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The Educational Potential of *Public Art*
An Art Event at the Mount Royal Park: "tam tam" 2000

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of
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ABSTRACT

The Educational Potential of *Public Art* An Art Event at the Mount Royal Park: "tam tam" 2000

This thesis is the study of "tam tam" 2000, an art project that was presented to the public attending the venue traditionally known as "tam tam," in the Mount Royal Park, during the summer of 2000. Through this art event, the public and the art educator united by a common interest, explored the art discourse and practice by painting on canvas during three consecutive Sunday sessions. The art educator invited the public to make *Public Art* by providing a framework consisting of canvas, paint, and themes related to socio-cultural issues of communal interest. With this project, the intention was to promote art as a vital social practice in order to motivate positive social change. Considerable pedagogical and logistical efforts were put into the making of "tam tam" 2000 in order to make the art experience entertaining, educational and meaningful. As a result of the interaction of the public, the site, art and the educator, the sessions produced three mural-like paintings. The event was documented on video and personal comments from the public were collected in a response book. Through the analysis of this documentation, this thesis examines the concept of *Public Art* as an important subject matter of art education.

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This art project could not have become "tam tam" 2000, without the participation of the public who attended "tam tam." Particularly, this work is dedicated to all the artists, especially drummers and dancers, who come to "tam tam" every Sunday to perform with the public. I wish to thank Seo Hong, Douglas, Fernando and Hamlet, who collaborated with me, voluntarily and enthusiastically, in the making of "tam tam" 2000.

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INTRODUCTION

The intention of this thesis is to examine the educational potential of public art activities, specifically those which involve the public and the educator in the production of *Public Art*. This inquiry evolves out of an art project that took place in the Mount Royal Park during the summer of 2000 at the site traditionally known as "tam tam." The project was presented to the public in the form of an art making activity - painting on canvas - on three consecutive Sundays: July 30, August 6 and August 13. The objective of this art project was to motivate the public who attended "tam tam" to become involved in the art experience. In other words, by inviting the public to paint, I wanted to promote artmaking among those from the public who do not have the opportunity to practice art or study art.

This art project, "tam tam" 2000, was an exploration of techniques and aesthetics within the public domain. Each session brought people together to participate in artmaking: for some, actively, as the protagonists (those who painted) and for others, passively, as the interpreters (those who watched). Due to the natural and social configurations of "tam tam," the framework for this art project had to be improvised on the site because the determining factor for accomplishing this task was the public's acceptance of my artmaking proposition. Besides providing practical and safe materials (canvas, paint and brushes), I wanted the activity to blend with "tam tam" aesthetics, population and activities.

Permanently, "tam tam" hosts activities of music and dance, which are practised by and interacted with a culturally diverse audience. Due to this unique nature of "tam tam," I introduced this project with the intention that the public could access yet another

means of expression to cultivate art, depict allegorical comments or simply explore the medium. Nevertheless, there were other factors that also played a significant role in the introduction of the project to "tam tam," such as the climatic conditions and the patrolling authorities in this public setting.

At first, the patrolling guards objected when I began setting up the canvas because I did not have a permit to hold an art event in this site. However, through a sensitive discussion with the guards, which resulted in a temporary agreement, the event was allowed to take place. Since permits for art events of this kind do not exist, I felt that it should be the public who decides to welcome or reject my artmaking proposition. The public welcomed the event.

I documented this art project in video and collected personal comments from some of the participants in a response book. Those who did not paint or write discussed with me about the importance of producing art events of this kind not only to provide the public with favourable conditions for art expression but also to educate and entertain. Arguably, good weather conditions were central for this art project to take place.

In this art project, the public produced three large mural-like paintings. These artworks depict the public's response to the art experience, especially to the themes of the work. Through this participatory act, the public had the opportunity to openly express their own creativity by painting on canvas and/or reflecting and commenting on social issues through the depiction of socially conscious art. For each session I proposed a theme that reflected today's global socio-political conditions. The first session was aimed to celebrate *Public Art*, or as it was presented to the public in Spanish, "ViVa el Arte Publico." The theme of the second session questioned 'globalism' vis - a - vis

multiculturalism. Finally, the theme of the third session condemned the notion of “First and Third Worlds.” For the purpose of this inquiry, I use these three mural-like paintings, the video and the response book to reflect upon the process of the project and to analyse the role of art and the educator in the public context.

This thesis encompasses three parts. The first part illustrates the concept of *Public Art* and its relationship with Environmental Art, Muralism and Graffiti. Montreal’s mural painting of the 1970’s and 80’s is examined as a parallel art movement dealing with *Public Art*. In the second part I review the underlying events leading up to this project, the initial planning for the production and the unfolding of the three sessions. In this part, I also describe the profile of the people who attend “tam tam” as well as the site’s background and activities. Finally, in the third part, I reflect upon the project and analyse the role of art and my role as an art educator within the public context, namely the public site, in order to identify some of the parameters that art education might take into consideration in order to teach *Public Art*. In conclusion, I will provide a general overview of some cultural and educational issues that emerged from this project, which invites a further investigation.

PART I

The Concept and Mission of *Public Art*

To position or define the parameters of *Public Art* is for me as challenging as producing *Public Art*. The concept of *Public Art* embodies the public, the artist and the site. I found that with the public, most individuals support art activities in public settings. However, others, namely the police and the patrolling force of a public site, do not seem very enthusiastic about these public acts. The artist(s) or the art educator takes on the role as co-ordinator of the art event, the provider of the framework and the art materials and the one assigned to ensure that artmaking has an impact on the individual and turns into a worthwhile experience. *Public Art* is context dependent. Each public setting has its own character and activities: what takes place in "tam tam" may not necessarily apply in the Old Port, for example.

Public Art is the art of the people performed in a public site without jury or prizes. Authorship and individual achievement are excluded from it. Ownership always remains a dilemma because it raises the question as to who owns the art produced by the public. *Public Art* is communal. It is the collective effort of a group of individuals who, regardless of age, gender or nationality, decide to make art in their own terms.

