"A Shift of Modality:"
Postminimal Montreal Sculpture in the 1970s

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Abstract

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In the early 1970s, prescribed definitions of traditional ways of making art underwent an intense re-evaluation. This thesis examines the reconsideration of sculpture through analysis of several works of Montreal artists Andrew Dutkewych (b.1944), Jean-Serge Champagne (b.1947), and Claude Mongrain (b.1948). In these works, we see a move towards sculpture that is more conceptual and site-specific. For instance, Dutkewych's architectonic sculptures explore and re-emphasize the relationship between the work and its location in the gallery, while Champagne's sculptures communicate to the viewer previously latent physical phenomena, and Mongrain's "situations" emphasize their temporal quality. We also see a preference of each artist for using natural, unprocessed materials.

This thesis analyzes the work of Dutkewych, Champagne and Mongrain within the modal shift in sculpture that moves away from the production of self-contained art objects towards the use of inexpensive natural materials, the referencing of site and the revelation of process. The study also contextualizes the work within the wider Montreal art milieu through discussing the critical reception it received when shown in pivotal group exhibitions such as *Périphéries* in 1974 and *Québec 75* a year later.

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Introduction

In 1969, the German artist Joseph Beuys stated, "For me the formation of the

thought is already sculpture."[1] This statement reflects the questioning that was taking

place throughout the western art world at the close of the 1960s regarding the objecthood

of sculpture. At the start of the 1970s, as the concept of the dematerialization of art

continued to spread, many sculptors became involved in an intense reevaluation of the

prescribed definitions and boundaries of their practice. They challenged the traditional

definitions of sculpture through the revelation of process, the use of natural materials, the

referencing of site and the creation of temporal situations. In this thesis, the reevaluation

and redefinition of the sculptural medium during the 1970s in Montreal will be traced

using as examples the postminimal sculptures of Andrew Dutkewych (b.1944), Jean-

Serge Champagne (b.1947), and Claude Mongrain (b.1948).

Before considering the sculptural work of these artists, it is necessary to briefly

discuss why their work has been classified here as "postminimal." This term was selected

because it implies a link with the minimalist paradigm of the 1960s and the early 1970s.

Like the reductive painting of that period, minimal sculpture emphasized the inherent

objecthood of traditional sculpture, but it is precisely this objecthood that postminimalist

artists rejected. At the same time, however, some of the very attributes postminimalist

sculptors emphasized, especially those concerning site-specificity, had their contemporary

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[1] In Lucy Lippard's "Escape attempts," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965-1975*, eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary art, 1995), 31.

roots in minimalism.[2] Thus, the term postminimalism was deemed an appropriate

classification of the sculpture by Dutkewych, Champagne and Mongrain because it

emphasizes the use of certain distinctive minimalist traits at the same time that it rejects

minimalism's objecthood that took place in the 1970s.[3]

It is now generally accepted that minimal sculptures of the mid-1960s were

perceived as the first instances of sculpture as site-specific art.[4] With minimalism, the

emphasis shifted from considering sculpture as an isolated, independent, three-

dimensional object to privileging considerations of space and context to the overall

understanding of a sculptural work. As Nick Kaye describes in *Site Specific Art:*

Performance, Place and Documentation, the site-specificity of minimalism "occurs in a

displacement of the viewer's attention toward the room which both she and the object

occupy."[5] Michael Fried, perhaps the staunchest critic of minimalism (literalism as he

calls it), wrote that, "the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a

plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art. Literalist sensibility

is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which

the beholder encounters literalist work. Whereas in previous art 'what is to be had from

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[2] Clearly, site and location have always been of consideration for the historical sculptor. As will be discussed further in chapter five, Alex Potts cites eighteenth-century examples where the sculptural object was directly conceived with the environmental surroundings in mind. See Alex Potts, "Installation and Sculpture," *Oxford History of Art* 24.2 (2001): 5-24.

[3] By the late 1960s and early 1970s, many identified minimalist such as Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt were beginning to produce sculpture that rejected minimalism's objecthood. For instance, Irving Sandler explains, "Morris's work exemplifies the transition from unitary objects to process, earth, installation, and conceptual, art. Minimalist Morris became his own postminimalist, as it were." From Irving Sandler's, *Art of the Postmodern Era* (New York: Haper-Collins Publishers, 1996), 25.

[4] Douglas Crimp's *On the Museums's Ruins* (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 1993), Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2002) and Nick Kaye's *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000) begin their respective accounts of site-specific work with minimalist sculpture of the 1960s.

[5] Kaye, 2.

the work is located strictly within [it],' the experience of literalist art is of an object in a

situation – on which, virtually by definition, *includes* the beholder."[6] As Andrew Causey

explains, "The problem with Minimalism, from this point of view, was that it was

theatrical, because it existed for an audience, and the experience of a Minimalist work of

art was incomplete without the spectator."[7] The postminimalist generation continued to

exploit this new theatrical aspect that, at the height of minimalism's popularity, was

sometimes seen as negative.

Nevertheless, "all postminimalist tendencies were linked by the urge to avoid

objecthood."[8] Postminimal sculpture was critical of what was seen as minimalism's

objectification of art and its "taciturn inexpressivity and absence of chromatic appeal."[9]

According to Robert Pincus-Witten, the early phase of postminimal sculpture, between

1968 and 1970, was centred on process and emphasized a "highly eccentric

dematerialized, or open form"[10] The second phase, beginning in 1970 featured "abstract

information-based" work.[11] As Irving Sandler writes, the "aura of radicality" associated

with 1970s postminimalism in the United States and Europe was directly linked to "the

use of unconventional, mainly 'poor' materials; the emphasis on process and concept

rather than on product; the reliance on chance; the seeming formlessness; the use of

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[6] The perceived theatricality of minimalism forms the basis of Michael Fried's famous essay, "Art and Objecthood," in *Artforum* volume 5 #10 (Summer 1967): 12-23.

[7] Andrew Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 113.

[8] Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era*, 23.

[9] Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism into Maximalism* (Ann Arbor Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1997), 10-11.

[10] Ibid, 11.

[11] Ibid, 11-12. This second phase, as Pincus-Witten describes, can also be traced to minimalism, whose "nerve centre . . . was its attachment to the 'pre-executive,' the intellectual." Thus, to impose the categorization of postminimalism on the sculpture discussed in this thesis is to recognize and reinforce the influence of minimalism on the forms and manifestations of sculpture that followed.

gravity alone to hold the floor-hugging parts in place; and the way works sprawled into their surroundings."[12]

This stated, it must be stressed that the term postminimalism, as a classification for the sculpture under discussion here, is being applied in the widest possible sense. In the words of Pincus-Witten, "the term [postminimalism] is useful in a broad way – the way the term 'Post Impressionism' is useful – a term covering a multitude of stylistic resolutions preceded and posited by an apparent generative style."[13] As we look at the distinctive stylistic resolutions of Dutkewych, Champagne and Mongrain, we will also pay attention to any commonalities that are uncovered.[14]

The second term that requires clarification is "dematerialization," which by definition is synonymous with the rejection of objecthood. In the United States at the end of the 1960s, production of art as an object was seen to imply the production of a commodity. Dematerialized art forms – conceptual art, earth or land art, video art, body art, installation – emerged out of a desire to transcend this practice. As the American art critic Lucy Lippard explained, in a dematerialized artwork the material form of the piece held secondary status.[15] This may lead to the erroneous conclusion that by the 1970s, artists who had adopted dematerialization did away with the material basis of art altogether. While the conceptual group Art & Language[16] created works in which

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[12] Sandler, 26. We will see all or some of these specific tendencies in the work of the artists selected for discussion.

[13] Pincus-Witten, 11.

[14] Claude Mongrain for instance describes his work from the 1970s as falling within the concepts of *arte povera*. See Chapter 5 for details.

[15] Lippard, 17.

[16] See Chapter 2 for details about this conceptual art group.

conventional art materials were replaced with words and language, not all sculptors went to such extremes.

By its very nature, sculpture is matter. Thus, the use of the term dematerialization in this thesis does not imply the extinction of art's material basis; rather, it questions both its meaning and emphasis. Furthermore, it is precisely because of the necessary material nature of sculpture that the term conceptualism was not selected. The discussion of the 1971 exhibition *45° 35'N - 73° 36'W* in Chapter Two will illustrate that conceptual art became associated primarily with the use of language. It seems, therefore, inappropriate to broadly categorize the sculptures of Dutkewych, Champagne and Mongrain as conceptual art because their works hold to a material form. However, a discussion of conceptualism does have its place here as all three artists were associated with Véhicule Art (Montreal) Inc., an artist-run centre with a strong interest in international vanguard practices such as conceptualism. Furthermore, as we will see, conceptualism, along with its concern for information systems, was often translated into a three-dimensional form.

Since Lucy Lippard's essay "The Dematerialization of Art" appeared in 1968, the radical nature of the shift from object to non-object has been questioned. Certainly, minimalism led to the dematerialization of the art object. In turn, this contributed to postminimal sculpture's emphasis on process, site and the use of natural unprocessed materials. Consequently, similarities between postminimal sculpture and the new three-dimensional art form, installation emerged to threaten the "expanded field" of sculpture.[17]

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[17] Rosalind Krauss described the sculpture produced following art's dematerialization as occupying an expanded field. It formed the basis for the title of her influential 1978 essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," first published in the Spring 1979 issue of the art periodical *October*. The essay was also included in her book, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1985.

The process-revealing, site-specific postminimal sculpture of the 1970s seemed to blur the traditional limits of sculpture and infringe on the territory of installation. However in fact, the late 1960s vanguard transition from object to non-object now seems less radical. As Alex Potts demonstrated, the line between installation and sculpture has always been slight. Potts proposes that the move to dematerialization, that occurred at the end of the 1960s, was not a radical shift from art as object (sculpture) to non-object (installation); rather, it was "a shift of modality [and not] a structural break."[18] Or, as the American sculptor Robert Morris put it in his essay "Beyond Objects" in 1969, the shift away from art objects "involves a restructuring of what is relevant."[19] Given this, sculpture's traditional and fundamental definition was not undone by process-revealing, site-specific postminimal work, although its emphasis and orientation, as we will see, did undergo significant change.

Chapter One of this thesis consists of an analysis of some of the sculptural trends of the 1960s in Quebec. Through a brief discussion of the sculptures of Claude Tousignant (b.1932) and Ulysse Comtois (1931-1999), this chapter will provide the historical background specific to Quebec from which we will consider the sculpture produced in the 1970s. The focus will be on the influence of abstract geometric painting and the experimentation with new industrial and technological materials in 1960s sculptural production.

Chapter Two will provide an overview of the Montreal art milieu of the 1970s, providing further background from which to consider the postminimal sculpture under

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[18] Alex Potts, "Installation and Sculpture," *Oxford History of Art* 24.2 (2001): 16.
[19] Robert Morris, "Notes on sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects," *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993), 64.

discussion. By examining journals, newspaper reviews and exhibition catalogues, particular emphasis will be placed on the discourse of internationalism surrounding such exhibitions as *Périphéries* in 1974 and *Québec 75* a year later, exhibitions in which the sculpture of Dutkewych, Champagne and Mongrain was shown. The chapter will also consider Véhicule Art (Montreal) Inc., an artist-run collective with which all three artists were directly and indirectly associated. Many of Vehicule's artists participated in these two exhibitions, and its gallery was one of the few in Montreal to show international vanguard art.

Chapter Three will look at the work of Andrew Dutkewych, placing particular emphasis on his intentional referencing of an architectural language and his use of natural materials, often used in earth art (also known as land art) practices. Using the common architectural devices of openness and closure, Dutkewych's sculpture referenced the surrounding exhibition space. The writings and theoretical frameworks informing this discussion include Rosalind Krauss' notion of the axiomatic structure, a term coined in her 1978 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," and Lucy Lippard's definition of architectural sculpture.

Chapter Four will consider the sculpture of Jean-Serge Champagne and centre on his deliberate intent to unmask the artistic process (*"la demarche"* as he called it in 1970) involved in his sculpture. Through the use of natural, unprocessed materials, his sculptural assemblages not only revealed their mode of construction, but made otherwise latent physical forces visible to the human eye. In illustrating these basic forces, Champagne's sculpture exemplified a knowledge-conscious approach and as such will be considered within the framework of "epistemological conceptualism" as defined by

Pincus-Witten. The writings of Robert Morris, particularly concerning the importance of process in early postminimal sculpture, will also inform this chapter.

The thesis will continue with a discussion of Claude Mongrain's sculptures, which directly referenced site and were experienced as "temporal fleeting situations." Chapter Five will investigate the way Mongrain's work inspired this sense of a fleeting situation and stretched the traditional boundaries of sculpture to enter the realm of installation. Yet, this chapter will unequivocally maintain that Mongrain's work is sculpture, not installation. A discussion of Alex Potts' essay "Installation and Sculpture" will illustrate that certain specific characteristics of our present-day understanding of installation "were already implicit in previous conceptions of sculpture."[20]

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[20] Potts, 5.

Chapter One:
Historical background, the 1960s

In his 1974 review in *Le Devoir* of the group exhibition *Périphéries*[1], Pierre

Vallières writes, "Il est très difficile de cerner . . . une conscience collective comparable à

celle qui a animé les deux principaux courants de l'art au Québec depuis 1945: Les

Automatistes et Les Plasticiens."[2] For Vallières, these currents set the standard against

which the work of avant-garde 1970s artists was compared and evaluated. Two years

later, an exhibition held at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MACM) entitled

Trois générations d'art québécois, 1940, 1950, 1960 traced the development of these

same currents that, according to organizer Fernande Saint-Martin, by the mid-1960s had

come to represent "an authentic Quebec art."[3]

Two major artists of the period traced in that exhibition were Claude Tousignant

(b. 1932) and Ulysse Comtois (1931 – 1999). Through a brief look at some of their

sculptural works created in the 1960s, this chapter aims to impart a general sense of the

types of sculpture produced during that decade.[4] By centring on two key characteristics of

the 1960s sculptural art milieu – the ascendancy of abstraction and the experimentation

with new materials – the discussion will provide context for the explorations that will

take place in later chapters.

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[1] This exhibition was held at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, and featured the works of artists associated with *Véhicule Art (Montreal) Inc.* See chapter Two for further details about this exhibition.

[2] Pierre Vallières, "Les périphéries de l'impuissance," *Le Devoir* 23 mars 1974.

[3] Fernande Saint-Martin explains that this "authentic Quebec art [was] endowed with various contents by the Automatistes and Surrealists, more or less transformed later on, and from which emerged the Plasticiens mouvement." *Trois générations d'art québécois, 1940, 1950, 1960* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1976), 18.

[4] Although this chapter centers solely on some sculptural trends of the 1960s in Quebec art it is important to note the tremendous social changes affecting all areas of life in Quebec during this decade. Known as the time of *La revolution tranquille*, three areas were particularly affected by the rapid modernization of Quebec following the election of Jean Lesage in 1960: education, health care, and social welfare. For further reading see, Paul-André Linteau, Réne Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, & François Ricard's, "Sous le signe de la révolution tranquille de 1960 à nos jours," *Histoire du Québec contemporaine: Le Québec depuis 1930*, Tome II (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1989), 421-432.

In the exhibition catalogue for *Trois générations d'art québécois* Fernande Saint-Martin writes, "Quebec art launched in the 1940s a transformation of the traditional visual language," and that "it is above all through the intermediary of plastic values that the revolution was to be achieved for Borduas and the Automatistes."[5] In the 1950s, intense experimentation with abstraction saw the emergence of two other groups of painters concerned with the articulation of an abstract vocabulary, namely, Les Premières Plasticiens, and Espace Dynamique.[6] Espace Dynamique proposed,

> the elaboration of an all-over space articulated through the dynamic and autonomous function of colour. As an alternative to perspective space created through three-dimensional illusion, this new spatial concept suggested not only a rediscovery of the basic elements of plastic language, but also opened up an unexplored field to human experience.[7]

While avant-garde trends in the late 1940s and 1950s inspired some Quebec painters to turn resolutely to abstraction in their art, avant-garde sculpture of the same period did not abandon its figurative emphasis. Artists such as Louis Archambault, Charles Daudelin and Robert Roussil often referred to the human form in their work, sometimes even evoking such religious motifs as the mother and child.[8] Archambault's sculpture of the late 1940s and early 1950s, for instance, "se fait remarquer pour les formes hybrides mi-homme, mi-oiseau."[9]

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[5] Saint-Martin, 18.

[6] For further reading concerning the definition of avant gardism in *Plasticien* and *Espace Dynamique* abstraction in the 1950s see, Jody Paterson's *Painting On the Edge: Geometric Abstraction in Montreal, the 1950s* (Master's thesis, Concordia University, 2001).

[7] Saint-Martin, 20.

[8] For further examples of the major currents prevalent in sculpture in Quebec from the late 1940s and the 1950s see the exhibition catalogue, *La sculpture au Quebec, 1946-1961: naissance et persistance* (Quebec: Musée du Québec, 1992). This exhibition grouped sculpture produced by Archambault, Daudelin, Dinel, Roussil, Vaillancourt, as well as Anne Kahane, Mario Bartolini, Armand Filion, Yvette Bisson, and Suzanne Guite, into five categories: 1.) Archaic forms or figures, 2.) Bodily or corporal forms, 3.) Totem forms or figures 4.) Forms in space, and 5.) Geometric forms.

[9] Gaston Saint-Pierre, "Figures archaiques," in *La sculpture au Québec 1946-1961*, 35.

Eventually the influence of painterly abstraction began to infiltrate sculptural

practices. In the second half of the 1950s, Marcel Barbeau, Denis Juneau and Claude

Tousignant produced sculpture driven by a geometric vocabulary.[10] As curator Michel

Martin writes, "Dans leurs assemblages en bois, ils questionnent en effet les fonctions

dynamiques d'un espace soumis à la logique édificatrice de l'expression géométrique."[11]

Throughout the 1960s, Tousignant assiduously explored this "geometric logic" in his

sculpture. His experimentation with abstract painterly concerns in the three-dimensional

form is representative of the shift from figuration, common to 1950s sculptural work,

towards the non-figuration and abstraction that dominated sculptural practice in the

1960s.

According to art historian Francine Couture, "Dans le milieu des années 60, nous

croyons constater la constitution d'une tradition de l'art contemporain qui se définit par le

courant de l'abstraction."[12] Born in 1932, Claude Tousignant was a member of *Espace*

Dynamique and was first and foremost known for his "bull's-eye, a set of round, multi-

chromatic, hard edge geometric painting."[13] He was also a sculptor, producing works

during the 1960s that were defined by the "courant de l'abstraction." Many writers have

emphasized the similarities between his colourful wood sculptures of the early 1960s and

his geometric painting. In fact, Tousignant's sculptures were the extension of his

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[10] Certainly abstract sculpture in Quebec was produced before Denis Juneau and Marcel Barbeau. Paul Emile Borduas began to experiment with abstraction in sculpture in the early 1950s; but for the most part, sculpture in the 1950s did conserve a semblance of figuration.

[11] Michel Martin, "Introduction," *La sculpture au Quebec, 1946-1961*, 26.

[12] Francine Couture, *Mises en scène de l'avant-garde* (Montréal: Université de Québec à Montréal, 1987), 6.

[13] Norman Thériault, *Claude Tousignant: Sculptures* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), 27.

painterly concerns into three-dimensional space.[14] As Gaston Saint-Pierre explains in the

catalogue essay for *La sculpture au Quebec 1946-1961: naissance et persistance,*

"Claude Tousignant poursuit . . . une démarche parallèle à sa peinture en recréant cette

dynamique figure/fond par la répétition et la sérialisation du motif dans un espace devenu

maintenant concret."[15] As such, his sculptures exemplified the ascendancy of abstraction

in the 1960s and fell decisively within the principle current of Quebec art as defined by

geometric abstraction.[16]

Two works created in 1961 by Tousignant, *Cristallisation* (Figure 1) and

Construction dans le losange (Figure 2), are composed of rectangles of different colours

and lengths emerging from a white base. Both are seen by art critic and curator Normand

Thériault to "make use, in fact, of the same formula [as his painting]: horizontals,

verticals, a rigid grid formed of juxtaposed colours."[17] *Cristallisation* particularly

epitomizes this "formula." Sitting in a self-confined space built up vertically from a

succession of horizontal planes of red, yellow and orange rectangles, *Cristallisation*

forms a grid. *Construction dans le losange* also makes use of use of geometric shapes in a

grid formation. Again, we have a succession of horizontal layers that juxtapose four

colours – red, yellow, orange and white – emerging from a white base. This time,

however, the sculpture is mounted on the wall, functioning as a relief.

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[14] Tousignant himself described his sculptures as the logical extension of his painterly concerns explaining that, "I wished, in the tradition of Mondrian, to examine the rhythms and serial systems that were the result of the use of a particular aesthetic arsenal – squares, rectangles, lines, colours. The sculptures produced between 1959 and 1961 are the projection in physical space of the same visual propositions that were contained in the paintings." From Normand Thériault's catalogue essay for, *Claude Tousignant : Sculptures,* 31.

[15] Saint-Pierre, "Figures géométriques et ludiques," *La sculpture au Québec 1946-1961,* 93.

[16] It should be noted that Claude Tousignant's work, throughout the remainder of the 1960s, becomes more particularly associated with *l'art op,* a current exemplified by Tousignant's signature 'bull's-eyes'. *The Responsive Eye* exhibition at Museum of Modern Art of New York in 1965, in which both Tousignant and Guido Molinari participated, was, as Francine Couture explains, the artistic event of the year in Quebec, and legitimized this abstract current. See Francine Couture, *La mise en scène de l'avant garde,* 13.

