



DOYON/DEMERS

THE HUNTING WIDOWS

Since we cannot really speak for the Hunting Widows, we would rather present our conceptual, factual and anecdotal perceptions of this manoeuvre, which took place in the community of Saint-Raymond.

To draw attention to the current hunting widow phenomenon,¹ we rented a storefront at 206 rue Saint-Joseph, halfway between the post office and the church in Saint-Raymond.² The window clearly identified Doyon/Demers as social aestheticians and presented the inscription *Veuves de chasse — Petits récits*, which made reference to this traditional seasonal event and piqued the curiosity of many passersby. The space was open for the month of October 2001 — from Wednesday to Saturday, 10am to noon and 1pm to 5pm and until 9pm on Friday.

Response to our project ranged from a pensioner telling a joke about the interest that he foresees in associating with the widows to some saying “the women take it easy when the men go hunting.” Others inevitably suggested a comparison with golf widows, women left alone because of work and so on. Obviously using the

expression “hunting widows” provokes reactions that are both ironic and sympathetic. But giving attention to hunting widows also reiterates the particularity that links them to this situation, which is that of “a woman whose husband is often away on a specified activity,”³ hunting.

However, these women are not a structured group within the community— even though one could say theoretically that they represent a collective because they are called or call themselves “hunting widows.” As distinct and spread out as they are, these women become transcendently linked to a referential community, presented as a brief extension of their usual environment. This is a reality that is willingly accepted as part of the complexity of daily life in which the individual is linked heterogeneously to the social and the singular to the general. In this sense, the *reliance généralisée* concept that Edgar Morin established refers to the fact that “we live in a world where separated things are inseparable,”⁴ a statement that contextualises his interest in linking the individual-society-species within such a world.⁵



As for Marcel Bolle De Bal, recognized as one of the main instigators of the *reliance* concept, he is particularly concerned with developing the idea of a social *reliance* (on others), isolating it from psychological *reliance* (on the self), ontological *reliance* (on the species) and cosmic *reliance* (on the world) and this, while avoiding the notion of extending connections between ideas and between things. In fact, his theory of *social reliance* is concerned with both actions and systems that try at least to create or re-create links between a person and another social player, be this a person or a collective, a group, organization, institution, social movement and so on. Needless to say for him “psychosocial *reliance* (between two people) is both a basic element and a special case,”⁶ distinguishing dominance and affectivity.

Thus, it appears that other than being presented as the founding principle of the living, *reliance* and its antonym, *deliance*, define the forms and movements of social interaction. In fact, and although this may appear paradoxical at first glance, *deliance* and *reliance* are formed from the same substratum, because one exists only through the active force of the other.

Slight and moderate *reliances* are vital in situations, images or ideas that one shares with others, like so many minor and everyday accounts, social breathing spaces that correspond to a need for individual freedom largely exploited and used by economic imperialism. The combined impact of commercial expansionism and the development of information technology, along with cultural democracy, favour broadening the notion of culture in various aspects of daily life such as tradition, environment and ways of life,⁷ even as an existential aesthetic. One also observes that the very modern imperative of self-invention implodes precisely as people participate in the most diverse aesthetic experiences, linking them to this or that in a more or less stable, ephemeral way.⁸ All these factors contribute to weakening the notion of art and enjoin us to not just reconsider the presence, place and realities of the artist within postmodern society, but to explore, above all, the concept of social aesthetics in concrete terms,⁹ that which is related, so to speak, to *reliance*.

It is always on the basis of these observations and using circumstantial actions as we go along that we invent a socio-professional activity, and thus create the profession of “socio-aesthéticien”.¹⁰



To produce and assume this profession so that it will be perceived as genuinely existing, we did not present ourselves expressly as artists on the main street of Saint-Raymond, at least not at first. Actually, as socio-aestheticians we interfered in the business area and thus occupied public space. This was done in the hope of going against the common practices of everyday life, notably by giving certain citizens, the hunting widows, an unusual aesthetic experience, time shared at a free *être-ensemble*. This experience concerns an audio-visual self-recording and is improvised in unstable and intersubjective conditions — a space that suggests dialogical relationships where whom one is, could be and would like to be is superposed.¹¹

Relying both on an *in situ* and *in socius* integration,¹² we endeavoured to create a few micro-groups. And to do this, we prepared festive meals to bring together four to eight hunting widows.¹³ At the height of our activities, four groups were formed; however, several widows were interested in coming but did not because

their friends were not hunting widows or because they had other commitments. And naturally, everyone wanted to be with friends,¹⁴ because they really wanted to be able to talk freely and above all, to relax and have a good time!

Finally, on Wednesday October 24, five women merrily participated in a gathering that took place in private. Sitting at a table to eat, they were all fitted out with a microphone and a frontal mini-camera. The mikes, in principle, only recorded the sounds of the person wearing it, and the camera only the images viewed as the hunting widows moved their heads. The coughing, sighing and nodding of heads, all these aberrations that everyone of them consciously or unconsciously did when being recorded, were a uniting part of the whole that encompassed the fragmentation of the place and the discussion. Although the voices were not always linked to the images seen, they certainly were related to the interactions taking place at any given moment of the *être-ensemble*.



During this time, our role as socio-aestheticians was essentially to serve the meal, which was prepared by caterers and chosen by the participants, and to look after the technical part of the audio-visual recording. This was done with five monitors placed at a distance from the group—this was planned to avoid having the exchanges influenced by too strong an awareness of the process of recording the self. During the very animated third hour of the meal, each of our guests was given her own videotape, the original, unique document that was the result of her participation.

