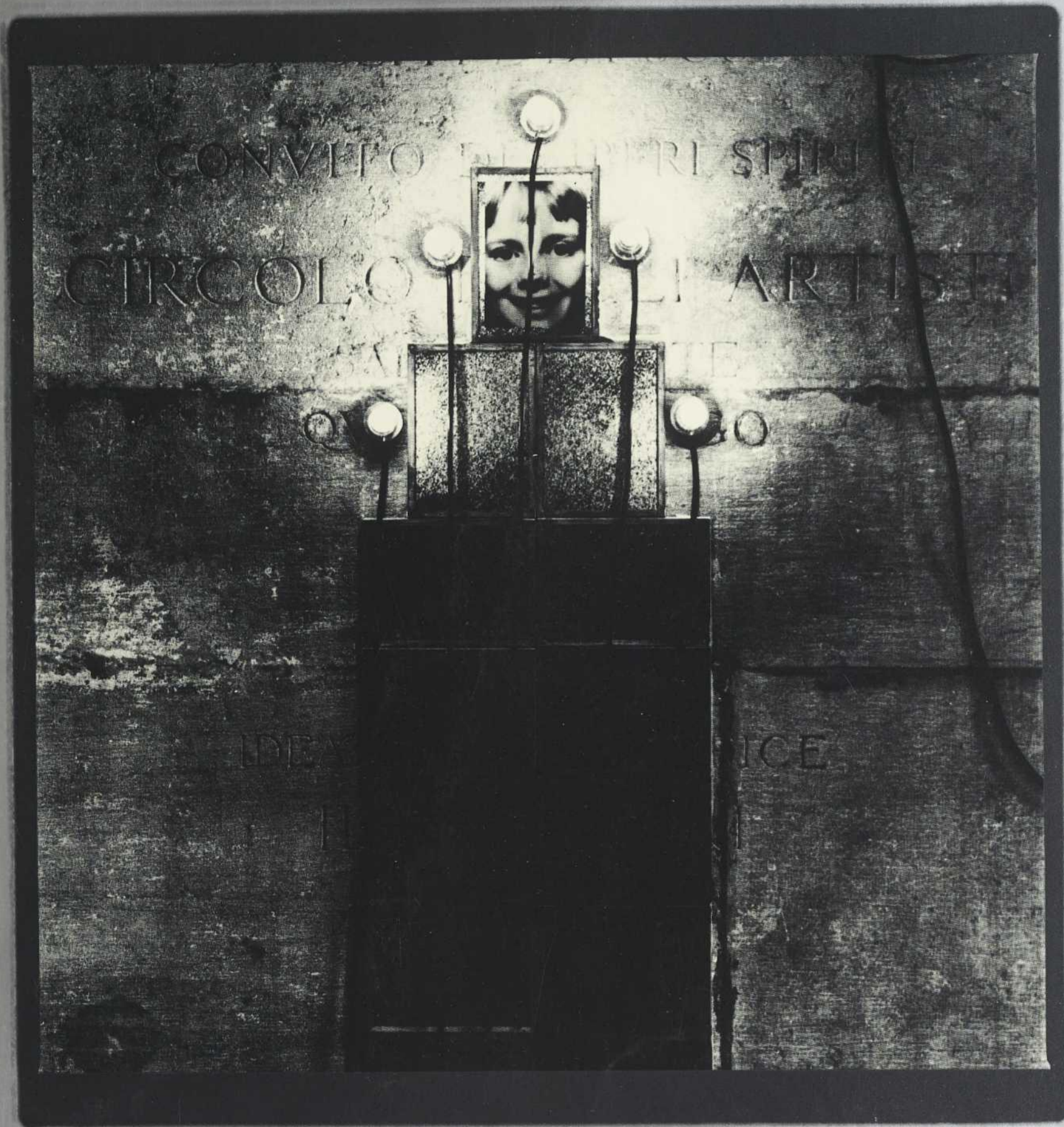


# PARACHUTE

art contemporain  
contemporary art



juillet,  
août,  
septembre,  
1989  
July,  
August,  
September  
7,00\$

# 55

# PARACHUTE

## 55

**directrice de la publication / editor** CHANTAL PONTBRIAND **directrice adjointe / managing editor** COLETTE TOUGAS **rédacteurs correspondants / contributing editors** SERGE BÉRARD, CAROL LAING **adjointes à la rédaction / assistant editors** JENNIFER FISHER, THÉRÈSE ST-GELAIS **collaborateurs / contributors** JANICE ANDREAE, MARC ARCHAMBAULT, CATHERINE BÉDARD, CHRISTINE BERNIER, MICHEL CAMPEAU, JAMES D. CAMPBELL, GREG CURNOE, GILBERT DAVID, KEVIN DOWLER, JACQUES DOYON, CHRISTINE DUBOIS, JENNIFER FISHER, RAYMOND GERVAIS, TREVOR GOULD, ANNETTE HURTIG, CAROL LAING, MARK LEWIS, MARIE-PAULE MACDONALD, BERNARD MARCADÉ, MARTINE MEILLEUR, ANDY PATTON, FRANCINE PAUL, JOHN ROBERTS, CHRISTINE ROSS, KITTY SCOTT, NANCY SHAW, JOHANNE SLOAN, THÉRÈSE ST-GELAIS, RENÉ VIAU, SCOTT WATSON, BOB WILKIE **graphisme / design** ROMAN-FLEUVE **traductions / translations** JEFFREY MOORE **publicité / advertising** MARIE-MICHÈLE CRON **promotion / promotion** GUYLAINE GAGNON **documentation / documentation** CHRISTINE DUBOIS **comptabilité / accounting** FRANÇOIS LAHAYE **secrétariat / secretariat** ANNE-MARIE LANCTÔT

### PARACHUTE, REVUE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN INC./ÉDITIONS PARACHUTE PUBLICATIONS

**conseil d'administration / board of directors:** CHARLES LAPOINTE, **président du conseil / chairman** CHANTAL PONTBRIAND, **présidente directrice générale / president** ROBERT GRAHAM, **vice-président / vice-president** COLETTE TOUGAS, **secrétaire-trésorière / secretary treasurer** JEAN-PIERRE GRÉMY, JANINE HARRIS, JOCELYNE LÉGARÉ, JEAN LEMOYNE, ÉLISE MERCIER, JEAN SIMARD **rédaction et administration / editorial and administration office:** PARACHUTE, 4060, boul. St-Laurent, bureau 501, Montréal (Québec), Canada H2W 1Y9, tél.: (514) 842-9805 **publicité / advertising:** (514) 522-2570 ou / or 842-9805 **abonnements / subscriptions:** PARACHUTE – Abonnements, C.P. 586, Succursale Tour de la Bourse, Montréal (Québec), Canada H4Z 1J8, tél.: (514) 333-9143 **tarifs des abonnements / subscription rates:** UN AN/ONE YEAR – Canada: individu/individual 25 \$ institution 35 \$ – à l'étranger/abroad: individu/individual 35 \$ institution 45 \$ – DEUX ANS/TWO YEARS – Canada: individu/individual 40 \$ institution 50 \$ – à l'étranger/abroad: individu/individual 50 \$ institution 64 \$ **vente au numéro / price per issue:** Allemagne de l'Ouest/West Germany: 12 DM Belgique/Belgium: 2,50 FB Canada/Canada: 7,00 \$ États-Unis/United States: 7,00 \$ France/France: 42 FF Grande-Bretagne/Great Britain: 3,80 £ Hollande/Holland: 14 FL Italie/Italy: 9 000 L Suisse/Switzerland: 10,00 FS **diffusion / distribution:** QUÉBEC: Diffusion Parallèle, 815 rue Ontario est, Montréal, Québec H2L 1P1, (514) 525-2513 – BRITISH COLUMBIA: Vancouver magazine Service Ltd., 2500 Vauxhall Place, Richmond, B.