[17] Thériault, 31.

In Rosalind Krauss' discussion of the use of the grid in twentieth-century art, she asserts that grids are the "emblems of all that is quintessentially modern in art."[18] She describes two manifestations of the grid in modern art: the *centrifugal*, where the grid "presents a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric," and the *centripetal*, where "the grid is a re-presentation of everything that separates the work of art from the world."[19] Krauss cites the work of Dutch artist Piet Mondrian who exemplified the often-paradoxical use of the grid formation in twentieth-century art, and who would become a major reference for Quebec's Plasticien and Espace Dynamique artists.

Yet, it is the closeness between Tousignant's abstract paintings and his painted wood sculptures that has elicited comment. Art historian and curator France Gascon, in "Claude Tousignant: sculpter pour peindre," traces the similarities between the artist's sculpture and his painting when she writes that, "ses sculptures conservaient quelques-uns des traits caractéristique structurelles de la peinture, soit la frontalité, la présence d'un cadre-limite et également celle d'un point de vue privilégié impose au spectateur par la symétrie qui ordonne les oeuvres."[20] Gascon goes on to note that as a result of the structural similarities between Tousignant's sculptures and his *Espace Dynamique* paintings, an ambiguity arises between these two art forms, and one which Tousignant deliberately emphasized throughout his career. Sculptures such as *Cristallisation* and *Construction dans le losange*, explains Gascon, could be considered as "hybrid objects,"

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[18] Rosalind Krauss, "Grids, you say," *Grids, Format and Image in 20th Century Art* (New York: the Pace Gallery, 1978), 1.

[19] Ibid, 6.

[20] France Gascon, "Claude Tousigant: sculpter pour peindre," *Journal of Canadian Art History*, 7.2 (1984): 156-179. Yet as France Gascon also points out, "Les préoccupations du sculpteur sont présentes chez ce peintre depuis plus longtemps qu'on ne le croirait à prime abord." Ibid, 165.

works that inhabit both the sculptural and painting fields.[21] This is most acutely observed in the relief work *Construction dans le losange,* which is caught between being a painting and a sculpture.[22]

By echoing the use of geometric shapes and formations and juxtaposing strong primary colours, Tousignant's sculptures of the early 1960s constitute part of the vocabulary of abstraction. As Gascon explains, "La perfection et la plénitude de la forme se remarquaient déjà dans les petites sculptures sur bois des années 1959, 1960, 1961. La composition qui semble très morcelée y crée en fait un ensemble compact qui ne fuit par aucun côté et qui épouse encore parfaitement la forme rectangulaire du cadre sur laquelle repose l'oeuvre."[23] The fundamental search for purity of form permeates Tousignant's entire body of work. However, highlighting the artist's strict allegiance to abstract sensibilities does not negate the intriguing ambiguity between the traditional boundaries of painting and sculpture that was articulated by his particular experimentation with the three-dimensional form. This will be of particular importance in the 1970s as avant-garde artists began to consistently question the existing traditional definitions of painting and sculpture.

Also associated with the emergence of abstract art during the 1950s was Ulysse Comtois (1931-1999), who participated in such important exhibitions as *La Matière chante* and *Espace 55.* Early in his career, Comtois had been associated with *Les Automatistes,*[24] the other pivotal non-figurative art group in Quebec. Like Tousignant, he

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[21] Ibid, 179. The term "hybrid-objects" is taken from the English résumé of Gascon's text.
[22] Ibid, 166.
[23] Ibid, 163.
[24] For further reading concerning the Automatistes movement of the 1940s and 1950s see, Francois-Marc Gagnon's *Chronique du mouvement Automatistes québécois, 1941-1954* (Outremont, Québec: Lanctôt, 1998).

began experimenting with the abstract sculptural form in the 1960s. Of the same

generation as Tousignant, Comtois never completely adopted the *Plasticiens* or *Espace

Dynamique* aesthetic. However, according to curator Manon Blanchette, the small,

colourful wood sculptures he made between 1965 and 1966 "utilisent les plans de

couleurs à la façon plasticienne des années 1955-1956 de Fernand Leduc en peinture ou

plus tard Molinari."[25]

A further comparison with Tousignant can be found in the relationship between

Comtois' painting and sculpture. For example, in the 1960s, many of the defining

elements in his sculptures, such as the use of repetition, horizontals, verticals and certain

graphic signs, can be found in his painting. Sculptures such as *Footprints* (1964) and

Décor (1965), explains Blanchette, "reprennent en effet des formes et des écritures déjà

vues. Qu'on se souvienne de *10,000 lieux sous terre* (1957), ou de *L'ombre au tableau*

(1957). Le même vocabulaire graphique se retrouve aussi bien en peinture qu'en

sculpture."[26] Yet it is the experimental and often playful nature of his sculptures during

the 1960s that take precedence.[27] In her discussion of the critical discourse surrounding

"experimental" art of the 1960s, Couture points out that "La période des années 60 étant

une période de mutation tant au plan politique, social que culturel, cette idée de novation

est très présente dans les textes de la critique d'art."[28] Couture describes Comtois as an

[25] Manon Blanchette, "En Marge de l'acquis," *Ulysse Comtois, 1952-1982* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporaine de Montréal, 1982), 16.
[26] Ibid, 16.
[27] Ulysse Comtois was also sculpture instructor at l'école des beaux arts de Montréal at this time and . taught both Claude Mongrain and Jean-Serge Champagne. Claude Mongrain has described Ulysse Comtois as a major influence. Mongrain describes of Comtois that, "son intérêt pour une approche formelle rigoureuse, la notion de système, l'étude du mouvement, sa passion pour le monde des technologies, ses connaissances historiques et ses positions idéologiques bien articulées ancrées dans un matérialisme lucide allaient me stimuler totalement et contribuer à fonder ma propre pratique, bien davantage que toute autre influence." Interview with artist, 2 February 2005.
[28] Couture, *Mises en scenes de l'avant garde*, 12.

artiste novateur.[29] His small, painted sculptures, which were similar to his 1965?

sculpture *Multicolore* (Figure 3), were described by one reviewer as "des pièces de

prémonition."[30]

Comtois' experimentation with the sculptural form used a wide variety of

materials, some of which were not traditionally associated with this medium. His

sculpture varied from small, highly colourful works made out of stone or wood, such as

Multicolore, to massive constructions of aluminium, such as the 1969 piece *Le 23*

octobre (Figure 4). Although startlingly different in scale and form, these two sculptures,

along with numerous other aluminium sculptures made during the same period, are

expressions of the industrialized age. Whether reminiscent of machines or implying

repetitious action akin to that found in manufacturing, Comtois' sculptures evoked mass

industry and technological production.

Many of the sculptures made by Comtois beginning in the early 1960s prelude the

larger, more complex aluminium structures of the late 1960s. Keeping in mind such

works as *Petit torse*, which was made of aluminium, Blanchette writes that Comtois

"laisse volontairement . . . la trace d'une machine qui tente de remplacer par ses effets à

répétitions, ce qui était autrefois la main du peintre et du sculpteur."[31] In addition to the

sculptures he constructed out of industrial materials, Comtois also produced a series of

small, colourfully painted objects. With its bold colours, *Multicolore* appears to be, very

different from *Petit Torse*, which was produced that same year. The whimsical patches of

primary colour that cover the entire surface of this oddly shaped object are suggestive of

playfulness. Yet, this seemingly amusing sculpture, with its high-gloss finish, leaves no

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[29] Ibid, 18-20.
[30] Ibid, 20. Couture quoting Claude Jasmin in, "Ulysse Comtois, chercheur impénitent," *La Presse* 1965.
[31] Blanchette, 17.

trace of modelling and as such is a reference to factory production.[32] It is enticing, like a new car, and like a car is redolent of machinery and mass production.

By the end of the 1960s, Comtois had abandoned the use of colour and was instead producing a series of aluminium columns similar to the 1969 sculpture *Le 23 octobre*. These massive structures "supposent des machines-outils et des techniques de production industrielle."[33] As Blanchette explains,

> Des colonnes simples à articulation unique d'un seul motif (*Colonne #6, Colonne #8, colonne 1967-1968*) l'artiste passe bientôt à des motifs beaucoup plus complexes dans leurs contours. Puis il multiplie les possibilités en augmentant les données de départ. D'un seul axe il passera à deux et à trois. Ceux-ci articuleront des motifs aux concours encore plus complexes ou fixeront un enfilement statique de formes.[34]

Consequently, there is something of the mathematical in these *colonnes*. As Blanchette points out, by increasing the number of axes, Comtois increased the number of options open for aesthetic exploration. The artist continued to experiment with this approach well into the 1970s.[35] While Comtois' sculptures embraced the contemporary tradition of abstraction, they also featured "unorthodox" materials whose meaning could be found in technological innovation. In this way, his sculptures were influenced by the spirit of experimentation and innovation that formed the crux of many sculptural practices throughout the 1960s and that continued to inspire artists in the 1970s. As Couture writes,

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[32] Jean-Pierre Latour, "L'atelier redéfini: études de la sculpture d'Ulysse Comtois, Jean Noël, Henry Saxe et Serge Tousignant," in *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante: l'éclatement du modernisme*, Tome II, ed., Francine Couture (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1997), 235.

[33] Ibid, 236.

[34] Blanchette, 19-20.

[35] The repetitive nature of Comtois' sculptures, reminiscent of American minimalist sculpture, which as Rosalind Krauss has described "exploited the possibilities of an element in a repetitive structure." From Krauss's *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge : MIT Press, 1978), 245.

"Le rapprochement de l'art et de la technologie a marqué la vie artistique des années

soixante."[36]

Although Comtois and Tousignant were representative of their generation, they

were also very much a part of the larger art scene that thrived in Quebec in the 1960s.

This community of artists of every kind sponsored happenings, formed associations and

groups,[37] and held outdoor sculpture symposiums.[38] These new alliances, as Andrée

Fortin explains, "ne présentent pas au public des expositions ou de manifestes comme les

automatistes et les plasticiens; essentiellement, ils organisent des 'soirées', des

happenings."[39] Also of particular importance was the establishment of the Musée d'art

contemporain de Montréal in 1964. According to Francine Couture, "La fondation du

Musée d'art contemporain nous apparaît comme un moment important, un moment-clé

ou un signe de reconnaissance de l'art contemporain comme valeur culturelle légitime."[40]

Student protests regarding the conservative nature of l'École des beaux arts de Montréal's

(EBAM) curriculum throughout the second half of the 1960s also changed the art milieu.

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[36] Francine Couture, "Art et technologie: repenser l'art et la culture," *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante,* 175.

[37] Michel Roy has explained that, "Le principal mandat de ces associations se rapporte à la diffusion des oeuvres de leurs membres et à la défense de leurs intérêts particuliers auprès des gouvernements." Resulting out of the need to increase the visibility of sculptors throughout the Quebec art milieu, the first association to emerge was L'Association des sculpteurs du Québec (ASQ) in 1961. The ASQ organized exhibitions, published monographs, and made slides. For further reading see, Michel Roy, "Artiste et société: professionnalisation ou action politique," *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante: l'éclatement du modernisme,* 339-413

[38] The outdoor sculpture symposium also became a feature of the Quebec sculptural milieu during the 1960s. Beginning in 1964 by L'association des sculpteurs du Québec (ASQ), the sculpture symposium increased the visibility of sculpture throughout the province of Quebec. Through governmental support, the artists, as Michel Roy explains, got materials, equipment, and salary to produce their sculptures. Mont-Royal (1964), Musée d'art contemporaine (1965), Alma (1965-1966), and Joliette (1966) played hosts for these symposiums during the 1960s. Of particular importance, the Mont-Royal symposium of 1964, which featured the work of local sculptors Armand Vaillancourt and Robert Roussil, included the work of many international sculptors. Roy, "Artiste et société," 339-413.

[39] Andrée Fortin, "Affirmations collectives et individuelles," *Declics Art et société: le Québec des années 1960 et 1970,* eds., Marie-Charlotte De Koninck and Pierre Landry (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal et Éditions Fides, 1999), 30.

[40] Couture, *Mises en scène de l'avant-garde,* 6.

As Suzanne Lemerise writes, "selon les étudiants, [EBAM] ne répondait pas aux besoins de la société et de l'artiste contemporains."[41] For the student at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia) "L'innovation était de taille," with the artists of this newly accredited fine arts department in 1965 selecting "des orientations qui ouvraient leur institution à l'ensemble de la communauté québécoise."[42]

Ulysse Comtois was not alone in referencing an industrial language in his art. In this practice, he was joined by younger sculptors as Jean Noel, Henry Saxe and Serge Tousignant.[43] It became common for artists and artist groups to merge art and scientific knowledge to create multidisciplinary works. For example, Serge Cournoyer's 1967 cinematic sculpture *Zéphyr* "peut être désigné comme un objet technique, un projecteur disposé sur un socle dont le dispositif technique, lentille, miroir, kaléidoscope, n'est pas camouflé."[44] Jean-Claude Lajeunie also produced multidisciplinary cinematic sculptures, and the artist group *Fusion des arts* wrote a manifesto in 1965 that proposed "un nouveau mode d'insertion sociale de l'art favorisant l'établissement de nouvelles relations avec la science et la technique."[45]

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the ambitious exhibition of contemporary sculpture at MACM, *Panorama de la sculpture au Quebec: 1945-1970*. This presentation

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[41] Suzanne Lemerise, "L'art – l'artiste – l'école," *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante: La reconnaissance de la modernité*, 293. As Lemerise explains, protests culminated with the student occupation of EBAM in the fall of 1968. By 1969, this historic art institution (established in 1922) fused with the newly founded L'Université de Québec à Montréal. Ibid, 296.

[42] Ibid, 302.

[43] Jean Pierre Latour essay for *Les arts visuels au Québec dans les années soixante: l'Éclatement du modernisme*, "L'atelier redéfini: études de la sculpture d'Ulysse Comtois, Jean Noel, Henry Saxe et Serge Tousignant," draws some parallels between the works of those four sculptors, among whose work gave the illusion of being produced in factories making any sign of the 'fait à la main' disappear. The choice of substances, forms, and their often modular-construction, also added greatly to the perception of these works as borrowing from the formal language of industry. Aluminum or plastic was replacing old materials, such as wood, bronze, or stone. And the sculptural forms themselves also reflected fabricated machines.

[44] Couture, "Art et technologie," 201.

[45] Ibid, 186. Like Cournoyer and Lajeunie, *Fusion des arts* produced *cinematic sculptures*.

attempted to account for the various tendencies in Quebec sculpture and included the organic forms of the 1940s and 1950s, the monumental outdoor sculptures of the 1950s and 1960s[46] and the technological and industry-inspired works of the 1960s. Set squarely inside this history were Tousignant and Comtois, who were identified first and foremost as painters. Describing this group of sculptor/painters, Gilles Hénault, then director of the MACM, writes, "Chez eux, la couleur ou la texture jouent une rôle particulier, comme transpositions des valeurs picturales dans un espace à trois dimensions."[47]

As the quote that opens this chapter suggests, artists in the 1970s were continually being measured against the tradition of contemporary Quebec art as defined by avant-garde abstraction. Even artists considered to be embedded in that tradition had earlier begun to find inspiration in other sources such as science, technology and the realm of mass production. As we will see in subsequent chapters, sculptors practicing their art in the 1970s continued to use abstract shapes and formations such as the cube and grid as seen in the work of Tousignant, while also experimenting with new materials, as did Comtois. It is not in the fundamentals that sculpture "radically" changed; sculpture in the 1970s continued to be a medium "subject to gravity and revealed by light."[48] Rather, its basic materials and how they were used on site were dramatically altered by the 1970s sculptor.

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[46] Armand Vaillancourt produced large, highly publicized, public sculptures throughout the 1960s. For instance, Vaillancourt's *Je me souviens* of 1966, for the international sculpture symposium at High Park in Toronto, garnered much controversy and was subsequently omitted from the symposium. This, among other monumental sculptures by Vaillancourt, propelled his popularity and made him, as Guy Sioui Durand explains, "le symbole de l'art sur la place publique, et est plus connu dans la communauté artistique que Borduas." Guy Sioui Durand, *L'art comme alternative* (Québec, Qc: Les Éditions Intervention, 1997), 42.
[47] Gilles Hénault, "Introduction," *Panorama de la sculpture au Québec: 1945-1970*, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, et Musée Rodin, Paris 1971 (Montréal: Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1970).
[48] William Tucker, "Introduction," *The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists* (London: Art's Council of Great Britain, 1975), 7.

By the end of the decade [1960s], connections had been made between "idea-artists" and their supporters around the United States and in England, Italy, France, Germany, Holland, Argentina, and Canada (Vancouver and Halifax in particular).

Lucy Lippard, 1995[1]

Chapter Two:
The Montreal Art Milieu of the 1970s

In Montreal during the 1970s various artist collectives, parallel galleries and art journals surfaced. Experimental art forms that challenged existing definitions of art had new funding and sites, emblematic of the progressive nature of Quebec since La Revolution Tranquille. Three artists who were indirectly linked to the artist-run space Véhicule Art (Montreal) Inc. and produced art that challenged existing definitions of the sculptural medium were Andrew Dutkewych, Jean-Serge Champagne and Claude Mongrain. In time, they became associated with minimalism, conceptualism and postminimalism. Their work exemplified concerns common to the international[2] reconsideration of sculpture that was taking place throughout the 1970s and was exhibited at the Véhicule gallery and at pivotal group exhibitions such as *Périphéries* and *Québec 75*. Through discussing Véhicule and the newspaper and journal coverage of *Périphéries* and *Québec 75,* this chapter considers how internationalism was central to the formation of Véhicule, the inspirational force behind these two exhibitions, and influenced the work of Dutkewych, Champagne and Mongrain.

During the 1970s, newly formed artist-run centres in Montreal became the locus for discussing changing ideas in sculpture and exhibiting new international art tendencies.

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[1] Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 34.
[2] With the use of international I am speaking of the western art world encompassing Europe and North America.

These centres not only nurtured emerging art forms such as conceptual art, they supported young, often unknown artists by providing them with the opportunity to exhibit in non-traditional, museum-like settings. In "Des Projections libérants Les lieux d'innovation et de transgression en arts visuels," art historian Guy Sioui Durand writes, "dans les années 1970, des galeries parallèles, des collectifs d'artistes militants, des regroupements de vidéastes, des périodiques culturels et des événements d'art se développent en réseaux. Mieux structurées que durant la décennie précédente, la plupart de ces initiatives profitent de programmes de subventions gouvernementales."[3] Perhaps the most important space in Montreal for producing multimedia art and new forms of sculpture was Véhicule, an alternative space located at 31 Ste. Catherine Street West.[4] Founded in 1972, Véhicule was the first centre of its type in Montreal and the second in Canada. Among the artists who frequented it were Dutkewych, Champagne and Mongrain.[5]

Other alternative art centres also opened their doors in the 1970s. The feminist collective gallery Powerhouse was established in 1973 and is still in existence today as Galerie La Centrale.[6] Powerhouse was instrumental in exhibiting "many of the major artists, local and international, whose work reflects the concerns central to both 1970s

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[3] Guy Sioui Durand, "Des Projections libérants? Les lieux d'innovation et de transgression en arts visuels," in *Déclics Arts et Société: le Québec des années 1960 et 1970*, eds. Marie-Charlotte De Koninck and Pierre Landry (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal & Éditions Fides, 1999), 153.

[4] Diana Nemiroff's *A History of Artist-Run Spaces in Canada with Particular Reference to Vehicule, A Space and the Western Front* (Master's thesis, Concordia University, 1985) provides a comprehensive history of *Véhicule* from its inception in 1972 to its dissolution in 1983. It charts *Véhicule's* overall goals, changing membership, major funding sources, operating structure, gallery space, and programming.

[5] According to Nemiroff, Andrew Dutkewych was director of *Véhicule* in 1974, was a member through 1975, and participated in *Véhicule* exhibitions in 1976. Jean-Serge Champagne either was, or had been a member in 1974, and Claude Mongrain was part of a group show, *Directions-Montreal 1972-1976*, at the Véhicule gallery in 1976.

[6] For a history of *Powerhouse (La Centrale)* see Celine Baril's *Instabili: the Question of Subject* (Montréal: La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse, 1990).

and 1980s feminist cultural activism."[7] In 1974, the opening of Optica increased the

visibility of contemporary photography in the Montreal area, and La Galerie Media was

established in 1969 as "un lieu d'animation et d'intervention communautaire qui propose

des exposition thématique tantôt-ludiques (*Pack-sack* 1972), tantôt politiques (*Just*

society, 1972)."[8] Prior to the opening of Véhicule, Bill Vazan, a sculptor and one of its

founding members, participated in the 1971 exhibition *45° 35'N - 73° 36'W* held

simultaneously at Sir George Williams University and the Saidye Bronfman Centre.[9]

Reviews identified the exhibition's recurring themes: the fundamental use of ideas and

systems, the importance of the spectator, and the use of narrative in lieu of the traditional

art object. The conceptual nature of the exhibition and the connections it facilitated

between Montreal artists and their international counterparts directly inspired the global

outlook that would shape Véhicule.[10]

Works that included the use of language and narrative formed an integral thematic

component of the 1971 exhibition. As Irwin and Myrna Gopnik wrote in "The Semantics

of Concept Art"

> More often there is a set of instructions or an explanatory caption attached to an
> image of some sort, usually photographic . . . But the profusion of words is not
> merely incidental, an excuse for a failure to fabricate . . . rather it is a consequence
> of the reintroduction of a straightforward, unabashed narrative, e.g., a travelogue
> of gas stations from Vancouver to Montreal (Harold Pearse) or the story of an

[7] Nell Tenhaaf, "A History, or a way of knowing," in *Instabili: la question of subject*, 83.

