

## Half a Dozen Heresies Mainly Regarding Collections, Exhibitions & Catalogues

W. McAllister Johnson

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### Résumé de l'article

Observations sur la plus grande entreprise de publication non contrôlée au monde. Sont présentées dans cet article les tendances actuelles de l'édition de catalogues d'expositions temporaires et permanentes, principalement en Ontario et au Canada. Ces tendances sont considérées ici dans le contexte de l'avènement de l'exposition d'art comme phénomène culturel. L'étude s'attache en outre à faire ressortir les points de vue plutôt contradictoires de celui qui produit ces oeuvres éphémères et de celui qui éventuellement, les achètera. Un certain nombre de modèles de catalogues sont proposés avec un aperçu de ce que chacun implique pour le personnel des musées, pour le financement de la publication et pour le savoir.

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# *Half a Dozen Heresies Mainly Regarding Collections, Exhibitions & Catalogues*

(An Address Delivered at the General Meeting of the Ontario Association  
of Art Galleries, McMaster University, Hamilton, 30 October 1980)\*

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W. McALLISTER JOHNSON

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to express my gratitude to the Executive of OAAG and particularly to Robert Swain for their invitation to speak in the context of the present workshop on collections, exhibitions and catalogues. Those of you who already know me, know also how delighted I am to deliver myself of some irritating and even provocative remarks on the subject, and how much this is in keeping with my character.

In any case, we would not be assembled here unless we all sensed that things are not quite as they should be, a malaise reflected in a ground swell of recent literature whose implications we are today attempting to talk out. As a result, we can only begin to define, to isolate areas of concern and enunciate some ideas for testing against tomorrow's realities – some of which are already with us.

In selecting a title for this morning's discussion – and the number of heresies given is only an approximate one – you should keep in mind one fact that has guided me in treating this extremely complex topic. In briefest terms, it is that one must consider as an organic whole a number of things usually viewed as separable entities, inasmuch as these have, in the long view, intimate and often surprising relationships. These may be examined pragmatically as isolated issues; without their insertion into some larger historical perspective, however, our conclusions may prove quite worthless.

In this, I am mindful that the OAAG constituency comprises some seventy-nine members whose differing dates of foundation necessarily define the level of their individual problems. Thus it is that, from the forty-four Full Members:

only two Ontario collections were established prior to 1900; four only being founded between 1900-1922; even as two collections were founded in the early 1940s and three in the mid 1950s; while sixteen were created between 1960-1969 (six in 1967 alone); and seventeen between 1970-1979 (nine in the period 1974-1976).<sup>1</sup>

Of these, most are said to have contemporary collections while others are of an historical nature. As a result, I find it difficult to establish some consistent middle ground for discussing concerns when your membership runs from the National Gallery itself to the mandate exercised by the 'public library and art gallery' or even a 'national exhibition centre.'

In the remarks that follow I am naturally speaking as an 'outsider,' as one who is *not* aware of the internal problems of each institution. I, as must the general public, form opinions and even judgments from tangible things – that is, from what can be known of individual and collective activity through what you produce. In this I am perhaps uniquely qualified to give a general picture since I come wearing three hats, which is perhaps better than having two faces, as:  
– someone who has created catalogues within and without Canada and who must use them, whose students use them within the University;  
– someone who, as Director of a special library

\* The oral nature of this paper, here printed by popular demand, has been respected even unto unusual punctuation and emphases. Although the text may be read independent of them, footnotes have been reinserted, while a select illustration of early date is appended.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics, courtesy Ontario Association of Art Galleries, revised as of June 1981.



FIGURE 1. Nicolas I Langlois, *The Salon of 1699*, detail from *L'Almanach Pour L'An de Grâce M.D.C.C.* (906 × 567 mm). First exhibition in the Louvre's Grande Galerie, showing temporary dividing wall at one end with dais, estrade and throne, with a tapestry background for sculptures while the pictures are hung in registers, even in the window embrasures. BN Est. Qb 1 1699

devoted to catalogues, collects and classifies them, whatever their age or place of origin; – someone who edits what I believe is the only journal of serious historical writing in the arts published in Canada – RACAR (*Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review*).

Now catalogues and other 'publications accompanying an exhibition' are notoriously difficult to evaluate without having them actually to hand. But I contend that we may examine in essentials the Canadian scene by assembling both an 'intensive' and a 'progressive' catalogue collection for your examination. Accordingly, you see before you as much of the catalogue production for the calendar year 1979 as could be brought together for this purpose by the McMaster and Hamilton Art Galleries. You also see virtually the entire production of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre during its near quarter-century of activity. Between these, we have models to examine *recent* trends everywhere as well as *developmental* trends within a given institution.

Why this particular emphasis? Because the catalogue is the residual product of an exhibition. We might then question the nature of the exhibition as a type of activity. According to the OED, it is 'to expose or show for amusement or instruction, or in a competition.' Such a definition, however comprehensive, says nothing terribly essential about the exhibition's function, which is, as they say, the name of the game. I much prefer

the comments of a Swedish visitor to the Paris Salon of 1699:

although there is much that is indifferent, this spectacle (Fig. 1) can only be grand, magnificent and useful for the spectator since one here sees, *together* in a single glance, things which ordinarily one only sees *separately* (italics mine).<sup>2</sup>

No lexicographer could provide a more basic definition than this of the exhibition's function – the *reunion* of art objects – a function *equally* applicable to the loan exhibition and to collections development from public monies to be held in public trust.

Curiously enough, until Michael Bell's thoughtful essay ('Canadian Galleries and their Catalogues,' *Queen's Quarterly*, LXXXVI (Summer 1979), 254-263), there was little or no literature attempting to characterise this complex effort of production, publicity and distribution. As an editor, I am pleased that his information came from RACAR's initial survey of 'The Year's Exhibitions 1977' published in 1978. This repertory was the first of its kind and particularly serves smaller institutions whose publications could not otherwise be known for lack of opportunity and means. This listing has one important restriction: it voluntarily excludes all exhibitions simply *received* for circulation throughout the country and records only the *creative* effort that, to all intents and purposes, represents museum and gallery activity. It is therefore immaterial how many institutions profit from a given exhibition created by or for Canadians. What is at stake is the amount, the variety and the level of activity involved!

To put this production in perspective, we must first consider how institutions and individuals regard catalogues. As might be surmised, their

<sup>2</sup> 'Quoy qu'il y ait beaucoup de mauvais, ce spectacle ne laisse pas d'estre grand, magnifique et utile pour le spectateur, puisque l'on voit la, d'un coup d'oeuil ensemble, des choses qu'on ne peut voir d'ordinaire que séparément....' Daniel Cronström à Nicodème Tessin le jeune (8/18 septembre 1699), in *Les Relations artistiques entre la France et la Suède, 1693-1718*, eds. R.-A. Weigert & C. Herninæck (Stockholm: AB Agnellska Boktryckeriet, 1964), 242.

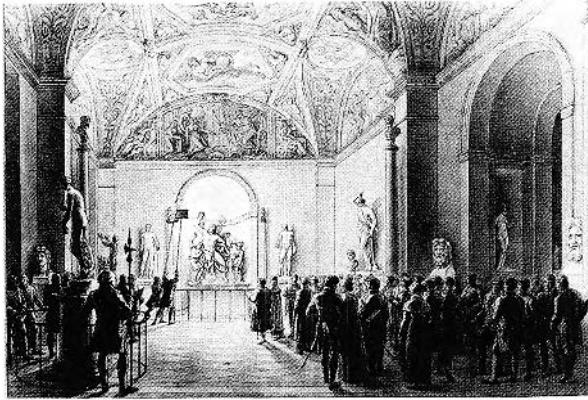


FIGURE 2. Benjamin Zix, *Illumination of the Laocoon before the Napoleonic Court*, c. 1810-1811. Drawing, 260 × 390 mm. An early example of a gallery or museum *nocturne*. Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Inv. 33406.

needs are very different even if these can be in some way 'satisfied' by the same or related publications. In simplest terms, let us look at catalogues not from the point of view of those *producing* them, but of those who *acquire* them. (The designer necessarily plays an intermediary role in that he must work with what he is given!)