-C. V6V 1Y8, (604) 278-4841 – BELGIQUE: Librairie Post-Scriptum, rue des Éperonniers 37, 1000 Bruxelles – TORONTO: C.P.P.A., 2 Stewart St., Toronto, Ontario M5Y 1H6, (416) 362-2546 – U.S.A.: Bernhard de Boer Inc., 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, N.J. 07110. **PARACHUTE** n'est pas responsable des documents qui lui sont adressés. Les manuscrits ne sont pas retournés. La direction se réserve quatre mois suite à la réception d'un texte pour informer l'auteur(e) de sa décision quant à sa publication. Les articles publiés n'engagent que la responsabilité de leurs auteur(e)s. Tous droits de reproduction et de traduction réservés © PARACHUTE, revue d'art contemporain inc./PARACHUTE assumes no responsibility for submitted documents. Manuscripts are not returned. Authors will be informed of the editor's decision concerning publication within four months of receipt of text. The content of the published articles is the sole responsibility of the author. All rights of reproduction and translation reserved © PARACHUTE, revue d'art contemporain, inc. PARACHUTE est indexé dans/is indexed in: Art Bibliography Modern, Canadian Periodical Index, International Directory of Arts, Points de repère, RILA. PARACHUTE est membre de/is a member of: L'Association des éditeurs de périodiques culturels québécois, The Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association, La Conférence canadienne des arts. Dépôts légaux/legal deposits: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, ISSN: 0318-7020. Parachute est une revue trimestrielle publiée en janvier, avril, juin et octobre. Parachute is a quarterly published in January, April, June and October. – courrier 2<sup>e</sup> classe/second class mail registration n° 4213 impression: Boulanger inc., Montréal typographie: Zibra inc., Montréal. Imprimé au Canada/Printed in Canada. 2<sup>e</sup> trimestre 1989/2<sup>nd</sup> trimester 1989. **PARACHUTE reçoit l'aide du / receives support from: Conseil des Arts du Canada / The Canada Council, Ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec, Ministère de l'Emploi et de l'Immigration du Canada / Department of Employment and Immigration of Canada, Ministère des Affaires extérieures du Canada / Department of External Affairs of Canada, Conseil des Arts de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal. PARACHUTE remercie ses généreux donateurs / wishes to thank its generous benefactors: Air Canada, Lavalin, Power Corporation, Corival inc., Marché Public 44 Itée.**

