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Thirty Years of Living in Quebec City A Dialogue Between You and I

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various auditoriums were known by all. The professors' participation kept the pedagogical teams alert, and, in poetry at F.-X. Garneau (with Pierre-André Arcand and Jean-Yves Fréchette) in visual arts and photography in Sainte-Foy (with André Bécot, Jocelyn Gasse, Lucie Lefebvre, Alain-Martin Richard and myself), in sound in Limoilou (with Gilles Arteau and Louis Ouellet). Many professors of the Écoles des arts visuels, including Marc Dugas, Michel Labbé and Richard Mill, actively participated in this adventure from the beginning.

Looking at it from a distance, the frictions that caused the break up of the first group of La chambre blanche enabled the opening of modes of diffusion and artistic productions. Each of these groups occupied a territory with well-established boundaries. We saw that when the frictions disappeared, the maturity prevailing in the artists' communities and centers rapidly forced a collaboration that has since not ceased to grow. It is the most important aspect of this exercise in *art actuel* in Quebec City: the friendships and collaborations between the diverse groups make viable this fascinating adventure. This adventure of the art movements in the beautiful city of Quebec.

And what if, instead of humming and hawing, we would get together to celebrate the civil birth of our country, in our big village...? ■

Notes

- 1 Extract from Engramme, see on website www.meduse.org/engramme.
- 2 These two years have seen the emergence of a generation of artists. Many artists involved at Comme Galerie became known in Quebec City, to mention Raymonde April, François Joly, Jean Lantier, Raymond Lavoie, Jean-Marie Martin, Joëlle Morosoli, Serge Murphy and Michèle Waquant. Also, two professors at the Écoles des arts visuels also exhibited at the Galerie Comme, namely Claude Girard and Michel Labbé.
- 3 The Comme Galerie became Galerie Comme to make the name more "French". This was one of the conditions to obtain the right to incorporate as a non-profit organization.
- 4 André Bécot is a sculptor that taught at the Arts Department of the CEGEP Sainte-Foy. He is now retired and still owns a space in Saint-Roch.
- 5 See Yves Robillard in *Le jour*, Montreal, April 15th 1977.
- 6 See Jean Royer, in *Le soleil*, February 12, 1977.
- 7 See Jean Tourangeau, « Jean-Claude St-Hilaire », in *Vie des Arts*, vol. 21, Spring issue 1977, p. 86.
- 8 See Jean Tourangeau, « Galerie Comme: Entrevue avec Odette Ducasse et Jean-Claude St-Hilaire » in *dérives*, Montreal, l'Enmieux, n° 10-11, 1977.

- 9 Côté and Gaudreault were interested in the masculine majority at *documenta*. Martel was questioning Beuys' importance and performed *Le traité de la farine*. Haché performed inside the museum by sleeping in a corner. St-Hilaire recited traditional German tales in the streets, turning the scope to more political international issues. At last, Haché, St-Hilaire and Vanderborght (one of the French participants) were making fun of *documenta*, naked on the front of the Frédéricianum Museum. At last, Durand was busy observing and writing. If one wants to know more on this issue, see number 17 of the review *Intervention*.

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THIRTY YEARS OF LIVING ART IN QUEBEC CITY

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOU AND I

BY LISANNE NADEAU
AND GUY SIOUI DURAND*

Banff, Tuesday January 22nd 2008
Dear Lisanne,

From my window, I observe the tops of the Rockies. The tremendous drifting snow, lifted by the winds, works to amalgamate the sky to the valley in a milky fog. It is very cold. Even this far out, this horizon liberates my reflections: how to tell the story of living art which has now 30 years with the City as its real subject? What can we say about « art actuel » in Quebec City, in 2008? Furthermore, how to be up for the challenge of writing, in duo, a narrative which relates its artists to the *Cité*?

First, it seems wise to start with a kind of remembrance of things past, going back in time until, maybe, 1978, isn't it? I have always given some importance to transition periods, shifts from one time to another. In this case a decade to another. Also, as we start this correspondence and for clarity purposes, I suggest that we keep in mind these chronological blocks as landmarks: from 1978 until 1988, from 1988 until 1998, and from 1998 until 2008. I know, and there I will

not teach anything to an art historian like you, all divisions are arbitrary. It is however important that we remember that this history of friendly agents is also ours.

What do you think?

Regards.

Guy

Stoneham, Friday January 25th

Guy,

I am glad that you wish to look at this history from the point of view of our personal experience. Before you left, when we discussed it together, I was suddenly aware that our first encounter with « art actuel » was determinant in our respective itinerary. I was telling myself that it would be interesting to talk about these experiences, in the first place. What do you think? And this history would then emerge from our complementary point of views, similar yet different: two voices testifying to the distinct angles of this development of art actuel in Quebec City. Of course, it is important to fulfill our mission and look back at these important dates, because it seems that we have the responsibility to revisit this trajectory which might vanish into oblivion at any moment. Already, younger people are completely unaware of the important actors that have made today's milieu possible. A basic Google search confronts us to the terrible reality that centers like Obscure are for many a memory of a distant past.

You start all of this with 1978, and that speaks to me directly. It was the year of the founding of La chambre blanche, a center for artists where I have been active for many years, as you know. This sectioning of time, in decades, is very productive because I think they were moments of distinct developments with distinct objectives. Going back and revisiting mentally this trajectory makes me realize that we are coming from very far, coming out of the seventies' formalism to multidisciplinary approaches, even the interdisciplinary of today's world.

I will tell you my story. We will see if yours meets mine on the way...

Lisanne

Banff, Saturday January 26th

Lisanne,

With this e-mail, I am telling you that I utterly accept your proposition. I like this idea of beginning with the "first experiences". Even better, during this exchange, such « confidences » will do nothing else but stimulate. I catch a glimpse of this lived experience. It will

sometimes be an encounter, a reading, a street, a work of art, and the tale is born, curiosity starts something... and the imagination is at work. Let's go for it!

Guy

1978-1988

Sunday January 27th

Guy,

I am going along with this game.

I am now in 1978. I have to say that haunting to me is this image of the hole that was Saint-Roch. We could see it from my office window at La chambre blanche, located at number 549, on Charest. The urban development was in crisis at the time, in this area. This area will become the core of the city's art scene. You remember, Robert Lepage made of this open wound in the city his Trilogy's catalyst... It is indeed in this quaint little space, an old office space with terrazzo flooring(!) that I fell in love with art actuel for the first time. I had not seen anything like this. Someone had invited me to write on an exposition of artists' book, in 1982. They also presented an installation by Françoise Girard in a space exclusively allocated to residences *in situ*. I have no idea if you remember this, but in this space artists were free to intervene as they pleased, on walls, floors and all. And they could also keep the traces and elements left by their predecessors. We were witnessing, from one work to another, a form of palimpsest. It was the *in situ* in its first phase where the main point was to consider, before anything else, the architectural specificity of each space, and then to integrate a poetic element to it. This was a way of questioning the status of the work of art as an object, and also the traditional and neutral utopia inherent to the way we hang them. I remember that we were all interested in the works done by Lapointe and Fleming and their investments in dilapidated spaces in Montreal.

When I was young, I had been to the Galerie Joliette and the Galerie du Musée (which was previously called l'Anse-aux-Barques), two essential spaces for their diffusion of contemporary arts in Quebec City at the time. But then, Françoise's installation was something else. The transformation of the small room into an immaculate white space opened the way to an untold visual and physical experience. At the time, installation, like René Payant was saying, was coming out of painting. This sensation of being *IN* troubled me profoundly. I had the will to become more engaged as a member.

It was another time! Computers were nonexistent. I had wanted to change our press releases and some members told me that we should not look like a commercial gallery. When we look at their history, we see that centers for artists have moved from an alternative status to their full recognition. We will have to see, together, this evolution and its consequences. At the beginning of the eighties, many people moved to Montreal. Many creators like Raymonde April, Serge Murphy, Fabienne Bilodeau, Michele Waquant and Francine Guay (today at the 1%) had already left to Montreal. I remember rubbing shoulders with Bernard Bilodeau, Isabelle Bernier, Monique Mongeau, Guy Pellerin, Michel Asselin, Francine Chainé and Chantal Boulanger. All of them left. Then Hélène Rochette and Helga Schlitter left. André Pelletier and Sylvie Gagné have unfortunately stopped their productions. They were outstanding artists. François Lachapelle also. She had coordinated a section of art actuel at Quebec City's celebration in 1984, for La chambre blanche. I did not know anything, as many of my colleagues. That said, we could see all the work that needed to be done in a city like ours and all the possibilities for explorations. During the years I was active in the collective, and the main drive was to serve art *in situ*. It is still important today, as a matter of fact. My understanding of *in situ* has changed, of course, but I cannot deny the profound impact of this period.

Lisanne

Tuesday January 29th
Lisanne,

The intimate tone of your letter warmed up my recollections of these times. These "first impressions" will also, I imagine. It will make few people remember. It will also wake up the spirit of younger people when they will be reading about this recent past, which is not very often mentioned. Two of "these situations" comes to mind, at the beginning of the seventies. First, there was the need to join the community life, the one taking place in the new spaces dedicated to arts in the Faubourg Saint-Jean-Baptiste (such as described by Jean-Claude St-Hilaire in his brilliant essay in this edition) and, secondly, the happening *Art et société*.

Living there, I am taking part in various issues of the Faubourg's life, particularly the latest refurbishing of Parliament Hill. You also have the highway projects compromising Saint-Gabriel Street and their

prolongation into Lockwell Street. I go from door to door, take the pen and write in « L'opinion du lecteur ». Surprise, I received words of congratulations from my neighbors. My meeting with Richard Martel was a landmark. He introduced me to the review *Intervention* and to the world of art action.

Between 1977 and 1982, I circulate with curiosity and interest in the various creative "dematerialized" milieu. In the Faubourg, we find the Atelier de réalisation graphique (ARG, 1972), La chambre blanche (a photo studio in 1978 which will become a parallel gallery in 1978) the Galerie Comme (from 1974 until 1977), the Atelier André Bécot (1978) Le Lieu (dedicated to social art and performance, 1982) and Obscure (audio, video and multidisciplinary arts, 1982). The center VU (1982) rented a space on Garneau Street, in the Upper City.

Saint-Jean Street is the lively quarter of the Faubourg Saint-Jean Baptiste. The exhibit called *Reliques*, by Jean-Claude St-Hilaire at André Bécot (1978), at the crossings of anthropology and body art, had impressed me as much as did this interdisciplinary department at the CEGEP Limoilou (1974-1977). I had studied there at the college level, close to Gilles Arteau. I will see him again later, at some point alongside the experimental music group called Bruit TTV, or at another time with the theater group known as Arbo Cyber theater (?) I was also participating to a radio show at CKRL-MF, run for a while by Arteau. The adventure of the center Obscure, and, as I will mention later, the founding of the *Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec* (RCAAQ) and of the cooperative Méduse are indeed indissociable.

At the end of 1977, I participate at the founding meetings of the review *Intervention* (which became *Inter, art actuel* later on), appearing on the scene for the first time on March 4, 1978. I had the impression of joining a true community and neighborhood epic of the city. I also remember that people such as François Bégin, Jean-Claude St-Hilaire, Diane-Jocelyne Côté, Chantal Gaudreau, Pierre-André Arcand, Patrick Altman, Richard Martel and Francine Bergeron were present.

Thirty years later, I can honestly say that it was not by fate if my first article to appear in *Intervention* was on the sociocultural and artistic life of the Faubourg Saint-Jean-Baptiste. This "spirit" of the time of art shifting in Quebec. It meant that for the sociologist and art critic's views, all analysis of content and form,

signifier and signified of works of art needed to be considered in the contexts in which they appeared and participated.

That said, because I have been one of the organizers and participants, the event *Art et société* has been, in my opinion, the second shift helping me to understand better the arts' mutations, namely 1) political art leaving behind its militant aspects to become a form of activism 2) the world of performances of art vacillating between the social and the body and 3) the Conference at the Canadian Institute (with its 300 visitors coming from others parts of Quebec) confirms, in this moment, the importance of networks.