I recently asked a Librarian of my acquaintance what she would do if a prospective donor confronted her with a possible gift of 10,000 exhibition catalogues, to which she replied that she would not faint but that she would surely scream. Her reaction did not significantly vary when the total was reduced to 5,000, 2,500 and so on until some critical point was reached, upon which she brightened up and said that she would *box* them. This, be it noted, is the essential problem of small formats in publication: they may measure as little as  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick, but this *physical* fact has nothing to do with their content or documentary worth. Most libraries treat catalogues as books (monographs), which they are not in any strict sense. Catalogues are for the most part paperbound, and so remain for a variety of reasons. Briefly, the catalogue is an *ephemera*, the bane of cataloguers and shelf-readers. Its fate is to be unbound, difficultly catalogued and easily lost or misplaced. It has no high public *visibility* or image and, irony of ironies, requires, as any book, one catalogue card per item even though an unconscionable amount of work still results in a very small linear footage on the shelves. (To give you some idea of scale, my special library has



FIGURE 3. Paul Helleu, *Watteau Drawings*, c. 1900. Drypoint, 298 × 403 mm. The exhibition-goer as lone wolf rather than a social animal. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1959. Inv. 59-599.19.

some 15,000 temporary exhibition and permanent collection catalogues occupying some 550 linear feet; but we collect *only* catalogues and have created a system to permit their retrieval and consultation with the least effort, which is impossible for most other libraries.)

Now Canadian permanent collection catalogues, when they indeed exist, fare no better than those of temporary exhibitions. For our purposes, however, I would like to introduce a terminological distinction borrowed from the French, where there is a difference between the 'permanent exhibition' and the 'permanent collection' – the first being what *remains on exhibit* from holdings (Fig. 2), while the latter may largely be in the reserves. In either event, there remains an intent to exhibit whose practical application is, as often as not, predicated upon available wall space. Works of art are deemed suitable for 'viewing in given circumstances,' and they are selectively memorialized through publications.

However, the principal motivation of an exhibition is, after all, *not* the generation of documentation for future historians, even though this task is often retroactively assigned. It is rather to record some *momentary* interest which may or may not stand up in the light of history, and it is this interest which results in an exhibition. A good exhibition may demand a catalogue lest viewers go away unsatisfied, without what is in effect a memento; there are surely as many exhibitions whose main if not unique contribution (Fig. 3) will have been to have put works *on view*.

We all know one solution to the catalogue dilemma, which is to mail out a bifold invitation which may include a hanging list.<sup>3</sup> However, these have no sense – and a low survival rate – once they have served their purpose as they cannot easily be dealt with. In practice, these become vertical-file material in art libraries: they are inserted, along with clippings, into artists' files when a one-man show is concerned. For group or thematic shows, they must be placed in some subject file and become untraceable by institutional origin. This seems rather important in view of the need for adequate institutional history, and I can provide ready proof of this.

Some years ago I commissioned for RACAR a listing of all exhibitions, with or without catalogue, of the Art Gallery of Toronto from 1906-1966, at which time a new name and a new phase of activity began.<sup>4</sup> Although there was little manifest enthusiasm at the administrative level for this project – at least until it was completed and accepted at the editorial level – it has since prompted queries from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in view of considering its own exhibition record. Now this can be of real use only for the three oldest Canadian collections – the AGO, the National Gallery, and Montreal – but what was our surprise to discover, through adequate internal archives, the dates and themes of numerous unsuspected shows which fill gaps in our knowledge of what was seen in Toronto when exhibitions were presumably less frequent than they now are. (Of 802 shows, 408 were *without* catalogue.) Save for the obvious periods of the Thirties and some of the war years, there is no real pattern in the distribution.

My point is this: all exhibitions are *unique in moment*, but *serial* when seen in a longer time span. The programming of museum and gallery activities must concern itself with greater than immediate issues. By this I mean that collections must have a sufficient sense of being and of history to decide what they wish to be remembered for – and what, as a result, they might be doing. The coming austerity may result in a more positive, a more thoughtful approach to *activity*,

which is, I stress, not merely *animation*. Should one be producing less but of better quality? Might one consider a wider *variety* of publication formats? Perhaps the present *definition* of art exhibitions is restrictive or, worse yet, misleading? Surely a balance must be struck between permanent collection-building and the loan exhibition ...

As concerns this last point, I submit that it is one of the more essential ones before us. Some *equilibrium* in public programmes is expected by all, but this is not come by easily or regularly. One should not see only what is familiar, neither should one see only that for which one is quite unprepared. Should one not be cataloguing one's own works rather than the works of others? This is only a logical posit. Even the permanent collection may be 'rediscovered' through regroupment or selection for given purposes. It is constantly re-evaluated by varying the comparison group, and this is done – objectively done – through the loan or receipt of objects to and from other collections.

This is, moreover, a defensible philosophy for collections of any order and magnitude. The temporary exhibition is the discovery, the appreciation of *other* sensibilities. It is also likely to be more truly 'encyclopaedic' than any permanent collections (save those of world-class) since it constantly shifts focus. From this I conclude that the nature of temporary exhibitions, their very subjects, must be *rethought* so as to take advantage of as yet untapped possibilities.

How then might we characterise *levels* of exhibition? Analogies with libraries may be of some help in understanding different roles, which fall into roughly three interrelated categories:

- exhibitions originating research and themes (their equivalent being the research library);
- exhibitions disseminating these topics at other levels in order to arouse general interest (the special library);
- exhibitions responding to a public interest *become general*, which may be compared to the public library.

It should be noted that these 'levels of intent and performance' have nothing to do with national, provincial, municipal or university affiliations as such. Such boundaries are, at least beyond an initial point of reference, misguided and arbitrary. If a vacuum is perceived, anyone is entitled to fill it according to his competence and means. But it is precisely here that preconceived

<sup>3</sup> For some indications concerning this phenomenon and its evolution, see Henri Attia & Raymond Josué Seckel, 'Les cartons d'invitation aux vernissages, esquisse historique. Résultat d'une enquête pour l'École des Bibliothécaires,' *La Chronique des arts*, supplément à la *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, n° 1260 (janvier 1974), 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> Karen McKenzie & Larry Pfaff, 'The Art Gallery of Ontario: Sixty Years of Exhibitions, 1906-1966,' RACAR, VII (1980), 62-91.

ideas about exhibition concepts raise their ugly heads and restrict creative freedom. Conventional wisdom requires a classic name or subject for an exhibition concept. These are, by their maddening repetitiousness, the virtual death of the intellect. A corollary, that the duty of public galleries is to deal with contemporary art and artists, must also be brought into question. (After all, *their* names or subjects are by definition not classic!) These two roles are thus in real contradiction and we should clearly set out what is *involved in* rather than what is *said* about them.

There is a curious anomaly in all this: both historical and very contemporary exhibitions are *equally* foreign to the viewer's experience and require equal attention by creators and viewers; that is to say, 'on both sides of the catalogue.' The exhibitions mosaic has many levels, with one category directed toward the solo or group shows or the retrospective – even though the time authorising a retrospective may seem indecently short to the historian, in which case it is called a five-year 'perspective.' One should know that many artists and students favour the one-man show format, feeling as they do that a single painting or whatever does not sufficiently inform one of the artist's development, much less his approach to problems, to process. In this context the contemporary exhibition has a 'proto-historical' intent despite itself: a probe revealing an artist's state of mind and his technical means. On the other hand, contemporary *experience* is assimilated so slowly – whatever its real or perceived worth – that it may be upsetting unless viewed with some detachment, through some filter. Perhaps for that reason many exhibition goers feel more secure when confronted with things no longer current.

