

ACTIONS
THAT
SPEAK

EDITED BY
Michèle Thériault

Essays by Sean Mills, Felicity Tayler, Michèle Thériault and Jean-Philippe Warren present ways of doing, thinking, and engaging oneself that attempted to redefine and reshape Quebec society of the 1960s and 1970s. They reveal a will to *speak* and to *act* that marked the collective life and artistic activity of the period, thus encouraging us to consider the present in terms of the complex density of that past.



LEONARD & BINA ELLEN ART GALLERY

ACTIONS THAT SPEAK

Aspects of Quebec Culture in the
1960s and 1970s

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Preface

Actions that Speak is published on the occasion of an important exhibition in Montreal.¹ *Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada 1965-1980* is the first Canadian attempt to take stock of an art form that was widely practiced throughout the world, offering not only a new way of thinking about the creative process and its object, but also its institutional apparatus. The exhibition brings together five regionally or city-based curatorial perspectives including one that focuses on Montreal. This collection of four essays does not engage with conceptual art, rather it offers an enlarged socio-cultural context for the exhibition by examining certain practices and historical conjunctures of the period in Montreal and Quebec. Conceptual art, in its diverse and scattered manifestations was marginalized in Quebec, among other reasons, because it developed outside, or against, the dominant painterly filiations that were engendered by the *Refus Global*. Just as the exhibition foregrounds lesser-known, occluded, or unrecognized practices in its Montreal section, this book's objective is to raise contextual and social issues that have been ignored or forgotten, or whose analysis needs to be considered in a new light.

The essays in *Actions that Speak* link together other areas of study with that of art, thereby underlining to what extent the practice of art is not an autonomous field and, most importantly, how it exists within a conjuncture of the social and the political. The first essay, by historian Sean Mills, examines the linguistic debate in Quebec of the late 1960s from the perspective of the political economy of empire in which questions of colonialism and capitalism were important forces in shaping that debate. Felicity Tayler presents an analysis of the history and performativity of *Québec underground, 1962-1972*, a three-volume publication that attempted to circumscribe the alternative and, for the most part, collective art practices of the 1960s in Montreal. My contribution consists of an initial assessment of the interventionist nature

of Norman Thériault's curatorial practice, a leading figure in the artistic landscape of the 1970s. The collection concludes with an examination of Quebec's neo-rural communal counterculture by the sociologist Jean-Philippe Warren. The essays in this modest publication convey ways of doing, thinking and engaging oneself that attempted to redefine and reshape Quebec society of the 1960s and 1970s. They reveal a will to *speak* and to *act* that marked the collective life and artistic activity of the period, thus encouraging us to consider the present in terms of the complex density of the past.

I extend my warmest thanks to the authors Sean Mills, Felicity Tayler and Jean-Philippe Warren who responded unhesitatingly and enthusiastically to my invitation to contribute to this volume. As always, in the case of a publication that comes to be through the work of translation, I wish to highlight the important contributions of the translators, namely Gabriel Chagnon and Eduardo Ralickas. I also greatly appreciated the committed editorial work of Lin Gibson. In the final stages of production of the publication, I received invaluable assistance from my colleagues Zoë Chan and Mélanie Rainville. Lastly, I wish to acknowledge Jess and Liz of TagTeam who gave shape to this book in keeping with the spirit of its intentions.

Michèle Thériault

^{1/1} *Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada 1965-1980*, an exhibition organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta, the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (University of Toronto) and the Vancouver Art Gallery, in partnership with the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery (Concordia University) and Halifax, INK., toured across Canada from 2010 to 2012 and in Europe in 2013.

The Language
of Liberation

Sean Mills

Beginning in the early 1960s, language dominated political debate in Montreal. Questions of language rights and of linguistic devaluation, of the cultural and imperial power of the English language, and of the necessity of building a new francophone culture of resistance, stood at the very centre of the political movements of the 1960s. In 1969 these questions exploded.¹ The first mass demonstration over "language rights"² took place on 28 March 1969, marking the beginning of a new era in which linguistic struggles would be played out on the streets of Montreal. The protest began when a crowd of 10,000 to 15,000 protesters carrying placards reading "McGill aux Québécois!" and "McGill aux travailleurs!" began marching west towards Montreal's most prestigious university. In the heated political atmosphere of 1969, McGill, standing on Mount Royal and dominating the city's urban landscape, had come to be seen as a symbol of imperial domination. In the months leading up to the demonstration, many had demanded that the university shed its colonial identity by becoming

/1/ Pierre Godin refers to the language question of the period as a "poudrière linguistique" in his book of that title. Pierre Godin, *La poudrière linguistique* (Montréal: Éditions du Boréal, 1990).

/2/ As I hope to demonstrate, in the late 1960s "Language" became a lightning rod that focused debates about cultural and economic power.

a French-language institution serving the province's working class. As the day of the protest approached, the rhetoric from both sides grew increasingly polarized, the army was put on alert, and everyone braced for the inevitable confrontation.

Leading the march were two figures who had become prominent in the provincial media: recently fired McGill professor Stanley Gray and nationalist leader Raymond Lemieux. Because of the increasingly violent nature of demonstrations, the city's municipal authorities feared the worst; 2,707 security officers were deployed, hundreds of police were arrayed inside McGill, and many more were waiting in full riot gear at the headquarters of the provincial police, the city police, and the RCMP. The covers of utility holes on the streets around McGill were welded in place and, during the demonstration, the crowd was circled by police helicopters and watched from rooftops. As the protesters reached the front entrance of the university, a group of counter-demonstrators yelled insults and sang "God Save the Queen." By 10:30 p.m., the riot squad had already divided the crowd into three groups and, although many scuffles and arguments broke out, the protesters never did succeed in taking over the university. A few fires burned throughout the evening but, by midnight, "Opération McGill" had come to an end.³

Opération McGill français represented an important moment in the development of oppositional politics in Montreal. It was the first in a series of mass demonstrations that made the claim that cultural deprivation could only be reversed if the root problems of capitalism and imperialism were opposed. Or, to put it another way, if an alternative North American society based on social justice and human dignity was to be built, the cultural and economic power of the English language would need to be overcome.

The question of language rights does not, of course, belong solely to the left. The defence of the French language and the fear of assimilation and cultural devaluation have been constant themes throughout Quebec history. But the defence of linguistic rights became a left-wing question when the devaluation of language was linked to larger analyses of capitalism and colonialism, and when its remedy was seen to require a reshaping of society in general. Opération McGill français, planned by the left, played a decisive role in articulating and popularizing a leftist interpretation of language rights. The movement itself was the product of an alliance of individuals and groups from many different backgrounds. Anglophone socialists from McGill preoccupied with building a working-class revolution joined with Quebec nationalists concerned primarily with questions of linguistic survival. The radical wing of the labour movement joined with Quebec students. Tensions remained, of course, for such coalitions are always temporary and fragile.

/3/ "Montreal's Diagram for Defence," *Canadian Magazine*, 7 June 1969, 2, Robert Chodos, "Hitting a Sore Spot," *McGill Daily (extra)*, 2 April 1969, 4, "L'opération McGill coûtera aux contribuables de \$50,000 à \$100,000," *Le Devoir*, 31 March 1969, 1, Peter Allnut and Robert Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," *Radical America* 6, no. 5 (1972): 43, and François Barbeau, Jean-Claude Leclerc, and Normand Lépine, "L'opération McGill," *Le Devoir*, 29 March 1969, 1-2. For discussions of the McGill français movement, see Marc V. Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 76-7. The most important treatment so far is found in Jean-Philippe Warren, "L'Opération McGill français. Une page méconnue de l'histoire de la gauche nationaliste," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 16, no. 2 (2008): 97-115. Also see Bédard, "McGill français: un contexte de fébrilité étudiante et nationaliste," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 9, no. 1 (2000): 148-52, Jean-Philippe Warren, *Une douce anarchie: les années 68 au Québec* (Montréal: Éditions du Boréal, 2008), and Robert Chodos, "A Short History of Student Activism at McGill," in *McGill Student Handbook*, Robert Chodos, Allan Feingold, and Tom Sorell, eds. (Montreal: Students' Society of McGill University, 1969), 86-92. For a remarkable study on language during the period, see Karim Larose, *La langue de papier. Spéculation linguistiques au Québec* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2004).

In this essay I will argue, first by looking at Opération McGill and then by exploring the massive street protests in the fall of 1969 over the province's proposed language legislation (Bill 63), that the linguistic explosions of the late 1960s were characterized by a mixing of people and ideas, of issues and analyses which defy the classifications in which they have so often been understood. Out of the street protests and political debates emerged an analysis that placed conceptions of language firmly within a political economy of empire.

THE LANGUAGE QUESTION OF THE LATE 1960s

While the language crisis of 1967–8 began in elementary schools in the fall of 1968, it was the state of post-secondary education that ignited a related dispute. Expenditures on education rose dramatically during the 1960s, going from 23% of the provincial budget in 1959 to 35% in 1969.⁴ According to Jean-Philippe Warren, for the first time in Quebec history, the majority of those under the age of twenty were in school, which had the effect of conflating the categories of "youth" and "student."⁵ In 1967, the Union nationale government opened the first seven CEGEPS – new junior colleges that would replace the province's antiquated classical college system – and in September 1968, sixteen more CEGEPS were created. By the late 1960s, 100,000 students studied in the province's CEGEP system, and the expansion of the education system became one of the main pillars of the Quiet Revolution.⁶

In September 1968, standing before an audience at Laval University, Quebec government officials made an announcement that sent shockwaves throughout the CEGEP system: 20,000 CEGEP students, they declared, had not found university places for that fall, and the problem would only get worse the following

year. In the eyes of many, the promise of the Quiet Revolution, that francophones could improve their social and economic status through new educational opportunities, did not appear to be materializing.⁷

In October, Quebec students, having watched students and workers in France bring their country to a standstill just months earlier, took to the streets and occupied their schools. For two weeks, the CEGEP system stopped functioning. Students barricaded themselves inside their buildings, hanging portraits of the world's best-known revolutionaries, from Lenin and Marx to Castro and Mao. Students wrote tracts, demonstrated in the streets, organized teach-ins and performed revolutionary theatre. In one of the more dramatic occupations, students at the École des Beaux-Arts took over their institution and proclaimed a republic. As the red flag flew above, those inside exercised their creative faculties and put art in the service of humanity.⁸

The occupations of the fall of 1968 died down, but the resentment among the student population remained. Students kept demanding that education be less repressive, and they wanted to be provided with money to attend university, as well as opportunities to use their skills once they graduated. They also demanded that a new French language university be established

/4/ Warren, *Une douce anarchie*, 34.

/5/ Ibid., 15.

/6/ Ibid., 27.

/7/ Ibid., 102–3, 242.

/8/ For a vivid portrait of the occupation at the École des Beaux-arts, see Claude Laflamme, *La République des Beaux-arts: la Malédiction de la momie* (Canada: Vent d'Est Films, 1997).

in the city (while McGill, Sir George Williams University, and Loyola College all served the city's less populous English-speaking community, Montreal's only French-language university at the time was the Université de Montréal).⁹

It would not take long for resentment over the inadequacy of the French language education system to be directed against the grandeur of McGill. On 21 October 1968, 5,000 to 10,000 students had marched through the McGill campus chanting "étudiants-ouvriers," before making their way to the Université de Montréal to hear speeches by student leaders.¹⁰ And then, on 3 December 1968, activists close to the MIS (Mouvement pour l'intégration scolaire) stormed the McGill campus and proceeded to occupy its computer centre. The occupation – which took everyone by surprise – was meant as a protest against Jean-Jacques Bertrand's proposed guarantee of English-language schooling rights in the province. Principal Rocke Robertson called in the police, and the riot squad stormed the building at 1:00 am. The eleven students inside had enough provisions to stay for a week, but their barricade of a door opening to the exterior did little to protect them, and the police had no trouble in clearing them out.¹¹ The occupation, along with the earlier CEGEP strike, brought Quebec politics directly onto the campus of McGill.

Before the 1968–69 school year, student politics at McGill comprised the same mixture of local issues and universal causes that was capturing the imaginations of students across North America and Europe.¹² The student population had grown from 8,795 in 1960 to 12,728 in 1965, with the majority of the new students enrolling in the humanities and social sciences.¹³ In the mid-1960s, the *McGill Daily*, under the editorship of Patrick MacFadden, had begun to publish articles about the Vietnam War and liberation movements in the Third World, and the *Daily* soon became the home of a nascent McGill left.¹⁴ Throughout the

1960s, the *Daily* not only acted as the most influential critical voice at the university, but it also achieved an important influence over Montreal's English-speaking activists more generally. Many McGill activists were "red diaper babies" who had grown up in the dynamic world of Jewish Montreal, and had faced the discrimination of French- and English-speaking Montrealers alike.¹⁵

Strongly influenced by European Marxism, activists placed their hopes in the working class, and they advocated the transformation of the school into a "critical university" organically connected to the needs and aspirations of the majority of citizens. Rather than fostering critical consciousness, it was argued, the university moulded students to the demands of capitalist society, creating the functionaries and technicians of exploitation. The task

/9/ Allnutt and Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," 39, Nick Auf der Maur, "'Opération McGill' Viewed from Inside," *McGill Reporter*, 31 March 1969, 2.

/10/ Robert Chodos, "Désormais," *McGill Daily*, 23 October 1968, 5. For an important look at the student revolts of the fall of 1968, including Opération McGill, see Warren, *Une douce anarchie*. Also see his excellent description of the march in "L'Opération McGill français."

/11/ "McGill ne déposerait pas de plainte contres ses onze 'occupants' francophones," *Le Devoir*, 5 December 1968, 3.

/12/ For an overview of student activism at McGill throughout the 1960s, see Peggy Sheppard, "The Relationship between Student Activism and Change in the University: With Particular Reference to McGill University in the 1960s" (MA, McGill University, 1989). A useful overview of the transformation of student politics at McGill throughout the 1960s can also be found in Chodos, "A Short History of Student Activism at McGill." For an alternative view, see Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University: For the Advancement of Learning. Vol. II* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), 443–4.

/13/ Frost, *McGill University*, 449.

/14/ Chodos, "A Short History of Student Activism at McGill," 88.

/15/ My thanks to Mark Wilson for this insight.

for radicals was therefore to grab hold of the university to bring the forces of modernity under democratic control and, by uniting theory and practice, put the university at the service of "the people."¹⁶ The idea of the critical university was that student radicals should ally themselves with broader movements of social change.¹⁷ Many activists at McGill were acutely aware of their relatively privileged position at the heart of Quebec society. In February 1967, the McGill student body even narrowly voted – after two unsuccessful attempts – to join UGEQ (Union générale des étudiants du Québec).¹⁸ But it was not until the 1968–69 school year – when McGill itself became the object of unrelenting attacks and denunciations – that the university became part of a city-wide movement of social upheaval.¹⁹

In September 1968, the atmosphere at McGill – like that at universities around the world – was tense. In France, students, who were quickly joined by workers, nearly succeeded in toppling the French government. Police had to break up an occupation at New York's Columbia University, and similar revolts on other campuses throughout North America were being met with similar repression. McGill's Radical Student Alliance (RSA) was doing its best to ensure that this insurrectionary energy would fuel student politics on campus. After fierce debate, the RSA even came to support Quebec independence, arguing that the sovereigntist movement could be likened to the efforts of Third World nations to free themselves from colonialism.²⁰

Of all the radical personalities who emerged on the McGill campus at the time, it was Stanley Gray – a young lecturer in the Department of Political Science, and Economics – who captured the most attention, becoming the intellectual leader of a new group of students who would put Quebec at the centre of their political ideology. Gray had grown up Jewish in Montreal's Mile End, and his father had been a member of the Communist Party

of Canada. No stranger to the prejudices of English-speaking Montreal, Gray nonetheless enrolled at McGill in the early 1960s where he became active in the Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. After earning his D. Phil. at Oxford, Gray returned to McGill in the fall of 1967, and would soon be at the very centre of one of the biggest controversies that the university had ever witnessed.²¹

September 1968 also marked an important moment for the *McGill Daily*. In the fall of 1968, Mark Starowicz took over as editor, and McGill's role in Quebec society became centrally important to the newspaper's coverage. For example, when John Ross Bradfield, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive of Noranda Mines, received an honorary doctorate from McGill, Starowicz lambasted both the company and the university. Contrary to what the university claimed, Starowicz argued, the event made it clear that McGill does "take political stands."²² And it was therefore the task of student radicals to take political stands of their own. Student activists at McGill – a school which seemed, in the eyes of many, to be a bastion of anglophone privilege – had come, by the fall of 1968, to believe that a democratization of

/16/Stan Gray, "For a Critical University," *McGill Daily (Review)*, 24 October 1968, 4-5.

/17/Interview with Stan Gray, June 10, 2005, Hamilton.

/18/Chodos, "A Short History of Student Activism at McGill," 87-8, Frost, *McGill University*, 459.

/19/Robert Lantos, "The Rise of the Left at McGill," *Together*, 25 February 1970, 5.

/20/Ibid.

/21/Stan Gray, "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian... Shit-Disturber," *Canadian Dimension* 38, no. 6 (2004): 12-13, Interview with Stan Gray, June 10, 2005, Hamilton, Ontario.

/22/Mark Starowicz, "Why Was This Man Honoured?" *McGill Daily*, 10 October 1968, 5.

society required a radical questioning of their own institution. In the coming school year, the *Daily* would become the chief organ of anglophone radicals who had decided to join the larger movement of opposition in the city.

Opération McGill was not just one more sixties demonstration; in the months leading up to the march, previously separate movements and organizations converged. In this sense, the lead-up to Opération McGill shared many characteristics with other revolts taking place around the world, and with France's May '68 in particular. According to Kristin Ross, May '68 can be seen as a "crisis in functionalism," as a time when the movement "took the form of political experiments in *déclassification*, in disrupting the natural 'givenness' of places."²³ In the union of intellectual and worker rebellions, Ross argues, lay "the verification of equality not as any objective of action, but as something that is part and parcel of action, something that emerges in the struggle and is lived and declared as such."²⁴ In a similar way, students in Montreal were no longer defending only student rights. Some anglophones, albeit representing a minority of McGill students, had joined the opposition to the cultural and economic power of the English language, and workers took their demands outside of the workplace to the front gates of the university. While it is true that in the years immediately preceding Opération McGill workers and students had sometimes joined together in demonstrations and on picket lines,²⁵ it was only in the months leading up to the march on McGill that the logic which kept various movements separate began to unravel. Activists argued that McGill, having its roots in nineteenth-century British colonialism, had become an institution dominated by American capital, training those who would go on to work for the American and English-Canadian companies operating in Quebec. To the eyes of the young activists, the school had come to symbolize much more than a prestigious site of "anglophone" education; it was a symbol of both the privileges of settler colonialism and of the technocratic and inhuman nature of American imperialism.