Guy

Wednesday January 30th

Guy,

I am learning now that you were involved in the movement opposing the refurbishing of Parliament Hill. Political and social actions really punctuate your career... your first article written for *Intervention* was also on the cultural scene of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste area. We are now hoping to do the same thing, together. This is incredible... you are right, Jean-Claude St-Hilaire's recollections of the seventies, in this dossier, will be very important. It will also be important not to forget, in this reading of cultural mappings, the infiltration happening in Saint-Roch and its many dilapidated buildings invested, in the seventies, by artists such as Jocelyn Gasse. Indeed, I would like to insist on the importance of the presence of artists, individually, in the area. Their action is as crucial and complementary as the ones offered by centers by creating an artistic milieu in sync with urban life. We will see it later on in the nineties and recently with Saint-Roch's revitalization. At last, it will also be important to mention the law concerning the artist's status, dating from 1988. A law that will help the development not only of the tools of representations, but the defense of royalties given to authors. We will talk.

Lisanne

Friday February 1st

Guy, it's me again...

Simultaneously, I had in my head the other "milestone" – to use your expression. I was telling myself that we should not forget this historical moment. I have no problem qualifying this file of the Musée de l'homme d'ici as "atrocious"!

I find myself at the public audiences, young, naïve and exalted... this happened, I believe, in 1979... if my memory is correct. The new generation will not remember what happened, and it seems important to return to this history. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs, in fact, M. Vaugeois opened public audiences in order to present and evaluate reactions to project of the Musée de l'homme d'ici. It was an idea issued by the high levels of the government. The objective was to transform the Musée du Québec in a Musée de l'homme, that is a space open to the relations between art and ethnology, and therefore associate Quebec City to its patrimony. This also encouraged a centralized vision of the tools serving to the diffusion of contemporary art and art actuel in Montreal. The expression « Musée de l'homme d'ici » was also retrograde. I was a very young feminist and I was raging at its machism and its ethnocentrism. Finally, the students in art history and La chambre blanche (it was the first time I heard of this collective) and other groups have submitted their reports. The tone was unanimous and loud, thank you very much.

Thankfully, this project never materialized. I learned that René Levesque himself had ultimately decided. All the money (20 millions) which was supposed to go to develop the Musée du Québec was given to the project of the Musée de la Civilisation. It is certain that this has stopped the growth of our art museum. It is also certain that this is a testimony to a past time of our history, and fortunately the consciousness has changed since. I was on the front. It was exalting. I have seen the most experienced artists with the sharpest tongues. It is there that I have seen how words have incredible power. Le Lieu also participated to all of this.

Small parenthesis here, it is also at that time, more precisely in 1981, that we have seen certain newspapers screaming scandal for the wood sculpture done by David Naylor, at the Musée du Québec. Art actuel was not popular in the media, but the public (I was an animator at the Museum at the time) was wondering what was so scandalous – and that was extremely reassuring to me.

I would like you to write back to me concerning the Musée de l'homme d'ici. I suppose that on your side things worked out differently.

Lisanne

Saturday February 2nd

Lisanne,

Indeed, this history had an impact on the future of the Musée. That said, this crisis also revealed the link that united Quebec artists to their only art institution. The "affair" will become a national public debate. Most artists and groups in Quebec will take part in it, with reports to testify and maintain the artistic vocation. The review *Intervention* will have a special issue about it, no. 5.

That said, Lisanne, this complex relation of local artists to institutions appears to me paradoxical. It is a sentiment of dissonance, which presides to my first socio-artistic implications. For many people like me (who subscribes to the views of self-management of means of productions, reflections and diffusion of art in society) the Musée and other institutions was a living proof of an opening towards the emerging milieu. Aside the gallery of l'Anse-aux-Barques that you have mentioned, under the impulsion of educative services, the Musée had shown a real concern for the arts in the present by programming Conferences and Symposiums with themes such as teaching the arts at the University (Constat, 1978), and the role of art reviews and the wheels of the contemporary art market.

In this respect, I remember the very interesting conference given by Yves Robillard, art historian, critic and "artor" on the adventure of the underground scene in Montreal, in the 60's and 70's. The topic (which was supposed to be the art market in Quebec) rapidly shifted to the importance, for the system, of what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was calling at the time "the scope of art". We were many to digress with Robillard in a dubious bar on Cartier Street, talking about self-management by artists!

We also should remember that at the beginning of the eighties, more precisely in 1982, the Musée, in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs at the time, starts its *Collection prêt d'oeuvres d'art* (CPOA) – one that includes, in 2008, over 2000 works representing 700 artists!

Regards.

Guy

Sunday February 3rd

Guy,

Many events from the eighties, such as *Art et société* and *Réseau art-femmes*, were indeed presented at the Musée du Québec, something that may be viewed today as surprising. We have to remember that the spaces reserved for

diffusion did not have the room, the equipment nor the money to present extensive projects like this one. Also, the collective that conceived *Art et société* will start Le Lieu only in 1982. Indeed, during this period in the 70's, and later in the 80's, the Galerie du Musée (l'Anse-aux-Barques) at the Place-Royale was managed like a real contemporary art Gallery. Andrée Laliberté-Bourque was close to the milieu. She discussed with artists, was open to suggestions. The physical distance with the museum institutions allowed it to act not as a sacred space, but rather as a space of living art. In this respect, Guy, Laurent Bouchard was recently reminding me that it was the Ministry of Public Works that had given its house to the Musée. Maybe they thought they would create an "heritage" space – even if the museum still had the mandate to serve ethnology...

The Musée had thus the Museum Gallery, far enough to maintain its freedom, and the CPOA, as you mention it, which somewhat intervenes at the margin of regular diffusion activities. Furthermore, in 1989 (and always in respect to what concerns our interactions in the museum culture) centers organize a collective to celebrate the 150 years of photography (we will talk about this later). The Musée puts together the event *Paysages verticaux* on the plains. For me, this was a very important event. Louise Déry worked at the Galerie du Musée and later as a curator in art actuel at the Musée until 1992. It was just before the radical slowing down of actions at the Musée, and also in art actuel. A kind of depression lasting for the following 10 years. She had conceived this event. But the community, if you remember, had expressed some frustrations to the effect that only one artist from Quebec City was part of the selection. The recognition of Quebec City's artists as major agents in the art actuel's evolution was anything but sure at the time. We were swimming between this frustration and the joy of witnessing the birth of *impactuels* events.

Lisanne

Monday February 4th

Lisanne,

Thanks for your precisions about the complexities of the relations between the milieu and the institutions, here, in this case, the Musée. It was in part what I was hoping to bring to light, when I have written on the feelings of dissonance and ambivalence in the

analysis of the relations between the various components of the world of arts. However, and it is the first object of our exchange, I think, this networking reality captivates me as a driving force, in the art development in the city. After this community effervescence and the crisis of the Upper City, at the end of the seventies and beginning of eighties, the urban evolution of art actuel is moving. The Gabrielle Roy Library, which opens in 1981 at Place Jacques-Cartier, plays the role of a pioneer institution. It offers not only access to books, films and discs but also to works of arts via its *artothèque*. It also operates an auditorium for shows, and an exhibition place. Indeed, many have seen in this Library, in Saint-Roch, the prototype for what would be the Grande Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, in Montreal, 20 years later! But it is the emerging centers for artists that will set the fire for the socio-artistic change happening afterwards.

In fact, these collectives of artists have given themselves some "tools" of assembling, creation and non-profit diffusion. Their modalities were cooperative, not to mention the "parallel" galleries leaving Saint-Jean Baptiste for the "growing" City, in its lower sectors (such as the old harbour) and literally the Lower city (in Saint-Roch). Since 1976, for La chambre blanche (photographers and residences *in situ*) Saint-Roch was home, on Christophe-Colomb Street. It would become the "in" place of conceptual art, performance, videos and conference such as Robert Filliou. It would later move on Saint-Jean Street and return on Charest Boulevard in 1981. The atelier of graphic realisations (the ARG, which would become Engramme, in 1990) and VU find locations near the Place-Royale. In 1986, Obscure is relocating on the côte d'Abraham and L'Œil de Poisson, the youngest of all these centers for artists, is born in 1985 in Saint-Sauveur. Few other organizations and collectives such as Folie/Culture (social art), Réparation de poésie (oral poetics) or the *Centre textuel of Saint-Ubalde* (contextual art), around Jean-Yves Fréchette. The latter will realize few great projects in the city such as *Le Lieu dit le lieu* (1982) and *G mon soleil sans complexe* (1983). All these projects were attached to the core of the Saint-Roch area.

I will end here by mentioning a structuring element of visibility, at the scale of Quebec and testifying to its effervescence. In the middle of the eighties, centers for artists in Quebec City will play an important role in the

constitution of the *Regroupements des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec*, the RCAAQ.

Guy

Monday late evening

Guy,

This mention of the RCAAQ brings this remark to me: I cannot count the representations structures to which I gave my time: the Conseil de la Culture, the deceased ANNPAC-RACA, the RCAAQ (where you there in 1986 at founding meeting in Vancouver?). It is often in such occasions that solidarity was or blossoming or annihilated. It is also there that we have acquired a discourse, a force of reckoning, that we mastered our actions for a better diffusion of the body of works, got better conditions for artists. May I remind you that it is thanks to the centers for artists that museums have begun, during the 80's, to give decent royalties to artists?

Reading your letter, I see that while we add almost no support from official systems when it came to recognize the value of local artists, people in Quebec City were on their best behaviour with the national structures of representation. Getting together passed first and foremost by concerted political action. Secondly, we had to learn to work together and collectively to help diffusing the arts, which was slower. We are doing it with success today. I am stopping myself here before going further, because we have to end this portrait of the first years.

Lisanne

Monday February 4th, almost midnight

Yes, yes, Lisanne, close to the magic of the arts and its poetics you will find, as always, the political and the economic aspects. I was not in Vancouver in 1986 but I was in Alma, the previous year, and you were also there. The ANNPAC-RACA, that is the Association of National Non Profit Artist-Run Centers or *Regroupement des artistes de centres d'artistes*, was getting together in the Lac-Saint-Jean region. This was a significant wind of change in itself. Sitting close to Gilles Arteau and René Payant, who was sick, we had a conversation which, to my "native" sensibility, was no less than one of "transmission". These power relations with the State will develop themselves, find a better structure, one that is also larger than our words here. But it is important since you bring it into our discussion.

Guy

Thursday February 7

Dear Guy,

I took some days to write to you. This meeting of the Canadian Association in Alma has its importance. The event is memorable. We were a whole group from Quebec City in the Saguenay. The energy was palpable, and it is there that the idea of being autonomous, in the difficulty of finding oneself in front of this inevitable cultural dichotomy, took shape. In Vancouver, the following year, the *regroupement québécois* was founded under the name *Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec* (RCAAQ).

The organizational life of the centers for artists that you mention, as always, implies a lot of elements speaking to me: the successive appearance of centers which have survived to this day. Also, how they have defined their respective mandates, the question of networks, structures of representation that have given rise to all centers, and a good kick to our partners, at last a series of event that have emerged during the eighties in centers, etc. Ouf!

This question of networks, so cherished by you, is extremely significant. I would like to come back to it first. In fact, connections with other regions in the province were made, notably in your sector. We will have to talk about this again. We will have to wait another decade before speaking of a real network of centers for artists in Quebec City. It will be a very long process, one that will be nourished by various elements and circumstances, in relation to which, today, we have some distance. In this regard, you may remember the Conference that I had organized at the ten anniversary of La chambre blanche in 1988. The Conference was on the network of parallel galleries, like we used to call it, even then. The climate was not so warm. There were still tensions between Le Lieu and La chambre blanche during this period.

During the eighties, the Atelier de réalisations graphiques, La chambre blanche, VU, and Le Lieu work more in a *vase clos*, with utterly distinct approaches and mandates. We were all fighting to survive. The fights for grants was not helping the development of a cohesion and complicity on the level of a common vision of our needs nor on the level of sharing about great issues touching the practices' evolution. My point of view might differ from yours here, since I have worked in a center. We can note that La Bande Vidéo (1977) and Spirafilm (1977) still exist to this day. These

grouping together are not part of the centers' landscapes composing the visual arts networks at the time. We will have to return to these similarities, ways of belongings and coexisting which have grown over time. The definition of art actuel and its diffusion has known rapid and important developments. Obscure will have an important role in the evolution of our identities by its explicit multidisciplinary mission. The center begins to be more explicitly active in the diffusion of visual art in 1984. And, as far as the video is concerned, it begins in 1989, in another perspective marked by a background « multi ». L'Œil de Poisson begins its *atelier-photo* in 1985. It becomes another space of diffusion proposing projects associated with the young generation. Art becomes an occasion for festive events. The years 1984-1985 brings a new impulsion, after a period of important exode.

