A Short History of Living Poetry

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A SHORT HISTORY OF LIVING POETRY

BY ANDRÉ MARCEAU*

The National Capital of Quebec City has a population of 493,000 people. That makes it the second city in demographic importance after Montreal. It reflects the situation of the vast territory of the province as a whole, with only 7 million people: a low density. One has to mention this "detail" because it is one of the major obstacles to the professional viability of the arts in the province.

Let's say that mathematically speaking, this small group of "art fanatics" in an population already small makes it more uncommon. It will become even more the case for disciplines of the arts which, despite the fact that they are considered major or prestigious (such as poetry), are directly interested to only a small pocket of the population, while the pourcentage diminishes further when we are talking about innovating practices among these.

Furthermore, Quebec City which spreads out in multiples small urban nests, hides under its wing a somewhat conservative spirit (and preservative?). This is largely motivated by the fact that the City (industrial oldest city of Canada) belongs to Unesco's World Heritage. Within the bureaucracy, it has for a long time helped the tendency to limit artistic life to its heritage. Indeed, the fact that Quebec City is the National Capital, it finds itself being large victim of the fact that its artists often move to Montreal. This scenario is common to most cities remotely far from their original monopoles. Let's admit it: the National Capital belongs to the far regions.

During the last thirty years, if there was some attempts to create an association of professional authors, none of them have lasted significantly. That said, many writers and poets have made Quebec City their home, live and stay there. Indubitably, it creates some viable possibilities of the arts in the province, thanks to the diversity and dynamism of centers for artists. It is therefore not surprising that Le Témoin of circulation of poetry has been, at the same time, presented here at the same time that its authors have been performed poetry, oral poetry (or the spoken word) and the slam. Since this article is part of a summary program that was radically opposed to the diversity and dynamism of centers for artists, it is therefore not surprising that Le Témoin of circulation of poetry has been, at the same time, presented here at the same time that its authors have been presented in Quebec City, let's start at the beginning, that is, thirty years ago.

**Few Important Landmarks**

1978 – and the future years was a landmark moment on the artistic scene of Quebec City, precisely because it has seen the births of centers for artists who, while proposing new ways of functionning, were destined to one or the other in visual arts. Many among these have become noteworthy institutions because of their density and lasting commitment to the arts. That said, we will give importance to the names that have given a space to living poetry in the city. Evidently, a number of events in poetry have been, at the same time, presented here at the same time that its authors have been presented in Quebec City since the seventies. And they have contributed to promote poetry actuelle, in the heart of the National Capital.

**Inter, art actuel and Le Lieu centre en art actuel**

The review Inter, art actuel began in 1978, first under the name Intervention (creating at the same time the Editions Intervention). That said, the active artists formed a group around it organised few evening readings. As a result, following all the philosophy of the review, art actuel, Le Lieu actuel was born in 1982, offering a program that was radically opposed to the art traditions in Quebec City. In 1983, in the middle of the Mall Place-Fleur-de-Lys, which gathered a great number of writers (most particularly poets) and artists from the region and elsewhere in Quebec City. Then, in 1984, two international...
**manifestations imposed an extreme approach to poetry, one which Quebec City’s population was always allergic to (we have to remember how Claude Gauveau was welcomed by the public 15 years earlier). There were events such as «Mésongi» Cabaret: Festival d’Intervention 1 and in memoriam Georges Maciunas. On the contrary, both events showed that the wind was changing in a province more open to various projects, including the augural "boîte de lustre"."
editions of "Urban Sinecure" offering the first poetry evening at the lot Fleurie, under the access roads to the highways called: "La poésie se pète les bretelles". Other evenings took place in the stairs of La Chapelle Street (the access road to walk up or down between the Upper and the Lower City), in parking lots, on the streets, on the steps of the Church Saint-Roch, at the Saint-Roch marina, in the interpretation center of the Saint-Charles river... just to name a few. Le Front de réappropriation locale des poteaux (FRLP) is a branch of TAP. Between 1998 and 2002, it performed poetic manoeuvres encompassing many aspects: political, urban and informative (communication). It has also been involved in poetic actions and activities realized in its hometown Quebec City. The final objective of the manoeuvre was to promote the agents' rights and local residents to post information about their local activities in their respective areas such as wall surfaces viewed as "urban trash" by then (streetphone posts, barricaded, and panel wood fences). All of these manifestations were for a local reapropriation of them. An article on the birth of the FRLP was published in the review inter, art actuel ("L'oeuf à la coupe: Pour une écologie des poteaux « n° 71, p. 66). Among the branch’s activity, we can mention the four editions of Exposition Saint-Roch (happening before the refurbishing of the old commercial area downtown) and two Walks for Poetry (the Pèlerinage des poteaux and the Procession des poteaux).