Among the movements of *Public Art*, the ones that have created considerable impact on the public and on the art world, during the past four decades, are Muralism, Environmental Art and Graffiti. Although Muralism, as an art movement, emerged in the early 1900's, its impact on popular culture only matured in the 1960's. Christo's art productions of the 1970's and 80's are testimonial examples of Environmental Art that

involved the public in the process. Goheen (1978) describes the spirit of *Public Art* on *Wrapped Walk Ways*. "Christo's installations occurred directly in the midst of curious, ubiquitous onlookers: dog walkers, joggers, sidewalk superintendents, dogs without walkers, sceptics, proponents, school children, reporters and photographers" (p. 14). The public's role in the art process is fundamental in order for *Public Art* to exist, whether as protagonists or as interpreters.

Today, *Public Art* is mainly manifested through Muralism and Graffiti. Both of these art expressions are traditionally performed in public sites and for the benefit of the public. However, the implication of the public in the process of these art practices is rather passive, as the viewer only. Furthermore, by bringing these art practices into the classroom, for the purpose of art education, and into community centres as art activities, the element of the public's implication in the process remains relatively non-existent. Within these contexts, the art experience is only the privilege of the art student or the community member. Although Muralism and Graffiti share many features in common, such as location, they also differ. Mural paintings are usually presented through a narrative depiction, as opposed to Graffiti, which makes an innovative and complex use of semiotics' richness. Barnett (1984) notes these differences. In his view, the features that Muralism and Graffiti have in common is more important than the features that separates them. The public's implication in these *Public Art* events is basically interpretative, apart from the few art students and art aficionados who have the opportunity to participate in the actual art productions.

The participatory character of *Public Art* is sometimes provocative. In 1981 in New York City, Serra's "Tilted Arc" caused a confrontation between the artist and the

workers from the surrounding office buildings. "Nearly one thousand federal workers signed a petition calling for its removal and stating that the sculpture casts an ominous shadow not only on we who work here but on the public as well" (Cornwell 1990, p. 67). As a result, the participation of the public in the debate that lasted several years until its removal in 1989, "Tilted Arc" became a symbol of *Public Art* because it provided an unusual example of participation. Thousands of people became involved in the process by signing petitions, some in favour and some against it.

Public Art functions as a common language because it provides the average citizen an equivalent understanding of the pragmatic and ephemeral fundamentals of the art experience. Indeed, a hands-on-experience is essential for the process, which is sometimes short-lived. "Tam tam" 2000, for example, consisted of sessions of only five to six hours each. Besides its mission as signifier of the people's art, the rationale of *Public Art* is to make art for both art's sake and humanity's sake. *Public Art* is not only a groundwork for self-expression, it is also for the participatory acts of teaching, learning and entertaining through the depiction of allegories and texts. In these circumstances, the public's creativity to openly express subject matter and aesthetics is a favourable medium to generate discussion about social issues of interest to the public.

Due to its communal characteristic, *Public Art* is sometimes activist because it provokes active action from the public. As Jacobs (as quoted by Ullrich) argues, because it is art that infuriates the public (1996, p. 31). Diggs, on the other hand, believes that: "Art is 'public' based not on where it is, but on what it does" (1995, p.286). Indeed, one of the main goals of *Public Art* is to enrich the quality of human life so that the public can learn about art by participating in the art experience and, consequently, to incite practical

and positive social change. Durham sees art as a learning process: "The role of art is to help people interpret their world so that they may be better able to change it in positive ways" (1993, p.69).

The praxis of *Public Art* challenges the individual to define art's value in daily life without being involved in a theoretical framework foreign to the average person. To practise *Public Art* means to become engaged in a pragmatic discourse about presence, body movement, grace, art techniques, social concerns and aesthetics. It is not only making and learning about art, it is also about the way the individual collectively explores and interprets the metaphor.

Montreal's artists and its public are not foreigners to the exploration of *Public Art*. The decades of the 70's and 80's were very productive and fruitful, particularly in mural painting. "Corridart" was also one *Public Art* event conceived for celebration and expression as part of an international public sports event, "The Olympic Games of 1976." This art event, which lasted only six days, consisted of projects by Quebec artists exhibited along Sherbrooke Street. The event was banned, the artworks were removed and some were destroyed because of the activist character of "Corridart." According to Gauvin (1996), one objective of "Corridart" was to return the street to the people by selecting an outdoor location as the exhibiting ground; one which is "more accessible to the public at large, since there would be no admission fee or forbidding museum entrances" (p. 17).

During the 1990's Graffiti gained impetus while Muralism acquired a new language. Presently, *Public Art* is exhibited mainly through Graffiti. It is important to

note that a considerable number of Graffiti artworks in the city are murals, simply because they are painted on walls. Wall is indeed the meaning of mural. Muralism being the ideology of mural painting or, as Anderson (1991) calls it, "modified naturalism" (p.548).

Montreal's Muralism of the 70's and 80's emerged as a response to the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's, 'hippieism.' Painting murals, then and now, is an art activity performed by artists who take their works directly to the public by using the streets as galleries. Murals function as ideal panoramic visions while brightening the communication channels among the public. Through mural painting, techniques and aesthetics can be learned and taught by both professional and amateur artists alike and by both art and non-art students.

According to Poissant (1988), in 1971, Carlos Bassanta, Gary Coward, Francois Dery and Guy Monpetit joined forces and founded the organisation called "Les peintres-sculpteurs au service de l'environnement de Montréal." With financial federal assistance, this association used mural painting as a framework to promote creativity and youth participation. Poissant states: "Grâce a un financement du gouvernement fédéral pour encourage l'emploi de jeunes travailleurs et stimule la créativité dans l'entreprise, le programme 'Initiatives Locales' a permit a des finissants des écoles d'art d'ouvrer a des projets rémunère" (p. 20). Others soon followed the early efforts of these artists. New organisations emerged, such as: "L'Escuade de la muralite", "Monte-en-l'air", "Les P'tits soleils" and "Les murs nous parlent".