[8] Gaston Saint-Pierre, "Illusions et désillusions autour de l'idée de vouloir changer le monde," in *Déclics Arts et Société*, 205.

[9] *45° 35'N - 73° 36'W* are the geographical coordinates of Montreal. This exhibition included the works of international artists such as Sol LeWitt and Les Levine, and Canadian and local artists such as Michael Snow, Iain Baxter, Bill Vazan, and Gary Coward. The title of the exhibition is reminiscent of other such exhibitions *557,087* (in Seattle), *955, 000* (in Vancouver), and *2,972,453* (Bueno Aires), three conceptual shows organized by Lucy Lippard in 1969-1970 which used the current populations of these cities as exhibition title. For further information see Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts" in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, 17-38.

[10] Diana Nemiroff explains that, *45° 35'N - 73° 36'W*, by virtue of being held at Sir George Williams University, put Vehicule's founding members into contact. Nemiroff, 135.

unpaid doctor's bill in twelve monthly instalments (removed from the exhibition when the MD. threatened to sue the artist Arno Mermelstein, for damage to his reputation).[11]

Attaching words to a photographic image is a formulated strategy, as the above passage illustrates, one that explores the use of non-fictional narrative as a means to engage the viewer in a decidedly new manner. In this way the traditional art object is replaced by words.[12] Similarly, Laurent Lamy's article in *Vie des arts*, "L'art conceptuel," also discussed the work in *45° 35'N - 73° 36'W*, as well as the new conceptual movement that was challenging the traditional definitions of art. Lamy writes, "A partir du document, le spectateur refait le cheminement de l'artiste. La structure de l'art est effectivement remise en question: au niveau des intentions, l'artiste cherche plus à percevoir qu'à s'exprimer; l'oeuvre consiste désormais en une idée. . . ."[13]

Another participant in *45° 35'N - 73° 36'W* was the American conceptual artist Sol LeWitt. As early as 1967 in his "Paragraph on conceptual art" and later in 1969 in his "Sentences on conceptual art," Lewitt articulated an art where, in Alex Alberro's words, "the process of conception stands in complementary relation to the process of

[11] Irwin and Myrna Gopnik, "The Semantics of Concept Art," *artscanada* 28.2 (April/May 1971): 61.
[12] We see with the work of the British group *Art & Language* founded in England in 1968 for instance, the recurring use of words to replace the traditional art object. The founding members of this conceptual art group included, Terry Atkinson (1939-), David Bainbridge (1941), Michael Baldwin (1945-), and Harold Hurrell (1940-). Their conceptual journal, *Art & Language: the journal of conceptual art,* was first published in May 1969. Joseph Kosuth acted as American editor for that first publication. By 1971, Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden formally of *The Society of Theoretical Art & Analyses* merged with *Art & Language. Art & Language* stated in the introduction to their art journal that they were concerned with, "the semantic qualities of the written language." Thus language became the focus and words became their material of art. As Alexander Alberro explains, "their work focused on the analysis of linguistic usage of both plastic art itself and its support languages, namely word-language." For further reading see, Editors of Art & Language, "Introduction to the first volume of Art & Language: the journal of Conceptual art 1.1 May 1969" and Alexander Alberro's, "Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977," both in *Conceptual Art: a Critical Anthology,* eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999).
[13] Larent Lamy, "L'art conceptuel," *Vie des arts* 64 (Automne 1971): 31.

realisation."[14] But LeWitt had previously been associated with minimalism. In the mid-

1960s, he took part in some of the decade's most important minimalist exhibitions along

with Donald Judd and Robert Morris.[15] Yet, partly because of his early writings on idea

art, he remains a formidable conceptual figure, famously declaring, "The idea becomes a

machine that makes the art."[16] According to Irwin and Myrna Gopnik, for *45° 35'N - 73°*

36'W, LeWitt sent "a set of written instructions specifying all the details for the

construction of the work – materials, size, form, time to be spent. The work, actually

realized at the Saidye Bronfman Centre, [consisted of] a series of horizontal magic

marker lines entirely covering one large pane of glass."[17] This work also illustrates how

the idea exists in "complementary relation to the process of realization." LeWitt's initial

idea was given voice in the written instructions he provided the organizers of the

exhibition, and in a way, both the process and the realization of the work, neither of

which was executed by LeWitt, appear almost secondary, or at the least, *complementary.*

Lewitt would later present a similar project at Vehicule in February of 1973.

Only a short time after *45° 35'N - 73° 36'W,* Véhicule was founded. In one of the

earliest discussions of the gallery, art critic Gilles Toupin identified certain aesthetic

trends that were prevalent in the work of Véhicule's artists. In his broad description, he

lists land art, process art and conceptual art. Although he is quick to qualify that there

exists in this work "une diversification de recherches qui empêche de les regrouper sous

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[14] Alberro, "Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977," xx.

[15] Among them, LeWitt was included in the pivotal 1966 exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York, "Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture." Although perhaps generally seen as a minimalist because of his geometric grid-like sculptures of the mid-60s, LeWitt's very same works were never closed solid sculptural objects. As will become evident in the following chapter through discussion of Andrew Dutkewych's work, because Lewitt sculptures always provided the viewer with the ability to see through and past the work to the gallery's surrounding, his sculptures maybe therefore understood as 'site-specific' architectural interventions in the gallery space.

[16] Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5.10 (Summer 1967): 79-83.

[17] Gopnik, 61.

une même catégorie,"[18] the general impression remained that artists associated with

Véhicule "preferred to speak the international language of vanguard art."[19] Works by

international artists shown at Véhicule include, Sol LeWitt, Les Levine, the German

Franz Ernhard Walter, Fluxus artists Ken Friedman and Dick Higgins, Herve Fischer and

Dennis Oppenheim, to name just a few.[20]

In the early years, Véhicule's vitality and identity as a parallel gallery were

closely linked to its role in connecting its artists to a wider global village of alternative

spaces. For example, international contacts were fostered through the gallery's

participation in the Basel International Art Fair in both 1974 and 1975.[21] Furthermore,

Vehicule's own conceptual art echoed this global outlook, as could be seen in Bill

Vazan's *Contacts*. As art critic and curator Diana Nemiroff observed, *Contacts* "looked

for a simple sign that might symbolize the reality of the global village."[22] What pervades

Nemiroff's discussion of the evolution of Véhicule is the "vision of the gallery as a

channel of communication" throughout the Montreal, Canadian and wider art milieus.

Communication remains a key concept in any understanding of conceptual art.[23] In its

most basic and pragmatic sense, "The easily portable, easily communicated forms of

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[18] Gilles Toupin, "L'Alternative du Groupe Véhicule," *Vie des arts* 17.70 (1973): 59.

[19] Nemiroff, 151-152.

[20]For a complete list of local and international artists exhibited at Véhicule consult Helene Sicotte's *Chronologie Véhicule Art Inc. Montréal* done for Concordia University Archives in March 1995.

[21] Véhicule artists who participated in 1974 include: Allan Bealy, Andrew Dutkewych, Suzy Lake, Leopold Plotek, and bill Vazan. Suzy Lake and Chantal Pontbriand went as representatives in both 1974 and 1975. Nemiroff, 157.

[22] Ibid, 152.

[23] Of course as Lucy Lippard suggests in her catalogue essay to the historical exhibition of Conceptual art at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 1995, this visionary ideal fell short. Time has demonstrated that communication between artists in a global village became "an area that populist desires were raised but unfulfilled." See Lippard's "Escape Attempts," 32.

Conceptual art made it possible for artists working out of the major art centers to participate in the early stages of ideas."[24]

In 1974, the MACM opened its space to seventeen Véhicule artists in the exhibition *Périphéries*. Fernande Saint-Martin, who was the museum's director, and Chantal Pontbriand, then director of Véhicule and the founding editor of *Parachute* magazine, collaborated in the realization of the exhibition and its catalogue. The catalogue contained an articulation of the exhibition's theme that remains an excellent example of Véhicule's internationalist philosophy. In the opening essay, Suzy Lake, another of Véhicule's founding members, writes, "Véhicule's purpose is related to the present attitudes towards 'Art', to the work being created now and to an openness to changing forms in the future."[25] The work Lake is referring to was being produced by *idea-makers*. She goes on to explain that as *idea-art*, it escapes the previously defined boundaries of art that live "only in the minds of its respective conceivers."[26]

In Chantal Pontbriand's essay, Véhicule emerges as the sole purveyor in Montreal of international art concerns. She places the artists exhibiting in *Périphéries* within the context of the historical shift from art object to idea that had taken place in the Western art milieu in recent years. Pontbriand writes, "*Périphéries* souligne des attitudes définies par quelques artistes montréalais qui ont voulu mettre à jour des recherches actuelles. . . Leur point de vue est celui d'une sensibilité qui s'affirme au niveau du "village global."[27]

Périphéries was met with mixed reviews. George Bogardi of the *Montreal Star* placed the work alongside the pantheon of Quebec vanguard artists, writing that, "for the

[24] Ibid, 33.
[25] Suzy Lake's "Introduction," *Périphéries* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1974), 1
[26] Ibid.
[27] Chantal Pontbriand, *Périphéries*, 3.

first time since the fading away of the Plasticiens, the Véhicule group has made Montreal art an exciting thing to watch."[28] Other reviews were not as glowing. Odette Bourdon of *Montreal-Matin* expresses a sense of ambiguity with, "Pour ma part, j'essaie encore de comprendre . . . ."[29] For Bourdon, however, trying to understand was reason enough for the public to see the show. [30] Pierre Vallières' review in *Le Devoir* was scathing as he wrote that its heterogeneity led to an incoherent, and worse, a wholly egocentric show: "la diversité sert à préserver l'ego de chaque individualité du groupe."[31] While Bogardi compared Véhicule to "great" Quebecois art movements, Vallières believed that the inability of the artists to create a collective voice placed their production below that of Les Automatistes and Les Plasticiens.[32]

The review in *La Presse* was not as contentious. In "Attention! Attention! Les barbares entrent au musée," Gilles Toupin describes the heterogeneity, or lack of cohesiveness, as the defining characteristic of the exhibition: "C'est un 'show' toute croche, épouvantable, bon, mauvais, niaiseux, intelligent, sans desseins, sans dessins, scandaleux, extraordinaire, moyen, pas pire, incompréhensible et tout ce que vous voudrez...mais c'est un gros 'show' (beaucoup plus qu'une exposition qu'il faut voir même si on n'est pas d'accord et qu'on a le foi malade)."[33] For Toupin *Périphéries* "ne témoigne pas d'un seul courant mais d'une diversité créative remarquable."[34]

The following year the MACM mounted *Québec 75*, which was similar to *Périphéries* in its presentation of a diverse collection of work that challenged traditional

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[28] George Bogardi, "An exciting thing to watch," *The Montreal Star*, March 2 1974.
[29] Odette Bourdon, "Allez au musée d'art contemporain," *Montréal-Matin*, 22 février 1974.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Pierre Vallières, "Les périphéries de l'impuissance," *Le Devoir*, 23 mars 1974, (Section, Les beaux arts).
[32] Ibid.
[33] Gilles Toupin, "Attention! Attention! les barbares entrent au musée," *La Presse*, 23 février 1974, C15.
[34] Ibid.

definitions of art. Furthermore, nine of its eighteen participants were associated with

Véhicule. According to Gaston Saint-Pierre, *Québec 75* "est devenu le point culminant de

toutes les questions politiques du moment, en démontrant paradoxalement un rejet ou un

refus d'assujettir l'art à une cause politique."[35] Beyond the perceived lack of political

content in the works, much of the criticism of *Québec 75* centred on the international

flavour of the exhibition. In Chantal Pontbriand's essay in the second issue of *Parachute*,

she points out that *Québec 75* spawned a period of intense debate about what Quebec art

was and should be: "Susciter des débats, des polémiques, *Québec 75*, ne manqua pas de

le faire. Pendant une semaine, l'atmosphère du Musée d'art contemporain fut à la frénésie

collective."[36]

The mandate of *Québec 75* was to present a broad look at new Quebec art

between 1970 and 1975, and as a result there was no thematic thread. Perhaps the most

accurate articulation of the exhibition's intent can be found in a statement in the

accompanying catalogue: "this exhibition can basically prove only one thing: it can only

affirm the existence of a *new situation*. Art is not simply an ensemble of objects which

are given meaning by their aesthetic or moral principles. A work of art is an object and as

an object its meaning is the product of a process of communication."[37] The art in *Québec

75* was chosen according to the artist's ability to articulate this "new situation." To this

end, the organizers established two criteria for selection: "1.) "Did the artist question art

and his own medium in a fundamental and basic way?; and 2.) "Was the formulation of

this question satisfactorily answered by his work of art?"[38]

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[35] Saint-Pierre, 206.
[36] Chantal Pontbriand, "Québec 75," *Parachute* 2 (1976): 32.
[37] Normand Thériault, *Québec 75* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1975), 10.
[38] Ibid, 10.

The works varied considerably, from the conceptual photography of Suzy Lake to

the performance art of Bill Vazan, whose piece commemorated the fifth anniversary of

the October Crisis. Experiments with sculptural form also found a home here. Viewers

took in Roland Poulin's minimalist sculptures, the funk-art-inspired tactile art of Yvon

Cozic, Jean-Serge Champagne's process-revealing work, and the site-specific

experimentation with elements in static suspension by Claude Mongrain. The emerging

field of installation was also represented in the art of Serge Tousignant and Irene

Whittome.[39] At the opening of the exhibition, however, the art work took a backseat to

the surrounding discourse that focused on the absence of a discernible and coherent

overall theme rather than on the art itself. This elicited cries of protest from the

participating artists.[40] At the same time, some critics took this opportunity to question the

internationalism espoused by Montreal's conceptual artists and by Véhicule in particular.

In a startling shift from his endorsement of *Périphéries'* heterogeneous flavour a

year earlier, Gilles Toupin forcefully criticized *Québec 75* in *La Presse*, condemning

what he describes as the exhibition's "présentation aveugle qui refuse d'assumer toute

responsabilité théorique"[41] and criticizing its association with the Anglophone art

community. Toupin opened his review by stating, "L'art québécois risque de faire fausse

route. Depuis quelques années certains de ses créateurs se sont laissés prendre au

racolage des receleurs d'images rassurantes et internationales." He identifies Véhicule as

the driving force behind *Québec 75*, declaring that, "Si *Périphéries* était le témoignage de

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[39] It should be noted that the catalogue is not an accurate representation of the works included in the exhibition, as it was published prior to the final selection of works.

[40] In an interview with Georges Bogardi, three artists who participated in *Quebec 75*, Roland Poulin, Gilles Mihalcean, and Claude Mongrain, described their dissatisfaction regarding the fact that discussion surrounding the exhibition did not focus on the works themselves. As Poulin described, "If there is a disappointment, it's in that we thought – naively perhaps – that the discussion would centre on the works of art in the show." Bogardi, "Three artists on Quebec 75," *The Montreal Star,* 15 November 1975.

[41] Gilles Toupin, "Québec 75 reflets et mirages," *La Presse,* 25 octobre 1975.

l'art engendré par les artistes qui sont dans l'orbite de la galerie Véhicule, *Québec 75*

l'est aussi. Cinquante pour cent (9 sur 18) des artistes de l'exposition sont de

anglophones. Et sept de ces neuf anglophones se sont pas natifs du Québec. On le voit,

Véhicule a tout charrié."

Turning to the works themselves, Toupin found that the projects were empty of

substance and failed to contribute to the unique history of Quebec art (with the exception

of Roland Poulin's work, which he likened to that of Molinari). With regards to Suzy

Lake's photographs, Toupin writes:

> Suzy Lake également voulant faire un commentaire historique sur les leçon de
> dessins académiques du faciès oublie que ce commentaire a déjà été fait depuis
> longtemps ici – qu'on se souvienne des oeuvres de Pellan – et que l'utilisation de
> son propre visage et du video n'ajoutent rien de plus à une remise en question
> déjà assumée. Encore une fois, les modèles du body-art auront été exploités par ce
> qu'il ont d'à la mode international, et non selon une réflexion qui puisse donner
> un sens à l'art québécois.

For Toupin, Québec 75 was fundamentally "un refus de toute conscience historique, une

négation des fondements mêmes de l'art québécois." He concluded that the show's

organizers, through their inclusion of many artists who produced predominately

conceptual or process-oriented projects, were championing internationalism:

> L'exposition a pris l'allure des tendances choyées par Véhicule, et par cela a
> assimilé l'art québécois à un tourbillon *internationaliste* factice. On ne s'est
> jamais rendu compte de la faiblesse des oeuvres des anglophones de Véhicule
> autant que par cette exposition, justement parce que eux aussi s'abreuvent à une
> idéologie superficielle. Ne pas comprendre que l'art americain pour être
> international doit avant tout être americain ou que l'art français pour franchir ses
> propres frontières est avant tout français, c'est ne pas comprendre l'imperialisme
> de pensée 'internationalisante.

Toupin went on to argue that by promoting "l'ideologie naïve de Véhicule" as the

dominant current in Quebec art during the first half of the 1970s, *Québec 75* disregarded

its own regional distinctiveness. He declared that works by artists not associated with Véhicule, such as Cozic, Pierre Ayot and Réal Lauzon, "refus de faire face aux défies lancés par Borduas, par les Automatistes, par les Plasticiens." Yet, is it fair to regard both Borduas and Les Plasticiens as the pillars of regionalism? Can it correctly be assumed that these foundational groups experimented with abstraction in a cultural vacuum, that they neither looked, nor found, any aesthetic commonality with abstract artists in Europe or the United States? The writings of Automatistes and Plasticiens artists and critics clearly show that this was not the case, and Borduas himself had spent significant time in New York.

Both Les Automatistes and Les Platiciens followed with interest what was happening at the School of Paris, and Espace Dynamique turned "to New York as the lodestar of modern artistic activity."[42] As Jody Patterson explains,

> Assimilating the lessons of Malevich's Suprematism, the constructivist principles of Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism and the 'all-over' spatial structure suggested by Pollock's brand of Abstract Expressionism, Espace Dynamique artists created their own pictorial language that was based on a dynamic synthesis of space and colour. The group's acquaintance with both European and American trends in modern art may be partially attributed to the artists' early training at the School of Art and Design of the Art Association of Montreal. Molinari, [Claude] Tousignant and Goguen all attended the school, studying under instructors such as Marion Scott and Gordon Webber, and both Molinari and Tousignant have commented on the 'internatinalist' attitude toward art fostered at the institution.[43]

Espace Dynamique's fascination with New York as the mecca of artistic activity in the Western world reflected a fundamental shift within the international art scene.[44] Thus, it is not entirely correct to regard the previous manifestations of vanguard art in Quebec as

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[42] Jody Patterson, *Painting on the Edge: Geometric Abstraction in Montreal, the 1950s* (Master's thesis, Concordia University, 2001), 77.
[43] Ibid, 73.
[44] Ibid, 77.

pillars of a distinctive regional art, uninformed about, or indifferent to, the development

of various trends in abstract art around the world.[45]

Claude Gosselin's review in *Le Devoir* focused on the scarcity of political content

in the projects included in the exhibition.[46] Critical of the works of the francophone

artists, who appeared to be solely concerned with formal elements, for example, and

addressing internal structures and the interaction between different materials, Gosselin

found it symptomatic of Quebec society that it was "seul les anglo-québécois [qui]

semblent avoir conscience du fait socio-politique de l'art."[47] According to Gaston Saint-

Pierre, who wrote about the exhibition twenty-five years later, the objections levelled at

Québec 75 by the francophone community were based on three factors: the large number

of anglophone artists who were exhibiting, the dearth of political content, and the

international as opposed to regional vision of the show.[48] He notes that artist and art

historian Marcel Saint-Pierre and professor of philosophy Laurent-Michel Vacher had

reactions to *Québec 75* that were similar to Gosselin's and Toupin's.[49] Returning to the

work in the exhibition, Saint-Pierre points out that it was not completely void of political

content, as Gunter Nolte's barbed wire sculpture, for example, evoked war, and

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[45] Ulysse Comtois was influenced by time spent in Europe. As Claude Mongrain describes, "Comtois revenait aussi d'un séjour prolongé en Europe (France et Italie) où sa carrière était sur le point de connaître un essor considérable, s'il avait décidé d'y rester. En 1968, il travaillait déjà sur les sculptures articulées pour lesquelles il est bien connu. Son intérêt pour une approche formelle rigoureuse, la notion de système, l'étude du mouvement, sa passion pour le monde des technologies, ses connaissances historiques et ses positions idéologiques bien articulées ancrées dans un matérialisme lucide allaient me stimuler totalement et contribuer à fonder ma propre pratique, bien davantage que toute autre influence." Interview with artist, 2 February 2005.

[46] Coincidentally Claude Gosselin founded, *Groupe de recherches et d'action sociale par l'art et les medias de communication (GRASAM)* with Francine Larivée and Jacqueline Rousseau in 1975.

[47] Claude Gosselin, "*Québec 75/arts*: la politiques connais pas," *Le Devoir,* 25 octobre 1975.

[48] Saint Pierre, 208.

[49] Gaston Saint Pierre describes that Vacher suggested that the exhibition was constructed based on a federalist model "visant la représentation proportionnelle des différents communautés." For Marcel Saint-Pierre the art work included was too formalist with little or no political content. Ibid, 210-211.

