Thirty Years of Living in Quebec City: A Dialogue Between You and I

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A DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOU AND I

BY LISANNE NADEAU
AND GUY SIOUX DURAND

Banff, Tuesday January 22
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 a narrative which relates its artists to the City?

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 sake, 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?

Guy

Banff, Friday January 25

Guy, I am glad that you wish to look at this history from the point of view of your 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 itineraries. 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, located at 549, place d’Youville. At last, Durand was busy observing and writing. If one wants to know more on this issue, see number 10 of the review Intervention. Jean-Claude St-Hilaire has been teaching art history for 20 years at the CEGEP Saint-Foy, and communications and multimedia design for the last 9 years in Quebec City and elsewhere. He pursues his artistic research in the field of performance and art installation. He has observed the cultural milieu all his life. He has been a contributor to the collective Intérieur/Lieu (1977) for many years. He is one of the founders of the review Inter/actuel (1978) and of the art center Le Lieu (1982). He collaborates with these two entities by writing articles and by his own artistic practice.

Dear 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 29

Guy,

I am going along with this game. I am now in 1978. I have to say that haunting me to this image is the muck 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 quiet 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 exhibition 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 the 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 space and its potential, 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-Barcques), two essential spaces for the dissemination of contemporary art 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 Parc 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,
It was another time! Computers were nonexistent. I had wanted to change our press releases and some members told me that we should not look like a commercial gallery. When we look at their history, we see that centers for artists have moved from an alternative status to their full recognition. We will have to see, together, this evolution and its consequences. At the beginning of the eighties, many people moved to Montreal. Many creators like Raymonde April, Serge Murphy, Fabienne Bilodeau, Michelle Waquant and Francine Guay (today at the 19%) had already left to Montreal. I remember rubbing shoulders with Bernard Bilodeau, Isabelle Bernier, Monique Mongeau, Guy Pellerin, Michel Asselin, Francine Châne and Charles Bouchard. All of them left. Then Hélène Rochette and Helga Schlitter left. André Pellerin and Sylvie Gagne have unfortunately stopped their productions. They were outstanding artists. François Lachapelle also. She had coordinated a section of art actual at Québec City's celebration in 1984, for La chambre blanche. I did not know anything, as many of my colleagues. That said, we could see all the work that needed to be done in a city like ours and all the possibilities for coordination. During the eighties, we were active in the collective, and the main drive was to serve art in situ. It is still important today, as a matter of fact. My understanding of art in situ has changed, of course, but I cannot deny the profound impact of this period.

Tuesday January 30th

Lisanne,

The intimate tone of your letter warmed up my recollections of these times. These “first impressions” will also, I imagine, it will make few people remember. It will also wake up the spirit of younger people when they will be reading about this recent past, which is not very often mentioned. Two of “these situations” comes to mind, at the beginning of the seventies. First, there was the need to join the collective life, the one taking place in the new spaces dedicated to arts in the Faubourg Saint-Jean-Baptiste (such as described by Jean-Claude St-Hilaire in his brilliant essay in this edition) and, secondly, the happening Art et société.

Living there, I am taking part in various issues of the Faubourg’s life, particularly the latest refurbishing of Parliament Hill. You also have the highway projects compromising Saint Gabriel Street and their prolongation into Lockwell Street. I go from door to door, take the pen and write in “L’opinion du lecteur”. Surprise, I received words of congratulations from my neighbors. My meeting with Richard Martel was a landmark. He introduced me to the review Intervention and to the world of art action.

Between 1977 and 1982, I circulate with curiosity and interest in the various creative dematerialized milieu. In the Faubourg, we find the Atelier de réalisation graphique (ARG, 1972), La chambre blanche (a photo studio in 1976 which will become a parallel gallery in 1978) the Galerie Comme (from 1974 until 1977), the Atelier André Bécat (1976) Le Lieu (dedicated to social art and performance, 1992) and Obscure (audio, video and multidisciplinary arts, 1982). The center VU (1982) rented a space on Garneau Street, in the Upper City.

Saint-Jean Street is the lively quarter of the Faubourg Saint-Jean-Baptiste. The exhibit called Reliques, by Jean-Claude St-Hilaire at André Bécat (1978), at the crossings of anthropology and body art, had impressed me so much that this interdisciplinary department at the CEGEP Limoilou (1974-1977). I had studied there at the college level, close to the Arbo Cyber team again later, at some point alongside the experimental music group called Bruit TV, or at another time with the theater group known as Arbo Cyber theater (7) I was also participating to a radio show at CKRL-MF, run for a while by Anneau. The adventure of the center Obscure, it is also on this dossier, will be very important. It will also be important not to forget, in this reading of cultural mappings, the infiltration happening in Saint-Roch and its many dilapidated buildings invested, in the seventies, by artists such as Jocelyn Gasco. Indeed, it would be important to insist on the importance of the presence of artists, individually, in the area. Their action is as crucial and complementary as the ones offered by centers by creating an artistic milieu in sync with urban life. We will see it later on in the nineties and recently with Saint-Roch’s revitalization. At last, it will also be important to mention the law concerning the artist’s status, dating from 1988. A law that will help the development not only of the tools of representations, but the defense of realities given to authors. We will talk.

Friday February 1st

Guy, it’s me again… I have been one of the organizers and participants, the event Art et société has been, in my opinion, the second shift helping me to understand better the arts’ mutations, namely: 1) political art leaving behind its militant aspects to become a form of activism 2) the world of performances of art vacillating between the social and the body and 3) the Conference at the Canadian Institute (with its 300 visitors coming from others parts of Quebec) confirms, in this moment, the importance of networks.

Guy

Wednesday January 30th

Guy,

I am learning now that you were involved in the movement opposing the refurbishing of Parliament Hill. Political and social actions really punctuated your career. Your first article written for Intervention was also on the cultural scene of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste area. We are now hoping to do the same thing, together. This is incredible… you are right, Jean-Claude St-Hilaire’s reflections of the seventies, in this dossier, will be very important. It will also be important to note, in this reading of cultural mappings, the infiltration happening in Saint-Roch and its many dilapidated buildings invested, in the seventies, by artists such as Jocelyn Gasco. Indeed, it would be important to insist on the importance of the presence of artists, individually, in the area. Their action is as crucial and complementary as the ones offered by centers by creating an artistic milieu in sync with urban life. We will see it later on in the nineties and recently with Saint-Roch’s revitalization. At last, it will also be important to mention the law concerning the artist’s status, dating from 1988. A law that will help the development not only of the tools of representations, but the defense of realities given to authors. We will talk.

Lisanne
Cartier with Robillard in a dubious bar on the 60’s and 70’s. The topic (which surprising. We have to remember the Collection Cultural Affairs at the time, starts its management by artists! and “artor” on the adventure of the very interesting conference given art reviews and the wheels of the system, of the importance, for the system, of the emerging centers for artists that museums had shown a real concern for the arts in the present by programming Conferences and Symposiums with themes such as teaching the arts at the University (1976), and the development of art reviews and the wheels of the contemporary art market.

In this respect, I remember the very interesting conference given by Yves Robillard, art historian, critic and “ator” on the adventure of the underground scene in Montreal in the 60’s and 70’s. The topic (which was supposed to be the art market in Quebec) rapidly shifted to the importance, for the system, of what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was calling at the time “the scope of art”. We were many to digress with the absurdity of a dubious bar on Cartier Street, talking about self-management by artists!

We also should remember that at the beginning of the eighties, more precisely in 1982, the Musée, in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, at the time, starts its Collection prêt d’œuvres d’art (CPOA) – one that includes, in 2008, over 2000 works representing 700 artists! Regards.