Due to the overwhelming response by the public, artists, students and various youth organisations, the painting of murals was to become an important *Public Art*

movement of the 70's. In fact, most of the mural paintings in Montreal were produced during this decade. Each organisation was under the direction of professional artists who had academic art training. Their subjects of interest were diverse. "Les P'tits soleils" and "Les murs nous parlent" under the co-ordination of Claude Guite, from 1973 to 1978, painted murals that depicted social and ecological issues. Dominique Girard and Jacques Sabourin supervised the works of "Monte-en-l'air" which evolved around lyrical and esoteric subjects. "L'Escuade de la muralite" with Robert Lesco and Rita Latendre chose supergraphyism as the subject matter of their murals.

The 1980's welcomed another organisation, "Mur-Murs" with the assistance of Claude Morin, Nicholas Boiley and Hubert Simard. The themes of work of this organisation were based on socio-historical and cultural events such as the building of the Canadian Railroad by people of Asian origin. By the mid-eighties mural painting in the tradition of the 70.s began to decline. For another generation of artists, new subject matters appeared: the James Bay Project, immigration from people of the so-called Third World, women rights and discrimination.

A considerable number of projects were completed. Among the most remarkable are murals produced by First Nations organisations in response to the James Bay Project. The Grand Council of the Cree provided funding for the production of one of the most outstanding murals of this decade. Indeed, this artwork attracted attention, particularly from the media. The mural, located on the premises of the "Alternative Book Store" on St. Lawrence Street, depicted the ecological devastation provoked by the James Bay project. Another significant production was the mural painted by "VIA JAR" on Duluth

Street, which was conceived of as a social commentary of the Diaspora of Hispano-Americans into Canada and the United States.

Ultimately, there have been various other groups and individual artists who, presumably, wished to remain anonymous or simply did not get the recognition they deserved; as is the case of "Design Animation" and "Artifact." There are also those murals that are not signed, which is the decision of the artists. Some artists do not sign their names in order to remain incognito, particularly for those murals whose content is considered a violation of the law or those that do not conform with the city's or landlords' approval. Lehman (1994) believes that these occurrences were exciting. He wrote in the local popular newspaper, *The Mirror*, "What makes city murals exciting is that they are challenges to law and order, property and propriety. Even when they are created with the blessing of the landlord, they tend to flout urban uniformity" (p. 34)

During the nineties and up to now, *Public Art* expanded its boundaries. Another accent is emerging from its language: the production of art in public settings where the public is engaged to partake in the process to make art for the benefit of all. Sometimes labelled as Activist Art, because it informs the public at large, *Public Art* is a legitimate art subject worth pursuing, thus is an important topic for art education.

PART II

A number of social issues compelled me to make this art project. My intention was to promote artmaking as a vital social practice that improves our quality of life; improvement in the sense of developing practical and sensitive means to achieving material and spiritual objectives to the benefit of all. I intended to promote art by inviting the public to become involved in artmaking, not only to communicate through a common language but also to change from estrangement to engagement and from spectatorship to participation. Although the public might use the language of art with different accents, art's richness is an alternative means for communication.

To bring art to the public free-of-charge and to allow some of its members an opportunity for artmaking were also social concerns of my project. In general, the average individual has limited exposure to art or artmaking, consequently, he or she does not have the opportunity to practice art. This estrangement from art is also provoked by the seduction of technology and its numerous entertaining artefacts, particularly electronic communications and games. This is not to negate the value and the art elements involved in the design composition of the software. However, art is archetypal. Despite the fact that technology provides a wide range of sophisticated communication devices, art is also an effective and a legitimate instrument of communication. Except that these new technologies often diminish practical creativity, while, art gives a forum for an individual's creativity.

Art education and practice is the privilege of only a few. Being one of these individuals, I find it imperative to search out innovative ways to allow the average non-art person access to practice art, especially in the field of *Public Art*.

A major influence in the preparation of this art project was the philosophy of Muralism. The Mexican murals during the 1920's, and the murals of Montreal in the 1970's and 80's constitute important art history periods of *Public Art*, which need to be cultivated. The Mexican murals by Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros resonated the social and political struggle in Mexico during the 1920's. On the other hand, Montreal in the 70's, while "Les P'tits soleils" focussed on social education through the use of ecological subject matters, "L'Escuade de la muralite" depicted supergraphism. In the 80's, the projects by "Mur - Murs" gathered socio-historical aspects of Montreal. There were also murals produced by First Nations' artists who used aesthetics and politics to condemn and denounce the James Bay Project.

Keeping in mind the way *Public Art* evolves through time, the early stages of my art project started with the production of a black and white graphic artwork in the form of a card, dealing with the issue of identity. The "Reflections on Identity" card contends that, first, the rhetoric between the First and Third worlds embodies the notion of identity; and second, artmaking is a state of mind rather than a leisure activity or a hobby. The text of this card also outlines the importance of art and science in the average citizen's daily life. I first distributed copies of the card to classmates in the department of Educational Studies at Concordia, while taking a course in the Politics of Education. The card had a big impact on them. Several students expressed their sincere wish to become involved in artmaking. Most importantly, the card made a group of intelligent individuals pause and reflect about the importance of both art and science. The card as a concept for using art to communicate simply but effectively was successful.

The student's supportive response to my mission of promoting art motivated my interest to expand this endeavour on a larger scale. I distributed cards to relatives, friends and then to people in the vicinity of "tam tam." In this venue, I also proposed to the public who attended this site the art experience through an artmaking activity: painting on an oversized canvas with acrylic paint. I chose canvas and paint because they are materials most people are familiar with, which at the same time happen to void boundaries such as age, gender, class, or nationality.