More recently, Le Tremplin d'actualisation de poésie imported Slam de poésie in Quebec City, by getting together with the Ligue québecoise de Slam (LQS) and also with the help of Slam cap, which was in its second year. One game was presented monthly according to the customs and rules of the various leagues in the United States, England Canada and France.

Over ten years, TAP has proposed more than 200 poetry activities to Quebec audiences: evenings, shows, exhibitions or recitals, which contributing to raise poetry's visibility and vitality. Aside, TAP created two small publishing houses of the "zine" type, cumulating twenty small books (each of them representing one poet) as well as a printing house for CDs (oral, performed or audio live poetry). It's now producing it 50th publication.

RhiZome Productions

Founded in 2000 by Marc Doucet (a sound creator) and Simon Dumas (an author) and that many other creators in literature, media arts and audio arts have since joined - RhiZome Productions "is motivated by the desire to give a place to the author in public more completely than traditional venues of presentations of authors and texts (done mostly by conventional poetry recital or with music)" (source: RhiZome Productions). During their last six years of experience, the team developed three series of shows, all different in the way they engage. You have respectively Formes, Phénomènes et Syllepse, Formes is the oldest. That said, if productions were seduced at the beginning by "multimedia theater", their shows have moved more and more to traditional and considering what would be the closest, examples are rare. We have to remember the yearly publications or more occasional publications of artists books such as Réparation de poésie (with 19 issues) and the Cahiers Folie/Culture (with 9 issues). On CDs, Intervention, Avatar and Obscur have occasionally released sound poetry, mostly with the time of publications covering more ground. We will have to wait the arrival of the next publication of RhiZome. Le Tremplin d'actualisation de poésie with its label Réservé phonique to see the appearance of exclusive CDs of living poetry (spoken, performed, audio and sound) as follows: Mots arrachés du corps: Anthologie de la poésie vivante de Québec (75 poems of the region, 2004); Des Montres dans la gorge: Poésie transmissible radiophoniquement (double CD which includes 30 poems from Quebec City, 2005); Ubrine n°: Informe (a review to be filled by 2006); Pop soc-d'vie (solo CD of living poetry and slam, 2007). A double album is currently in production and will promote thirty poets coming from three different regions in Quebec (Quebec City, Montreal and Gatineau), thanks to the organizations holding living poetry events in their respective regions. On the radio, since 2001, TAP makes sure that living poetry is heard on a weekly basis (on radio frequency 89.1 of CKRL, in Quebec City) with a program about "poetry transmitted by radio" and produced by the authors of these stations.

To conclude, we can mention that at the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ), poetry is always solely perceived as a literary discipline. The needs for a scene aesthetic (because of oral, sound and performance elements) are considered mostly the ability to promote books. There is still a lot of work to do to make sure living poetry gets the recognition it deserves as a discipline in itself amongst the arts, and to make sure it remains alive in Quebec City and the province. In this regard, Le Tremplin d'actualisation de poésie is a pioneer because it promotes what has called living poetry and performed poetry through its various activities. ■

* As one of the founding member of Tremplin d'actualisation de Poesie (TAP) and as a driving force of the famous Vendredi de poésie and Slam de poésie in Quebec City, André Marcoux developed the idea of living and performed poetry. He is its ultimate advocate. For the last fifteen years, he has practiced poetry in its cross disciplinary fashion. He has been involved in more than 100 performances in the province. He published visual poetry and has participated at many collective events. Since 2001, he creates and produces a program dedicated to "poetry on the radio". He has also participated in round table discussions on poetry and performance at various universities, and produced with other artists, two cd's of live poetry as well as one solo cd, Pop soc-d'vie. He has published in many reviews (such as Estudire, Moebius, Cahiers Folie/Culture) and poetry books or talks, but not to mention few essays on today's poetry, in the review Inter, art actuel.