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Richard Long
A Generous Sharing

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TEXTS IN ENGLISH

THE GREAT CHALLENGE

By Andrée PARADIS

What kind of relation exists between the function of art criticism and the policy of regionalization in geocultural ensembles? By all the evidence, a very close tie and a complete interdependence. At present, in most countries, although to varying degrees, the decentralization factor, linked to the active rôle of the media, involves a new examination of the critical function in order that it may play its proper part, that of the dissemination of art and the encouragement of creation. It is obvious that a good policy of regionalization cannot come about without the co-operation of the apparatus of criticism. Failing this, an atmosphere of false security is established and risks sterilizing the creative effort, which is in constant need of being evaluated.

At the conference of the International Association of Art Critics held at Sophia Antipolis from September 12 to 20, 1982, these questions were debated particularly on two themes: *The function of art criticism in geocultural and regional ensembles* and *Art criticism in the media age*. First let us look at the place where the conference was held. Sophia Antipolis, new city of the Arts and the Sciences, erected at Antibes on the Mediterranean shore in a unique setting, is a place of research on industrial creation. From year to year the accomodations are increasing, in order that all artistic and scientific domains may eventually be assembled to work for reflection and common experience.

Criticism, like art, is always evolving: it expands steadily through new contributions that enrich or impoverish it according to the use made of them. The new ideas from sociology have allowed criticism to be sensitive to socio-historical changes that have had an influence, not only on our methods of communication – this famous passing from the written to the audiovisual – but also on the evolution of the forms of expression which reflect in plastic language the phases of transition that civilizations go through. As for the contributions from semiology, they have led criticism to take an interest in the functioning of works, in studying the relationships that exist between container and contents, in encouraging the accessibility of the viewer to the work. These approaches are different from the traditional methods of the history of art, whether they be formalist or interpretative, but they are complementary to an appreciable degree. It is the same with the approaches arising from psychoanalysis, and from those which spread doctrinaire ideology. As each has its own language, we can measure the complex intensity of the vocabularies used by critical information.

Will the new technologies force more unified or more simplified approaches? For the moment, we are questioning ourselves on the opportuneness of the kinds of orientation. Should we opt for information or for instruction? Ought we to aim at professional groups or at the public at large? What exactly do we hope for from innovative programmes? Who is going to choose? And once these things are done, what use shall we make of them?

All new technology disturbs, and already bitter criticisms are afloat around the recording of the means of culture. What is most violently attacked is the accumulation of banks of images, for example. In all cases, it will be necessary to measure and be more selective. Criticism must develop its strategies while making sure of the constructive and complementary rôle of the audiovisual. Cinema, in this sense, is an admirable success; it has managed to effect the symbiosis of an art and a cultural practice.

Our perception of the image is changing fundamentally (R. Berger). The rapid evolution of technology forces us to realize that stable representation is being transformed into dynamic communication. It is necessary to change rhetoric although books still fulfil their rôle well; video, cassettes, records will do something else. This is a field of exploration where we must find the new conditions of articulation of the speech that accompanies the work of art, while avoiding the imposing of a type of speech.

No doubt, in the future the critic will have to leave his desk and learn to come to terms with the designer and the cameraman. The ideal would be that he would become a cameraman himself! At the rate at which things are developing, we must imagine a complete transformation of the habits of writing ten years from now.

At Sophia Antipolis (the city opposite), in the Mediterranean mellowness of the first days of September, a gentle wisdom prevailed at the discussions. President Haulica reminded us that if we feel that we have gone back to our proper selves, in tune with our true being, as only the Mediterranean – as Goethe said – has the gift of making us achieve this, it will not be for having avoided the tensions of the Idea, but really for having debated a bitter and invigorating matter.

RICHARD LONG: A GENEROUS SHARING

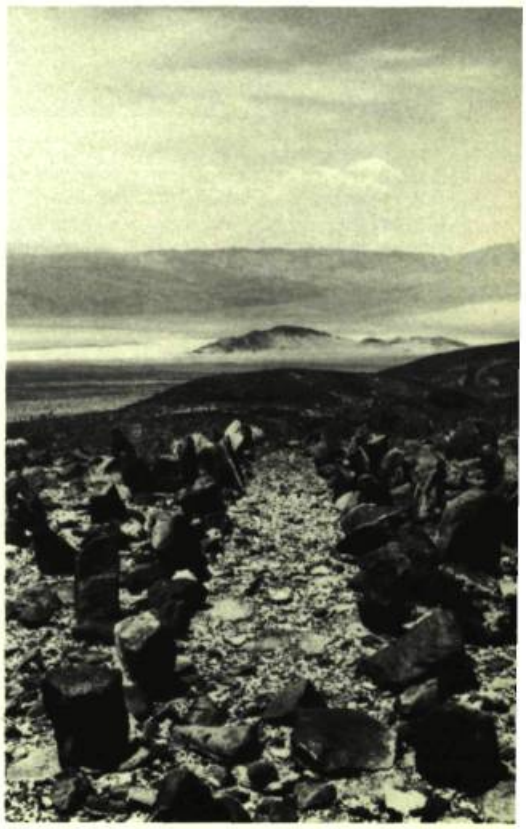
An artist is surely by definition original. Why then do some seem more original than others? Is originality, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder? Or perhaps in the eye of the artist himself. This seems to be the case with the British sculptor-photographer Richard Long.

Long has an acute awareness of himself, physically moving across the earth. He likes to walk and often makes a photograph of the path he has taken. This may be in this native British Isles such as *A Line of Scotland, Cúl Mór.* Or he may go farther afield, to walk and photograph the traces he finds and leaves, e.g. *Forêt du Porge Line, Bordeaux; A Line in Japan, Mount Fiji; A Line in Bolivia Kicked Stones;* or *A Line in California*.

When he can't walk himself, Richard Long makes stones walk. He lays carefully chosen shapes and sizes of stone in straight or circular patterns to create a rough sort of sculpture on the floor of the gallery showing his work, or in his own studio, where he photographs the stones for a permanent record. Examples of this are *Six Stone Circles, London; River Avon Mud Circles; Paris,* and *Wood Fire Circle, Bordeaux*.

These examples of Richard Long's work are all taken from an exhibition catalogue which he designed himself, to accompany the presentation of his work at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa this winter[1]. For Richard Long not only walks and photographs these walks, he also creates the book which will contain the experiences.

1. Richard LONG
A Line in California.



The curator of his exhibition in Ottawa awaited Long's arrival with particular interest and curiosity this autumn, because Long had promised to use rock from a local Ottawa quarry to concoct an on-the-spot sculpture when he arrived. He also brought with him pocketfuls of a special mud-dust which, when mixed with water, gave him the substance he needed to create a special effects happening in Canada's National Gallery.

Original, yes. Also strong, breezy, physical. Richard Long presents a happy aspect of modern man on earth to-day – one that is far from the fumes and smoke of big city life – walking instead through the rocks and hills and open skies of ancient time and space.

He writes of his own work: "The source of my work is nature...A walk moves through life, it is physical but afterwards invisible." And so Richard Long turns to sculpture, maps, texts, photographs, to record and pass on the experience, which to him is art. It is a generous sharing.

1 From October 21, 1982 to January 9, 1983.

Anne McDOUGALL