# S O M M A I R E / C O N T E N T S

## ESSAIS / ESSAYS

- LA VIE IMPOSSIBLE DE CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI** par Bernard Marcadé 4
- SOME NOTES ON PHOTOGRAPHY, DEMOCRACY AND THE PUBLIC BODY** by Mark Lewis 9
- LES MAGICIENS DE LA TERRE Vers un champ «mondial» d'investigation?** par René Viau 16
- MONTRÉAL MAGNÉTIQUE** par Raymond Gervais 20
- PAINTING AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE** by John Roberts 25
- INTERVIEW WITH MARY KELLY** by Jennifer Fisher 32

## ARTS VISUELS / VISUAL ARTS

- Sylvie Bouchard** par Martine Meilleur 36
- British Now: sculpture et autres dessins** par Jacques Doyon 37
- Céline Surprenant** par Francine Paul 38
- Louise Robert** par Thérèse St-Gelais 39
- Marie A. Côté, Joseph Branco, François Lacasse** par Marc Archambault 40
- The Bi-National: American and German Art of the Late 80s** by Trevor Gould 42
- The New Urban Landscape** by Marie-Paule Macdonald 44
- Bill Burns** by Bob Wilkie 45
- Jana Sterbak** by Kitty Scott, Johanne Sloan 46
- John Massey** by James D. Campbell 47
- Enchantment / Disturbance** by Janice Andreae 48
- Mina Totino** by Nancy Shaw 50
- Joey Morgan** by Annette Hurtig 51
- Guido Molinari** by Scott Watson 52

## PHOTOGRAPHIE / PHOTOGRAPHY

- Espaces révélateurs** par Sylvain Campeau 54

## THÉÂTRE / THEATRE

- D'une saison l'autre: le facteur mise en scène (1) Devant les œuvres du répertoire** par Gilbert David 56

## DÉBATS / ISSUES

- Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings 1971 — 1987 Monk's Dream** by Greg Curnoe 61
- History Evaporates: Philip Monk and Paterson Ewen** by Andy Patton 63