The battle over McGill was therefore not only about schooling rights; it was also a fight concerning foreign control of the economy and public space in the city. Rather than merely writing political tracts from a distance, the protesters took their grievances over the state of Quebec society to the heart of its most venerable institution. On the Monday following the event, an article in *Le Devoir* openly mused about the necessity of limiting protests to certain areas of the city.²⁶ And in the period leading up to the march, Montreal police planned to prevent marchers from coming onto the McGill campus and to make it extremely difficult for protesters to gather anywhere near the university. According to Don Mitchell, social justice and rights to urban space "are not determined in the abstract, but rather in practice."²⁷ In this sense, the conflict over McGill was, at least to some extent, a conflict over who owned and controlled Montreal itself. Protesters denounced the university's isolation from the interests of the majority of citizens and, in their eyes, to protest anywhere else would have merely reinforced McGill's lack of accountability to the Quebec people.

The first organizational meetings for Opération McGill, bringing together anglophone radicals and the largely francophone organizations of the extra-parliamentary opposition, began in the

/23/ Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 25.

/24/ *Ibid.*, 74.

/25/ Jean-Philippe Warren notes, for example, the joining of students and workers in the protest against Murray Hill in October 1968. Warren, "L'Opération McGill français", 98.

/26/ Vincent Prince, "Quelques réflexions sur la manifestation de vendredi soir à l'université McGill," *Le Devoir*, 31 March 1969, 4.

/27/ Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003), 6.

aftermath of the MIS protests on McGill campus in the fall of 1968.²⁸ Francophone radicals felt that challenging the hegemony of McGill allowed them to attack many symbols at once: the legacy of colonialism, the injustices of capitalism, the present-day dominance of the English language, anglophone control over the Quebec economy, and the inadequacy of the francophone education system. It allowed them to link opposition to colonialism with the opposition to hierarchies in the educational system, and to combine these struggles with the issue of access to university for francophones.²⁹ At the same time, some anglophone students had come to see that, if they wanted to forge a working-class movement, they would need to join forces with francophone groups.³⁰ Before long, in schools and CEGEPS around Montreal, hundreds of committees sprang up, and many began predicting that the demonstration would be the largest in the history of Quebec.³¹ The coalition received the support of the Mouvement de libération du taxi, citizens' and workers' committees, the Comité Vallières-Gagnon, the Chevaliers de l'indépendance and, most importantly, the Montreal Central Council of the CSN (representing the CSN's 65,000 Montreal workers).³²

From its origins as a confessional Catholic union, the CSN (Confédération des syndicats nationaux) had always paid special attention to the French language. Although the initial motivation for establishing the union was religion rather than language, from 1921 until 1969 the union consistently passed resolutions advocating the defence of French language rights in a bilingual Canada.³³ But upholding Canadian bilingualism is a far cry from supporting French unilingualism. By the late 1960s, the question of French unilingualism had been explicitly placed in the larger framework of the struggle over power in Quebec, and it quickly became a central platform in the fight for decolonization. The election of Michel Chartrand to the presidency of the Montreal Central Council of the CSN at the end of 1968 marked an important moment for Quebec labour. Opération McGill was, in fact, the Central Council's

first major demonstration. In the weeks leading up to the march on McGill, Chartrand invited Gray to speak before a General Assembly of the Central Council. In an explosive hall packed with workers, Gray outlined the case against McGill, the destructive power of imperialism, and the need for decolonization. And he watched as huge piles of the newspaper *Bienvenue à McGill* were devoured by the anxious audience. In the period leading up to the protest Gray, Michel Chartrand and Raymond Lemieux toured the province, being greeted by enthusiastic crowds everywhere that they went.³⁴ On 26 March 1969, just two days before the protest, flyers announced a "teach-in" to be held in the ballroom of the University Centre featuring talks by, among others, Léandre Bergeron, Michel Chartrand, Raymond Lemieux and, of course, Stanley Gray.³⁵

/28/Chodos, "Hitting a Sore Spot," 4.

/29/Pierre Beaudet, *On a raison de se révolter. Chronique des années 70* (Montréal: Les Éditions Écosociété, 2008), 79.

/30/Interview with Stan Gray, June 10, 2005, Hamilton. It should be noted that some leftist groups at McGill refused to participate in the march, as they saw it as not focused enough on issues of class. See Warren, "L'Opération McGill français," 102.

/31/Beaudet, *On a raison de se révolter*, 79.

/32/Allnutt and Chodos, "Quebec," 42. Also, see Louis Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestine* (Outremont: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998), 203. The Central Council voted to support the protest on the 28, denounced McGill and invited all workers to take part in the march on the university. It also pledged \$100 to the organization that published *Bienvenue à McGill*. In the protest that took place on the evening of 28 March, many workers of various affiliations took the advice of the Montreal Central Council and attended. Archives de la CSN (ASCN), CCSNM fonds, Congrès 1969, Fernand Foisy, "Rapport du secrétaire - décisions du comité exécutif," 7, 26.

/33/Jacques Rouillard, "La CSN et la protection de la langue française (1921- 1996)," *La CSN, 75 ans d'action syndicale et sociale*, Yves Bélanger and Robert Comeau, eds. (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1998), 12-15.

/34/Interview with Stan Gray, 10 June 2005, Hamilton. Also, see Gray, "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian...Shit-Disturber," 14.

/35/McGill University Archives (MUA), Opération McGill, RG2 C401. Flyer for "teach in" at McGill held 26 March 1969, n.d.

While the growing coalition prepared for the march, the university administration became increasingly concerned about Gray's presence on campus. On 11 February 1969, the same day as the Sir George Williams Affair, Gray was given notice that he was being fired from his job at the university. Although the reason cited for his dismissal was his disruption of a Board of Governors' meeting, many believed that the real reason was Gray's effort to bring student activism off the McGill campus and into the city.³⁶ Gray's termination hearings demonstrated both the new coalition and the new lines of opposition that were being drawn. While some members of the English-speaking establishment wondered why McGill had hired "such a dirty, unkempt creature" in the first place,³⁷ the CSN assigned two of its staff lawyers, Jacques Desmarais and Robert Burns, to Gray's defence; both refused to speak English at the hearings.³⁸ Michel Chartrand issued a statement supporting Gray, declaring that, from "its behavior, it is becoming simpler to visualize McGill as some university in South Africa."³⁹

Many members of the English-speaking community condemned the movement.⁴⁰ Its organizers and sympathizers were routinely harassed by police, residences were put under surveillance, cars were followed, and arbitrary arrests were made. On 18 March, the police arrested, among others, Mark Starowicz and Robert Chodos from the *McGill Daily*, Louis-Bernard Robitaille from *La Presse*, Stanley Gray, and an assorted group of activists that included CSN militants, members of the Mouvement de libération du taxi, a professor, an unemployed man, and a bureaucrat – all of whom were returning from an assembly of the Montreal Central Council.⁴¹ In the week leading up to the protest, many of the main organizers had to go underground to avoid police harassment.⁴² The movement received scorn from many of the city's mainstream nationalists, including the editorialists of the province's major newspapers. Claude Ryan, editor of *Le Devoir*, for example, argued that the English-speaking community in Quebec merited its own schools, not only because its numbers warranted them,

but also because of its very long, distinguished, and honourable tradition.⁴³ To the movement's organizers, that the majority of French editorials denounced the demonstration merely proved the alternative nature of their project.⁴⁴ But it was not only the city's newspapers that kept their distance from the movement. All the main political parties, including the newly formed Parti Québécois and its leader René Lévesque, distanced themselves from the protesters.⁴⁵ Even the Société Saint Jean Baptiste de Montréal, the traditional mouthpiece of French-Canadian nationalism, and one of the most ardent defenders of linguistic rights, decided that it would have nothing to do with the march.⁴⁶

/36/Marlene Dixon, *Things Which Are Done in Secret* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1976), 50. *The McGill Daily*, of course, immediately rallied to his defense. See, for example, Robert Chodos and Mark Starowicz, "Don't Put Out the Fire - Stop the Fire Alarm," *McGill Daily*, 13 February 1969, 4.

/37/MUA, Opération McGill fonds, RG2 C 401, Message left by Mrs Roschon for Rocke Robertson, 10 March 1969

/38/"Gray Outlines Defence," *McGill Daily (extra)*, 2 April 1969, 3.

/39/Michel Chartrand, "Chartrand Statement," *McGill Daily*, 3 March 1969, 3.

/40/See the many memos and documents held in MUA, Opération McGill fonds, RG2 c401.

/41/William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections (WRDA), Opération McGill fonds, Organizers of Opération McGill français in Regards to Police Actions, 30 March 1969, 1, and Louis Fournier, *FLQ: Histoire d'un mouvement clandestin* (Outremont: Lanctôt edition, 1998), 203.

/42/Gray, "Stan Gray: The Greatest Canadian...Shit-Disturber," 14.

/43/Claude Ryan, "Éditorial: McGill et son avenir," *Le Devoir*, 26 March 1969.

/44/WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, Organizers of Opération McGill français in Regards to Police Actions, 30 March 1969, 4.

/45/Allnutt and Chodos, "Quebec: Into the Streets," 42.

/46/"La SSJB de Montréal se dissocie de la manifestation de vendredi prochain," *Le Devoir*, 26 March 1969, Cahier 2.

THE ARGUMENT

The distance between Opération McGill and the mainstream nationalist movement was at least partly a product of the latter's reaction to the militant tone and uncompromising attitude of the mostly young activists organizing the protest. The organizers of Opération McGill spoke a language of absolutes, one very much shaped by the certainties of youth. But there were ideological divisions as well, as Opération McGill explicitly framed its struggle as one of overcoming not only linguistic, but also economic power.

In the middle of February 1969, the *McGill Daily* published Stanley Gray's "McGill and the Rape of Quebec," an article which, reprinted in publications throughout the province, played a central role in shaping the ideology of the movement. The article was indebted to the language of Quebec decolonization, inheriting both the insights and limitations of the larger movement. Gray's very title reveals his reliance on the heavily gendered language of decolonization that had been characteristic of the movement since its beginning. Gray not only spoke of the "Rape of Quebec," but also of how "the university's academics act as the intellectual whores of the Establishment."⁴⁷ Gray was not alone in using gendered metaphors in his attempt to highlight power relations in the province. Mark Starowicz, for example, caricatured the administration's pronouncements in defence of the university as an attempt to pose "the spectre of McGill the innocent virgin standing naked before thousands of sexually deprived separatists."⁴⁸ By using gendered metaphors representing women as either passive victims or as "whores," these writers tried to deconstruct systems of power and oppression, but in doing so they relied on a gendered language that embedded new forms of exclusion.

"McGill and the Rape of Quebec" not only addresses the role of the university in society, but also strives to expose the democratic potential dormant in its structure. The article begins with the premise that for the past two hundred years Quebec has been colonized, its natural resources owned by British and then American capital, and its people exploited by foreign elites (with the collusion of local leaders).⁴⁹ And there was perhaps no better symbol of this foreign domination, Gray argued, than McGill University. The McGill Board of Governors personified Quebec's ruling corporate elite, representing corporations that had "a relationship to Quebec similar to that of the United Fruit Company to Latin America banana republics – absentee owners of the economy, plundering the nation's natural resources and taking the profits out of the country."⁵⁰ That Quebec's richest and most important institution functioned in English was not an accident of history, Gray argued: the English language had been imposed on Quebecers by "military conquest, political colonization and economic domination." Colonialism had ensured that the "two major contradictions operating within Quebec society – the class conflict pitting workers against the interests of private profit, and the national conflict pitting the nation on the bottom against the nation on top – are thus integrally related." Echoing the simplistic Manichaeism of *La Revue socialiste* in the late 1950s, Gray argued that when workers went on strike against major corporations, "the French are almost wholly on one side and the English almost wholly on the other." In Quebec, there were two forms of exploitation –

/47/Stan Gray, "For a Critical University," 4, and "McGill and the Rape of Quebec - Part I," *McGill Daily*, 10 February 1969, 4-5.

/48/Mark Starowicz, "Terrorism in the Press," *McGill Daily*, 2 April 1969, 6.

/49/Gray, "McGill and the Rape of Quebec - Part I," 4.

/50/Ibid.

class and national – but these two different forms of domination were fused together, and McGill, Gray maintained, was “on the wrong side of both.”⁵¹

Gray’s analyses of Quebec society and of McGill’s role within it were repeated by student publications throughout the city, from the *McGill Daily* to the papers of francophone CEGEPS. When, in March 1969, Maurice Roy of the Université de Montréal’s *Le Quartier latin* telephoned Mark Starowicz to inquire into the *Daily*’s position on the upcoming demonstration, for example, he was both surprised and pleased that, while the *Daily* supported a French-language McGill, Starowicz made a point of indicating that “it was not merely a linguistic question: the editors of the *Daily* are demanding a socialization of McGill.” If it was a question “of creating a second ‘Université de Montréal,’” Starowicz was reported to have said, they would no longer take part. The editors of the *Daily*, Roy wrote, “define themselves as indépendantistes and socialists, and are unable to disassociate the two concepts.”⁵²

Because of its function as a training centre for the managers of American capital, the CEGEP students at Collège Sainte-Marie in Montreal argued, “McGill has become the bastion of Canadian and American imperialism.” As the university was guilty of “the exploitation of thousands of Quebec workers and entire populations,” and formed an important part of the American military industrial complex, it became clear that the liberation of Quebec workers “passes through McGill.”⁵³ For J.-P. Dallaire of *Le Quartier latin*, McGill had become the symbol of a “colonial minority,” and it was becoming more and more clear that the university was an obstacle to any progress of the Quebec people.⁵⁴ In a future independent and socialist Quebec, McGill would not only have to become a French-language institution, but revise its relationship with the population.⁵⁵

In a widely-circulated document signed by many of the groups involved in organizing Opération McGill⁵⁶ – a document which became something of a manifesto for the movement⁵⁷ – the current inequities of the Quebec educational system were traced back to the Conquest of 1759. Because of the fortune of the English-speaking bourgeoisie, the quality of English-language

/51/ Stan Gray, “McGill and Quebec, Part II,” *McGill Daily*, 12 February 1969. For a similar use of broad generalizations describing the relations of labour and capital in Quebec, see Mark Wilson, “A Short History of McGill,” in the *McGill Student Handbook* (1969).

/52/ Maurice Roy, “La gauche mcgilloise: ‘pas une deuxième université de Montréal,’” *Le Quartier latin*, 18 March 1969, 5.

/53/ WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, “Who’s Who in that Two-Faced McGill?” *Le Sainte-marie: journal des étudiants du collège Sainte-Marie de Montréal*, 24 March 1969, 7.

/54/ J.-P. Dallaire, “McGill un autre St. Léonard?,” *Le Quartier latin*, 18 March 1969, 2.

/55/ Ibid.

/56/ The signatories included the following organizations: Comité Indépendance-Socialisme; Comités d’action des CEGEPS: Ahuntsic (St-Ignace), Bois-de-Boulogne, De Mortagne, Edouard-Montpetit, Maisonneuve, Rosemont, Vieux Montréal (Arts Appliqués, Marie-Victorin, Ste-Marie); Comités Ouvriers: Rosemont, Ste-Marie; Comité d’action de l’U. de M. (Hec. Philosophie, Sciences sociales, Histoire, Lettres); Comité d’action école normale Ville-Marie; Front de libération populaire; Intellectuels ouvriers patriotes du Québec; McGill radical students alliance; Mouvement d’intégration scolaire; Mouvement pour l’unilinguisme français au Québec; Société nationale populaire; Université libre d’art quotidien; Union générale des étudiants du secondaire. The document was republished in various newspapers, but it was not reproduced in exact detail everywhere. In the student newspaper for Montreal’s Sainte-Marie’s College, for example, the following uncompromising concluding paragraph was added: “Selon Albert Memmi, il y a deux réponses possibles pour le colonisé face à la violence de la situation coloniale: l’identification aux colonialistes ou la recherche d’une identité; donc... soumission ou révolte.” WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, “Who’s Afraid of a French McGill?,” *Le Sainte-Marie*, 24 March 1969, 2-3.

/57/ See “Une douzaine d’organismes signent un manifeste sur ‘l’opération McGill,’” *Le Devoir*, 13 March 1969, 3.

universities was far superior to that of their French-language counterparts, which reflected "the painful history of a defeated, conquered and dominated nation." The statistics seemed to speak for themselves: although francophones made up 83% of Quebec society, of Quebec's six universities, three were English. Anglophones comprised 17% of the population, but they occupied 42% of all university places and received 30% of Quebec government grants. McGill had a research budget equivalent to the budgets of the Université de Montréal and Laval combined, and its library – not accessible to the general public – had the best collection of Quebec literature in the province. McGill's tuition was two hundred dollars more than that of other universities and, to top it all off, the document argued, the school regularly awarded honorary doctorates to Anglo-American financiers who were responsible for the exploitation of the Quebec people.⁵⁸

Of all the documents, papers, and flyers produced by Opération McGill, the most important was *Bienvenue à McGill*. Originally conceived as a French edition of the *McGill Daily*,⁵⁹ the paper was funded by the *comités d'actions* of a number of CEGEPS, and by the Montreal Central Council of the CSN. Over 90,000 copies were printed and were distributed in schools, factories, metro stations, and political meetings.⁶⁰ This paper, more than any other document, spoke for the movement, outlining the reasons why students, workers, and activists needed to take to the streets in protest. McGill needed to be opposed, the paper argued, because it was the living symbol of the two hundred years during which Quebec had been exploited by imperial powers. In support of this argument *Bienvenue à McGill* reprinted Michèle Lalonde's poem "Speak White," and to demonstrate its internationalism, the paper reprinted a letter of solidarity from the national bureau of the German S.D.S. (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund), the main organization of the German New Left, which stated:

Today, in the context of international interdependence, international solidarity is not only a question of moral sympathy towards people who are struggling for their liberation. The victory of the Vietnamese is also our victory, the repression against movements in Quebec is also repression against us. The S.D.S. movement has followed the development of an anti-imperialist consciousness in Quebec with much interest, sympathy, and solidarity. The National Bureau of the S.D.S. therefore expresses its total support of the struggle of the Québécois against Anglo-Saxon cultural imperialism.⁶¹

In its attempt to reach a wide constituency, *Bienvenue à McGill* reached out to workers, printing a message by Michel Chartrand about the need to restructure Quebec's economy, and arguing that if McGill were simply to become another French-language university, little would change. The university system itself needed to be radically democratized, and put to the service of ordinary people. Chartrand's argument was taken up by Gray who emphasized the enormous potential that the university possessed. If the university was put in the hands of the people, he

/58/WRDA, Opération McGill fonds, "Operation McGill" typed document (Montreal, March 1969), 2-6.

/59/The McGill student council, which had originally agreed to provide the funding for the special edition of the paper, revised its decision, believing that the paper raised the possibility of inciting violence. "Des étudiants de McGill publient un journal en français," *Le Devoir*, 19 March 1969, 16.

/60/"Hitting a Sore Spot," 5. "Des étudiants de McGill publient un journal en français," 16. ACSN, CCSNM fonds, Congrès 1969, Fernand Foisy, "Rapport du secrétaire - décisions du comité exécutif," 7.

