A Short History of Living Poetry

André Marceau

Ville de Québec 1978-2008
Quebec City 1978-2008
Numéro 100, automne 2008

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/60204ac

Citer cet article
"abribus" to our extreme winter conditions, b) by raising the numbers of reserved lanes for buses to see a real advantage when using it, while improving the conditions and the continuity of pathways for bikers and pedestrians; c) to help with mixed development in order to reduce the needs in transportation for long distances and further develop narrower streets, better equipped to retain the rain water, etc.

Most projects presented here come from the cultural and institutional sector. Unfortunately not a deliberate choice: we would have loved to present a majority of projects coming from private orders or habitations, but the financial imperatives guiding these projects, mostly since the turn of the century, are their creators in the development of an architecture interested in creation and innovation. It is important to note that the originality of several of these projects is at times contentious. A resolutely modern proposition will be more fruitful than one of the others by her successor. It could open the way to prepare for the enlargement of Palais and renovate its installations, taking advantage of the mixed usages and with the environment by ensuring the maintenance of the area framing the Palais and what surrounds it. Above all, let's hope that the new architecture tendencies, taking at once advantage of the mixed usages and of a language well adapted to our time, open to sustainable concepts and principles, will appear all over the city. It would allow us to take the qualities of the downtown area. It would also better develop our suburbs and the many entrances into the city, as we see it happening, on the Boulevard Laurier, today in full development.

References

Thematic issues of ARQ/Architecture-Québec:
ARQ, n° 51, Octobre 1989 : « Québec ». 
ARQ, n° 84, Avril 1995 : « Québec : la capitale en chantier ».
ARQ, n° 102, Juin 1999 : « Québec : la rénaissance d’un tout autre centre-ville ».
ARQ, n° 113, Novembre 2005 : « Architecture récente dans le centre et Fest du Québec ».

Note

Réjean Lemieux is an employee of Radio-Canada. He is a journalist and chronicler urban matters since 1977. He has been the municipal councilor representing the Saint-Roch district in Quebec City Hall during two terms, from 1989 until 1997. He was one of the founders of the radio station CIOA-MAF and has also contributed to the founding of the review Capitale-Orléans, in the eighties. He holds a B.A. from Laval University in History (1974) and a master’s degree (1980). He was born in Valleyfield, 1955.

Olivier Vallerand has earned his master’s degree in Architecture at Laval University in 2005. His research was on the potential of commercial spaces to stimulate new urban forms. After working for Ayers Saint Gross Architects + Planners in Washington D.C., and for Grégoire Vallerand Architects in Los Angeles, he currently works on projects for the firm Gagnon, Letellier, Cyr, Richard, Mathieu in Quebec City. In the same time, he is doing research on creative works, particularly with themes relating to urbanity and contemporary landscape, with the collective 1x1x1-laboratoire de création.

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 interesting to only a small pocket of the population, while the percentage diminishes further when we are dealing with 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 (indeed the oldest city of European colonies in America) 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, despite the fact that Quebec City is the National Capital, it finds itself often victim of the fact that its artists often move to Montreal. This scenario is common to most cities remotely far from their only metropolis.

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 and able offsprings. The City has notably become, in the last thirty years, an ardent foyer for the arts actuels in the province, thanks to the diversity and dynamism of centers for artists. It is therefore not surprising that Le Tremplin d’innovation de poésie, was born there more than elsewhere like in Montreal, the metropolis, or Trois-Rivières even, the capital of poetry. It offered new grounds for poetry based on oral tradition, the scene and performance. In this respect, for the last ten years, TAP and its founder (the author of this present essay) proposed and defended an approach of poetry actuelle – mainly in Quebec City. It begins to be known all over the province. Two terms have been elaborated by TAP. First, there was a king of performed poetry where the writing process meets the partition in order to force the poet into a performance situation (where the body and the language are put to the test). Second, there is a form of living poetry which encompasses more generally all kinds of poetry performed in live scenarios (scene, audio and in situ). It also includes performed poetry, oral poetry (or the spoken word) and the slam.