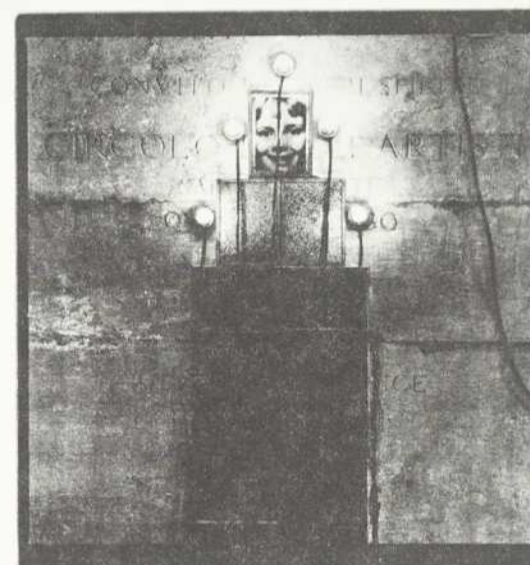
## LIVRES ET REVUES / BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

- par Catherine Bédard, Christine Bernier, Christine Dubois, Christine Ross  
by Kevin Dowler, Carol Laing, Johanne Sloan, Bob Wilkie 67

## TRADUCTIONS / TRANSLATIONS

- The Impossible Life of Christian Boltanski** by Bernard Marcadé 71

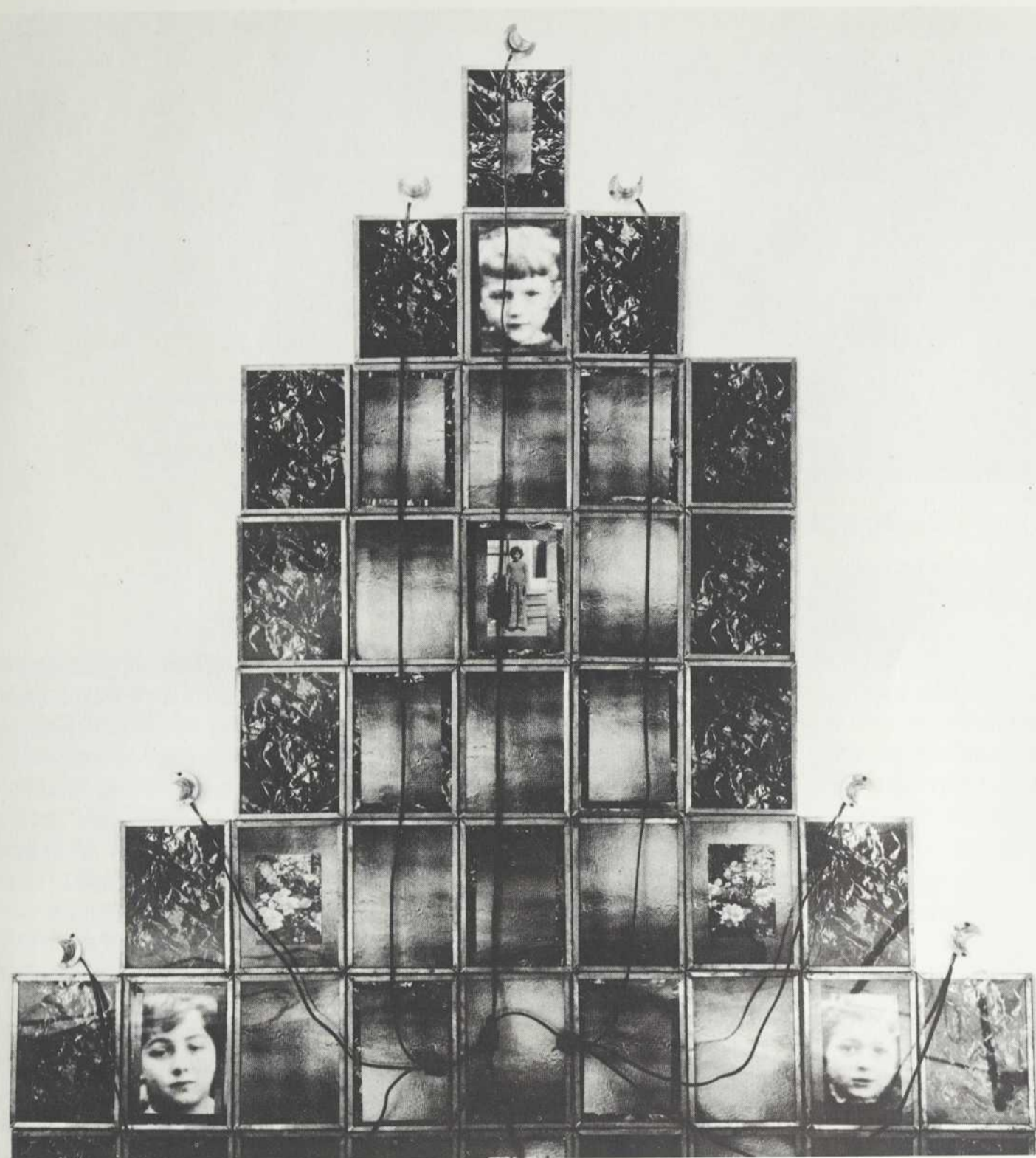
juillet,  
août,  
septembre,  
1989  
July,  
August,  
September,