/61/WRDA, Opération McGill fonds. "Message de solidarité avec la manifestation McGill," *Bienvenue à McGill*: Journal publié par des étudiants de l'Université McGill appuyant la manifestation du 28 mars. n.d.

argued, it could become "a centre of research and teaching which would help give the population the means of taking control of its own destiny." But if McGill did not change, did not democratize, "an increasing number of *Québécois* will perceive it as a threat to their self-realization, as an obstacle to their liberation."⁶²

The protest at McGill articulated a complicated mix of national and social demands, so it would be wrong to attribute it to either nationalism or socialism alone. One of the major points of contention around the event was its very name. Many were dismayed when the socialistic *Opération McGill* gave way to the more nationalistic "McGill français."⁶³ When the organizers of the protest allowed the media to present the event as more focused on language than class, they faced a revolt from francophone students and workers, who had become angry by the downplaying of the class-based struggle of the movement's origins.⁶⁴

Most people at McGill did not support the protest or the larger politics of anti-colonialism in Quebec,⁶⁵ of course, yet an important consequence of *Opération McGill* was the radicalization of a new generation of anglophones who would continue to defend the cause of Quebec decolonization. Many of the radical writers from the *McGill Daily* went on to found *The Last Post*, an English-language journal which sought to connect readers with the radical political movements in Quebec, hoping to be a Canadian version of *Ramparts*. The journal stands alone as the one major English-Canadian publication to be born out of the struggle for Quebec decolonization. For the Quebec student movement, which had played such an important role in politicizing questions of language and education, and which had exploded onto the scene in the fall of 1968, 1969 would be the beginning of its unravelling, as it was crushed under the weight of its own voluntarism and the polarizing nature of its own rhetoric.⁶⁶

In many ways, *Opération McGill français* was just another ephemeral protest of the 1960s: a protest that brought diverse groups together temporarily, but which did not lead to any lasting political organization. Yet, the protests around McGill had brought questions of language, power, economics, and education to the centre of political discussion, and contributed much to an atmosphere that would bring tens of thousands to the streets in the fall of 1969.

BILLS 63, DECOLONIZATION, AND NATIONALISM

The MIS/Ligue pour l'intégration scolaire (LIS)⁶⁷ organized public meetings and demonstrations to discuss the language of schooling in Saint-Léonard throughout 1969. On 10 September, as the LIS decided to march through the neighbourhood demanding that the language of education be French, Italian demonstrators lined

/62/WRDA, *Opération McGill fonds*. Stan Gray, "McGill: Option Anti-Quebec" *Bienvenue à McGill*, 4-5.

/63/Beaudet, *On a raison de se révolter*, 80.

/64/My thanks to Mark Wilson for this insight.

/65/For a critical assessment of radical student politics at McGill from the incoming president of the McGill students' society, see Julius Grey, "What Is McGill, What Are We Doing Here, and What Ought We To Do?," in *McGill Student Handbook* (1969).

/66/For a detailed discussion of these events, see Warren, *Une douce anarchie*.

/67/On 16 March 1969, the MIS held a meeting at which it changed its name to the Ligue pour l'intégration scolaire (LIS). The chair of the assembly, Pierre Jobin of Laval University, had difficulty maintaining a quorum in the tumultuous assembly, where amendments, propositions, and counter-propositions were debated simultaneously. François Barbeau, "Le MIS devient la Ligue pour l'intégration scolaire et adopte sa première constitution," *Le Devoir*, 17 mars 1969, 3.

the roads yelling insults. Before long a riot broke out; fifty people were arrested, one hundred were injured, and for the first time since 1957 the Riot Act was read in Montreal.⁶⁸

With linguistic tensions growing more pronounced by the day, Quebec's Union Nationale government realized that it would need to enter into the explosive debate. On 23 October 1969, Bertrand presented his solution to the linguistic crisis, Bill 63. Many features of the Bill were intended to promote the French language; immigrants would be encouraged to learn French, an "Office de la langue française" would be established, and all graduates from Quebec schools would be expected to have a working knowledge of the language. But these elements did not ease the worries of Quebec nationalists, when compared to the Bill's one key provision: all parents in the province – francophones included – would be able to choose whether their children would be educated in either English or French.⁶⁹ By guaranteeing English-language schooling rights, the government was seen to be giving a privileged place to the language of the dominant class. Because it was unrealistic to expect immigrants to choose to educate their children in a language that would ensure economic marginalization, Bill 63 was seen by many as "one more step in the direction of the cultural genocide of the Quebec nation."⁷⁰

Virtually all the opposition movements in Montreal began to mobilize against the Bill. Labour unions, student groups, and extra-parliamentary organizations began moving into action. But unlike the lead-up to Opération McGill, this time protest would not come from the left alone. Both the Parti Québécois and the Société Saint-Jean Baptiste joined the ranks of opposition and, on the first Saturday after Bertrand unveiled Bill 63, over 600 individuals representing a wide variety of groups gathered in a common front. Over one hundred groups came together to form the Front du Québec français (FQF), and they decided that they would organize

a week of protest to mobilize public opinion against the passing of the Bill.⁷¹ Within days, streets across the province were filled with protesters forming the largest popular mobilisation since the conscription crisis of the Second World War.

The FQF's main spokesperson was François-Albert Angers, president of the Société Saint Jean Baptiste de Montréal. Angers declared that the struggle against Bill 63 was a new Battle of the Plains of Abraham, and he affirmed that Quebec premier Jean-Jacques Bertrand was a new General Wolfe. By giving English equal legal status to French, he argued, the National Assembly was de facto legislating anglophone superiority. From its very beginnings, the FQF outlined its demands in purely linguistic rather than social and economic terms. As a solution to the language problem, the FQF demanded that the government present the population with a comprehensive policy and that it proclaim French unilingualism at all levels.⁷² While many groups involved in the protests saw them as evidence of a mass desire for change, it was the FQF that succeeded in becoming the main voice of opposition to Bill 63.

/68/Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal*, 78.

/69/Ibid., 79.

/70/WRDA, Stanley Gray fonds, Box 1, Stanley Gray, "The Struggle in Quebec - 1969." Speech delivered at the Year of the Barricade conference at Glendon College in Toronto on 25 October 1969, 11.

/71/Gilles Provost, "Un Front commun du 'Québec français' organise la résistance contre le bill 63," *Le Devoir*, 27 October 1969, 1. For details on the functioning of the FQF, see Denis Turcotte, *La culture politique du Mouvement Québec Français*, (Quebec: Centre international de Recherche sur le bilinguisme, 1976), 10-12.

/72/Provost, "Un Front commun du 'Québec français' organise la résistance contre le bill 63," 1-2.

The FQF – bringing together groups from both the right and the left – spoke in a language of nationalism that blurred class distinctions and relations of economic power. There is no better expression of this outlook than François-Albert Angers himself, speaking before the Montreal Central Council of the CSN (Confédération des syndicats nationaux). Appealing to the CSN workers as the “elite of the working class” and then as “simply the elite of Quebec,” Angers argued that:

French is the mother tongue of the entire population, and when it is in danger, there are no more workers, no more lawyers, there must no longer be business men, or professors, but there are only francophone Quebecers, defending their life, their very existence, their right to work in French, to speak French, in the language of their mothers and fathers.⁷³

For Angers, the linguistic problems in Quebec were the result of conquest, by which one group imposed its language onto another. To anglophones who argued for parents’ right to choose, he stated that true linguistic rights were the rights “of a group to conserve its culture in spite of conquests.”⁷⁴ The only solution was for francophone Quebec to close ranks, ignore distinctions between workers and professionals, put aside questions class and power differences, and fight for the preservation of the nation.

But at the same time another vision was being articulated which considered the interrelationship of class and language, and envisioned social transformation in different ways. Although the FQF was seen as the dominant voice of opposition to Bill 63, the crowds that spilled into Montreal streets in the first week of protests had an agenda that could not be controlled by a single voice at the top. According to one young activist, Bill 63 was denounced because it merely reproduced colonial structures. “At

a fundamental level,” he argues, “it was not a linguistic question, but a political one.”⁷⁵ Workers, students, and independent leftists organized themselves to mobilize in the streets. Student and citizen groups worked to mobilize their constituencies, and a coalition of leftist groups even formed a common front of their own, “Front commun contre le Bill 63.” This alternative common front ran parallel to the FQF and acted as the main organizational force behind many of the demonstrations during the first week after Bill 63 was unveiled.⁷⁶

The first major protest, held Tuesday 28 October, was organized by the combined forces of student and other leftist groups. Students throughout the province disrupted the regular functioning of their schools by organizing study sessions, but it was in Montreal that the largest and most dramatic protests were held. Ten thousand students marched through the city before converging on the sports centre of the Université de Montréal, where they were met by thousands of others. At certain moments, there were more than 11,000 students packed into an arena that held 4,500; the ice surface and aisles were covered with people and, in the end, over 20,000 students rotated in and out of the arena for a massive teach-in.⁷⁷ Michel Chartrand, Pierre Bourgault,

/73/ (ACSN), CCSNM fonds, Assemblée Générale, François-Albert Angers, invité, 18 novembre 1969, 85-6.

/74/WRDA, Campaign Against Bill 63 fonds, F.-Albert Angers, “Le Droit des parents,” *L’Information nationale*, November 1969, 7.

/75/Beaudet, *On a raison de se révolter*, 88.

/76/Léandre Bergeron, *The History of Quebec: A Patriot’s Handbook* updated ed. (Toronto: NC Press, 1971), 226, and Stan Gray, “Le mouvement contre le bill 63,” *Mobilisation* 5 (1970): 17-18.

/77/Gilles Provost, “Des milliers d’étudiants descendent dans la rue,” *Le Devoir*, 29 October 1969, 1-2.

and Raymond Lemieux spoke to the receptive crowd, telling them that their purpose in opposing Bill 63 was to stop English from serving as the "main tool in the oppression of the Quebec people."⁷⁸

On Wednesday 29 October, a coalition of workers' and citizens' committees⁷⁹ organized a massive protest that brought at least 25,000 citizens to the streets of Montreal. Protesters met in the early evening at four rallying points, in Saint-Henri, downtown, and in the east and the north ends; they were soon joined by groups of students who had been roaming the city throughout the day, and who had gathered at Parc Lafontaine in preparation for the march. The itinerary of the march reveals much about its underlying ideology. The mass of protesters walked past the main sites of power in Montreal, first to City Hall and then west to Square Victoria, the heart of the city's business district. Standing before offices including those of the Conseil du patronat and the Montreal Chamber of Commerce, the crowd lit a large bonfire and burned Bertrand, mayor Jean Drapeau, and others in effigy. The protesters then marched back along Dorchester and up to Parc Lafontaine, where they lit more fires, burnt more effigies, and then dispersed.⁸⁰ By marching through the city's main sites of economic and political power, the crowd demonstrated that their struggle was about more than just language.

While the FQF did not oppose the protests organized by students and workers, neither did it do anything to aid them. Instead, it planned a massive rally in Quebec City on Friday 31 October. The protest, which started out calmly, erupted into violence when protesters began throwing bottles at police. It did not take long for the police to respond with tear gas, and for chaos to ensue.⁸¹ By the end of the unprecedented week of protests, it was clear that opposition to Bill 63 was profound. The groups of workers, students, and leftist organizations did not have a coherent ideology, but, for all of them, Bill 63 fit within a larger conception of

the colonized nature of Quebec society. According to a pamphlet issued by a variety of neighbourhood workers' committees, Bill 63, the "Bill of electoral donations," facilitated the exploitation of Quebec workers by the province's anglophone minority.⁸²

The newly-minted *Québec-Presse* – a weekly newspaper founded by the left to provide a counter-weight to the mainstream media – outlined its own rationale for opposing Bill 63. The French language was in danger in Quebec, the paper argued, because francophones increasingly needed to be able to speak English – the language of power and authority – to survive. Reinforcing this unequal power relationship, Bill 63 was designed by either "the conqueror" or "the *roi-nègre*," and was not legislated by "a free government."⁸³ The editors of the paper recognized that parents could not be blamed for sending their children to English-language schools, because everyone knew that speaking English was economically advantageous.⁸⁴ An in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the language problem therefore revealed that

/78/ Ibid., 2.

/79/ According to Gray, the protest was organized by the FLP and its worker committees, with the collaboration of the Saint Jacques citizens' committee. See "Le mouvement contre le bill 63," in *Mobilisations* 5 (1970): 17-18.

/80/ "Une mer de manifestants déferle rue Craig," *Le Devoir*, 30 October 1969, 1-2.

/81/ Jean-Luc Duguay, "La violence éclate devant le parlement," *Le Devoir*, 1 November 1969, 1.

/82/ WRDA, Campaign Against Bill 63 fonds, "Travailleurs unissons nous contre le bill 63, pamphlet put out by the Comité ouvrier de St-Henri, Comité ouvrier de St-Marie, Comité ouvrier Centre-Ville, Comité ouvrier Hochelaga Maisonneuve, Comité de citoyens de Mercier, Comité de citoyens de St-Jacques, n.d.

/83/ "Notre position," *Québec-Presse*, 2 November 1969, 1 A.

/84/ "Le Bill 63," *Québec-Presse*, 2 November 1969, 7 A.

focusing only on the language of education was putting the “cart before the horse.” Was the problem of language at work, the paper asked, not an effect of social and economic factors?⁸⁵

When the Parti québécois – with the collaboration of the CSN, the CEQ (Corporation des enseignants du Québec), the Alliance des Professeurs de Montréal, the FTQ, the Fédération des Sociétés Saint-Jean Baptiste and the SSJB de Montréal—published a special edition of *Pouvoir*, the differing ways of understanding the language problem in Quebec were made apparent. On the one hand, the paper reprinted a speech by Jérôme Proulx, an ex-Union Nationale deputy who left the party when it unveiled Bill 63. Proulx, far from seeing the world through the lens of global anti-imperialism, made ample use of traditional nationalist tropes, speaking of a “betrayal to the direction of history,” and about “how there exists only one true loyalty, one solidarity, that which we owe to our nation, our people, ourselves.”⁸⁶ While the paper printed Proulx’s speech, it also published speeches by Raymond Parent of the CSN and Fernand Daoust of the FTQ, both of whom insisted that the struggle for language rights needed to be placed within a larger frame of reference. Parent argued that while the causes of the present linguistic crisis were multifaceted, they included both the power and influence of English Canada and the United States, and the separation under capitalism between “the economic rulers” who were “mostly anglophone,” and the “mass of the population.” “Taken as a whole,” Parent argued, “we believe that the future of a threatened and compromised culture like ours depends on a deeply popular movement, one which is political, economic, and social.”⁸⁷ Fernand Daoust, for his part, argued that English was the language of prestige and economic power and French the language of unemployment and uncertainty. The FTQ rejoiced in the knowledge that the population “has begun to wake up and that more and more, it has decided to take its destiny into its own hands.”⁸⁸

While both the street politics and the political language of opposition to Bill 63 were profoundly influenced by ideas about socialist decolonization, this was not the only theory inspiring the protests. Many, especially those who protested at the National Assembly on 31 October, drew on the tropes of traditional nationalism to denounce the actions of the government. But most were simply caught up in the public expression of outrage; protesters on the streets articulated an ambiguous mélange of nationalism, Marxism, and national liberation. And yet, despite the mixing of perspectives and movements, many voices were left unheard, suppressed, or at the very least pushed to the sidelines. If the language of schooling for immigrants sparked the crisis in the first place, why were the voices of those immigrants – and especially of the many immigrants on the left who formed such an important part of Montreal’s radical community – not being heard?

A QUESTION OF IMMIGRANTS?

During the 1960s, conceptions of the nation in Quebec underwent an important symbolic transformation from an ethnically defined “French-Canadian” nation to a more *territorially* defined nationalism, represented by Quebec as a state. With this transformation, Martin Pâquet has argued, came a new political culture and new conceptions of citizenship, as relations between the individual and society increasingly came to be defined in contractual terms

/85/ Ibid.

/86/WRDA, FRAP fonds, ‘Jérôme Proulx,’ *Le Pouvoir* 2, no. 4. n.d., 2.

/87/WRDA, FRAP fonds, Raymond Parent, “La CSN,” *Le Pouvoir* 2, no. 4. n.d., 2.

/88/WRDA, FRAP fonds, Fernand Daoust, “La FTQ,” *Le Pouvoir* 2, no. 4. n.d., 3.

rather than organic ones.⁸⁹ Rather than seeing immigration as a destabilizing force for the nation, as earlier nationalists had done, many mainstream nationalists in the 1960s began to see immigration in instrumental terms. They came, in other words, to believe that the successful integration of immigrants into the francophone community was essential for the survival and development of the nation.⁹⁰

The struggle against Bill 63 revolved specifically around the language in which new immigrants would be educated. It was a fight over which linguistic community in Montreal, the French or the English, would, in the face of a dramatically declining birth-rate, continue to grow.⁹¹ Leftists in Montreal consistently included immigrants in their descriptions of the oppressed in Quebec. The problem they saw was not that immigrants were refusing to integrate into a new society, but rather that they were integrating, for reasons of economic necessity, into the language and culture of the dominant power.

At the same time that debates about the place of immigrants in Quebec society brought Montreal to a standstill, however, many immigrants themselves were demanding that their voices be heard. On 12 November 1969, Kimon Valaskakis, a self-declared "néo-Québécois," published a moving article in *Le Devoir* in which he described his interpretation of the debate around Bill 63. Valaskakis was encouraged to see a "long oppressed population deciding to take to the streets to demonstrate its desire to avoid fading away," and he was convinced that the "neo-Quebecker certainly needs to assimilate into the *québécois* milieu." Nonetheless, despite the excitement of the moment, he worried about the near unanimous response of civil society to Bill 63. He objected to both nationalist arguments and to the left-wing rhetoric which too easily conflated language and class on two grounds: "1) not all of the exploited are francophones; 2) not all francophones are exploited." To the

contention that language was an arm of domination, Valaskakis responded that this argument did not take adequate account of the political, economic, and military dimensions of domination, against which speaking French offered little protection. And it was not just francophones who were poor: the two ethnic groups that ranked below them, Italians and Natives, were predominantly English-speaking.⁹²

What made Quebec unique, for Valaskakis, was that it escaped the prison of monolithism that entrapped so many other societies. Montreal symbolized:

a veritable mosaic of nationalities, ideas, and points of view. Here we have an open society, and therefore a rich and fertile one. Here we have, in opposition to the old

/89/Martin Pâquet, "Un nouveau contrat social. Les États généraux du Canada français et l'immigration, novembre 1967," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 10, no. 2 (2002)

/90/Ibid., 132. For a fuller discussion of these developments, see Martin Pâquet, *Tracer les marges de la cote. Étranger, Immigrant et État au Québec, 1627-1981* (Montréal: Éditions du Boréal, 2005).

/91/It is, of course, rather ironic that the debate was framed around the integration of immigrants. According to Michael Behiels, throughout most of the twentieth century, neither francophone nor anglophone communities were particularly eager to accommodate immigrants, and neither "wanted the provincial government to alter the dual ethnic and religious constitutional structure." "Their respective unwillingness to come to terms with religious and ethnic pluralism," Behiels argues, "set the pattern for nearly seven decades and contributed in no small measure to the linguistic and cultural crises of the 1970s and 80s." Michael Behiels, *Quebec and the Question of Immigration: From Ethnocentrism to Ethnic Pluralism, 1900-1985* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), 5.

