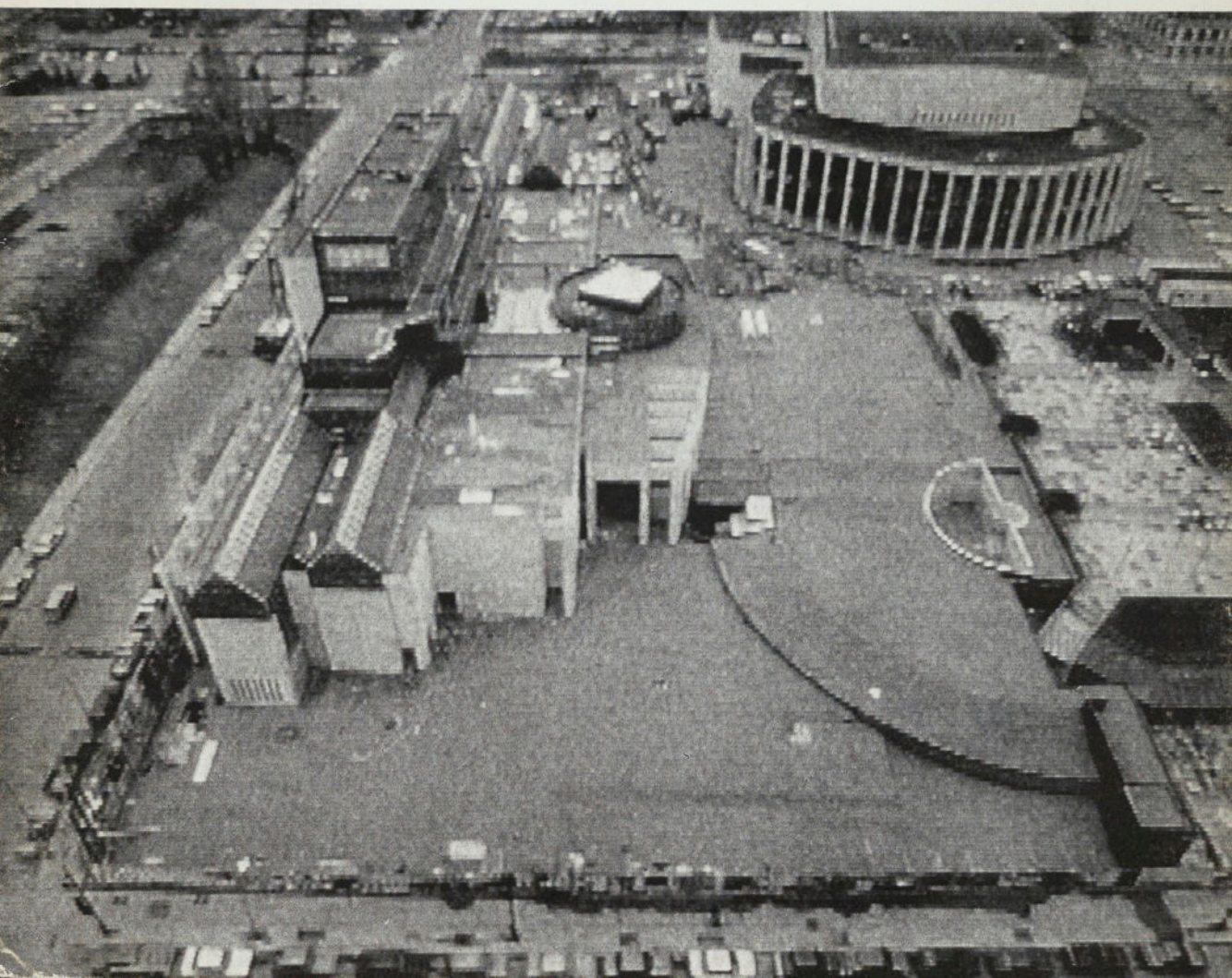
 MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

LOUIS
COUTURIER

26 | 11
May | October 1992

Muséologie



Muséologie

Louis Couturier is a young Québec artist whose work is being presented for the first time at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Indeed, what better opportunity could there be than the inauguration of this new building. First, because *Muséologie* reminds us of one of the institution's traditions — one that is also linked to its mandate — namely to show works by younger artists, or of a more experimental nature. And second, because the actual work presented by Louis Couturier, a video installation, also makes us wonder and think, both about the role of the museum and about its relationship with the work exhibited.

M*uséologie* consists of nine video monitors each showing, one after the other, from its foundations to its very recent completion, the different stages in constructing the new building that now houses the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. To begin with, the playfulness of this piece (which clearly relates to the moment chosen for its presentation), combined with its ambiguousness, is somewhat surprising. The work could actually be nothing more than a means of promoting the institution, or else an archive-type account documenting the construction of this new building which is the very site of the installation. No doubt these aspects are a part of Couturier's work. However, aside from its conceptual character, which should also be pointed out here — the space-time contraction of the museum building process — this work goes well beyond these initial considerations.

