The Hospitality of *Parachute*

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REFERENCES

Parachute : essais choisis vol. 1 1975-1984, vol. 2 1985-2000, Bruxelles : La Lettre volée, 2004, (Essais)

- 1 Chantal Pontbriand's role cannot be over-emphasized as far as the quality of *Parachute*, created by her in 1975 in Montreal¹, is concerned. Her foreword, introducing the 23 articles brought together for these two publications, updates the principles behind the magazine's success. In them, under the aegis of Jacques Derrida, C. Pontbriand champions an ethics of "hospitality" attesting to her own ability to lend an ear to the other, and her attentiveness to the "emergent zones" of artistic and intellectual output, not forgetting her ability to stand back from her own activity. It is this latter quality that made the magazine's new and successful departure possible, after 25 years, in 2000, coinciding with the selection of these essays. The chronological part, consisting of nine articles in the first book (1975-1984) and fourteen in the second (1985-2000) shows a clear intention of historical readability. The two volumes thus make available much valuable information about many international artists busy over those years, about whom there is little to be found in France: Ed Ruscha, Mary Kelly, Rober Racine, Geneviève Cadieux, Komar and Melamid, Guillermo Kuitca, and Lothar Baumgarten, and then other slightly more familiar names like Willie Doherty and Michael Snow. Plenty of room is earmarked for the new technologies, with writings by Anne-Marie Duguet on Bill Viola, Christine Ross on Nan Hoover, Peggy Gale on Stan Douglas, Jacinto Lageira on James Coleman, and Raymond Gervais on a sound piece by Michael Snow. These are all extremely competent analyses of these artists and the actual technologies they use.
- 2 These 23 articles represent more than an overview of historically specific practices: they actually confirm the role of *Parachute* as a "laboratory" of writings on art. In this respect, it is worth asking ourselves to what extent the selection, with its quite perceptible break

between the two books, constitutes a situation of essay-based criticism. In a nutshell, while all the articles are excellent, the first book contains particularly outstanding essays by well-known authors (Thierry de Duve, Serge Guilbaut, Georges Didi-Huberman..) undertaking long-range criticism. The difference between the two books may be due to a selection that is as thematic as it is chronological, and it may reflect a Montreal-type dynamism between the 1970s and 1980s, spurred on by an equal reception of Anglo-Saxon and French art theory. The quality of the whole also traces another between-the-lines hypothesis: this period (late 1970s-early 1980s), affected both by the artistic changes ushered in in the previous decade and by the declared end of the avant-gardes, was extraordinarily stimulating for criticism. In the first book, we grasp a conceptualization in progress, keen to circumscribe in its historical ramifications the different facets of modernism and the influence of photography. As beneficiary of a well worked-out conceptual framework, after 1985 criticism proceeded towards a closer target, related to a caution brought on by the dispersal of forms of praxis—or because of a fragmented perception of art due to the increase and interrelationship between them. So in the first book, we get a hunch about future diatribes on modernism in an interview with Jean-François Lyotard in the early stages of writing *La Condition postmoderne*, and setting forth his choice of a Kantian model as a result of the fact that this latter contains “already a philosophy of multiplicity”. The following articles give us to understand to what point the Greenberg discourse has acted as a pedestal for definitions of modernism and contributed through antithesis to circumscribing structural art organizations still active today. S. Guilbaut’s article, preparing the ground for his famous *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1989) is a model of deconstruction of the ideological stances underpinning art. T. de Duve, Douglas Crimp, Thomas Crow and G. Didi-Huberman have written many an essay since, but their pieces here declare their amazing clear-sightedness. Re-introducing, in 2005, the clear-cut articulation of issues, since harped on, to do with aura (remarkable analyses by T. de Duve, based on Robert Ryman’s work), and understanding the contamination of art categories based on the institutionalization of photography (D. Crimp), and the relations between modernist art and mass culture (T. Crow), can only stimulate the present-day critical essay, to such an extent do the notions discussed underpin what Nicolas Bourriaud calls the art of “postproduction”. As for the article by Kate Linker, this sheds light on the contributions of feminist criticism, due to her most rigorous presentation of the part played by Jacques Lacan in the issue of subject and representation. All these essays act as basic instruments for a historian’s critique. If we grasp less, in the articles in the second book, which has a dynamics that rummage through history to trace the present, the writings are still exciting and interesting. The piece by Johanne Lamoureux, a brilliant reflection on the picturesque since William Gilpin, the better to apply its notions to postmodern Canadian artists, introduces the second compilation and acts as a transition. The other articles often deal with issues that were little developed prior to 1985, on video, the fetish value of transnational objects heightened by globalization (Laura U. Marks), on the non-utopian approach to politics (Dot Tuer/Guillermo Kuitca; Victor Tupitsyn; Vincent Lavoie/Willie Doherty)... What is more, scattered through both tomes, another type of writing illustrates the hospitality of *Parachute*: the critique produced by artists. Here, Jeff Wall on Edouard Manet and Dan Graham on Gordon Matta-Clark wield a visual keenness that all critics might envy. For the way they see things, attentive as they are to the historical and political data of art, is, de facto, at the service of “forms of synchronous interpretations with works in the process of being produced”, which is precisely what C. Pontbriand’s magazine is after.

NOTES

1. See the profile on page 114.