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At What Point Are We In the Dissemination of Art? Art of the Seventies

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LA DIFFUSION DES ARTS, OÙ EN SOMMES-NOUS? DEUX CONGRÈS DE LA CRITIQUE D'ART

Les conférences ont rarement un sort heureux. Quelles que soient les formules utilisées, les critiques fusent de toutes parts: trop de ceci, pas assez de cela, la réunion est terne, les intervenants manquent d'objectivité, les plus passionnés ne vocifèrent que des lieux communs. C'est là, habituellement, le triste déroulement des jeux de la délibération et de la participation qui se font au nom de la démocratie.

Ce qui progresse, à la suite de ces confrontations, est moins apparent. Les modestes retombées qui engagent des plans d'action n'ont rien de bien spectaculaire ou de sensationnel pour les affamés de nouvelles qui **couvrent** les événements et encore moins, pour les délégués saturés et blasés qui réapparaissent **quand même** fidèlement à ces réunions.

On est si peu habitué à la réflexion, si peu entraîné à chercher dans les communications les valeurs positives et essentielles qu'on ne voit partout que frustration, échec, lenteur, manque d'originalité, etc. La Conférence sur **Les Arts et les média** qui s'est tenue, au début de juillet, au Centre National des Arts d'Ottawa, n'a pas échappé au cortège des lamentations de la presse pessimiste. Et pourtant, une importante réflexion sur ce sujet s'y poursuit, depuis trois années consécutives. Dans quelle mesure l'information, la critique, la transmission ou retransmission des œuvres facilitent-elles la diffusion des arts et contribuent-elles à augmenter leur rayonnement? Ce n'est pas une question simple. Les solutions immédiates et hâtives ne répondent pas entièrement à un souci d'orientation durable. Pourquoi les arts? Est-ce aussi important que les sports, l'économie, les affaires publiques? Il faut encore se poser ces questions, qui semblent élémentaires. Il faut encore le faire avec la foi et l'amour qui inspirent les grandes aventures. S'il faut aller jusqu'aux statistiques pour convaincre, on sait aujourd'hui que le public qui fréquente les salles de concert, les musées, les théâtres est au moins aussi important que les adeptes du sport. Les heures d'écoute à la radio et à la télévision sont cependant loin de refléter cette situation, de même que l'espace réservé aux événements culturels dans la presse. Et pourtant, c'est là que se trouvent les outils par excellence du pouvoir de diffusion. Avec eux, on peut éveiller, sensibiliser, libérer, c'est-à-dire inviter chacun à faire ses propres choix. Sans eux, l'information demeure limitée à de petits groupes — l'œuvre, malgré toute son excellence, est privée de diffusion.

Un signe prometteur. Pour la première fois, la réunion a été organisée conjointement par la Société Radio-Canada et le Centre National des Arts. C'est une avant-première d'une collaboration de plus en plus étroite et sûrement très fertile entre les centres de diffusion et de production. Il s'agit de savoir mieux utiliser les différents éléments qui concourent à l'expression harmonieuse de la vie culturelle.

L'enquête annoncée par le Ministre des Communications, Mme Jeanne Sauvé, permettra d'assurer, à l'avenir, une plus large part au contenu artistique et culturel en tant qu'on réussira à persuader chacun d'y mettre un peu de bonne volonté. Par exemple, les syndicats doivent comprendre que leur collaboration dans la question des droits d'auteurs est nécessaire afin de rendre possible une large diffusion populaire. A défaut d'entente, les sommes vertigineuses à engager rendraient prohibitives les retransmissions de grandes émissions.