Guy

Sunday February 4th

Guy,

Many events from the eighties, such as Art et société and Réseau artistes féminines, were indeed presented at the Musée du Québec, something that may be viewed today as surprising. We have to remember that the spaces reserved for diffusion did not have the room, the equipment nor the money to present extensive projects like this one. Also, the collective that conceived Art et société will start Le Lieu only in 1982. Indeed, during this period, and later in the 80’s, the Musée was managed like a real contemporary art gallery. André Laliberté-Bourque was close to the milieu. She discussed with artists, was open to their suggestions. The physical distance with the museum institutions allowed it to act not as a sacred space, but rather as a space of living art. In this respect, Guy, Laurent Bouchard was recently reminding me that it was the Ministry of Public Works that had given its house to the Musée. Maybe they thought they would create an “heritage” space – even if the museum still had the mandate to serve ethnology...

The Musée had thus the Museum Gallery, far enough in its freedom, and the CPOA, as you mention it, which somewhat intervenes at the margin of regular diffusion activities. Furthermore, in 1989 (and always in respect to what concerns our interactions in the museum culture) centers organize a collective to celebrate the 150 years of photography (we will talk about this later). The Musée puts together the event Paysages verticaux on the plains. For me, this was a very important event. Louise Déry worked at the Galerie du Musée and later as a curator in art actual at the Musée until 1992. It was just before the radical slowing down of actions at the Musée, and also in art actual. A kind of depression lasting for the following 10 years. She had conceived this event. But the community, if you remember, had expressed some frustrations to the effect that only one artist from Quebec City was part of the selection. The recognition of Quebec City’s artists as major agents in the art actual’s evolution was anything but a given at this time. We were swimming between this frustration and the joy of witnessing the birth of impactful events.

Lisanne

Monday February 4th

Lisanne,

Thanks for your precision about the complexities of the relations between the milieu and the institutions, here, in this case, the Musée. It was in part what I was hoping to bring to light, when I wrote on the feelings of dissonance and ambivalence in the analysis of the relations between the various components of the world of arts. However, and it is the first object of our exchange. I think, this networking reality captivates me as a driving force, in my activity in the art development in the city. After this community effervescence and the crisis of the Upper City, at the end of the seventies and beginning of eighties, the urban evolution of art actuel is moving. The Gabrielle Ray Library, as it opens in 1981, at Place Jacques-Cartier, plays the role of a pioneer institution. It offers not only access to books, films and discs but also to works of art via its artothèque. It also operates an auditorium for shows, and an exhibition place.

Indeed, during this period in the 1980s, centers for artists that museums have begun, during the 80’s, to give decent royalities to artists.

Reading your letter, I see that while we add almost no support from official systems when it came to recognize the value of local artists, people in Quebec City were on their best behaviour with the national structures of representation. Getting together passed first and foremost by concerted political action.

Secondly, we had to learn to work together and collectively to help diffusing the arts, which was slower. We are doing it with success today. I am stopping myself here before going further, because we have to end this portrait of the first years.

Lisanne

Monday February 4th, almost midnight

Guy,

Lisanne, close to the magic of the arts and its poetics you will find, as always, the political and the economic aspects. I was not in Vancouver in 1986 but I was in Alma, the previous year, and you were also there. The ANNNPAC-RACA, that is the Association of National Non Profit Art-ist-Run Centers or Regroupement des artistes de centres d’artistes, was getting together in the Lac-Saint- Jean region. This was a significant wind of change in itself. Sitting close to Gilles Arteau and René Payant, who was sick, we had a conversation which, to my “native” sensitivity, was no less than one of “transmission”. These power relations with the State will develop themselves, find a better structure, one that is also larger than our words here. But it is important since you bring it into our discussion.

Guy
Thursday February 2
Dear Guy,
I took some days to write to you. This meeting of the Canadian Association in Alma has its importance. The event is memorable. We were a whole group from Quebec City in the Saguenay. The energy was palpable, and it is there that the idea of being autonomous, in the difficulty of finding oneself in front of this inevitable cultural dichotomy, took shape. In Vancouver, the following year, the group Québec was founded under the name Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ).

The organizational life of the centers for artists that you mention, as always, implies a lot of elements speaking to me: the successive appearance of centers which have survived to this day. Also, how they have defined their respective mandates, the question of networks, structures of representation that have arisen to all centers, and a good kick to our partners, at last a series of event that have emerged during the eighties in centers, etc.

Out!

This question of networks, so cherished by you, is extremely significant. I would like to come back to it later. In fact, the event is not only because of the abundance of networks. We had a bit at the margins, in the eighties, with its location on Garneau Street. Later on, it has moved on Dalhousie Street, in this small house falling apart. We were never sure if, at an opening, the floor would not collapse under the weight of the crowd.

There has been, indeed, a change of climate, a singular energy during this period. For instance, the center founded under the initiative of Christiane Jobin and Lucie Lefebvre, asked for collaboration with Obscure for the loan of its equipment among other things. It is important to mention the close net of relations established with other organizations and galleries also specialized in photography, on the national and international scenes. VU has thus created its own networks outside Quebec City, like Le Lieu.

The multiplication of centers has forced us to formally and explicitly define our mandates, act and be consistent. I don't know if it was entirely positive, but this certainly allowed us to work with confidence and avoid a certain type of competition. Maybe a saner climate will be allowed us to work with confidence and avoid a certain type of competition. I don't know if this «mission» is still alive in the attitude of people who are now running self-managed centers, but during that period, we were motivated by it. I think that my generation, the one of Claude Bélanger, Richard Martel, Christane Jobin, Gaëtan Gosselin and Gilles Arteau, Réjean Perron and Hélène Doyon was animated by an indefatigable passion pushing us to give to no end and without counting. We had indeed, in the context of this

Friday February 8
More than interesting, Lisanne, are these details. They help us to clarify our own views. I want to pursue in this direction by mentioning a second driving force, complementary to the constitution of the network’s mechanisms. It is about these occasions to meet, to explore in common, and, mostly, to create and diffuse art. It is about using the modes of participation outside the models of exhibiting as such. The projects and themes opened themselves to the dematerialization of practices, going from conceptual art to environmental sculptures, not to mention performances. It is in this sense that I can say that the inter-regional and international networks were established, as always, in favor of a creative output nourished by the utopia of total art.

The have such names: L’objet fugitif (1978) by the collective of La chambre blanche, an event in conceptual art, communal and audacious. Then would come Art et société in Quebec City (1981) and Art et politique: Attention à fort, in Kassel, Germany, at the margins of documenta (1982) and realized by the review Intervention. In the wake of feminism, Quebec City will be at the core of Réseau art-femmes (1982) which takes place in six regions in the province of Quebec. We will have another year later, Art et écologie: Un temps, six lieux, organized by the Atelier Insertion in Chicoutimi in collaboration with Le Lieu, in Quebec City (1983). We will also have 76 heures Marathon d’écriture (1983) happening at Place-Fleuri which will surprise. And Le Lieu will start its festival of performance art (with the events In memoriam Georges Maciunas, 1984; Espèces nomades, 1986). I think that again, the hybrid manifestation Enfances... ou les 120 heures at Laval University (1987).

Finally, I am thinking of Serge Murphy and Fabienne Bilodeau, on the important role which takes place in six regions which have grown over the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, such as Mirabile Visus: la performance à la manoeuvre and the Première Biennale d’art actuel de Québec (1984-1985). We will also see, one year later: Le regroupement des centres d’arts visuels Visu: 150 ans après. We are in 1989, with all people involved and under VU’s Impulsion, I would say of Gaëtan Gosselin who had replaced Christane Jobin at the coordination level. We see a will to work together that goes beyond the simple anniversary of the photo medium. I see, as far as I am concerned, the seeds for a new way of thinking in networks, on the local scene, a will to work together after 10 years of preparations.