You are evoking the spaces of establishment of centers. It is important to note that VU was a bit at the margins, in the eighties, with its location on Garneau Street. Later on, it has moved on Dalhousie Street, in this small house falling apart. We were never sure if, at an opening, the floor would not collapse under the weight of the many visitors! There has been, it seems, a change of climate, a singular energy during this period. For instance, the center founded under the initiative of Christiane Jobin and Lucie Lefebvre, asked for collaboration with Obscure for the loan of its equipment among other things. It is important to mention the close net of relations established with other organizations and galleries also specialized in photography, on the national and international scenes. VU has thus created its own networks outside Quebec City, like Le Lieu.

The multiplication of centers has forced us to formally and explicitly define our mandates, act and be consistent. I don't know if it was entirely positive, but this certainly allowed us to work with confidence and avoid a certain type of competition. Maybe a saner climate was created.

Lisanne

Friday February 8th

More than interesting, Lisanne, are these details. They help us clarify our own views. I want to pursue in this direction by mentioning a second driving force, complementary to the constitution of the network's mechanisms. It is about these occasions to meet, to explore in

common, and, mostly, to create and diffuse art. It is about using the modes of participation outside the models of exhibiting as such. The projects and themes opened themselves to the dematerialization of practices, going from conceptual art to environmental sculptures, not to mention performances. It is in this sense that I can say that the inter/regional and international networks were established, as always, in favor of a creative output nourished by the utopia of total art.

The have such names: *L'objet fugitif* (1978) by the collective of La chambre blanche, an event in conceptual art, communal and audacious. Then would come *Art et société* in Quebec City (1981) and *Art et politique: Attention à l'art*, in Kassel, Germany, at the margins of *documenta* (1982) and realized by the review *Intervention*. In the wake of feminism, Quebec City will be at the core of *Réseau art-femmes* (1982) which takes place in six regions in the province of Quebec. We will also see, one year later: *Art et écologie: Un temps, six lieux*, organized by the Atelier Insertion in Chicoutimi in collaboration with Le Lieu, in Quebec City (1983). We will also have 76 heures: *Marathon d'écriture* (1983) happening at Place-Fleur-de-Lys, which will surprise. And Le Lieu will start its festival of performance art (with the events *In memoriam Georges Macianus*, 1984; *Espèces nomades*, 1986). I think that again, the hybrid manifestation *Enformances... ou les 120 heures* at Laval University (1987).

Because I have been part of it, I would like to insist on a fact. While these new actors, collectives and centers have had leaders – I am thinking of Serge Murphy and Fabienne Bilodeau for the *Marathon d'écriture* and Richard Martel at the review *Intervention* –, for most of these events and programs, an authentic process of dialogue and realization was also assumed, collectively. In all cases, it was the reality at the review *Intervention*, and at the beginning of Le Lieu: Pierre Monat's graphic design will have been groundbreaking at the review, as much as the contribution of people like Diane-Jocelyne Côté, Chantal Gaudreault, Pierre-André Arcand, Jean-Claude St-Hilaire, Jean-Claude Gagnon, Alain-Martin Richard, Patrick Altman, Jean-Yves Fréchette and Nathalie Perrault. This self-management will finally be spread too thin. The task divisions will become more and more professional and complex by the appearing roles of coordinator and curator. We will be discussing this later on.

Indeed, I am telling you an hypothesis, by saying that it is in the favor of the art event creation that the whole dialogue between various agents from Quebec City's scene in art actuel will structure themselves progressively – some would say slowly. Hence the case of some manifestations at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, such as *Mirabile Visu: de la performance à la manoeuvre* and the *Première Biennale d'art actuel de Québec*.

I would like to have your thoughts, knowing that you lived through the first event.

Guy

Sunday February 10th

Yes, Guy,

As much as I would like to return to the events at the beginning of the eighties – it was then common – I will move further towards the beginning of the next decade. It is because a crucial moment of this evolution, of this emergence of networks between centers in our City, is without a doubt the happening, and all the collective works which brought to reality *Mirabile Visu: 150 ans après*. We are in 1989, with all people involved and under VU's impulsion, I would say of Gaëtan Gosselin who had replaced Christiane Jobin at the coordination level. We see a will to work together that goes beyond the simple anniversary of the photo medium. I see, as far as I am concerned, the seeds for a new way of thinking in networks, on the local scene, a will to work together after 10 years of preparations.

You are right to say that in 1986, the founding of RCAAQ was fundamental. But on the level of our action in the field of practices of art diffusion in themselves, *Mirabile Visu* was a first. The RCAAQ had its leaders, its political action, but *Mirabile Visu* was something else. I had left La chambre blanche and I had the chance to join the team in the role of coordinator. It was like a fresh breath of energy, a year where it was possible to share, in spite of our differences, our passion and commitment to shared causes. I don't know if this « mission » is still alive in the attitude of people who are now running self-managed centers, but during that period, we were motivated by it. I think that my generation, the one of Claude Bélanger, Richard Martel, Christiane Jobin, Gaëtan Gosselin and Gilles Arteau, Réjean Perron and Hélène Doyon was animated by an indefectible passion pushing us to give to no end and without counting. We had indeed, in the context of this

event, invented almost all agents of the cultural scene. Gaëtan saw things in a big way. It was for him the opportunity to affirm the undeniable place of artists centers in the network diffusion of art actuel.

The fact that centers invite museums to participate to one of their events was to demonstrate how we had gained an undeniable professional level, how we were adamant to affirm loud and clear the crucial role we were now playing. This is not a small thing. It is an important step that we can easily forget. The perception that many people had, thinking that artists centers were exclusively forced to play the role of a springboard for young creators (a perception which was almost a given at the time) was weakening at last.

This great wind of effervescence was also fragile, because we have tried to revisit the idea of an event that mobilized people. We tried to create another *Mirabile Visu*, some years later, and it failed. In Gaëtan's absence, the different points of view around the table became bigger, and it is at this moment that I realized that we had still a lot of work to do to be able to work harmoniously. Claude Bélanger, who was still at L'Œil de Poisson, was extremely disappointed by this failure. In fact, *Mirabile Visu* was the germ of what would become the *Manif d'art*, almost a decade later. There were in between a number of attempts, often futile, sometimes difficult.

To be sarcastic, this passage from *Art et société* to *Mirabile Visu* in the network of centers for artists seems to me significant afterwards. The passage to the nineties is, and I can't wait to talk about it with you, a passage from an underground reality to an institutionalization of the structures of diffusion. Centers became more professional over the years. The absolute moment of this movement will be, as far as I am concerned, the creation of Méduse. For instance, the shift of L'Œil de Poisson from a center organizing festivals and disjointed events into an old space, to a center with secure financing and later occupying a space as good as a museum is noteworthy. And they were not the only ones! But in saying that, we enter into the nineties.

Lisanne

1988-1998

Limoilou, February 12th

Lisanne,

Back to the Kabir-Kouba River (Saint-Charles), I read your phrases with pleasure. You add this inner sensibility to acts and events that

the sociological view doesn't offer very often because only the socio-artistic facts do matter. This idea of a dialogue on our city and its arts will contribute, I hope to give a place to the necessary emotive dimensions of a plural history, one that we're only approaching on the surface. From this "great wind of effervescence... also fragile", as you rightly mention it, which comes out of the networks at the beginning of the nineties, can we see there a creative time and space that, paradoxically, will be as intense but in a different way? Many hypothesis, many angles of interpretation on these links produced or neutralized between all art agents in Quebec City, during the nineties, will have to be considered.

This will be captivating!

Thanks for insisting on what happened behind the scene at the event *Mirabile Visu*. Thanks for reminding me about the local issues and the beginning of a great climate which will take a decade to structure itself. Indeed, the following year, in 1990, the *Première Biennale d'art actuel* in Quebec, under the theme « De la performance à la manœuvre » initiated by Le Lieu and sponsored by most of the centers for artists, will stand as a landmark of this phenomenon. It will have no immediate effect except for the intentions to create a major event. Installations and other creations *in situ* as well as more residences for creation are the most popular option for works programmed to be viewed in exhibit rooms. And by welcoming many artists from Quebec and the world, Quebec City becomes a center for major international events according to a lot of importance to the renewal of artistic practices. For instance, audio art is blossoming at the Festival *Évitez le bruit* (1989) and media arts emerge at manifestations such as *Le corps amplifié: L'informatique appliquée aux arts* (1993) and *La parallaxe* (1996) organized by Obscure.

I also remember the success of the *Ateliers ouverts*, a circuit of visiting artists workshops. Videre, the association of professional artists of Quebec, was one of its best advocate.

Yet another sign of this vitality.

Guy

Wednesday February 13th

Dear Guy,

I have been really busy with the *Manif*, these last days. Sorry. Both of us are feeling that time and space are missing to make a portrait of these three very dynamic decades. Yes, indeed, the nineties. How is

it possible that all these events happened in such a short period of time? You can see some comments that come to mind regarding the event *De la performance à la manœuvre*, and the *Ateliers ouverts* and also some comments on the absence of a curator for art actuel at the museum at the time. All of these are facts that have made the art scene, in the nineties, in Quebec City.

I am happy to see that you mention this manifestation coming out of the *Première Biennale*... we can see again this desire for a dialogue, a need to create an event bringing people together. Each center for visual arts tempted to initiate the movement in its own way. I remember that for this event, Florent Cousineau had conceived, with the collaboration of few members of La chambre blanche, a crazy project called *Opération liaison*, taking the shape of a fictitious radio program inspired by Hitchcock. This link with the team working at Le lieu had pleased us. In fact, in writing to you, I realize that it was important to make the auditors believe that a bundle of wood was walking in the city from one center to the next, testifying to a desire to make the existence of a network concrete. I was in Banff myself. To each their turn!

At another level, I agree with you, it is important to go back to this question of the artists actions outside the centers. You speak of *ateliers ouverts*. In fact, the event is born in 1984, under the initiative of Helga Schlitter and Francine Chaîné. Additional participants included Guy Pellerin, Monique Mongeau, thus people close to me, a group of artists of La chambre blanche. Afterwards, Odette Thériault played an important role by improving the structure of what had become an important event. Videre, founded in 1991, will take over. We can consider these actions as a will to create a dialogue between artist. A will that is in sync with the gradual closeness between agents, already noticed by centers during the same period.

1988 is an important year. Especially when we analyze the tools used for dialogue and the artists' claims outside the self-managed centers. It sees to the establishment of the law on the professional status of artists and ethical pressures in order to constitute an organization of unique representation. You know this history full of harrowing battles between artists of different venues. This goes beyond our actual discussion. But finally, in 1992, the *Regroupement des artistes en arts visuels* (RAAV) was created. On the local scene, we feel otherwise that

artists hope to consolidate their working conditions. They are getting together to buy the building they occupy, and it will be the founding of *La Maison longue*, an important moment in 1993. I will need to take few lines here to mention the program which assisted artists in purchasing property (atelier-residences). To this day, Quebec City will be a model because of this program, in this domain, on the national and international scenes.

In 1996, Quebec City initiates this program to assist artists in purchasing property. It allows many artists to establish their studio or studio-residence, essentially in the Saint-Roch area. Studio complex will then emerge. Associated with grants for renovations, this program helped revitalizing many industrial offices which were disused – ten of them in the area. It encouraged artists with meager means to become owners. This program is unique and many cities here and elsewhere (I have had French civil servants visit because they were interested in this program) see an example to follow. We have also seen the birth of collaborations with artists which were neighbors, dancers, actors, and musicians. This presence of artists living in the area helped to reduce the violence in the neighborhood. In 1988, beer bottles were thrown to people and the syringes were littering Christophe-Colomb Street. At the end of the nineties, the area becomes a cultural sector with an undeniable quality. The residents have thus benefited from this change of climate, and, at last, artists have stopped being the speculation's victims!