The central challenge was how to overcome the technical difficulties of working in a public space. To meet this challenge, I enlisted the help of four friends. Seo Hong's responsibilities at first were to assist in the early planning and purchasing of the materials such as wood, cloth, paint, brushes, and all purpose essentials. During the project (the three sessions) Seo Hong assisted me transporting to the site and back all necessary art materials and tools. On the second and third sessions, her role also included documenting the event with a video camera. Douglas's participation was also behind the camera. His mission was to film "tam tam" activities, including the public's moods and gestures. Another of his tasks was to find a strategic position to capture the evolution of the event; particularly, he was assigned to video-record the anticipated patrolling guards and/or police intervention and opposition to my artmaking proposition. Fernando's duty was to help transport and set up the wooden frame from the construction area to the specific location designated for the activity. His duty was also to maintain vigilance of the authorities' routines, both the city police and the park guards; but most importantly, Fernando's role was to observe people's reaction to the activity and ensure the public's safety. Finally, Hamlet's duties took place usually at the end of the session. His

assistance consisted of helping to take down the frame, remove the canvas, pack the wood and transport it to a strategic location in the park until the next session. The project was scheduled to take place over three consecutive Sundays, July 30, August 6 and August 13.

The Site

In planning this art activity I took into consideration the socio-historical and physical environment of "tam tam." Historically and geographically, the Mount Royal Park is located in the heart of Montreal. This prime geographic position makes the park accessible from any point within the city. "Tam tam" is located on the eastern side of the park, facing Park Avenue. It is situated across from the Jeanne Mance Park, which is also very popular for family gatherings and multicultural celebrations. These two parks, the Mount Royal and the Jeanne Mance, are very distinct in activities, space, and attendance. Those who attend one may not necessarily attend the other, and vice-versa. That is, the activities and the ambience in each differ. The Jeanne Mance Park is more appropriate for sports' activities as opposed to the Mount Royal Park, which is mainly attended by people seeking leisure and playing music

As a public venue for playing music and dance, "tam tam" emerged around the early 1970's. The central point of this area is a tall cement obelisk with two inscriptions at its base, actually quotes by a certain Cartier, one from 1865 written both in French and English and another one from 1867 written in French only. The texts go as follow

"LA RECONNAISSANCE
ET L'ADMISION
D'UN PEUPLE"

"WE ARE OF DIFFERENT RACES
NOT TO STRIFE BUT TO WORK
TOGETHER FOR
THE COMMON WELFARE"

CARTIER 1865

"LE CANADA DOIT ETRE UN PAYS DE LIBERTE
ET TOUTES LES LIBERTES
DOIVENT ETRE PROTEGES PAR LA LOI"

CARTIER 1867

The term "tam tam" is a product of popular culture and the most commonly used by all. The English language dictionary refers to this term as a musical instrument resembling the gong. Most people use this term because in popular language any drum is called a tam tam. In my view, this term is the phonetic interpretation of drum's sound - poorly but simply represented. Although sometimes I find the term "tam tam" to be simplistic because it homogenises all different kinds of drums into one. I do not have any objections to the way popular culture invents words, constructs meanings and derives pleasures out of them.

The City of Montreal maintains "tam tam" rigorously. The grass surrounding the main square is always neatly trimmed; trash containers are always available, as well as drinking water fountains. Selling food or consumption of alcohol is forbidden. Recently, the city endowed both parks with washroom facilities. The city also has a certain control

on the activities at "tam tam." There are two patrol forces, the park guards and the city police. They watch people very closely to avoid incidents, by imposing their authority. Yet, and ironically, I sometimes do not mind their presence because they are also part of the public and this is the way they participate in the weekly Sunday spectacle.

The People

Most of the people I questioned never noticed the quotes on the obelisk. One of the reasons could perhaps be relegated to their age. Some of the letters are no longer legible. Nevertheless, these inscriptions connote multiculturalism and democracy, words that are exemplified every Sunday. The four bronze lions surrounding the obelisk are attractive and charming despite their arrogant and imposing character. People of all ages like to caress them, children in particular, love to ride them. Patrol guards sometimes warn people away from them because their attention seems disrespectful towards these metaphoric symbols of power. For the past 6 to 8 years, the city has allowed individuals to sell arts and crafts on Sundays only. Merchants are permitted an area of 10 to 12sq. feet but previous booking is required. There are all kinds of merchants and merchandise. Most sellers are getting initiated in the making and the business of crafts, which consists mainly of silver and bead jewellery and musical instruments. Others are well organised; they sell batik garments and accessories from Indonesia and Thailand, which are very practical for the summer heat. On the other hand, some factions market heavy wool winter garments from Latin America and other parts of the world. Finally, African

merchants import and sell various kinds of drums, jewellery and clothing which constitutes a very colourful and pleasing part of "tam tam."

Another group of active participants is the people who pick up empty cans and bottles. Long ago, they were usually seniors, who would use a nice, sunny summer Sunday to exercise and make a bit of money. However, this requires long walks back and forth for many hours carrying large bags filled with empty containers. Today, there are many competitors because the population in "tam tam" has increased enormously and because a day of collecting these containers can be financially worthwhile.

One of the most colourful and entertaining groups of active participants are the music players and dancers. They are people from various parts of the world who play a wide variety of percussive instruments such as drums (at least 10 different kinds), cowbells, maracas, guiros, claves, horns, whistles, timbales, and others. Often, guitars, trumpets and saxophones players join the drummers. Those who do not bring instruments along, sing, dance, clap or play any object they can find in order to partake in the ambience and/or actively respond to the music. Presently, there are at least five rhythm tendencies: African, Arab, Francophone, Haitian, and Latin. Most players are music lovers only. There are also some professional musicians who participate in exchange for the richness of rhythms and ideas that emerge from every session. These groups, whether together or endeavouring individually, are central to the atmosphere of this public setting.

Finally, there is the group of people who attend "tam tam" as members of the audience. Their participation is of prime importance because their responses and support to the activities, whether as dancers or as spectators, animate the scene. These

participants come from around the world - from both worlds: the First and the Third. This blend of cultural backgrounds is both orderly and disorderly. Individuals come here to walk or run, sleep or rest, read or listen to the drum beats, play fives-be or sunbathe, or simply do as they pleased, which sometimes 'disorders the order' of the establishment, embodied by the park guards and the city police force. "Tam tam" has the charm of attracting dominant culture and popular culture. Fortunately, the spirit and harmony that emerges from within everybody's energy and presence compensates for this divisiveness. The ambience is classless; people feel more at ease and often express happy faces and gestures. This public site, "tam tam," is an important cultural centre in Montreal and a favourable venue to participate in art activities involving both the public and the artists. "Tam tam" provides the environment, the public, the artists, the audience, and even the authorities of 'order' to control the 'disorder'.