You are right to say that in 1986, the founding of RCAAQ was fundamental. But on the level of our action in the field of practices of art diffusion in themselves, Mirabile Visus was a first. The RCAAQ had its leaders, its political action, but Mirabile Visus was something else. I had left La chambre blanche and I had the chance to join the team in the role of coordinator. It was like a fresh breath of energy, a year where it was possible to share. In spite of our differences, our passion and commitment, shared causes. I don’t know if this «mission» is still alive in the attitude of people who are now running self-managed centers. But during that period, we were motivated by it. I think that my generation, the one of Claude Bélanger, Richard Martel, Christane Jobin, Gaëtan Gosselin and Gilles Arteau, Réjean Perron and Hélène Doyon was animated by an indefatigable passion pushing us to give to no end and without counting. We had indeed, in the context of this
Cultural event, invented almost all agents of the cultural scene. Gaétan saw things in a big way. It was for him the opportunity to affirm the undeniable place of artists centers in the network diffusion of art actuel.

The fact that centers invite musicians to participate to one of their events was to demonstrate how we had gained an undeniable professional level, how we were adamant to affirm loud and clear the crucial role we were now playing. This is not a small thing. It is an important step that we can easily forget. The perception that many people had, thinking that artists centers were exclusively forced to play the role of a springboard for young creators (a perception which was almost given at the time) was weakening at last.

This great wind of effervescence was fragile, because we have tried to revisit the idea of an event that mobilized people. We tried to create another Mirabile Visus, some years later, and it failed. In Gaétan's absence, the different points of view around the table became bigger, and it is still more the nineties is still and I realized that we had still a lot of work to do to be able to work harmoniously. Claude Bélanger, who was still at L'Œil de Poisson, was extremely disappointed by this failure. In fact, Mirable Visu was the germ of what would become the Manif d'art, almost a decade later. There were in between a number of attempts, often futile, sometimes difficult.

To be sarcastic, this passage from Art société à Mirabile Visu in the network of centers for artists seems to me significant afterwards. The passage to the nineties is, and I can't wait to talk about it with you. The perception of an event of this "great wind of effervescence... also fragile", as you rightly mention it, which comes out of the networks at the beginning of the nineties, can we see there a creative time and space that, paradoxically, will be as intense but in a different way? Many hypothesis, many angles of interpretation on these links produced or neutralized between all art agents in Quebec City, during the nineties, will have to be considered. This is captivating! Thanks for insisting on what happens behind the scenes, and particularly at the event Mirabile Visus. Thanks for reminding me about the local issues and the beginning of a great climate which will take a decade to structure itself. Indeed, the following year, in 1990, the Première Biennale d'art contemporain en scene à Quebec under the theme « De la performance à la manœuvre » initiated by Le Lieu and sponsored by most of the centers for artists, will stand as a landmark of this phenomenon. It will have no immediate effect except for the intentions to create a major event. Installations and other creations in situ as well as more residences for creation are the most popular option for works programmed to be viewed in exhibit rooms. And by welcoming many artists from Quebec and the world, Quebec City becomes a center for major international events according a lot of importance to the renewal of artistic practices. For instance, audio art is blossoming at the Festival États le bruit (1989) and media arts emerge at manifestations such as Le corps amplifié. L’information amplifiée aux arts (1993) and La paralole (1996) organized by Obscurc. I also remember the success of the Ateliers ouvert, a circuit of visiting artists workshops. Videre, the association of professional artists of Quebec, was one of its best advocates.

Yet another sign of this vitality. Guy

Wednesday February 15th
Dear Guy,
I have been really busy with the Manif these last days. Sorry. Both of us are feeling that time and space are missing to make a portrait of these three very dynamic decades. Yes, indeed, the nineties. How is it possible that all these events happened is such a short period of time? You can see some comments that come to mind regarding the event De la performance à la manœuvre, and the Ateliers ouvert and also some comments on the absence of a curator for art actuel at the museum at the time. All of these facts that have made the art scene, in the nineties, in Quebec City.

I am happy to see that you mention this manifestation coming out of the Première Biennale... we can see again this desire for a dialogue. A need to create an event bringing people together. Each center for visual arts tempted to initiate the movement in its own way. I remember that for this event, Florent Cousineau had conceived, with the collaboration of few members of La chambre blanche, a crazy project called Opération Liaison, taking the shape of a fictitious radio program inspired by Hitchcock. This link with the team working at Le Lieu had pleased me. In fact, in writing to you, I realize that it was important to make this program, and I believe that the thought of wood was walking in the city from one center to the next, testifying to a desire to make the existence of a network concrete. I was in Banff myself. To each their turn! At another level, I agree with you. It is important to go back to this question of the artists actions outside the centers. You speak of atelier ouverts. In fact, the event is born in 1984, under the initiative of Helga Schlitter and Francine Chaine. Additional participants included Guy Pellerin, Monique Mongeau, and the ex-minister of Culture. We should remember that he has seen the potential between new technologies, teaching institutions (among which the Ecoles des arts visuels of Laval University, which was relocated in the Dominion Corset Building in 1984) and the artists. The artists centers will also see their living condition getting better by the nineties, with the Méduse complex whom, in 1994, allowed the consolidation of about twenty self-managed centers. We will talk about this later. And you have to remember that La chambre blanche buys its building in 1992. Lisanne

1988-1998

Limoilou, February 13th,
Lisanne.
Back to the Kabir-Kouba River (Saint-Charles), I read your phrases with pleasure. You add this inner sensibility to acts and events that
Although the progressive move of many centers for artists and the appearance of a municipal program to assist in the purchasing of studios gave a new face to the urban landscape (what we started calling the Saint-Roch space), it is important for me to mention personal contributions. For one, the continuous work of Florent Cousineau who, with his sculpture projects, residences and manoeuvre such as Opération liason that you mentioned, and more, was remarkable. Hasn't he made of urban textures and built environments its privilege material for creation to make sure that renovated buildings dedicated to artists become real in the area? We only have to mention the building « Roullement à balles » near the École des arts visuels, and, later, the one of La falaise approvièto à understand the scope of his interventions.

Indeed, it is hard for the sociologist not to mention this core of humble citizens of a dilapidated Saint Roch (the space was called in your 1st letter). Citizens have (from 1991 onwards) given back a dignity to this area by creating the Ilot Fleurie under the leadership of sculptor Louis Fortier and few voluntary gardeners. We will find there art writing essays on urban design and premises important to the planning of the place (where we today find Saint-Roch gardens and the park of the Grande Place at the bottom of Meduse and the côté d'Abraham). In fact, from 1993, while the series of events such as La Charte blanche were taking place and despite its two moves (they will have to be moved up to the access roads of the Dufferin Highway in 1998) the Ilot Fleurie will become a unique zone for the art actual scene. Many international tribunes dedicated to landscape architecture will be most interested. Founded on this dynamic closeness between community groups, cultural organizations and centers for artists, gardening workshops, gardens surrounded by sculptures, evenings with poetry and music, picnics, graffiti and murals will coexist, in the summer, along with performers and activists.

We will enter in the year two thousands, which I will return to later.

The intensification of the permanent presence of workshops and its public spaces - like the École des arts visuels in Saint-Roch - will motivate many artists to invest these spaces during events. However, this tendency does not limit itself to this area only, far from it. In this respect, how can we not mention the unbelievable quality of such creation project put forward by La chambre blanche, called Chambres d'hôtels (1993) and the art photography which becomes and open zone for the creation of Trois fois 3 paysages (1997-1998) here and there in the city? The intensification of the tendency does not limit itself and its public spaces thousands, which I will return to the summer, along with performers and activists.

We will enter in the year two thousands, which I will return to later.

The intensification of the area, was a rupture. A positive rupture. We had to re-join ourselves to this notion of a situ, in constant evolution. The repetitive infiltration of dilapidated sites or public spaces opened another venue. And it was then the whole question of urbanity was enlightened. One day, many years later, I was sitting at a café and a woman came to me and said: "I recognize you, you were part of the project Chambres d'hôtel with your husband and your baby?" I was flabbergasted! I have never lost this utopic desire to make people aware of new works. Let's say that, this time, it was a success.