What a pity then that Canadian exhibitions are as a rule too exclusively focused on the present, or even upon the present from a certain area. As Bernard Berenson once wrote, 'the attempt of communities, big and little, to retain their own art creations, good and bad, great and small, for no better reason than that they were done by fellow countrymen or fellow townsmen long ago, is as narrowing, as self-immuring, as the rest of nationalism.'<sup>5</sup> In the light of older Italian art, he went on to suggest that it would have been better to have regularly 'exported' the finer artworks from point of origin so that all could benefit from them. This explicitly acknowledges the *comparative function* that the exhibition serves, for in due course the permanent collection becomes an historically-based rather than a contemporary

one – unless, of course, one sells off one's acquisitions each decade to finance those of the next.

One is therefore moved to wonder whether collections having a very restricted appeal are not building on too narrow a basis for growth, much less survival. Galleries having small (or no significant) collections would accordingly run a higher risk in providing display space for the collections of others – of 'walls for other people's wallpaper.'<sup>6</sup> Were we to use the homely simile of the business office, these institutions might, through excessive reliance upon loan exhibitions, be likened to an office which purchased only expendable supplies rather than equipment which remains. Such activity is arguably incompatible with the role of a public trust in consuming time and monies but leaving no particular trace which justifies that activity.

You have by now sensed that I am leading up to something. I am. The exhibition as a phenomenon really begins only around 1760,<sup>7</sup> and was generally dependent upon professional associations or academies of the order of the Ontario Society of Artists or the Royal Canadian Academy. Rather like these, their success depended upon the enthusiasm and energies of members. What is more, such exhibitions did not invariably have catalogues. Indeed, throughout history, there have been more exhibitions which simply existed in some *available* space than exhibitions which left some verifiable record. How so? Because they were of short duration (one week to a month). No one really expected them to occur *regularly*, as we now do since 1945 or, more exactly, since around 1960. Outside the academies, exhibitions were highly circum-

5 Bernard Berenson, *Rumor and Reflection* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952), 170.

6 Once known, the collections may well prove to be susceptible of improvement, with the cataloguing effort and resulting publications having provided an inadvertent but perhaps necessary impetus to this end. It is, however, equally apparent that the quality of installations can and must improve within a much shorter time, finding some intermediate ground between the knowledge that the works must be set off to advantage and the impression that they are as often as not merely *placed* on the walls. Among the contributing factors are inadequate lighting systems, lack of attention to colour values, inappropriate framing and matting and, in the case of works under glass, 'cross-room reflections' – the works themselves becoming invisible as a result of contradictory lighting and intriguing, albeit uninformative, views of the hind-sides of other visitors.

7 For a fine survey and copious iconography, see Georg Friedrich Koch, *Die Kunstausstellung. Ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967).



FIGURE 4. Abraham Bosse, *A Visit to the Sculptor's Studio*, 1642. Enching, 353 × 325 mm. One notes a full reperory of speculative and commissioned sculpture in wax, clay and stone, including religious and mythological subjects, architectural pieces and coats-of-arms, statuettes and their enlargements or reductions. BN Est. Ed 30.

stanced: artists exposed in their studios (Fig. 4),<sup>8</sup> a group of artists exhibited in rented rooms or art fairs, or even in the equivalent of the commercial or parallel galleries of their day. These were all *events* since few in number, and they were to my knowledge almost invariably held at *one location* only. Public collections exhibited their holdings on a regular basis. Museums and galleries were built for specific collections (Fig. 5) or in anticipation of a collection that could only grow with time. As a result they escaped the current tendency to relegate the permanent collection to less-favoured (usually summer) moments in a full loan exhibition schedule that, in turn, necessarily requires the *dismounting* of the permanent collection so that loans may be displayed in its place.

To anyone who lived through World War II – even through that brief and troubled period between the two Great Wars – the rise of exhibitions on some regular basis was the result of a critical and inescapable moment whose causes, one hopes, will not soon be repeated. Europe was then a great depot of *masterworks* often made homeless as a result of bombardments. Since they could ‘be seen’ again, since they were well-known

<sup>8</sup> Some of these not only took place within the artist's studio on a more or less regular basis (which would probably be considered an invasion of privacy today), but also served as conscious manifestations against official exhibition policy, e.g. *Salon d'Horace Vernet. Analyse historique et pittoresque des quarante-cinq tableaux exposés chez lui en 1822* (Paris: Jouy & Jay, 1822).

FACADE ET COUPE DE LA GALERIE ELECTORALE DES TABLEAUX A DÜSSELDORF.

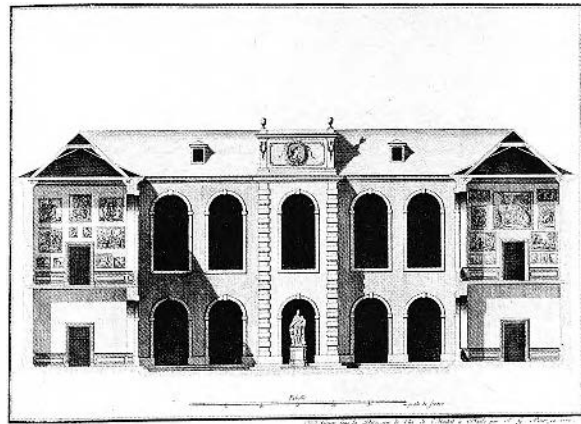


FIGURE 5. Christian G. Mechel & Philipp Gottfried Pintz, *Façade and Elevation of the Electoral Gallery at Düsseldorf*, 1776. View showing situation of pictures in a permanent installation, the smaller items having been mounted on the window shutters. BN Est. Ac 6.

and catalogued, their circulation and/or reinstallation became a necessity well into the 1950s. Prior to the reorganization and rebuilding of museums and galleries, the itinerant exhibition was, as it should be, sufficient unto itself, not an intended money-maker for participating institutions or a cultural loss-leader for countries or political blocks. Whatever the then-existing diplomatic imperatives for reconstruction, the exhibition had not yet become a phenomenon risking the very existence of works of art in the guise of cultural identity as defined by artistic patrimony. There had not as yet been the proliferation of exhibition spaces which must be kept filled and somehow functioning – presumably on the basis of someone else's activity. These transformations brought with them another change – the old ‘guides to the exhibition’ (handlists) became catalogues. With their development over the last two decades, the exhibition and its publications have become ‘battered ornaments’ whose lineage is to be found in the *Vanity Press*. Thereby hangs another tale.

An exhibition's catalogue is probably a narrowing rather than a liberalising force since it tries to *fix* the mirage that is the exhibition. It has become a symbol of cultural vitality and has taken on national production characteristics and often national preoccupations. It becomes an historical document of sorts, perhaps an historical state-



FIGURE 6. Jean Dambrun, *August or the Salon du Louvre*, from the *Étrennes galantes des promenades et amusements de Paris et de ses Environs* (Paris: Boulanger, 1781). Engraving, 73 × 43 mm. The *livret* or hand-list is shown available for purchase on the table at the entrance to the biennial exhibition, although admission was free. Exhibition critiques of all sorts were hawked outside the premises and were, as well, available from specialized booksellers. BN Est. Ef 71.

ment, although the exhibition's public changes constantly – perhaps every five years – and could theoretically see the same exhibition at stated intervals with renewed pleasure and profit.

What, then, is the *regularity* with which institutions can originate or co-originate worthwhile, even first-rate exhibitions and catalogues? Here one might take issue with Michael Bell's otherwise excellent description of the excitement resulting from this activity within an institution. Such publications represent the largest unrefereed publishing effort in the world! They are *in-house* efforts with a presumably guaranteed purchase. We know also that they represent a major effort in personnel, in costing, production and distribution. Given the prestige of catalogue production (which may sometimes be equated with cost), the *image* of the catalogue has doubtless become more important than its *usage*. It serves (and serves as) the *image of the institution*!

