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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 ceci, pas assez de cela, la réunion est ternie, les intervenants manquent d'objectivité, les plus passionnés ne voient 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 retombées 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 délégués saturés et blasés qui réapparaissent quand même fidèlement à ces réunions.

On 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 immédiate 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 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 diffusion populaire. A défaut d’entente, les sommes vertigineuses à engager rendraient prohibitive la retransmission 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 irresponsible 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 partie 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 débattre leur raison d’être avec la population qu’ils servent en quelque sorte et à laquelle ils sont redevables. Un nouveau mode de fonctionnement mériterait 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.
AT WHAT POINT ARE WE IN THE DISSEMINATION OF ART?

ART OF THE SEVENTIES

By Andrée PARADIS

Conferences seldom arrive at a happy fate. Whatever may be the formulas used, criticism bursts forth from everywhere: too much of this, too little of that, the museums, the theatres, the halls, the museums, the theatres, the halls, the museums, the theatres, the halls, the museums, the theatres. Although usually carried on in the name of democracy the result is the sad unfolding of the rules of deliberation and participation.

What improves following these confrontations is less apparent. The nodes, the symposia, the conferences, the seminars, are at least as stifled as the contributors lack objectivity, the most passionately interested shout only the commonplaces. Although usually carried on in the name of democracy the result is the sad unfolding of the rules of deliberation and participation.

We are so little used to reflection, so little trained in searching for positive and essential values in communications that everywhere we see only frustration, failure, slovenliness, lack of originality, etc. The Arts and Media Conference held at the beginning of July at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa has not escaped the series of laments of the pessimistic press. The inquiry announced by Mme Jeanne Sauvé, Minister of Communications, will permit 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 agreement, the enormous sums called for would make re-broadcasts of big programs prohibitive.

The conference ended on a note of hope. 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.

The conclusions of the Conference, drawn by Professor Hoggett, took the form of a declaration in seven articles:

1. The Arts are essential to a good life and the satisfaction it must be a part of all human lives. This has been true since time immemorial and it is time to recognize the fact.

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, and in particular broadcasting, have particular responsibilities 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 must be used for public ends. Secondly, because they have a privileged role, a special status in the modern social context of the arts. The power of the media is immeasurable. It is necessary to know how to use it while remaining aware of the responsibilities it entails. The media often display a superficial and irresponsible attitude toward the arts and all things of the mind. They do not yet allow the artists to be great adventures in thought; far from it.

5. It is similarly the duty of governments to set up such structures as to give such mandates and at least a special status to the arts. The power of the media is immeasurable. It is necessary to know how to use it while remaining aware of the responsibilities it entails. The media often display a superficial and irresponsible attitude toward the arts and all things of the mind. They do not yet allow the artists to be great adventures in thought; far from it.

6. Having thus set up living space for good broadcasting, the government should get out of it. In this prospect, a new way of functioning should be studied.

Finally, there is nothing further to be added here, and what must be added, 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 fortune of broadcasters to love their medium and its possibilities.

The conference ended on a note of hope. We have been fortunate to have with us the Secretary of State, Mr. John Roberts, a man who likes what is solid, a man 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 beginning of July), it is because it recognizes the necessity for this. In his view, the artist not only the function of entertainer, he represents vital superabundance of the essential. We need him, we need him for better understand ourselves, for lack of loving ourselves. "The arts", he recalled, "must 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 art of the Seventies will be considered, and the discussions will bear particularly on the following themes: 1. Expansion of the plastic arts beyond their traditional limits; 2. Perception 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 call attention to these preoccupations. We hope to publish during 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 on the reciprocal relations between modern art and African art.

Until the 20th century, historians and critics drew their inspiration from exclusively European 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 modernism, at that time, was neither a new thing nor the discovery of a new world.

African art, which began with the Industrial Revolution, is a modern art in the true sense of the word. It is necessary to know how to use it while remaining aware of the responsibilities it entails. The media often display a superficial and irresponsible attitude toward the arts and all things of the mind. They do not yet allow the artists to be great adventures in thought; far from it.

By means of texts by writers such as Apollinaire, Dufour, one of the lecturers, Jean-Louis Pau-drat, tried to analyze what the discovery of African negro art brought to modern art. A completely renewed sense of relationships that motivated a return to Africa is the result of a renewed sense of relationships with European architecture. He cites good examples of architecture well integrated at Accra in Ghana. The rate of population growth and urbanization is going to create tremendous problems in a few years.

It is imperative to make use of traditions as much as possible and change them only when it is about the arts. 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 role of the art you are producing? This question is often examined by art critics concerning the art of painting, sculpting, executing plastic work. They have been examining the reality that is also the reality of colour and forms. They ask themselves what plastic language is and particularly what its meaning is. Their answers are very fragmented, often confused, and sometimes inadequate: whence arises an impression of great indecision among the artists themselves concerning 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 (this time of great indecision) and of social conscience, in which to some years in the Western world are struggling under the burden of the eternal questions that endlessly batter them: What is life? What is society?

We are certainly obliged to observe that, in Quebec as elsewhere in the world, artists are passing through an intense period of interrogation. First, on themselves, then on plastic space, on the crises of our time, on the society that surrounds them and, more precisely, on the production (industrial, technological, intellectual, scientific, political, economic) of the subject whose good or bad conscience they carefully avoid bringing about their production goes far beyond the traditional rules of art. Artists attempt (or are content) to find the essential of their creative development on strictly theoretical bases. However, the modesty (the lack of scope) of certain undertakings seems tainted by weakness and, consequently, debatable: in fact, there are genuine extensions of the subject. 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 blindness. They do not feel concerned by what often seems to be an ensemble of superficial justifications; it also has the impression that they wish to force its approval by presenting it to a part of the other side of the coin. There is added, too, the risk or showing that the work cannot speak by itself, and, consequently, to be explained by a discourse which, besides, has no hesitation in being redundant. The progression is such that the artist’s dissertation on his work finally becomes more important than the work itself. This is the pitfall that certain plasticians have remained unable to avoid, to the point where their theorization has been considered as terrorism. Doubtless, the absence of a leader among to-day’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, expressing and criticizing those critical processes that we are experiencing, we can, in spite of everything, try to discern some trends. This is a dangerous practice, since we know how numerous are the zones of interference, with the dispersion that constitutes the chief sociological characteristic of current art. The artist who began his career as a part of this process of minimalism or even to post-minimalism, without that all 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 notice, therefore, are those that we can produce in the process that cannot be analyzed 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 Automatism movement (1945-1948), which was followed by that of the plasticians (1980). Geometric art, Abstract Expressionism, Lyrical Abstraction and research in chromatics are part of an authentic movement that still dominates contemporary art in Quebec in the view of certain persons. Many members of these movements still pursue an active career: they are well known: Yves Gaucher, Charles Gagnon, Guido Moliari, Serge Tousignant, Omer Parent, Jacques Hurtubise, Denis Juneau, Marcelle Ferron, Rita Letendre, Mario Merola, Yves Trudeau, Ulysses Comtois, Guy Montpetit, Roger Viard. This last group also includes Roger Viger’s kinetic productions.

A second form of creation draws its inspiration from Pop art that originated in England about 1962, spread to the United States and reached Quebec in 1965. This style marks a first return to representative art: Realism, Neo-Realism, Hyperrealism, Neo-Surrealism, Neo-