Playfully and ironically, this work has selected an almost literal method of illustration. In wanting to talk to us about the museum, *Muséologie* has chosen to imitate one of this institution's main functions, namely to show: the museum shows the work, which itself reveals the museum. Here the object's status as a work of art will be made official by everything the institution brings into play in these cases, namely optimum exhibition conditions, prominent identification in keeping with museological standards, an exhibition brochure including an analysis of the work, photographic documentation and artist's résumé, along with the promotional support that generally accompanies all of the museum's activities, such as press releases, advertisements, etc.

In fact, what might possibly not be a work of art, but proves to be one after all, thus reveals, through this reversibility of roles, the mechanisms in which art in general is confined and in which museums, galleries, critics and collectors form the dynamics of what we may call the art system. Couturier shows a clear desire to demystify

1. In the (translated) words of Louis Couturier himself.

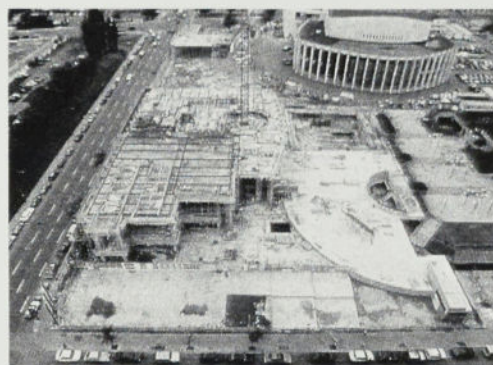
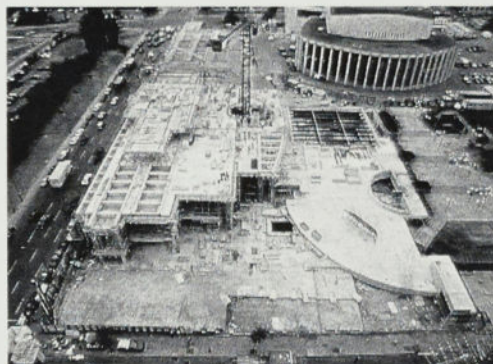
the work of art, in displaying the whole process of achieving this status by an object that the museum, gallery, etc. has decided to promote. Thus appropriated by the institution and its entire system of dissemination, the object so designated acquires, in a way, the aura attached to its new status which will then be strongly inclined to overshadow the real meaning of that object or, worse still, to drain it of its substance.

Quite plainly, *Muséologie* therefore warns us against the temptation of a purely formalist approach to the work, an approach that too easily evades the context of what we could call the historical reality inherent in its creation. For Couturier, the "myth of the autonomous work that has its own discourse, outside of time, and that is polished by the patina of history"¹ does not exist. The work comes into being and develops in a particular framework which is part of it and which must be known in order to properly understand the work and grasp its full meaning. Dissociating it from that, retaining only the formal aspect, means misrepresenting it.

The first in a series of presentations reexamining the art object and the institutional process, *Muséologie* could not broach such considerations at a more appropriate time. As the museum, finally moving downtown, prepares to play a role of more daily importance in the cultural life of Montréal and Québec, and as art and institutions increasingly want to be a party to the social issues being experienced now and to be experienced in the near future, the presentation of this work by Louis Couturier is timely and enlightening. It will remind some, and suggest to others, that any work, when appropriated by an institution, runs the risk of seeing its meaning shift or finding its content altered or diverted. What is more, this is happening just when this content, which has been growing in importance in recent years, is being used by more and more artists as an instrument for increased awareness and for social change.

■ Gilles Godmer





Photographic excerpts
from 8 of the 9 videodisks
in *Muséologie*, 1989-1992.
Video installation, colour,
9 min. ea., sound.
228.5 x 195.5 x 90 cm.
Photos: Louis Couturier

LOUIS COUTURIER

*Born in Sherbrooke, Québec, in 1960.
Studied at the École nationale des beaux-
arts, Lyon, France, from 1983 to 1988.
Lives and works in Montréal, Québec.*

Solo Exhibitions

- 1989 120 Volt 60 Hertz, 4600 Hôtel-de-Ville Street,
Montréal, Québec
- 1990 *Narcissisme et tautologie*, Collège Édouard-Montpetit art
gallery, Longueuil, Québec
- 1992 *Objets trouvés, images volées (collection d'une attitude)*
[in collaboration with Jacky Lafargue], Collège Édouard-
Montpetit art gallery, Longueuil, Québec
- Attitude d'artistes* [in collaboration with Jacky Lafargue],
1124 Marie-Anne Street East, Montréal, Québec

Group Exhibitions

- 1986 *18 images/sec.*, Galerie Plan de travail, Lyon, France
- 1987 *Cinq êtres humains*, 13, rue d'Algérie, Lyon, France
- 1988 *Octobre des arts*, École nationale des beaux-arts, Lyon, France

Bibliography

Molin Vasseur Annie. — "Le Golfe". — Etc. Montréal. —
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by artists. — Article by Louis Couturier: p. 14. — Special
section on art and war

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