These are hard words but they are not uncharitable. It is understandable that institutions find it necessary to appeal to the vanity of their boards of trustees by producing something remarkable. It is however equally – and often painfully – obvious that catalogue writers and designers have but rarely put themselves in the position of anyone having to *use* them. Had they done so, at least the worst production aberrations could have been avoided, most notably:

- the indiscriminate use of coated paper (which adds weight, thickness and cost overruns);
- curious stylistic revivals in catalogue design

which are but rarely more than cute or anachronistic;

- novelty formats (too long, too wide, with covers of inflatable plastic or forged steel, or yet of different grades of sandpaper riveted together);
- title pages or catalogue spines lacking sufficient identification (name of institution, running dates or even the year of exhibition)<sup>8 (bis)</sup>;
- poor production values of more- or less-subtle nature (poor editing or indifferent paper, casual proof-reading, insufficient margins and gluing, lack of pagination and, most especially, poor layout).

This litany has nothing to do with *content*, unless all defects may be said to arise from insufficient lead time in conception and gestation. When, however, world production is surveyed, one begins to realize that catalogues are, on the whole, among the most poorly and most chaotically produced publications extant, unbindable and often unusable. One might think that the surest way to evaluate production would be to examine it materially. Yet this is not as decisive a method as might be thought, for no reference can be made to *historical developments* in the catalogue genre. And this, in turn, is only appreciable once we correct a basic misunderstanding as to the *nature* of the catalogue. It is not the accumulation of references or information alone; it is giving that information *tangible and intellectual form* within each entry and within the catalogue as a whole. This is done by placing the object in its context and interpreting it, so we must give a schematic history of catalogue evolution in order to know what a given catalogue or exhibition meant *for its time*.

The earliest exhibitions simply reunited artworks, numbering them so that they could be

<sup>8bis</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent than in the anarchy governing placement of spine information in thicker catalogues, for conservative European binding tradition holds that information running from the bottom up avoids constant shifting of feet and craning of necks. That there no longer seems to be any consistent practise at all, with as many examples having information running from the top down, may be an unconscious indication that catalogues are no longer intended to be massed together on shelves and should be individually or selectively displayed on flat surfaces which set off the front cover to advantage.



keyed to a simple handlist (Fig. 6) giving author, subject and perhaps some additional information. Descriptive details (dimensions, medium) were later added and, need I say, there were no illustrations. This method of handling art exhibitions continued through the 1930s in Paris, when there were first and second editions (*not* printings) and even 'provisional' and 'definitive' catalogue editions.<sup>9</sup>

This is possible only when the apparatus is simple; it permitted for nearly two hundred years the *last-minute addition* (or supplement) of artworks to the show. Once this format was abandoned (numbering by entry has been retained as numbered labels corresponding to the catalogue, which you know has nothing whatsoever to do with hanging order), once more extensive historical or critical notices were adopted, another problem resulted. That is, that each object displayed necessarily had *unequal interest* and, as a result, *unequal possibilities for discussion*. Add to this any expectation of illustration (a frontispiece, plates at the back of the volume or as a plate volume) and you complicate design and production problems, often immeasurably. The move towards illustration *integrated within the text* has since 1945 or so simply compounded these problems. This has undoubtedly led to somewhat sterile distinctions between 'scholarly' and 'popular' catalogues. For my part I find this difficult to comprehend beyond enquiring whether catalogues are meant to be regarded or consulted.

In most cases, neither criterion is wholly satisfied. However, emphasis upon illustration has resulted in a more general criterion. One views the catalogue as much as or more than the exhibition itself! This becomes an important costing factor, particularly when it involves colour reproduction; but it is no less negligible when only black-and-white illustration is involved. I, for one, am not fully convinced that the public really is a *mobile* as has been held, unless the exhibition is held within some metropolitan or touristic circuit. One 'goes' to an exhibition, which means one thing in a small town and something else in a city. Once within the exhibition, it is usual to purchase a catalogue which may ornament one's bookshelves. If European precedent is any indication, an accumulation of catalogues is

<sup>9</sup> Notably the *Exposition Eugène Delacroix. Peintures, aquarelles, pastels, dessins, gravures, documents* (Louvre, Paris, juin-juillet 1930), consisting of an album of 114 pages, the provisional text having 342 pages and 894 numbers, and the definitive edition, 383 pages with 895 numbers. Both are graced with something rarely found in much larger temporary exhibition catalogues these days, that is to say, *indices*!

boxed up in cellars or attics and, at death, is put out to paper or inherited; inbetween, they may be disposed of at garage sales or recirculated as gifts. The point of this digression is that catalogue acquisition is rather more conditioned by *immediate availability* and can thus represent no reasoned or consistent acquisition. Many would add that a catalogue's cover represents some 90% of potential attraction and that it should be thought of as indicating content even when the text lacks colour, or even illustration. A colder reasoning would simply say that a good cover and design are some indication of the *quality of production*. Still and all, appearances may be deceiving. Personal catalogue purchase, because of its erratic nature and limited quantity, escapes all the headaches of libraries which are forced to obtain the national or foreign catalogue production sight unseen and regardless of quality.

We may then say without much fear of contradiction that, just as the choice of colour over black-and-white defines relative values, the appearance and the amount of catalogue illustration reveals different epochs. Colour is now viewed as a means of instilling interest, but it is not cost-efficient. Anyone who has taught appreciates the difficulty in double-screen projection of the mixing of black-and-white and colour slides – the first is too discreet and the second too distracting to be *seen equivalently*. What happens when one has a catalogue and 'has seen' the exhibition, or when one knows the catalogue only? In both cases, reproduction is somehow equated with the original, even though we *know* that it cannot be the original in scale or texture. Colour adds another *dimension*, but does not of itself affect the strength or weakness of compositions whose essential configurations are better seen in the wide range of black and white tonalities. Even if the colour is *all wrong*, it commands attention because it is *there*. It might be remembered that the insistence on colour has gone hand-in-hand with colour-field painting, posters and the like which originally encouraged its rise. Yet I suggest this is but a minor aspect of the real problem of illustration, which regards the collections from whence it comes.

It is scarcely realized that documentary photography is an art in itself. In black and white, for the cost of making high-quality colour transparencies for an entire collection is manifestly prohibitive as well as unnecessary. Yet photographs necessary for inventory and collections management are often generated only in respect of actual

demand.<sup>10</sup> Any practising scholar usually measures the worth of the subject he is investigating in direct proportion to the number of new negatives taken, most usually at his expense. Yet it is instructive to note certain trends of the last decade as regards illustration. First came the small illustrations used as *visual footnotes* to catalogue prefaces and essays. Now grouped colour plates repeating black and white figures scattered throughout the text are upon us. Our concern might focus upon the degree to which the mere availability of reproductive processes causes the needless proliferation of illustration as a more purely commercial vehicle, just as it may reduce the amount of new illustration because familiar negatives already exist. Unless compelling answers are forthcoming, I am tempted to say that this has already occurred – in much the same way that most periodical editors find it necessary to reduce by one-third illustration assembled by an author which serves no discernible purpose. As George Kubler has pointed out: ‘When change is wanted, the public itself require(s) only improvement or extensions upon the actual product. Public demand recognizes only what exists, unlike the inventors and artists whose minds turn more upon future possibilities ...’<sup>11</sup> We may transfer this idea to catalogues and exhibitions as ‘the seriation of the known,’ that is, of repeating in ever more complex manners formulae which once proved their worth. I submit with no particular humility that this expectation must change if the exhibition as an institutional phenomenon is to escape collapse by its own inertia.

How then are we to bridge the gap between object and spectator so as to give the public the presumed insights and knowledge of those who organized the exhibition? Again we may look to History for some ideas that have been forgotten in the press of things. In so doing, as Edgar Wind once remarked in a footnote, one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that exhibitions are now set up so as to yield on scrutiny the ‘desired’ sense much as do tightly-framed literary passages.<sup>12</sup> Yet none of this takes into account the amount of time that anyone *other* than a professional spends within an exhibition. It is my contention that many Canadian exhibitions are too tightly focused and repetitive to serve the general educated public; that for lack of means of comparison, visual literacy is actually declining. Nor am I alone in the uneasy sentiment that the public has perhaps been underestimated and overmanipulated. An exhibition is after all a social event (Fig. 1) and the subject of mutual conversation.