COUVERTURE / COVER  
Christian Boltanski, *Monument* (détail), 1986,  
25 photos n. et b. et coul. avec cadres de tôle,  
5 lampes électriques, 207 x 40 cm.  
Collection de M. et Mme Claude Fain, Bologne.



*Candle Piece*, 1987-1988, tôle, cuivre, chandelle, support: 30 x 11 x 4 cm., marionnette: c. 10 cm.



*Monument*, 1986, photographies, lampes électriques. Coll. Goddez.

LA VIE IMPOSSIBLE DE  
**CHRISTIAN  
 BOLTANSKI**

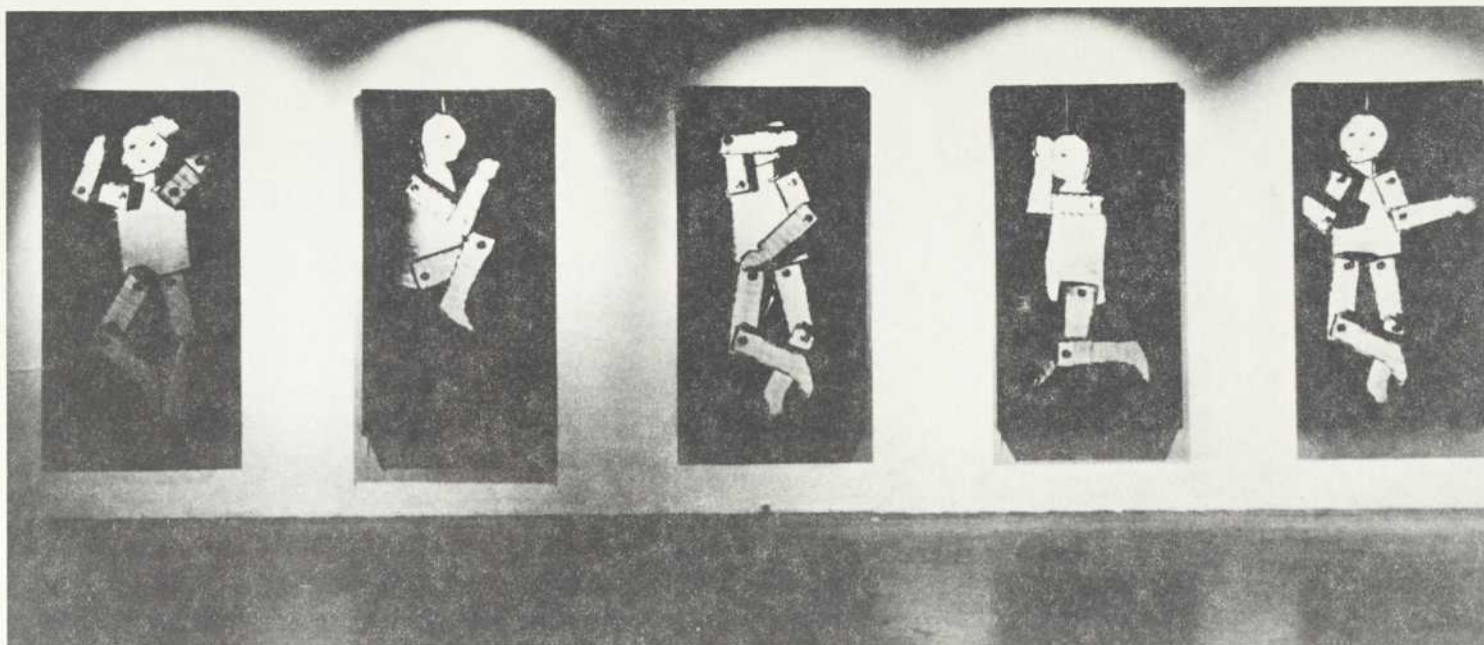
B E R N A R D M A R C A D É

C'est dans des circonstances on ne peut plus confuses, mais néanmoins exceptionnelles, que Christian Boltanski fait son entrée dans le monde de l'art contemporain. Le 3 mai 1968, date inaugurale des événements du même nom, est en effet projeté au *Ranelagh*, dans une boîte montée sur roulettes pouvant contenir six à sept personnes, un film 8mm de douze minutes au titre énigmatique mais pourtant déjà très évocateur: *La Vie impossible de Christian Boltanski*. Ce film, de même que les conditions dans lesquelles il s'est trouvé montré, manifestent déjà en filigrane, ce qui fait le cœur et le nerf de l'œuvre de Christian Boltanski. Ce n'est en effet ni dans un musée ni dans une galerie que C.B. expose son travail pour la première fois. Ce n'est pas non plus avec ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler des objets — ou des œuvres — d'art. D'entrée de jeu, c'est sur le mode du paradoxe et de la dissimulation que Boltanski choisit de se manifester en tant qu'artiste. Le titre du film lui-même augure déjà du sens des œuvres futures. D'emblée, son activité se voit marquée au double sceau de la biographie et de l'impossibilité. L'attitude de Boltanski joue elle-même de — et avec — cette impossibilité: il s'agit pour lui de dresser une forme de biographie de l'impossible en même temps que de signifier l'impossibilité (la vacuité) de toute approche biographique.