"*Touchez, do not touch* de Cozic [qui] rappelait les interdits entourant l'oeuvre d'art," did

have a political dimension.[50]

The reviews in both *The Gazette* and *The Montreal Star* were mixed. Virginia

Nixon of *The Gazette* describes the exhibition as a "striking collection."[51] In *The*

Montreal Star, Henry Lehmann writes, "*Québec 75* demands to be considered in the

setting of a post-modern, post-Beatles psychological texture," but he also expresses some

misgivings regarding the intent of the show when he writes, "How can anyone organize

an exhibition of art entitled *Québec 75* if he is unwilling or unable to offer a definition for

art and for Québécois?."[52] Lehmann identifies what was quickly becoming the

contentious issue surrounding the exhibition: "Perhaps the most significant statement

made by this show is in the overwhelming absence of the sensibility which was once

synonymous with progressive Quebec art – the plasticiens." George Bogardi's review for

the Montreal Star also describes the show's inadequacies: "that the work is wildly

uneven in quality, that the show is larger in scale but less coherent than recent events like

Peripheries and *Camerart*, and that the catalogue is something of a disaster."[53]

In the fall of 1975, *Parachute* surfaced as an influential and internationally

recognized theory-based art journal. It was launched by Chantal Pontbriand and France

Morin, who were previously active in Véhicule.[54] As Nemiroff explains,

> With France Morin went all the information collected in the Art Data archives;
> thus the long-standing vision of Vehicule as an information centre as well as a

[50] Ibid, 213.

[51] Virgina Nixon, "Giving spectators the chance to understand," *Montreal Gazette* 25 October 1975.

[52] Henry Lehmann, "Echos of the past," *The Montreal Star*, 25 October 1975.

[53] Georges Bogardi, "Quebec 75: a mirror image?" *The Montreal Star*, 25 October 1975.

[54] Chantal Pontrbiand, was voted in as member of Véhicule in 1973 and became a director in 1974. France Morin worked at Véhicule's documentation centre. The history and establishment of this art journal is linked to the heated internal conflict that plagued much of 1975 at Véhicule *Art (Montreal) Inc*, which subsequently resulted with both Pontbriand and Morin's resignations. See Nemiroff's *A History of Artist-Run Spaces in Canada* for further details.

gallery, collapsed. The resources represented by Art Data and the contacts made during Pontbriand's European trips went into *Parachute*, a new art magazine with a decidedly international outlook founded by the two women; the first issue appeared in the fall of 1975.[55]

The "international outlook" of *Parachute* could be seen in its own reviews of international exhibitions that included such essays as "Sculptur à Münster" by Pierre Théberge.[56] *Parachute* also featured more theoretical articles by Quebec and Canadian critics on sculpture that attempted to account for the redefinition of the medium in terms of site, the use of natural materials and the role of the spectator.[57]

The controversy surrounding *Québec 75* was duly noted in the first three issues of *Parachute*. In the first issue, Pontbriand and Morin conducted an interview with Normand Thériault wherein he articulated again the overall goal of *Québec 75*, which was to put together an exhibition that reflected the plurality of the art milieu. He then went on to explain how the idea for the exhibition came about, how it was financed and what was behind the choice of artists.[58] The interview also gave Thériault the opportunity to respond to the negative discourse that had overtaken the exhibition: "L'exposition n'est pas un jugement de qualité, elle ne veut pas nécessairement rassembler les meilleurs artistes du Québec. Elle cherche plutôt à identifier les artistes qui ont fait évoluer le milieu culturel québécois entre 1970-1975."[59] Answering a question regarding the historical significance of the exhibition, he explains that, "Face à Borduas et face aux

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[55] Nemiroff, 163-164.

[56] This exhibition was divided in three parts which represented the phases of 20th century sculpture: the evolution of abstract sculpture, autonomous sculpture, and site-specific work. The exhibition was described by Pierre Théberge as, "probablement la plus importante exposition de la sculpture au XXe siècle organisée depuis longtemps en Europe ou même en Amérique." *Parachute* #8 (1977): 41.

[57] See for example Jean-Marc Poinsot's "Sculpture/Nature" *Parachute* #12 (1978): 14-19, and Philip Monk's "Structures of Behavior" *Parachute* #12 (1978): 21-27.

[58] Chantal Pontbriand and France Morin, "Québec 75 une stratégie," *Parachute* #1 (1975): 4-7.

[59] Ibid, 5.

Plasticiens, l'exposition témoigne d'un pluralisme. Le milieu culturel québécois est nourri de différentes idéologies à l'heure actuelle." With regards to the anglophone participation, he responds, "Nous avons voulu choisir les démarches les plus signifiantes de notre milieu. Savoir que l'artiste est né en Colombie Britannique, au Nigéria, à Toronto, s'il parle français ou non, ce n'était pas important."

In the second issue of *Parachute*, Pontbriand discusses the impact of *Québec 75* and weighs in on the discourse of internationalism:

> L'internationalisme est une grosse machine entretenue par le système capitaliste américain, on le sait. Les artistes voyagent (?), les foires annuelles sont d'énormes conventions, les biennales, des instruments de prestige. La communication et l'information à une échelle internationale est pourtant une réalité, et internationalisation est un phénomène et un paradoxe, dont l'artiste québécois, à moins qu'il ne soit stupide et naïf (certains semblent y croire), se méfiera.[60]

The strategy proposed by the critics of *Québec 75* to counter this "internationalist machine" was to retreat into a heightened sense of regionalism. Pontbriand objected that this would trap Quebec artists in the past. She writes, "Les Automatistes et les Plasticiens sont des mouvements historiques, classés, qui sont très loin de la dynamique actuelle. Ils prouvent heureusement le viabilité de mouvements artistiques ici. Mais n'est-il pas temps pour l'artiste québécois d'aujourd'hui de regarder en *avant* plutôt qu'en arrière, comme le réclame tant les critiques."[61] It is not surprising that Pontbriand, as a former member of Véhicule and the co-founder of an art journal with an international emphasis, would come to the defence of *Québec 75* and, more specifically, the concept of internationalism. Furthermore, it indicates Pontbriand's concern that the intensely negative critical response to *Québec 75* and its organizers had the potential to threaten Montreal's status

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[60] Pontbriand, "Québec 75," *Parachute* #2 (1976): 33.
[61] Ibid, 33.

as an emerging player in the global art scene and a leading centre of vanguard art. Given

Pontbriand's essay in the catalogue for *Périphéries,* these were developments that she

was keen to see take place.

The following year, international currents in art such as conceptualism came

under attack once again with the demolition of an outdoor exhibition organized for the

1976 Olympic Games in Montreal – *Corridart: dans la rue Sherbrooke* – by city workers

on July 13, just days after it was mounted.[62] Earlier that day, the Executive Committee of

the City of Montreal stated that, "Such structures contravened municipal bylaws

governing the occupancy of the public domain and moreover, in a number of instances,

constituted a safety hazard."[63] Organized by the Arts and Culture Programme of the

Comité organisateur des Jeux Olympiques and scheduled to run from July 7 to July 31,

the avant-garde artworks were to line an eight-kilometre route from Atwater Avenue to

the Olympic site. The works that were included "provided a variety of interpretations of

urban art" and touched on such themes as the "duality of nature and artifice" and "the

vocabulary of urban construction."[64]

Corridart's demolition was immediately experienced by the local and

international art community as art censorship. As Concordia professor Sandra Paikowsky

writes, "Issues of censorship would remain the most enduring legacy of the discourse on

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[62] For a comprehensive chronology of the steps leading to *Corridart's* eventual removal, including those involved in the initial planning of the exhibition, see, *Corridart: Revisited/25ans plus tard* an exhibition curated by Sandra Paikowsky and Nancy Marrelli at Concordia University's Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2001. See also Kim Gauvin's *Corridart Revisited: Excavating the Remains* (Master's thesis, Concordia University 1996) for the planning and installation of *Corridart* and her article "Corridart Revisited: excavating the remains" in *The Journal of Canadian Art History* volume XVIII/2 (1997), 6-50 for reproductions of the works included.
[63] Paikowsky, *Corridart: Revisited/25 ans plus tard,* 4.
[64] Ibid, 8.

Corridart.[65] According to Paikowsky, "the art community had its own interpretations of the motives for the demolition of *Corridart*, including the legitimate belief that real estate developers had complained to the City about the exhibition's critical stance on the destruction of historic buildings." Kim Gauvin wrote that, "[Corridart's] demolition transformed it into a ruin, in our society, ruins endure the test of time."[66]

The 1970s included exhibition unmarked by controversy and devoted specifically to the sculptural medium.[67] *Onze sculpteurs canadiens,* held at the MACM in 1977, is relevant to this discussion in that it not only provides an example of an exhibition that featured and reviewed currents specific to the sculptural form, it included works by Jean-Serge Champagne and Claude Mongrain and identified them as postminimal. As the title suggests, *Onze sculpteurs canadiens* brought together eleven sculptors, all of whom, with the exception of Henry Saxe, were around the age of thirty.[68] The sculpture was selected from the collection of the Canada Council Art Bank and was categorized by Alain Parent, the exhibition's organizer, as exemplifying the vast field of postminimal work:

"L'enrichissement du champ des possibilités en sculpture, au cours des années 1970, par de nombreux artistes pratiquant, à la suite du minimalisme, l'art conceptuel, le land art,

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[65] Sandra Paikowsky writes, "The demolition of Corridart was covered by the media across Canada and in the United States as well as Europe. The influential periodical *Art in America* called the demolition of *Corridart* "one of the most shocking stories to emerge from the summer Olympics." Ibid, 10.

[66] Gauvin, "Corridart Revisited," *Journal of Canadian Art History,* 16.

[67] Two such exhibitions devoted to contemporary Quebec sculpture were *Luminicence* held at the Saidye Bronfman Centre in 1976, and *Tactile* held at the Musée du Québec in 1978. *Luminiscence* included the work of Francois Brosseau, Jean-Yves Coté, Marc Duquet, Michel Goulet, Jacques Ladoucer, Lisette Lemieux, Michel Lussier, Clement Picard, Serge Poulin, Bernard Rousseau, and Yves Trudeau. *Tactile* included the work of Azélie-lee Artand & Jovette Marchessault, Pierre Ayot, Ginette Geoffrion Begin, Maurice Bergeron, Heather Campbell, Ann Cecil, Francine Chaîné, Linda Covit, Cozic, Jacques Garnier, Alain Giguère, Doreen Lindsay, Richard Saint-Marie, Michel Sansoucy, Réné Taillefer, Denys Tremblay, Michèle Waquant, and Nin Weller.

[68] The sculptors include Douglas Bentham, Karl Beveridge, Robin Collier, David Rabinovitch, Royden Rabinovitch, and Mia Westerlund. From Montreal, Jean-Serge Champagne, Andre Fauteux, Claude Mongrain, Roland Poulin, and Henry Saxe.

l'art corporel, le process art, etc., aboutit à la fin de cette décennie à un grand nombre de créations originales que l'on peut qualifier de post-minimales.[69]

Parent identified three physical attributes common to the structure of each sculpture – relations, tensions and latent forces – as forming the thematic crux of the show.[70] With regards to the sculpture of Fauteux and Bentham he writes: "D'une manière avantage rigide, les constructions d'André Fauteux (*Verve*) et de Douglas Bentham, réintègrent les éléments relationnels par adjunction à une structure centrale, un axe horizontal pour le premier, un grand cadre de métal présenté en oblique par rapport au sol, dans l'oeuvre de Bentham (*Opens-piece no. 16,* 1976)."[71] Of Royden Rabinovitch's work, Parent identifies, "La cohésion de la forme, l'énergie latente atteignent un raffinement tout particulier chez Rabinovitch."[72] And with the sculpture of Karl Beveridge, "c'est par le jeu de tension tenant à la matérialité même du medium, et non simplement à une latence formelle, par le contraste physique des éléments que fonctionne la pièce de Karl Beveridge intitulée *Wax 23 2, 1970.*"[73]

In his review of *Onze sculpteurs canadiens* for *La Presse*, Gilles Toupin concluded that the works convincingly exemplified recent developments in sculptural form.[74] He describes the exhibition as "riche de connaissances et d'enseignements," and writes that the choice of sculptures was "serré, éclectique, mais éclairant." An untitled review in *Parachute* confirms the importance of the exhibition stating that,"nous avons rarement eu l'occasion de nous familiariser avec la sculpture de ces dernières années,

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[69] Alain Parent, *Onze sculpteurs canadiens* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1977), 1.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid, 2.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Gilles Toupin, "Onze sculpteurs d'ici en quête d'un nouveau langage," *La Presse,* 20 août 1977.

celle d'ici et d'ailleurs."[75] However, *Onze sculpteurs canadiens* was not without its critics.

Yves Robillard, writing for *Le Jour*, claimed that the exhibition was aesthetically

pleasing, but incensed by Robin Collyer's *Bright Moments*, he exclaimed, "j'en ai marre

de cet art avant tout 'intellectuel'!"[76]

The postminimal sculpture produced by Andrew Dutkewych, Jean-Serge

Champagne and Claude Mongrain that will be discussed in the following chapters

articulated the new concerns surrounding the sculptural medium, in particular,

dematerialization and the reconsideration of the sculptural medium. At the same time,

however, their work can be associated with the philosophy of Véhicule and *Québec 75*.

As we have seen, this philosophy had given rise to many heated discussions, an

indication that the art milieu in Quebec in the 1970s was wrestling with questions

concerning the coalescence of art and politics and the paradox of regionalism versus

internationalism.

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[75] No author. Exhibition review from *Parachute* # 8 (1977): 46.

[76] Robillard described Collyer's sculpture as resembling a tent for camping made out of metal, with various forms resembling farm animals trapped inside, rural farm life is evoked but not convincingly and criticized the sculpture for being too "gadget-like" and lacking in anything substantive. As he explains, "tout cela, ce genre d'art, pour moi, manque d'engagement réel, de compromission face à l'entendue des expériences quotidiennes de la vie." Yves Robillard, "Retour de vacances," *Le Jour* 26 août 1977.

Chapter Three:
Andrew Dutkewych's Architectural Sculpture

Born in 1944 in Vienna, Austria, Andrew Dutkewych received his Bachelor's

degree from the Philadelphia College of Art in 1966 and studied at the Slate School of

Fine Arts in London prior to settling in Montreal. For the 1973 group exhibition with

Yvonne Lammerich and Kelly Morgan at Véhicule, Dutkewych exhibited *Raft* (Figure 5),

which he created in 1972. Made of uncut lumber and wire meshing shaped into a large

triangle, it was described by a reviewer from *The Gazette* as, "untouched hardware store

and lumber yard material."[1] This dematerialized sculpture, with its preference for

materials in their natural state, announced that the field of sculpture in Montreal was open

to new possibilities.

Dematerialized sculpture surfaced in opposition to the production of object-like

forms commonly associated with minimalism. Yet, *Raft* also referenced a minimalist

language in his use of wire meshing, which in its very nature is reminiscent of a

mathematical grid and a geometrical form of the triangle. This might explain why in 1972

a *Montreal Star* reviewer described Dutkewych's body of work as minimal.[2]

Dutkewych's fusion of the minimalist cube or triangle and his use of natural materials

such as uncut logs and rocks is actually "typical" of many 1970s sculptural practices and

the rise of hybridity (or hybrid work). As art critic Lucy Lippard writes, "The

'primitivizing' tendency of the last decade [the 1970s] has led artists to combine the box-

sculpture of minimalist esteem with the box-house of broader ramifications, to fill their

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[1] Michael White, "Experimental art in the right setting," *The Montreal Gazette*, 20 January 1973.
[2] Catherine Bates, "Making the most of the minimal," *The Montreal Star*, 26 August 1972.

perceptual boxes with associative richness . . . the result has been a pluralistic hybrid typical of the 70s."[3]

In the catalogue for the 1976 traveling exhibition *Véhicule Art in Transit*, Dutkewych explains that, "I react directly to material; often my sources for ideas and inspiration are construction sites, lumber yards and hardware stores."[4] Dutkewych's sculpture of the early 1970s assembled seemingly dissimilar materials such as natural wood, glass and wire meshing in geometric forms common to minimalism, and that intentionally referenced architecture. [5] As such, his works fell into a category of 1970s sculpture defined as "axiomatic structures" by Rosalind Krauss in her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," written in 1978. Through his use of plexiglass and metal grids, Dutkewych made manifest elements which Krauss describes as "abstract conditions of openness and closure."[6] Sculpture that exhibits the abstract conditions of "openness and closure" is architectural as is sculpture that combines forms associated with the built environment and structural elements associated with the natural environment. As such, Dutkewych's work can be broadly defined as architectural sculpture.

Krauss' essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" defines the sculpture that was produced after the dematerialization of the art object. Borrowing from the branch of mathematics called logic, she describes sculpture from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s as

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[3] Lucy Lippard, "The Inside Picture from the Outside," in *Architectural Sculpture* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1980), 21.

[4] Andrew Dutkewych, "Artist statement" *Véhicule Art in Transit* (Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1975), 3.

[5] It should be noted, as Dutkewych points out, that these materials are all natural to their respective sources: "basically, I use natural materials in their natural state: angle-irons, 2 x 4's, metal grids, rocks . . . and plexiglass – a natural material of the urban environment." Ibid, 3. This point taken from 1974 artist statement in *Peripheries* was reiterated in my interview with the artist, August 26th 2004.

[6] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 287.

the demonstration of a logically expanded field.[7] Benefiting from what she saw as the

minimalist metamorphosing of sculpture into "pure negativity the combination of

exclusions . . . the addition of 'not landscape' and 'not architecture',"[8] sculpture became

the logical expansion of these two sets of binaries:

> The expansion to which I am referring to is called a Klein group when employed
> mathematically and has various other designations, among them the Piaget group,
> when used by structuralists involved in mapping operations within the human
> sciences. By means of this logical expansion a set of binaries is transformed into a
> quaternary field which both mirrors the original opposition and at the same time
> opens it. It becomes a logically expanded field.[9]

She hypothesizes three different categories within this quaternary field: site construction

(landscape + architecture); marked sites (not landscape + landscape); and axiomatic

structures (architecture + not architecture). It is the latter category that is of particular

interest here as Dutkewych's sculpture may be considered within its parameters.

When defining axiomatic structures in her essay, Krauss says that regardless of

the medium employed, whether sculpture or drawing or photography, an axiomatic

structure is "a process of mapping the axiomatic features of the architectural experience–

the abstract conditions of openness and closure–onto the reality of a given space."[10] She

sites the work of American sculptors Sol LeWitt and Richard Serra as examples of

sculptural practices that use the "abstract conditions of openness and closure" in the

gallery space. Richard Serra's *5:30*, which consists of four steel slabs propped up against

each other, along with a fifth element, a thin cylindrical form that lies across the top of

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[7] Krauss, 283.
[8] Ibid, 282.
[9] Ibid, 283.
[10] Ibid, 287.

the structure, forming a sort of cube-like shape plays with our understanding of the

conditions of architecture.[11]

Krauss further defines an axiomatic structure as a "kind of intervention into the

real space of architecture."[12] Five years earlier, Dutkewych had described his own work

as "drawing in space."[13] As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, his sculpture *Raft*

(approximately 106 cm high x 121.92 cm long x 121.92 cm wide) assembled

unconventional materials into a triangular shape. But how does this work "map the

axiomatic features of the architectural experience"? How does Dutkewych's sculpture,

like Serra's *5:30*, employ an architectural language in a manner that successfully

transmits the "abstract conditions of openness and closure"? In building the two sides of

Raft, Dutkewych used wire meshing and plexiglass to create an open triangle common to

all architectural work and most reminiscent of a pediment. More importantly, as in *5:30*,

Raft metaphorically made use of its shape and language by remaining open to the space

that surrounded it.

The term architectural sculpture broadly describes "anything that imitates,

simulates or suggests architecture's scale, or its spatial effects or its images or its

materials or its shelter functions."[14] The materials of *Raft* come from the vernacular of

architecture: the plexiglass acts as a window to see through to the gallery and the wire

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[11] Since Krauss' essay, others have discussed Serra's referencing of architecture, particularly how his sculpture makes use of the gallery or exhibition space's architecture in a manner that, in its massiveness, sets up a visual confrontation with that space. For further reading see, Armin Zweite, "Evidence and Experience of Self: Some spatially related sculptures by Richard Serra," *Richard Serra*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), pages 8-25, and Douglas Crimp's, "Serra's Public Sculpture: Redefining Site specificity," *Richard Serra*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), pages 26-39.
[12] Krauss, 287.
[13] Michael White, "Experimental art in the right setting."
[14] Lippard, 21.

grid, which is reminiscent of graph paper, allows the gallery space to enter the sculpture. Graph paper is used in the early stages of architectural planning to map the three-dimensional space of a structure, with each square representing a block of space. In this sense, *Raft* was a "drawing in space," as Dutkewych so aptly described his artistic practice.

Notably the grid forms an intricate part of Dutkewych's early sculpture, reflecting his retention of minimalist strategies. *Grid I* from 1970, for instance, consisted of the repetition of rectangular forms on the floor of the exhibition space. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Krauss considered grids to be "emblems of all that is quintessentially modern art;" it carries "mythic power" as "it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or something science or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction)."[15] In other words, the grid is a paradox, at once scientific and symbolic and Krauss writes that the historical roots of this paradox are found in nineteenth-century art especially the image of windows in Symbolist art.[16] Similarly, this dynamic plays itself out in *Raft*, whose grid symbolically functions as a window even as it materially/scientifically maps its internal coordinates onto the architecture of the surrounding room.