The police force on their side try to be friendly and more accessible by wearing jeans, which is indeed problematic, due to the symbolism attached to this garment. Despite this naive but problematic gesture, the authorities assert a strong presence with the use of a patrolling strategy of at least six different operations: on horse, on bicycle, on foot, with dogs, by car, and undercover. In order to enjoy a free and peaceful Sunday afternoon while maintaining courteous relationship with the authorities; most people value an ambience without disturbing spectacles or fisticuffs as a great way to celebrate a Sunday at the park.

The Sessions

In total there were three artmaking sessions. The rationale, the location and the materials used were the same for all. Each session was meant to bringing a meaningful and educational art activity to the public who attended "tam tam." For the actual artmaking I selected an area that I am familiar with. This is the place where I usually play music, and I expected to have sympathetic support from the public. However, I had envisioned the project to be mobile; that is, to use different areas within "tam tam." The reason being, it would avoid conflict with the patrolling guards, who would not allow an unconventional art activity in this park.

One of my original goals was to offer the art activity in different areas within "tam tam." However, with the experience gained from the first session, this mobility aspect was eliminated from the project. I founded that the music, the topography, the trees, and the public in this particular area were enchanting and favourable. This is not to negate that I still consider mobility to be an important character of an art activity in this site because it could reach other sectors of the public. There were also financial and logistic obstacles, which were due mainly to my limited financial resources and lack of transportation. However, with the conceptualised rationale in place, the designated location chosen, the materials purchased, and the date to start fixed for July 30, I began my first *Public Art* project in "tam tam."

The project was introduced to the public under the umbrella of a social movement named "Viva el third worldism": a non-bureaucratic art movement without address, telephone number, e-mail or web page. This movement promotes socio-political discourse through public artmaking activities. Its strategy is to deliver a concept, which

promotes artistic concientization. The movement coexists with "La Espiral Rota: *an artistic movement in process of utopia,*" which encourages social consciousness through the engagement of interdisciplinary artistic activity by having "third worldists" artists and other local artists exhibit and exchange art.

To name the movement "Viva el third worldism" is my way of empowering the so-called Third World. To portray the movement and promote global consciousness, I produced a charcoal drawing of the globe we call the *world* in which I depict the interdependence between the First and Third worlds. I used this drawing, in which I present the way I perceive the *world* in its psychic configuration, to produce a card. In it, I claim the movement's rationale within Montreal's multicultural society. Some of these cards were distributed in "tam tam" to a number of people I knew, prior to the event and others during the event.

The implementation of the project began by designing an A-shape wooden frame 8 feet in high by 10 across, and 3 at the base. The intention was to assign one of the sides to exhibit a completed or an in-progress artwork, whether by myself, by someone else or for the artwork from the previous Sunday. The other side was designated for the canvas of the live-artwork of the session. The canvas was about 10 feet in width by 5 feet in height; the medium planned to use was acrylic paint; yellow, red, blue, black and white. The brushes were small and thin to avoid large lines or shapes. This approach was not intended to control the participants' expression, but rather to permit the participation of more people. The frame was constructed in segments in order to assemble and dismantle it easily and quickly. I located a strategic corner in the woods for its storage from one Sunday to the next.

First Session

The first session was an aesthetic and technical experiment. Although we were optimistic and enthusiastic to begin the project, there were doubts about the procedure, the authorities, and the outcome. Despite these doubts, the only way to find out if this kind of art event could blend with the other "tam tam" activities and the public was to try it out. The actual making of the art activity could not have been planned before hand because that was going to be determined by the response of the public. Indeed, the elements of surprise and uncertainty were important to the initial spirit of launching the event. Douglas was ready with his VHS video camera to participate in the project and capture the session's evolution in its most important aspects: the public's moods and gestures and the anticipated objection to the event by the patrolling guards. Seo Hong and Fernando assisted me in constructing the frame on which I stretched the canvas. They remained vigilant vis-à-vis the guards and the police, and watched for inconveniences that the art activity might cause to the public.

Once the early steps of setting up the frame began to take shape, the police made their appearance as well. They parked a patrol vehicle, a van, nearby and watched carefully what we were doing. Soon after, three guards approached me and asked me to pack and leave. They told me that I was not allowed to set up a frame of this size and kind in this public site. In addition, I was not supposed to attach cords, strings or ropes to the trees, nor was I allowed to make holes in the ground. I abided by their last requirement. In response to the guards' demands, I explained to them that the intention of providing a framework for the public to manifest their art expression was sincere and experimental.

With this artmaking proposition, I did not intend to disturb neither the peace nor the public atmosphere. I suggested the option to try it with the condition of cancelling the activity if it became a disturbance or endangered the public safety. This was accepted by the guards. The frame stood up among the people and the trees. In the mean time, many spectators watched curiously this aggravation. Most observers did not think that this large piece of white fabric that people were going to paint on would create a disturbance. In fact they supported my proposition. Although the guards stayed in the area, they allowed the artwork to begin.

After surpassing all the logistical and legal encounters, the moment for the activity to begin finally arrived. I did not have any plan to follow, simply because I could not anticipate the way the public would respond to my artmaking proposition. Although the activity was to be produced by the public itself, nevertheless, I realised that the first steps had to be initiated by me. Thus, I invited people from the public to join me in artmaking. I began by painting a drum, which compelled a child to participate. At this time, a second group of guards questioned me about a permit. Once they received my negative reply that I did not actually have a permit, they too, asked me to pack up and leave. My response this time was more decisive. I was empowered by the public's support since the art activity was harmless and welcomed by all. After a brief discussion, an agreement was reached. Using the French language in the debate proved to be an important factor in reaching an agreement.

Due to the conflict of the language issue in Quebec, most foreigners regardless of their cultural background are sensitive towards this issue. To speak French to a Francophone citizen is as important as to speak in English to the counterpart. While

living in Montreal for over fifteen years. I learned that the bureaucratic establishment operates in French. In order to describe to the guards the objective of the art activity, I used the French language. This made them feel at ease with their authority and duty, which is something I did not challenge. Instead, I invited them to participate as well because they are also part the "tam tam" public.