Une grande partie de mon activité, déclare-t-il à Alain Fleischer, est liée à l'idée de biographie: mais une biographie totalement fautive et donnée comme fautive avec toutes sortes de fausses preuves. On peut retrouver ceci dans toute ma vie: la non-existence du personnage; plus on parle de Christian Boltanski, moins il existe. [...] Un travail biographique a pour but d'empêcher l'artiste de mourir: l'entourer de tant de précisions que l'on sache tout de sa vie, pour que finalement il ne soit pas mort. En fait, il y a toujours une sorte d'échec car on ne peut toujours tout saisir de quelqu'un: tout ce qu'il a fait, tout ce qu'il a mangé, tout ce qu'il a vécu...<sup>1</sup>

Il y a, chez Christian Boltanski, une manière peu commune de se situer sur le fil du rasoir, qui se démarque assez sensiblement des conceptions militantes alors en vigueur dans le milieu artistique. La force et l'évidence de son œuvre sont précisément liées à la fragilité et à la précarité de ses positions esthétiques, morales ou même politiques. «Aujourd'hui, mais personnellement je l'ai toujours pensé, je crois que l'art ne cherche plus à influencer la vie; l'art n'est que de l'art, la peinture subit le monde mais agit très peu sur lui.»<sup>2</sup>

Cette conception dont il faisait part en 1983 à Delphine Renard, pour aussi réactionnaire qu'elle puisse paraître, n'en constitue pas moins une vision aiguë et exigeante (non romantique) de la situation de l'artiste aujourd'hui. Boltanski bat ici en brèche une forme d'hypocrisie intellectuelle, doublée de démagogie, qui tend à parer l'activité artistique des vertus les plus radicales, voire les plus révolutionnaires. Boltanski se méfie des visions totalisantes, des «images de marque» qui s'imposent et qui imposent une vision du monde au spectateur. Les *Reconstitutions* du début des années soixante-dix, qu'elles soient photographiques (*Recherche et présentation de tout ce qui reste de mon enfance* (1969), *Reconstitution des gestes effectués par C.B. entre 1948 et 1954* (1972)...), qu'elles fassent intervenir des objets



*Compositions théâtrales*, 1981,  
5 photographies en couleur  
avec cadre de bois et plexiglas,  
240 × 125 cm. ch.