In situ allowed me to see the possibility of making an event from the works. And following that, this insertion in urban texture forced me to look at the question of the public. How do we intervene in the street, in the everyday, without thinking about the person looking, without reflecting its presence, which is still a pertinent question today. At the moment where we had to return to La chambre blanche's coordination, François Vallée and myself had radicalized the center's mandate, in situ and residence. Then, in 1998, we had established the Rencontres internationales en arts visuels (RIAV) which had « communication » as a theme, and strangely enough, because I am actually putting together and event on human common living in the context of the Manif. A. Taking another way, the relational aesthetic current was starting. We had invited a Serbian artist who had placarded the city, François Lamontagne opened a small studio where he invited visitors to dress objects while playing cards in regular intervals. Marielle Dupuis-Larose showed her first video installation... in 1998, we had also conceived an event in the old jail of the Maison Gomin. People were lining up to see the prison. We could not believe the event, the number of people and a line up... It is important to say that Robert Gilet had done a stellar advertising job. Many questions came to mind: where they coming to see the art or the space? Was it conceivable to seduce a public not so much interested in art and give it its first contact with today's practices? You will maybe remember the wonderful interventions done by Michel Saint-Onge and Patrick Altman? Then RIAV's second edition called Temporaële will happen in the year 2000.

As far as the specific domain of the art action is concerned and which I have closely analysed, the series of manifestations like immedia concerto (1988), Intercap, Pologne (1990), Ondulates-Polyphonix (1991) and Interzone (1992), the Symposium des Auteurs in Saint-Malo, the concert of the Young (Germany 1993) and the one of Art actuel in Amiens in France (1994), Art et nature (1996) and the editions of Réseaux internationales d’art performance (1992-1998) welcoming artists from many countries which will circulate in various places such as Alma, Chicoutimi, Granby, Victoriaville, Montréal or Matane will reinforce this tendency which will keep growing until de year 2000.

Guy

Monday February 10th

Guy, I don't want to forget an important point that surfaces a lot during our exchange. While on my side, I was trying, along with François Vallée, to establish relations with other countries by inviting individual artists from Europe at La chambre blanche, VU, for instance, was participating at a series of exchanges or at the diffusion of observations from here, in the francophonie (Bruxelles, Saint-Malo, Paris, Dieppe. Champagne-Ardenne, Bas-Rhin), and also other countries have developed an international network, but it also gave a lot energy to regional networks. Amongst all art critics in Quebec, critics of Montréal are concentrating on Montréal. Here in Quebec City, you were one of the first to circulate all over the province and you had. I think, a certain influence. Who was talking about what was happening in Beauce or in Amos? Inter, which was your principal vehicle of expression, and it has played an important role in the decentralization of our art history. On the level of our relations outside Quebec City, there was all these exchange realised with Latin America and Mexico. Many artists from Quebec City never exposed in Montreal, but exhibited in Mexico and Buenos Aires, or even in Marseille and Cracow, thanks to these exchanges organized by various centers in Quebec City. This disregard of Montreal is difficult to understand for people who belong to official networks. But we can't hide it. It is a reflex of a certain generation.


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Guy

Monday February 10th

Thanks Lisanne for mentioning my travels as a "columnist" of art actuel on the ground, in the regions. This logic of networks participated and helped to redefine the relations between art and society. It has been much talked about by the CLSC in a report book. L’art canne alternative: Réseaux et pratiques d’art parallèle au Québec, 1976-1996, published in 1997.

As far as the rapport between generations over the years are concerned, you are certainly right when you speak about a sort of consecration, situations, concerning to a reading of the intercultural relations particular to each generation. The cultural agents, including the artists, have been influenced by the critics of centralism, and for the whole spectrum of life in society. Generally, it is fair to say that the networks of self-managed centers for artists which have emerged in a cultural mode, at the end of the seventies and in the eighties, would become more professional in the nineties. That movement comes after the creation of the CLSC in the health sector, the CEGEPS and what formed the Université du Québec, in various regions, in education, and also many community initiatives in all regions in the province. All of these components, seen as vague impulse to self-determination of communities, share two major points: they resist to the only big city that exist in Quebec, Montréal, and to the techno/ bureaucratic centralization of the State. In this respect, Quebec City, the Capital where the government is located, has a particular status, noticeable in the arts. On the one hand, we have seen it, the socio-artistic agents in Quebec City have affinities with artists groups working in regions. In this respect, the relations with the Saguenay-Lac Saint-Jean will be significant but also with the Galerie Sarrazin in Moncton where, with Hélène Larcher’s invitation (now at the CALQ, in Quebec City) Obscur, Le Lieu, L’Œil de Poisson will visit. On the other hand, I agree with your hypothesis that it is also because of this surpassing on the international scene that Quebec City’s artists hope to resolve this evident cultural tension with Montréal, that the exode of so many artists exemplified. For the generations today, I think that idea of going anywhere is more important, creating new comings and goings, as far as the place of interest to find out how the young see their visibility outside Quebec City.

Lisanne

Tuesday February 10th

I am referring to the ISEA, at SAT and the Congress of the ISEA in Montréal in 1994, at the third meeting of the ISEA in 1995, and at the fourth meeting of the ISEA in 1996.

Guy

Wednesday February 20th

Dear Gus,

You have mentioned Obscur's role in this relation with the media arts and Méduse. You mention La parallaxe, an event of creation and reflection, held in September 1996. It is also the swan song of the cooperative Obscur, which closed its doors in 1996. Yes, a cooperative is such a singular way of functioning, chosen "for the values of economic solidarity that it promotes". We should also speak of Obscur’s impact, of these important pioneers: Arteau, Robert Faguy, Réjean Perron, Jocelyn Robert, Robert Faguy, Of Course, Hélène Boucher, Yvon Doyon. It was the first center to put forward multidisciplinary and the new media arts at the time. Then came the video in the eighties, and, in the nineties (from 1993 onwards), what we would call “computer science” in the world. No other centers or group existing today are, it is fair to say, Obscur’s children: we think of La Bande Vidéo, the Productions Recto-Verso (1984) and Avatar (1993).

Obscur has adopted a critical attitude to the media arts as such. It has been the first grants program which were nonexistent at the time. Such grants programs will start, help to finance its multi activities and acquire equipment. And I think that it was an excellent way to “warm up” to negotiations concerning the State. Bob Arteau had an unbelievable charisma and tongue, but we should not forget Gaëtan Gosselin, and Jocelyn Robert in this matter. Le Lieu and La chambre blanche were part of the first meetings of discussions, but have finally decided to keep their autonomy. We should also say that they both occupied spaces corresponding to their needs.

From this moment, it is the definition of what we were expecting from art actuel, in itself, that became a critical attitude to the media arts as such. At the same time, the cooperation Méduse which opens in 1994, under the leadership of Gilles Arteau and Gaëtan Gosselin, is not only not of the main piece of this reconfiguration of urban art in Saint-Roch, by its grouping around 12 centers - Avatar, Engramme, L’Œil de Poisson, Antitube, La Bande Vidéo, the Productions Recto-Verso, CIUDA, the Ateliers de la Mezannine - it will become, at some artistic level, a point of reference for production and diffusion. Méduse participates here to this passion for new technologies in the arts, and is now a major player all over the province (for instance, at the ISEA, at SAT and the Fondation Langlois in Montreal, at La Filature in the Outaouais, at the gallery Sagamie et Séquence in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean). In this regard, it will be fundamental to the powerful meta-
in the province, will change. With the financing helping to buy La chambre blanche (bought by its collective members) and the Méduse project, doors were opened to other significant gestures and claims, to make sure that the center's life were maintained. Outside Quebec City, we think of the planning of Axe-Néo 7 at La Filature in 2002.

This concentration effect by Méduse is still asking the question of property. In this respect, on the side of La chambre blanche, it is important to mention that we bought the building that we occupied in 1992. Le Liseu will do the same in 2003. All of this « Méduse » effect that you mention... How can I say? Of course, we can say that this decade was marked by a will, on the part of our financing partners, to support our infrastructures and consolidate the network. It is also to make sure that the new center/landlords, or whom ever benefits from contracts and advantageous long-term leases, are not becoming white elephants for which the Council of Arts and Letters had signed contracts in the nineties, with countries such as Finland, Mexico and the Catalogue... where centers were becoming privilege organizations welcoming international artists. And in Quebec City, we have been well served in this respect. It is also part of an official recognition of self-managed centers as major agents on the cultural scene.

