation of artists. Many artists involved at Comme Galerie became known in Quebec City, to mention Raymonde April, François Joly, Jean Lantier, Raymond Lavoie, Jean-Marie Martin, Joëlle Morosoli, Serge Murphy and Michèle Waquant. Also, two professors at the Écoles des arts visuels also exhibited at the Galerie Comme, namely Claude Girard and Michel Labbé.
- 3 The Comme Galerie became Galerie Comme to make the name more "French". This was one of the conditions to obtain the right to incorporate as a non-profit organization.
- 4 André Bécot is a sculptor that taught at the Arts Department of the CEGEP Sainte-Foy. He is now retired and still owns a space in Saint-Roch.
- 5 See Yves Robillard in *Le jour*, Montreal, April 15th 1977.
- 6 See Jean Royer, in *Le soleil*, February 12, 1977.
- 7 See Jean Tourangeau, « Jean-Claude St-Hilaire », in *Vie des Arts*, vol. 21, Spring issue 1977, p. 86.
- 8 See Jean Tourangeau, « Galerie Comme: Entrevue avec Odette Ducasse et Jean-Claude St-Hilaire » in *dérives*, Montreal, l'Enmieux, n° 10-11, 1977.

- 9 Côté and Gaudreault were interested in the masculine majority at *documenta*. Martel was questioning Beuys' importance and performed *Le traité de la farine*. Haché performed inside the museum by sleeping in a corner. St-Hilaire recited traditional German tales in the streets, turning the scope to more political international issues. At last, Haché, St-Hilaire and Vanderborght (one of the French participants) were making fun of *documenta*, naked on the front of the Frédéricianum Museum. At last, Durand was busy observing and writing. If one wants to know more on this issue, see number 17 of the review *Intervention*.

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THIRTY YEARS OF LIVING ART IN QUEBEC CITY

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOU AND I

BY LISANNE NADEAU
AND GUY SIOUI DURAND*

Banff, Tuesday January 22nd 2008
Dear Lisanne,

From my window, I observe the tops of the Rockies. The tremendous drifting snow, lifted by the winds, works to amalgamate the sky to the valley in a milky fog. It is very cold. Even this far out, this horizon liberates my reflections: how to tell the story of living art which has now 30 years with the City as its real subject? What can we say about « art actuel » in Quebec City, in 2008? Furthermore, how to be up for the challenge of writing, in duo, a narrative which relates its artists to the *Cité*?

First, it seems wise to start with a kind of remembrance of things past, going back in time until, maybe, 1978, isn't it? I have always given some importance to transition periods, shifts from one time to another. In this case a decade to another. Also, as we start this correspondence and for clarity purposes, I suggest that we keep in mind these chronological blocks as landmarks: from 1978 until 1988, from 1988 until 1998, and from 1998 until 2008. I know, and there I will

not teach anything to an art historian like you, all divisions are arbitrary. It is however important that we remember that this history of friendly agents is also ours.

What do you think?

Regards.

Guy

Stoneham, Friday January 25th

Guy,

I am glad that you wish to look at this history from the point of view of our personal experience. Before you left, when we discussed it together, I was suddenly aware that our first encounter with « art actuel » was determinant in our respective itinerary. I was telling myself that it would be interesting to talk about these experiences, in the first place. What do you think? And this history would then emerge from our complementary point of views, similar yet different: two voices testifying to the distinct angles of this development of art actuel in Quebec City. Of course, it is important to fulfill our mission and look back at these important dates, because it seems that we have the responsibility to revisit this trajectory which might vanish into oblivion at any moment. Already, younger people are completely unaware of the important actors that have made today's milieu possible. A basic Google search confronts us to the terrible reality that centers like Obscure are for many a memory of a distant past.

You start all of this with 1978, and that speaks to me directly. It was the year of the founding of La chambre blanche, a center for artists where I have been active for many years, as you know. This sectioning of time, in decades, is very productive because I think they were moments of distinct developments with distinct objectives. Going back and revisiting mentally this trajectory makes me realize that we are coming from very far, coming out of the seventies' formalism to multidisciplinary approaches, even the interdisciplinary of today's world.

I will tell you my story. We will see if yours meets mine on the way...

Lisanne

Banff, Saturday January 26th

Lisanne,

With this e-mail, I am telling you that I utterly accept your proposition. I like this idea of beginning with the "first experiences". Even better, during this exchange, such « confidences » will do nothing else but stimulate. I catch a glimpse of this lived experience. It will

sometimes be an encounter, a reading, a street, a work of art, and the tale is born, curiosity starts something... and the imagination is at work. Let's go for it!

Guy

1978-1988

Sunday January 27th

Guy,

I am going along with this game.

I am now in 1978. I have to say that haunting to me is this image of the hole that was Saint-Roch. We could see it from my office window at La chambre blanche, located at number 549, on Charest. The urban development was in crisis at the time, in this area. This area will become the core of the city's art scene. You remember, Robert Lepage made of this open wound in the city his Trilogy's catalyst... It is indeed in this quaint little space, an old office space with terrazzo flooring(!) that I fell in love with art actuel for the first time. I had not seen anything like this. Someone had invited me to write on an exposition of artists' book, in 1982. They also presented an installation by Françoise Girard in a space exclusively allocated to residences *in situ*. I have no idea if you remember this, but in this space artists were free to intervene as they pleased, on walls, floors and all. And they could also keep the traces and elements left by their predecessors. We were witnessing, from one work to another, a form of palimpsest. It was the *in situ* in its first phase where the main point was to consider, before anything else, the architectural specificity of each space, and then to integrate a poetic element to it. This was a way of questioning the status of the work of art as an object, and also the traditional and neutral utopia inherent to the way we hang them. I remember that we were all interested in the works done by Lapointe and Fleming and their investments in dilapidated spaces in Montreal.

When I was young, I had been to the Galerie Joliette and the Galerie du Musée (which was previously called l'Anse-aux-Barques), two essential spaces for their diffusion of contemporary arts in Quebec City at the time. But then, Françoise's installation was something else. The transformation of the small room into an immaculate white space opened the way to an untold visual and physical experience. At the time, installation, like René Payant was saying, was coming out of painting. This sensation of being *IN* troubled me profoundly. I had the will to become more engaged as a member.