(boules de terre, petits couteaux, sucres taillés, reconstitutions en plastiline (1970–71)... ) ou même qu'elles soient chantées (*Reconstitution de chansons qui ont été chantées à C.B. entre 1944 et 1946* (1971)) font toutes appel à la mémoire de ceux qui sont censés les appréhender. Elles les laissent libres d'imaginer, de se souvenir, de s'identifier. «Pour moi, un tableau est en partie créé par celui qui le regarde, qui le «lit» à l'aide de ses propres expériences.»<sup>3</sup> Boltanski reprend ici à son compte la célèbre proposition de Duchamp: «Ce sont les regardeurs qui font les tableaux.» Sa conception cependant se fait moins «optimiste». Ses *Reconstitutions* comme ses *Images stimuli* (1976) ou ses *Images modèles* (1975) n'ont pas la prétention de promouvoir un monde visuel nouveau. Au contraire, elles témoignent du fait que nous soyons voués à partager un fond commun d'images. «Je veux que les spectateurs ne découvrent pas, mais qu'ils reconnaissent.»<sup>4</sup>

Il est dès lors possible de comprendre l'ambition, récurrente chez Boltanski, de vouloir disparaître dans le regard des autres. Cette position fait montre tout à la fois de la plus extrême humilité et de la plus grande prétention. Elle procède en effet tout autant d'une volonté d'effacement, proche en cela de l'attitude de Rimbaud («Je est un autre»), que du désir très warholien d'«être une machine», de se fondre dans l'univers de l'image au point de devenir soi-même une pure représentation collective. «Je pense toujours que l'artiste est une sorte de machine à travailler, à être les autres, et que son désir de faire des choses est aussi celui de supprimer sa propre vie.»<sup>5</sup>

Boltanski désire que l'on parle de ses œuvres comme de celles d'un artiste mort. Telle est par exemple la règle du jeu qui préside à la conception de la monographie que Didier Semin lui consacre en 1988: «Je ne voulais pas voir [D.S.] et il devait considérer que j'étais mort... Je ne lui ai donné vraiment aucun renseignement. Il a été remarquable: il ne m'a jamais téléphoné. Donc, c'était comme si le livre décrivait une œuvre faite.»<sup>6</sup> Ce n'est pas complaisance morbide ni même coquetterie esthétique. En 1969, déjà, il avait fait du simu-

lacre de sa propre mort le sujet et l'objet d'une publication: *Reconstitution d'un accident qui ne m'est pas encore arrivé et où j'ai trouvé la mort*. Didier Semin parle très justement de la manière originale dont Boltanski pose la question — très contemporaine — du rapport de l'œuvre (du sujet, de l'auteur) à la mort:

Plus sûrement que l'absence de signature, le travail collectif, l'anonymat de la facture ou de la touche — toutes stratégies autour desquelles l'art moderne ne cesse de tourner — l'insistance de «Boltanski» à maintenir l'auteur dans une œuvre qui structurellement se détache de lui, ruine l'idée même d'auteur et le désir, commun, de chercher au-delà de l'œuvre, un sujet qui en fournisse la clef.<sup>7</sup>

