La diffusion des arts, où en sommes-nous? Deux congrès de la critique d’art / At What Point Are We In the Dissemination of Art? Art of the Seventies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Les arts sont essentiels à la vie — ils ne sont pas des artifices. C'est une vérité qui vient du fond des temps et qu'il est temps de reconnaître.

2. Chaque individu est un amant potentiel des arts. Le virus des arts a certainement une forte puissance d'attrait mais, comme dans tout amour, il faut pouvoir le mériter, le garder et l'approfondir, pour en avoir pleine jouissance.

3. Chaque individu a droit à la culture et aux arts. Un des principaux articles de la Charte de l'Unesco, en vigueur depuis plus de vingt-cinq ans!

4. Les média ont une responsabilité particulière vis-à-vis des arts parce qu'ils sont un bien public, d'une part, et, d'autre part, parce qu'ils occupent une position stratégique en tant que diffuseurs dans le champ de la communication. Le pouvoir des média est incommensurable. Il faut savoir l'utiliser, tout en demeurant conscient des responsabilités qu'il entraîne. Les média ont souvent une attitude superficielle et irresponsable en ce qui concerne les arts et toutes les choses de l'esprit. Ils ne créent pas encore, loin de là, un milieu stimulant pour les grandes aventures de la pensée.

5. L'État a le devoir de veiller à favoriser par une réglementation spécifique l'élaboration d'une programmation équilibrée des média. Une part importante des solutions dépend d'un bon dosage de la programmation et de la conscience des animateurs chargés de sa réalisation.

6. Une fois les réglementations admises, l'État doit se retirer et laisser les média délibérer leur raison d'être avec la population qu'ils servent en quelque sorte et à laquelle ils sont redevables. Un nouveau mode de fonctionnement méritait d'être étudié dans cette perspective.

7. Enfin, ici, il n'y a rien à ajouter et les média cherchent à satisfaire les exigences suivantes: Les média doivent respecter le caractère spécifique des arts tout en cherchant à exploiter toutes leurs possibilités pour leur rendre justice.
limited to small groups — the work of art, in spite of all its excellence, is deprived of dis-
semination.
A promising sign. For the first time, a meet-
ing was organized jointly by Radio-Canada and the National Arts Centre. This is a preview of the cooperation that is becoming closer and closer. The hearts of the men and women behind the centres of diffusion and those of produc-
tion. It is a matter of knowing how to better use the different elements that combine in the harmonious expression of cultural life.
The inquiry announced by Mme Jeanne Sauvé, Minister of Communications, will per-
mit the assuring in the future of a greater share in the artistic and cultural content in so far as each can be persuaded to apply a little good-
will. For instance, unions should understand that their cooperation in the matter of authors’ rights is necessary in order to make possible a wide popular distribution. Failing an agree-
ment, the enormous sums called for would make re-broadcasts of big programmes pro-
hibitive.
The conclusions of the Conference, drawn by Professor Hoggart, took the form of a declara-
tion in seven articles:
1. The Arts are essential to a good life and the press. Yet it is here that the tools par excel-
cell that incite to great adventures. If we must go out of it. In this prospect, a new way of func-
tioning should be studied.
2. Everyone is potentially a special kind of lover of the arts. The virus of the arts surely
has a great power of attraction, but, as in any love, one must be able to deserve, retain and go deeply into it, in order to enjoy it fully.
3. Everyone has the right of access to the arts and that right must be met and honoured.
One of the chief articles of the UNESCO Charter, in force for more than twenty-five years.
4. The media of Mass communication, in particular broadcasting, have particular re-
 sponsibilities towards this right of access, and for two main reasons. First because they are public resources and must be used for public ends. They are a public resource and a limited public resource. Secondly, because the terms "public" and "private" do not apply in the case of the arts. They must be viewed under two aspects: the emo-
tional and irresponsible attitude toward the arts and all things of the mind. They do not
yet create such structures, to give such mandates to artists and to the media, that they can
work, and go deeply into it, in order to enjoy it fully.
5. It is similarly the duty of governments to set up such structures. To give such mandates
to the media as will allow them to fulfill the above truths, and not thwart them. An impor-
tant part of the solutions depends heavily on press, radio and television, who have the capaci-
tiousness of the animators responsible.
6. Having thus set up living space for great broadcastings, the government should get out of it. In this prospect, a new way of func-
tioning should be studied.
Finally, there is nothing further to be added here, and the media must fulfill, on the whole, the following demands: First of all, it is the duty
of broadcasters to respect the Arts in and for themselves. Second, it is the great good for-
tune of broadcasters to love their medium and its possibilities.
The conference ended on a note of hope. We have been fortunate to have us with us the
Secretary of State, Mr. John Roberts, a man who likes what is solid, a man of refined and
cultured mind. He later declared that, if the government consents to increase the sums allocated to the Arts (a decision taken at the begin-
ing of July), it is because it recognizes the necessity for this. In his view, the artist has not only the function of entertainer, he repre-