Les conclusions de la Conférence, tirées par le Professeur Richard Hoggart prirent la forme d'une déclaration en sept articles:

1. **Les arts sont essentiels à la vie — ils ne sont pas des artifices.** C'est une vérité qui vient du fond des temps et qu'il est temps de reconnaître.
2. **Chaque individu est un amant potentiel des arts.** Le virus des arts a certainement une forte puissance d'attrait mais, comme dans tout amour, il faut pouvoir le mériter, le garder et l'approfondir, pour en avoir pleine jouissance.
3. **Chaque individu a droit à la culture et aux arts.** Un des principaux articles de la Charte de l'Unesco, en vigueur depuis plus de vingt-cinq ans!
4. **Les média ont une responsabilité particulière vis-à-vis des arts parce qu'ils sont un bien public, d'une part, et, d'autre part, parce qu'ils occupent une position stratégique en tant que diffuseurs dans le champ de la communication.** Le pouvoir des média est incommensurable. Il faut savoir l'utiliser, tout en demeurant conscient des responsabilités qu'il entraîne. Les média ont souvent une attitude superficielle et irresponsable en ce qui concerne les arts et toutes les choses de l'esprit. Ils ne créent pas encore, loin de là, un milieu stimulant pour les grandes aventures de la pensée.
5. **L'État a le devoir de veiller à favoriser par une réglementation spécifique l'élaboration d'une programmation équilibrée des média.** Une partie importante des solutions dépend d'un bon dosage de la programmation et de la conscience des animateurs chargés de sa réalisation.
6. **Une fois les réglementations admises, l'État doit se retirer et laisser les média débattre leur raison d'être avec la population qu'ils servent en quelque sorte et à laquelle ils sont redevables.** Un nouveau mode de fonctionnement mériterait d'être étudié dans cette perspective.
7. Enfin, ici, il n'y a rien à ajouter et les média cherchent à satisfaire les exigences suivantes: **Les média doivent respecter le caractère spécifique des arts tout en cherchant à exploiter toutes leurs possibilités pour leur rendre justice.**

TEXTS IN ENGLISH

AT WHAT POINT ARE WE IN THE DISSEMINATION OF ART?
ART OF THE SEVENTIES

By Andrée PARADIS

Conferences seldom arrive at a happy fate. Whatever may be the formulas used, criticism bursts forth from everywhere: too much of this, not enough of that. The meeting is dull, the contributors lack objectivity, the most passionately interested shout only commonplaces. Although usually carried on in the name of democracy the result is the sad unfolding of games of deliberation and participation.

What improves following these confrontations is less apparent. The modest results that begin plans of action hold nothing very spectacular or sensational for those hungry for news who *cover* the events and still less for the satiated and blasé delegates who repeatedly appear faithfully *anyhow* at these meetings.

We are so little used to reflection, so little trained in searching for positive and essential values in communications that everywhere we see only frustration, failure, slowness, lack of originality, etc. The Arts and Media Conference held at the beginning of July at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa has not escaped the series of laments of the pessimistic press. However, important thought on this subject has been taking place for the last three years. To what degree do information, criticism, transmission or retransmission of works promote the dissemination of the arts and contribute to their spread? This is no simple question. Urgent, hasty solutions do not entirely respond to a lasting concern on orientation. Why the arts? Is this as important as sports, economy or public affairs? We must still ask ourselves these seemingly elementary questions. We must still do this with the faith and the love that incite to great adventures. If we must go so far as statistics to convince, we know to-day that the public that visits the concert halls, the museums, the theatres, is at least as important as the sports followers. The time devoted to the arts on radio and television is, however, far from reflecting this situation, just like the space reserved for cultural events in the press. Yet it is here that the tools par excellence of the power of dissemination are to be found. With these we can awaken, sensitize, liberate, that is invite each person to make his own choice. Without these, information remains limited to small groups — the work of art, in spite of all its excellence, is deprived of dissemination.

A promising sign. For the first time, a meeting was organized jointly by Radio-Canada and the National Arts Centre. This is a preview of the cooperation that is becoming closer and closer and certainly very productive between the centres of diffusion and those of production. It is a matter of knowing how to better use the different elements that combine in the harmonious expression of cultural life.

The inquiry announced by Mme Jeanne Sauvé, Minister of Communications, will permit the assuring in the future of a greater share in the artistic and cultural content in so far as each can be persuaded to apply a little goodwill. For instance, unions should understand that their cooperation in the matter of authors' rights is necessary in order to make possible a wide popular distribution. Failing an agreement, the enormous sums called for would make re-broadcasts of big programmes prohibitive.