The crowd was very enthusiastic and willing to participate. Most children and at least two adults were eager to start painting. The session's theme was intended to celebrate *Public Art*, which was painted on the canvas in Spanish. Most people understood the expression 'Viva el arte publico'. Meanwhile, the authorities kept watching the evolution of this revolution in artmaking, which due to its integrity had an impact on all of us. The reaction from the public was mixed: some did not realise that there was a canvas and people painting on it. Others watched curiously and were pleased at the sign of such a surprising art event, while others continued playing music.

My participation was mainly logistic. I supplied sufficient containers with water, paint and brushes. I also distributed the cards. I felt that the encounter between the public and myself was successful, entertaining, and educational. After several hours of intense human interaction, technical and aesthetic experimentation and struggle, the session came to an end.

We produced a mural-like painting that depicts the spontaneity and the joy of celebrating art on our personal terms. Ephemeral in nature but permanent in meaning, this artwork is the testimony of one day at "tam tam", striving to make *Public Art* by celebrating diversity in culture and expression.

Second Session

The following session was free from bureaucratic interruptions. The public welcomed the art activity. Children and adults were expecting it and anxious to start painting. This time, I had assembled the frame elsewhere and transported it ready-made to the site. In doing so, I avoided any objection from the guards who, this time, did not attempt to disturb the activity. I used the element of surprise to carry the frame and set it up in place quickly. This was followed by people immediate implication in the artwork. During the first session, I learned that once the public starts the activity, it was difficult, but not impossible, for the guards to intervene. For this session I proposed a more poignant theme which referred to the politics of globalisation. I painted the text as a question/statement in English, French and Spanish. It read:

Multiculturalism

Oui.

Globalizacion?

Once the session was underway, I realised that we had succeeded at making *Public Art*: 'we' in the sense of the public, the authorities and myself. I felt contentment and anxiety. It was the realisation of many years of latent preparation that now suddenly germinated into concrete expression. Now it was time to act. There was creative energy in the air. This time, Seo Hong was behind the camera since Douglas had other commitments. Although Seo Hong's expertise with the camera was limited, she was able to capture extraordinary moments, images, gestures, and rhythms of permanence and significance, deriving from this modest culture making experience. There was amazing artistic output. Many people participated: some painted, others wrote statements, while

others wrote comments in the response book. Others pondered many questions in regards to the theme of the session and the rationale of the project. I virtually had to stop the session, because the canvas was fully used up and because I wanted to preserve the original expressions without the interventions of other participants. Coincidentally, it began to rain, which I interpreted as nature's signal to bring the session to an end.

Third Session

This was the final session. I experienced mixed feelings: of sadness on one hand, because the project which was starting to take shape suddenly had to end; and of accomplishment, on the other hand, because the event succeeded both artistically and socially. For this final session, the topic was more complex. It debated the rhetoric of dominance and struggle between the First and Third worlds. This time, due to our past experience, we proceeded with more confidence and assurance. The frame was assembled, transported, and installed on the site without any interventions. As the session was about to begin, and to my delight and surprise, an ex-classmate from art education, stopped by for a greeting. It was not necessary to familiarise her with the project. As an artist, she understood that the canvas, the paint and the brushes were there for public use. She then joined me in beginning the session. She suggested a mixture of bright colours and circular shapes, which was later expanded by other participants. Meanwhile, I wrote the theme's text, which was aimed to debunk this notion of there being a First and Third world and glorify *the world* as a whole. The text read as follows:

THE FIRST WORLD

THE THIRD WORLD

THE WORLD

After our initial participation, the public followed beginning with the children. Some of these children had participated in the previous sessions and had invited their friends to join them. Others, too, happened to be at "tam tam" for the first time. Some adults joined the children but most waited for the children to finish before they began. In this session, there was also greater enthusiasm and confidence from the public and myself than in the previous ones. Practically, the procedure did not have to be co-ordinated. It evolved naturally by itself. It seemed as though the event had been prepared beforehand by all of us. This note of complicity and intuitive communication, together with Julie's participation, highlighted the session. Seo Hong filmed this final encounter with more assurance and even explored new possibilities while I engaged myself in dialogues with several participants. Arguably, the theme touched most people. They used the colours and the canvas to speak freely; they also manifested their thoughts and impressions in the 'comments y autres' response book.

This final session evolved in the same spirit of kindness and friendship that governed the previous ones. The artwork produced depicted ample cohesion and integration of thoughts, feelings, colours, and shapes. This painting and the previous two mirror the wish and, even more, the need of the public to get involved in artmaking activities but more importantly, their need to express their individuality within a collective context. As a result of this extraordinary experience, the public and myself made *Public Art* in "tam tam" a success producing three large mural-like paintings, a video documentation of its process and a response book.

PART III

The Outcome: The Roles of Art and the Art Educator

Through the analysis of the documentation of this art project in *Public Art*, it is possible to frame a theoretical, optimal set of pedagogical aspects that might contribute to the art educator and the field of art education in addressing the topic of *Public Art*. With the inception of "tam tam" 2000 in this public venue, I learned various new perspectives about *Public Art*, particularly in terms of site and population. I also achieved some of my original goals. First, I promoted artmaking among the public at large; second, I was able to encourage the practice of *Public Art*; and third, I made an effective use of art's ability to provide the public with a terrain for socio-political discourse.

First, in presenting a familiar framework, which consisted of basic art materials, canvas and paint, within a natural environment, I proposed to the public an attractive and creative venture. The children's spontaneity, in particular, was an inciting factor that might have compelled some adults to become involved in the art experience. However, most of the adults' participation was also spontaneous, with the exception that their expression was pertinent to the themes of the sessions where as the children concentrated mainly on the exploration of the medium.