Today, I am an independent curator for the Manif d'Art, and see how far we have come... we have both participated in many debates during this period. Pages are many, and there is still much to say once we embark together on the last decade. I will await your next letter.

Lisanne

Thursday February 28th
Lisanne,

I am just coming from L'Abraham Martin café. Walking here to write to you, Lisanne, many recent facts about art and about the decade of the year 2000 rushed in my head. For instance, the 5 à 7 s, the press conference informing all about the fourth edition, in May, of the Manif d'Art, an event always long-awaited here, in Montreal and in the rest of Canada. And, in February, for the last nine years in the main art programing of the Mois Multi which takes over at the cooperative Méduse. I have also reflected that in few days, on March 4th to be exact, the review Inter will celebrate its 30 years in print – in this year of incomparable festivities for the 400th year anniversary of the founding of the City.

Few hours ago, I have appreciated the refined enthusiasm with which you have played the role of the invited independent curator for the Manif d'Art 4, proposing the theme: « To talk to you » as an invitation to surpass the cleavage of « art of relation vs. multimedia arts » and in order to reintroduce a shift in art sensibilities performed in Quebec City. There, among the compact crowd, listening to you speaking of it, I have wondered if the collaboration between all agents involved (for instance the Musée that produces a Sylvie Cotton and many other artists from all over, from Chilli, Mexico and Europe) was not, at last, a common character of the 30 years adventure of art actual in Quebec City.

But here I think I anticipate. Like we have done for the two previous decades, I am submitting my reflections, my intuitions which are also open questions. My first intuition for a dialogue could be about the confirmation of this organizational tendency, which, after taking form in the previous decade, consolidates all scopes of art. I want to talk about the importance of the invited curator's role in the institutions, the centers for artists and the events. Isn't this intellectual and artistic division of roles not questioning the self-managements orientations, creation in collective as much as the relations between reflections and practices? I am first sharing this with you.

Guy

Friday leap year February 29th

I am sure you know this, Guy. I don't have much distance when it comes to this Manif. All I know is that Jérôme Delgado was writing recently in Le Devoir that it was THE biennial in the province of Quebec. The question here is not to debate which one is the best between the biennale de Montreal or the one in Quebec City. Each have their role to play. And the triennial of the Musée d'art contemporain has proven that, in this existing landscape, it will respect all the work previously done... with means that are not in the same league. The question is how to come to terms with the fact that Quebec City doesn't have, in the eyes of the establishment of Quebec's art, this image of a city-museum having the heavy burden of history where the art actual scene would be an exception, an isolated endeavor of few people. The next step will be to receive a more balanced share of grants, if we want to maintain the course of things. This problem of state subsidies doesn't only hurt the events. In fact, while I have constantly sought to put in parallel the centers and artists working on an individual basis, let's mention here that the number of artists of Quebec City which have received, in the last 3 years, money for their creation is indecent, considering how dynamic the art scene is. And the jury in Quebec City knows artists coming from Montreal and the region. The contrary is rare.

Fortunately, Diane Landry's participation at the Biennale de Montreal (2000), the solo exhibits of BGL and, more recently, Yannick Pouliot (2008) at the Musée d'art contemporain as well as an important participation of Quebec artists at the exhibit L'envies des apparences (2005-2006), done by Gilles Godmer, are important signals to the effect that things can change. The success of the Manif d'Art is not foreign to this recognition. We have already mentioned that the Manif testified to the synergy of the whole milieu, which is mostly singular in the whole art actual landscape in the province (you know my chauvinistic side). The next step is certainly a more adequate financial support and, eventually, finding a permanent space for the Manif. The organization will then be able to pursue the presentation of important exhibitions, like it has done with Paul-Emile Borduas prize. We need to have a great tool of diffusion complementary to centers for artists. And the addition of these tools shed new light on the mandates. There are no exhibition centers in Quebec City. Some centers have the opportunity to play this role. But the centers for artists have to always keep consistent with their critical mission. I am stopping here because we will discuss the state of the network, later.

Let's return to this idea of commissionship in Quebec City.

Lisanne

Saturday March 1st

Lisanne,

My understanding of the independent curator's role, more than what distinguishes it from the role of art critic, is to me closer to a kind of challenge than the profession of the specialist. Having been an auditor at many conferences in the last years, and where the subject was as much theory, art criticism or commissionship, I have often heard Rainer Rochling's formulation (in Feu de la critique d'art), saying that the function of the independent curator will have overridden the role of art critic and theoretician. This should be nuanced. In the production and promotional phases of an event or an exhibit, it is more than normal that the discourse of its protagonist, the curator or the artistic director in charge, be ideologically oriented, functional, and on the side of self-promotion. The critical dimension is in general irrelevant. It will come for the external observers. That said, we should not forget the before and the after: the role taken, the vision and the selection ruling the conception are, on the one hand, readings on art happenings in the present, to be done or to exhibit. On the other hand, when there is publication, the reflections and analyses following also participate to the vast critical knowledge. In fact, it is a debate between the thinking on arts that take action and theoretical thoughts, aside, even academic.

It is moreover the events projects or group manifestations, symposiums or other zones become events that will stir me as an invited curator. In Quebec City, in the year 2000, there was the Arboretum, at the Maison Hamel-Bruneau, Emergence art social at the Ilot Fleurie in 2000 and Les commandos nomades, for the Manif d'Art 2, in 2003. My interest will go more for the manifestations “in context”, exterior, in the côté, or on the territory than for exhibitions only in "black and white cubes”. These larger zones of events seemed to allow experimentation of new ideas, "extreme" situations (to paraphrase my friend Paul Ardenne) or to find this junction between popular identification and high art, native contemporary art, social politically...
its importance for the visibility of our artists in Quebec City. There is a commitment on the part of the centers which is extraordinary. But for the curators there isn’t much room. I would say that Habiter (done by VJR, 2000) was an exception in this sense that we have identified Giorgia Volpe’s contribution. That said, there would be more thematic exhibits, more space for reflection with the works, if there were an opening and more requests to independent curators. I know that here we have a different point of view. We will need to talk about it again.

For instance, I would say that in 1985, I have proposed a project which would have a curator (Mobillier d’artistes). Excluding conceived projects in the contexts of my background at La Chambre blanche, I have never worked since for any centers. I have worked in Quebec City for the Musée du Québec (Paul Lacroix 1988-1999 and Annie Thibault, 2001) at the Maison Hamel-Bruno (aux Paysages et autres fictions, 2002), at the Musée des beaux-arts du Québec (Richard Baillargeon’s production in 1991) on the spot. All that considered, I have in memory the event DSM-V+, it was the legitimization of works that we estimate pertinent in the course of history. I have to say that I have always felt a responsibility to support Quebec City’s artists in my curator’s projects or in my writing on art. It is, I believe, a situation that art critics in Montreal don’t experience and which belongs to a consciousness of the need, of the necessity to be also committed in this respect. Exhibits and events in Quebec City don’t have the coverage that they should have in art periodicals, and art critics are still in demand, to this day. We can actually only name another one, aside both of us, Nathalie Côté, whose work is rigorous and generous. There is a form of art journalism but few critics, which is distressing and disturbing. And it is evidently related to the scarce numbers of independent curators in Quebec City.

Lisanne Nadeau

Monday March 3rd

Our dialogue could degenerate into a debate. However, other aspects of the first eight years of art in Quebec City, in this new millennium, are intriguing. They also require that we dialogue about them, dear Lisanne. My first point turns on our mutual question: is the Musée de la civilisation and the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. As much as we have given perspective to elements of openness in the milieu, as much we have to remember the generalized attitude of the opposition of concentration which persists in spite of remarkable openings.