Yet one may well ask whether *yet another* one-man show chronicling an individual’s exhaustion of all possibilities of thematic or format development serves this end. If the show is called ‘didactic’ then selection and interpretation are presumed to be impeccable, and the very order in which objects are perceived must be determined. Perhaps the aggressive and highly selective display of artworks reduces the artistic experience to something too structured, too direct, too simplistic and, above all, too pretentious.

When looking at the full range of exhibition formats once current, we remark three basic types, the first of which was the simple *assemblage* of a number of objects having some roughly-defined linkage. In a word, an interesting variety more resembling an album than a *catalogue raisonné*! Following this train of thought, one might cast a glance at two standard types of 19th century exhibitions – the ‘retrospective’ and the many showings of ‘masterpieces or treasures.’

The first of these, the ‘amateur’s retrospective,’ has come down to us as the local or regional collectors’ exhibition. At once a testimony of interest in the arts and a means of exchanging information, of forming opinions as to attribution, date and quality, it recalls 18th-century tradition where the proper identification of a work of art was a major cultural service. (It still is.) As to the second, it doubtless stems from the great

<sup>10</sup> Some *initial* organisation of photographic services and archives must be presumed, whether within or without the collection itself. In the latter case this may involve approved photographers and/or the confiding of such tasks to purely commercial firms; in time, it concerns the *upgrading* of negatives which, whenever restoration is involved, necessarily proceeds quite apart from any external demand. A striking early example of the construction of a text around available photographs – in which even the reference numbers arising from photographic campaigns are cited – is V. Alinari, *Églises et couvents de Florence* (Florence: S. Landi, 1895).

<sup>11</sup> George Kubler, *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1962), 85.

<sup>12</sup> ‘The medium of diffusion tends to take precedence over the direct experience of the object, and more often than not the object itself is conceived with this purpose in mind,’ Edgar Wind, *Art and Anarchy: The Reith Lectures 1960*, revised and enlarged, including addenda, 1968 (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 79, cf. 76-77. Beyond any normal falsification of expectations as regards colour and configuration, the art catalogue normally effects a complete abstraction of absolute and relative scale of the objects exhibited, the consequences of which may be examined in the *Von Bembo bis Guardi. Meisterwerke oberitalienischer Malerei aus der Pinacoteca di Brera in Mailand und aus einigen Privatsammlungen* (Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, 3 Juli - 4 September 1975). The text volume has only installation shots revealing relative scale and the effect of groupings, while the album shows only the individual pictures.

Manchester Exhibition of 1857 – with its six fat catalogues and 3,342 works of art of truly encyclopaedic range – a bench-mark in exhibition history not soon to be repeated. From it we have derived the idea of *exceptional quality* in the objects shown; hence the innumerable ‘Treasures’ volumes, luxuriously produced albums drawn from permanent collections, albums depending upon the beauty of illustration. Yet ‘treasures’ surely means ‘unique or outstanding in its place and time,’ and this criterion should receive wider extension than it has. By definition, treasures are rather heterogeneous in nature, even if presuming some level of compatibility. It remains to find these objects and identify these levels.

Somewhere along the way the ‘treasures’ concept was changed into the thematic or historical exhibition, both rather difficult to pull off adequately. Each of these terms defines a particular focus – the ‘thematic’ one being more general while the ‘historical’ one presumes some defined point of view about the past. One of the earliest of these is the *Classicisme* show of 1846, featuring David and Ingres and reviewed by Baudelaire. All this is in marked difference to the type of historical show which, in the 18th century, simply exhibited objects under their owner’s name, as *curiosities*.

In turn, we are led to the observation that the catalogue is no longer a fixed image of an exhibition which was created for a certain environment *and no other*. With the advent of the shared or itinerant exhibition (recalling that the International Exhibitions Foundation and many smaller institutions as well now create exhibitions *only* for circulation) the mounting of objects in spaces *not intended for them* results in abrupt changes in context and scale. Unexpected aspects may be revealed, so one must impress upon galleries and museums the necessity of proper installation shots as documents of institutional history and taste. These may complement or even supplant catalogues, but they do form part of a sufficient concern with internal archives that must everywhere prevail.

In sum, when an exhibition circulates, it is all the more important to have a good catalogue since the perception of the objects changes constantly. And *what*, you may add, *is* a good catalogue? *Whatever* it is, its real test is an ability to stand on its own over a period of time, to triumph over limitations inherent in its subject or to surpass its author’s deficiencies. A fine catalogue would still be remembered were its subject eventually to lead to a monograph or more extensive

treatment, while its production values might, depending upon the case, be sufficient to interest the foreign market.

As to the public’s ‘experience’ with catalogues, it may be said that the average Swede or Belgian, just as any Canadian, knows primarily *his own country’s production*, and this perhaps only fractionally. No illusions are possible here: only the art professional or the scholar is concerned with continental or international production. This has necessarily different implications for Europe, given the smaller geographical area and, need one say, because of the multiple languages at one’s disposal. But it is curious to note that Europe has more loan exhibitions ‘from abroad’ than Canada, so the question remains open as to whether one can and should rely upon only national resources. If, however, the answer is *primarily* to depend upon national artistic patrimony – in its widest sense – I dare say that a serious effort in collections-building and propaganda is in order. This in turn requires new dedication and new types of training and thinking within the art community. As previously mentioned, the small format has a place apart, an ambiguous role in publishing everywhere. But this format may range from the very modest to the rather complex. You are surely aware that, as of this funding year, the National Museums of Canada will have as condition that its assisted publications be *bilingual*. Because of the lack of sensitive translators, the results are sure to be horrendous, yet this is at base simply another variable in catalogue design peculiar to Belgium, Canada and, perhaps, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Be it said, however, that these countries often produce multiple catalogues, or catalogues in the dominant language, and the public (particularly the foreign public) be damned. If only bilingualism were more intelligently approached: somehow the invariant reprinting of cited literature headed by *Bibliographie* while the letterpress has already appeared under *Bibliography*, seems unjustified by any reasoning. What bilingualism may accomplish, which should not be forgotten, is the titling of objects in some conscious and regular fashion in the two main language groups so as to avoid casual or incorrect reference.

No, the surest way to good publications is to know *why* you are producing them and to determine their *level* of publication withal. Some of these are bound to be virtual throwaways, but they need not be unattractive ... A hierarchy of involvement is implicit in this as in all publishing

ventures. One must decide what is negotiable; in a word, what *could* be sacrificed and what *is* absolutely essential to preserve. The 'little publications' are like the various articles of an encyclopaedia – not just subjects arranged alphabetically, but showing some order and progression in human knowledge. Only *regular* catalogue production becomes second nature and avoids the pitfalls of the occasional publication. As to historical record, the rise and perfection of photomechanical means can only diversify and facilitate catalogue production. When properly set up, an electric typewriter can produce fine-quality publications once one takes into account the wide variety of paper and elements. For certain efforts, standard typewriter paper could be used for creating sheets destined for three-ring binders, thus facilitating preservation, consultation and updating at modest cost.

For more sophisticated publications – those printed in some way – I dare say that the continuing problem is poor layout, where design does not advance understanding or pleasure but hinders it. Curiously enough, some exhibition catalogues more resemble dealer's catalogues or steamship menus than anything else. Designers' subtleties may be appreciated in some degree without, however, being able to define their qualities, and we further know that *design* is itself subject to *fashion*: the catalogues of the 1920s and 1930s have a 'look' about them, just as do those of the 50s, 60s and 70s, and as will those of the 80s. But it is to be hoped that there will be some discernible qualitative progression in the coming decade. (After all, if one were stopped dead by a poorly produced catalogue, the genre would have disappeared long ago.) There is an old saying that you can't tell a book by its cover. True enough. But a catalogue cover should tell you immediately whether to go farther because of a cover illustration – or title – that intrigues or repulses you. (In this context it is more important to have some strong feelings than any indifferent ones.) A cover illustration may be present for aesthetic or historical reasons, but its absence sets up no expectations; and this point might be considered in respect of art documentation, which is usually thought to be the result of *massive* illustration. I believe this is, once again, a 'future possibility syndrome' of those making a catalogue rather than looking back on it, as purchasers surely will. Within any historical or contemporary show, there is surely one work which is of the highest significance and quality. Perhaps it should appear on the cover, even be reproduced

in colour (budget permitting), while the rest should depend upon a meditated text.