Second, through my encouragement of the practice of *Public Art*, I began my role as "*Public Art* educator." Although the average person in "tam tam" might or might not consider *Public Art* as a legitimate art subject matter, their exposure to *Public Art* is vast. Today, most people in Montreal are familiar with Graffiti art in public spaces, mainly walls in parking lots. Graffiti artists use many buildings in the downtown area, especially the roofs, as their canvases. The Graffiti art on walls of the building at the corners of

McKay and St. Catherine Streets is another example of *Public Art*. In addition, most regular attendants of "tam tam" come from disadvantaged and even marginalized neighbourhoods where Graffiti art is more often practised, and it is also the place where most of these artists live. Khan (1999) notes how Graffiti art is not a familiar scenery in Westmount but rather indigenous of the Saint Henri area.

"Tam tam" 2000, a combination of visual and performing arts, was my way to freely explore art in the public context. In exchange, I provided the framework so that we could all live the art experience. Many participants were motivated to partake in the activity because it was 'free-of-charge,' which is an important matter for the average citizen with minimal financial resources.

Technically, the preparation and implementation of "tam tam" 2000 was challenging. To introduce another activity to "tam tam" was a risk because the police and the city have doubts about "tam tam." On Sundays, this public venue hosts a large and culturally diverse crowd, something that seems threatening for these authorities, even though most citizens in this venue are sensitive, co-operative and assert their rights intelligently. However, in practice, the magic and power of art convinced both the public and the authorities that my artmaking proposition actually promoted *Public Art* as a valid cultural activity in Montreal.

The pedagogical plan was instrumental in the actual painting activity and on building the relationship between the public and myself. The public accepted my artmaking proposition by participating in it because they were already acquainted with me and trusted me, which turned out to be an important learning experience for me. From then on, I knew I could count on their support to promote *Public Art*. This was

essential to ensure a successful interaction between artmaking and the public involvement. The collaboration of the public and myself in creating this experience was primarily based on intimacy, trust, and our wish to make *Public Art* in order to give visual form to social criticism.

Third, I made an effective use of art's ability to provide the public with a terrain for art discourse and practice. Through the different themes of the three sessions based on social issues of communal interest, the public was able to voice their opinions. While some participants addressed these issues on canvas and/or in the response book, others express their thoughts verbally to me. Although some of the comments written in the response book are not academically worded, their meanings are significant and often profound. However, other participants' comments were voiced in a more academic manner: literally and critically they were pertinent to the themes. Most comments in the response book were unsigned. I take the liberty to include two of them in this thesis because I find them to be explicit in the description of the role of art in society and they exemplify the way the public responded to "tam tam" 2000.

A comment from the second session was:

If we see and talk about all the things that have gone wrong in this world ...
Its not enough. We must take positive action, art is a positive action that every single individual can put forth, in order to teach and learn from one another. In addition to its most simple function of aesthetic appeal, think also of the people and thus society, that benefits from this kind of expression. Listen to everyone. We are what make this city, this country, this world.

"Comments y autres" response book, August 6, 2000.

A comment from the third session was:

Un magnifique projet de peinture collective est selon moi une idée géniale. Nous avons besoin d'exprimer nos idées et des partager aux autres. Voila une Belle façon de commencer a conscientiser au du moins sensibiliser les autres aux nombreuses causes qui nous oppressent et nous dépriment. En peignant pour nous et pour les autres en même temps, c'est un moyen extraordinaire de nous sortir de L'artificiel et de montrer aux autres que la beauté se retrouve au fond des choses. Peu importe le produit, c'est l'expérience et le moment qui comptent.

Comments y autres response book. August 13, 2000.

Arguably, the natural setting in this public space helped art to bring together those who performed as the protagonists (those who painted) with those who acted as the interpreters (those who watched). The public's response to the artmaking dialogue that I established with canvas and paint was the motivation that evoked in us the wish to live the art experience and void the abstract notions attached to art. In the moment of interaction between the individual, the paint and the canvas, theory did not seem to matter. In this situation, the personal meaning of art was shared in a plurality. According to Miles (1989), by encouraging artmaking, the role of art was to transform this space into a place and the public into people.

In "tam tam" 2000 I performed various roles. As an educator, my priority was to formulate a plan that combined materials, ideas and techniques in order to produce an artmaking activity that would impact on the participants and on the viewers. The pedagogical plan concentrated on the process rather than the final result, although, I expected to complete one painting in each session. I wanted these artworks to be significant because they were going to constitute the model for future *Public Art* projects.

Another reason to focus on the final product was my intention to bring these artworks to my art education graduate program as examples of *Public Art* to generate a response from art education students and the instructor.

My studies in art education were essential in the planning of this art project. For this first exploration in *Public Art*, I selected painting as the medium because painting happens to be a common art activity with which most people have some familiarity and because painting requires only a few basic materials such as cloth, paint and brushes, which are easy to carry and transport.

In "tam tam" 2000, the approach to art education was constructivist. With this art project I wanted to provide the average citizen the opportunity to construct meaning out of his or her own art experience in order "to understand the relationship between culture, politics and design as well as individual and social life" (Wodenczko 1992, p.20). Most importantly, the objective of this art project was to motivate the public to take an active role in turning "tam tam" into a cultural site for memory and critical evaluation of history, society, politics and aesthetics.

Through this art project, I learned other aspects about *Public Art*, particularly about its complexity. *Public Art* embraces a multiplicity of meaning. In a small space, as in a painting, meanings overflow and escape control. It is a space where contradictions exist, where popular culture frees art from the conventions of its traditions and opens new modes of representation. As an art educator, I recognised the need for art education to prepare students in the field of *Public Art*. However, this task "... requires an understanding of the nature of a place. It has three main aspects: the physical location, the people who use the space, and the local history (which may suggest a theme, or give a

reason why a space becomes a focal point, as well as being a vehicle for community involvement)" (Miles 1989, p. 8).

The combination of the public, the location and its history; the social themes, the materials, the natural environment, the music and dance, the authorities and the artmaking are part of the dynamic that made *Public art* in "tam tam." I hope this art project planted some seeds for future Public Art projects.