/92/Kimon Valaskakis, "La crise du bill 63 vue par un Néo-Québécois: L'alliance des nationalistes et des mouvements de gauche débouchera-t-elle sur une monolithisme intolérant?" *Le Devoir*, 12 November 1969, 5.

European capitals, a human dimension which is a language without nationality, an aggregate of values, a free spirit.

But Montreal was not only different from Europe – it was also an alternative to the rest of North America. “This character,” he argued, “exists only because of francophone Quebec culture which, through its vitality, has foiled North America. And it is this same society which can either remain multi-dimensional or itself become monolithic.” He worried that nationalism had the potential of denying Quebec’s diversity, and that, if this were to happen, the:

transatlantic and multicultural symbiosis of Quebec will be eliminated. The American melting-pot will be neutralized, but only to be replaced by a new French-language one. Individualities will be broken, dissidents will be treated as foolish and a monolithism as ruthless...and as ugly as its American version will transform us.

“We can therefore ask ourselves,” he wrote, “what would be the interest of being ‘melted’ in French rather than in English?” During their struggle for liberation, he concluded, Quebecers should adopt a form of nationalism which was polyvalent and flexible, one which would undergo perpetual questioning and renewal, and work to create “the first technologically advanced society which would not be one-dimensional.”⁹³

Valaskakis’s intervention, coming just weeks after the beginning of the protests against Bill 63, was prescient and insightful. A struggle for identity that positioned francophones as the victims in Quebec’s historical drama, and which drew a clear line between English capital and French labour, was bound to fail. Life in Montreal was too multifaceted to ever contain only one movement of political opposition with one axis of oppression. In

the radical rhetoric of opposition to McGill or to Bill 63, those on the left often set francophones – seen to be a colonized ethnic class that carried the hopes of a future based on justice and liberty – against the province’s English-speaking minority, portrayed as a parasitical class of settler colonialists and capitalist imperialists. But in between, as the object of struggle, as the silent partner which both sides hoped to “integrate” or “assimilate,” were Montreal’s immigrant communities, almost by definition excluded from the debates. When a group of anglophones who had been radicalized through Opération McGill headed out to Saint-Léonard with the intent of informing the Italian community about the Quebec liberation struggle, for example, few thought of seeking out the perspectives of immigrants themselves.⁹⁴ The independent voices of these communities, although they were beginning to be more loudly articulated, rarely factored into the debates.

Soon these voices would be too loud to be ignored. Haitian emigré groups began publishing newsletters, participating in debates at the Université de Montréal, and appearing on Radio-Canada to discuss their efforts to bring social justice to Haiti.⁹⁵ African groups advocating anti-imperialism and decolonization began publishing newspapers and bulletins.⁹⁶ Montreal’s

/93/ Ibid.

/94/ Rénald Bourque, “L’esprit de Stan Gray n’est pas mort,” *Le Quartier latin*, 1 October 1969, 10.

/95/ UQAM Archives, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21 p 900:04 /67, “Faisons le point,” *Le Bulletin du C.H.A.P.* (Comité haïtien d’action patriotique – Montréal) 20 March 1971, 3.

/96/ See, for example, UQAM, Collection de publications de groupes de gauche et de groupes populaires, 21 p 900:04 /3, *African Voice, Organ of the African Progressive Study Group* 1, no. 2 (Montreal, 10 June 1972).

Vietnamese community organized marches and demonstrations to oppose the war being waged on their country of origin, and exiles from South Africa organized resistance to the Apartheid regime that ruled with brutal terror.⁹⁷ As the vast coalition of francophone radicals attempted to claim public space in the city, therefore, new groups of radical immigrants protesting against the exclusion of minorities from society's larger structures began to emerge. They were intimately involved with the struggles taking place in their countries of origin, yet were also becoming interested in the struggle in Quebec. Many groups even began developing their own spaces of resistance where radical thought could develop. Like the offices of Uhuru and the Negro Community Centre for Black Montrealers, a group of self-defined "Afro-Asians" founded the Ho Chi Minh bookstore, and members of Montreal's Arab community established a Palestinian House.⁹⁸

The Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Committee and the parallel Comité de Solidarité des Peuples d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique Latine eventually went on to establish a "Third World Centre" on University Street, asserting by its very presence that language issues could not capture the full complexity of life in a cosmopolitan city like Montreal. But the "Third World Centre" also maintained a goal that differentiated it from similar centres throughout North America. It hoped not only to broaden "the base for anti-imperialist work among the Third World people," but also to "play its due role in promoting solidarity between the people of Quebec and the people of the Third World."⁹⁹ Already various coalitions of minority groups were claiming to be playing their parts in both worldwide anti-imperialist struggle and politics in Quebec.¹⁰⁰ It would be wrong to argue that inter-ethnic solidarity ever became the driving thrust of politics in Montreal, or that all groups united in opposition to empire. But it is true nonetheless that the history of this period is far more complex than is often portrayed.

This essay is an abridged version of Chapter 6 of Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

/97/ Interview with Daya Varma, 24 June 2007, Montréal.

/98/ See "Fascist Attacks Against Ho Chi Minh Book-Store and Its Workers," *National Minority News* 1, no. 1 (1971): 9, and "Fascist Attacks Against Palestinian House," *National Minority News* 1, no. 1 (1971): 10.

/99/ In the early 1970s, the Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Committee met for discussion groups in English at McGill University on Thursday, and the parallel Comité de Solidarité des Peuples d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique Latine met for their French-language discussion groups on Tuesdays at the newly established Université du Québec à Montréal. See "A Brief Review of Some Activities," *Third World Solidarity: Journal of the Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Committee* 3, no. 1 (1972): 16, and "Third World Centre," *Third World Solidarity* 3, no. 1 (1972): 13.

/100/ "Solidarity Statement by Movement Progressiste Italo-Quebecois," *National Minority News* 1, no. 1 (1971): 14.

Information
from the
Quebec
Underground,
1962-1972

Felicity Tayler

It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come.¹

Jacques Derrida

Preface

It's June 2, 2011, and I'm reading page four of the newspaper distributed for free on public transport. The content is mostly advertising aimed at mobile professionals. Above an ad for the most recent smart phone, there's a hundred words on the strike by workers at Canada Post, and above that a photograph of a funeral. Filmmaker Pierre Falardeau, a hero to generations of Quebec nationalists, lies interred. In the foreground, the sculptor Armand Vaillancourt stands beside the granite tombstone he has created for his friend. The tombstone is inscribed with a letter that Falardeau wrote to his son in 1995, the year of the second referendum on Quebec sovereignty. In the background stand the youth for whom this message continues to resonate. Behind Vaillancourt, unfurls the flag of the Mouvement de libération nationale du Québec (MLNQ), symbol of the stillborn Patriot War, a rebellion against British colonial power in 1837. A striking figure with his full, white beard and long, flowing hair, the artist raises both arms towards the sky. It is a messianic gesture.

/1/ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 36.

Vaillancourt is one of *Les pionniers* ("pioneers") identified in the first volume of *Quebec underground, 1962–1972*, originally published in 1973 as a catalogue to accompany the three-day exhibition of the same name in Montréal. A press clipping from the *San Francisco Examiner* describes a dramatic and critical moment in the installation of Vaillancourt's renowned 1971 commission for the city.² Officially titled *Vaillancourt Fountain* the public sculpture is referred to as *Québec libre!* in the popular imagination. In response to budgetary constraints by the city of San Francisco, the artist, well versed in provocative performance strategies, disrupted the inauguration ceremonies by jumping into the fountain and stenciling the inflammatory slogan, "Québec libre" in red paint. This act was the voice of one individual standing in for the Québécois collective in protest against economic imperialism. Although Vaillancourt echoes French President Charles de Gaulle's famous proclamation, "Vive le Québec libre," made during a 1967 public address in Montréal, the meaning of "Québec libre" in his politics is not simply analogous to "free Québec," that is, Quebec as a sovereign state in the image of the French Republic.³ For Vaillancourt, "freedom" is nuanced by the liberation politics of a counterculture issuing from France and America in the 1960s combined with the activism of a global decolonization movement.

Quebec underground, 1962–1972 serves as a case study in visual art publishing at a time when communications media and the transmission of information were rapidly becoming a pressing concern for artists and other cultural producers. It was also a time when engagement with popular culture meant participation in the collective pursuit of national identity. *Quebec underground* presents us with the traces of a period in which artists conflated the cultural transformation of Quebec society with political discourses reflecting social and economic factors of the period. The new environment of information technologies foretold by Marshall McLuhan was in the early stages of development, while the old paper media of books and magazines still functioned as a parallel information

network. International activism and countercultural movements of the 1960s engaged with publishing and printed matter as a force for social change. In Quebec, this flurry of publishing took place during the Quiet Revolution, when burgeoning economic development coexisted uneasily with a decolonization discourse associated with the international political Left.

Quebec underground was published under the imprint of *Médiart* (1971–1973), a magazine produced by the Groupe de recherche en administration de l'art at l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Students took part in the Groupe de recherche for course credit, but it was no ordinary university seminar, as distinctions of expertise between "student" and "teacher" were collapsed in the name of experiential and participatory learning. Normand Thériault taught the course while on sabbatical from his position as art critic for the *La Presse*. Drawing on his curatorial practice, Thériault saw his pedagogical projects as interventions, a politics that would identify how the ethics of aesthetics were present in the social sphere;⁴ he felt the Quebec art scene was insular, and saw no interest for the Group de recherche to passively learn from existing institutions. His solution was to encourage his students to engage with the scene directly, so that they would themselves become cultural producers. With the help of some twelve to fifteen students (including Chantal Pontbriand and René

/2/ "Québec Libre à San Francisco," *Quebec underground: 1962–1972, Tome 1* (Montreal: Médiart, 1973), 45.

/3/ An article by Gilles Bourque, "De Gaulle, politique et stratégie," *Parti pris* 5.1 (1967): 9–17, presents a nuanced account of the relationship of Quebec's decolonization discourse and the figure of de Gaulle. The suggestion is made to play French imperialism off of American imperialism in the favour of *québécois* socialist self-determination. Gaullism relied on the strict reinforcement of national identity extending to the French colonies.

/4/ Normand Thériault interviewed by Michèle Thériault and Vincent Bonin, Montreal, 5 March 2010.

Blouin), the Groupe de recherche produced a series of ambitious exhibitions and accompanying catalogues, including *Quebec underground, 1962-1972*. Thériault later reflected upon his desire to train a new generation, “qui vont faire en sorte qu’un jour il va se passer quelque chose!”⁵

Quebec underground is dialogic in its assembly and production. The preface identifies the three-volume catalogue as “un produit collectif réalisé sous la direction d’Yves Robillard,” who was responsible for much of the extensive documentation. Others mentioned in the preface include fifteen authors of original texts; the authors of more than thirty-five reproduced texts; and approximately sixty journalists who contributed to the project in some way. The preface also credited Pierre Monat for graphic design and François Martel and Normand Thériault for production, along with acknowledgement of newspapers, publishers, photographers, and those who helped organize the exhibition at Casa Loma, the nightclub where the exhibition took place.

Originally intended to be 300 pages, the accumulation of material proved to be unrelenting. Prior to the exhibition, *Médiart* announced there would be two volumes but in the end production spilled over to three. The first volume of 456 pages was launched in March 1973, at the exhibition at Casa Loma; the second volume of 475 pages was launched in May, again at Casa Loma; and the third volume of 103 pages was distributed as the summer issue of *Médiart*. As an attempt at order, the three volumes are divided into sections and sub-sections. Volume One consists of “Les pionniers: Robert Roussil, Armand Vaillancourt, Claude Gauvreau, Patrick Straram” and “Les groupes: Parti pris and Ti-pop, Les groupes du nouvel age, Fusion des arts, Opération Déclit, De l’osstidcho à l’infonie: toujours, Le groupe Luci et associés, Le groupe image et verbe.” Volume Two continues with “Les groupes: La république des beaux-arts, Les groupes de l’UQÀM” along with “Les illustrateurs:

Le groupe chiendent, La bande dessinée, Les publications” and “La critique.” Volume Three concludes with “Les lone rangers: Jean-Paul Mousseau, François Dallegret, Germain Perron, Maurice Demers.”

The effort of classification is overwhelmed by the eclecticism of the graphics and sheer number of pages – the aesthetics of a neo-Dadaist engagement with popular culture and a disruption of the reader’s experience of time and space. Similarly, the treatment of the book’s content in this essay is not systematic, but rather, follows the reader as she randomly flips through the pages. The intention is not to give a comprehensive overview of the contents, nor capture the ethos of an era. Rather, I am interested in the publication itself, how it came to be, its form and content and its performativity in the transmission of a particular moment across time.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT AS READYMADE

Though the three volumes of *Quebec underground* can not strictly be classified as an “artists’ book,” this genre, as it was emerging internationally in the 1960s and 1970s provides a useful frame of reference for hybrid works that combine the factual content of a document with the manipulation of pre-existing semiotic material. (Though *Quebec underground* was published alongside an exhibition and conference of the same name, a review in *artscanada* states that the exhibition was simply a premise to launch the book.) At the time of the opening, the book was still being printed and only a hand-bound copy – and incomplete at that – was available. *Quebec underground* is not a catalogue with

/5/ Ibid.

a referential relationship to the material in an exhibition; instead, it has the feel of "evidence" as the facsimile reproduction of statements by artists dependent upon a context beyond the time and space of Casa Loma, Montréal, 1973.⁶

In contemporaneous publishing by artists, such as General Idea's *FILE Magazine*, the reproduction or remediation of materials creates a dialectic between primary and secondary information.⁷ *Quebec underground* is a publication that consciously acts as documentation, serving both as a record of past experiences and a document of its own constitution at the hands of the students and their teachers. It is exhibition catalogue as democratic multiple as the students controlled the means of production and put the industrial technology of offset printing to their own use. In *Quebec underground*, there is no clear delineation between the book as a documentary trace of activities and as a work of intervention in the symbolic order of a culture. This slipperiness is not unlike the conundrum presented by the *Refus global* of 1948 to sociologists and historians who study the expression of national narratives of Quebec and Canada in literary and print culture.

The form of *Quebec underground* brings together two contradictory influences: the militant decolonization discourse of *Parti pris* (1963–1968), and the countercultural lifestyle choice of *Mainmise* (1970–1978). The square format of the publication echoes that of *Parti pris*, a magazine that called for socialist revolution by uniting the political and the cultural. For the editors of *Parti pris*, liberation of the people was "literary" in that it was tied to language, and for the anti-colonial nationalists, the preservation of the French language, the origin of Quebec culture, was critical. In the columns of this magazine, the identity of the French-Canadian was rewritten as that of the Québécois.

The assemblage of the pages in *Quebec underground* mimics *Mainmise*, a self-styled organ of the counterculture. Its approach was one of transforming Quebec into a utopian alternative to the mainstream consumer culture of America and the parallel politics of the Vietnam War. The transformation would occur, they hoped, via the mind-expanding properties of drugs, music, and sexual liberation. In *Mainmise* information took precedence over analysis. Its pages featured lists of music events, festivals and so on as well as recycled content from other magazines on the Underground Press Syndicate (including translations of texts by Marshall McLuhan), because the editors viewed media such as the underground press and radio as agents of liberation.⁸

Like *Mainmise*, *Quebec underground* is not a project of critical analysis, but rather, a means of reproducing primary information. The main content consists of documents and ephemera hastily collected over the course of two months. The reduced point size of the typeface, compressed leading, and minimal contrast with headings allows as much information on a page as possible, but without adequate white space, legibility is compromised. *Quebec underground* is self-aware of its archiving function but, ironically, its overabundance works against the clear transmission of information.

/6/ The exhibition took place for three days at Casa Loma (21, 22, 23 March 1973). Robert Johns suggests in his review of the show that the club environment was a "vanishing artefact of urban folklore" of red light entertainment in the 1950s period of *La Grande Noirceur*. Robert Johns, "Quebec underground," *artscanada* 30.2 (May 1973): 72.

/7/ A story on *FILE Magazine* was published in *Médiart* 6 (May 1972).

/8/ See *Mainmise* 1 (1970). Inspired by the magazines of the San Francisco counterculture, by 1973, *Mainmise* had achieved a circulation of 26,000.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF REPRESENTATION

Written histories of Quebec struggle with the representation of the period of transition between the *Grande noirceur* and the Quiet Revolution. This is a history bound up with myths that focus on the cultural dimensions of modernization: a repressed rural population under the influence of Catholic obscurantism transformed to a technologically advanced urban population with all the comforts, opportunities, and internationalism implied by the phantasmagoria of Expo '67.⁹ The *Refus global* is a pivotal text in the national imaginary of this period, a strong example of the power of the artistic manifesto as speech act.¹⁰ It can be read as a representation of a repressed population living under Maurice Duplessis's "règne de la peur soustrayante," historically colonized by British and French interests and the alienation of the "peur d'être seul sans Dieu" instilled by the Roman Catholic Church. The text had enough impact on the intellectual and political elite for the ministère du Bien-être social et de la Jeunesse to demand that Paul-Émile Borduas be dismissed from his teaching position.¹¹ However, it presents a problem to historians who argue that the cultural shifts of this era were not the dramatic rupture, the "éclatement du modernisme" as it exists in the popular imagination, but were, in fact, commensurate with post-war developments in other Western countries.¹² In Quebec, this development exacerbated issues of class tied to language, gender, and ethnicity. For many in the 1960s, the Québécois "I" was formed in solidarity as nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America achieved political independence.

The myths surrounding this transition period in Quebec are, in part, attributed to a revival of the *Refus global* through a polemic titled *La Ligne du risque* (1963)¹³ written by Pierre Vadeboncœur, the legal council for the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), one of the largest and most active

labour unions of the 1960s. Vadeboncœur described the Québécois as a disempowered people without freedom of creative spirit. As the author of *Refus global*, Borduas was an example to be followed in his rupture from the past and spiritual renewal: "Le Canada-français moderne commence avec lui. Il nous a donné un enseignement capital qui nous manquait. Il a délié en nous la liberté."¹⁴ For a new generation, Borduas was revered as an artist, not for his paintings, but rather for his speech act – his

/9/ See Ben Highmore, "Into the Labyrinth: Phantasmagoria at Expo '67" in *Expo 67: Not Just a Souvenir*, Rhona Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 128-130. for an argument regarding the prevalence of screen technologies and immersive environments at Expo '67 and the link between the phantasmagoria of the commodity form, the industrial exhibition and new relationships to technology.

/10/ In *How to do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), J.L. Austin presents a theory of the speech act as a performative utterance. He shows how language (speech or text) brings a state of affairs, neither true nor false, into being. In visual art, Duchamp's readymades are speech acts, because everyday objects are transformed into art through his declaration of its status. The *Refus global*, and by extension, *Quebec underground*, are perlocutionary speech acts, because their language persuades us of a shared cultural experience that does not necessarily correspond to the "facts" of the sociologist or the historian. This disjuncture complicates historical representation.

/11/ The letter from the ministère to the Director of the École du Meuble reads: "... parce que les écrits et les manifestes qu'il publie, ainsi que son état d'esprit ne sont pas de nature à favoriser l'enseignement que nous voulons donner à nos élèves." Quoted in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942-1958*, François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young, eds. (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1978), 15.