Since this article is part of a summary dedicated to the last thirty years 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 arts scene in Quebec City particularly because it has seen the births of centers for artists whom, while proposing new ways of functioning, were destined to one or the other in visual arts. Many among these have become noteworthy institutions because of their dynamical vitality and lasting commitment to the arts. That said, we will give importance to the ones 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, dedicated to the last thirty years 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 forming a group around it organised few events. As a result, following the philosophy of the review Inter, art actuel, Le Lieu (a center in art actuel) was born in 1982, offering a program that was radicly opposed to the art traditions in Quebec City at the time. For instance, the Marathon d’écritures held for 16 hours 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
Folie/Culture
Folie/Culture was born in 1984, bringing together two domains not as far apart as it would appear — Mental Health and Culture (or art) — thanks to the initiative of two passionate people: Paul Morin (part of the collective Autopsie, defending people who have spent time in psychiatric hospitals) and Gilles Aréau (from Obscure). This association was subsequently devoted to mental health issues and their applications in society and art (or vice-versa) more than to a precise form of art. It has regularly integrated poetry evenings among the variety of discipline presented in its program. At first inclined towards the « festival » type of events until the mid-nineties, Folie/Culture presented events on a bi-annual basis. The association offered a diversified program over the period of a whole year. To this day, Folie/Culture presented about a dozen of poetry evenings in Quebec City, generally following an hybrid form between performance, music and poetry. On the occasion, the association has published nine opus of its Cahier Folie/Culture over the years. The majority of its texts are dedicated to poetry, all of it amalgamated with visual works. Each issue of the Cahier forms a box-object because it is matched with the most unexpected objects, such as kleenex boxes, hospital scrubs, bread bags or even First-aid kits.

Réparation de poésie
Founded in 1986 by Jean-Clarence Arteau, Réparation de poésie was the first association in Quebec to be completely dedicated to poetry and its avatars, such as postal art. Its mandate consists of creating and stimulating relations between poetry and the visual arts while implementing postal art in Quebec City. Between the years of its inception and the beginning of 2000, Réparation de poésie was able to present dozens of poetry evenings in Quebec City. Many others have followed, both in libraries in the city, particularly in the contexts of the Manif d’Art. Since eight years, if Réparation de poésie has limited its activities to artists and poets books and postal art, it remains an essential vehicle working for the dissemination of both, living poetry and Quebec City.

Avatar
Active since 1993, this non-profit organization dedicated to research, creation and diffusion of audio and electronic arts has been implementing postal art poetry activities in sound or electronic poetry CDs in its growing discography. Even more, Avatar organizes annually a benefit in support to other organizations by realizing events or CDs of poetry related to audio and electronic arts. Even if it is not directly related to the poetry world, this organization is viewed as an allied center by contributing to living poetry's visibility.

Poets of French America
Since 1996, the corporation Poètes de l’Amérique française (Poets of French America), directed by the poet Guy Cloutier, presents eight concert/recitals during the whole year, yearly, at the Canada House of French America. This series produced in Quebec City was also presented in Montreal and presented at different contexts of Quebec City’s Book Fair. This corporation has the mandate to offer authors "that have a body of work" (to understand here great authors) a place for their voices to be heard directly, towards a non-academic public. Each concert/recital offers readings (of about five to ten minutes) by the invited poet, for a total of thirty-five minutes. The performances are divided into two parts. Each part of the concerts is divided into four segments. The poems are chosen from the repertoire. Inspired by literary works, the performances are characterized by the inclusion of new poetry. They offer the advantage of sharing many of the advantages of the scene and the great poetic works.

Le Trempland d’actualisation de poésie (TAP)
Beginning its activity in 1998 with living poetry evenings presented monthly (known as The Fridays of Poetry) and a « manœuvre-frontale » of poetry (by Le Front de Rappaportation locale des poètes), the collective has operated a transdisciplinary unfurling of poetry: living poetry (oral, performed and audio), visual poetry, and evidently literary poetry. As its name indicates, TAP is dedicated to poetry's actualization (actual meaning in this case "which relates to the act"); it is a type of poetry that implies a performative aspect. This organization has put forward the notions of living poetry and performed poetry in order to designate a type of poetry solely created for oral events (on the scene or on CD's). The association is proud to be its best advocate in Quebec City. Each second Friday of the month (ten months per year), The Fridays of Poetry produced evenings dedicated to performances of poetry, with TAP, the center Jacques-Cartier and the Tam Tam Café. They have reached their 10th anniversary in 2008 (and their 100th evening). Each edition happens in two parts: a short first segment of the show with included few invited poets, all recognized by institutions and each of them giving a five minutes performance (they welcome about 50 established poets, yearly). This is followed by spontaneous performances where fifteen people give their names, in an open type of poetry, all performed (they are known poets or poets that are at their beginnings). Each time the room fills up of people of all ages and backgrounds. Many of them are gradually initiated to poetry. Furthermore, this monthly happening was secured for the last ten years and greatly contributed to make poetry known to people in Quebec City. It helped deem poetry by breaking the wall of prejudices haunting it.