This evolution is evidently the result of the will of the mayor L'Allier, ex-minister of Culture. We should remember that he has seen the potential between new technologies, teaching institutions (among which the Écoles des arts visuels of Laval University, which was relocated in the Dominion Corset Building in 1984) and the artists. The artists centers will also see their living condition getting better by the nineties, with the Méduse complex whom, in 1994, allowed the consolidation of about ten self-managed centers. We will talk about this later. And you have to remember that La chambre blanche buys its building in 1992.

Lisanne

Wednesday February 13th

Hello to you,

Your precisions are important, Lisanne. They force me to pursue about this climate of synergy and collaboration between acting networks, in their urban contexts.

Although the progressive move of many centers for artists and the appearance of a municipal program to assist in the purchasing of studios give a new face to the urban landscape (what we started calling the Saint-Roch space), it is important for me to mention personal contributions. For one, the continuous work of Florent Cousineau who, with his sculpture projects, residences and manoeuvre such as *Opération liaison* that you mentioned, and more, was remarkable. Hasn't he made of urban textures and built environments its privilege material for creation to make sure that renovated buildings dedicated to artists become real in the area? We only have to mention the building « Roulement à billes » near the École des arts visuels, and, later, the one of « La falaise apprivoisée » to understand the scope of his interventions.

Indeed, it is hard for the sociologist not to mention this core of humble citizens of a dilapidated Saint-Roch (that you mentioned in your 1st letter). Citizens that have (from 1991 onwards) given back a dignity to this area by creating the îlot Fleurie under the leadership of sculptor Louis Fortier and few voluntary gardeners. We will find there more than the basic popular premises important to the planning of the place (where we today find Saint-Roch gardens and the park of the Grande Place at the bottom of Méduse and the côte d'Abraham). In fact, from 1995, while the series of events such as *Émergences* were taking place and despite its two moves (they will have to be moved up to the access roads of the Dufferin Highway in 1998) the îlot Fleurie will become a unique zone for the art actuel scene. Many international tribunes dedicated to landscape architecture will be most interested. Founded on this dynamic closeness between community groups, cultural organizations and centers for artists, gardening workshops, gardens surrounded by sculptures, evenings with poetry and music, picnics, graffiti and murals will coexist, in the summer, along with performers and activists.

We will enter in the year two thousands, which I will return to later.

The intensification of the permanent presence of workshops and its public spaces – like the mall and many dilapidated spaces available in Saint-Roch – will motivate many artists to invest these spaces during events. However, this tendency does not limit itself to this area only, far from it. In this

respect, how can we not mention the unbelievable quality of such creation project put forward by La chambre blanche, called *Chambres d'hôtels* (1993) and the art photography which becomes and open zone for the creation of *Trois fois 3 paysages* (1997-1998) here and there in the city?

Guy

Friday February 15th

Guy, as always, you radically open a door on an effervescent period. As I read, striking is what you mention about the îlot Fleurie, where collective gardens introduced a natural environment with ephemeral sculptures and some more permanent. This was an incredible collective empowerment. It is evident that later, the City cannot go back: it will become later the very site of the Saint-Roch Gardens.

While we return to the event *Chambres d'hôtel*, which you also have lived through, I would like to go deeper in this venue, that is the role of *in situ* as far as this notion is important to my whole career. It is indeed interesting to see how artists and centers for artists have invested the city, the new cultural center of Saint-Roch. I have always believed that Quebec City, because of its scale and geography, was facilitating events where the public is invited to circulate from one space to the next, the way the event of *Manif d'art* is doing it.

You have often spoken to me about your passion for the event *Chambres d'hôtel*. It was 15 interventions *in situ*, in as much hotel rooms in the city. Michel Goulet, Patrick Altman, Guy Pellerin, Claudie Gagnon and many others have participated to this event. I have participated to it on many levels. *Chambres d'hôtel* was to celebrate the 15 years of La chambre blanche, and we had dreamed collectively to this project, with Sylvie Fortin and Carl Johnson, responsible for the coordination. We wanted to intervene in the city, where we could touch a larger public. It is important to remember that we had just moved. The loss of our palimpsest type of space, when we moved in 1988 in the Saint-Roch area, was a rupture. A positive rupture. We had to realign ourselves to this notion of *in situ*, in constant evolution. The repetitive infiltration of dilapidated sites or public spaces opened another venue. And it was then the whole question of urbanity was enlightened. One day, many years later, I was sitting at a café and a woman came to me and said: "I recognize you, you were part of

the project *Chambres d'hôtel* with your husband and your baby!" I was flabbergasted! I have never lost this utopic desire to make people aware of new works. Let's say that, this time, it was a success.

In situ allowed me to see the possibility of making an event from the works. And following that, this insertion in the urban texture forced me to look at the question of the public. How do we intervene in the street, in the everyday, without thinking about the person looking, without reflecting its presence, which is still a pertinent question today. At the moment where we had to return to La chambre blanche's coordination, François Vallée and myself had radicalized the center's mandate: *in situ* and residences. Then, in 1998, we had established the *Rencontres internationales en arts visuels* (RIAV) which had « communication » as a theme, and strangely enough, because I am actually putting together and event on human communication in the context of the *Manif 4*. Taking another way, the relational aesthetic current was starting. We had invited a Serbian artist who had placarded the city. François Lamontagne opened a small studio where he invited visitors to dress objects while putting them in regulated relations. Murielle Dupuis-Larose showed her first video installation... in 1998, we had also conceived an event in the old jail of the Maison Gomin. People were lining up to see the prison. We could not believe the events, thousands of people and a line up... it is important to say that Robert Gilet had done a stellar advertising job. Many questions come to mind: where they coming to see the art or the space? Was it conceivable to seduce a public not so much interested in art and give it its first contact with today's practices? You will maybe remember the wonderful interventions done by Michel Saint-Onge and Patrick Altman? Then RIAV's second edition called *Temporalité* will happen in the year 2000.

Following these events in the city, few other interventions were born before. I am thinking of the exhibition put together by students graduating from the École des arts visuels at the Gauvreau-Beaudry Building, in the old harbour, in 1987. I refer also to the remarkable *Lignes de suites* realised by the collective Arqhé (with Luc Lévesque, James Partaik and Michel Saint-Onge), their *Gazon de luxe* (1993). This centrifugal art in the city will evidently keep going while we passed the year 2000.

Lisanne

Saturday February 16th

Dear Lisanne,

I have always loved infiltration projects in the city, contaminations in *non-lieu* of the everyday by the arts. I see in it the concrete heritage of the revolutionary utopia that the venerable Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre (whom I had the chance to meet in 1981 when he came Quebec City) shared for a while with the international situationists. I had the privilege to meet with him. He was really interested in all the self-managed projects criticizing centralist forms, among which our adventure of centers for artists. Lefebvre thought that the revolution could not be anything else than urban, « manifestive ». He has remained one of my mentors. Then, to have witnessed and to be invited by Florent Cousineau to live through, *in situ*, one of these "hotel rooms" as a situation was remarkable. Many artists were my guests during that night: Pierre-André Arcand came to write a poem, Jean-Claude Gagnon to play the saxophone, and others, and the door semi-opened to the other, the improbable, what could not be situated...

But one should not move away from the more and more complex realities of art in Quebec City, in the nineties.

For instance, as symbolic as the city's recognition, in 1994, of January 17th as the Art Anniversary (an initiative of Le Lieu) might look, it was all about promoting a mark in the calendar of this attitude addressed to "a universal and eternal network between the artists of the world". This attitude was put forward by the influential artists Fluxus Robert Filliou and others, like the poet Jean Dupuy, whom will surprisingly join the *commandos nomades* in 2003. I will return to this later. I know that I insist a lot on that, but at the margins of the main institutional pathways, it seems to me that Quebec City has simultaneously showed itself as a point of reference from which the centers for artists will make many networks possible, in the regions as well as on the international scene.

The sustained critical mass will become such that these relations will allow a circulation and more diffusion of the artists' works. It will also stimulate the imagination for thematic and art ideas in a period where the narratives of the museum and the gallery will be discreet, the "void" which you mentioned earlier.

The photographic manifestations of international scope, of the center VU are also many with expositions such as: 04 50: *La mission*

photographique, in Brussels (1992), *Behold the Man/Hommes nus* in Scotland (1993), *Mujer x Mujer/Femmes x Femmes* in Mexico (1993) and *Les contes de Slovaquie* (1994). VU also organised major photographic events and has helped the circulation of exhibitions on the national and international scenes, mostly Michel Campeau: *Les tremblements du coeur* (Canada, 1988) *Faire image: Penser la photographie* (Québec, 1990), *Le réel et ses simulacres* (Bruxel, Saint-Malo, Paris, Dieppe, 1991-1992; Canada (1992-1996), *La traversée des mirages* (Champagne-Ardenne, 1992), *Les rencontres internationales de Plovdiv* (Bulgarie, 1995) and *Du poétique au politique: Ambivalence des territoires* (Basse-Normandie, 1996-1997). Let's not forget the series *Rencontres*, at La chambre blanche.

As far as the specific domain of the art action is concerned and which I have closely analysed, the series of manifestations like *Immedia concerto* (1988), *Interscop*, *Pologne* (1990), *Oralités - Polyphonix* (1991) and *Interzone* (1992), the *Symposium des sculptures in Saint-Wendel* in Germany (1993) and the one of *Art actuel* in Amiens in France (1994), *Art et nature* (1996) and the editions of *Rencontre internationale d'art performance* (1994-1996), welcoming artists from many countries which will circulate in various places such as Alma, Chicoutimi, Granby, Victoriaville, Montréal or Matane will reinforce this tendency which will keep growing until the year 2000.

Guy

Monday February 18th

Guy, I don't want to forget an important point that surfaces a lot during our exchange. While on my side, I was trying, along with François Vallée, to establish relations with other countries by inviting individual artists from Europe at La chambre blanche, VU, for instance, was participating at a series of exchanges or at the diffusion of photographers from here, in the francophonie (Bruxels, Saint-Malo, Paris, Dieppe, Champagne-Ardenne, Basse-Normandie...). Le Lieu developed an international network, but it also gave a lot of energy to regional networks. Amongst all art critics in Quebec, critics of Montreal are concentrating on Montreal. Here in Quebec City, you were one of the first to circulate all over the province and you had, I think, a certain influence. Who was talking about what was happening in Beauce or in Amos? *Inter*, which was your principal vehicle of expression, and it has played an important role

in the decentralization of our art history. On the level of our relations outside Quebec City, there was all these exchange realised with Latin America and Mexico. Many artists from Quebec City never exposed in Montreal, but exhibited in Mexico and Buenos Aires, or even in Marseille and Cracow, thanks to these exchanges organized by various centers in Quebec City. This disregard of Montreal is difficult to understand for people who belong to official networks. But we can't hide it, it is a reflex of a certain generation, maybe the one that left for Montreal in the eighties, because of this absence of recognition of our artists by the Montreal scene, and even our own museum at a time in its history. Guy, am I in the woods? I would like to hear your views on the topic. It would be interesting to find out how the young see their visibility outside Quebec City.

Till later
Lisanne

Tuesday February 19th

Thanks Lisanne for mentioning my travels as a "columnist" of art actuel on the ground, in the regions. This logic of networks participated and helped to redefine the relations between art and society. It has been, if I might say, the main topic of my book: *L'art comme alternative: Réseaux et pratiques d'art parallèle au Québec, 1976-1996*, published in 1997.

As far as the rapport between generations over the years are concerned, you are certainly right when you speak about a sort of conducts-situations, testifying to a reading of the intercultural relations particular to each generation. The cultural agents, including the artists, have been influenced by the critics of centralism, and for the whole spectrum of life in society. Generally, it is fair to say that the networks of self-managed centers for artists which have emerged in an anti-cultural mode, at the end of the seventies and in the eighties, would become more professional in the nineties. That movement comes after the creation of the CLSC in the health sector, the CEGEPS and what formed the Université du Québec, in various regions, in education, and also many community initiatives in all regions in the province. All of these components, seen as vague impulse of self-determination of communities, share two major points: they resist to the only big city that exist in Quebec, Montreal, and to the techno/ bureaucratic centralization of the State. In this respect, Quebec City, the Capital where the government is located, has

a particular status, noticeable in the arts. On the one hand, we have seen it, the socio-artistic agents in Quebec City have affinities with artists groups working in regions. In this respect, the relations with the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean will be significant but also with the Galerie Sans Nom in Moncton where, with Hélène Laroche's invitation (now at the CALQ, in Quebec City) *Obscure*, Le Lieu, L'Œil de Poisson will visit. On the other hand, I agree with your hypothesis that it is also because of this surpassing on the international scene that Quebec City's artists hope to resolve this evident cultural tension with Montreal, that the exode of so many artists exemplified. For the generations today, I think that idea of going everywhere is more important, creating new comings and goings, as far as the place of origins is concerned. I will talk about this later in the context of globalization of the scope of arts and that the proliferation of the biennials around the world - we are now counting 225 of these - will implicate.

