Richard Long: A Generous Sharing

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THE GREAT CHALLENGE

By Andrée PARADIS

What kind of relation exists between the function of art criticism and the policy of regionalization in geocultural ensembles? By all the evidence, a very close tie and a complete interdependence. At present, in most countries, although to varying degrees, the decentralization factor, linked to the active rôle of the media, involves a new examination of the critical function in order that it may play its proper part, that of the dissemination of art. And the encouragement of creation. It is obvious that a good policy of regionalization cannot come about without the co-operation of the apparatus of criticism. Failing this, an atmosphere of false security is established and risks sterilizing the creative effort, which is in constant need of being evaluated.

The curator of his exhibition in Ottawa awaited Long's arrival with particular interest. Long's work is nature... A walk moves through life, it is a generous sharing. From year to year the accommodations are increasing, in order that all artistic and scientific domains may eventually be assembled to work for reflection and common experience.

Criticisms, like art, is always evolving: it expands steadily through new contributions that enrich or impoverish it according to the use made of them. The new ideas from sociology have allowed criticism to be sensitive to socio-historical changes that have had an influence, not only on our methods of communication - this famous passing from the written to the visual - but also on the evolution of the forms of expression which reflect in plastic language the phases of transition that civilizations go through. As for the contributions from semiology, they have led criticism to take an interest in the functioning of works, in studying the relationships that exist between container and contents, in encouraging the accessibility of the viewer to the work. These approaches are different from the traditional methods of the history of art, whether they be formalist or interpretative, but they are complementary to an appreciable degree. It is the same with the approaches arising from psychoanalysis, and from those which spread doctrinaire ideology. As each has its own language, we can measure the complex intensity of the vocabularies used by critical information.

Will the new technologies force more unified or more simplified approaches? For the moment, we are questioning ourselves on the opportuneness of the kinds of orientation. Should we opt for information or for instruction? Ought we to aim at professional groups or at the public at large? What exactly do we hope for from innovative programmes? Who is going to choose? And once these things are done, what use shall we make of them?

The curator of his exhibition in Ottawa awaited Long's arrival with particular interest and curiosity this autumn, because Long had promised to use rock from a local Ottawa quarry to concoct an on-the-spot sculpture when he arrived. He also brought with him pocketfuls of special mud-dust which, when mixed with water, gave him the substance he needed to create a special effects happening in Canada's National Gallery.

No doubt, in the future the critic will have to leave his desk and learn to come to terms with the designer and the cameramen. The ideal would be that he would become a cameraman himself! At the rate at which things are developing, we must imagine a complete transformation of the habits of writing ten years from now.

At Sophia Antipolis (the city opposite), in the Mediterranean mellowness of the first days of September, a gentle wisdom prevailed at the discussions. President Hauillac reminded us that if we feel that we have gone back to our proper selves, in tune with our true being, as only the Mediterranean - as Goethe said - has the gift of making us achieve this, it will not be for having avoided the tensions of the idea, but really for having debated a bitter and invigorating matter.