/12/ See the social histories of Jean Philippe Warren, Sean Mills or John A. Dickson and Brian Young.

/13/ Patricia Smart, *Refus global: genèse et métamorphoses d'un mythe fondateur*. (Montreal: Programme des études sur le Québec, McGill University, 1998), 12-13.

/14/ Pierre Vadeboncœur, "La ligne du risque" in *La ligne du risque, essais* (Montreal: Éditions HMH, 1963), 186.

vociferous defiance of social convention. But Borduas did not act alone. Vadeboncœur's essay overlooks the solidarity of the fifteen signatories of the *Refus global*, however, the focus on Borduas would have resonated with artists who believed that personal liberation and the transformation of individual consciousness could effect mass social change.

While Vadeboncœur's revival of *Refus global* offers Borduas as a hero for the popular imagination, it obscures the material conditions of the period.¹⁵ For thirty years, the conservative nationalism of the Union Nationale under Premier Maurice Duplessis outwardly projected an image of a compliant Catholic labour force, reliable and respectful of hierarchy, to attract American investment in natural resources. When the Liberals, under Jean Lesage, took power in 1960, foreign capital controlled much of industry, and as The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963), showed, French-Canadians faced greater linguistic discrimination and wage disparity in the workplace in 1961 than they had in 1941.¹⁶ From the perspective of those who were constructing a national identity through the discourse of decolonization, Quebec had the industrial infrastructure of a developed nation but suffered the exploitation patterns of a colony.

The narrative of social rupture is repeated in the art history of Quebec as the shift in aesthetic paradigms. The *Refus global* for example, adopts the style of the manifestos of European Surrealism. In its internationalism and Marxist class-consciousness, Automatisme rejected the conventions of provincial isolation: the painting and sculpture associated with the *École des beaux-arts*, or the regionalist painters of Quebec.¹⁷ The aesthetic rupture of the 1960s is described as a shift away from lyrical abstraction towards industrial processes and materials, and the act of creation through mass events and happenings.¹⁸ Play and humour are described as strategies for intervention in the political

and social realm of popular culture however, a focus on aesthetic ruptures obscures the Marxist and anti-colonial discourse that persists as continuity between the *Refus global* and *Quebec underground*.

CULTURAL DEPENDENCY AS COUNTERPART TO ECONOMIC COLONIZATION

Refus global had denounced the colonial regimes of England and France, and the French-Canadian cultural dependency upon the Vatican; the next generation defined itself within an international discourse of Third-World nationalism, the New Left, and the civil rights movement, and denounced American economic and cultural imperialism. In the section "La critique" in *Quebec underground*, Marcel Saint-Pierre explains that within the visual arts of the 1960s, the discourse of economic colonialism was equated to cultural dependency. This manifested itself as mimicry of aesthetic styles dictated by the art world centres of America as evidenced by the exhibition of Les Plasticiens alongside Minimalist or Op Art works from New York. Similarly, the federal programs in support of the arts that emerged from the 1957 Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (the *Massey Report*) are criticized for encouraging

/15/Jean-Philippe Warren, "De Dollard à Borduas ou le mythe du *Refus global*" *Combats* 4.4 (Fall 2000): 8.

/16/Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2010), 20-21.

/17/François-Marc Gagnon, *Chronique du mouvement automatiste québécois, 1941-1954* (Montreal: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998), 340.

/18/François-Marc Gagnon, *Chronique du mouvement automatiste québécois, 1941-1954* (Montreal: Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998), 340.

a homogenous "unité nationale qui n'a de réalité que celle d'une évidente illusion: celle d'un pan-canadianisme à l'image des U.S.A."¹⁹ *Quebec underground* is not simply a document of 1960s optimism and the "rupture" of social and cultural upheaval of the Quiet Revolution. Instead, it is better understood within a larger history, tied to the publication of the *Refus global* in 1948 and its embedded social context.

A modest publication produced in 400 mimeographed copies, the manifesto was not "high art" in the form of a painting but was closer to an object of the everyday. Its hybrid status as both document and aesthetic statement was made more poignant by its launch at the Librairie tranquille, a bookstore notorious for distributing books that Catholics were forbidden to read.²⁰ This gesture brings the publication into a dialogue with the repression and legislation of the lives of the Québécois in both the intellectual and social spheres, made all the more evident at the time by the anti-labour actions of the Duplessis government. The government action against Borduas preceded the violent police action at the strikes in the Quebec mining town of Asbestos in 1949. The strikes were suppressed through the broadly defined anti-labour Act Concerning Communist Propaganda (otherwise known as the Padlock Act), which restricted rights to public assembly and made it illegal to disseminate materials considered "communist" (*Refus global* speaks of "Révolution" and states, "Il s'agit de classe"). At the end of the 1960s, a number of magazines mentioned in the section "Les publications" had experienced censorship on the grounds of "immorality."²¹ During the 1970 October Crisis, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's invocation of the War Measures Act in response to the perceived threat of the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), also resulted in the censorship and suppression of print media and restrictions on the freedom of assembly.

MASS ASSEMBLIES ARE POPULAR CULTURE

The discourse of decolonization called for radical intellectuals to work with the people in a program of popular political education.²² For artists, this meant an engagement with the readymades of popular culture. In *Quebec underground*, the section on Ti-Pop reprints a defining text from *Parti pris* by Pierre Maheu. Although related (and often compared) to American Pop Art or the French Nouveau Réalistes, the affinity with international styles is considered part the decolonization experience because it engages with the specificities of the Québécois culture. Parodies of language, sex, and religion, assemblages of beer bottles, and crucifixes are the material for the folk art of national alienation, collectively ambivalent in their relationship to America and France and nostalgic in their view of Duplessis' conservative nationalism. The environment spectacles of Serge Lemoyne, given their own

/19/ Marcel Saint-Pierre, "A QUEBEC ART SCENIC TOUR and his 'contradictions itineraries,'" *Quebec underground: 1962-1972*, Tome 1, 448.

/20/ Within the text of *Refus global*, the difficulty in attaining works by the Marquis de Sade or Isadore Ducasse is mentioned in particular, and an article "Cadenas et Indiens: une protestation" denouncing the The Act Concerning Communist Propaganda (the Padlock Act) and its censorship of publications and private bookstores was published in 1949 in *Le Devoir* and *Le Canada*, signed by nine of the signatories of the manifesto. André Bourassa and Gilles Lapointe, *Refus global et ses environs 1948-1988* (Montreal: Éditions de l'Hexagone, 1988), 175.

/21/ In the period leading up to the October Crisis of 1970, when the Trudeau Government invoked the War Measures Act, a number of underground newspapers had experienced censorship or confiscation by the "morality squad" including *Sexus*, *Logos*, *The Last Post* (later to become *Y donner la claque*). "La contre culture: manifestes et manifestations," exhibition at the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, curated by Marilou Sainte-Marie, 8 February 2011 to 29 January 2012.

/22/ Mills, 32.

section in *Quebec underground*, combine the everyday objects of the consumer economy with nostalgia for the gestural and spontaneous qualities of the Les Automatistes.²³

These symbols of popular culture included mass assemblies by members of labour unions that paralleled the industrialization and automation of industry. Saint-Pierre writes that since the time of the *Refus global*, artists had become activists for independence from cultural dependency, passing from the marginality of an aesthetic position to the marginality of a political position.²⁴ The language of independence and marginality join artists to a mass movement of political upheaval that, as Sean Mills has shown, shared a "similar grammar of dissent" through decolonization theory.²⁵ In this sense, the contemporaneous mass assemblies of radicalized labour unions and activist protests are structurally similar to the mass assemblies of happenings and popular festivals represented in *Quebec underground*, even if the alliances were transitory.

The planning documents for Opération Décllic,²⁶ a mass event organized over five days at the Bibliothèque nationale to mark the twentieth anniversary of the *Refus global*, are reproduced in Volume One of *Quebec underground*. Conceived as a spontaneous popular festival, it also identified itself as an "occupation" in the language of international protest movements. The target of this protest was the homogenizing effect of the consumer economy and the mediocrity of American mass media, TV, radio, and films that had replaced British and French influence on Canadian culture since the shift in power following the Second World War.²⁷ The protesters' demands are directed at the ministère des Affaires culturelles, declaring the artist's role as citizen in a project to jolt the public out of the stupor induced by cultural dependency.

In volume two of *Quebec underground*, over 300 pages are devoted to "La république des beaux-arts." Timelines chronicle a series of student strikes and occupations between 1965 and 1968 as students at the École des beaux-arts denounced the school's arcane practices. They decried the alienation of the artist as cultural producer, demanding integrated instruction in the style of the Bauhaus and the democratization of art as the basis for the cultural life of a nation. In 1966, the Lesage government commissioned sociologist Marcel Rioux to produce recommendations on reforms to art education. His recommendations would rely heavily on the theory of Herbert Marcuse, the principles of self-management, and a wariness regarding the influence of mass communications. By Fall 1968, the students were tired of waiting for the *Rapport Rioux* to be published. They were aware of strikes and the imprisonment of unionized teachers in the newly established CEGEP system (Quebec's network of post-secondary colleges)²⁸ and mindful of slogans such as "Les étudiants au pouvoir," emerging from Paris earlier that spring. They decided to take matters into their own hands, forming their own self-governing association, levelling the hierarchies of expertise and specialization as they engaged directly in conversation with Rioux.

/23/ Serge Allaire, "Pop art, Montreal, P.Q." *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante: L'éclatement du modernisme*. Vol. 2., Francine Couture, ed. (Montreal: VLB Éditeur, 1993), 179.

/24/ Saint-Pierre, 457.

/25/ Mills, 9.

/26/ *Décllic* is a synonym for rupture.

/27/ "L'Opération Décllic," *Quebec underground: 1962-1972*, Tome 1, 353-357.

/28/ The timeline shows that following protests in the CEGEPS earlier that year, thirteen professors were imprisoned for union activity. *Quebec underground: 1962-1972*, Tome 2, 91.

Fusion des arts, affiliated with the printmaking facilities of Richard Lacroix's Atelier libre de recherches graphiques, eschewed representation for immediate engagement with protests in the street. At Atelier libre, posters were produced for Opération Déclic. Posters were also produced for Opération McGill français, a mass protest that united many activist groups that identified McGill University as a symbol of class inequity, and economic and linguistic colonization. Posters were produced for protests supporting Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon during the legal proceedings related to their magazine *Révolution québécoise* and their association with the FLQ.²⁹ In September 1968, the Comité d'information politique invited Alain Badiou to give a lecture on the subject of Marxist aesthetics.³⁰ Both Atelier libre and Fusion des arts received funding from provincial and federal government agencies, but accusations of subversion and the request for an inquiry into Fusion des arts by the National Assembly of Quebec, destabilized these resources resulting in the dissolution of the groups.³¹

MARXIST AESTHETICS

The transcript for Alain Badiou's lecture and the ensuing debate, reprinted in *Quebec underground*, provides a theoretical framework for the aesthetics of art for popular culture. As a form of production, art is understood as a type of knowledge that acts as intermediary between social ideologies (the internalized value systems of the bourgeoisie, proletariat, petit-bourgeoisie, and so on) and the purity of scientific fact. Badiou explains that aesthetic creation is a phenomenon of rupture or decentering of our knowledge – to discover things we do not know, to see beyond the restriction of the ideological framework of our own social class. In a society in which mass media and rapid information transmission are tools of oppression and illusory consciousness in a class war, Badiou proposes two solutions for the artist. The first is the route

of decadence appealing to an intelligentsia, creating work that is formally elaborate in its self-reflexivity. However, he cautions, in the consumer economy of Europe and the United States, anything can become a commodity and the effects of rupture dissipate quickly, leaving the artist anxiously trying to invent new forms in order to continue revealing contradictions. The second is the route of popular art, the production of objects and situations that reveal the consciousness of the popular masses as paralyzed by the phantasmagoria of mass communications and advertising that manipulates their desires. Popular art should accompany ordinary people, in the process of becoming self-aware, to take control of the production of their own desires and collective futures. In this way, art that may present itself as a game or as leisure serves a practical function, an organizing function in the class struggle.³²

RÉACTION TRANQUILLE, 1973

The voice of Yves Robillard in his *Présentation of Quebec underground* clarifies for us his definition of "underground": "Par underground ou marginal, nous entendons toute expression artistique qui a cherché à sortir résolument de ou des médiums dans lesquels s'était traditionnellement cantonnée, ou bien, dans un autre esprit, toute forme d'art que l'on a voulu résolument populaire."

/29/ *Quebec underground: 1962-1972, Tome 1*, 242.

/30/ The conference took advantage of Badiou's presence in the city as a representative of the Ligue des droits de l'homme in defense of Charles Gagnon. *Quebec underground: 1962-1972, Tome 1*, 256.

/31/ Rose-Marie Arbour "L'atelier libre de recherches graphiques et la guilde graphique," *Vie des arts* 22.90 (1978): 31.

/32/ Alain Badiou, "Pour une esthétique marxiste," *Quebec underground: 1962-1972, Tome 1*, 340-343.

In this definition, there are echoes of rupture associated with the *Refus global*, and an emphasis is placed on an engagement with mass media (later in the text, he provides the examples of *Parti pris* and mass assemblies in the style of happenings or popular festivals).³³ In light of the Marxist aesthetics proposed by Badiou, Robillard advocates an alternate route of self-determination for the artist in the class struggle: the need for ordinary people to become self-aware, to take control of the production of their own desires and collective futures. However, in a reflection published after the fact in *Médiart*, Robillard admits that using the term "underground" in the title was an opportunistic grafting of the Quebec experience onto the myths of the counterculture in the United States.³⁴

Quebec underground could be seen as homage to the role of media in the previous decade, including publishing, as a means of cultural self-liberation. However, *Quebec underground* arrives two-and-a-half years following the suspension of civil liberties by Trudeau during the October Crisis. In the growing awareness of second-wave feminism, the singular male hero of the decolonization discourse had lost relevance. Likewise, the rise of aboriginal-rights activism belied claims of colonization by descendants of European settlers. In the spring of 1972, workers throughout Quebec had engaged in a series of general strikes, resulting in the imprisonment of three labour leaders by the state. Popular opinion saw this as a choice to defend American capital against the interests of the Québécois people. All three covers of *Quebec underground* display the same illustration: a section of the brain removed from the body and dissected, suggesting a transformation of consciousness. For Robillard, in 1973, this transformation was complete: "Car le plus grand apport des dix dernières années est sans contredit d'avoir réussi à tracer notre portrait de Québécois et d'être maintenant capable d'en rire et de passer à autre chose en tout confiance de nous-mêmes..."³⁵

In the liberation theory of Herbert Marcuse, the pleasure principle in laughter, play, or leisure (or pharmaceutically-altered states) is effective only if sublimated to work towards socialism, but ineffective as withdrawal or escape.³⁶ Saint-Pierre asks whether in the peace and love of underground magazines, such as *Mainmise*, one can detect "les passages de la 'Révolution tranquille' à la 'Répression' ou 'Réaction tranquille' de '70'."³⁷ He reproaches the protesting fine-arts students for their lack of a plan or theoretical base: for refusing their condition in the emerging post-industrial society but having no concrete demands for something else. For Saint-Pierre, this marks the beginning of a fetishization of politics in the arts. By 1971, he saw the neutralization of the demands of a formerly radical Left. The social role of the artist is the reflection of the ideology of only one class: the francophone petite bourgeoisie privileged by the economic reforms of successive nationalist governments. This was part of a process in which contemporary artists formed a social contract with the modernized Quebec state³⁸ and the moment of the artist's transformation to "cultural worker."³⁹

/33/ Yves Robillard, "Presentation," *Quebec underground: 1962-1972, Tome 1*, 5.

/34/ Yves Robillard, "Underground vs Overground ou comment s'en sortir, s'il y a lieu, ou bien y rester, en l'occurrence" *Quebec underground: 1962-1972, Tome 3*, 106.

/35/ Robillard, "Presentation" *Quebec underground: 1962-1972, Tome 1*, 19.

/36/ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 35.

/37/ Saint-Pierre, 460.

/38/ Francine Couture, "L'État et l'art contemporain," *Possibles* 18.3 (1994): 9.

/39/ Vincent Bonin and Michèle Theriault, eds., *Documentary Protocols (1967-1975)* (Montreal: Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2010), 19.

In 1973, as the ideologies of nationalism and their cultural representations shifted, the students assembled the materials of Robillard's "scrapbook." It was an intergenerational collective action and the production of a hybrid work. *Quebec underground* is simultaneously an object of knowledge and the reassembly of semantic structures as event. At a time when television and video were becoming dominant forms of mass media and artistic expression, the students used paper to record their understanding of culture as imposed language. Perhaps because of its internal contradictions, *Quebec underground* is an archive as speech act without closure. Like *Refus global*, the three volumes of *Quebec underground* sank into obscurity shortly after its release. What resonance might it hold today for the youth assembled at Pierre Falardeau's funeral?

The author would like to thank Michèle Thériault and Lin Gibson for their comments on previous versions of the essay.

Intervening,
Debating,
Taking a Stand:

The Curatorial
Work of Normand
Thériault,
1968-1977

Michèle Thériault

*To produce with the risk of making a mistake,
to risk at least doing something.*¹

Normand Thériault

"I was involved in everything; there was nothing going on in art that I wasn't a part of."² Between 1968 and 1980, Normand Thériault was a key figure in Quebec's visual arts scene. In 1968, at the age of twenty-three, he began working as an art critic at *La Presse* where he remained until 1971. Throughout the following decade, he worked as an editor, author, curator, government consultant, university instructor, events organizer, facilitator, and administrator. Thériault was not only present; he was a committed and controversial cultural figure who displayed an uncommon degree of audacity. His numerous undertakings include publishing magazines (*Médiart*, 1971–73 and *Tilt*, 1973), directing the GRAA (UQÀM's *Groupe de recherche en administration de l'art*, 1971–73), creating production platforms (*Médiart, Inc.* and the *Institut d'art contemporain*, 1971–84),³ and conceiving and

/1/ France Morin and Chantal Pontbriand, "Québec 75, une stratégie, une interview de Normand Thériault," *Parachute* 1 (October, November, December 1975): 6.

/2/ Normand Thériault interviewed by the author, Montreal, 28 October 2011.

/3/ Thériault took over *Médiart* from Claude Gosselin after the first issue and ran it until its demise in 1973. He then founded the periodical *Tilt* that appeared only twice in 1973. *Médiart, inc.* and L'Institut d'art contemporain were overlapping organizational platforms. Their staffing depended on the project, for instance, the students of the GRAA or the team that organized *Québec 75*, but often it consisted only of Thériault.

mounting exhibitions such as *Les moins de 35 ans, Québec 75, 032303*, and *Hier et après (Yesterday and After)*. These projects stand out for the relevance of their intent, the ambitious character of their subject matter, and the conviction with which they were executed. Some, such as the *Québec 75* exhibition have now attained a mythical status.⁴

For those of us who curate today and who are faced with the astonishing elasticity of the term and of the practice, its expansion within the art world (and beyond), and the power it bestows on its author, the curatorial practice of Thériault is of particular interest given that he worked at a time when curatorial authoring began emerging (Thériault *signed* his exhibitions).⁵ The very nature of his projects and initiatives, and his *modus operandi* can help us to better position ourselves within the little-known history of exhibition curating in Quebec and, indeed, in Canada. Moreover, Thériault's work can point to the ways in which micro-history meets with the master narrative of Western curating. Beyond these more specific considerations, Thériault's endeavours can also inform us on the attitudes and debates that defined Quebec culture of the time.