This dialectic between the capital and the metropole, I tend to see it in the mid-nineties, between 1994 and 1996 to be precise. It take place around two events: in Montreal, we have the 1995 edition of the IDEA while in Quebec City, the cooperative Méduse opens and *Obscure* presents there *La parallaxe*. This brings us to a domain that we should not forget. Today, I am able to say that I think I had underestimated it at the time, because it will become a new paradigm for art actuel: I am referring to the importance of the media arts which are linked to new technologies.

The era of the media arts is beginning.

I still remember the passage of Stelarc at *Obscure* and its "third technological arm" (1993). The cooperative Méduse which opens in 1994, under the leadership of Gilles Arteau and Gaëtan Gosselin, is not only one of the main piece of this reconfiguration of urban art in Saint-Roch, by its grouping around 12 centers - Avatar, Engramme, L'Œil de Poisson, Antitube, La Bande Vidéo, the Productions Recto-Verso, CKIA-MF and the Ateliers de la Mezannine - it will become, at some artistic level, a point of reference for production and diffusion. Méduse participates here to this passion for new technologies in the arts, and is now a major player all over the province (for instance, at the ISEA, at SAT and the Fondation Langlois in Montreal, at La Filature in the Outaouais, at the gallery Sagamie et Séquence in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean). In this regard, it will be fundamental to the powerful meta-

morphosis experienced by technological arts and interdisciplinary.

Until later.
Guy

Wednesday February 20th

Dear Guy,

You have mentioned *Obscure's* role in this relation with the media arts and Méduse. You mention *La parallaxe*, an event of creation and reflection, held in September 1996. It is also the swan song of the cooperative *Obscure*, which closed its doors in 1996. Yes, a cooperative is such a singular way of functioning, chosen "for the values of economic solidarity that it promotes". We should also speak of *Obscure's* impact, of these important pioneers: Arteau, Robert Faguy, Réjean Perron, Jocelyn Robert, Robert Morin, Hélène Doyon. It was the first center to put forward multidisciplinary and the new media arts at the time. Then came the video in the eighties, and, in the nineties (from 1993 onwards), what we would call "computer science applied to the arts". Many centers or group existing today are, it is fair to say, *Obscure's* children: we think of La Bande Vidéo, the Productions Recto-Verso (1984) and Avatar (1993).

Obscure has adopted a critical attitude towards the State, particularly in regards to grant programs which were nonexistent at the time. Such grant programs will start, help to finance its « multi » activities and acquire equipment. And I think that it was an excellent way to "warm up" to negotiations concerning Méduse. Of course, Gilles Arteau had an unbelievable charisma and tongue, but we should not forget Gaëtan Gosselin, and Jocelyn Robert in this matter. Le Lieu and La chambre blanche were part of the first meetings of discussions, but have finally decided to keep their autonomy. We should also say that they both occupied spaces corresponding to their needs.

From this moment, it is the definition of what we were expecting from art actuel, in itself, that became contentious. We can see an unavoidable movement where the centers interested in sound experimentation and video production/diffusion are more explicitly integrated to the visual arts networks. This is something that would have been unthinkable in the eighties. Remember that La Bande Vidéo and Recto-Verso had then few contact with the centers in visual arts such as La chambre blanche and VU.

On the infrastructure level, the hopes of centers, here and there

in the province, will change. With the financing helping to buy La chambre blanche (bought by its collective members) and the Méduse project, doors were opened to other significant gestures and claims, to make sure that the center's life were maintained. Outside Quebec City, we think of the planning of Axe-Néo 7 at La Filature in 2002.

This concentration effect by Méduse is still asking the question of property. In this respect, on the side of La chambre blanche, it is important to mention that we bought the building that we occupied in 1992. Le Lieu will do the same in 2003. All of this « Méduse » effect that you mention... How can I say? Of course, we can say that this decade was marked by a will, on the part of our financing partners, to support our infrastructures and consolidate the network. It is also to make sure that the new center/landlords, or whom ever benefits from contracts and advantageous long-term leases, are not becoming white elephants for which the Council of Arts and Letters had signed contracts in the nineties, with countries such as Finland, Mexico and the Catalogue... where centers were becoming privilege organizations welcoming international artists. And in Quebec City, we have been well served in this respect. Of course, this is also part of an official recognition of self-managed centers as major agents on the cultural scene.

Today, I am an independent curator for the *Manif d'art*, and see how far we have come... we have both participated in many debates during this period. Pages are many, and there is still much to say once we embark together on the last decade. I will await your next letter.

Lisanne

Thursday February 21st

Lisanne,

When we look at this fin-de-siècle, and at the beginning of this new century, it appears to me that all the venues we have talked about, in the last week, demonstrate how the nineties were rich in experiences but also full of hopes. They created the conditions for the beginning of the new millennium: the creation of the editions of *Manif d'art*, of the *Mois Multi*, of the social events at the îlot Fleurie and of the continuation of the *Rencontre internationale d'art performance* in an area that has found its urban dignity again, all of which being an echo, suggesting new stakes.

With my salutations,
Guy

1998-2008

Thursday night February 28th

Lisanne,

I am just coming from L'Abraham Martin café. Walking here to write to you, Lisanne, many recent facts about art and about the decade of the year 2000 rushed in my head. For instance, the « 5 à 7 », the press conference informing all about the fourth edition, in May, of the *Manif d'art*, an event always long-awaited here, in Montreal and in the rest of Canada. And, in February, for the last nine years now, the media art programming of the *Mois Multi* which takes over at the cooperative Méduse. I have also reflected that in few days, on March 4th to be exact, the review *Inter* will celebrate its 30 years in print – in this year of incomparable festivities for the 400th year anniversary of the founding of the City.

Few hours ago, I have appreciated the refined enthusiasm with which you have played the role of the invited independent curator for the *Manif d'art 4*, proposing the them « Toi/You » as an invitation to surpass the cleavage of "art of relation vs. multimedia arts" and in order to reintroduce a shift in art sensibilities performed in Quebec City. There, among the compact crowd, listening to you speaking of satellite activities at the main exhibit, I have wondered if the collaboration between all agents involved (for instance the Musée that produces a Sylvie Cotton and many other artists from all over, from Chili, Mexico and Europe) was not, at last, a common character of the 30 years adventure of art actuel in Quebec City.

But here I think I anticipate.

Like we have done for the two previous decades, I am submitting my reflections, my intuitions which are also open questions. My first intuition for a dialogue could be about the confirmation of this organizational tendency, which, after taking form in the previous decade, consolidates all scopes of art. I want to talk about the importance of the invited curator's role in the institutions, the centers for artists and the events. Isn't this intellectual and artistic division of roles not questioning the self-managements orientations, creation in collective as much as the relations between reflections and practices?

I am first sharing this with you.
Guy

Friday leap year February 29th

I am sure you know this, Guy,

I don't have much distance when it comes to this *Manif*. All I know is that Jérôme Delgado was writing recently in *Le Devoir* that it was THE biennale in the province of Quebec. The question here is not to debate which one is the best between the biennale of Montreal or the one in Quebec City. Each have their role to play. And the triennial of the Musée d'art contemporain has to prove that, in this existing landscape, it will respect all the work previously done... with means that are not in the same league. The question is how to come to terms with the fact that Quebec City doesn't have, in the eyes of the establishment of Quebec's art, this image of a city-museum having the heavy burden of history where the art actuel scene would be an exception, an isolated endeavor of few people. The next step will be to receive a more balanced share of grants, if we want to maintain the course of things. This problem of state subsidies doesn't only hurt the events. In fact, while I have constantly sought to put in parallel the centers and artists working on an individual basis, let's mention here that the number of artists of Quebec City which have received, in the last 3 years, money for their creation is indecent, considering how dynamic the art scene is. And the jury in Quebec City knows artists coming from Montreal and the region. The contrary is rare.

Fortunately, Diane Landry's participation at the *Biennale de Montréal* (2000), the solo exhibits of BGL and, more recently, Yannick Pouliot (2008) at the Musée d'art contemporain as well as an important participation of Quebec artists at the exhibit *L'envers des apparences* (2005-2006), done by Gilles Godmer, are important signals to the effect that things can change. The success of the *Manif d'art* is not foreign to this recognition. We have already mentioned that the *Manif* testified to the synergy of the whole milieu, which is mostly singular in the whole art actuel landscape in the province (you know my chauvinistic side). The next step is certainly a more adequate financial support and, eventually, finding a permanent space for the *Manif*. The organization will then be able to pursue the presentation of important exhibitions, like it has done with Paul-Émile Borduas prize. We need to have a great tool of diffusion, complementary to centers for artists. And the addition of these tools shed new light on the mandates. There are no exhibition centers in

Quebec City. Some centers have the opportunity to play this role. But the centers for artists have to always keep consistent with their critical mission. I am stopping here because we will discuss the state of the network, later.

Let's return to this idea of commissionership in Quebec City.

Lisanne

Saturday March 1st

Lisanne,

My understanding of the independent curator's role, more than what distinguishes it from the role of art critic, is to me closer to a kind of challenge than the profession of the specialist. Having been an auditor at many conferences in the last years, and where the subject was as much theory, art criticism or commissionership, I have often heard Rainer Rochlig's formulation (in *Feu de la critique d'art*), saying that the function of the independent curator will have overridden the role of art critic and theoretician. This should be nuanced. In the production and promotional phases of an event or an exhibit, it is more than normal that the discourse of its protagonist, the curator or the artistic director in charge, be ideologically oriented, functional, and on the side of self-promotion. The critical dimension is in general irrelevant. It will come for the external observers. That said, we should not forget the before and the after: the role taken, the vision and the selection ruling the conception are, on the one hand, readings on art happenings in the present, to be done or to exhibit. On the other hand, when there is publication, the reflections and analyses following also participate to the vast critical knowledge. In fact, it is a debate between the thinking on arts that take action and theoretical thoughts, aside, even *academic*.

It is moreover the event projects or group manifestations, symposiums or other zones become events that will stir me as an invited curator. In Quebec City, in the year 2000, there was the *Arboretum*, at the Maison Hamel-Bruneau, *Émergence art social* at the îlot Fleurie in 2000 and *Les commandos nomades*, for the *Manif d'art 2*, in 2003. My interest will go more for the manifestations "in context", exterior, in the *cit*, or on the territory than for exhibitions only in "black and white cubes". These larger zones of events seemed to allow experimentations of new ideas, "extreme" situations (to paraphrase my friend Paul Ardenne) or to find this junction between popular identification and high art, native contemporary art, social politically

charged art. It is in some ways the heir, if we can say, of the bygone period of conception, collective and self-managed event realizations. And I see the ethical responsibility of an independent curator as a "living art maker" for, amongst and with audiences: a public. It is the bias, I think, that comes across, one which I have tried to make my city's artists associate with, on many occasions.

Indeed, here was my collaboration for the *Manif d'art 2: Bonheur et simulacres*, in May 2003. More than organizing a conventional conference in auditoriums, I have thought the ideas of « commandos nomades » – like thinkers of art actuel. I have chosen this wandering formula with a clear goal to "bring closer critical thinking and manifest art, by encouraging to reflect". The first team was composed of Anne-Marie Ninacs, Patrice Loubier, André-L. Paré, Sonia Pelletier and Jean-Michel Ross, and the second of Nisk Imbeault, Anthony Kiendl, Pierre-Raphaël Pelletier, Sylvie Cotton, Jean Dupuy, and... Lisanne Nadeau.

This seems enough to clarify my position, I think. But you, Lisanne, the commissioners, how do you see it, live it?