These recordings, a true *symbolum* for five people,¹⁵ gave concrete expression to a new collective memory, establishing additional bonds between these women who were already linked by their friendship and experience as hunting widows. Already, one can imagine them getting together again by themselves, each one bringing her tape recorder and television set, and rediscovering this event as it is replayed on the video. And as far as we are concerned, we can only reveal what was said that evening, by replying with the familiar expression: “What takes place in the forest, remains in the forest.”



Notes

¹ Concerning the impact of this phenomenon, Guy Sioui-Durand has stated: “This cyclical micro phenomenon, the call of the animal, not only modifies the local economy but even the interpersonal relationships of couples and families. As a rule, the women remain in the village. They are called the “Hunting widows,” and hidden under this designation are unexpected happy or dramatic stories. This cyclical time-space relationship that a community has to life in the forest, to the animal world, translates into a state of daily chaos, which conceals a questioning and emancipatory flights similar to insurmountable alienation.” Guy Sioui-Durand, “L’année 2001 de l’art actuel au Québec,” *Inter*, 81, 2001, [Special “Arts d’attitude”], p 50.

² Situated at the foot of the Laurentians, 50km northeast of Quebec City, the municipality of Saint-Raymond’s most significant means of developing socio-economically is to exploit the forest for its raw materials and for outdoor activities.

³ This is the informal definition given of the word, widow, in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, 2001.

⁴ Morin makes reference here to Espagnat’s theory of *inseparability*, stemming from a quantum physics experiment produced in 1970. “Broadly speaking, if one divides a particle into two, and keeps them at a distance from each other. Although separated, they remain in a relationship of “reliance.” The movements of one determine those of the other.” Edgar Morin, *Vers un théorie de la reliance généralisée ?* in Marcel Bolle De Bal, ed. *Voyage au cœur des sciences humaines. De la Reliance*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996, p. 326.

⁵ Edgar Morin, *La nature de la nature. La méthode Tome I*, Paris: Seuil, 1997, p. 10,55,60.

⁶ Marcel Bolle De Bal, “La reliance : connexions et sens,” *Connexions*, 33 (1981), p. 15-16.

⁷ Lise Santerre, “De la démocratisation de la culture à la démocratie culturelle,” in Guy Bellavance, ed., *Démocratisation de la culture ou démocratie culturelle*, Quebec: PUL, 2000, p. 47-63.

⁸ Here we take up several remarks already stated in “Citoyen ‘volontaire,’” *esse arts + opinions*, 48, (spring-summer 2003), p. 8.

⁹ Aesthetic understood here in the meaning of its Greek root: “[...] *æsthesis* shared proven emotion, collective sensitivity. Understood in this way, *æsthesis* favours interaction, uniting, empathy, the understanding of multiple networks and of small groups that make it up,” namely shared experience, in reference to the work of Michel Maffesoli. See Marcel Bolle De Bal, “De l’esthétique sociale à la sociologie existentielle : sours le signe de la reliance,” *Sociétés. Revue des sciences Humaines et Sociales*, 36 (1992), p. 169.

¹⁰ As such, we must state that our actions are not concerned with any kind social services, such as trying to give people a better quality of life by implementing aesthetic care. Instead, the interventions of a socio-aesthetician combine the exploration of socio-professional ties and the creation of situations favourable to relations between people, whether by chance or within micro-communities with similar affinities, contexts and interests. See Doyon/Demers, “Profession : socio-esthéticien,” in Patrice Loubier & Anne-Marie Ninacs, ed., *Les commensaux. Quand l’art se fait circonstances*, Montreal: SKOL, 2001, p. 142-149.

¹¹ Doyon/Demers, “Profession : socio-esthéticien,” in Patrice Loubier & Anne-Marie Ninacs, ed., *Les commensaux. Quand l’art se fait circonstances*, Montreal: SKOL, 2001, p. 142-149. Cf. : Réalité augmentée, *ibid*, p. 146,

¹² An expression that we have borrowed from Nicolas Bourriaud, *Formes de vie. L’art moderne et l’invention de soi*, Paris: Paris, Denoël, 1999, p. 168.

¹³ Every effort was made to promote the activity. During the week of October 14, an article about our quest was published in the regional weekly *Le Courrier de Portneuf* and the following week, community television CJSR-9 broadcast news of our activities four times on a local information program *INFO-3 — Télépoint*.

¹⁴ In this sense, it should be noted that we created a similar experience in Hull in June 2000, titled *Communauté d’auteurs dispersés en société et cie*. Here our guests, all professional artists representing more or less imaginary companies, only knew each other by reputation. Most of them were meeting for the first time. However, it is important to say that through their practice of exploring ways of existing, they all presented themselves with ambiguous theatricality that stemmed from both the individual and the corporate character. In conclusion, the dynamics of this meeting, a public presentation, was obviously very different.

¹⁵ “[...] the Greek *sumbolon* was a piece of pottery broken into two when there was to be a separation between friends, and its being brought together later was a sign of recognition.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *Etre singulier pluriel*, Paris: Galilée, 1996, p. 79, note 1.

Source: Doyon/Demers, (2003). *Veuves de chasse in ALICA, huit manœuvres en quête d'un territoire*, 3^e impérial, Granby, p. 66-75.

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