

## Letter to the Editor

Bradford R. Collins

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rounded us, of all we have said and of what was said around us, that is my aim. The task is tremendous and my means are weak"<sup>2</sup>.

At the beginning, Boltanski tried to find again all that remained of his childhood, from his birth to his sixth year. The elements were few and sometimes trivial: a book, a piece of a pullover, a lock of hair; so the artist tried to preserve, to fix existential moments of his present life, by putting them in metal boxes. These, opened later, made possible the global, almost perfect remembrance of such or such a day of Boltanski. He quickly realized the mark of authenticity of this notion, on account of the infinite number of elements that enter into each minute of our lives. He therefore understood that the contents of his boxes were only a tiny part of a few moments.

In the face of this difficulty, Boltanski decided to reconstruct his childhood from memory. He had himself photographed while playing the moments and the movements which had not been captured or kept at the time they occurred. Thus he threw the pillow again, as he thought he had done on October 15, 1949; he slid once more down the banister as on July 6, 1951; he shot a water-pistol, as on May 15, 1952, . . . On the other hand, the artist recreated in modelling clay all the things that surrounded him during this period (1948-1954). "In spite of the concern for authenticity brought to the décor of the photographs, and the conscientious work of the modelling (some objects were begun more than twenty times), I did not succeed in conveying the reality of my past"<sup>3</sup>.

This proves that his work is a failure, that it is only the plan of an ideal work to be accomplished; for it is obvious that the work of the artist is, after all, only raw information — that is, pretext, point of departure, fragments to set off each one's retrospective and evolving perception. An ideology that apparently hides its vast charm, its potential destined to be developed in our brains. While it is a failure, it seems artificial to us, on the other hand, to compare this work to a simple photographic experience, indeed of a collector or a man of letters (a Proustian analogy that its author rejects).

Media of photo and object are, in this precise case, only the personal choice of supports more fitting, by their impact and their effectiveness, to the discourse they convey; a choice that itself expresses the breach that carries the artist from the technical values of an art, if not completely outstripped, at least in agony.

In Boltanski's work the idea of non-dying is to make a non-existence aware, to assume the wish to be others and to confess it without shame. The photograph, a medium that preserves the thing, is at the same time the proof of the death of that very thing since it crystallizes the moment. Like the photograph, the museum is the place of protection where the object is no longer an object, but the image of it. Boltanski, therefore, in making little personal museums, lost museums that are his work, tells a story that is not his, while being his own because it belongs to everyone. "I am a sum of others", he acknowledges. "Even if an experience never lived by anyone should happen to me, I would not have any new thoughts to suffer it, nor any new words to express it. Therefore, I repeat, we always repeat what has already been said, even while drawing analogies, like that of the astronaut who, going around Earth, said it was blue."

In 1971 Boltanski began his *Inventories*. Now, he is also interested in the gag aspect

of the persons in childhood. In front of the camera, the artist himself reconstructs the gestures that recall those of mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, etc. He restores to us cliché images in which comedy and ridicule abound.

On the subject of the *Inventories* from which he has lately exhibited *34 Rules and Techniques Used in June 1972 by a Child of Nine Years*, at the Galerie Sonnabend in Paris, Boltanski stated that this method sends him back to his own memories. "By asking for the photograph album that my friend Michael D's parents had, I, who knew nothing about them, wished to try to reconstitute their life by using these pictures which, taken at all important moments, would remain after their death as the evidence of their existence. I was able to discover the order in which they had been taken and the ties that existed between the persons they pictured. But I realized that I could go no further, because these documents seemed to belong to the mutual memories of any family, and anyone could recognize himself in these photographs of holidays or of anniversaries"<sup>4</sup>.

At Sonnabend's a real little museum obedient to a certain museum-aesthetic, related the world of an unknown boy through framed things and photographs, arranged according to scenes, in series of four, six, eight, among which were some of rectangular shape, like those of the swing, the forming of the triangle, the game of marbles; others vertical: like the tree-climbing, the soccer game, the descent, the banister. In a show-case were displayed labelled objects: crest, religious picture, little penknife, exercise book, eraser, compasses, pen, stamp collection, school books, coloured pencils. In another there were things made of paper: boat, arrow, rocket, glider, bird, cut-outs, cardboard pistol, arm-band, little theatre; a cabinet of curiosities, revealing a contribution to the museum institution at the same time as an act of subversion.

Boltanski's procedure doubtless sets a pattern. His work is the document of everyone. A work essentially archaeological (the reconstruction of childhood), ethnological (the inventories) and psychoanalytical (gestures). A work that invites us to ponder on the truth of this sentence by André Malraux: "The work of art is never formed of itself."

Boltanski does not exist, nor has he ever existed; he is only a myth, for himself as much as for others.

For footnotes see French text.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, B.C.,  
March 14th, 1975

#### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Madame:

I wish to publicly apologize to Bill Laing for certain remarks which I attributed to him in my article published in the last issue — specifically, his disappointment over the slack performance of other teachers at the Vancouver Art School. Mister Laing vehemently denies authorship of the sentiment. My memory of our conversation must surely have failed me. I think I'll buy a cassette recorder.

Sincerely

Bradford R. COLLINS



## The Vancouver School of Art Summer Institute 1975

### FIRST SESSION

June 23 to July 18

Painting	Bob Michener 'towards a personal understanding of form'
Sculpture	Ralph Westfall 'wood and metal fabrication'
Ceramic	Rudi Autio 'handbuilding'
Lithography	Garo Antreasian 'advanced and beginning stone work'
Graphic design	Milo Hicks 'technique and content'
Film animation	Al Razutis 'documentary and synaesthetic'

### SECOND SESSION

July 21 to August 15

Painting	Art Green 'towards a personal understanding of form'
Ceramics	Walter Dexter 'wheel work and raku'
Intaglio	Bob Evermon 'traditional and experimental techniques'
Photography	Fred Douglas 'flesh and structure'
Media communication (video)	Michael Goldberg 'history and artistic uses'
Foundation	Willem Volkersz 'introduction to creative process'

### FEES:

4 weeks: \$65.00 8 weeks: \$120.00

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