This essay addresses issues involving collective work, taking position and debating, Thériault's methodology, as well as his influences and the isolation in which he worked. It examines Thériault's *modus operandi* in order to better understand the nature of his activities as an independent curator and his curatorial attitude until 1978, when he was appointed curator of contemporary art at Montreal's Museum of Fine Arts. It also suggests ways in which one can better understand how curating was defined and what was its significance in Quebec in the 1970s.

A few of the period's key events are worth recalling here. When Thériault became art critic at *La Presse* in 1968, it was the year of student unrest within the new network of CEGEPS; of yet another occupation of the École des beaux-arts, an event that led, among other things, to its merging with the newly founded Université du Québec à Montréal the following year; of the *Rapport de la commission d'enquête sur l'enseignement des arts* penned by sociologist Marcel Rioux; and of the twentieth anniversary of the *Refus global*, which itself gave rise to the Opération Décllic, an event mobilizing artists over the course of several days to reflect publicly on their role in society. The Parti québécois was also founded in 1968. That turbulent year – elsewhere as well – came and filled the void left by Expo 67 and the dreary return to daily life its end signalled for the many Montrealers and Quebecers who had taken advantage of a brief and dazzling opening to world cultures and who had revelled in the international attention their city had garnered.⁶ Two years later, Quebec was in the midst of the October Crisis.

/4/ Véronique Rodriguez, "Québec 75 / Arts, Cinéma, Vidéo: pour une nouvelle vision de l'art contemporain au Québec" in *Exposer l'art contemporain du Québec. Discours d'intention et d'accompagnement*, Francine Couture, ed. (Montreal: Centre de diffusion 3D, 2003), 17-54.

/5/ The emblematic figure of Harald Szeemann comes to mind and his groundbreaking exhibitions: *When Attitude Becomes Form* (1969) at Kunsthall Berne and *Documenta V* in Kassel (1972). At the time, curatorial work was not considered an area of study and neither was the function of the curator identified as such, except in relation to the museum context. Outside of that context, one simply "organized" exhibitions.

/6/ See Rhona Richman Kenneally and Johanne Sloan, eds., *Expo 67: Not Just a Souvenir* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

Thériault began working at a time when Quebec was undergoing radical changes. It was in the process of becoming a welfare state (both social security and universal health care were being implemented) and various ministries made (or had just made) their appearance: the Ministry of Education (1964), the Ministry of Immigration (1968), the Ministry of Communications (1969), and the Ministry of Public Service (1969). Higher education had become accessible to a vast majority of francophones after the creation of the network of CEGEPS (1967) and of the Université du Québec (1969). The linguistic debate, always latent, suddenly became filled with animosity in 1969. It would lead to the adoption of the Charter of French Language in 1977, which made French Quebec's official language. Although Thériault deplored the lack of commitment shown by the government of Quebec towards the visual arts as well as the poor quality of the exhibitions offered, Quebec had created the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1961 and founded a museum of contemporary art in 1965, an institution unique in Canada both then and now.

The population was primarily young at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. The age of approximately one third of voters was close to the thirty-year mark. University students like Thériault (who studied art history at the Université de Montréal between 1964 and 1968) led a relatively prosperous lifestyle when compared with that of previous generations. Another fact worth mentioning: students were increasingly attracted to the social sciences. Registration in this growing academic field increased fourfold at the Université de Montréal during those years.⁷ Graduates later worked in the rapidly expanding tertiary sector of the economy.

Thériault was prolific at *La Presse*. He wrote on every aspect of contemporary practice in Montreal and, occasionally, on important exhibitions held at the National Gallery of Canada.⁸ He also

/7/ Jean-Philippe Warren, *Une douce anarchie. Les années 68 au Québec* (Montréal: Éditions du Boréal), 37-38.

/8/ Selection of exhibitions at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts reviewed by N. T.:

"Un art total: L'art nègre" (on the exhibition *L'art du Congo*), *La Presse*, 18 March 1969.

"Sondage 69: un parti pris antitableau," *La Presse*, 24 May 1969. The works in this exhibition were selected by a jury composed of Ronald Bloore, Lucy Lippard, and Andrée Paradis.

"Jean Dubuffet: homme du commun," *La Presse*, 27 December 1969.

"En 70, pas de caprices, on est réaliste," (on the exhibition *Sondage 70: Réalismes*), *La Presse*, 9 May 1970.

"Heureux Mexique," (sur l'exposition d'art précolombien: *Mangeurs d'hommes et jolies dames*), *La Presse*, 23 January 1971.

Selection of exhibitions at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal reviewed by N. T.:

"Objets made in N.Y. USA" (on the exhibition *New York 13*), *La Presse*, 14 June 1969.

"Hartung, le geste raisonné et la couleur," *La Presse*, 18 October 1969.

"Alchimistes au XX^e siècle" (on the exhibition *Nouvelle Alchimie: éléments, systèmes, forces / New Alchemy: Elements, Systems, Forces*), *La Presse*, 8 November 1969.

"Le tableau au mur" (on the exhibition *Grands formats*), *La Presse*, 31 January 1970.

"Fernand Léger: témoin de son temps," *La Presse*, 28 février 1970.

"La sculpture québécoise: un silence et quelques cris" (on the exhibition *Panorama de la sculpture Québécoise 1945-1970*), *La Presse*, 27 June 1970.

"Au temps des Plasticiens" (on the exhibition *Seven Montreal Artists*), *La Presse*, 13 March 1971.

"Pour le plaisir de l'art: l'art pour votre plaisir" (on the exhibition Carl and Heidi Bucher: *Environnement - Participation - Body Art*), *La Presse*, 12 June 1971.

Selection of exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada reviewed by N. T.:

"Mies van der Rohe. Un nouveau langage," *La Presse*, 1 February 1969.

"Une enquête sur tout et sur rien" (on the exhibition *The N.E. Thing Co. Environment*), *La Presse*, 21 June 1969.

"Que la lumière soit!" (on the exhibition *Dan Flavin*), *La Presse*, 4 October 1969.

"Le Canada, c'est du folklore" (on Joyce Wieland's exhibition: *True Patriot Love / Véritable amour patriotique*), *La Presse*, 10 July 1971.

authored critical assessments of exhibitions held in New York (at the time, critics seldom travelled overseas). These include, among others, Pontus Hulten's *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* (MoMA, 1968), which greatly impressed him, as well as reviews of art-related publications.⁹ Thériault was an incisive commentator of the arts scene and of the conditions in which contemporary art was created and disseminated in Quebec.¹⁰ He also let artists use *La Presse* as a forum to express themselves directly.¹¹

When he organized his first exhibition, *La peinture au Québec : 1948-1970* held at Terre des hommes in Expo 67's Australian Pavilion, Thériault was still working as an art critic for *La Presse*. This survey of painting in Quebec since the *Refus global* is important for the temporal marker from which the exhibition develops. The 1948 manifesto and the figure of Paul-Émile Borduas together constitute the point of inception of the master narrative of Quebec art, which still functioned at that time as an indomitable reference point for francophone artists. Its consequences were numerous and the resulting state of affairs was not always a liberating one. On the one hand, the entire field of painting had to measure itself against such a legacy (for the act of painting signified both a break with the past and imparted a sense of progress). Thus, the challenge of history emphasized painting's prominent role in the shaping of Quebec art, thereby keeping non-pictorial practices at bay, as well as other, more political or popular forms of discourse.¹² On the other hand, this act of breaking free from history and rising up against it represented an attitude that, in the end, had not led to State support or to the social recognition of artists at large (hence the Opération Déclit of 1968). Ultimately, it fuelled an unfulfilled and aborted revolt that always needed to be taken up anew. These tensions are part of the legacy of the *Refus global* and run through Thériault's curating. In fact, Thériault's position consists in reclaiming Borduas's attitude as a model¹³ and taking full responsibility for its negative consequences while

/9/ "Noël à New York à l'ère de la machine," *La Presse*, 21 December 1968, 37; "De la machine comme la fin de l'art," *La Presse*, 18 January 1969.

He analyses, among others, the following publications:
 Jack Burnham, Herbert Marcuse, Annette Michelson, Louis Kahn, James Seawright, B. F. Skinner, and Arnold J. Toynbee, *On the Future of Art* (New York: Viking Press, 1970) in "Entre la révolution et la technologie," *La Presse*, 13 February 1971.
 Abraham Moles, *Art et ordinateur* (Paris: Casterman, Collection Synthèses, 1971) in "L'artiste devenu programmeur," *La Presse*, 8 May 1971.

/10/ Articles sometimes appearing as a series, address the following issues:

The teaching curriculum as devised by Yves Robillard at the time of the integration of the École des beaux-arts to the Université du Québec à Montréal: "L'histoire de l'art n'est plus l'histoire de l'art à l'Université du Québec," *La Presse*, 13 September 1969.

The Opération Déclit: "Les artistes contestent; mais quoi?," *La Presse*, 16 November 1968.

The report on arts education by sociologist Marcel Rioux: "Un nouvel art dans une nouvelle société," *La Presse*, 26 April 1969.

The growing number of artists in society and the lack of opportunities open to them: "Des expositions à la tonne... Et puis après," *La Presse*, 1 November 1969.

The dissemination of the arts in Quebec (in three articles): "La farce de la diffusion de la culture: 1. Le pourrissement," *La Presse*, 27 March 1970; "2. La diffusion ça s'organise," *La Presse*, 28 March 1970; "3. Le temps des guérillas," *La Presse*, 4 April 1970.

Heritage, the role of museums and federal cultural policies: "Le Patrimoine et les mandarins," *La Presse*, 20 February 1971.

Artistic Competitions and the ministry: "Les artistes et le ministère," *La Presse*, 24 April 1971.

The artist in crisis: "L'état de la crise," *La Presse*, 1 May 1971.

The demands made by Quebec museums: "Pourquoi Québec doit agir," *La Presse*, 26 June 1971.

/11/ In January 1970, Henry Saxe, Guido Molinari and Serge Lemoyne use Thériault's space in *La Presse* as a platform to condemn apathy, stagnation and conventionalism in the milieu. "1969-1970: Saxe. Deux ans en 25 nouvelles"; "Molinari. Pour un art de participation"; "Lemoyne. Admettons qu'il en soit ainsi," *La Presse*, 3 January 1970.

deploring the unwillingness of artists and institutions to put more at stake.¹⁴ Thériault would later attempt to break free from the *Refus global's* hold on Quebec art: "Quebec art cannot develop within its own parameters,"¹⁵ he claimed, for it needs to expose itself to other narratives and legacies that would transform it not into an *art québécois*, but into an art made in Quebec. As surprising as this statement may seem today, Thériault's openness (to English-speaking artists, among others) generated a large-scale controversy during the *Québec 75* exhibition.¹⁶ In 1971, Thériault left *La Presse* and became the director of UQÀM's GRAA (1971–73). During his tenure as head of this group of students for which he decided to "create matter to be administered,"¹⁷ a series of projects were brought to fruition, such as *Médiart* magazine, *Québec 71. Ou en sommes-nous ?, Les moins de 35 ans*, and *Quebec Underground, 1962-1972*. It was also during those two years that he created the production platforms Médiart, Inc. and the Institut d'art contemporain and authored a report commissioned by the Canada Council for the Arts on the funding of artist-run centres and collectives.

According to Thériault, art has a social value. Thus, the purpose of his activities, both as a curator and in his many other capacities, is to ensure the presence of art in society, hence his choice of an interventionist approach.¹⁸ All his projects were conceived as a kind of intervention seeking to make art a dynamic player in the development of society. Working in an environment which he regarded as weak and lethargic, Thériault favoured action, direct speech, and debate,¹⁹ for in his view, art fosters reflection above and beyond the creation of objects.²⁰ Thus, one can understand Thériault's involvement in a wide range of often overlapping initiatives, as well as his emphatic will to defend them. In this light, curating consists in an open-ended and varied project of social transformation by means of art, a project from which all such initiatives mutually thrive. Curating belongs to a network of

/12/ One thinks of the many collectives and happenings of the 1960s that are inventoried in *Quebec Underground: 1962-1972* and are now forgotten: of Richard Lacroix's Atelier libre de recherches graphiques, of Fusion des arts, of the environments of Maurice Demers, of Serge Lemoyne and his actions, and of practices, during the 1970s, that developed away from painting and sculpture and the formalist discourse; of those that were more conceptual, namely those of Raymond Gervais, Rober Racine, and Charles Gagnon, of the artists that were part of Véhicule Art or that were supported by *Parachute* at its beginnings, or again the mapping and corporeal activities of Bill Vazan and Françoise Sullivan.

/13/ See Normand Thériault, "Refus global: vingt ans après...", *La Presse*, 26 October 1968, 40 and "La peinture québécoise revécue à Terre des Hommes," *La Presse*, 13 June 1970, 42; France Morin and Chantal Pontbriand, p. 5 and Normand Thériault, "Introduction à la visite d'Aurora borealis," leaflet accompanying the exhibition *Aurora borealis*, Centre international d'art contemporain, 1985.

/14/ Thériault declared that visual artists were the only cultural players who had not reacted to the October Crisis and the application of the War Measures Act in 1970, in France Morin and Chantal Pontbriand, 7.

/15/ Normand Thériault interviewed by the author, Montreal, 28 October 2011.

/16/ Véronique Rodriguez, 40–44.

/17/ Normand Thériault interviewed by Vincent Bonin and the author, Montreal, 5 March 2010.

/18/ Ibid.

/19/ See "Québec année zéro," *La Presse*, 28 November 1970, D-14. The article ends with the following words that would be reproduced in the catalogue of the exhibition *45° 30' North 73° 36' West + Inventory*, 1971: "Aussi indépendamment d'un passé glorieux, au niveau de l'action, nous en sommes revenus en art au Québec, à l'année zéro." By speaking out, the artist asserts his or her engagement. This voicing of one's concerns in the public sphere is part of the legacy of the *Refus global*; as such, it is specific to the Quebec context: "Nous Québécois, avons cependant une tout autre tradition, qui pourra sembler à quelques-uns n'être qu'une mauvaise habitude, même un vieux complexe. Depuis août 1948, depuis la parution du *Refus global*, l'art n'est d'abord pas l'œuvre: l'art est l'engagement d'un individu dans une démarche globale qui ne craint pas les interférences des divers niveaux" in "Dans la jungle new-yorkaise, l'art est bien petit," *La Presse*, 29 May 1971, D-14.

/20/ See Normand Thériault, "Historique d'une exposition," *Québec 75 / Arts*, catalogue of the exhibition (Montréal: Institut d'art contemporain, 1975), 13 and France Morin and Chantal Pontbriand, 6.

interrelated activities that include publishing, instigating debate, animating educational sessions, writing criticism, organizing exhibitions, producing special events²¹ and publications, and even studying one's own milieu in order to assess its new modes of production.

If a given curatorial concept often seems solely linked to its author, its actual realization is almost always a collective undertaking. Thériault's work as head of the GRAA is a prime example, as are the *Québec 75* and *032303* projects. Within the GRAA, Thériault performed his duties more like an facilitator than a professor, thereby eschewing the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student. He created situations in which students worked together in the field, thereby giving shape to "raw material" (i.e., producing issues of *Médiart*; organizing the *Les moins de 35 ans* exhibition, which was held at three different Quebec venues; organizing a three-day conference on the state of contemporary art in Québec at the CEGEP de Vaudreuil (*Québec 71. Ou en sommes-nous ?*)²²; or producing *Quebec Underground 1962-1972*, a three-volume publication documenting a decade's worth of marginal practices – happenings, magazines, protest movements, illustrators, and collectives – by drawing on the archives of Yves Robillard). This programme implemented by Thériault made active agents out of students and aimed to train the cultural managers and workers of the future. One need only think here of Chantal Pontbriand (*Parachute*), René Blouin (program officer at the Canada Council for the Arts, curator, and art dealer), and André Ménard (Director of the Musée d'art contemporain).

In the case of *Québec 75*, the exhibition was developed by means of a collective process of discussion involving an advisory committee (that met in the fall of 1974). On the one hand, the exhibition's very concept – to define art in Quebec since 1970 – required such an approach, for "the very act of working together to

produce a concept is to intervene in the field." On the other hand, since the project had received considerable financial support, Thériault believed that it was "necessary to rely on collective resources in order to compile the most information as possible."²³ The advisory committee was torn between two different exhibition concepts: the first consisted in framing contemporary practice as a response to questions of visual perception; the other implied intervening in the visual arts arena and questioning the autonomy of the artwork. This latter approach emphasized the plural nature of contemporary practice and refused to impose a prescribed analytical framework onto artworks.²⁴ Thériault and the Institut d'art contemporain opted for the latter concept; as a result, the group was divided. Thériault then invited cultural figures to comment on the concept. They (Laurent Lamy, Bill Vazan, Roland Poulin, Marthe Adam, and René Blouin) encouraged Thériault and his team to implement the project. From the advisory process (and the debates it entailed) to the production staff who were deeply involved in the process of selecting artists (France Renaud and Claude de Guise conducted most of the studio visits and artist interviews) to the shared task of managing the *Québec 75* project (Thériault oversaw the visual arts, whereas Jean-Pierre Bastien was responsible for film and Yves Chaput, Gérard Henry, and Michel van de Walle were in charge of video), the collective and participatory character of the curatorial process was pervasive and reflected a societal ethics.

/21/ Médiart, Inc. would produce the publication *Quebec Underground: 1962-1972*, and L'Institut d'art contemporain would produce many events such as concerts of experimental and jazz music (*Musique à voir* at the Bibliothèque nationale in 1974) and the exhibitions *Québec 75* and *032303* (in collaboration with *Parachute* in 1977).

/22/ The program of the public forum held at the Centre culturel de Vaudreuil is reproduced in "Québec 71. Ou en sommes-nous? Rencontre des artistes québécois," *Médiart* 1, no. 2 (October 1971).

/23/ France Morin and Chantal Pontbriand, 4.

/24/ Normand Thériault, "Historique d'une exposition," in *Québec 75/ Arts* (Montréal: Institut d'art contemporain, 1975), 15.