The concept of *Public Art* raises many questions, specifically to the field of art education because this is the domain supposedly most suitable for the instruction of this social practice and, arguably, the one responsible for this task. Since *Public Art* is an educational experience, the very process offers the field of art education the opportunity to investigate the potential of art events in public settings. If the concept of *Public Art* is considered a legitimate subject matter of art education, it would be essential to prepare educators and artists to be *Public Art* educators. With this perspective, art education needs to be more liberal, in the sense of practical, with a multicultural approach to the art discourse and practice. Eventually, art educators will become aware of the notion that *Public Art* exists through its efforts to establish a meaningful relationship rather than creating boundaries, among art, the public and the social context.

In order to promote positive social change, art education must engage the public. Art education that is socially oriented must focus on preparing educators with the ability not only to teach but also to animate *Public Art* events in order to bring out the richness and meaningfulness of the art experience for the public.

The concept of *Public Art* is not intended to promote multiculturalism only; it also aims to assist the educator to envision the student's experience in the natural and social

environment, where imagination and practical applications are basic experiences to learn and teach. Art education through *Public Art* can make it possible for the non-art individual and the community to construct meanings and pleasures out of art activities that are usually confined only to the art student. Although art education, for the most part, takes place in schools, museums, galleries and community centres, the unconventional locations used by *Public Art* also lead to valid and enlightening experience. The public's art education may be possible once the artist(s), art students and educators commit to bring art into the public context.

Art education can be partially achieved through public art events in which the entire process, from the conception to the final product, provides a tangible, yet ephemeral but meaningful experience. The artmaking framework in the public context must allocate space where the public can consider wider issues than authorship and aesthetics. Because it focuses more on the communal efforts and on the technical and aesthetic struggle of the public through the process, *Public Art* is consequential because it produces practical and positive consciousness towards social change.

Keeping this in mind, this research concludes by identifying some pertinent educational issues, which invite further investigation and analysis. First, through

Public Art we can address some of the many topics involved in multicultural art education. The second issue examines the way the public responds to art in the public domain, which may vary from the traditional art response theories of art education. The third explores art education in the non-traditional parameters of *Public Art*. Finally, the topic of "Activist Art" emerges since *Public Art* provides the public with a discursive terrain for critical discussion about social issues of communal interest.

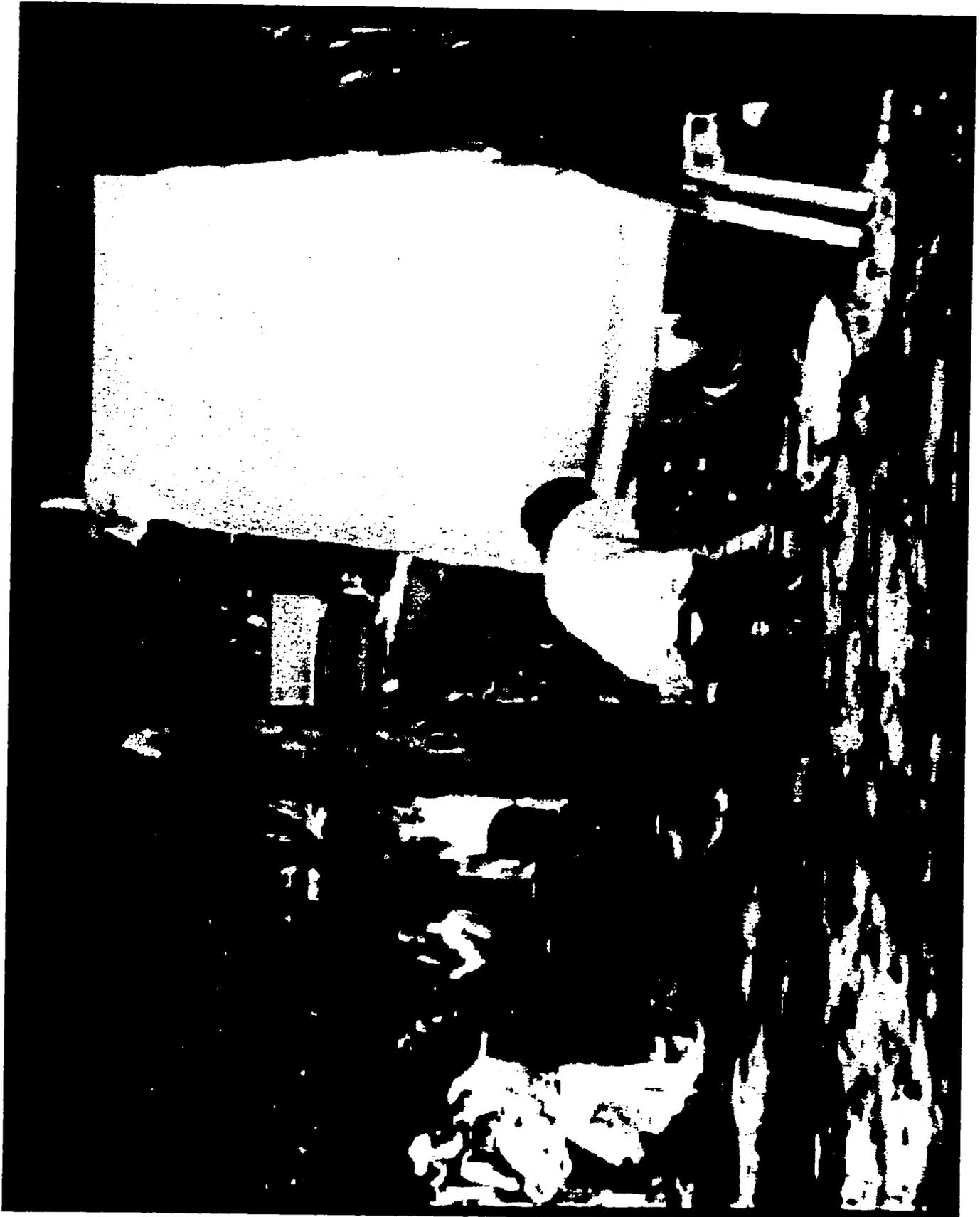
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MULTICULTURALISM

Oui

GLOBALIZATION?