As far as the Musée de la civilisation is concerned, I have in mind the years 1990-1999, in agreement with the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, the exhibit Déclics: Art et société, Le Québec des années 1966-1970. In 2000, if I remember correctly, it presented a multimedia conference organized by La chambre blanche. It gathered, via new technologies, Daniel Buren who was in Tel Aviv and Jocelyne Allouche in Lethbridge with the Quebec team. In company of Loco Locas, a rap group to which I have been associated. The meeting between rap and visual arts was not as "bizarre" as we might think. For instance, Biz, the most articulate. He is the son of the poet and performer Jean-Yves Frechet, whose works I have mentioned earlier. That very night, I have felt the importance of "interdisciplinary" relations and of the "interactions", these light signals of change which seemed to accelerate in this beginning of the new millennium in the art world. It is not a no matter if we were in a museum, in a center for artists, in the street or in front of a computer: "inter-generations," "inter-disciplines," "inter-relations" and "inter-activities" between young and older people, men and women, roles and spaces of art, images, sounds, all arts were there, together!

If I have collaborated with the two museums. You, Lisanne, have also worked with Annie Thibault at the Musée des Plaines.
Can you talk about it, and, can you tell me your reflections on your rapport to institutions, in the entry of Quebec City on the art scene, during the years 2000.

Guy

Tuesday March 4th

Guy,

I think, as I have mentioned earlier, that we have reached a very serious point in the transformation of art and artistic practices in the networks (for instance Folie/Culture, which will produce in 2006 the amazing event DSM-V+, Doyons/Demers, Arké – Luc Lévesque, James Partak and Michel Saint-Onge –, and you have mentioned their importance, and, of course, we could name the sacred and famous trio of the country, BGL).

Following them, we can see in the first years following 2000, an intense third wave of artistic “indisciplines”, put forward by new duos, trios and groups. We observe it by looking at installations such as the one of the souirs Couture and the art-action of the Fermières Obsédées. On the side of contextual art which is also socially involved, I would like to point out the influence of the Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté, here, in Quebec City, and its famous “red square” and the collective “Les Haines” which will be used by the student movement in 2004, the editions of the Réclame ta rue movement, the grand photographs done by Doyon-Rivest, and the ones, social, of the Démentcheurs, this other new group.

I add to this the medatic sculpture L’œil de poisson, which is a collaborative project which will be used by the student movement and the installation sculpture, iconoclastic, of the duo Cooke-Sassville, whose studio is also a place of informal gatherings. It is difficult, le nez collé dans la fenêtre, when we have the nose in the window to decipher these “weak signals” of change from the transformations which will survive. Especially when we know that we will be able only to assess them... 30 years later, because there are other elements structuring the art networks. But I think that the contribution of new groups would be a good theme for a Conference, for an organization like Les arts dans la ville which has a window on the street in Quebec City. It would be useful to know how to examine, in its excellent conferences, the long-term evolution of this adventure.

Guy

Thursday March 6th

Dear Lisanne,

You are forcing me to refine my reflection about the state of network. I have to say that I am fascinated by all the things happening these days, I see the Manif working for International exchanges, I see Le Lieu, which has contact with the Biennale de La Havane... but I would like to come back to our local dynamic. I think that some centers have the role of exhibition centers (I mentioned the absence of such structure in Quebec City), while others have kept more easily an experimental approach. The important thing is to always have, in this landscape, the presence of specific action to self-managed centers: this critical dimension, this capacity to always question the modes of operations and the way we exhibit art in the actual. In this respect, it is also interesting to see new collectives such as Ex-Muro or Wagon starting their journey and offer an image of what is needed these days, or a new conception of intervention that artists of the new generation want to have in their milieu. And it does not obviously translated in planning formal exhibit spaces.

Helping to produce you have L’Œil de Poisson, with its wood workshop, VU, with its recent equipment acquisitions and La chambre blanche which allow artists to grasp the art réseau, La Bande Vidéo, also.

Lisanne

Thursday in the evening

Dear Lisanne, you put in perspective the new generation. This brings me to mention the phenomenon of new groups, in numbers in Quebec City, and their contribution to change. Indeed, between zones and actors of art actual in Quebec City, this tendency to create collectives, typical of the city since the eighties, remains the same in the year 2000-2008.

We have seen that in the seventies and eighties. We have witnessed the first wave of collectives, interested in sharing to gain some spaces, tools and creative strategies, in short, to create the self-managed centers for artists.

In the nineties, a second wave of organizations and groups will focus on experimentation of new forms and new practices in the networks (for instance Folie/Culture, which will produce in 2006 the amazing event DSM-V+, Doyons/Demers, Arké – Luc Lévesque, James Partal and Michel Saint-Onge –, and you have mentioned their importance, and, of course, we could name the sacred and famous trio of the country, BGL).

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Guy
they were giving to young artists. It is also a phenomenon of the last decade, an immediate consequence of the aging teams in place and of the development of structures. In this respect, I see how the awards given year after year to finishing students of the École des arts visuels of Laval University, are most structuring. These awards consist not only of an invaluable recognition, they also ensure that resources from various organizations will be readily available. Often, there is also an exhibition. We are indeed taking care of the needs of the newcomers, needs that are always the same in spite of the decades passing by: the needs for production and the necessity to diffuse the work outside the school. These awards have been really popular, and today, many centers are involved in this respect.

The pedagogical activities of the Écoles des arts visuels, and the relations that it entertains with the milieu are maybe much more important that what we had foreseen. We only have one University giving the formation in visual arts. If the student's production is weak, the whole chain is affected. And I am often surprised that exchanges are not frequent between school and the centers' network. The École des arts visuels is one extremely important link in the chain. And I am very happy to work with students as interns, in the context of the Manif d'art this year. Richard Lévesque, on his side, also gives a class in contextual art and forms young people to art-d'art, visuels, sculptors, people which are doing installations and manoeuvres.

The notion of territory, applied to urban space, signify art connected to daily life, the urban environment, to others. We are leaving a conception of the "white cube" of art. That allows to question engagement in art, political art and social art, by counting on the general social contingencies. I would call it the centrifugal energies of the works which permeate, activate, manifest themselves outside conventional spaces, with some care for the other, the others, the milieu of life. In this respect, there was always some art links in the city. As far as I am concerned, in the first year of 2000, Saint-Roch is vibrant of its ideas and "zones of events", which perpetuate this constant interest for the development of multimedia installations in situ and action modalities (performances, manoeuvres, relational aesthetic) in the city.

Indeed, the city continues to be the "landscape" of many creative social art experiments, performative, photographic or in situ. In the first year of 2000, adding to the "zones" already mentioned, other events such as Sur les toits (2002), of La chambre blanche, Parcours et débordements de l'École de Poisson (2003), Les vertiges de l'évidence (2004), Habiter (2006) and 20 émissaires; Québec 2000, the new "phantom" of Montreal, in 2007, the last three of VS. Other artists that you were mentioning to me, on the phone, have also invented the city as landscape/territory. What can we say of the repetition of the collective Angèle which propose an exceptional manoeuvre, in the contexts of the Rencontres Internationales de la chambre blanche in 2000? You were also passionately mentioning to me with that Giorgia Volpe whom, in 2001, intervened (Le nom des arbres) on the wintry envelope of the trees in the Parc Saint-Roch. At last, we should also not forget the Massacre à la scie in 2004, this event regrouping spontaneously, during a weekend, young artists in a building meant to be destroyed and where you can find now the domesticated Faîte Faîte. Evidently, the îlot Fleuri's evolution between 2000 and 2007, would be for many such as Luc Lévesque, Patrice Loubier and myself, an urban "zone" connecting these notions of landscape and territory. Between the event Emergences: Art Social in September 2000 and the occupation of the îlot Fleuri in September 2007, would bring near the river the works of Pierre Bourgault done in parallel to research is over. The image of the city is sensibly changing with the presence of all these works from the present. Of course, the reactions are in numbers (see the debate concerning the work of Pierre Bourgault done for the Promenade Samuel-de-Champlain, which is not without reference to the Naylor case in 1981). The artists see art, in integration, as a space of investigation of the landscape and territory, and in the light of what we have illustrated, of the urban territory. For creators, the time when public art was a production done in parallel to research is over. The lasting elements of the works are not negligible. They testify to an undeniable recognition of our artists.