It thus appears – and this is crucial to our considerations today – that the catalogue must exist on many levels of sophistication. I particularly say this in the face of those curators and directors who look down their noses at the \$200 or \$500, the \$1,000 or even the \$5,000 exhibition. The state of health of a discipline is like that of chain of being, as good as its weakest link. Without *feeder literature* making 'specific but limited' contributions, one can never progress into more complex spheres. I will go further: anyone who dismisses the good small exhibition may be sincere, but he is a fool. It is the level of *conception and execution* that make the difference, not just the means.

The catalogue has its ultimate effect in the concentration of attention upon artistic patrimony as a whole. Upon publication it generates interest and stimulates 'finds' for years to come, enriching thereby the amount of artistic documentation available to all. In its consultation, one has a series of familiar patterns or configurations which might otherwise have to be seen within a limited time and, perhaps, crowded viewing conditions within the exhibition itself. Matter for comparison with as yet unknown or unidentified objects is provided. Yet there is no valid reason why one should not forgo in great measure the 'fine art' exhibition and catalogue for that of the 'cultural' exhibition incorporating art objects<sup>13</sup> which is now common in Europe. Within perhaps a generation or so, one would have enough to work with at a scholarly level. Briefly said, the catalogue assures free and repeated access to an exhibition. Both the passage of time as well as the quite unpredictable intervals of time between consultations result in greater understanding since the catalogue is consulted *at leisure* and *at will*. There is no dearth of regional subjects that could regenerate local history and for which the catalogue is

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most pertinent and closely-reasoned observations on the conceptions underlying such 'permanent exhibitions' and their realization – most of whose lessons are transferable to similar material employed within the temporary exhibition of art-historical nature – are found in Jean-Pierre Babelon, 'Expositions et Musées d'Archives,' *La Gazette des Archives*, n.s., n° 38 (7 décembre 1962), 99-119. One might take special note of his comments (pp. 114-115) on the necessity of considering more closely the roles, complexity and interrelations of catalogues, labels and panels, and of inspiring 'du respect au public pour le catalogue et pour ce qu'il contient de travail et d'érudition.' This latter issue applies as much, if not more, to the Administrations of the institutions in which catalogues are produced.

the least common denominator. I dare say that such effort is indispensable for an understanding of history and culture as exemplified by art.

A number of indispensable qualifiers must follow such a glowing call to arms: the exhibition concept must revolve around or converge toward artistic documentation. The catalogue must be well-produced, which means well-edited. Few of the public at large realize, and few professionals care to admit, that the exhibition is a *restrictive format*. In its purest form it deals with what is *on exhibition* and is therefore current; by extension, it becomes a publication to accompany an exhibition and often results in a book issued long after the show closes.

This brings us to another curious contradiction: a catalogue is issued for the exhibition even as it is supposed to record its 'results'! It therefore *anticipates* the fact ... This perception led Georges Wildenstein to suggest in 1957 that the catalogue 'resulting' from an exhibition would most justify the expense of the whole enterprise were it issued after the exhibition closed and once all reasonable critical comment was in.<sup>14</sup> (This comment is only valid for a certain type of exhibition to be sure.) Yet, as an editor, I am distressed by the lack of proper and serious critical attention given Canadian exhibitions once the journalists have suggested that the public flock to see them. If the art community were larger and less inbred, did it not suffer from professional shortfall as a result of rapid expansion between 1967-1977, I believe that catalogues might improve as a result of informed public comment. Whatever the time and energy expended in their creation, catalogue production remains a 'cottage industry' whose artisans have very different ideas of their craft. Otherwise put, they may not know it well if at all.

I hasten to add that a Guest Curator from the University is *not* the answer. On the whole they write as poorly as anyone else, and who among the permanent staff of a museum or gallery has not had to recast at critical moments the first (and perhaps only) catalogue of someone just finishing studies; for whom the splendidly edited result will provide rather misleading but impressive credentials for future employ? An exhibition catalogue is a very special brand of literature and, in general, most writers struggle so heroically with *content* that *form and expression* suffer. By this I mean that they seem incapable of taking an

existing catalogue in hand and examining it to see whether its lessons are appropriate to affairs to hand.

Faced with this, I instituted a decade ago an exercise on catalogue evaluation within a seminar on bibliography, methodology and historiography. This, since I observed that students at the fourth-year and even the M.A. level used this literature uncritically for reference purposes. They may be right in one thing: the catalogue *presents itself* as the most current, the most authorized statement on the subject once one excepts journal articles. (This may, but need not, be so.) As a result, students have been required to examine five catalogues – three in foreign language – in each of two topical groupings:

- an artist or group of artists
- a theme or technique (stained glass, art conservation, The Bronze Age).

One of these assignments is given as a 10-15 minute oral presentation, and both critiques are written up in 5-7 pages with all apparatus, for submission. Grades are based upon material description of the catalogue and presentation of content, specific contribution to knowledge as well as a guess as to the likely *historical position* of the catalogues discussed. Come seminar, the catalogues are fingered by all, much as we are doing today, to facilitate examination and comparison. I can assure you that comments are matter-of-fact and usually devastating. I can also assure you that catalogue literature is never again taken for granted.

There is admittedly one flaw in this exercise: it cannot be done without possessing many catalogues of all dates and from all over the world so that foreign language capacity is incidentally brought to bear on a subject. There is one lacuna as well: students criticise without actually experiencing the *gestation* of a catalogue. This will be remedied in 1981-1982 when a complementary seminar will be introduced, this time dealing with the development of exhibition concepts and supervised writing of entries, prefaces and apparatus. I shudder to think of the preparation required, but I see no other solution to the problem than sensitizing people to the problematical aspects of catalogues ... and *only then* to have them participate in catalogue writing. Time will tell. But grounding in research methods has to begin somewhere, sometime.

Certain catalogues are demonstrably successful, sought after. Others are eminently forgettable, while still others manifest the best intentions

<sup>14</sup> Georges Wildenstein, 'À propos des catalogues d'expositions,' *La Chronique des arts*, supplément à la *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, n<sup>os</sup> 1060-1061 (mai-juin 1957), 1.

through deficient technique. What is important to the public who have seen an exhibition is that the catalogue not have a different spirit or direction; what is also important, if pressed, is that they confess that they are buying fewer catalogues these days 'because of the expense.' One would like to be able to effect an *anatomy* of the more successful catalogues. In the end, one realizes that these have a peculiar aura which pervades ... and sells. In sum, much depends upon what the public has come to know (and to expect) of an institution's catalogues *as a whole*, not necessarily of any *given* catalogue. Some exhibition organizers have adopted a recognizable *house style*; their publications are identifiable at ten paces and, whatever the subject, line up nicely on library shelves. Those of the Grand-Palais, Paris, and of the Cologne Museums come to mind, even though the latter are as unpleasant as the former are agreeable. In the battle for institutional image, one may lose individual battles yet gain the war by producing regularly, almost industrially. Other houses prefer to *number* their catalogues.<sup>15</sup> This assigns them a defined order of appearance and permits librarians to notice gaps in holdings not otherwise apparent. Some catalogues even give a listing of all prior catalogues, available or not, on the inside back cover, although this is practicable only for a restricted or specialized production. But such cases are decidedly in the minority, perhaps for the reason that both the public and the producing institutions consider the *catalogue of the moment* rather than catalogues past and future. Perhaps the best advice is to say that, lacking sufficient comparison, one must simply address the material and hope for the best.