The use of logs also references the earliest forms of architecture. *Raft* sits rooted to the ground of the exhibition space. There is an imposing quality to this work, despite its relatively small size, as it demonstrates sculpture's innate concern with weight and gravity. As on reviewer described, "La force de cette oeuvre se trouve dans cette présence

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[15] Rosalind Krauss, "Grids, you say," *Grids, Format and Image in 20th Century Art* (New York: Pace Gallry, 1979), 3.
[16] Ibid, 5.

presque théâtrale qu'elle impose au spectateur par ses dimension et son état brut ainsi que par cette facilite de lecture qui la caractérise."[17] Yet the open mesh sides give a sense of weightlessness which is in direct contrast to the heavy logs. All the while Dutkewych's quasi-mathematical play with scale – the big heavy logs, the smaller framing, and the grid-like meshing – reminds the viewer of its architectural emphasis and the tradition of classical ordering.

The title of the sculpture – *Raft* – also warrants mention. Clearly the title refers to the logs which connote the materials used in traditional raft constructions. The paradox of weight and weightlessness suggests immediately a raft on water. This image, in addition to the natural materials employed, references nature in an urbanized environment, and more specifically, the constructed gallery space. Yet, unlike architecture, there is no practical use for these architectonic devices in *Raft*; while a raft has a particular function as transport on water, here it does not. The title is therefore a reference to the metaphorical and symbolic nature of architecture, both past and present.

For the 1974 *Périphéries* exhibition,[18] Dutkewych constructed the piece *Four-by-four* (Figure 6), in which he continued to employ a sculptural language hinged on the referencing of architectural elements. Here he uses the most basic architectural shape, the rectangle, referring not only to individual architectural elements but the concept of architecture as container. George Bogardi wrote of the piece that, "There is a beautiful tension created between the compelling physical presence of the cube and the varying visual densities of its components."[19] *Four-by-four* is strikingly similar to *Raft*. Both

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[17] Gilles Toupin, "Recherches et redites," *La Presse* 3 février 1973.
[18] See Chapter Two for details regarding this exhibition.
[19] George Bogardi, "An exciting thing to watch," *The Montreal Star* 2 March 1974.

assume a distinctive, open-formed geometric shape (a cube in *Four-by-four* and a triangle

in *Raft*), employ wire grids associated with architectural planning, and integrate natural

found materials in a piece that also sits on the floor. As a *Montreal Star* reviewer noted,

"specific raw materials and their cross-referencing with art and nature has been one of

Dutkewych's main preoccupations."[20] Finally the title also symbolically evokes

architecture as "four-by-four" refers to the dimensions of lumber commonly used in

construction, dimensions which also refer to the actual physical size of the sculpture itself

(4 x 4 ft, or 121.98 x 121.98 x 121.98 cm). In *Four-by-four*, Dutkewych added a layer of

rocks to the bottom of this four foot cube, bringing a portion of the outdoors into the

indoor environment. Nature was thus transplanted, by artificial means, into the gallery

space.[21] Yet these organic materials (untreated wood, rocks) are assimilated by

Dutkewych to, in the final instance, form non-organic shapes (rectangles, triangles). Thus

the inherent paradox of the built environment is unmasked to the viewer.

By employing an architectural language based on the notion of openness and

closure, *Raft* and *Four-by-four* engage with the space in which they are displayed and

have a specificity to that site. Their open sides reflect and reveal the site, allowing

spectators a view of the surrounding environment and ultimately forcing them to consider

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[20] Henry Lehmann, "Form as tone," *The Montreal Star*, 3 May 1978.

[21] Dutkewych was one of many artists in the 1970s to create sculpture that integrated natural objects such as wood, rocks and earth. This kind of postminimal work, called earth art or land art. While he constructed the two above-mentioned sculptures for a gallery, earth art was usually intended for a particular landscape. Famous *land art* pieces include Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* constructed at the Great Salt Lake, Utah, in 1970 (measuring 1,500 ft and made of black basalt, limestone, rocks, and earth), and Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* constructed near Overton, Nevada in 1969-1970 (measuring 1,500 x 50 x 30 ft). Some artists, however, documented the in-landscape work they did and later brought the work indoors in the form of photographs or small-scale sculptures. For further reading see the introduction to Gilles A. Tiberghien's book, *Land art* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995) and John Beardsley, Introduction, *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989).

the sculptures vis-à-vis that environment. The use of plexiglass, for instance, makes the

viewer look through and past the sculpture to the wood floor and white gallery wall,

which in turn fuse with the sculpture. Other similar sculptures by Dutkewych, for

example, the 1972 sculpture *Rock bottom*, attest to his preoccupation with maintaining

this dialogue.[22]

Like *Raft* and *Four-by-four*, Dutkewych's *Plateau*, created in 1975 (Figure 7) for

the traveling exhibition *Vehicule Art in Transit*,[23] entered into a dialogue with the gallery

space through its open sides. Consisting of plywood, metal wire, metal tubing, stones and

earth – a familiar combination of natural and synthetic materials – and measuring 182.88

x 121.92 x 142.24 cm, *Plateau's* rectangular shape mirrored the space within which it sat.

Similar to *Raft* and *Four-by-four*, *Plateau* allows the viewer to see through and past the

piece, thus ensuring that the spectator's eye is immediately deflected to the sculpture's

location. As a result the visual dialogue between the sculpture and its surroundings was as

much a part of it as the elements used in its construction. Those elements – the plywood,

rocks and metal wire (used to support and highlight the rocks) – merged together to form

a sculpture that incorporated the surrounding architecture no matter from which angle it

was viewed. The surrounding built environment of the gallery became enmeshed with

Plateau. But what was the nature of the dialogue between the sculpture and the site? Was

Plateau saying something about the gallery space in which it was located?

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[22] *Rock bottom* (1972), 66.04 x 62.23 x 62.23 cm, consisted of a plexiglass cylinder slightly filled with rocks.

[23] This exhibition traveled to Simon Fraser University Gallery, Burnaby British Columbia, from February 18 to March 14, 1975, to Open Space, Victoria, British Columbia, from March 19 to April 12, 1975, and finally to Clouds n Water, Calgary, Alberta, from June 29 to July 12, 1975.

The rocks in *Plateau* sit on a platform, the plateau of the title, exposed in their isolation for the viewer's contemplation. The platform is a wire grid, and the rocks lie suspended on that grid as if they are being mapped on a field of space. Metaphorically, perhaps, we can envision these rocks as reflecting or mimicking the manner in which a sculpture is placed in an exhibition space. By mimicking the positioning of sculpture in a gallery setting, has the rock been elevated to the status of sculpture? Or has its status been elevated in a different way? A quick glance confirms that *Plateau* resembles a sort of exhibition-style glass case, traditionally used to highlight the decorative arts such as ceramics, glass, metal objects and jewelry. In *Plateau*, however, instead of a precious vessel from antiquity, we find simple rocks. By raising the status of nature through bringing the outside environment inside, is Dutkewych giving it a status worthy of museal contemplation?

By conserving minimalist characteristics (geometric shapes, grids), incorporating natural substances (rocks, wood, earth) and referencing architecture and location, Dutkewych's work was indicative of the international experimentation with the sculptural form in the 1970s. Not only did he make use of objects found naturally in the environment, the work entered into a dialogue with the exhibition space. And the meaning of that dialogue will change depending upon the specific gallery site in which it is displayed. In *Raft*, *Four-by-four* and *Plateau*, the surrounding environment was a distinct part of the sculpture.

This relationship between site and sculpture makes Dutkewych's work an art of location. His sculptures remain contingent on their respective environments, allowing the spectator to consider what they reveal about their location. The natural materials (rocks,

logs, earth) employed in these sculptures combined with forms associated with the built

environment such as wire meshing, lumber yard materials, and plexiglass, transform the

object's significance. Once transplanted, these natural elements have been 'rebuilt' to

interact within the built environment of a gallery space in a manner that artificially

simulates "all the inside/outside spatial experiences."[24] While the relatively small size of

all of his sculptures maintained a 'human' scale, allowing for direct interaction with the

viewer.

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[24] Lippard, 22.

Chapter Four:
Jean Serge Champagne's Epistemological Sculpture

Jean-Serge Champagne was born in 1947 in Verdun, Quebec and studied

sculpture at l'École des beaux-arts de Montréal from 1966 to 1969 under Ulysse Comtois

and Henry Saxe. In 1970, he created the work *Tension #2* (Figure 8), which was

presented in the sculpture section of the 1973 exhibition *Les moins de 35 ans.*[1]

Champagne states in the exhibition catalogue that "le produit n'a aucune importance

autre que celle d'expliquer la démarche."[2] His brute unpolished work combined wood,

cord, screws and clamps, elements reminiscent of the workshop of a cabinetmaker, not

that of a sculptor. In its final form, one could argue that the sculpture appeared to have

been assembled in parts so that it looked more like a prototype or an experiment.

Viewed in the traditional terms of sculpture Champagne's work seems unfinished,

like a conglomeration of bolted-together elements that keep repeating themselves and

growing in length and height. But this lack of refinement, this unfinished quality, as

Champagne hinted at in the exhibition statement, does not hinder an understanding of the

piece. Rather, it works to unmask understanding and knowledge through revealing the

various elements of construction. As we will see, Champagne's sculptures are not full

entities unto themselves in a minimalist sense of objects, but rather are visual illustrations

of a selected and predetermined physical phenomenon. By insisting that "the hand is

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[1] The 1973 exhibition *Les moins de 35 ans,* was seen in seven venues across Quebec: Montreal, Quebec City, Trois-Riviere, Jonquiere, Hull, Alma, and Sherbrooke. It included two hundred and three participants. Its mission was to present a non-restrictive image of contemporary Quebec art produced by young artists under the age of 35. There was no jury; and the only criteria set was that artists sign up by a specific date. *Tension #2* was exhibited at *Galerie Espace* in Montreal from the 22nd of January to the 4th of February 1973, along with other sculpture entries in this exhibition. See the exhibition catalogue to this exhibition by Normand Thériault, *Les moins de 35 ans* (Montreal: Médiart, 1973), 7.

[2] Ibid, 30.

everywhere apparent – forming and stretching, modelling mass and surface,"[3] dematerialized postminimalist sculpture shares the experience of making art with the participation of the spectator. This part of the process, many postminimalist artists believed, had been lost amidst the factory-like precision that was common to minimalist work.

What will become further evident in the discussion of Champagne's practice is that he not only chose to unveil *la démarche*, as he described it, but chose to demonstrate the physical phenomena involved. The *Webster's Dictionary* defines a phenomenon as "an observable fact or event that can be scientifically described" (like the phenomena of heat, light or electricity). [4] In Champagne's 1970s sculptures discussed in this chapter, the fact or event (i.e., phenomenon) of tension and balance is paramount. Because the artist emphasizes these phenomena in his sculptures, his work exemplifies a knowledge-based approach. As such, it is both akin to the dematerialized and process art practices of the 1970s, and to more conceptually oriented work. By 1970, with sculptures like *Tension #2*, Champagne was attempting to reconcile the significant international shift from product to process common to the early stages of postminimalist work. Referring to the works of Eva Hesse and Linda Benglis, Robert Pincus-Witten termed this early phase "pictorial/sculptural" because of the use of color and painterly expressiveness. [5] Yet the emphasis, as Pincus-Witten identified it, was on "the process of making, a process so emphatic as to be seen as the primary content of the work itself, hence the term *process*

[3] Richard Armstrong, "Between Geometry and Gesture," in *The New Sculpture 1965-1975,* eds. Richard Armstrong and Richard Marshall (New York: The Whitney Museum of Art, 1990), 13.

[4] *Webster's New World Dictionary. Warner Books Paperback Edition* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1990) 441. It is necessary to define my use of phenomenon/phenomena, as I would not want to have readers confuse it with the philosophical theory of perception known as Phenomenology.

[5] Now synonymous with their sculptural practice, Hesse's *Untitled (rope piece)* 1970 used latex covered rope and Benglis's *Bonce* 1969 used pigment latex. Both introduced new unconventional materials that were often tactile and colorful.

art. When this occurred . . . the virtual content of the art became that of the spectator's

intellectual recreation of the actions used by the artist to realize the work in the first

place."[6]

Once *Tension #2* was assembled, each bolt that held a wood section in place and

each clamp and cord was used to solidify the form measuring, 106 centimeters high by

279.4 centimeters long by 100 centimeters wide. The floor piece was left undisguised as

Champagne's aesthetic strategy exposed each element of construction and succeeded in

unabashedly illustrating the manner in which the various elements were manipulated and

consolidated. Employing an elaborate clamping system, the untreated wood was

manipulated to curve to a pre-desired degree. Through the tension created by the

tightening of the cord and the twisting of the clamps, the wood sections would bend and

the structure gained its final coherence. Differences in the curvature of the wood indicate

the various levels of tension that were applied. By purposely exposing the structural

elements the viewer sees that process supersedes the overall material form in this floor

piece.

In his art and in his writings, the American sculptor Robert Morris explained the

importance of process in sculptural work created in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For

Morris, this tendency encompassed a reaffirmation and reintegration of the intrinsic, but

recently lost, step of revealing the process of the making of a work of art. Morris notes in

his 1969 essay "Anti-Form" that, historically "the visibility of process in art occurred

with the saving of sketches and unfinished work in the High Renaissance. In the

nineteenth century both Rodin and Rosso left traces of touch in the finished work. Like

the Abstract Expressionists after them, they registered the plasticity of material in

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[6] Robert Pincus-Witten, "Postminimalism: An Argentine Glance," in *The New Sculpture 1965-1975*, 23.

autobiographical terms."[7] With minimalism "the traces of touch in the finished work"

disappeared. As Morris explains, "In object-type art process is not visible. Materials often

are. When they are, their reasonableness is usually apparent. Rigid industrial materials go

together at right angles with great ease."[8] Morris's description of process art involves the

sculptor's experimentation with new materials "other than rigid industrial ones."[9]

In a 1973 article for *Vie des arts* entitled "Deux jeunes sculpteurs,"[10] Luc Benoit

details Champagne's process-oriented sculpture and its emphasis on the presentation of a

natural substance (wood) assembled in a manner that negated all mystery. Benoit writes,

> Ici le matériau s'emploie brut (une planche est une planche), sans artifice ni
> camouflage. Parfois le bois est moulé, parfois il est tendu. Dans ce cas précis
> [Tension #2] le ridoir, la corde, et, parfois, l'étau, qui servent à exercer la tension
> ou à retenir ensemble les différentes pièces de bois, deviennent partie intégrante
> de l'objet fini. Cet objet, la plus part du temps, reste brut, sans laque ni peinture.[11]

The result, according to Benoit, was a sculptural practice that left the spectator, "1. face

au matériau tel quel; 2. à la façon de faire et 3. au résultat." His works Benoit concludes,

"temoigne d'une nouvelles sculpture au Quebec."[12] Champagne himself says in an article

in *Vie des arts*, worth quoting at length, that,

> Je n'ai rien à cacher; si j'ai besoin de faire des entailles pour que courbe le
> bois, je le fais et elles restent apparentes. Il n'y a pas de trucs, pas de mystère dans
> ce que je fais.
> J'aurais pu choisir autre chose, du plastique, par exemple. Mais à ce
> moment, il m'aurait semblé fabriqué des objets; tandis qu'a travers le bois, la
> sculpture s'explique d'elles-mêmes et la compréhension en devient facile. En
> laquant le bois, on peut donner l'impression que c'est autre chose. Pourquoi ne pas
> dire les choses comme elles sont?

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[7] Robert Morris, "Anti-Form," *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993) 44.
[8] Ibid, 45.
[9] Ibid, 46.
[10] Luc Benoit, "Deux jeunes sculpteurs," *Vie des arts* 72 (1973): 68. This article followed an exhibition of Champagne and Claude Mongrain at the Galerie Média at the end of March and early April 1973.
[11] Ibid, 66.
[12] Ibid, 68.

L'important est de faire ce qu'on a à faire. Le produit fini importe peu: ce n'est qu'un point entre ce qui est fait et ce qui reste à faire. Mais sans l'avoir exécute, je n'aurais jamais compris tout ce qui trouve dedans. C'est dans les moments ou je fais que c'est efficace. D'ou l'importance de poser des gestes, parce que c'est un pas vers la liberté. C'est éliminer les contraintes, accéder à la joie.

Et on n'a pas à justifier ses gestes. Il suffit d'être disponibles face aux choses.[13]

As Champagne's statements indicate, his sculptural practice was committed to

demystifying the realm of artistic production. Both his choice of materials (i.e. untreated,

unpainted wood) and his mode of execution were calculated to inform a practice that had

as its goal imparting the knowledge of process. As discussed in the previous chapter on

the sculpture of Andrew Dutkewych, postminimal sculptors often used materials in their

natural state. Both sculptors regarded the use of paint and positioned their sculpture in

opposition to practices of the previous Plasticiens generation. For Dutkewych, his

materials were assembled in a manner that directly referenced the surrounding exhibition

space. For Champagne the use of unprocessed materials was a strategy designed to first

and foremost eliminate artifice and allow the spectator to easily understand the

sculpture's construction. Nevertheless Champagne's less architectonic work does

reference its presentation space because it lies along the gallery floor, occupying

approximately three meters of area. The curving of the wood sections, may suggest the

walls of the gallery space, or at least its container-like function. However, despite his use

of materials that are reminiscent of architecture, *Tension* implies the built environment

rather than its specific architectural aspects.

In 1973-1974, Champagne executed *Sans titre* (Figure 9). This work was also

illustrated in the exhibition catalogue for *Québec 75*. With *Sans titre*, Champagne showed

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[13] Ibid, 67-68.

that he was continuing his preoccupied with the sculptural demonstration of process.

Composed only of wood and clamps, it presents a single beam clamped at each end to

one side of a wood sawhorse. As a result of the clamping, one of the two sawhorses is

raised precariously off the ground. The 91.4 centimeters high by 304 centimeters long by

91.4 centimeters wide sculpture sits motionless in the exhibition space, balancing in

suspension. Similarly, the American sculptor Richard Serra positioned large sheets of

metal in a way that achieved, in the words of Thomas Crow, "temporary stasis."[14] This

temporal quality is found in Champagne's *Sans titre*, 1973-1974 (and much of Claude

Mongrain's work) and achieved through the interaction of different elements. Pincus-

Witten observed in Serra's massive lead sculptures "the viewer's ability to reconstruct,

on the basis of the work's clear exposition, the artist's undisguised step-by-step

intentions."[15] Similarly, the clear exposition of Champagne's process allows the spectator

to understand how his work achieved "temporary stasis," on a smaller scale and with

more mundane materials. Furthermore the suspension inherent in *Sans titre* has its own

paradoxical reference. Through the clamping of the wood and the resulting disturbance of

balance between the two primary forms, he denies the prescribed role of one of the

sawhorses, which is of course to provide solidity. The sawhorses themselves, like the

bent wood in *Tension*, reference the built environment as they are aids to construction.

But Champagne negates their constructive purpose in their transformation as art objects.

In his 1974 *La Presse* review of Champagne's solo show at *La Galerie S.A.P.Q.*,

Gilles Toupin again focused on the manner in which everything was so purposely

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[14] Thomas Crow, "Site-Specificity: The Strong and the Weak," *Modern Art in the Common* Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 144.

[15] Robert Pincus-Witten, "Richard Serra: Slow Information," *Postminimalism into Maximalism American Art, 1966-1986* (Ann Arbour, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987), 22.

revealed in Champagne's work. Because the process of construction was unmasked, Toupin also concluded that the works had a conceptual quality: "Il laisse paraître dans ses petites constructions ou pour être plus précis dans ses juxtapositions d'éléments l'aspect conceptuel de son travail."[16] Champagne's sculptures can be viewed as illustrations of phenomena that obey the laws of physics and any exploration of such phenomena through sculpture becomes an information-based exercise, similar to what Pincus-Witten sees as epistemological conceptualism. "The epistemological conceptualist" Pincus-Witten writes, "is engaged in the study of knowledge as its own end. He tends to make or do things for the kinds of information, knowledge or data which the things or activities reveal. He tends to be a grammarian, a mathematician, a cartographer."[17] He describes the work of American artist Mel Bochner in this manner and the use of mathematics and language principles formed the ideal vehicle for this second phase of postminimal work described by Pincus-Witten. In writing on Mel Bochner's *A Theory of Sculpture*, a work installed in an abandoned factory in Turin, Italy Pincus-Witten concludes that, "the issue at hand is not physicality or materiality, but rather the exposure of principles of structure which makes physicality or materiality seem tangible."[18] Champagne's two sculptures discussed here, indeed make physicality and materiality evident to the viewer in a manner that appears to supersede the finished form.

In 1977, Champagne's work *Sans titre* (Figure 10), made that same year, was chosen for the group exhibition at the MACM, *Onze sculpteurs Canadiens* featuring

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[16] Gilles Toupin, "L'outil fait le moine," *La Presse*, 2 March 1974.
[17] Pincus-Witten, "Bochner at MoMA: Three Ideas and Seven Procedure," *Postminmalism into Maximalism*, 97.
[18] Pincus-Witten, "Mel Bochner the Constant as Variable," 110.

postminimal sculpture selected from the Canada Council Art Bank.[19] *Sans titre*, 1977

revisits Champagne's experimentation with balance and tension. Measuring 121.92 by

365.76 by 30.48 cm, this sculpture incorporates wood, clamps and nails, all common

construction materials. Here, force and tension are exerted on two separate beams of

wood. The suspension of five weights (or plumb bobs) across the twelve foot long beam,

causes the upper beam to curve down. The beam located at the base of the structure is

also made to curve, by nailing it to piles of wood of varying lengths which in turn rest on

a supporting plank.