Guy

Sunday March 2nd
Guy,

First of all, the term « commissaire » came to us in the nineties from our French cousins. This term is indeed not used in English (they use more the term *independent curators*). I always had reservations towards this terminology. A curator is someone, he or she, in charge of temporary functions, someone in charge of a dossier. This dimension of reflection, of conceptualization is not implicit to this terminology... Many individuals, in fact, have said they were « commissaires » in the context of event preparations. As far I am concerned, I have never felt my role in the place of the production director facilitating projects to take place. Actually, money is rare for projects. We often ask the curator to go and seek grants on an individual basis to pay for publications, for instance. This annoys me. It seems that my role is more to propose venues to reflect... in short, there is a lot of work to do. The budgets of centers for artists are not sufficient to pay curators. In Quebec City, we see that many collective projects of diffusion or exchanges are signed by collectives. And the community spirit testifies to this positive situation. We have already underlined

its importance for the visibility of our artists in Quebec City. There is a commitment on the part of the centers which is extraordinary. But for the curators there isn't much room. I would say that *Habiter* (done by VU, 2006) was an exception in this sense that we have identified Giorgia Volpe's contribution. That said, there would be more thematic exhibits, more space for reflection with the works, by the works, if there were an opening and more requests to independent curators. I know that here we have a different point of view. We will need to talk about it again.

For instance, I would say that in 1985, I have proposed a project which would have a curator (*Mobilier d'artistes*). Excluding conceived projects in the contexts of my background at La chambre blanche, I have never worked since for any centers. I have worked in Quebec City for the Musée du Québec (Paul Lacroix 1998-1999 and Annie Thibault, 2001) at the Maison Hamel-Bruneau (for *Paysages et autres fictions*, 2002), and at this year's *Manif d'art*! The practices of commissioners are almost inexistent in Quebec City. I have been isolated for many years, being the only one of my generation with a background as art historian, that has stayed in Quebec City and chosen to specialize in art actuel. Fortunately, there is generation learning, but we are now in 2008!!!

Guy, you have mentioned your interests in collective events. I have personally chosen to work closer to one artist in order to push my understanding of the stakes in place in one practice. I think that this is there that I experience emptiness. Impossible to reduce one practice to prefabricated visions. There, in the intimate contact with the work in progress (and even with its contradictions) it is an extremely fertile challenge for thoughts. You often work at the macro level, I work more in the proximity.

And then there are the words. Writing is a fascinating medium which I have explored – that I explore since 1981!!! Is it possible? Some texts, more rational, in *Parachute*, to the catalogue *Comme des îles* (on Richard Baillargeon's production in 1991) which is more lyrical, to the words of *La chutes des mots*... on the building of *Le soleil*. We can't neglect the importance of writing on the arts. I have worked a lot to give a place to artists' creations in Quebec City. As you have done. I have also done it with very young artists who had no texts. I knew I was helping them and I stress the commitment to diffusion, here again, but also

the legitimization of works that we estimate pertinent in the course of history. I have to say that I have always felt a responsibility to support Quebec City's artists in my curator's projects or in my writing on art. It is, I believe, a situation that art critics in Montreal don't experience and which belongs to a consciousness of the need, of the necessity to be also committed in this respect. Exhibits and events in Quebec City don't have the coverage that they should have in art periodicals, and art critics are still in demand, to this day. We can actually only name another one, aside both of us, Nathalie Côté, whose work is rigorous and generous. There is a form of art journalism but few critics, which is distressing and disturbing. And it is evidently related to the scarce numbers of independent curators in Quebec City.

Lisanne

Monday March 3rd

Lisanne,

Our dialogue could degenerate into a debate. However, other aspects of the first eight years of art in Quebec City, in this new millennium, are intriguing. They also require that we dialogue about them, dear Lisanne. My first point concerns our museums: the Musée de la civilisation and the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. As much as we have given perspective to elements of openness in the milieu, as much we have to remember the generalized attitude of centralization, of concentration which persists in spite of remarkable openings.

As far as the Musée de la civilisation is concerned, the institution has programmed in 1999-2000, in agreement with the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the exhibit *Déclics: Art et société. Le Québec des années 1960-1970*. In 2000, if I remember correctly, it presented a multimedia conference organized by La chambre blanche. It gathered, via new technologies, Daniel Buren who was in Tel Aviv and Jocelyne Alloucherie in Lethbridge with the Quebec audience – and I had to monitor this "virtual" conversation, replacing you on the spot. All that considered, I have a tendency to give credits to the centers for artists for this initiative, this presence of art actuel in the institution. In 2000-2001, there was the exhibit *Métissage*, under Robert Lepage's proposition. Claudie Gagnon participated to it. When the Musée gave his best room for Diane Landry and Nicolas Reeves' installation at the event *DSM-V+*, it was the

initiative of Folie/Culture in Quebec City. This is a dynamic organization which constantly invites artists to come and create around mental health issues and situations at the margins, such as in 2006. Here is the opening of arts for you. I would like now to go back to the exhibition *Déclics: Art et société*, because my collaboration also shows this tension, in the understanding and exhibition of art. This is where the importance of Montreal is palpable. This request came from Marie-Charlotte de Koninck. For each exhibit, the Musée de la civilisation asks, in most cases, experts from Universities to come together around a designated theme. In the case of the *Déclics* exhibition, Marie-Charlotte, when realizing that not only most of the exhibit's works coming from the collection of the Musée d'art contemporain was from Montreal, and that the views of the team of specialists of this period (the 60's and the 70's) was also all Montréalers, she asked me to write, in extremis (I have had only two weeks to write) an essay on the socio-artistic practices in the regions. It is how I came to publish *Des projections libérantes? Les lieux de transgressions de l'art*, in the book about the exhibit.

As far as the Musée du Québec is concerned, I have in memory the year 2002. The institution gains then the status of Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, making official the permanence of the works of Jean-Paul Riopelle in a few rooms – and all around the immense tryptic *Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg*. For the occasion, there is festive night in company of Loco Locass, a rap group to which I have been associated. The meeting between rap and visual arts was not as « bizarre » as we might think. For instance, Biz, is the most articulate. He is the son of the poet and performer Jean-Yves Fréchette, whose works I have mentioned earlier. That very night, I have felt the importance of "interdisciplinary" relations and of the « interstices », these light signals of change which seemed to accelerate in this beginning of the new millennium in the art scene. I have also noticed that no matter if we were in a museum, in a center for artists, in the street or in front of a computer: "inter-generations", "inter-discipline", "inter-relations" and "inter-activities" between young and older people, men and women, spaces and non-spaces of art, images, sounds, all arts were there, together!

If I have collaborated with the two museums. You, Lisanne, have also have worked with Annie Thibault at the Musée des Plaines.

Can you talk about it, and, can you tell me your reflections on your rapport to institutions, in the entry of Quebec City on the art scene, during the years 2000.

Guy

Tuesday March 4th

Guy,

I think, as I have mentioned earlier, that we have reached a very sane professional level. In spite of our distinct approaches, I would say thanks to our clear differences, collaborations seems more possible between centers, on the one hand, and between the centers and the organizations of the present, on the other. We have learned to grasp the possibilities of our institutions. When I was working at La chambre blanche, we were very aware that our spaces were not convenient when it came to welcoming a vast public at conferences. We knew some people were more attracted by museum auditoriums, explicitly public, to assist anonymously to any event. These collaborations always vary according to the individuals in place. The Musée de la civilisation has always been very open to collaborations with the milieu. In the context of the *Manif d'art*, I have wanted to hold the Conference at the Musée national des beaux-arts, because I am convinced that we have to find a larger public. The *Manif* will be more visited by a non-expert public if we try to reach people which are not finding themselves at ease, in such events, but are open to art actuel. I have never felt that I was doing dangerous compromises in being sensitive to this opening dimension.

At another level, if you want to talk about our museum, I am asking myself this fundamental question: how the museum can adapt itself to the reality of new works, interactive, *in situ*, multidisciplinary? The institution of the Musée will always resist these forms. It is a stigmatized space. I think that works of this type are always out of contexts when they enter the museum. All works exhibited in a museum are transformed by it, and should assume their transformations. In this respect, I am impatient to see how Sylvie Cotton will resolve this paradox at the *Manif d'art*. You will say that this debate is outside our topic, but in fact, we have, in Quebec City, two museum contexts. They are very distinctive and both offer an analysis of the actual practices' situation in the museum. We could also however analyze the artists' collaboration in the conception process, thus

before the process of creating a view of the events in the museum. We could see what has been done very audaciously at the Musée de la civilisation, as you have mentioned. The place of art in our two museums is very interesting for this type of reflection.

Guy, for the past decades, we have spoken almost of art network. Let's maintain this venue. How do you see its actual state, since 2000?

Lisanne

Wednesday March 5th

Dear Lisanne,

Two strong macro sociological facts are important in the network evolution in the arts, in the last eight years in Quebec City: recurrence of manifestations, annual or biannual, and international reach.

First fact: there is not only abundance, but also recurrence. There is the 4th edition of the *Manif d'art* (2001, 2003, 2005, 2008) – with Claude Bélanger in control – the continuation, every 2 years, of the *Rencontre internationale d'art performance* (RIAP 2002, 2004, 2006) at the Lieu. Add to this the *Vidéastes recherchés* of La Bande Vidéo, which takes place now in the sphere of influence of the cabaret Kino, Wapikoni Mobile and others. And I would also like to point out here the artistic influence of someone like Boris Firquet – or the nine editions (2000-2008) of *Mois Multi* – Émile Morin being a key element – go in the same sense. In second, we can only notice this intensification of the international, when it comes to the event contents and exhibitions put forward by or around centers of artists from Quebec City. To really show this idea of critical mass, which creates a significant phenomenon other than the ones I have mentioned, and without making here a lists, I will name a few in a non exhaustive fashion: the international exhibition *Torun: Full of Colour* of Engramme in 2003 and *La disparition/Zanikanie* reuniting Engramme, VU, L'Œil de Poisson and the galerie Rouge in 2004. Of course, you can find also attached to these, the international twinning organized by Inter/Le Lieu such as *Latinos del Norte, Québec/Mexico* (2001), *RWNT: Québec-Whales/Québec-Cardiff* (2003), *Villes anciennes/Art Nouveau, Québec/Cracovie* (2004) and *Habanart à Québec: art cubain actuel/Arte de Quebec en la Habana* (fall 2007 and spring 2008). For this last project, Le Lieu was associated with La chambre blanche in Quebec City and the center Séquence, in the Saguenay, for this spring

2008. Also, we can mention the exhibition/expedition *Québec Gold*, organized by L'Œil de Poisson in Reims, in the context of the regional activities of the 400th years of Quebec City's founding. As you can see, collaborations, local, inter/regional and international networks are included.

Guy

Thursday March 6th, in the morning

Dear Guy,

You are forcing me to refine my reflection about the state of network. I have to say that I am fascinated by all the things happening these days. I see the *Manif* working for international exchanges. I see Le Lieu which has contact with the Biennale de La Havane... but I would like to come back to our local dynamic. I think that some centers have the role of exhibition centers (I have mentioned the absence of such structure in Quebec City), while others have kept more easily an experimental approach. The important thing is to always have, in this landscape, the presence of specific action to self-managed centers: this critical dimension, this capacity to always question the modes of operations and the way we exhibit in art actuel. In this respect, it is also interesting to see new collectives such as *Ex-Muro* or *Wagon* starting their journey and offer an image of what is needed these days, or a new conception of intervention that artists of the new generation want to have in their milieu. And it does not obviously translated in planning formal exhibit spaces.

Helping to produce you have L'Œil de Poisson, with its wood workshop, VU, with its recent equipment acquisitions and La chambre blanche which allow artists to grasp the art réseau, La Bande Vidéo, also.

Lisanne

Thursday in the evening

Dear Lisanne, you put in perspective the new generation. This brings me to mention the phenomenon of new groups, in numbers in Quebec City, and their contribution to change. Indeed, between zones and actors of art actuel in Quebec City, this tendency to create collectives, typical of the city since the eighties, remains the same in the year 2000-2008.