The conclusions of the Conference, drawn by Professor Hoggart, took the form of a declaration in seven articles:

1. *The Arts are essential to a good life and the stress must be on the word essential.* This has been true since time immemorial and it is time to recognize the fact.
2. *Everyone is potentially a special kind of lover of the arts.* The virus of the arts surely has a great power of attraction, but, as in any love, one must be able to deserve, retain and go deeply into it, in order to enjoy it fully.
3. *Everyone has the right of access to the arts and that right must be met and honoured.* One of the chief articles of the UNESCO Charter, in force for more than twenty-five years.
4. *The media of Mass communication, and in particular broadcasting, have particular responsibilities towards ths right of access, and for two main reasons. First because they are public resources and must be used for public ends. They are a public resource and a limited public resource. Secondly, because they have a privileged rôle, a special status in thus developing the appreciation of the arts.* The power of the media is immeasurable. It is necessary to know how to use it while remaining aware of the responsibilities it entails. The media often display a superficial and irresponsible attitude toward the arts and all things of the mind. They do not yet create a stimulating milieu for great adventures in thought; far from it.
5. *It is similarly the duty of governments to set up such structures, to give such mandates to the media as will allow them to fulfill the above truths, and not thwart them.* An important part of the solutions depends heavily on programming and on the conscientiousness of the animators responsible.
6. *Having thus set up living space for good broadcasting, the government should get out of it.* In this prospect, a new way of functioning should be studied.

Finally, there is nothing further to be added here, and the media fulfill, on the whole, the following demands: *First of all, it is the duty of broadcasters to respect the Arts in and for themselves. Second, it is the great good fortune of broadcasters to love their medium and its possibilities.*

The conference ended on a note of hope. We have been fortunate to have with us the Secretary of State, Mr. John Roberts, a man who likes what is solid, a man of refined and cultured mind. He later declared that, if the government consents to increase the sums allocated to the arts (a decision taken at the beginning of July), it is because it recognizes the necessity for this. In his view, the artist has not only the function of entertainer, he represents vital superabundance, the essential. We need his talent, his generosity, his ideas, to better understand ourselves, for lack of loving ourselves. "The arts", re recalled, "must chiefly be used for the exploration of the human condition. By becoming priorities, the arts will help us to build a civilized country."

The arts need these words which come from the heart and which give confidence.

The International Association of Art Critics will hold its next convention in Germany, from the seventh to the ninth of the coming September. There, questions relative to art of the Seventies will be considered, and the discussions will bear particularly on the following themes: 1. Expansion of the plastic arts beyond their traditional limits; 2. Conception and problems of present-day realism; 3. Theory and methodology of criticism of contemporary art. In anticipation of these sessions, we intend to present some articles that call attention to these preoccupations. We hope to publish during the year one or two other texts that seemed important to us.

The quarterly publishing of *Vie des Arts* has unfortunately not allowed us to emphasize the success of the 1976 Conference, held at Lisbon and organized by Mme Salette Tavares. There, discussion centered on the reciprocal relations between modern art and African-negro art.

Until the 20th century, historians and critics drew their inspiration from exclusively European canons to evaluate all forms of culture, which led to blind, puerile judgments on African art. The year 1905 marked a turning point. We know now that the advent of modernity coincided with the new scrutiny that the principal artists of the period applied to negro art. Upon becoming interested in it, inquiring into it, integrating it, they found the basis of a new language which unceasingly demands fresh clarifications.

By means of texts by writers such as Apollinaire, Kahnweiler, Vlaminck, Carl Einstein and Laude and according to a definition of modern art borrowed from G. Picon and P. Dufour, one of the lecturers, Jean-Louis Paudrat, tried to analyze what the discovery of African-negro art brought to modern art. A completely renewed sense of relationships that must be viewed under two aspects: the emotional primitive and the intellectual primitive. He has stressed the perception of artists such as Picasso, Braque and Vlaminck, whose intuitions have been confirmed by the subsequent investigations of ethnologists in Africa. As for Alberto Sartoris, he is involved more in the problems of the African architecture and its relationships with European architecture. He cites good examples of architecture well integrated at Accra in Ghana. The rate of population growth and urbanization is going to create tremendous problems in a few years. It is imperative to make use of traditions as much as possible and change them only when this is absolutely necessary.