In the exhibition catalogue accompanying *Onze sculpteurs canadiens*, Alain

Parent describes the invisible physical forces at play in this kind of sculpture as *latent*

forces. Referring to *Sans titre*, 1977, Parent writes

> Ces pressions [tension and gravity] unissent dans la sculpture de Jean-Serge
> Champagne, la latence formelle du rapport entre deux tiges de bois parallèles,
> superposées, et la latence réelle des pressions éprouvant l'élasticité du bois de la
> tige inférieure, que l'on force à 'mimer' la tige supérieure, synthétisant en quelque
> sorte, par ce processus, l'équivalence de masses, la sinuosité de la ligne. La
> construction nécessitée pour infliger au bois ces distorsions, les instruments de
> mesure, (serres, fils a plomb) demeurent par nécessitée physique et témoignent du
> processus. [20]

Like *Tension #2* and *Sans titre*, 1973-1974, *Sans titre*, 1977 clearly expresses basic

scientific realities by successfully conveying to the viewer the knowledge of how its two

formally similar components – the mirroring pieces of wood – came to exist.[21] It has as

its ultimate aim, "the exposure of principles of structure which makes physicality or

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[19] See chapter 2 for details regarding this exhibition and its critical reception.
[20] Alain Parent, *Onze Sculpteurs Canadiens* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1977), 2.
[21] Consequently, latent forces are at play in many of the other sculptures included in this exhibition. For example Parent points out that, "L'évolution récente de l'oeuvre de Henry Saxe est symptomatique d'une concentration des relations formelles latentes au sein d'une même oeuvre," and that the work of Claude Mongrain demonstrates "les tensions latentes" and "les équilibres en rupture imminente." Ibid, 1-2.

materiality seem tangible." Governed by the laws of science, the engineer constructs bridges and high-rise office towers. In the same way, *Sans titre*, 1977 manipulates scientific realities, albeit on a smaller scale, through the artist's use of plumb bobs, wood beams and weights. Like Dutkewych, Champagne implies the realm of architecture; however it is not the dwellings in which we live and work each day that are referenced, but the *invisible* physical phenomena of which these structures are composed. In 1973, Champagne stated that "sans l'avoir exécuté, je n'aurais jamais compris tout ce qui se trouve dedans."[22] In fact, from start to finish, his search for knowledge is embedded in his sculptural practice. While constructing his sculptures, Champagne uncovered knowledge about the essence of their construction a process of discovery which would be continued by the viewer who would later encounter them in the gallery space. Champagne's sculptures are etched with this knowledge as they facilitate the spectator's *active* experience of the mode of production, through the act of seeing.

Tension #2, as its title suggests, is an informational situation that explores how varying degrees of tension make pieces of wood curve. Perhaps not all the possibilities implicit in this specific informational system are explored, but many are. With *Sans titre*, 1973-74, the informational situation again explores tension, but this time it looks at its ability as a *latent* force to suspend one component of the sculpture in mid-air. *Sans titre*, 1977 again shows us how materials are shaped and manipulated by previously invisible phenomena and the plays of tension have become increasingly complex.

Robert Morris wrote in his essay "Beyond Objects," which first appeared in 1969, that "Under attack is the rationalistic notion that art is a form of work that results in a

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[22] Benoit, 68.

finished product."[23] Champagne's seemingly brutal works strategically fell within the field of sculpture that challenged this rationalistic notion. Through the "reclamation of process,"[24] previously *latent* forces emerged as the basis of his sculpture. Yet these types of physical forces have always been components of the sculptural form; indeed, they are components of any three-dimensional object. "The condition of sculpture," as William Tucker explains, "will depend at any given moment on the intuitive recognition by the sculptors of sculpture's necessary relation with the world, its condition in the broader sense, how sculpture *is* in the world, what are the fundamentally limiting factors."[25] By producing sculpture that negated all artifice, Champagne's 1970s postminimalist work recognized "sculpture's necessary relation to the world." To inform the viewer, he emphasized process, the various components of his sculptures and "the fundamental limiting factors" that sustained their materiality. As Champagne said of his work in 1979,

> Je ne souscris pas à la valorisation de l'objet par son extérieur, par sa surface. Mes oeuvres n'ont pas de projections mystiques. Elles jouent sur les relations entre ce qu'on pense savoir et ce qu'on perçoit. Le spectateur est invité à faire le lien entre ces choses-là. L'oeuvre d'art n'est pas là pour rassurer le monde . . . je veux le confronter à des choses physiques.[26]

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[23] Morris, "Notes on sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects," 68.
[24] Ibid.
[25] William Tucker, "Introduction," *The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists* (London: Hayward Gallery & Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975), 6-7.
[26] Léo Rosshandler, "Champagne: la sculpture vue de l'interieur, *La Presse*, 7 avril, 1979.

They can not be removed without being destroyed.
Robert Barry, 1969[1]

Chapter Five:
Claude Mongrain's *Fleeting Situations*

Shawinigan born Claude Mongrain graduated from l'École des beaux-arts de

Montréal in 1969. He went on to produce works that were included in several of the most

discussed and reviewed exhibitions of the 1970s – *Les moins de 35 ans* and *Québec 75* to

name only two – as well as in solo and smaller group shows. His works also figured in

many prominent public collections, including those of the Montreal Museum of Fine

Arts, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the National Gallery of Canada.

In the early 1970s, Mongrain produced a series of sculptures with the common

title of *Situation* (*Situation I*, 1973, Figure 11). These intimate works were composed of

string, small pieces of wood and found objects such as glass bottles and were assembled

to give the impression of a captured situation. As the decade progressed, however,

Mongrain abandoned the use of found objects and began creating sculptures made

predominantly of wood and concrete. These assemblages allowed the viewer to encounter

sets of sculptural snapshots, or chance meetings, of seemingly unrelated shapes, giving

the impression of a "fleeting situation."[2]

During this period, Mongrain's sculpture inspired in viewers a sense of witnessing a

temporal situation, even while the works induced a strong connection with the past.

Mongrain's *Sans titre* of 1975 (Figure 12), and *Sans titre* of 1975 (Figure 13), presented

elements of various shapes and sizes once again assembled in a sculptural situation; the

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[1] Miwon Kwon quoting the sculptor Robert Barry in, "Genealogy of Site-Specificity," *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 12.
[2] Ibid, 24

temporality achieved through the use of the exhibition space's wall as part of the construction (Figure 12), and the precarious suspension and balance of elements at a stand still (Figure 13). Mongrain would continue to experiment with these conjoined *architectural* forms, slabs of broken concrete shapes, till the end of the 1970s. Through the use of broken cylindrical and rectangular concrete shapes in 1979's *Construction: gisant* (Figure 14), Mongrain called on, according to a review in the *Montreal Star*, "the most insistent temporality of all . . . the time evoked by the allusions to ruined, ancient cities."[3] This chapter will discuss the recurring sense of a fleeting situation that arises from the site-specific and temporal qualities of his work. Questions will arise with regards to defining Mongrain's work as sculpture, especially in consideration of installation, an art form that gained prominence following art's dematerialization and whose defining characteristics included being inextricably and temporally linked to the space where the work was installed. If, as we will see, the visitor to *Québec 75*, for example, encountered sculptural snap-shots that inspired a sense of situations that exist for a brief duration are we not describing the elements that make up the environment-type work known as installation?

To answer the above question and provide a framework within which to consider Mongrain's sculpture, two general definitions of installation must be considered. In their survey text *Installation Art*, Michael Archer, Nicholas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxely and Micheal Perry describe installation as "a kind of art making which rejects concentration on one object in favour of a concentration of the relationship between a number of

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[3] George Bogardi, "Memorable Mongrain," *The Montreal Star*, 23 May 1979.

elements or of the interaction between things and their context."[4] In the exhibition

catalogue for *Blurring the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969-1996*, held at the San Diego

Museum of Contemporary Art in 1997, the following definition of installation art was

given:

> The broad spectrum of works described as installation art share a common aspect:
> they are not spatially autonomous art objects. The architectural site or
> environment context is as integral to installation art as any object placed within it.
> Installation artists employ both indoor and outdoor spaces for works that are
> permanent or temporary—existing only for the duration of the exhibition. Some
> installation art is specific to a particular site; other installations change,
> chameleon-like, according to the particular sites in which they are installed.
> Artists often co-opt the exhibition space and transform it, and in so doing,
> challenge the traditional notion of the clean, white cube of the museum gallery.[5]

Considering such definitions, we may draw some parallels with Mongrain's

sculptural production in the 1970s. Speaking in general terms in a 1975 interview with

Parachute, Mongrain described sculpture as a system that consists of the *assemblage* of

various parts in interaction.[6] Mongrain's use of the descriptive term *assemblage* to define

sculpture seems strikingly similar to Archer's definition of installation. Can it therefore

be concluded that Mongrain's *Sans titres*, 1975 (Figure 13), included in *Québec 75* and

consisting of independent cylinders and rectangles presented as an *assemblage*, ALSO be

defined as installation? His *Situation I* and *Sans titre*, 1975 (Figure 12) used the

exhibition space as a supportive mechanism, and as such existed, in Oronato's words,

"only for the duration of the exhibition." Does this mean they can be considered

installation as well?

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[4] Michael Archer, Nicholas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxely & Micheal Perry's, eds, *Installation Art* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1994), 8.

[5] Ronald J. Onorato, *Blurring the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969-1996* (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary, 1997), 31.

[6] France Morin, "Claude Mongrain," *Parachute*, 2 (1976):20.

Throughout the 1970s, Mongrain's work was consistently and unwaveringly discussed and defined as sculpture. As late as 1979, in a *Vie des arts* article on Mongrain and fellow Quebec sculptor Roland Poulin, Mongrain's art was described within the context of a *travail sculptural*.[7] Because of its site-specificity and temporality, it seems difficult to deny that this same *travail sculptural* includes characteristics common to our present-day concepts of installation. This being said, this chapter aims to maintain that Mongrain's work discussed here is sculpture, and not, therefore, installation.

After seeing the sculptures in Mongrain's *Situation* series, a reviewer from *La Presse* wrote, "Le résultat est vraiment une situation (autre que naturelle) créée par l'artiste seul et qui sert à démontrer sa propre réalité . . . ."[8] These sculptures employ a variety of materials, from pieces of wood to found objects such as glass bottles, that work together using the principles of balance and weight. Like the postminimal sculptures of Jean-Serge Champagne and Andrew Dutkewych, the method of construction is wholly visible to the viewer. Yet, as the title of the series aptly points out, random static situations develop in space through the process of construction. In *Situation V* (1973), in which a glass bottle is suspended from string, these oddly unrelated materials are assembled together to create a desired *situation* located in the exhibition space.

In a 1973 article for *Vie des arts*, Luc Benoit discusses the work of both Mongrain and Champagne. Regarding Mongrain's *Situation* series, he writes, "Le produit fini n'ayant plus d'importance, la recherche s'axe strictement sur la matière, son environnement et l'action produite sur ou par une autre matière."[9] He goes on to describe Mongrain's *Situation I*: "La tension la plus forte s'exerce en haut, produite par tous les

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[7] Jean Tourangeau, "Mongrain et Poulin: Structure contre instinct," *Vie des arts* 96.34 (1979): 41.

[8] No author, "Deux part quatre," *La Presse* Samedi 31 mars 1973.

[9] Luc Benoit, "Deux jeunes sculpteurs," *Vie des art* 72 (1973): 69.

éléments dessous. Cette tension est lisible, de même que l'angle de chaque morceau de

bois indique par un traît rouge horizontal: 17 degrés pour le premier, 72 pour le

dernier."[10] Composed of six 60 cm (two feet) sections of wood that are connected by

metal hooks and plumb bobs, *Situation I* approximately 366 cm (12 feet) long, hangs

from the gallery ceiling. The plumb bobs act as a balancing device, creating tension that

is made visible by the angle at which each section of wood is suspended.

Making physical phenomena visible to the human eye is reminiscent of

Champagne's work discussed in Chapter 4, a similarity that was noted by Benoit. In the

section of the article devoted to Mongrain's work, he begins by emphasizing the

commonality in their sculptural practices. He writes, "Par des démarches différentes, il va

sans dire, leur recherches se situent au niveau du phénomène de la perception, quitte à

négliger l'objet fini pour ce faire."[11] While Champagne's *Tension #2* (Figure 8), showed

the effects of tension on pieces of wood, forcing the wood to curve, *Situation I* makes

tension wholly visible through the arrangement of each piece of wood in suspension. In a

1975 interview in *Parachute*, Mongrain said, "En ce qui concerne mon travail, il n'y a

pas seulement l'impact global, il y a aussi la démarche que je fais, je pense que la

perception de mes choses doit jouer sur une espèce de dualité entre ce que tu sais de la

pièce et ce que tu perçois de cette dernière."[12] Thus, both sculptors elicit the spectator's

participation by creating works that capitalize on this "shift of modality"[13] towards the

illustration of process.

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[10] Ibid, 69.
[11] Ibid, 68.
[12] Morin, 22.
[13] Alex Potts, "Installation and sculpture," *Oxford Art Journal* 24.2 (2001): 16.

While all Mongrain's sculptures purposely reveal the process involved in their construction, in *Situation I* also makes use of the exhibition space's ceiling as main supportive mechanism. It dangles almost to the floor, creating, in Miwon Kwon words, an "inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and site."[14] Substantiated by its title and presentation, the work seems inescapably defined by time, a definition that is not as strongly inherent in Champagne's *Tension #2* or Dutkewych's architectural work. Because of this "inextricable" link with site, *Situation I* is engraved with temporality: Only for the duration of the exhibition does it remains fixed, supported, intact and whole.

Referring to Richard Serra's early works in "Site Specific Art: The Strong and the Weak," Thomas Crow writes, "these [sculptures] used the sheer mass of the material to achieve a temporary stasis their elements leaning against the wall of whatever gallery they were installed in (or as in *One-top Prop* of 1969, supporting one another in a free-standing arrangement)."[15] Although it must be strongly stressed how decidedly different Serra's work is from Mongrain's, it is important to emphasize Crow's notion of "temporary stasis". Both this concept and Miwon Kwon's descriptive phrase "fleeting situation" speak to Mongrain's sculptural work. Like *Situation I,* other pieces, such as *Sans titre*, 1974 exhibit a sense of temporary stasis. Composed of a wood beam and two bricks, one of which is attached to the wall and the other to the floor, *Sans titre* of 1974 achieves an inevitable site-specificity through the overt referencing and utilization of the site where they are displayed. Other sculptures by Mongrain from this period similarly use the exhibition space wall as part of their construction, for example, *Sans titre*, 1975 (Figure 12). Composed of wood and concrete, this sculpture consists of a approximately

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[14] Kwon, 11.
[15] Thomas Crow, "Site-Specificity: the strong and the weak," *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 144.

61 cm (two feet) long cylinder that rests on the wall and connected by a 101.6 cm (40 inches) long rectangular piece of wood to a second cylinder, which in turn is supported by a small block of concrete on the floor. Given its assemblage, this *Sans titre* of 1975 describes a situation and a temporality that changes meaning when the work is presented in different spaces.

Mongrain exhibited the work *Sans titre*, 1975 (Figure 13) in *Québec 75.*[16] Made of wood, aluminium and concrete, and measuring approximately 122 cm high by 234 cm long by 76 cm wide, this sculpture transforms cylinders, wood beams and concrete slabs into yet another sculptural situation. A large concrete slab is held in mid-air by two precariously suspended cylindrical forms with one anchored to the floor, and the other resting on two equally suspended wood beams. Mongrain's work is reminiscent of Champagne's sculptures in that the latent forces at play – balance and tension – are revealed to the viewer. In turn, the viewer remains transfixed on the forces, which allows the assemblage to reach a state of *temporary stasis*.

Sans titre, 1975 (Figure 13) sits like a film still in space, with the viewer waiting for the large heavy concrete slab to fall. But Mongrain's construction will not allow for this outcome, therefore betraying our notions of inevitability. Its precariousness and vulnerability destabilizes the viewer's expectations of physical order. Yet, when we recreate in our mind *Sans titre*, 1975's construction, piece by piece, we reconfigure the process of realization and understand how such a heavy mass can balance in mid-air without the plausible eventuality of its collapse. Even though *Sans titre*, 1975 does not use its wider site as a supportive mechanism, a sense of the sculpture as a *temporary* assemblage is achieved through the relationship between the different shapes and their

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[16] See Chapter Two for details about this exhibition.

varying sizes. As Kwon further explains regarding later forms of site-specific work, "the guarantee of a specific relationship between an art work and its site is not based on a physical permanence of that relationship (as demanded Serra for example) but rather on the recognition of its unfixed impermanence, to be experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeting situation."[17] Thus *Sans titre*, 1975 (Figure 13) with its "unfixed impermanence," claims a sense of "brief duration" in the exhibition space, satisfying elements in both Kwon and Thomas Crow's respective concepts of site-specificity.[18] However, the viewer's ability to recreate the process of construction through observation fosters an understanding that the piece is no longer perilous but stable and whole. Mongrain's statement in the *Québec 75* exhibition catalogue further confirms that the artist's sculptural practice forms an "uncertain character" dictated by the impact of external forces such as time. Mongrain writes, "My sculptures may seem to project 'permanence' and 'immovability' however each element is autonomous and each sculpture has an uncertain character. They should be looked at as objects susceptible to change by external influences, such as lighting. . . spectators. . . time."[19]

To further complicate the "uncertain nature" of his work, in a 1975 interview with *Parachute*, Mongrain describes the importance of *hasard* (chance) in the construction of his sculpture: "Pour revenir à l'élément hasard, il occupe une place importante dans mon travail. C'est à dire que mon approche doit laisser place à des développements plus ou moins prévisibles mais que je peux intégrer après coup dans la mesure où ils conforment aux règles que j'ai déterminées.[20] Letting the unexpected play a role in the process was

[17] Kwon, 24.
[18] Crow, 140.
[19] Artist statement from, *Quebec 75* (Montreal: Musee d'art contemporain de Montreal, 1975), 34.
[20] Morin, 22.

common to contemporary postminimal sculpture in the early 1970s.[21] In fact, it seems

that instability in a work is heightened by such an approach. The device of the haphazard

described by Mongrain infiltrates the work discussed here and his process-revealing

sculptural formations created situations that appeared bound to the effects of time.

Furthermore the surface of the sculpture is etched with time and its effects. The

unpolished quality of the surface materials, particularly the slab of concrete, is

reminiscent of unearthed ancient artefacts that through the ages have begun to erode and

are scarred by the passage of time. The large wood cylinders suggest Greek or Roman

architectural elements such as pieces of a fallen temple column. This particular

architectural referencing, one marked by the use of elements reminiscent of ancient

architectural ruins, continued to inspire and figure prominently in Mongrain's sculptures

created at the end of the decade.

In the late 1970s, Mongrain began a series of sculptures entitled *Constructions*

(Figure 14, *Construction: gisant*, 1979, measuring 64 x 238 x 218 cm). Time is imprinted

everywhere on these works, not only through their perilous balancing, as is the case with

Sans titre, 1975 (Figure 13), but through their allusions to the past. Made of broken white

concrete in three geometric forms (cylinders, triangles, rectangles), these assemblages

seem to suggest the remnants of classical Greek or Roman architecture.[22] In a catalogue

essay for the Mongrain and Roland Poulin exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater

Victoria in 1980, Willard Holmes describes "the undeniable similarity of these works to

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[21] Certainly the writings of Robert Morris discuss the incorporation of *chance* in the sculptural process. See Morris's, "Anti-Form," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993), 41-49.

[22] In fact Claude Mongrain describes that, "Les sculptures en béton blanc de la fin des années 70 seraient à lire comme un appel à se réapproprier un rapport à l'histoire et mes installations subséquentes allaient dans les années 80 confirmer cette orientation. Interview with artist, 2 February, 2005.

architecture" and the "frequent perception of these sculptures as a very specific type of architecture; ruins."[23] Similar to Figure 13, the broken cylinders are reminiscent of discarded temple columns, while the unfinished, unpolished quality of the concrete surface also connotes ancient sites whose structures have collapsed over the centuries. This referencing of architecture, also seen in the work of Andrew Dutkewych, is a powerful motif. Furthermore, time radiates from these works because they appear "not to be stable or eternal as would simpler more unitary structure[s]; not maintained but in transition."[24] Holmes explains how Mongrain's *Construction* series, "emphatically assimilate time. . . it is as though time, with its intricate overlapping of appearances and manifestations as history, essence, measurement, and movement, as lived abstract, is unpacked through the instrument of these sculpture."[25]

According to contemporary definitions of sculpture, Mongrain's *Construction: gisant* is temporal – it appears to exist in a transitory state while remaining evocative of ancient ruins, and it is site-specific through its involvement with the surrounding architecture. As well, *Construction: gisant* is composed of many independent elements that interact harmoniously with the exhibition space. Thus, two fundamental characteristics of installation are seemingly satisfied: that the work is temporal as it exists "for the duration of the exhibition" and it is site-specific in that it "rejects concentration on one object in favour of a concentration of the relationship between a number of elements or of the interaction between things and their context." Yet are these two qualities enough to consider Mongrain's work installation, rather than sculpture?

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[23] Willard Holmes, *Claude Mongrain and Roland Poulin* (Victoria: The Art Galletry of Greater Victoria, 1980), 1-2.
[24] Ibid, 2.
[25] Ibid, 1.

Similarly, how applicable is the term 'installation' to the sculpture of Dutkewych and

Champagne, even if their work is more self-contained?

