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Fee, Fie, Foe...

Andrew Dutkewych, Trevor Gould, Michel Goulet, Galerie
Christiane Chassay, Montréal, October 13 to November 10, 1990

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ACTUALITÉS / EXPOSITIONS

FEE, FIE, FOE...

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According to one much-touted French theoretician, the ecstasy of communication is currently lost in the masses; it is dissipated in a (social) void that absorbs (not processes) all radiation from the constellations of state, history, culture and meaning. They (the masses) are inertia; their strength is in their neutrality, in their willingness to accept an *in vacuo* aggregation of lost power and truth. The masses are no longer the protagonists of change; they are the silent spectators of a collapsing social system. For the purposes of this report, the art-viewing public represents those masses.

The art-viewing public is, today, more than ever, without attribute, predicate or reference; they are distanced from the "reality" of their own existence. Art exhibition projects have, by-and-large, become conjunctions between those presenters who have little to say in a relevant (read: social) context and an audience that, by virtue of its neutrality, blocks the generation and/or circulation of any singular discourse. In essence, viewers have succumbed to the overwhelming inefficacy of it all, resigning themselves to function as complacent witnesses to the vastness of uncaptured significance, incomplete histories and untraceable systems of representation offered up by the *milieu*.

This stated (and acknowledged as possessing at least a grain of truth) it would be tantamount to folly to organize an art exhibition under the pretext of meaningful dialogue or under the umbrella of pertinent issue or theme. Nonetheless, last year, C.I.A.C.'s *Savoir-vivre*, *Savoir-faire*, *Savoir-être*, attempted to do just that. Beginning with the observation that we "live in a world that has lost its bearings" (noted by Claude Gosselin in the exhibition catalogue preamble), the project's organizers proceeded to assemble a number of international artists of "intense goodwill" – artists who allegedly shared concerns for the state of our fragile environment. Goodwill, however, is inevitably lost in the cerebral *chiaroscuro* of our present-day art *milieu*. And if *Savoir-vivre* fell short of its expectations, it was precisely because its initiators failed to grasp the opaque resistance of the masses to "reading", let alone "contextu-

alizing", any assigned meaning or value. So let's check pretext at the door, dump the freight of imposed sociopolitical worth, and celebrate creative impulses for reasons of their (more honest) subjective intent. The *impromptu* exhibition of recent sculpture by Andrew Dutkewych, Trevor Gould, and Michel Goulet, running concurrent with *Savoir-vivre*, invited one such celebration. All three artists glanced the ineluctable dimension of lost truth, grasped the purposelessness of precise narrative, and so produced a body of work rich in sustained ambiguity – a body of work resplendent in its flowering of sublations and reversals.

Entering the exhibition area, and moving counter-clockwise through the three show rooms:

With *Sometimes called monument*, Trevor Gould sought to give body and form to some thoughts on the demise of colonial ideology. The artist caromed word from image and image from meaning in a game that could be likened to the playing of billiards. A band of text reading "J. L. David and the Sculptor", painted in mute earthen tones (think felt), and wrapped around one corner of the gallery, served as the cushion for the gaming table(s) centrally positioned between four posts (the outer limits of the *in situ* composition – the "edge" or brink of the playing surface). The name J. L. (Jacques-Louis) David and the classical-styled pediment, perched precariously atop the table(s), alluded to the neo-classical time frame and (presumably) its attendant aesthetic dispositions. One such disposition, developed by eighteenth-century grammarian, César Dumarsais, seems ideally suited to a fuller appreciation of Gould's bank shots. It was Dumarsais who introduced "tropology" (that is, the tortuous study of the twisting of a word's original meaning) into the analysis of Western language. It is precisely in the tropological space created by meaning displacement that Gould cues his audience to the infinite multiplication of reflexions – the ellipses of being.

Andrew Dutkewych's *Pod Mostem* (Polish for "under the bridge") deals with displacement of a different sort. It is the re-creation of a work originally produced for, and exhibited in, an "unofficial" gallery



Andrew Dutkewych, *Pod Mostem*, 1990 ; mixed media.

in Poznan, Poland (an old film studio commandeered as gallery space). *Pod Mostem* is manifestly a social piece – social in the sense that all socialization is measured according to exposure to the masses. *Pod Mostem* is a collection of *artefacts / souvenirs*, a fragmented simulation of the artist's prosaic travel experiences, a simulacrum of Polish quotidian and its inherent banalities. That Dutkewych's selection of *artefacts* is familiar to us in North America (a Victorian table and period wallpaper, a pair of 50s-styled, stiletto-heeled shoes, a farmer's wash-tub...) is but one indication of the triteness of social fabric. Thus, in essence, the artist offers the viewer an anti-theatre of communication – an abundance of information apparently intended to exhaust itself in the recycling / restaging of meaning. The spectator is left pondering whether it is a loss of culturally specific meaning that leads to the use of simulacra, or if, in fact, it is the presence of trace elements that has short-circuited any possibility of meaningful communication. A wall unit of an apple mirroring an apple would seem to warn about the purposelessness of embarking upon any such reflective journey.

Michel Goulet's *State of Directions* was anything but a work indicative of motivating purposes and is perhaps best viewed in the light of some recent critical / curatorial appraisals. In the preceding issue of *Etc Montréal* (an issue honouring Michel Goulet as recipient of the coveted *prix Paul-Émile-Borduas* for 1990),

the artist's friend and colleague, Lise Lamarche, emphasized the pointlessness of saying anything precise about Goulet except that he is indeed a sculptor. Nonetheless, Lamarche referred the reader to France Gascon's essay appearing in the 43rd Venice Biennial exhibition catalogue as an authoritative statement on Goulet's *œuvre*. Well... scanning that text we discover that Goulet, by means of "a superficially simple situation" (a *tableé* /assembly-line process), produces "levels of meaning" that "postpone almost indefinitely the viewer's conclusion about the work". Several thousand words of enquiry without thesis lead to the conclusion that Goulet's work is "political" – political because "it does not seek to free itself from the conditions imposed by (our) time". What conditions are those? Isn't something 'political' necessarily expedient, tactful, or policy promoting – at the very least, in some measure, contrived?

FEE, FIE, FOE...

And finally, the (imagined) reverberant strum of a bass fiddle – the "sound" of realization off-heard in theatrical productions, a strum dissipating into the silence of contemplation... into aftermath. It is, at once, the sound of (en)light(en)ment and darkness. Could we have come to the (reluctant) conclusion that we have reached a point in art and art critical history where effect theoretically precedes cause.

Fummmmm....

ALLAN PRINGLE