In theory, this latter solution permits a variety of decisions giving variety to a gallery's catalogues, sometimes to the point of anarchy. In practise, it often results in a certain blandness or, worse yet, wild variations which have but little to do with their appropriateness to a given subject. But the day of recognition for the catalogue has doubtless arrived with the creation of the Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Award for Museum Scholarship, founded this year by the College Art Association of America for the 'museum catalogue published during the penultimate year that is judged to have made the most exemplary contribution to knowledge.' Catalogues of public or private collections – or exhibitions – are also eligible. With them might come the Renaissance of the 'little publication.' And all its problems.

I should here like to insert a heartfelt plea for accessible handlists or summary illustrated catalogues of your permanent collections. The National Inventory Programme is *not* the answer.<sup>16</sup> \$3,723,000 later, it has been discovered that information tendered by some 150 institutions over nine years is both unreliable and incompatible, as if 'Fine & Decorative Arts, History, Ethnology, Ornithology and Archaeological Sites & Specimens' *ever* had anything in common. It also seems that this information is not for public access and that the 45 terminals of the NIP are intended as a means of collections management, that is, as *internal* records. It is safe to say that the NIP might never have been considered a panacea had widespread and adequate permanent collections checklists existed. Most of these since the 19th century were, by the way, written and printed by *private initiative* anyhow, which is rather depressing unless you happen to think, as I, that this might be the normal state of affairs.<sup>17</sup> It follows that the NIP is a 'locations' device, provided you *know* what you want and someone has *described* it correctly. Like all software it presumes that information – in this case works of art – is somehow quantifiable and that adequate descriptive and, perhaps, scholarly research has already been done. What software may prevent is the putting together by anyone of disparate pieces of information to form something infinitely more complex and worthwhile. In this light, permanent collections and temporary exhibitions seem to converge towards a single purpose. And I am led to wonder aloud whether museum and gallery holdings are as well known *to each other*, to scholars and to the public as might be thought?

15 Most notably the Guggenheim Museum, New York, and the Stedelijk in Amsterdam. The rise of interest in scholarly catalogues of drawings exhibitions can be precisely dated to 1951, at which time the Cabinet des Dessins (Louvre) and the Gabinetto Disegni & Stampe degli Uffizi began their series.

16 Once disencumbered of its prudent rhetorics, my facts are drawn from H. D. Hemphill's *Report to the Council of Associate Museum Directors on the National Inventory Program* (May 1980). Their formulation is mine alone, although it is but an echo of the more general dissatisfaction voiced at the level of participating institutions.

17 Cf. Denise Jalabert, 'Répertoire des catalogues des musées de province,' *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français* (1923), 121-290. One should particularly distinguish differences between editions and reprintings of given catalogues, noting the date of the first and all succeeding catalogues in respect of that of the collection's foundation – all of which led Marquet de Vasselot to remark in his preface: 'Ces répertoires prouvent que, sans des initiatives privées, des ouvrages de référence très utiles, concernant des services publics et dont l'impression devrait être assurée par les Administrations intéressées, ne seraient pas édités.'

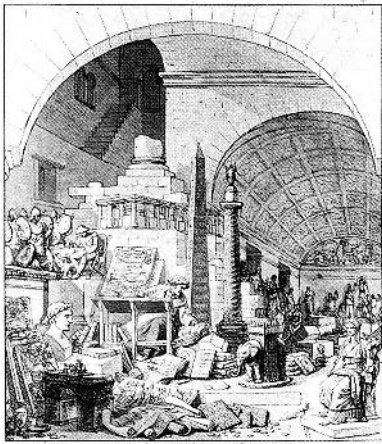


FIGURE 7. Benjamin Zix, *Dominique-Vivant Denon, Head of the Louvre, cataloguing Art Objects including Conquests from the Napoleonic Wars, 1811*. Drawing, 380 × 330 mm. An ideal view in its first version of three, prior to modification of details, notably the enlargement of the elephant and obelisk, and of chiaroscuro. Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Inv. 33404.

Many older collections are worse catalogued (Fig. 7) than those of more recent origin, and with more justification.<sup>18</sup> As a rule, temporary exhibitions are generated from gifts or bequests which have entered the collection on the pretext of commemorating a curator's activity or a benefactor's taste.<sup>19</sup> Still other collections have adopted another method, with varying results.

<sup>18</sup> Catalogues of permanent collections are of inevitably 'progressive' character. Once *minimum professional standards* have been attained, they are thereafter more questions of the complexity and refinement of scientific apparatus and presentation – format, the number and choice of illustration, reattributions, augmentations and the like. After a certain point it becomes much easier to determine what is appropriate to a given audience and to generate ever more sophisticated productions on the whole, so maintenance of *continuity* is paramount. Compare, for example, J.J. Marquet de Vasselot, *Répertoire des catalogues du Musée du Louvre, 1793-1917, suivi de la liste des directeurs et conservateurs du Musée* (Paris: Hachette, 1917) and his *Répertoire des catalogues du Musée du Louvre, 1793-1926*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd. rev. et aug. (Paris: Musées Nationaux, 1927).

<sup>19</sup> At time of writing it may be said that the greater part of cataloguing of permanent collections in Canada has assumed the form, in descending order of importance, of temporary exhibition catalogue entries, of exhibitions generated upon receipt of considerable gifts or bequests and, more rarely, of annual or periodic showings of 'New Acquisitions;' see Irene Beaupré, *Bibliography of Canadian Permanent Exhibition Catalogues* (University of Toronto: Department of Fine Art, 1979). In this context one can only commend the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, for the inauguration in 1956 and 1957 of two parallel catalogue series printed by a *trade publisher*, the first devoted to exhibitions generated in large measure from collections, the second to the collections themselves. The former effort has since been extended to cooperative ventures between public institutions and dealers so as to assure a greater variety of venues for exhibitions.

<sup>20</sup> *Trésors des Musées du Nord de la France*, iv: *La peinture française aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Dunkerque/Valenciennes/Lille, 1980); see especially, pp. 13-19, the essay of J. Thuillier, 'Réflexions à propos d'une exposition. Pour une politique régionale.' A similar initiative, proceeding from works held in three institutions, resulted in a splendid yet portable monograph-as-exhibition catalogue: *Carle Vanloo, premier peintre du roi, 1705-1765* (Nice/Clermont-Ferrand/Nancy, 21 janvier-15 août 1977).

There is something inherently touching about mounting a show containing a very minor work (even by a major artist) surrounded by better works from other collections, just as there is something basically honest in working with what one has and putting it in larger perspective through loans. In this light, perhaps the nature (and regularity) of institutional cooperation might be examined.

Precedents for this type of arrangement have existed for well over a decade, 'this' being to get the permanent collections on the exhibition circuit. One such understanding is to send part of Collection X to Collection Y, only to receive an exhibition in kind. This is important for two reasons:

- it permits everyone to see what the collections are and what their level is;
- it stimulates restoration and cataloguing which are long overdue.

Concerted action among compatible collections should stimulate wider public interest while, as a result of a published catalogue, these collections could begin to exist to scholar and public alike. Why not form a consortium arrangement which might originate exhibitions based on works within a province or between provinces? To cite only one striking example, no less than eleven collections in the French provinces recently put on a show of eighty-five 17th-18th century French paintings.<sup>20</sup> Its catalogue has full colour illustration and an agreeable text for around \$20, followed by a black-and-white repertory and catalogue of artworks of that area of interest (even minor ones) represented in all eleven collections.

Naturally such older foundations have more in common (and more to draw upon) than most of their Canadian counterparts. But one must propagandise the permanent collections, drawing attention to the museums and galleries of Ontario and other provinces rather than to individual works from given collections. A catalogue of this type has greater potential for wide geographical appeal even as it spreads costs throughout many collections. It provides impetus for good and regular collecting and it might redress the present programme imbalance favouring contemporary artists. If only one show of quality could be mounted every two or three years, the results one

or two decades hence could be immeasurable. Of course we are speaking of the setting up of mechanisms to favour a sure and almost inevitable progression over a period of time. It is understood that vast funding on a crisis basis is undesirable and would surely misfire; but there must be a sustained effort toward cataloguing and publicising the permanent collections in many ways.