In answering this question it is important to keep in mind that the history of both

genres is intertwined. In his essay "Installation and Sculpture," Alex Potts demonstrates

how "certain supposedly distinctive features of installation work were already implicit in

previous conceptions of sculpture."[26] Recent accounts of the history of installation begin

with the sculptural medium and look at minimalism in the mid-1960s and the manner in

which the object was conceived of in "collaboration with the environment that surrounds"

it.[27] In fact, the common ground between the two genres reaches further back. In

"Installation and Sculpture," Potts argues that they share a closely related history that

predates the 1960s. Accordingly, countless eighteenth-century examples abound where

the sculptural object was conceived in "collaboration with the environment that

surrounds."[28] This is also an intrinsic quality of contemporary installation. Ironically the

eighteenth-century sculpture gallery, Potts illustrates, purposely staged neo-classical

sculpture as self-sufficient. Installation, he argues, blocks the viewer from seeing the

work as an integrated whole shape due to its proximity to the viewer.[29] Potts concludes

that "the shift from a traditional display of sculpture to recent installation is not entirely

clear-cut. Indeed it would be quite misleading to think of this shift as one from a

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[26] Alex Potts, "Installation and sculpture," *Oxford art journal* 24.2 (2001): 8.

[27] Asher, 22.

[28] Potts cites Canova's *Hercules and* Lichas which he describes "was placed in a custom-designed rotunda in the Palazzo Torlonia in Rome which opened out into a larger gallery through an arched opening of columns. From a distance the work presented itself as a single stable plastic image, framed by the entry to the rotunda, but this effect would be undone were one to enter the rotunda and circulate around the statue, viewing it close-up in the round." Ibid, 10. Of course Potts could have cited examples from the 17th century such as the sculpture of Bernini, whom as both architect and sculptor, certainly conceived sculpture in relation to its surrounding environment.

[29] Ibid, 9.

purportedly context-free presentation of the autonomous sculptural object to a self-consciously staged spectacle."[30]

Although Mongrain's sculptures are site-specific-dematerialized forms that consist of various elements in interaction, they do not, as Potts describes, "situate the viewer inside the frame."[31] The fleeting situations Mongrain creates do not afford the viewer the possibility of access. For example, one cannot physically enter *Construction: gisant's* frame. Because of its size and configuration here and elsewhere in Mongrain's production, the viewer maintains a *traditional* relationship with the sculptured object. As Potts describes, "a traditional sculpture presents itself as existing in a space set slightly a part within a virtual frame."[32] Despite certain distinctive features of Mongrain's work that imply the fundamental characteristics of installation, a semblance of autonomy common to the three-dimensional sculptural medium is retained. As Holmes explains in discussing Mongrain's *Construction* series, "They are structures which inhabit a space but are not inhabitable, conceptually or physically."[33] Certainly, the precarious situations Claude Mongrain created throughout the 1970s, through the *assemblage* and interaction of various independent elements, is strikingly reminiscent of some of the strategies of installation. However, as Alex Potts maintained, both sculpture and installation are stunningly similar due to the fact that site, and a work's installation within that frame, has always been a contributing factor to how a sculpture is experienced.

The nature of the broad definitions of installation included here must also be considered. For example, Montreal installation art of the 1970s included Francine

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[30] Ibid, 11.
[31] Ibid, 9.
[32] Ibid, 9-10.
[33] Holmes, 2.

Larivée's *La Chambre Nuptiale*,[34] a work that "situates the viewer inside the frame." In

this context, Mongrain's 1970s work was and can only be considered sculpture.[35] What

his sculpture does provide, however, is the opportunity to examine the territory shared by

sculpture and installation, which, as demonstrated by Potts, is a large territory indeed,

reaching even farther back than the site-conscious minimalist sculptures of the mid-

1960s. By evoking the ancient past in these sculptures, Mongrain may be signalling to the

viewer a preoccupation that has always existed in sculpture. Like Dutkewych's use of an

architectural language and Champagne's epistemological conceptualist sculptures, the

referential constructions of Mongrain theoretically make evident to the viewer those

elements that have always been at work in sculpture.

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[34] As Rose-Marie Arbour explains, Francine Larivée's installation of *La Chambre Nuptial* at Complex Desjardins in 1976 was, "un pavillon thématique en toile blanche, de forme circulaire, comportant une partie centrale en forme de dome d'une hauteur de 19 pieds et d'un diamètre au sol de 30 pieds."[34] Inside, the visitor encounters seventy-three plaster personages who represent the different stages of life through childhood, adolescence and adulthood. See Rose-Marie Arbour, "Dissidence et Différence: Aspects de l'art des femmes," in *Déclics Arts et Société: le Québec des années 1960 et 1970*, eds. Marie-Charlotte De Koninck and Pierre Landry (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal & Éditions Fides, 1999), 142.

[35] Interestingly Mongrain describes the influence of the Italian *arte povera* movement on his sculptural practice of the 1970s. Mongrain writes, "il faut dire que ma rencontre avec la culture italienne et le mouvement de l'arte povera ont été des points de repère importants. Deux aspects sont à la source de cette convergence: premièrement, dès mes débuts, j'ai privilégié l'emploi de matériaux pauvres issus de l'environnement urbain immédiat. Deuxièmement, pendant ces années, j'ai progressivement développé une position critique sur le discours et la logique des avant-garde, tel qu'il s'incarnait dans le modernisme américain, y compris l'art minimal." Interview with artist, 2 February 2005.

Sculpture is subject to gravity and revealed by light.
William Tucker, 1975[1]

Conclusion

In August and September of 1980, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

held the exhibition, *La sculpture au Québec de 1970 à 1980,*[2] in which all three sculptors

discussed in this thesis participated. Jean Dumont, reviewing the exhibition for *Montréal*

Ce Mois-Ci, described the show as,

> Destinée à vous donner une idée des apports nouveaux à la sculpture durant la
> dernière décennie, cette exposition est orientée autour de deux axes; les apports à
> la forme, d'une part, matériaux nouveaux, horizontalité, multidisciplinarité, et
> d'autre part, les apports au contenu, introduction de la notion de temps, appel à la
> participation du spectateur, importance de l'environnement et prise de compte des
> psychologies individuelles et sociales.[3]

This statement identifies the intent of the exhibition to illustrate the *new* orientation of

sculpture during the 1970s. It also identifies certain sculptural characteristics employed

by the three artists discussed in this thesis, particularly the use of new materials, the

importance of the site and the introduction of temporality. The exhibition, therefore, is

relevant here given the overall aim of this discussion to better understand that in the

context of 1970s Montreal, contemporary sculpture was in a state of renewal, whereby its

characteristics and forms were being re-evaluated and re-defined.

In discussing some of the works produced by Andrew Dutkewych, Jean-Serge

Champagne and Claude Mongrain in the 1970s, the intent was to establish the manner in

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[1] William Tucker, Introduction to *The Condition of Sculpture: A Selection of Recent Sculpture by Younger British and Foreign Artists* (London: Art's council of Great Britain, 1975), 7.

[2] The exhibition also included sculptures from, Mark Prent, Barbara Steinman, Ronald Thibert, Roland Poulin, Henry Saxe, Jean-Marie Delavalle, Michel Goulet, Denys Tremblay, and Edmund Alleyn. No catalogue remains of this exhibition. Information gathered from the exhibition file from the médiatèque of the musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

[3] Jean Dumont, "La sculpture au Québec de 1970 à 1980 (Musée d'art contemporain, du 10 août au 14 sept.)," *Montréal Ce Mois-Ci* 6.8 (août 1980): 20.

which each sculptor, in the wake of dematerialization (the international reconsideration of

the art object), defined their specific material-based practice. In the sculptures of

Dutkewych, we saw the referencing of architectural devices and the use of natural

materials in a way that created a dialogue between the work and its surroundings. With

Champagne, we saw sculptural work that illustrated knowledge systems and physical

phenomena. Finally, in Mongrain's sculptures, we saw the exploration of temporality in

the three-dimensional form.

Unlike sculptors of the previous generation such as Claude Tousignant and Ulysse

Comtois, none of these artists chose to paint or finish the materials they selected,

deciding against incorporating the veneer of artificial processing. While their

manipulation of the materials varied dramatically, their decision to use natural,

unprocessed items emphasized the material basis of their work. As a result, their work

differed from that of Tousignant, which blurred the boundaries of painting and sculpture.

It also departed from the work of Comtois, which metaphorically and physically

referenced industrial production. Through their use of natural materials alone,

Dutkewych, Champagne and Mongrain set themselves apart from the previous

generation.

Another commonality was the artists' choosing to reveal the process involved in

the creation of their sculptures. By leaving their materials unmasked they displayed the

artistic process involved in the sculpture's production, making it transparent to the

viewer. This resulted in initiating a different type of active participation by the viewer in

recreating the steps of construction. The process of realization then became as much a

part of the viewer's experience as the sculptor's, something that occurred less easily with the 1960s sculptures of Tousignant and Comtois.

Yet, some commonality was discovered between these two decidedly different generations of Quebec sculptors. As Alex Potts convincingly concluded, 1970s sculpture was not witness to a radical break from the autonomous object. Furthermore, as a three-dimensional object in space, sculpture will continue to inspire. According to British sculptor and theorist William Tucker, "Sculpture's very existence demands that it is made of some material, as some form is necessitated by its boundlessness."[4] This statement illustrates an obvious but easily forgotten fact – that it does not matter whether a sculpture is painted with a high-gloss veneer (Tousignant, Comtois) or is simply assembled from the remnants of lumberyard materials (Dutkewych, Champagne), it is always formed of physical matter. What changes is the manipulation of the form and content of that physical matter, known as sculpture. Yet, its fundamental characteristic – being material in space – does not change.

The radical break from the autonomous object in the sculptural practice of the 1970s and the movement towards considering the context and privileging the spectator should therefore be considered as a redirection or reaffirmation. The fact will remain that, "Gravity governs sculpture's existence in itself, [and] light discloses sculpture to us."[5] As was noted in the discussion of Mongrain's work, these new considerations of site and spectator position, once seen as presenting a radical shift from the previous generation, seem now to only highlight already implicit aspects of the sculptural form. Furthermore, even the use of natural, untreated materials continued to stress the fact that matter and

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[4] Tucker, 7.
[5] Ibid.

"the condition of gravity" have always governed sculpture's existence.[6] Therefore, the

sculpture of the 1970s reaffirmed some characteristics of the sculptural medium that had

fallen into disfavour during the height of the modernist era.[7]

Nevertheless, in light of the aim of the exhibition *La sculpture au Québec 1970-*

1980 as described above, we see that the 1970s Montreal sculptors discussed here in fact

desired new definitions of sculpture. Their information systems, site-specific

interventions and fleeting situations forced the emphasis of Quebec sculpture to change.

Furthermore, it reflected the changing Montreal art community during that same period, a

milieu that was open to new initiatives and new ways of thinking. The re-emphasis of

sculpture seen in pivotal presentations such as *Périphéries* and *Québec 75*, demonstrated

the willingness of public institutions such as the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

to support exhibitions that challenged existing definitions of sculpture.

The intention of this thesis was to convey the manner in which Andrew

Dutkewych, Jean-Serge Champagne and Claude Mongrain, following art's

dematerialization, distinctly shaped the materials they used into sculpture, and how these

specific works related to both the wider Montreal art scene and to the reemphasis and

redefinition of sculpture throughout the 1970s. Did the direction of sculpture continue to

change in emphasis or orientation in the decades that followed? A study of the sculptural

trends and innovations that developed in Montreal after the 1970s could help provide the

answer.

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[6] Ibid, 8.
[7] As exemplary of modernist sculpture in Quebec, Tousignant's reliefs, which emerged as the extension of his painterly concerns into three-dimensionality, did not, by their very nature, *reaffirm* characteristics specific to the sculptural form. Rather they remain symptomatic of what William Tucker described as "the pressure on sculpture to adopt the painting-directed role of relief [which] has been enormous throughout the modern period." Ibid.

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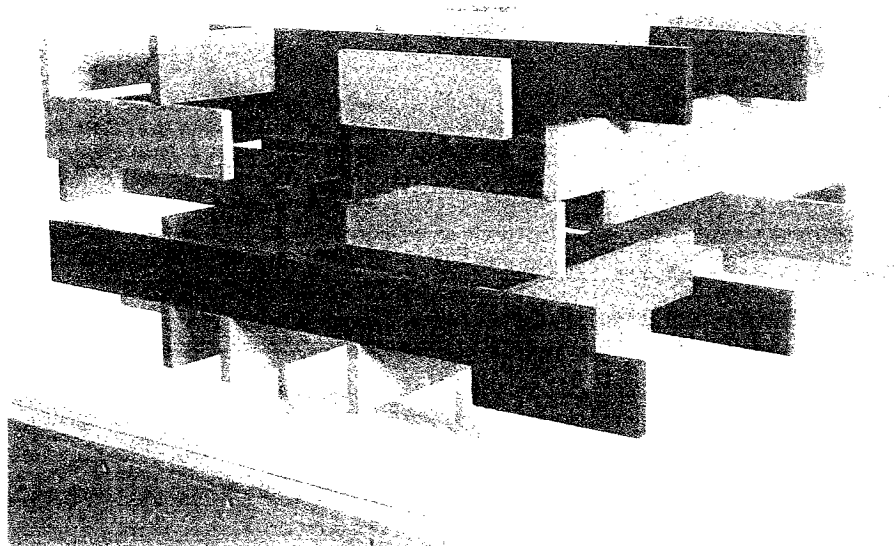
Figure 1. Claude Tousignant, *Cristallisation*, 1961.
Acrylic on wood
38.1 x 71.1 x 71.1 cm
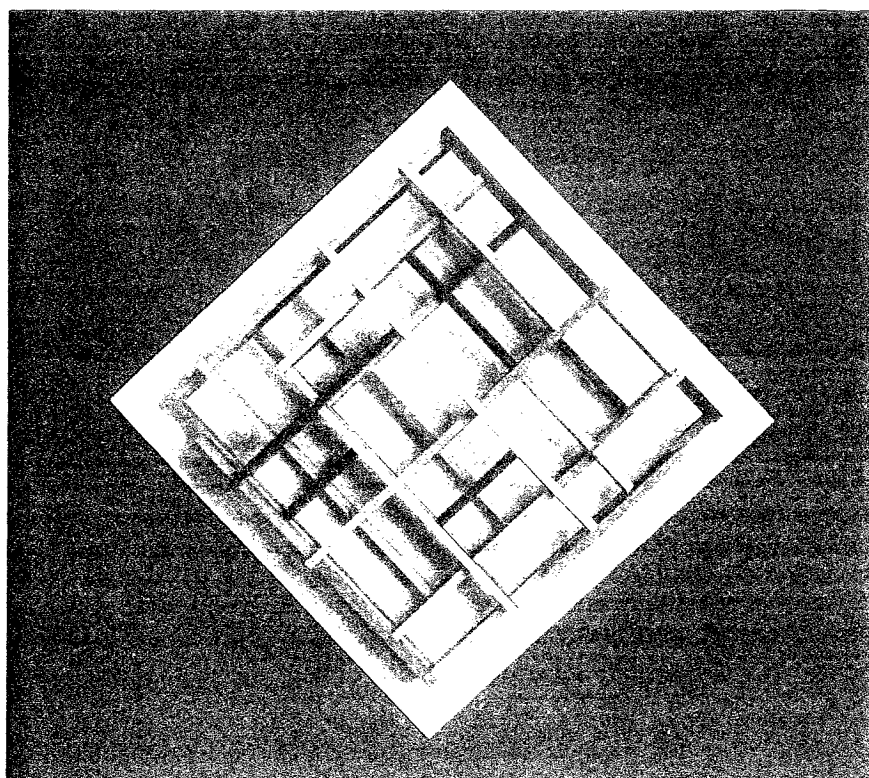
Figure 2. Claude Tousignant, *Construction dans le losange*, 1961.
Acrylic on wood
34.3 x 71.1 x 71.1 cm
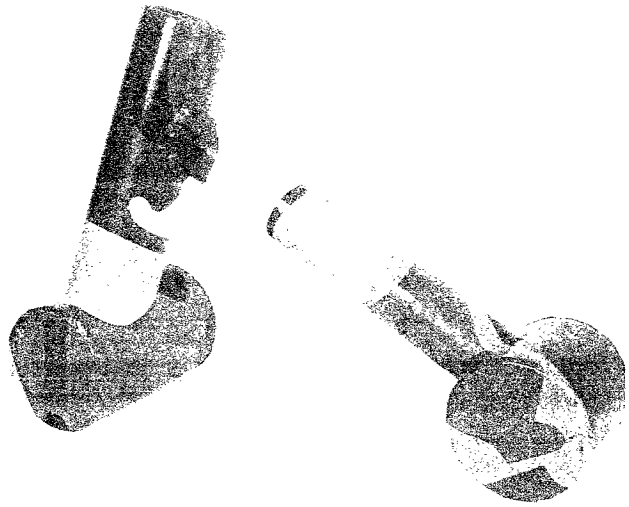
Figure 3. Ulysse Comtois, *Multicolore*, 1965?.
Painted soldered metal
51 x 67 cm
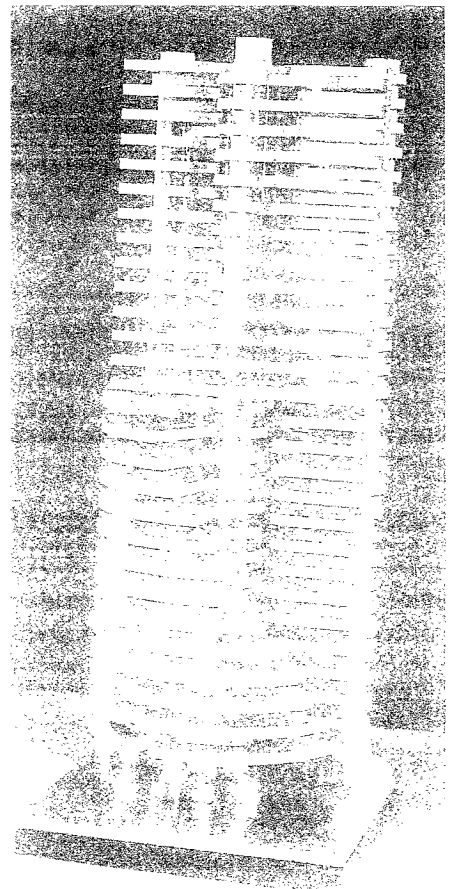
Figure 4. Ulysse Comtois, *Le 23 Octobre*. 1969.
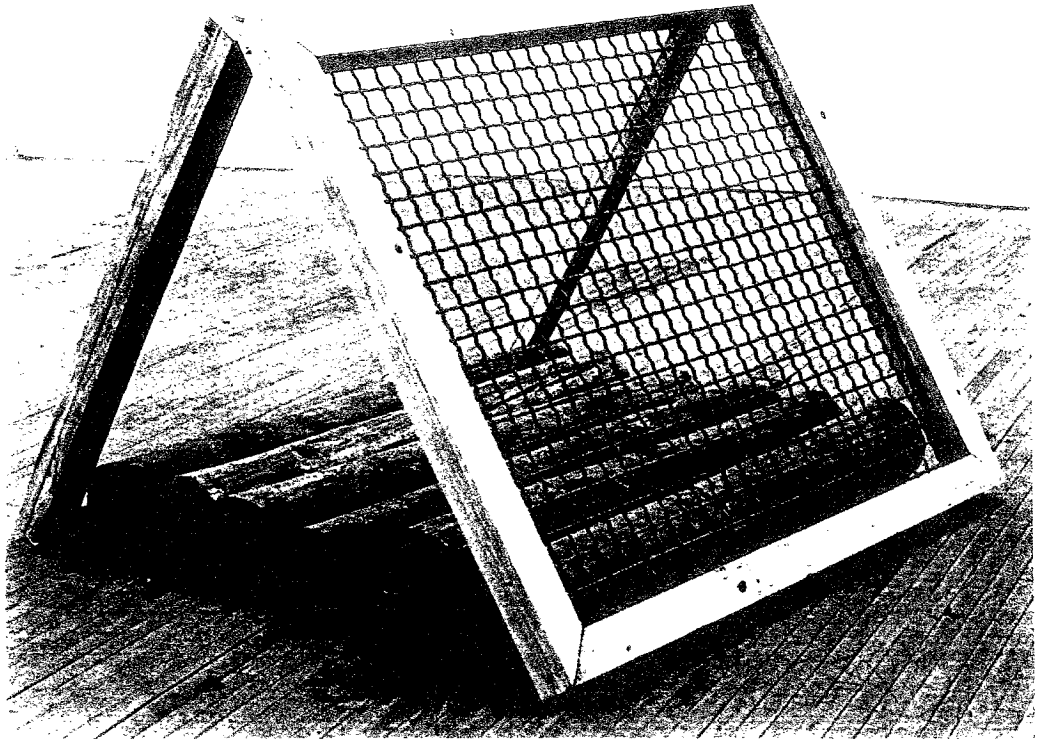Stainless steel and aluminum axle
174 x 58 x 58 cm