sents an absolute superabundance, an essential. We need not only the love of the artist, but to better understand ourselves, for lack of loving ourselves. "The arts", he recalled, "must
chiefly be used for the exploration of the human condition. By becoming priorities, the
arts will help us to build a civilized country."
The arts need these words which come from the heart and which give confidence.
The International Association of Art Critics will hold its next convention in Germany, from
the second to the ninth of the coming September. There, questions relative to the arts of the
Seventies will be considered, and the discus-
sions will bear particularly on the following themes: 1. Expansion of the plastic arts beyond
their traditional limits; 2. Conception and problems of present-day realism; 3. Theory
and methodology of criticism of contemporary art. In anticipation of these sessions, we intend
to present some articles that will call attention to these preoccupations. We hope to publish dur-
ing the year one or two other texts that seemed important to us.
The quarterly publishing of Vie des Arts has unfortunately not allowed us to emphasize
the success of the 1976 Conference, held at Lisbon and organized by Mme Salette Tavares. There
discussion centered around the relationships between modern art and African-afro art.
Until the 20th century, historians and critics drew their inspiration from exclusively Euro-
pean canons to evaluate all forms of culture, which led to blind, puerile judgments on African art. The year 1905 marked a turning
point. We know now that the advent of modern art has been preceded several years by the
principal artists of the period applied to
African art. Upon becoming interested in it,
inquiring into it, integrating it, they found the
basis of a new language which unceasingly

Demands fresh clarifications.
By means of texts by authors such as Apoll-
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and the intellectual primitive. He has stressed the perception of artists such as Picasso, Braque and Vlaminck, whose intu-
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The arts need these words which come from the heart and which give confidence.
In recent years, artists in Quebec have been coping with the return of the fundamental problem that revolves around the question: What is the meaning of life? They have been examining themselves concerning the art of painting, sculpting, executing plastic work. They have been re-examining the reality that is also the reality of colour and form. They ask themselves what plastic language is and particularly what its meaning is. Their answers are very fragmentary, often confused, and sometimes inadequate: whence arises an impression of very great indecision among the artists themselves on the subject of current orientations in art. This indecision extends to observers and to the public. We shall see that such a climate can be the prelude to a particularly fruitful period.

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

Therefore, the absence of one or several important movements is not accidental. It is the reflection of a period when artists deliberately refrain from expressing judgments and ideological positions as shattering as they are dogmatic. They are questioning themselves and actualizes his personal itinerary, applying himself to developing only a tiny, microscopic aspect of a tremendous problem whose whole they refuse to undertake. And so they move with very small steps, somewhat like certain scientists specialists. They regularly show their works at exhibitions. Without going so far as to increase their marginality, they are happy in the favourable opinion of a public — friends — that, in any case, has always been restricted in the matter of avant-garde creation and that follows their evolution with a half-approving, half-sceptical eye. However, from the evidence of the crowd at the Contemporary Art Museum on Saturdays and Sundays, we would be wrong to believe that a large part of it has not been the object of persistent interest in present-day art. Certainly, extensive efforts remain to be exerted on the levels of education and artistic information. Still, it cannot be denied that artists are perfectly aware of how much it is to be understood. That is why, in no other context, it is easier, for example, to study with extreme precision and seriousness above any suspicion of the phenomena of chromatic differential perception: this form of activity allows whisking away at a cheap price the reflection on the meaning of such a work for the one who blindly takes his eyes for the pure emotion and that being so far from the ivory tower, we understand also why a public is lacking to hold to hypotheses of illusion or vanishing point.

Concerning present art in Quebec, at this time, and in the context of the contemporary art movement, is not accidental. The absence of a leader is a fact that has been recognized by the majority of the artists engaged in this form of creation and that follows their evolution. It is the reflection of a period when artists were not able to avoid it; the point where their theorization has been considered as terrorism. Doubtless, the absence of a leader among today's young creators is a sign of opposition to their elders, and an avowal, too. Therefore, at the heart of a situation where serious difficulties are experienced in perceiving great axes and criticism that is criticism, we can, in spite of everything, try to discern some tendencies. This is a dangerous practice since we know how numerous and acute the zones of interference, with the dispersion that constitutes the chief sociological characteristic of current art. The artist who began his career as a plastician appeals to-day to minimalism or even to post-minimalism, without for all that repudiating his first adherence. There is also the risk of labelling. That is why the examples and names cited are used here only by way of illustration. The categories we are going to note are not definitive but rather part of a process that cannot be analyzable in detail: these divisions contribute to the lucidity of the account.

A first series of trends finds its faraway source in Surrealism which, schematically, gave birth to the Automatist movement (1945-1946). The meeting took place at the Gulbenkian Foundation, one of the most interesting modern museums in Europe, which, at the time, was presenting a special exhibition organized to honour the memory of Calouste Gulbenkian, upon the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Foundation.

For the last few years, therefore, the artists have been examining themselves concerning the art of painting, sculpting, executing plastic work. They have been re-examining the reality that is also the reality of colour and form. They ask themselves what plastic language is and particularly what its meaning is. Their answers are very fragmentary, often confused, and sometimes inadequate: whence arises an impression of very great indecision among the artists themselves on the subject of current orientations in art. This indecision extends to observers and to the public. We shall see that such a climate can be the prelude to a particularly fruitful period.

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