Friday March 9th, in the evening
Lisanne

I observe the dual city, at once landscape and territory. Speaking sociologically, the notions of territory and landscape differs entirely. The territory is inhabited. It takes us in some spaces, zones, and areas of life where economy, politics, culture are intertwined. Otherwise, the landscape can be invented: reproduced, framed, and virtual. It belongs to the imagination. It is in this sense that, with the immobility of the historical and patrimonial city, there is a shifting landscape of Quebec City thanks to its painters, engravers, sculptors, people which are doing installations and manoeuvres.

The notion of territory, applied to urban space, signify art connected to daily life, the urban environment, to others. We are leaving a conception of the "white cube" of art. That allows to question engagement in art, political art and social art, by counting on the general social contingencies. I would call it the centrifugal energies of the works which permeate, activate, manifest themselves outside conventional spaces, with some care for the other, the others, the milieu of life. In this respect, there was always some art links in the city. As far as I am concerned, in the first year of 2000, Saint-Roch is vibrant of its ideas and "zones of events", which perpetuate this constant interest for the development of multimedia installations in situ and action modalities (performances, manoeuvres, relational aesthetic) in the city.

Indeed, the city continues to be the "landscape" of many creative social art experiments, performative, photographic or in situ. In the first year of 2000, adding to the "zones" already mentioned, other events such as Sur les toits (2002), of La chambre blanche, Parcours et débordements de l'École de Poisson (2003), Les vertiges de l'évidence (2004), Habiter (2006) and 20 émissaires; Québec 2000, the new "phantom" of Montreal, in 2007, the last three of VS. Other artists that you were mentioning to me, on the phone, have also invented the city as landscape/territory. What can we say of the repetition of the collective Angèle which propose an exceptional manoeuvre, in the contexts of the Rencontres Internationales de la chambre blanche in 2000? You were also passionately mentioning to me with that Giorgia Volpe whom, in 2001, intervened (Le nom des arbres) on the wintry envelope of the trees in the Parc Saint-Roch. At last, we should also not forget the Massacre à la scie in 2004, this event regrouping spontaneously, during a weekend, young artists in a building meant to be destroyed and where you can find now the domesticated Faîte Faîte. Evidently, the îlot Fleuri's evolution between 2000 and 2007, would be for many such as Luc Lévesque, Patrice Loubier and myself, an urban "zone" connecting these notions of landscape and territory. Between the event Emergences: Art Social in September 2000 and the occupation of the îlot Fleuri in September 2007, would bring near the river the works of Pierre Bourgault done in parallel to research is over. The image of the city is sensibly changing with the presence of all these works from the present. Of course, the reactions are in numbers (see the debate concerning the work of Pierre Bourgault done for the Promenade Samuel-de-Champlain, which is not without reference to the Naylor case in 1981). The artists see art, in integration, as a space of investigation of the landscape and territory, and in the light of what we have illustrated, of the urban territory. For creators, the time when public art was a production done in parallel to research is over. The lasting elements of the works are not negligible. They testify to an undeniable recognition of our artists.

Sunday March 9th
Lisanne

My interest for this notion of territory implies some aesthetic understanding, for the changes of the city as such. In fact, I have started our dialogue by imagining the City of Quebec in itself, as a real subject. Doesn't the city possess a global evolutive aesthetic showing the character of the urban planning of areas/landscape... and/or in the light of what we have illustrated, of the urban territory. For creators, the time when public art was a production done in parallel to research is over. The lasting elements of the works are not negligible. They testify to an undeniable recognition of our artists.

Lisanne
Fisher's expression, they are "citizen sculptures", determinant to the environment of daily life where we work, walk and play. Even better, where we create and live with art altogether.

I will not insist here on the surroundings, the river and the mountains, and even less on the urban spreading which has resulted in the fusion of various cities. They form the district cutting the Capitale-Nationale. I will not mention the immutable "old historic capital" which makes Quebec City the 6th destination the most appreciated by tourists on 116 tourist places in the world! No. I will narrow my views to the core relations between arts and the city, namely, the links between the Faubourg which links the Montcalm quarter to the Musée in the Upper City, on the one hand, and the Lower City, on the other hand, in the area that goes from the river to Saint-Roch. The aesthetic perception of public art is made of conflicts, critics and divergences. This also, it's the city and its, which breathe the challenges to come.

These "citizen sculptures" - unless seen from the air, even if it is possible to see all the works of public art in Quebec City, from the installation by Pierre Granche on University Laval's campus to Farland's park in Limoulo, where BGL have installed friendly "sculpted clothes lines" - remain to my eyes, signs of confrontations between conceptions of arts, culture and ways of life. It is still the case, now, vis-à-vis the realist murals, very clean and oriented towards historic, which seem to have taken the place of the statues and monuments - and created by companies here and there in the city, as public art. The last in the list is the projet for the "Bank of Montreal". It is supposed to represent, in front of the chapel Bon-Pasteur near the Complex 6, the history of the ten provinces of Canada, for the occasion of the 400th years of the founding of Quebec City.

Samuel de Champlain, is one example.

Guy, we have been together at the Largo resto-club to finish this narrative about art actuel in Quebec City, and you make, you, the sociologist, an interesting link: the Largo Foundation. Outside the centers for artists, outside the museum, who will be tomorrow's actors? I have spoken of initiatives in the private sector, in the context of art integration, it could be taking different forms. We have to work in this direction, make foundations aware of the importance of an action in the cultural sphere, etc.

In this great voyage, we have not really spoken about private galleries. Yes, the absence of an art market is clear in Quebec City and influences all our actions. Estampes plus (1984-2002) has closed its doors few months ago after 23 years of existence. Together, let's make a list of the commercial galleries that have punctuated the art actuel's history: the Galerie Joiola (possibly 1970-1985), the Galerie René Bertrand, whom, in 1984 and 1985, was crucial for newcomers, the Galerie Andrè Bécout (1976-1992, and recently reopened), the Galerie Lacerte (Galerie Lacerte-Guillemot in 1981, then Galerie Lacerte, in 1986), the Galerie O Matière (opened in 1989), the Galerie Charles et Martin Gauthier (very active from 1990-1998). I have not mentioned Rougie which operates differently, nor the Galerie Esthesio (2002-2006). Without a doubt, it is the Galerie Joiola, and then, the Galerie Lacert, which will have the most significant impact on the art milieu in Quebec City.

There are also the hybrid spaces: the persistent Galerie Le 36 run by Marcel Jean on Couillard Street, open to young talents like Francis Arguin, Christian Messier. Both have contributed to the recognition of a resurgence in paintings. Over the years, the galerie Rougie, as we know, has also become, between 2001 and 2007, a festive center. This space, at once gallery, bar and multifunctional room, has renewed the rapport between art and everyday by offering exhibit spaces in location, something that is not common in Quebec City.

Lisanne

in Conclusion

Monday March 10th

Lisanne,

30 years have passed.

I am rejoicing about the vitality of these times, to have witnessed the change of the millennium.

I am glad to have the power of our dreams, somewhere, and to dream more! But if you asked me, if you insisted, Lisanne, to find a word of synthesis, I would risk the word MANIFESTIVE. Moreover, of the same ideology as the name given to the Manifeste of the Galerie Comme in 1977, or like the abbreviated Manif, to name a great event of 2008, doesn't it define one of the principal elements of specificity of the artistic life in Quebec City? The spirit of making things happen, together, collectively. And because it has meant something, during 3 decades, the adjective manifestive qualifies it for me.