Figure 5. Andrew Dutkewych, *Raft*, 1972.
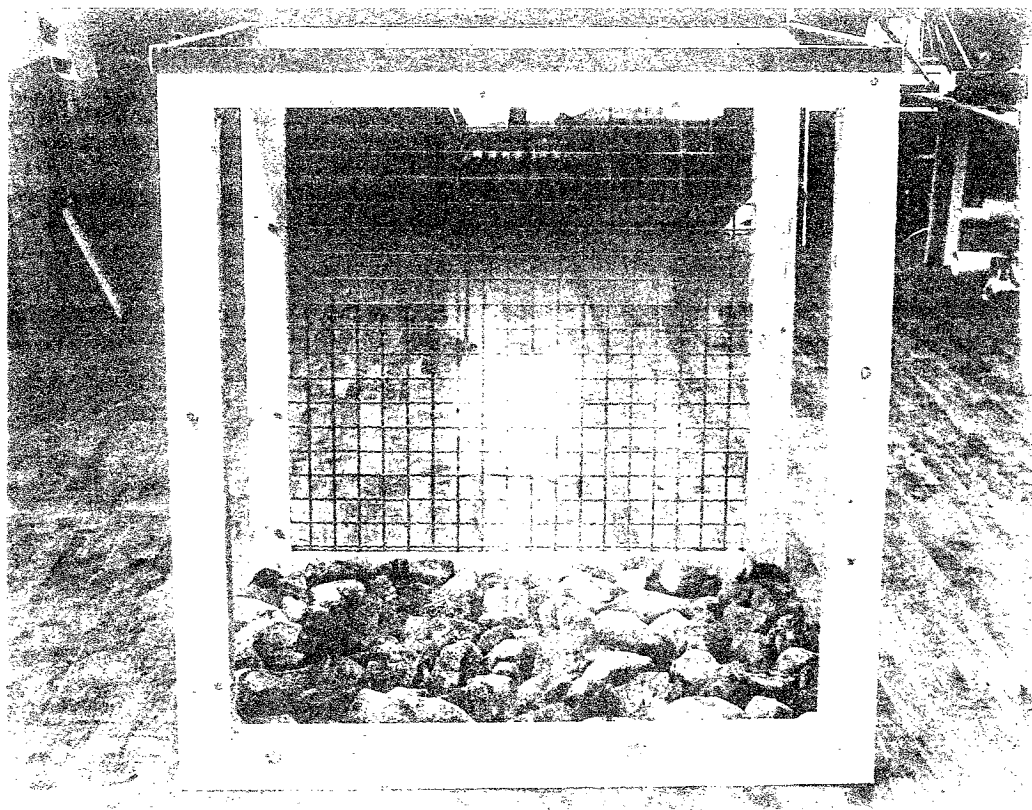Wood, metal wire, and plexiglass
Approximately 106 x 121.92 x 121.92 cm

Figure 6. Andrew Dutkewych, *Four-by-four*, 1974.
Wood, metal wire, plexiglass, and stones
121.92 x 121.92 x 121.92 cm
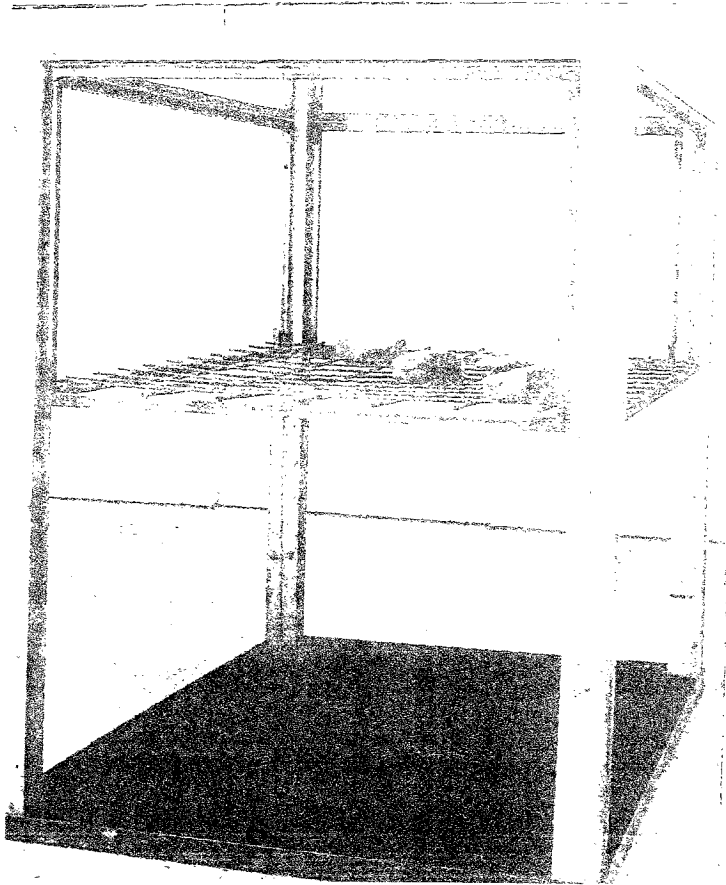
Figure 7, view 1. Andrew Dutkewych, *Plateau*, 1975.
Wood, plywood, metal wire, metal tubing, stones and earth
182.88 x 121.92 x 142.24 cm
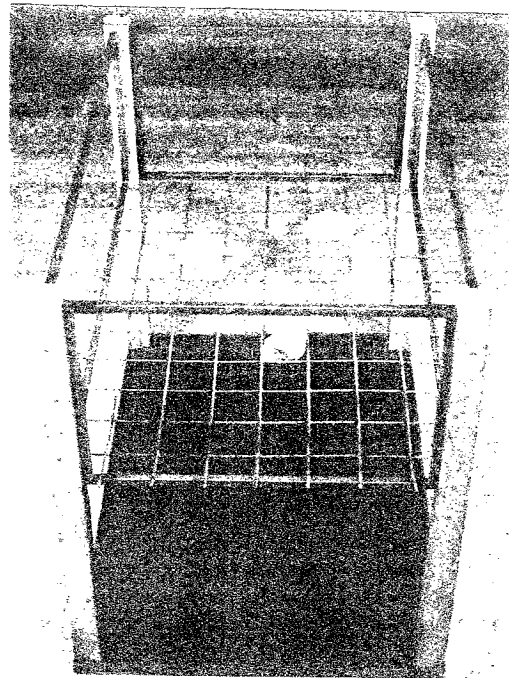
Figure 7, view 2.
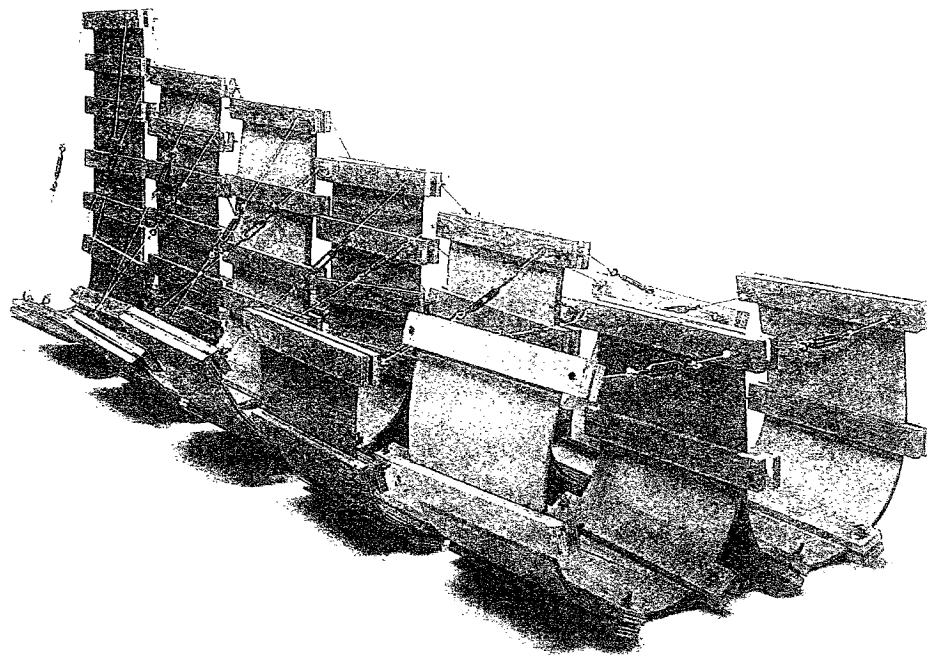
Figure 8. Jean-Serge Champagne, *Tension #2*, 1970.
Mixed media
106 x 279.4 x 100.96 cm
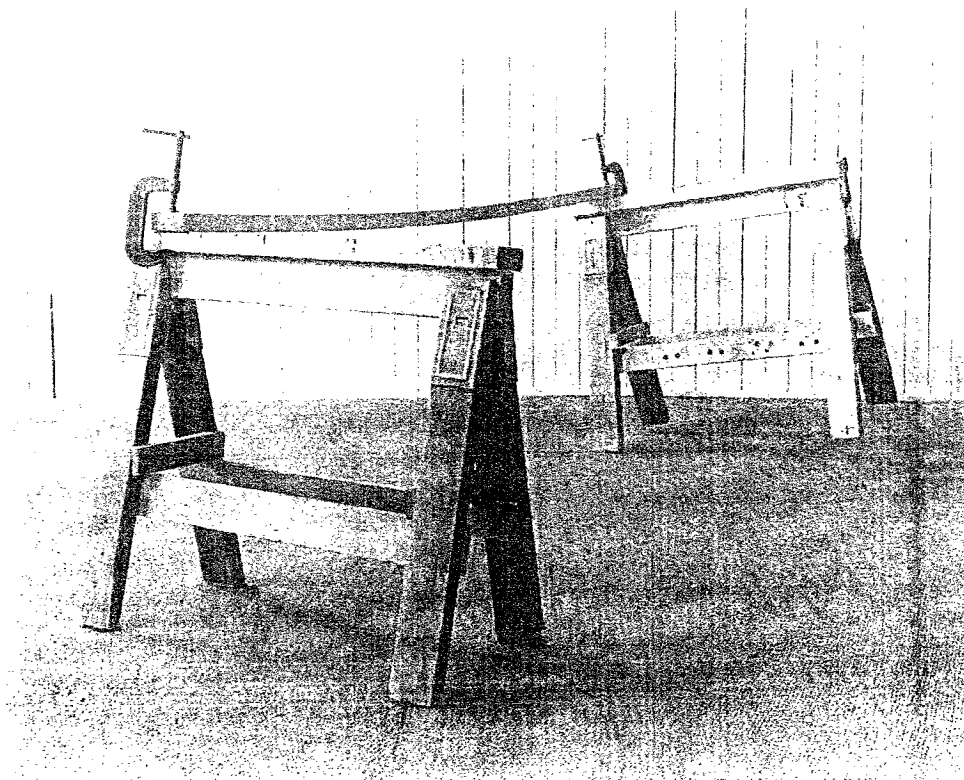
Figure 9. Jean-Serge Champagne, *Sans titre*, 1973-1974.
Wood, clamps, sawhorses
91.4 x 304.8 x 91.4 cm
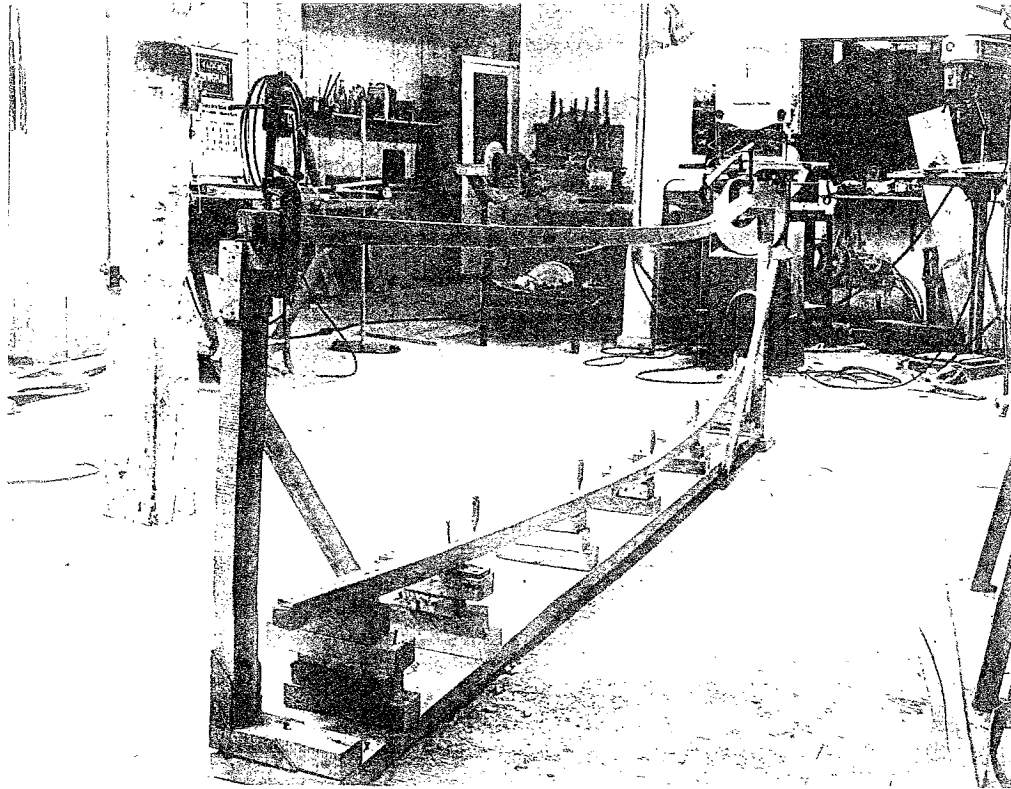
Figure 10. Jean-Serge Champagne, *Sans titre*, 1977.
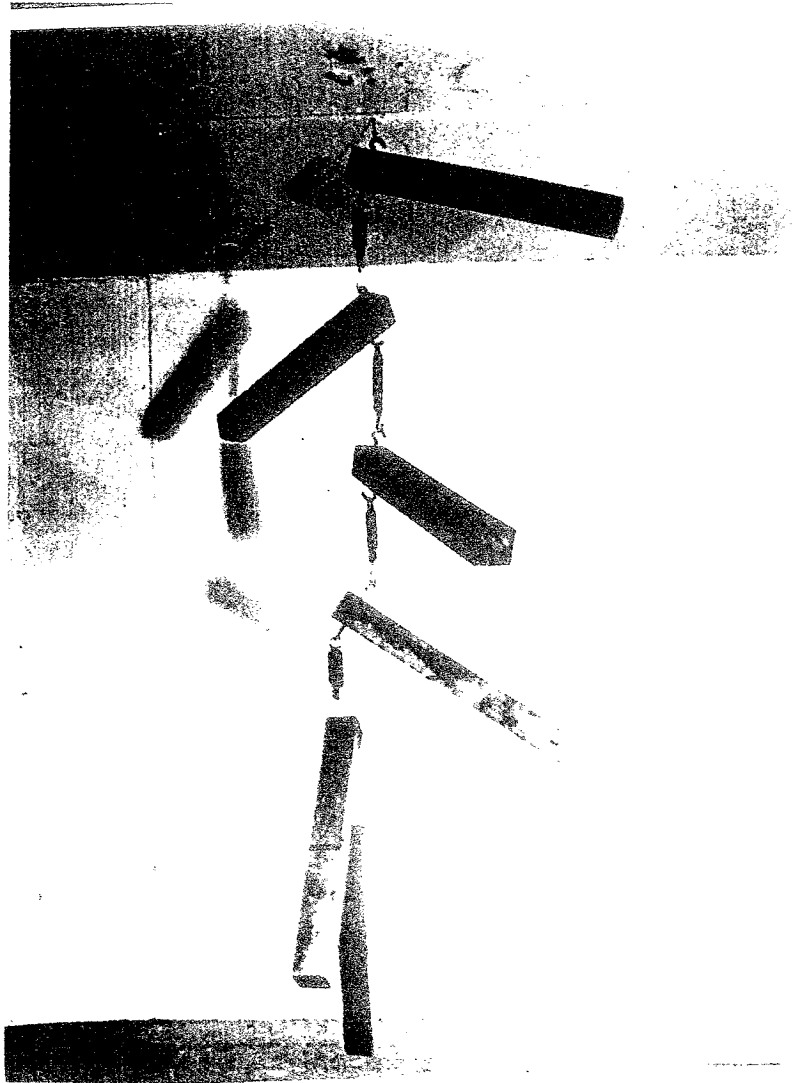Wood, clamps, plumb bobs
121.92 x 365.76 x 30.48 cm

Figure 11. Claude Mongrain, *Situation I*, 1973.
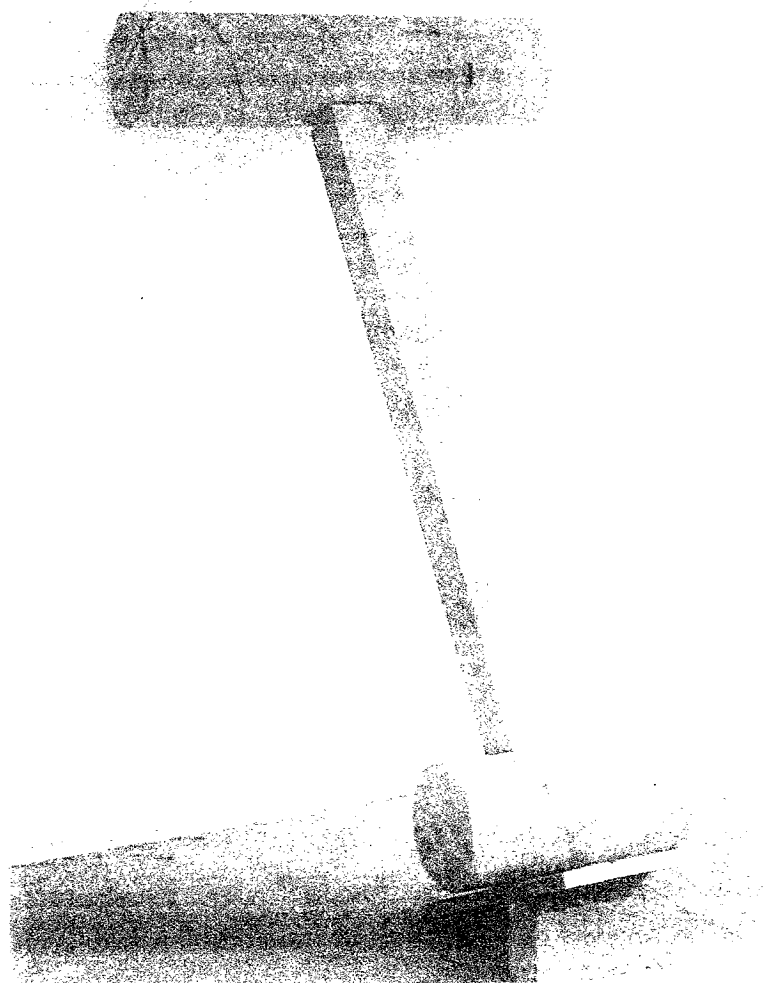Six sections of wood 60.96 cm each

Figure 12. Claude Mongrain, *Sans titre*, 1975.
Wood, concrete
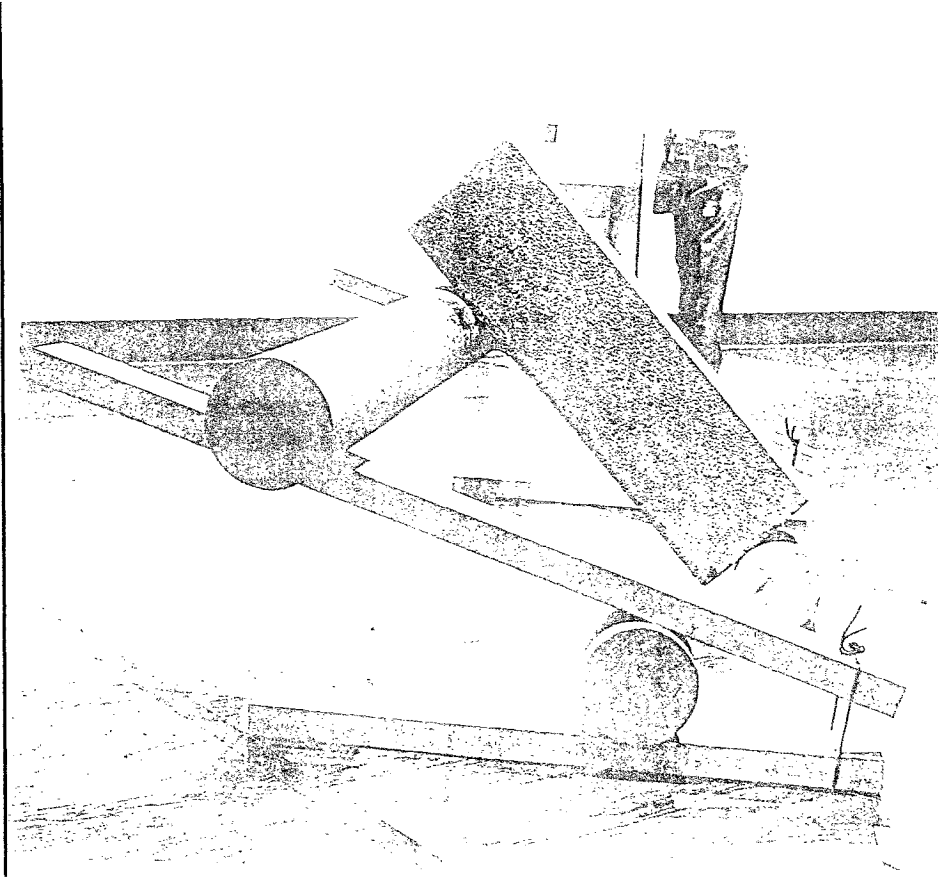101.6 x 60.96 x 101.6 cm

Figure 13. Claude Mongrain, *Sans titre*, 1975.
Wood, aluminum, concrete
121.92 x 233.68 x 76.2 cm

Figure 14. Claude Mongrain, *Construction: gisant*, 1979.
Concrete
64 x 238 x 218 cm