While working on *032303*, Thériault joined forces with France Morin and Chantal Pontbriand who had founded *Parachute*, an art magazine with an international scope, just two years before. *032303* sought to foster productive encounters between practices stemming from local (i.e., Quebec and Canada) and external contexts. It aimed to assess the state of Western contemporary art in 1977 without subscribing to an “imperialist” discourse. This project took shape within a pluralistic framework, as it was led by a group (France Morin, Chantal Pontbriand, and Normand Thériault) with a heterogeneous set of interests. France Morin and Chantal Pontbriand were interested in interdisciplinarity – *Parachute* later became their forum in this respect – and, more particularly at the time, in the intersection of experimental dance and music in local, European, and American artistic practices. *032303* was a three-part project held in an abandoned post office. It included: an exhibition (of projects showcasing contemporary research that had been mailed in by hundreds of international artists) and an international program of lectures and performances. The entire project was undertaken under the banner of the *Rencontres internationales d'art contemporain*. The organizers were ambitious: Montreal and Quebec were to become the site of an emphatic experience of art *being made and being thought* in an international perspective.²⁵

Working within and “through” the collective, as Thériault does, fosters discussion and the exchange of ideas, which are determining factors in his curatorial approach. Already, at *La Presse*, Thériault had been involved in debates arising out of stands he had taken in his critical writing and, at times, in his condemnation of artists’ precarious living conditions and the lack of sufficient funding for the arts. The GRAA informed its projects by means of its dialogical and dynamic structure. As for *Québec 75*, debate was a constituent part of the intervention: the project’s very concept was shaped by means of discussion. Vigorous exchanges also followed the two lecture series, one bearing on the “Art System” (with Guido Molinari, Philip Fry, Francine Couture,

Suzanne Lemerise, Marcel Saint-Pierre, and François-Marc Gagnon), and the other on the “Situation of Art in Quebec” (with Marcel Rioux, Pierre Vallières, Raoul Duguay, and Fernande Saint-Martin); moreover, there were artist talks delivered throughout the duration of the exhibition. This inclusion of open discussion forums within the exhibition’s very program gave rise to a broad and particularly spiteful media controversy, as the press accused the organizers of having excluded painters from the show; of having included anglophone artists; or of having embraced pluralism, which was regarded as a disavowal of the Automatist legacy. Partisans of the show’s previously rejected concept also took part. In addition, the press also took issue with the catalogue’s design, its content, the quality of the translation, and the spirit of chaos that permeated the lecture series, which stole the spotlight from the works themselves. At the time, the exhibition and its accompanying activities were perceived as failures, yet Thériault continued to subscribe fervently to its pluralistic concept and to its break with the past.²⁶

Discussion and debate are empirical modes of enquiry; for Thériault they were ways to assert direct speech in the public arena at a time in Quebec history when conditions for this type of intervention were favourable. According to Thériault, throughout this period, Quebec art was less influenced than it is today by academic discourse, museum boards and their philanthropist members, or the authority of the art market (he notes, for instance, that no debate surrounded the *Aurora borealis* exhibition that took

/25/ See the publication that appeared after the event in which are reproduced introductory texts by Normand Thériault and Chantal Pontbriand as well as the conferences of Jean-Christophe Amman, Annette Michelson, Germano Celant and Caroline Tisdall; *032303. Premières rencontres internationales de l'art contemporain, Montréal 1977* (Montréal: Parachute and L'Institut d'art contemporain, 1977).

/26/ Véronique Rodriguez, 38–45

place in 1985).²⁷ Discussion also emphasizes the value of art in society and, more particularly, the role of the artist rather than that of the work. Public discussion is socially engaged speech, a mutating force whose results cannot be fully ascertained; it also affords a voice to dissent. Thus, it is embedded in Thériault's interventionist strategy, for it is essentially a potential, and it contains the possible conditions whereby projects are produced, as well as the risks that this entails.

Thériault developed a working methodology much in keeping with his approach to curating. One could even claim that his role as director of the GRAA was a method unto itself, particularly when one re-examines *Médiart* magazine, which was produced by the students who authored most of its content. The magazine's eighteen issues attest to Montreal's blossoming arts scene and its conditions of existence, and they also feature reports on international matters (*Documenta V*, Fluxus, Joseph Beuys, Vancouver and Intermedia, General Idea and *FILE Magazine*). If its purpose was to create "matter to be administered" which could then be sited in the public sphere, the magazine is clearly a public dissemination tool and the students, vectors of information, hunter-gatherers who accumulate and process matter. Thus, they perform a "process for attaining an object" (a method).

Québec 75 was given its final form by the artist interview process. In order to take part in *Québec 75*, selected artists were required to meet with the organizers to answer a set of questions. The questions were designed to ascertain artists' intentions, to assess the coherence of their discourse with respect to their practice, and, more importantly, to determine whether their work represented a rupture with the past.²⁸ This method foregrounds exchange in real time, and places greater emphasis on the artist rather than on the work to give shape to the exhibition. Artists were also the starting point of a selection process targeting hundreds of

international art producers who were asked to mail their projects to 032303. A letter stating the project's parameters had been written and one artist in four listed in the *Art Diary* were invited to take part. Thériault's methodology is a responsive process that is never arrested, as it adapts itself to the structure of the project at hand. His approach in the 032303 project is simple and straightforward, and it subscribes to the following four concepts: "information, communication, presence and the immediacy of the message."²⁹

In 1972, Thériault travelled to Kassel to see Harald Szeemann's *Documenta V*. The experience transformed him. The exhibition's emphasis on large-scale installations by such artists as Kienholz and Thek, among others, and the breadth of the interventions it showcased, including one by Beuys, became a reference point for him: "When one has been to Kassel, one knows that whatever the organizer's point of view may be, it is now impossible to organize exhibitions in the same way."³⁰ Four years earlier, he had seen Pontus Hulten's *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* at the MoMA (an exhibition that focussed on

/27/Normand Thériault interviewed by the author, Montreal, 28 October 2011.

/28/Normand Thériault, "Une intervention" and "Une exposition," in *Québec 75 / Arts* (Montréal: Institut d'art contemporain, 1975), 9 and 11.

/29/Normand Thériault, "032303. Introduction," *032303. Premières rencontres internationales de l'art contemporain, Montréal 1977* (Montréal: Parachute and L'Institut d'art contemporain, 1977), 17.

/30/Normand Thériault, "Documenta 5", *Médiart* 9 (September 1972), B-8. See also Véronique Rodriguez, "Aurora borealis ou l'internationalisation de l'art contemporain" dans *Exposer l'art contemporain du Québec. Discours d'intention et d'accompagnement*, Francine Couture, ed. (Montreal: Centre de diffusion 3D, 2003), 278-280 and Normand Thériault interviewed by the author, Montreal, 28 October 2011.

the intersection of humans with machines, from Leonardo to Jean Tinguely, and that included collaborations between artists and engineers commissioned by EAT). It had the same effect on him.³¹ The view espoused in these exhibitions, as well as the resources that lay at their disposal, had nothing in common with the poverty of the Quebec context. Moreover, both exhibitions emphasized a distinctive authorial voice, thereby addressing the curator's power in shaping one's experience and understanding of the artwork, as well as his capacity to convey a form of knowledge. They afforded Thériault a new awareness of what was lacking and of what the future could be. Thus, instead of hindering his development, they compelled him to act and even justified the necessity of action. When he was invited to co-curate an exhibition at the Centre international d'art contemporain (CIAC) in 1985, which was to be titled *Aurora borealis*, he declared:

If I were seeking to find where this exhibition begins, it wouldn't be at the entrance of a given room or at any given door leading to the exhibition space; this exhibition begins in 1972 at Kassel at the magnificent project that was *DOCUMENTA V*; it begins when I was still a student and stood at the foot of the stairs at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and looked upwards towards Borduas's *L'Étoile noire*.³²

Aurora borealis and *Hier et après* (an exhibition mounted in 1980 when Thériault was a curator at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) were modelled on *The Machine and Documenta*, in so far as both projects made use of large-scale installations with arresting visual and spatial effects. *The Machine and Documenta*, as well as Borduas's sustained practice of resistance in Quebec, were Thériault's three principal reference points; they were models underpinning the intellectual goals he wished to reach in his various interventions.

Despite this external impetus and his enthusiastic reception of new practices and discourses, Thériault worked in isolation. In the 1970s, the art market was virtually non-existent in Quebec and Canada. Although artists' networks succeeded in overcoming geographic borders (as Image Bank, Fluxus, and certain conceptual practices clearly demonstrate), the notion of peripheral sites of production had no currency, and the art world was associated with only a handful of large Western cities (New York, London, Los Angeles, Paris, Milan, Düsseldorf, and Frankfurt). In the 1970s, Quebec was not yet part of this mapping of the art world. Information was mostly disseminated in art magazines, and trips to New York allowed one to become better acquainted with a wide variety of experimental art. But Thériault, who familiarized himself with the mutations and stakes of contemporary art through those means, was not particularly interested in establishing a network of curatorial peers. Rather, he preferred being in direct contact with artists and acting on his firsthand experience with artworks.³³

He was not well acquainted with his Canadian colleagues such as Alvin Balkind (head of the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery, 1962–73, and later curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1975–78), or Dennis Young (curator at the Art Gallery of

/31/ See "Noël à New York à l'ère de la machine," *La Presse*, 21 December 1968, 37; "De la machine comme la fin de l'art." *La Presse*, 18 January 1969, 40. A few months earlier (*La Presse*, 17 August 1968, 38), Thériault devotes an entire article to EAT (Experiments in Art and Technology), in which he discusses the possibilities offered by technological innovations and collaborations between artists and engineers, and mentions the representatives of EAT in Canada. He ends this article by stating that EAT is not an artform but a structure.

/32/ Normand Thériault, "Introduction à la visite d'Aurora borealis."

/33/ Normand Thériault interviewed by the author, Montreal, 28 October 2011.

Ontario), and he had no contact with the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, then a mecca of conceptual art. He knew Pierre Théberge who had introduced to the National Gallery of Canada the work of N.E. Thing Co., Joyce Wieland, Michael Snow, and the London group of artists, but did not develop any sustained exchange with him. However, he did sustain relationships with his peers at the Canada Council for the Arts, which funded many of his projects and commissioned him to write a report in 1973 that allowed him to enter into contact with Image Bank, the New York Corres-Sponge Dance School, and General Idea, three collectives that convinced him of the importance of group operation and production structures.³⁴ When he visited *The Machine* in 1968 and *Documenta* in 1972, rising stars in contemporary curating such as Pontus Hulten or Harald Szeemann were unknown to him, as was Szeemann's assistant, Jean-Christophe Amman. In fact, it was Chantal Pontbriand and France Morin who invited Amman to Montreal for 032303.³⁵ Nevertheless, in the Canadian context, Montreal was still a key cultural player in the 1970s when compared with Toronto and Vancouver. This is due, on the one hand, to Expo 67, which evoked a degree of cosmopolitanism unequalled elsewhere in Canada, and, on the other, to the presence of formalist painters such as Gaucher, Molinari, and Tousignant. Ironically, it was this very pictorial legacy that Thériault strove to overcome.

The diversity and intensity of Thériault's curatorial practice is unlike any other throughout this period, not only in Quebec, but throughout all of Canada as well. Thériault had something of the *travailleur intellectuel* about him, a notion dear to French students during May 68. It comes through in his solidarity with artists as cultural workers, and in his desire to firmly ground artistic production within society and, more particularly, within his own society. He was also thoroughly convinced that such an anchoring was possible. His social view of art is echoed in his curatorial

interventions, whose very form acknowledges risk, the possibility of failure, and the constant need to begin the whole process over again.

Thériault's interventionist approach to curating gives rise to a variety of interrelated forms that ultimately define the sum total of his activities as an independent curator. At the beginning of the 1970s, his curating was already aware of its conditions of authorship, which meant for Thériault that he took full responsibility for his actions. This is clearly demonstrated in the controversy surrounding *Québec 75* and the project's ultimate failure, in Thériault's articles for *La Presse* in which he denounced the state of affairs in Quebec, and in the various magazine projects he undertook but which came to an end given the lack of resources.

How ought we to understand Thériault's activities today? From a contemporary perspective, Thériault's attitude and curatorial achievements partake in Maria Lind's notion of "the curatorial," which consists in an undertaking:

that encourages you to start with the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away and against it. ... It involves not just representing but presenting and testing; it performs something here and now instead of merely mapping something from there and then.³⁶

³⁴/ See Normand Thériault, "Les groupes" in *Canada Trajectoires 73*, catalogue of the exhibition, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (Montréal: Éditions Médiart, 1973).

³⁵/ Normand Thériault interviewed by the author, Montreal, 28 October 2011.

³⁶/ Maria Lind, "On the Curatorial," *Artforum* (October 2009), 103.

Despite the fact that the art world has changed radically and that "the curatorial" is now linked to the increased mobility of curators, artworks, and ideas, this way of framing artworks within a broader set of issues, as well as the openness, trial and error, and debate such a notion fosters, lie at the heart of Thériault's practice.

Lind also draws on Chantal Mouffe's concept of the political, which encompasses disagreement and dissent.³⁷ Thériault, who staunchly defended pluralism in Quebec at a time when such an approach was often deemed a threat to the cause of sovereignty, gave such a concept the space to affirm itself in his curating. But to affirm does not mean to produce harmony, much to the contrary. The determination underpinning the positions taken by Thériault, and the varied nature of the resulting projects, often produced in the midst of controversy, all indicate that disagreement and dissent had free reign. Such a state of affairs set the stage for the next intervention.

/37/ "The objective of a democratic politics is not to eliminate passions or to relegate them to the private realm, but to mobilize them and afford them a framework within an agonistic system [a system of relations between adversaries] that promotes the respect of pluralism." Trans. by the author. Chantal Mouffe, "Introduction: pour une démocratie plurielle," in *Le politique et ses enjeux. Pour une démocratie plurielle* (Paris: La Découverte, Collection du mauss, 1994), 5.

Countercultural
Practices and
Experiences
in Quebec's
Neo-Rural Communes

Jean-Philippe Warren

*We wanted to change everything.
Not only did we want to change religions,
but also change our groove,
change our masters,
change our illusion: EVERYTHING.¹*

In the years around 1968 (i.e., 1967–70),² Quebec was the stage for a series of violent and radical events undertaken in response to the large-scale reforms that were implemented after the election of Jean Lesage and the stirrings of the Quiet Revolution (1960–66). In no particular order, a list of the most spectacular would include: the so-called “*Lundi de la matraque*” (“Monday of the truncheon”), which took place during the Saint-Jean Baptiste parade; the bombing of the Montreal Stock Exchange; the Murray-Hill riot lead by taxi drivers; the Sir George Williams University Computer Riot in which students infuriated by the institution’s racism destroyed its computer centre; the CEGEP strikes of October 1968; the demonstrations against Bill 63; or the kidnapping of James Richard Cross and Pierre Laporte by two cells of the Front de liberation du Québec (FLQ) in October 1970. These years of turmoil awoke unbridled and impatient hopes for social and political revolution as most of the period’s protest groups thrived on leftist and nationalist ideologies.³

/1/ Christian Allègre et al., “Une commune rurale québécoise,” in *Répertoire québécois des outils planétaires* (Montreal: Éditions Mainmise, 1977), 205.

/2/ See Jean-Philippe Warren, *Une douce anarchie: Les années 68 au Québec* (Montreal: Éditions du Boréal, 2008).

/3/ Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010).

However, to many disillusioned activists, the repeated failure of such popular protest movements at the turn of the 1970s seemed to demonstrate that the powers that be, along with their potent control institutions, could not be overturned by means of a frontal and spontaneous attack, and that it was perhaps a more worthwhile task to try to "save one's soul" by deserting the sites wherein dominant institutions reproduce themselves.⁴ To activists exhausted by apparently sterile political struggles, the possibility of acting in a constructive manner without waiting for an authentic world to emerge at the margins of dominant society was the very stuff dreams were made of. But they did not regard such a flight of fancy as a mode of resignation; rather, by refusing to take further part in an alienating and oppressive system, and without seeking to measure themselves directly against it, they believed that they were laying the foundations of a new society that would slowly develop at the margins of the old one.

For certain young rebels, the solution lay in regrouping into communes. Historian Timothy Miller has devised a list of the defining elements of such countercultural communes. These include: the will to break free from dominant society; a certain degree of self-denial to the benefit of group welfare; the sharing of daily life; frequent, intimate, and meaningful interpersonal relations; the need for a critical mass (which Miller regards as comprising at least five individuals, the majority of which is not linked by family or marriage ties⁵). Despite such common features, emergent communal practices actually entailed a stunning variety of lifestyles – be they ecological, artistic, craft-oriented, pacifist, mystical, political, popular, student-run, or Christian (i.e., the famous "Jesus Freaks"). From "crash pads," simple shelters where anyone could spend the night, to highly organized cooperatives, all variations were possible.

In order not to lose the reader in this disorienting array of social practices, the present text only addresses the experiences of countercultural communes in rural areas, for such communities generally went further than urban ones in their hopes of creating a parallel society that was to be independent and, ideally, autarchic, and where the links between persons were to be perfectly fraternal and egalitarian. To young adults who were mainly aged between twenty and thirty, these initiatives were an opportunity to experience a kind of group life that promised to reconcile their struggle for independence with their need to break free from the bonds of society, as well as their natural, gregarious impulse. However, as we will see in what follows, these tensions, which were then enthusiastically welcomed, ultimately undermined most of these communal projects after years of conflict and disappointment. Therein lies the reason why it is worthwhile to reconsider these experiments, which can still provide us with invaluable lessons.

THE REFUSAL OF THE INTOLERABLE

The countercultural communes that emerged in Quebec at the turn of the 1970s originated in the United States. In fact, some of the first communes established in the province were founded by American immigrants.⁶ On a continental level though, this phenomenon was not fundamentally new, for the history of America involves, from its inception, the establishment of more or less widespread and

/4/ Jean-Philippe Warren, *Ils voulaient changer le monde* (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 2007).

/5/ Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), XXIII-XXIV.

/6/ Novia Carter, *Un phénomène prometteur: les communes canadiennes* (Ottawa: Le Conseil Canadien de Développement Social, 1974), 9.

long lasting communes. From the Shakers and the Rappites to the Mennonites and the Beatniks, there is in fact a long tradition of communal living encompassing the history of America, a place otherwise defined as staunchly individualist and materialist.⁷ Similarly, in Quebec, despite irreconcilable ideological differences, it is possible to draw historical parallels between the colonisation of new land by French Canadian settlers (les "habitants") and hippie communes, for the countercultural movement embraced an alternative vision of society based on agriculture, craft practices, and folklore. Sewing, crochet, baking, working the land, in short, the whole spectrum of traditional practices were rehabilitated in a vast project seeking social and cultural renewal, a project that went against the grain of the Quiet Revolution's ideology of modernisation.

Certain communes were more successful in shaping the period's *Québécois* imaginary. For instance, the Maison du pêcheur ("House of the Fisherman"), a small farm located in Gaspé, was a refuge for radical and revolutionary activists during the summers of 1969 and 1970. In 1975, Michel Bélair, president of F.R.E.A.K. (the Fondation de recherches en écologie et alternatives québécoises, or the "Quebec Research Foundation for Ecology and Alternative Kebecois Solutions," a non-profit organization seeking to collect and disseminate information) moved to the Petits-Vallons farm in Matane. Between 1973 and 1978, Paul Chamberland took up residence at the Cadet-Roussel commune along with a dozen adults and their numerous children. The commune was established in a large house at the outskirts of Morin-Heights in order to take part in a revolutionary experiment that aimed to start life anew.⁸ From 1960 to 1974, sociologist Marcel Rioux and several friends attempted to create a small village based on such values as mutual aid and discussion within the larger municipality of North Hatley where Rioux owned a house.⁹ During the same period, the P'tit Québec libre (literally: the "Free lil Quebec") farm, which was based on a libertarian model, opened its doors to both politicized

persons who emulated Che Guevara, and to individuals with hippy leanings who sought out the farm only to smoke pot and go on a communal "trip" together.¹⁰ In an ad placed in the sixth issue of *Le Village*, a magazine based in Montreal's Carré Saint-Louis, members of P'tit Québec libre depicted their commune as a place to socialize and party beyond official institutions.