Jacques Meuris had attempted a global but varied approach to objects of primitive art: he recalled the contemporary concern for craftsmanship that began with the Industrial Revolution and that is a form of opposition to the machine. Morris and Ruskin directed their efforts toward a return to traditional humanism. Jacques Meuris suggests naming this instinc-

tive art rather than primitive. This proposal has met with keen opposition. Terminology, it seems, leads us into difficult paths.

The perception of objects and the changes brought about by ethnology were then studied by Joaquim Pais de Brito. Should viewing be a militant act? Pleasure and curiosity no longer being enough, one must dare "to look for himself", "to watch himself looking" at things. This is a process of decolonization of the eye that ethnology itself undergoes.

The I.A.A.C. conference in Portugal coincided with an exhibition, *Modernism and African-negro Art*, presented at the Lisbon Museum of Ethnology. For many of us, this was a first contact with the stupendous art of the Bijagos Islands of the Guinea-Bissau region. Twelve other areas were also represented. Of great beauty, this exhibition had, at the same time, the merit of making the objects accessible and permitting the detailed examination of them.

Finally, contacts with Portuguese artists and critics were assured by the visit of two exhibitions: 1. *Pioneers of Modern Art in Portugal;* 2. *Modern Art Salon 1976.*

The meetings took place at the Gulbenkian Foundation, one of the most interesting modern museums in Europe, which, at the time, was presenting a special exhibition organized to honour the memory of Calouste Gulbenkian, upon the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Foundation.

Briefly, this was a very rewarding conference and an additional gesture of international cultural solidarity.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

CURRENT ART AND THE BIAS OF THE VIEWER

By Bernard LEVY

In recent years, artists in Quebec have been coping with the return of the fundamental problem that revolves around the question: What is art? They have been examining themselves concerning the art of painting, sculpting, executing plastic work. They have been re-examining the *reality* that is also the reality of colour and forms. They ask themselves what plastic language is and particularly what its meaning is. Their answers are very fragmentary, often confused, and sometimes inadequate; whence arises an impression of very great indecision among the artists themselves on the subject of current orientations in art. This indecision extends to observers and to the public. We shall see that such a climate can be the prelude to a particularly fruitful period.

For the last few years, therefore, art trends in Quebec have found themselves in a global questioning perspective on art. They have entered into a context frequently invoked even if it is very badly defined as a crisis in civilization. Doubtless, the crisis in present-day art (this time of great indecision) and the socio-cultural malaise that has prevailed for some years in the Western world are struggling under the burden of the eternal questions that endlessly batter them: What is life? What is society?

We are certainly obliged to observe that, in Quebec as elsewhere in the world, artists are passing through an intense period of interrogation first on themselves, then on plastic space, on the crises of our time, on the society that surrounds them and, more precisely, on the production (industrial, technological, intellectual, scientific, political, economic) of the society whose good or bad conscience they carefully avoid being. Their involvement goes beyond the narrow frames of politics. Artists attempt (or are content) to found the essential of their creative development on strictly theoretical bases. However, the modesty (the lack of scope) of certain undertakings seems tainted by weakness and, consequently, debatable; in any case, it deserves criticism. Indeed, it is easier, for example, to study with extreme precision and seriousness above any suspicion of the phenomena of chromatic differential perception; this form of activity allows whisking away at a cheap price the reflection on the meaning of such a work for the one who blindly devotes himself to it. The laboratory is never far from the ivory tower. We understand also why a public is lacking to hold to hypotheses of illusion or vanishing point.

Concerning present art in Quebec, at this time we can only indicate certain trends. In fact, there are no genuine movements that gather around hypotheses or global theories of the groups or individuals who, by their production, feed a wide discussion on artistic output. We have, rather, to do with small groups and particularly with isolated artists who, in the self-communion of their studios, solitarily pursue research that can, without too much exaggeration, be located in a same trend of thought. This orientation, or rather, these orientations, find their ferment in the critical reflections of the *atmosphere of the times* or, if you prefer, in the intellectual interrogations inspired by this famous crisis in civilization.