We have seen that in the seventies and eighties. We have witnessed the first wave of collectives, interested in sharing to gain some spaces, tools and creative

strategies, in short, to create the self-managed centers for artists. In the nineties, a second wave of organizations and groups will focus on experimentation of new forms and art practices in the networks (for instance Folie/Culture, which will produce in 2006 the amazing event *DSM-V+*, Doyons/Demers, Arkhé – Luc Lévesque, James Partaik and Michel Saint-Onge –, and you have mentioned their importance, and, of course, let's not forget the sacred and famous trio of the country, BGL).

Following them, we can see in the first years following 2000, an intense third wave of artistic « indisdisciplines », put forward by new duos, trios and groups. We observe it by looking at installations such as the one of the sœurs Couture and the art-action of the Fermières Obsédées. On the side of contextual art which is also socially involved, I would like to point out the influence of the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté*, here, in Quebec City, and its famous "red square" – a collaboration of artists which will be used by the student movement in 2004, the editions of the *Réclame ta rue* movement, the grand photographs done by Doyon-Rivest, and the ones, social, of the DéclencheurEs, this other new group. I add to this the mediatic sculpture *L'atopie textuelle est une cause qui se perd* (2001) of the collective *Causes perdues*, and the installation/sculpture, iconoclastic, of the duo Cooke-Sasseville, whose studio is also a place of informal gatherings.

It is difficult, *le nez collé dans la vitre* (when we have the nose in the window) to decipher these "weak signals" of change from the transformations which will survive. Especially when we know that we will be able only to assess them... 30 years later, because there are other elements structuring the art networks. But I think that the contribution of new groups would be a good theme for a Conference, for an organization like *Les arts dans la ville* which has a window on the street in Quebec City. It would be useful to know how to examine, in its excellent conferences, the long-term evolution of this adventure.

Guy

Friday March 7th

Guy,

Another element that we should underline, is the centers' adaptation to their professional status. It is totally paradoxical – but also most natural – to realize that centers which were founded by newcomers, in their time, needed to ask themselves the question of the place

they were giving to young artists. It is also a phenomenon of the last decade, an immediate consequence of the aging teams in place and of the development of structures. In this respect, I see how the awards given year after year to finishing students of the École des arts visuels of Laval University, are most structuring. These awards consist not only of an invaluable recognition, they also ensure that resources from various organizations will be readily available. Often, there is also an exhibition. We are indeed taking care of the needs of the newcomers, needs that are always the same in spite of the decades passing by: the needs for production and the necessity to diffuse the work outside the school. These awards have been really popular, and today, many centers are involved in this respect.

The pedagogical activities of the Écoles des arts visuels, and the relations it entertains with the milieu are maybe much more important that we had foreseen. We only have one University giving the formation in visual arts. If the student's production is weak, the whole chain is affected. And I am often surprised that exchanges are not frequent between school and the centers' network. The École des arts visuels is one extremely important link in the chain. And I am very happy to work with students as interns, in the context of the *Manif d'art*, this year. Richard Martel, on his side, also gives a class in contextual art and forms young people to art-action. The centers provide formation to the young.

I have the intuition, Guy, that naming actors and events resonate in you this preoccupation of the city's evolution as a background.

Lisanne

Friday March 7th, in the evening
Lisanne,

I observe the dual city, at once landscape and territory. Speaking sociologically, the notions of *territory* and *landscape* differs entirely. The territory is inhabited. It takes us in some spaces, zones, and areas of life where economy, politics and culture are intertwined. Otherwise, the landscape can be invented: reproduced, framed, and virtual. It belongs to the imagination. It is in this sense that, with the immobility of the historical and patrimonial city, there is a shifting landscape of Quebec City thanks to its painters, engravers, sculptors, people which are doing installations and manoeuvres.

The notion of territory, applied to urban space, signify art connected to

daily life, the urban environment, to others. We are leaving a conception of the "white cube" of art. That allows to question engagement in art, political art and social art, by counting on the general social contingencies. I would call it the centrifugal energies of the works which permeate, activate, manifest themselves outside conventional spaces, with some care for the other, the others, the milieu of life. In this respect, there was always some art links in the city. As far as I am concerned, in the first year of 2000, Saint-Roch is vibrant of its ideas and "zones of events", which perpetuate this constant interest for the development of multimedia installations *in situ* and art-action modalities (performances, manoeuvres, relational aesthetics) in the city.

Indeed, the city continues to be the "landscape" of many creative social art experimentations, performatives, photographic or *in situ*. In the first year of 2000, adding to the « zones » already mentioned, other events such as *Sur les toits* (2002), of La chambre blanche, *Parcours et débordements* of L'Œil de Poisson (2003), *Les vertiges de l'évidence* (2004), *Habiter* (2006) and *06 émissaires: Québec 2008*, the new "photographic mission in the city" (2008), the last three of VU. Other artists that you were mentioning to me, on the phone, have also invented the city as landscape/territory. What can we say of the repetition of the collective Arqhé which will propose an exceptional manoeuvre, in the contexts of the *Rencontres internationales* of La chambre blanche in 2000?! You were also passionately mentioning to me with that Giorgia Volpe whom, in 2001, intervened (*Le nom des arbres*) on the wintery envelope of the trees in the Parc Saint-Roch. At last, we should also not forget the *Massacre à la scie* in 2004, this event regrouping spontaneously, during a weekend, young artists in a building meant to be destroyed and where you can find now the domesticated La Falaise.

Evidently, the îlot Fleurie's evolution, between 2002 and 2007, would be for many such as Luc Lévesque, Patrice Loubier and myself, an urban « zone » connecting these notions of landscape and territory. Between the event *Émergences: Art Social* in September 2000 and the occupation of the Boulevard Charest by *Réclame ta rue* from September 2007, under the "access roads" of the Dufferin Highway to be demolished, many artistic and even political manifestations have taken place. The year 2001 will see the *Sommet*

des Amériques in the Upper City and the *Sommet des peuples* in the Market at the bassin Louise, placing l'îlot Fleurie in a kind of tension, between two types of manifestations. In September will follow the event *Émergences: Famille* done by the collective l'îlot Fleurie. The famous soeurs Couture will participate to this event. This will be followed by *Incube* in October, bringing together performers and people from Quebec and France doing installations in response to the event *Arts d'attitudes* (the whole event was organized by Le Lieu). In 2002, BGL will be part of the edition of *Émergences* with a festive « manège » made of garbage. And, in 2003, La chambre blanche will produce *La nef des fous* at the opening of activities of its 25th anniversary. Personally, I have been a friend of the edition *Émergences: Art social* in 2000, under Paryse Martin's invitation – a person whose contribution we don't always acknowledge in the milieu – and I am part of the collective of young women artists (such as Julie Picard, Hélène Matte and Fanny Giguère). Diane Landry, Doyon/Demers and Pierre Bourgault will add their works to the thirty sculptures populating the place already, among them Don Darby, one the most underestimated sculptor in Quebec City, and also someone which has been much involved in the community.

I am sure that these notions of landscape and inhabited territory make you think of works of art, or different situations maybe completely opposed to my conception, which believes in the progress of conceptual and committed art...

Guy

Saturday March 8th

Guy,

I like this distinction between landscape and territory, which reminds me of a round table discussion on Action-Art, where we both were, and it was about this question. Landscape and territory... the landscape marked by the imagination, the territory inhabited and connected to life. The interventions *in situ*, would be on the side of invented landscape or about a taking possession of a territory in order to mark the city of gesture of arts?

I know that you hope we will talk about public art. You know to which extend this topic interests me. I have directed the edition of a publication on the 20 years of what we commonly call the 1%, and I have worked on a summary

of the 10 years... I have conceived, in a different context, collective art events in public areas. I have even participated to the conception of a work of integrated art (*La chute des mots*). "Public Art", "Art in Public Places", signified, only few years ago still, an art of the State. The term is much more open today. Public art, ephemeral, furtive, temporary, eternal... and in Quebec City, a phenomenon takes place: organizations or private companies launching contests or predict orders of art integration (the SSQ, the CAA in collaboration with the City of Quebec and the Commission de la Capitale-Nationale). The City of Quebec proposes to artists, more and more, open contests. A public park is now coming along on the promenade Samuel-de-Champlain with a "resolute contemporary stance". This project, close to my heart and for which I have worked, will bring near the river the works of Jean-Pierre Morin, Pierre Bourgault, Yves Gendreau and, very soon, a work from an artist from Quebec City. The City of Montreal is giving Quebec City, for its 400 years, a work of integration conceived by Michel Goulet. The image of the city is sensibly changing with the presence of all these works from the present. Of course, the reactions are in numbers (see the debate concerning the work of Pierre Bourgault done for the Promenade Samuel-de-Champlain, which is not without reference to the Naylor case in 1981). The artists see art, in integration, as a space of investigation of the landscape... and/or in the light of what we have illustrated, of the urban territory. For creators, the time when public art was a production done in parallel to research is over. The lasting elements of the works are not negligible. They testify to an undeniable recognition of our artists.

Lisanne

Sunday March 9th

Lisanne,

My interest for this notion of territory implies some aesthetic understanding, for the changes of the city as such. In fact, I have started our dialogue by imagining the City of Quebec in itself, as a real subject. Doesn't the city possess a global evolutionary aesthetic showing the character of the urban planning of areas and roads, promenades or public spaces, of its monuments and works of public art as they are integrated to the architecture? These elements are « architectures », to take the term developed by Luc Lévesque. And to borrow Hervé

Fisher's expression, they are "citizen sculptures", determinant to the environment of daily life where we walk, work and play. Even better, where we create and live with art altogether.

I will not insist here on the surroundings, the river and the mountains, and even less on the urban spreading which has resulted in the fusion of various cities. They form the district cutting the Capitale-Nationale. I will not mention the immutable "old historic capital" which makes Quebec City the 6th destination the most appreciated by tourists on 116 tourist places in the world! No. I will narrow my views to the core relations between arts and the city, namely, the links between the Faubourg which links the Montcalm quarter to the Musée, in the Upper City, on the one hand, and the Lower City, on the other hand, in the area that goes from the river to Saint-Roch. The aesthetic perception of public art is made of conflicts, critics and divergences. This also, it's the city and its art which breathe the challenges to come.

These "citizen sculptures" – unless seen from the air, even if it is possible to see all the works of public art in Quebec City, from the installation by Pierre Granche on University Laval's campus to Ferland's park in Limoilou, where BGL have installed friendly "sculpted clothes lines" – remain, to my eyes, signs of confrontations between conceptions of arts, culture and ways of life. It is still the case, now, vis-à-vis the realist murals, very clean and imitation/historic – which seem to have taken the place of the statues and monuments – and created by companies here and there in the city, as public art. The last in the list is the projet for the "Bank of Montreal". It is supposed to represent, in front of the chapel Bon-Pasteur near the Complexe G, the history of the ten provinces of Canada, for the occasion of the 400th years of the founding of Quebec City!

Guy

Sunday March 9th

Guy,

It is indeed important that we position ourselves in relation to this multiplications of portraits. I have appreciated your reactions against these totally anachronic murals which we have seen grow in numbers, all around us. But I am very optimistic, the sensibilities have improved in 2008. Utopia? No. I see results. The recent works done by the Commission de la Capitale-Nationale, on the promenade

Samuel-de-Champlain, is one example.

Guy, we have been together at the Largo resto-club to finish this narrative about art actuel in Quebec City, and you make, you, the sociologist, an interesting link: the Largo Foundation. Outside the centers for artists, outside the museum, who will be tomorrow's actors? I have spoken of initiatives in the private sector, in the context of art integration. It could be taking different forms. We have to work in this direction, make foundations aware of the importance of an action in the cultural sphere, etc.

In this great voyage, we have not really spoken about private galleries. Yes, the absence of an art market is clear in Quebec City and influences all our actions. Estampe plus (1984-2007) has closed its doors few months ago after 23 years of existence. Together, let's make a list of the commercial galleries that have punctuated the art actuel's history: the Galerie Joliet (possibly 1976-1981), the Galerie René Bertrand, whom, in 1984 and 1985, was crucial for newcomers, the Galerie André Bécot (1976-1992, and recently reopened), the Galerie Lacerte (Galerie Lacerte-Guimont in 1981, then Galerie Lacerte, in 1986), the Galerie O Matière (opened in 1989), the Galerie Charles et Martin Gauthier (very active from 1990-1998). I have not mentioned Rouje which operates differently, nor the Galerie Esthesio (2002-2006). Without a doubt, it is the Galerie Joliet, and then, the Galerie Lacerte, which will have the most significant impact on the art milieu in Quebec City.