Since 1999, thanks to the same collaboration, TAP organized eleventh editions of the series "Urban Sinecure". They are part of The Fridays of Poetry. These evenings are proposed in situ, in public spaces outside in the heart of the Saint-Roch area, located downtown. Amplification systems, lighting and the installation of a scene are taking over the space, altogether making one with it in order to reach a precise objective: to create the occasion to live a poetic experience in the context where these poets are performing. This is one of the
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 by cultural schoolchildren in the whole 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" (telephone poles, barricades, and papered 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, actuel ("L'oeuf à la loupe: Pour une écologie des poteaux» n° 71, p. 60). Among the branch’s activities, we can mention the four editions of Exploesie Saint-Roch (happening before the refurbishing of the old commercial area downtown) and two Walks for Poetry (le 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 (LQG) 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 and France.

Over ten years, TAP has proposed more than 200 poetry activities to Quebec audiences: evenings, shows, exhibitions, bibli?): and radio (both oral and performed or audio living poetry). It’s now producing its 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 theatre", their shows have moved on to more and more media technologies performatively during the last years. They have brought literary events closer to art actuel.

They are real literary events because, on each occasion, the whole show is about an author (or more) and his or her texts said directly (or not). Since 2000, this enterprise realized no less than fifty literary activities – for the most part, in one or the other of the mentioned series – in Quebec City and in other cities of the province (like Montreal) or in few cities of Europe and Mexico.

The Editors...

Only fifteen publishing houses (licensed) are operating in the greater Quebec region. Even if there was few attempts during the last 30 years, only one publishing house is dedicated to poetry was able to survive significantly: Le Loup de Gouttière. Born in 1989, Le Loup de Gouttière always gave priority to poets from the Quebec City region. It was sold in 2008 (after almost 20 years of existence) and became Cormac Editions. For editors in the margins, publishing reviews or small books of the "zine" type, there has been many attempts, but in less numbers were the ones essentially dedicated to poetry. We can mention here the most recent. As far as the reviews and zine are concerned, we have L’idolethé (about six issues) and L’ér (about 15 issues); for the poetry collections.

We have the publishing group Poésie Combattante (with five publications, mostly collective, since 2002) and the ones of TAP (des poteaux). Since 2001, that is Tal (short poetry such as haikus and sneryds, with nine publications) and Les croque-mots (poetry in verse with ten publications) and La Revue des invisibles (poetry books focusing on oral tradition with two publications).

Although they are not distributed in the libraries, 200 copies (on average) of these publications are sold each time, yearly. This is a satisfying result if we compare it to sales of official editors which are often lower. That said, in all these cases we are talking about literary poetry more than living poetry. In this respect 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 Obscure have occasionally released sound poetry, most of the time with publications covering more ground. We will have to wait the arrival of Le Tremplin d’actualisation de poésie with its label Réserve phonique to see the appearance of exclusive CDs of living poetry (spoken, performed, audio and sound) as follows: Mots emmêlés du corps: Anthologie de la poésie vivante de Quebec (9 poets of the region, 2004), Des Montres dans la gorge: Poesie transmissible radiophoniquement (double CD which includes 30 poets from Quebec City, 2005), Ubrine n° Informe (philatst issue of a review still to be born, 2006), Pop sac-à-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, Montrel 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 89.3 of CKRL, in Quebec City) with a program about "poetry transmitted by radio" and produced by the authors of the poems.

To conclude, we can mention that at the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Quebec (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 has a way 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 I have called living poetry and performed poetry through its various activities.