If I needed to find a formula to synthesize the evolution, define 30 years of specificity in art actuel in and from Quebec City, I would choose the plural by applying it to three important notions: the collective, the collaboration and the network. I insist here on the fact that these groups in collectives, as well as the founding of regional and international networks, have sustained the artistic life of Quebec City, since 1978. This attitude has prevailed in spite of the move from the Upper City to the Lower City, from the Faubourg Saint-Jean Baptiste to Saint-Roch, as a center, and despite this progressive move of community and cooperative strategies towards more experimental, plural, relational, multimedia and contextual practices.

With some distance, how can we not be surprised to see this interesting paradox between the autonomous discourse of some agents and the solidarities on the ground, each time an opportunity arose?

Guy

Tuesday March 11th

Dear Guy,

It was my mandate, as sociologist and historian, to put some facts on paper. The publishing medium has this particularity of living long. We expose, we debate, we are also living long. And I have always found that in the numbers of reviews, catalogues, conference proceedings, all essays and archived documents now available on CD, DVD, and internet sites. I am thinking of the 100 numbers of the review Intervention, which became Inter, actuel, of the short existence of the review Noir d'entre, which you have founded with Daniel Bélanger at the beginning of the nineties. The bulletin of La chambre blanche, of the newspaper Droit commun, or of the very recent review Bazzart. And we have very important books, offering summaries, such as Art Performance: Anthologie au Canada, 1970-1990 and Art action 1958-1998, Résidence, 1982-1993, which you have coordinated the edition yourself. Books such as L'art comme alternative, réseaux et pratiques d'art parallèle au Québec 1976-1990 that I have authored (1997), or Nouveau territoire de l'art: Régions, réseau, place publique written by sociologist Andrée Fortin

Wednesday March 12th

Lisanne,

One word calls for thousands. This open essay would not be so intense if it did not possess the desire to bring all readers to all the numbers of reviews, catalogues, conference proceedings, all essays and archived documents now available on CD, DVD, and internet sites. I am thinking of the 100 numbers of the review Intervention, which became Inter, actuel, of the short existence of the review Noir d'entre, which you have founded with Daniel Bélanger at the beginning of the nineties. The bulletin of La chambre blanche, of the newspaper Droit commun, or of the very recent review Bazzart. And we have very important books, offering summaries, such as Art Performance: Anthologie au Canada, 1970-1990 and Art action 1958-1998, Résidence, 1982-1993, which you have coordinated the edition yourself. Books such as L'art comme alternative, réseaux et pratiques d'art parallèle au Québec 1976-1990 that I have authored (1997), or Nouveau territoire de l'art: Régions, réseau, place publique written by sociologist Andrée Fortin
THIRTY YEARS OF URBANISM IN QUEBEC CITY

A CITY HIT BY A TRAUMATISM THAT AIN'T THE ONE WE THINK IT IS

BY MARC BOUTIN*

Quebec City's urban history was marked by a major event which is not the Conquest nor the Battlefield of Abraham. It is not to exaggerated to speak here of a cataclysm around which stands the history of many areas downtown. Indeed, it explains the morphology and the structure of the metropolitan region. Its impact on our daily life's organization is from far more important than all other historical phenomenon of the last 400 years. Nevertheless, our valorous tourist guides are not mentioning it and historians rarely discuss it in this respect. It is, without a doubt, because the stir it has generated is yet and ready to calm down. To say the least, the public as well as experts often mistake it for its timely corollary, the Quiet Revolution. This event is called "Urban Renovation" (U.R.)

Like a natural catastrophe, the U.R. hit North America without any warning. Each city had to cope with it in its own terms. Younger cities like Winnipeg and Edmonton, in Canada, adapted rapidly. It was for them a form of rapid growth considering their short past and some infrastructures already in place. In 1950, Boston and Toronto, cities viewed as the most dynamic today, resisted the temptation to get rid of their tramways. But Montreal and Quebec City, wanting to be modern, were eager to get rid of it. Today, Toronto is part of the avant-garde with a vast rail network and its costs are easy to absorb. Quebec City is still hesitant to go ahead with a new network which would include structures that existed not a long time ago. It is important to be careful: to be of your own time.

Boston: Our Close Urban Relative

The compact built environment of North American cities, such as Quebec City, Boston. New Orleans and San Francisco served as a first protection against the assault of the U.R. But these cities were fast to understand that a kind of passive resistance would not be enough. Eastern cities like Quebec City indeed, the most directly European, had the most to lose. And even if they were the most vivid in their opposition to this movement, they have lost a great deal. All proportions considered, Boston is the American city that most closely resembles Quebec City.

In 1950, these two cities had had almost 350 years of history. From an "urbanist" point of view, their two downtown core are similar in their compact quarters. These quarters have clear boundaries, they are socially distinct and densely populated. They cover most of the central territory, to the exception of some great urban parks such as the Boston Common and the Plains of Abraham. This is a distinctive mark of urbanity: each square meter available is occupied, and there is basically no space for random planning. We have to count on filling the surrounding low waters to get more space. At the beginning of the fifties, first in Boston and then in Quebec City, problems started to occur. Narrow streets are congested to the point that commerce is in decline. The pressure for a radical modification of the U.R., along with the urbanist's response to this pressure, is becoming a panacea for the business world. It is the beginning of the great malls at the periphery of the city - something most daunting for inhabited areas.

The Urban Renewal

In Boston, between 1950 and 1960, urbanists made their first mistakes under the name of the Urban Renewal. Scollay Square is central location amongst the most lively and welcoming. It is typical of the same mindless and abandoned quarters surrounding it. It was to Boston what was once the Place d'Youville in Quebec City: a popular gathering place. All of it, including its residential neighborhood, was destroyed and replaced by the so-called Government Center, a huge agora in red brick, testimony to a bureaucratic austerity as cold as can be. It is also next to a monumental City Hall that would have made Hitler's architect Albert Speer very proud. Another example which evokes Duffin-Montmorency: a suspended highway runs through the heart of the city. It is indeed the same highway that was transformed into a tunnel for an outrageous cost ($16 billions US$).

Nevertheless, in Boston, resistance has been beneficial. Indeed, most living quarters in downtown, with the exception of the one surrounding Scollay Square, remained intact. Since the 50's, Boston's center is an example of the striking contrast between two styles of urban planning. There is an exuberant vertical modernity, juxtaposed to a rigorous horizontal residential areas, at once urban and Victorian, among the most beautiful in the world (North End, Beacon Hill, Back Bay). In fact, the public opinion uprising has tempered the renovation endeavors of the "planners", hence protecting downtown's residential life.

A Simple Concept... or Simplistic?

In Quebec City, the U.R. (politicians at the time had associated the idea of progress to the extent that to be against it meant that you were "retrograde") has taken, from 1957 onwards, the forms of a street fight between urbanists feeling entitled to power, and a certain civil society in a desperate plight. Statistics allow us to understand the magnitude of these fights, ending in 1978, when tired of these everlasting wars, the City gave up on transforming Saint-Gabriel Street as a way to access the area of the former tramways. Between 1975 and 1976, some 10,000 people had been displaced, fourteen public schools were demolished or closed, more than 4,000 rental apartments were sacrificed. In terms of its demography, the agglomeration literally exploded. Indeed, the average density has passed from 1,000 people per km² to less than 1,000, and that, despite the fact that the total population has passed from 3,650,000 to 6,000,000 people. It is fair to say that the dimensions of the constrasting zone was multiplied by two volumes. Between 1950 and 1976, some 10,000 people had been displaced, fourteen public schools were demolished or closed, more than 4,000 rental apartments were sacrificed. In terms of its demography, the agglomeration literally exploded. Indeed, the average density has passed from 1,000 people per km² to less than 1,000, and that, despite the fact that the total population has passed from 3,650,000 to 6,000,000 people. It is fair to say that the dimensions of the constrasting zone was multiplied by two volumes.