We might recapitulate as follows: institutional purchase (libraries, museums) represents relatively assured catalogue sales, while public interest may not always be assured. To acquire a catalogue means hearing about it, by word of mouth or by something in print, and *Quill and Quire* does not repertory anything having less than 75 pages! Some catalogue jobbers exist, usually adding up to 40% for a service which consists largely of buying and distributing in bulk. (OAAG might herself take on some coordinating role in this line.) Yet all this seems a confession of inadequacy or lack of vitality on the part of acquisition librarians.

To fill this gap and reduce correspondence for individual transactions, Museum Exchange was instituted years ago and is rapidly degenerating as galleries discover that they are not getting equivalent exchange for their own production and are effectively subsidising other institutions. Reliance upon this system has led to further impoverishment of funding for curatorial libraries. Should the system fail altogether, even significantly degenerate beyond present levels, it will have consequences far beyond the need for healthier budgets. Some of these are already apparent. One may receive multiple copies of catalogues from circulating exhibitions; permanent catalogues are not usually exchanged. This latter problem is entirely justifiable: permanent catalogues are large and expensive, so the deployment of personnel and funds over a period of time should be acknowledged and adequately recompensed. As a whole, Canadian production is of inferior quality in respect of the English, German and the French. But we must also acknowledge that we see the result of different traditions in funding catalogue production over the years, that is to say, of experience, of personnel and organisation. I for one would like to think that the strengthening of major art reference centres might result in better catalogues because of better research and familiarity with what has been produced. Two recent Ontario collection catalogues were immeasurably strengthened by research at the AGO and elsewhere, particularly by

use of Canadian artists' reference files. One might accordingly query extensive reliance upon interviews and material description and insert some heavier research commitment in Canadian catalogues.

In any event the Museum Exchange programme becomes rather problematical unless one knows what is *dome* with the material received. Is it regularly kept for retrieval in reference or curatorial collections, thrown into closets or distributed among personnel and friends? This seemingly impertinent question, for which precise answers could be forthcoming, leads to the whole issue of catalogue production in relation to the different museums and galleries. Is any *use* being made of them; can scholarly literature be *generated* from them, particularly in recently-founded galleries? The realities must be faced: even over several decades it is unlikely that new libraries based on exhibition literature alone can render much service to themselves. One must build on established strength, with a continuity in tradition which can be extended into the future. Ontario is fortunate to have two major centres for art research, Ottawa and Toronto, the others, according to a National Library survey of 1978, being Montreal and Vancouver.<sup>21</sup> All these have, as well, the necessary general libraries to back up art research. Predominant strength is not simply domination but the recognition of the value of concentration in resources. I would recommend that curators everywhere discover the full range of documentation that exists on subjects of interest rather than contenting themselves with what is merely to hand.

In all this we must recall that the public is not and cannot be fascinated by *erudition*. Whether a catalogue entry has three or fifty-three references, or whether the catalogue itself has an extensive bibliography, is perhaps of no real use to them, although it is essential to the scholar.<sup>22</sup> No one wishes, moreover, to put out *multiple* catalogues where *one* would do, although the tabloid format (*Petit Journal*) at modest cost has enjoyed success since it costs little, is relatively portable and can be pitched once its immediate interest has passed. But all catalogue producers should

21 *Research Collections in Canadian Libraries*, 6: *Fine Arts Library Resources in Canada* (Ottawa: National Library, 1978), 1, 35.

22 One successful attempt to do a 'combined' catalogue incorporating both general and very specific information, particularly as regards historiography and attribution, is the *Primitifs flamands anonymes. Maîtres au noms d'emprunt des Pays-Bas méridionaux du XV<sup>e</sup> et du début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Catalogue avec supplément scientifique* (Groeningemuseum, Bruges, 14 juin - 21 septembre 1969).



FIGURE 8. Michel-Honoré Bounieu, *The Arts Bereft: Allegory on the Distressed Circumstances of the Musée Central des Arts (Louvre)*, inaugurated 23 Thermidor An II / 10 August 1793 and opened to the public 8 November following. Mezzotint, 595 × 373 mm. BN Est. Dc 19.



realize that their publications are of great potential interest to all and determine minimum production standards for *defined* purposes. (One of the most successful catalogues ever done – in 1929 – became a book which has since been reprinted but whose text was the first proper descriptive labels for engravings.<sup>23</sup>) But I here speak as a connoisseur of catalogues, not as one examining the gallery sales balance at the end of an exhibition. Otherwise put, your public is more than a stone's throw away from your gallery, provided you wish it thus.

None of us can predict exactly what will be retained by historical selection in either permanent collection or exhibition activity. One thing is sure: without catalogues, it will be impossible to *evaluate* that activity. So I submit that, if you have permanent collections, then the public *is owed* a handlist at very least, perhaps more. (For that reason, a third pile of catalogues is here exhibited, corresponding to Ontario only.) I dare say that the roles of museums, public galleries and the dealers – even unto the nonprofit or 'parallel' galleries – must also be re-examined to see whether their assumed roles are indeed proper ones. In short, nothing can ever match individual initiative (Fig. 8) in seeking one's own salvation.

<sup>23</sup> William M. Ivins, Jr., *Notes on Prints. Being the Text of Labels Prepared for a Special Exhibition of Prints from the Museum Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1930). Reprint (New York: Da Capo, 1967).

<sup>24</sup> Hans Tietze, *Review of Luitpold Dussler, Sebastiano del Piombo*, in *Art Bulletin*, xxvi (June 1944), 129.

I am also mindful of the fact that institutions exercising public mandates often have difficulty in advancing solutions to even the most pressing problems. After all, they are in common parlance thought to 'respond' to public demand; yet to assume this passive role is exceedingly dangerous for their collective and individual conscience and, doubtless, for their survival as art professionals. I should like to assure you that RACAR is willing to put before the public the necessity of permanent catalogues, but that its task would be made easier were OAG and other professional associations to manifest their concern in the form of resolutions to this effect. Whatever the difference in vocabulary or avenue of approach, art professionals form a community which should upon occasion act as one. Not upon impulse or inspiration, for to originate is carefully, patiently and understandingly to combine.

In conclusion, I should like to feel part of a privileged generation – the one that came to grips with basic custodial obligations and established a firm foundation for their successors to work, and to work better. I can think of no finer guide than the words of Hans Tietze in 1944:

To my way of thinking, research is not an autonomous realm within which any problem, that of an artist of secondary interest included, can be allowed to assume disproportionate importance. Such an attitude ... belongs to the stage, now left behind, of economic abundance, and demands revision. In the field of art history, as in others, a more planned economy seems unavoidable. Each individual study should fit into a general pattern not drawn, to be sure, by a 'leader' or by any other appointed or self-appointed agency, but established by a conscientious and responsible examination of the needs existing in the field of studies in question.<sup>24</sup>

Are we really sure to have made substantial progress towards this goal in the intervening thirty-five years? Come the year 2000, I dare say we would all like to look back to this workshop and know that something of worth began here because of a free exchange of different viewpoints regarding problems in common.

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## RÉSUMÉ

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Observations sur la plus grande entreprise de publication non contrôlée au monde. Sont présentées dans cet article les tendances actuelles de l'édition de catalogues d'expositions temporaires et permanentes, principalement en Ontario et au Canada. Ces tendances sont considérées ici dans le contexte de l'avènement de l'exposition d'art comme phénomène culturel. L'étude s'attache en outre à faire ressortir les points de vue plutôt contradictoires de celui qui produit ces oeuvres éphémères et de celui qui éventuellement les achètera. Un certain nombre de modèles de catalogues sont proposés avec un aperçu de ce que chacun implique pour le personnel des musées, pour le financement de la publication et pour le savoir.

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