There are also the hybrid spaces: the persistent Galerie Le 36 run by Marcel Jean on Couillard Street, open to young talents like Francis Arguin, Christian Messier. Both have contributed to the recognition of a resurgence in paintings. Over the years, the galerie Rouje, as we know, has also become, between 2001 and 2007, a festive center. This space, at once gallery, bar and multifunctional room, has renewed the rapport artist/gallery by offering exhibit spaces in location, something that is not common in Quebec City.

Lisanne

in Conclusion

Monday March 10th

Lisanne,

30 years have passed.

I am rejoicing about the vitality of these times, to have witnessed the change of the millennium.

I am glad to have the power of our dreams, somewhere, and to dream more! But if you asked me, if you insisted, Lisanne, to find a word of synthesis, I would risk the word MANIFESTIVE. Moreover, of the same idiom as the name given to the Manifeste of the Galerie Comme in 1977, or like the abbreviated *Manif*, to name a great event of 2008, doesn't it define one of the principal elements of specificity of the artistic life in Quebec City? The spirit of making things happen, together, collectively. And because it has meant something, during 3 decades, the adjective *manifestive* qualifies it for me.

If I needed to find a formula to synthesize the evolution, define 30 years of specificity in art actuel in and from Quebec City, I would chose the plural by applying it to three important notions: the collective, the collaboration and the network. I insist here on the fact that these groups in collectives, as well as the founding of regional and international networks have sustained the artistic life of Quebec City, since 1978. This attitude has prevailed in spite of the move from the Upper City to the Lower City, from the Faubourg Saint-Jean Baptiste to Saint-Roch, as a center, and despite this progressive move of community and cooperative strategies towards more experimental, plural, relational, multimedia and contextual practices. With some distance, how can we not be surprised to see this interesting paradox between the autonomous discourse of some agents and the solidarity on the ground, each time an opportunity arose?

Guy

Tuesday March 11th

Dear Guy,

It was our mandate, as sociologist and historian, to put some facts on paper. The publishing medium has this particularity of living long. We expose, we debate, we are also posing art gestures, but if all of this is not recollected, all is lost. And I have suffered vertigo, recently, when a young curator told me that she did not know some major players in this history. It was like received a slap in the face. It was for me a great realization that history has to be done, in this moment, when the founding members and creators of this adventure of art actuel can still share their stories. And I would have had the pleasure to see again, verify and rediscover, hear people about the Comme Galerie, when I was not yet in the circuit. I could revisit my perceptions, which is one

of the tasks of the historian, that is always reading and re-reading the facts in the light of new elements, trajectories. Indeed, when I arrived at La chambre blanche, we were saying that we were the first parallel gallery. Of course, there was the ARG, but the mode of diffusion, the type of art that we wanted to diffuse was stopping us to have this large perspective showing many points of view. I have always found that in the province of Quebec, we always had blind spots. If an artist doesn't create in the mainstream, it's over. I hope this section of this dialogue, without pretense, will have at least demonstrated that art actuel has benefited, in our city, from the presence of different people and that it was most productive in this respect.

In conclusion, in respect to this reality and this need of history, I would like to mention the question of publications. La chambre blanche has its bulletin, since 1981, VU founded a publishing house in 1999, J'ai VU, the *Manif d'art* also needed to act in the same way. And the convergence of our exhibits should occupy our energies in a more obvious way. We also have to think about the future, the continuity and the differences. The makings of history from another angle. Books. We have to think about traces, in this sense.

Lisanne

Wednesday March 12th

Lisanne,

One word calls for thousands.

This two-pen essay would not be so intense if it did not possess the desire to bring all readers to all the numbers of reviews, catalogues, conference proceedings, all essays and archived documents now available on CD, DVD, and internet sites. I am thinking of the 100 numbers of the review *Intervention*, which became *Inter, art actuel*, of the short existence of the review *Noir d'encre*, which you have founded with Daniel Béland at the beginning of the nineties, of the *Bulletins* of La chambre blanche, of the newspaper *Droit de parole*, or of the very new review *Bazzart*. And we have very important books, offering summaries, such as *Art Performance: Anthologie au/in Canada, 1970-1990* and *Art action 1958-1998, Résidence, 1982-1993*, which you have coordinated the edition yourself. Books such as *L'art comme alternative: réseaux et pratiques d'art parallèle au Québec 1976-1996* that I have authored (1997), or *Nouveau terroirs de l'art: Régions, réseaux, place publique* written by sociologist Andrée Fortin

(2000) or *Art-Action*, born of the writings of Richard Martel (2005). We also have to mention the many catalogues and quality publications accompanying events such as *Mirabile Visu*, *L'année photographique à Québec*, *Trois fois 3 passages*, *Temporalité*, *Art d'attitudes*, *Bonheur et simulacres*, the publications of the editions J'ai VU, DVD's of different editions of the *Rencontre internationale d'art performance* of Le Lieu or the studio art Avatar, and the videos done by La Bande Vidéo, without mentioning the websites and the blogs of today's world.

They stand as the true memory of art actuel in Quebec City, since 1978. They are so rich of details. Others, we can only hope, will be interested to find out more, as soon as you will have dropped the last word of our dialogue...

Thanks for your complicity
Guy

Thursday March 13th
Guy,

I write. And the words help me to think. I have proposed this dialogue to you to destabilize my habits, to destabilize myself, to open doors. And we have succeeded, I think.

You have written: the writing like "dusts on the City"... leaving you to that?

Lisanne

P.S. Thanks for all of this. ■

* **Lisanne Nadeau** lives and works in Quebec City. Historian and art critic, she is the Director of the Galerie des arts visuels of Laval University. Working for many years at the center La chambre blanche, she has coordinated many events, conferences and publications dealing with installation practices and *in situ*. She publishes regularly in various specialized publications and was the coordinator of the *Summary of 20 years of the 196*, in 2004, for the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications. Lisanne Nadeau has been the independent curator for the *Manif d'art 4*, in the spring of 2008.

* **Guy Sioui Durand** is a Huron-Wendat. He is also a sociologist (Ph. D.), art critic and independant curator who has scrutinized Quebec's art actuel scene and given most of his time to the understanding of political art and contemporary native arts. He is one of the founders of the review *Inter*, art actuel and the center for artists Le Lieu: a space dedicated to the art actuel scene in Quebec City. Durand has written for many periodicals and publications. He is the author of three books: *L'art comme alternative: Réseaux et pratiques d'art parallèle au Québec* (1997), *Les très riches heures de Jean-Paul Riopelle* (2000) and *Riopelle: L'art d'un trappeur supérieur. Indéanité* (2003). He also has authored articles and chapters in other monographies, such as the recent *Aimitaitu! Parlons-nous!* (2008). Celebrated as a stimulating speaker, his conferences and performances are always greatly appreciated.

THIRTY YEARS OF URBANISM IN QUEBEC CITY

A CITY HIT BY A TRAUMATISM THAT AIN'T THE ONE WE THINK IT IS

BY MARC BOUTIN*

Quebec City's urban history was marked by a major event which is not the Conquest nor the Battlefields of Abraham. It is not to exaggerated to speak here of a cataclysm around which stands the history of many areas downtown. Indeed, it explains the morphology and the structure of the metropolitan region. Its impact on our daily life's organization is from far more important than all other local historical phenomenon of the last 400 years. Nevertheless, our valorous tourist guides are not mentioning it and historians rarely discuss it in this respect. It is, without a doubt, because the stir it has generated is yet to calm down. To say the least, the public as well as experts often mistakes it for its timely corollary, the Quiet Revolution. This event is called "Urban Renovation" (U.R.).

Like a natural catastrophe, the U.R. hit North America without any warning. Each city had to cope with it in its own terms. Younger cities like Winnipeg and Edmonton, in Canada, adapted rapidly. It was for them a form of rapid growth considering their short past and some infrastructures already in place. In 1950, Boston and Toronto, cities viewed as the most dynamic today, resisted the temptation to get rid of their tramways. But Montreal and Quebec City, wanting to be modern, were eager to get rid of it. Today, Toronto is part of the avant-garde with a vast rail network and its costs are easy to absorb. Quebec City is still hesitant to go ahead with a new network which would include structures that existed not a long time ago. It is important to be careful: to be of your own time.

Boston: Our Close Urban Relative

The compact built environment of North American cities, such as Quebec City, Boston, New Orleans and San Francisco served as a first protection against the assault of the U.R. But these cities were fast to understand that a kind of passive resistance would not be enough. Eastern cities like Quebec City, indeed the most directly European, had the most to lose. And even if they were the most vivid in their

opposition to this movement, they have lost a great deal. All proportions considered, Boston is the American city that most closely resembles Quebec City.

In 1950, these two cities had had almost 350 years of history. From an "urbanist" point of view, their two downtown core are similar in their compact quarters. These quarters have clear boundaries, they are socially distinct and densely populated. They cover most of the central territory, to the exception of some great urban parks such as the Boston Common and the Plains of Abraham. This is a distinctive mark of urbanity: each square meter available is occupied, and there is basically no space for random planning. We have to count on filling the surrounding low waters to get more space. At the beginning of the fifties, first in Boston and then in Quebec City, problems started to occur. Narrow streets are congested to the point that commerce is in decline. The pressure for a radical move exists. The U.R., along with the urbanist's response to this pressure, is becoming a panacea for the business world. It is the beginning of the great malls at the periphery of the city – something most daunting for inhabited areas.

The Urban Renewal

In Boston, between 1950 and 1960, urbanists made their first mistakes under the name of the *Urban Renewal*. Scollay Square is central location amongst the most lively and welcoming. It is typical of the open minded and burlesque quarters surrounding it. It was to Boston what was once the Place d'Youville in Quebec City: a popular gathering place. All of it, including its residential neighborhood, was destroyed and replaced by the so-called Government Center, a huge agora in red brick, testimony to a bureaucratic austerity as cold as can be. It is also next to a monumental City Hall that would have made Hitler's architect Albert Speer very proud. Another example which evokes Dufferin-Montmorency: a suspended highway runs through the core of the city. It is indeed the same highway that was transformed into a tunnel for an outrageous cost (16 billions \$US).

Nevertheless, in Boston, resistance has been beneficial. Indeed, most living quarters in downtown, with the exception of the one surrounding Scollay Square, remained intact. Since the 50's, Boston's center is an example of the striking contrast between two styles of urban planning. There is

an exuberant vertical modernity, juxtaposed to a rigorous horizontal residential areas, at once urban and Victorian, among the most beautiful in the world (North End, Beacon Hill, Back Bay). In fact, the public opinion uprising has tempered the renovation endeavors of the "planners", hence protecting downtown's residential life.

A Simple Concept... or Simplistic?

In Quebec City, the U.R. (politicians at the time had associated the idea of progress to the extent that to be against it meant that you were "retrograde") has taken, from 1967 onwards, the forms of a street fight between urbanists feeling entitled to power, and a certain civil society in a desperate plight. Statistics allow [us] to understand the magnitude of these fights, ending in 1978, when tired of these everlasting wars, the City gave up on transforming Saint-Gabriel Street as a way to access Place-Québec. Between these two dates, some 10 000 people had been dislocated, fourteen public schools were demolished or closed, more than 4000 rental apartments were sacrificed. In terms of its demography, the agglomeration literally exploded. Indeed, the average density has passed from 10000 people per Km² to less than 1000, and that, despite the fact that the total population has passed from 365,000 to 620,000 people. It is fair to say that the dimensions of the contrasting zone was multiplied by twenty. No city, with the exception of some third-world megapolis, has suffered such an impact. From the most densely populated city in Canada, Quebec City has now become the most spread out metropolitan region. Even today, we are seeing a few striking contrasts. The Faubourg Saint-Jean, for instance, keeps a density difficult to surpass, at 17,500 people/km² while many suburbs are barely capable of reaching the national average of countries like Belgium – which is 330 people/km². If the average density, before 1950, was to be viewed today on the whole agglomeration, Quebec City would virtually be as populated as Paris with its 8 millions people.

On an era that has 350 years of history, we have instigated a development model that did not consider how delicate the urban structure in place really was. In terms of the circulation network structuring it, the city has broken away from the stages of the commercial street to invest in the realities of the highway, without