Free lil Quebec! At last, a place where no freakin' dirty government is gonna remind us of the dog's life that we're used'to living. There's a place; we can take a break from their god-forsaken problem. A place where each person can feel free. A place where people ain't afraid to look at themselves in the eye and to talk. And we're gonna talk; we're gonna understand one another, and it's gonna feel good for everybody to come together and to shake hands and to understand that in *la belle province* we're all born screwed up by the same gang of jerks that keeps promising us jobs and then tells us to eat shit.¹¹

/7/ Keith Melville, *Communes in the Counter Culture: Origins, Theories, Styles of Life* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1972).

/8/ Quoted in Stéphane Baillargeon, "Paul Chamberland. Entre le plancher des vaches et le septième ciel," *Le Devoir*, August 30, 1993, 9.

/9/ Jules Duchastel, *Marcel Rioux: entre l'utopie et la raison* (Montreal: Nouvelle Optique, 1981).

/10/ "Après trois années d'existence, le P'tit Québec libre à vendre?" *Mainmise* 22 (April 1973): 59.

/11/ "Le P'tit Québec libre," *Le Village* 2.6 (17 June 1971): 10.

Irrespective of place and style, the driving spirit behind all such initiatives was always the same: it consisted in embracing a looser kind of socialisation, which was more fraternal and more spontaneous. What drove persons in Quebec to choose a communal lifestyle was in fact the desire to be free: free from the constraints of work, from consumer society, and from their parents. They all shared the same refusal of rationality, assembly line work, hierarchies, schedules, specialisations, sexual differences, domestic chores, and the institution of the family. Although they differed in terms of their scale, internal organization, and philosophy, Quebec's communes converged in their condemnation of the "normalization of the intolerable," that is, the transformation of daily life into a banal and oppressive experience. Reports were on the rise showing that there was a widespread refusal of domestic and professional routines, of constraining schedules, of the material poverty that prevailed in downtown Montreal's slum-like dwellings, and of the moral poverty of the suburbs. In this radical, anti-institutional atmosphere pervasive in the years around 1968, the suppression of authority, rules, and hierarchies became a kind of rallying cry for a generation seeking a more festive and libertarian existence.

Such long-sought freedom was to undermine, among other things, sexual and drug-related taboos. However, it is worth mentioning that such freedom was not permissive to the point of alarming the period's conservative minds. In fact, although drug consumption was widespread in the communes, members generally took soft drugs, from marijuana to magic mushrooms. As for the spirit of free love, which continues to fascinate the general public, it usually implied the rejection of wedlock and not the refusal of stable and long-term bonds. The embrace of nudity was much more aimed at breaking free from taboos and preconceptions related to the body and human nature, than at cultivating an erotic aesthetic. Thus, the main intention here consisted in undermining the social conditioning that impeded individuals from desiring

and feeling pleasure. In fact, what allows one to understand the spirit of sexual and emotional liberation that suffused these communes is the age of participants. Irrespective of whether they live in communes or not, young adults in their twenties then craved multiple sexual experiences, were in the process of discovering their own bodies, changed partners frequently, and disliked relationships with too many strings attached.

NEO-RURALISM

These experiences of new forms of communal life also stemmed from the threat posed by the anonymous, cold, and artificial character of the city. "What a god-forsaken, boring civilisation. The other day I was stuck in the middle of the metropolitan [highway], with the honking, the slush; it was hell. I don't like it, the city, money, the boss, the concrete, I really don't like it."¹² People dreamt of an autarchic kind of existence in which interpersonal relationships would be transparent and would develop away from the dizzying constraints of the modern world. In contrast to the dominant rhythm of urban life, it seemed that the farm afforded a lifestyle that was both more real and more simple. Much like in Gilles Carle's film *La vraie nature de Bernadette* (1972), the countercultural movement was driven by a certain longing for the countryside, which was a place in which life seemed more authentic than in the cold, concrete universe of the city. By breaking free from the individualism prevalent in the urban context, from the mad rush for profit, and from the relentless rationalisation of human relations, the neo-rural commune promised to rekindle the community-

/12/ "1973-1975 : la commune?" *Mainmise* 46 (April 1975): 15.

based and land-bound values that comprised the childhood lullaby of the previous generation of French Canadians:¹³

Perhaps the most important thing I learned from the commune is that I was able to take off my armour, and that's why I freak out when I come to town; I feel besieged. The commune functions as a return to intimacy, as a sharing of intimacy, as an openness, and it calls for an end to 'private' life, for the sharing of all, and for the reconstruction of a unanimous society. I need the village, the network.¹⁴

The period's fascination with the figure of the Indian – which was still regarded as wild and pure, ecological and animist – is consistent with this refusal of civilisation's alienating, polluting, crushing, and conformist character.

It bears mentioning that many in Quebec felt that industrial society was about to come tumbling down in an ultimate act of social and economic convulsion. Jacques Bernier, who then lived in a long abandoned country house with some ten friends and colleagues in Maria, Gaspésie, believed he was about to witness a cataclysm: "... we believe that we are perhaps going to have to live like Cro Magnon man, and that it is preferable to get away and to take it easy."¹⁵ Alain Robert, who then lived in Abitibi, wanted to break free from the absurd character of the dominant world; in this light, he stated: "many foresee the coming of very dire times that will be brought on by the ruin of this artificial regime." In such a menacing context, the will to progressively achieve self-determinacy did not constitute in his eyes a gratuitous revolt; much to the contrary, it was "a clear means to begin building a more viable world."¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is well known that the return to the land and to communal forms of life has sometimes espoused sectarian overtones and produced nightmares, as is the case with the group led by Roch Thériault (aka Moïse) at the end of the 1970s.

SOCIAL PRECARIOUSNESS

Very early on, hippy communes were plagued by a serious problem: were they not based on an internal contradiction? On the one hand, they encouraged groups to sustain relationships in which members were to bond as if in unison, while claiming, on the other, to fully respect individual desires and personal aspirations. Thus, Paul Chamberland joined a commune in the Laurentians in order to experience what he called "the comprehensive achievement of anarchy": "Ultimately, I have become an anarchist, a situationist, and the Commune perfectly matched my ideas."¹⁷ In the Morin-Heights commune populated by ten adults aged twenty through thirty-five, interpersonal relations were casual and the group's philosophy consisted in a generalized laissez-faire attitude. "Every time we attempted to adopt rules," Chamberland later confessed, "it fell apart."¹⁸ It was only a matter of time before such an attitude was to conflict with the banal and daily requirements of group living.

By remaining faithful to anarchist ideology while seeking to increasingly emphasize interpersonal relations between group members, the commune did not make group life an easy affair, for the promiscuity of members contrasted time and again with

/13/Gaétan Rochon, *Politique et contre-culture: essai d'analyse interprétative* (Ville LaSalle: Hurtubise-HMH, 1979).

/14/"1973-1975: la commune?," 15.

/15/Jacques Bernier, "Une expérience d'agriculture communautaire" in Allègre *et al.*, 8.

/16/Alain Robert, "L'autosuffisance" in Allègre *et al.*, 99.

/17/Quoted in Baillargeon, 9.

/18/Paul Chamberland, quoted by Françoise-Renée Pineau, "La vie en commune" in *Perspectives*, *La Presse* Sunday supplement 17.32, August 9, 1975, 4.

their unbridled individualism. Moreover, the fact that communes mainly attracted "flunkies," or "freaks," or "black sheep" did not help matters, nor did the fact that all such persons were eccentrics who had trouble dealing with other people from the start. The main leader of a commune established in a country house near Quebec City had no qualms about revealing the group's problems: "Last year, everyone spoke in joyous tones of the ambitious projects they intended to undertake at the farm. This summer though, everyone who comes by is only here to "hang out."¹⁹ Micheline, a member of the same Quebec City commune, spoke bitterly of the lack of cooperation between certain male and female members:

You see, I've already spent time at three communes. I always bring along good vibrations and contribute to work, but it's always the same. There's still too many people who cling on to the "peace-and-love-I-leave-things-be attitude. And the same morons are always ready to take on projects, but they are the last to actually want to work.²⁰

Even when relationships were not tense, meetings organized to settle minor domestic problems ended up by exhausting even the most enthusiastic of personalities. As a result, communes were dissolved soon after they were founded, for they were victims of tensions that are inherent to their *modus operandi*.

FINANCIAL PRECARIOUSNESS

In 1970, a small income was sufficient to allow young adults without responsibilities or a taste for luxury to live in a more of less acceptable manner: when all one really aspires to is to strum a guitar, make love, drink beer with friends, go skinny dipping in the wild, or smoke weed while gazing at the stars, one need not be a millionaire. By regrouping into communes, these

marginal young adults could save more money by sharing rental and utility costs (i.e., telephone, heating, etc.). It comes as no surprise then that members of such communes included students who temporarily dropped out of school, defrocked priests, avant-garde artists, and runaways, that is, persons without stable jobs who depended on welfare, unemployment insurance, or on other federal programmes such as the Opportunities for Youth or the Local Initiatives Programs. "A young man of twenty-five who dropped out approximately one year ago because he didn't want to take part in consumer society claims that one can survive in Quebec with \$75 per month, provided one has a very particular lifestyle."²¹ By living in a commune, such a man would pay \$22 per month in rent and \$20 for food, which would leave him with \$33 for other expenses. Moreover, he would be keen on using public transportation and would only travel by bus or subway. His medical expenses would be covered by medical insurance. He would attend free shows in Montreal and would buy his clothes at army surplus stores.

In many cases, low housing costs in both the buying and leasing real-estate markets drove many such individuals to the countryside. Although the vast majority of this neo-rural population continued to depend on the city for goods, services, and even work, a certain number sought to push their rural experience to the limit; thus, by taking advantage of affordable property costs, they took up farming in order to live off the fruits of the land. However, if cheap country houses and farmland certainly aided

/19/ Ronnie, quoted by Paul Henri Goulet, "Phénomène des 'crash pads' communautaires au Québec," in *Pop Jeunesse* 2.16 (25 August 1973): 16.

/20/ Micheline, quoted by Goulet, 16.

/21/ "Comment survivre au Québec avec \$2.50 par jour," *La Patrie* (4-10 November 1971): 4.

in establishing communes at the outset of a given summer, the situation became increasingly difficult to maintain over the course of several years. Quebec's young hippies soon realized that the requirements for maintaining farmland in Gaspésie, Lac-Saint-Jean or the Laurentians were far different from those they had read about in books on communal life penned by Californian authors. The fact that prior owners, who often descended from generations of French Canadian farmers accustomed to hard work in the fields, had altogether abandoned agriculture and herding, was certainly a bad omen for the idealists residing in the communes, for they had no experience in farming, no supporting income, no tools or equipment, and no contact with the local population, which was often suspicious if not openly hostile.

Maurice Roy and two friends had taken up residence in a farm located in Beauce. At the beginning, they sought to live in total autarchy. Not only did they produce their own milk, but they also ate their own cheese, butter, yogurt, eggs, bread, maple syrup, honey, beer, wine, vegetables (both in the summer and winter), jam, fruit jelly, cretons, and liver pâté, and even made their clothes. They were able to live off a mere \$5 per week for three persons. However, over the course of time, such a lifestyle was deemed too demanding. The work involved was too difficult, and it implied too much sacrifice in exchange for disappointing results. At one point, Roy and his friends entertained the hope of living off a substantial income by selling pigs and eggs,²² but such expectations were soon curbed by the constraints of the Quebec agricultural market. As a result, they decided to relinquish their communal project.

THE LA PLAINE COMMUNE

The La Plaine Commune was founded in the spring of 1972 in Saint-Épiphanie in the Lower Saint-Lawrence region by three men

and one woman who had been more or less successful political activists and who sought to sow the seeds of a new society. This commune is a particularly enlightening example not only of the financial problems faced by the members of Quebec's communes, but also of the general evolution of Quebec's collective sensibility. The commune's four founding members and those who later joined them were all in their early twenties and newcomers to the rural world. Many were drop-outs who had initially met in CEGEP. After having decided to buy a house located in one of La Plaine's rural roads, at l'Isle-Verte, for the sum of \$1500, they each contributed their respective incomes and personal belongings for members to use as needed. Living expenses were thereby reduced to a minimum, and the moneys left untouched were used to maintain the project afloat. The group's enthusiasm prevailed but its naïveté did not allow members to foresee the obstacles that lay on their path.

Villagers did not cast a friendly eye on these newcomers, who behaved like marginals, even in the city. Although the commune could rely on occasional acts of goodwill and on the exchange of goods and services between neighbours, it did not have access to the local community's vast support network. Moreover, members lacked practical knowledge (concerning soil texture, the feeding and caring of animals, mechanics, woodwork, accounting), and the first winters were harsh: "Commune members were under the false impression that previous modes of production were less complicated. Horse farming [...] implies as much if not more technical knowledge than the use of tractors."²³ Members also believed that they could not only do farming without motors, but

²²/Maurice Roy, quoted in Allègre *et al.*, 99.

²³/Marc Corbeil, *L'Utopie en acte : la Commune de La Plaine* (Rimouski: Université du Québec à Rimouski, 1990), 22.

also without chemical fertilizers, insecticides, or herbicides. As a result, they were soon faced with bad crops and fields overrun by parasites.

In 1975, members were still living below the poverty line and had no hot water; they requested that renovations be undertaken and that improvements be implemented in both houses. Soon, the commune had to make a compromise. Members accepted to consolidate debt and to refinance the commune, which became, by the same token, a non-profit organization. Thus, the group was eligible to receive several subsidies (including \$60,000 in 1980 in the context of the Programme expérimental de création d'emplois communautaires (the "Experimental Community Job Creation Programme"). As a sign of the commune's transformation, members purchased a new combine harvester: they had come a long way from draft horse farming! However, despite numerous changes, budgetary constraints multiplied. In October 1984, unrecognizable in its new guise, the experiment that was the La Plaine Commune was brought to a close. "People had grown older. The trials of ten years of communal life in what were sometimes dire conditions had become apparent, and one grew tired of realizing that efforts that would have been fruitful in more conventional circumstances did nothing to guarantee a more comfortable life."²⁴ The company's assets were liquidated. Many members had to leave the region and embark on very different careers than those of which they had dreamt ten years before.

FROM THE AGE OF AQUARIUS TO ADULTHOOD

The story of the La Plaine Commune was re-enacted almost everywhere in Quebec several times over. At the beginning of the 1980s, the rebellious youth of 1968 had grown older and no longer sought to lead the same lifestyle they had lead in their twenties. At the end of the 1970s, people felt that the hopes fuelled

by the baby-boomer generation were undermined as the protest generation turned thirty. Men and women who had previously joined the ranks of student protest groups in the years around 1968 had now reached the age of responsibility. "We do not feel that we are wrong in claiming that thirty is a psychologically important age," militants were now claiming. "It is a time when one begins to look at the future while casting a glance backwards. The most obstinate of activists are not indifferent to the precariousness of a marginal lifestyle, and above all to the economic character of such a lifestyle."²⁵ As members of communes gradually came of age, they spent less time outdoors and lead a more domestic life, a fact that made communal living more difficult. Previously rejected impulses and dominant values resurfaced once individuals had overcome their fascination with the hippie movement.

In its first editorial published in March 1978, the editors of the newly founded periodical *Temps fou* reflected on the last twenty years of Quebec history, from the effervescence of the Quiet Revolution to the process of political normalisation and collective resignation characterizing the end of the 1970s. They tried to assess what remained of previous revolutionary dreams at a time when, on the left side of the political spectrum, the Marxist-Leninist groups indulged in dogmatism and, on the right, international corporations were trumpeting a profit-seeking logic. Among other things, they agreed on the "failure of counterculture to model a true alternative."²⁶ "After more than ten years of practice, the collective dimension of change initiated by individuals who had

²⁴/Corbeil, 38.

²⁵/C.L., "Pour y voir clair," *Le Temps fou* 1 (March-April 1978): 6.

²⁶/Véronique Dassas "Scènes de la vie d'un journal," *Le Temps fou* 5 (March/April/May 1979): 7.

decided to 'change life' remains pretty thin. The achievements are principally called organic food co-ops, vegan restaurants, co-op bookshops. The only political tools that one can associate with this social movement are the diverse ecological groups that remain very marginalized and more often than not lack a political vision of everyday struggle.²⁷ These wanderings and errors had indeed invalidated the neat frames of analysis that, until recently, enabled the interpretation and remaking of the world around a few glasses of beer.

Born in 1947, Roch Fortin, who was a veteran of the struggles of 1968, asserted in 1978: "The countercultural dream of the 1960s is dead."²⁸ The end of the libertarian movement was tangible. In 1977, one writer claimed: "Quebecers no longer live in communes, or almost. That time is over."²⁹ The period's radical individualism ended up by superseding the communitarian ideology. Young adults struggled to come to terms with a more individualistic and professional way of life. After having effected a virulent critique of the principal modern institutions—the family, work, religion, marriage, school – the protesters of 1968 now embraced a new quest for freedom by breaking free from the communes and abandoning the communitarian spirit endemic to groups and parties: "After having lived within a commune or as a couple, living alone constituted a whole new step."³⁰ Madeleine, for instance, was a twenty-nine-year-old woman who had belonged to the first generation of CEGEP students. She now liked to treat herself to new dishes and go shopping for new clothes.³¹ Denis, a veteran of the 1968–69 student protest movement, was now ready to put his former dream of radical communitarianism into perspective: his frequent readings of Wilhelm Reich had not been able to suppress his desire to possess things and to establish stable and monogamous relationships with a loved one.³²

Born in 1947, Christine L'Heureux had initially been drawn by some of the Quebec underground movement's leading names. She had been a member of a commune, lived outside official social norms, and adopted an unstructured lifestyle. These experiences notwithstanding, she returned to a "normal" lifestyle and re-immersed herself into the "straight world." For months, Christine L'Heureux had been soul searching. She attempted to find new bearings for herself, and hoped to provide herself with more room for deeply personal experiences. "Increasingly, I want people to write "I" in their texts," she claimed.³³ Gradually, people began returning home, albeit without fully relinquishing their utopia of a transparent world, a world that would be at once more fraternal, ecological, and spiritual. This homecoming was an acknowledgment that the countercultural communal project had failed despite the fact that it had mobilized an important part of Quebec's youth over the course of the years that followed the political fervour of 1968.

/27/C.L., "Pour y voir clair," 6.

/28/"Absolu pour le fond, relatif quant à la forme," *Mainmise* 73 (January 1978): 26.

/29/"Les tout seuls en ville," *Mainmise* 72 (July 1977): 25.

/30/Ibid., 25.

/31/Ibid., 26.

/32/Ibid., 26.

/33/"Absolu pour le fond, relatif quant à la forme," 24.

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