If we cannot truly define this crisis, we can at least review some of its obvious effects. It finds expression, for example, in a series of man's new moral perceptions with his milieu (environment) that especially questions the functions of education, the foundations of social justice (human rights), the principles of allocation of natural resources, the rôle of the State and of institutions. It follows that a climate of existential uncertainty prevails which finds an echo at the political level where uncertainty rests on a base of disguised economic crises marked by inflation difficult to control, by a high percentage of unemployment and by strikes. Art magazines are not generally spoken of in this socio-historical context that is not so foreign as one might think to the process of creation, since it is on this basis that is established the search for the improvement of the quality of life, a search that has become commonplace. This hidden demand puts the question of the meaning of life that reverts to the centre of contemporary concerns. A question long deferred, a question for poets and artists. Those of to-day unfortunately have no successful answers. Nor have they, perhaps, any stimulating critical standpoints.

Therefore, maybe the absence of one or several important movements is not accidental. It is the reflection of a period when artists deliberately refrain from expressing judgements and ideological positions as shattering as they are dogmatic. They are questioning themselves. Each travels his personal itinerary, applying himself to developing only a tiny, microscopic aspect of a tremendous problem whose whole they refuse to undertake. And so they move with very small steps, somewhat like certain scientific specialists. They regularly show their works at exhibitions. Without going so far as to increase their marginality, they are happy in the favourable opinion of a public — friends — that, in any case, has always been restricted in the matter of avant-garde creation and that follows their evolution with a half-approving, half-sceptical eye. However, from the evidence of the crowd at the Contemporary Art Museum on Saturdays and Sundays, we would be wrong to believe that a larger public does not display a keen interest in present-day art. Certainly, extensive efforts remain to be exerted on the levels of education and artistic information. Still, it cannot be denied that artists are perfectly aware of how important it is to be understood. That is why, in order to limit wrong comprehension of their production and to stimulate participation by visitors, they add to their works typed explanatory texts, sound or videographic tapes. So they no longer neglect making their development clear, sometimes in detail. The viewing public is not indifferent to these marks of concern. Nor is it their dupe. It does not always feel concerned by what often seems to be an ensemble of superfluous justifications; it also has the impression that they wish to force its approval by presenting to it a part of the other side of the coin. There is added, too, the risk of showing that the work cannot speak by itself and that it needs to be supported, to be explained by a discourse which, besides, has no hesitation in being redundant. The progression is such that the artist's dissertation on his work finally becomes more important than the work itself. This is the pitfall that certain plasticians have not been able to avoid, to the point where their *theorization* has been considered as terrorism. Doubtless, the absence of a leader among to-day's young creators is a sign of opposition to their elders, and an avowal, too.

Therefore, at the heart of a situation where serious difficulties are experienced in perceiving great axes and criticism that is criticism, we can, in spite of everything, try to discern some trends. This is a dangerous practice, since we know how numerous are the zones of interference, with the dispersion that constitutes the chief sociological characteristic of current art. The artist who began his career as a plastician appeals to-day to minimalism or even to post-minimalism, without for all that repudiating his first adherence. There is also the risk of labelling. That is why the examples and names cited are used here only by way of illustration. The categories we are going to note belong, in fact, in a complex historical process that cannot be analyzed in detail: these divisions contribute to the lucidity of the account.

A first series of trends finds its faraway source in Surrealism which, schematically, gave birth to the Automatist movement (1945-1948), which was followed by that of the plasticians (1960). Geometric art, Abstract Expressionism, Lyrical Abstraction and research in chromatics are part of an authentic movement that still dominates contemporary art in Quebec in the view of certain persons. Many members of these movements still pursue an active career; they are well known: Yves Gaucher, Charles Gagnon, Guido Molinari, Serge Tousignant, Omer Parent, Jacques Hurtubise, Denis Juneau, Marcelle Ferron, Rita Letendre, Mario Merola, Yves Trudeau, Ulysse Comtois, Guy Montpetit, Armand Vaillancourt. The movement also includes Roger Vilder's kinetic productions.

A second form of creation draws its inspiration from Pop art that originated in England about 1962, spread to the United States and reached Quebec in 1965. This style marks a first return to representative art: Realism, Neo-Realism, Hyperrealism, Neo-Surrealism, Neo-