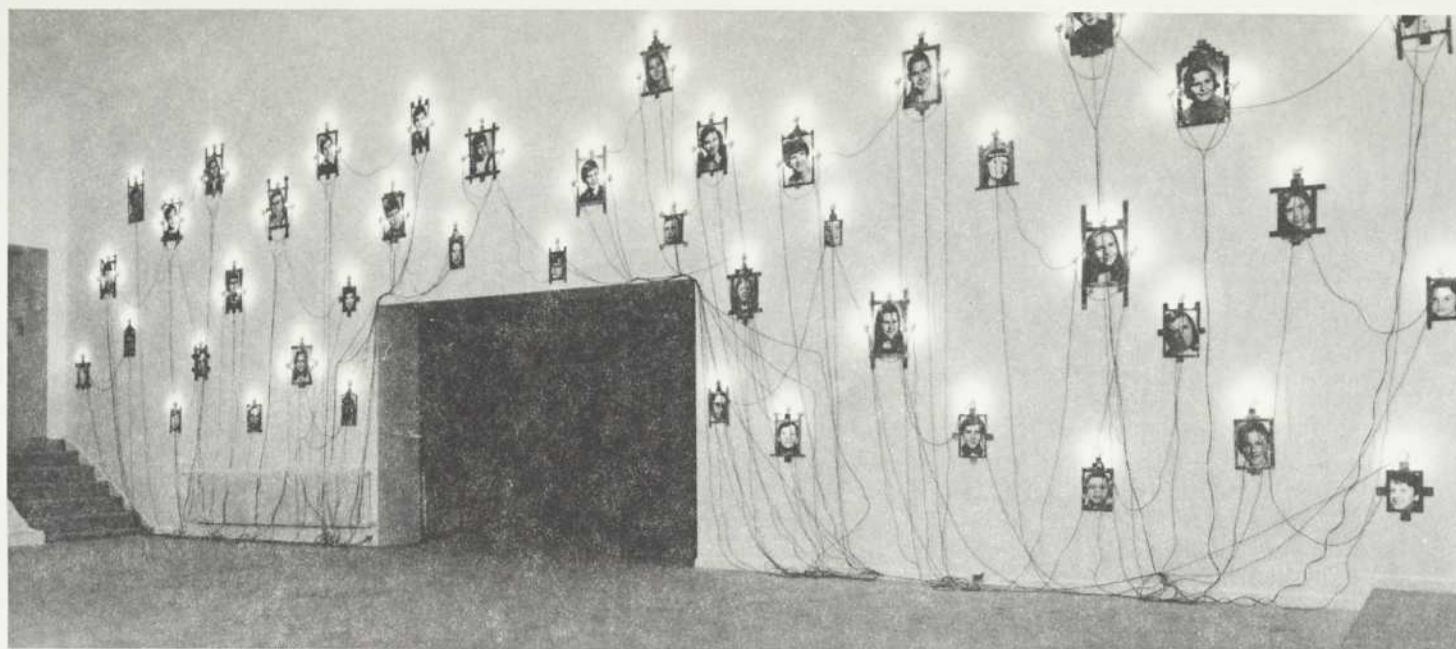
Il y a dans les activités multiformes de Christian Boltanski (envois, photographies, reconstitutions, installations, etc.) une conscience aiguë de l'œuvre considérée comme un processus aimanté par sa propre disparition.

Il ne peut y avoir chez C.B. de commencement immaculé. Toute origine est toujours-déjà travaillée par la mort. Tout se passe comme si Boltanski prenait les choses *par la fin*, comme si le devenir des œuvres (leur vieillissement, leur altération...) induisait, rétroactivement, leur conception et leur fabrication. Les premières œuvres de Boltanski (*petits bâtons, petits couteaux, reconstitutions d'objets* en plastiline...) représentent à cet égard une forme de désastre. Elles se trouvent déjà rongées comme par anticipation. Avant que d'avoir subi les outrages et l'usure du temps, elles se présentent comme des ruines d'elles-mêmes. Cette œuvre s'est ainsi immédiatement définie comme relique, comme un ensemble d'objets dérisoires déjà susceptibles de figurer dans ces cimetières culturels que sont les musées.

Le Musée de l'Homme a eu pour moi une très grande importance; j'y voyais de grandes vitrines métalliques dans lesquelles se trouvaient de petits objets fragiles et sans signification. Dans un coin de la vitrine prenait souvent place une photographie jaunie représentant un «sauvage» en train de manier ces petits objets. Chaque vitrine présentait un monde disparu: le sauvage de la photographie était sans doute mort, les objets étaient devenus inutiles et, de toute façon, plus personne ne savait s'en servir. Le Musée de l'Homme m'apparaissait comme une grande morgue.<sup>8</sup>

Le fait que Christian Boltanski se soit intéressé de façon aussi obsessionnelle à l'enfance (souvenirs, portraits, habits, jouets...) est dans la logique des choses. L'enfant, de la même manière que le «primitif», est en effet le support traditionnel des valeurs de «pureté» et d'«authenticité». L'art lui-même procède de cette idéologie et de cette fiction. Rien de moins innocent en effet que le monde de l'enfance. Rien de plus cruel. L'idéologie de l'enfance partage avec l'idéologie de l'art la même croyance au bonheur et en la transparence. Avec un malin plaisir, Boltanski s'attache à semer le trouble au sein de ces évidences. Au travers de ces portraits d'enfants inlassablement alignés (*Les 62 membres du Club Mickey*, 1974), méthodiquement accumulés (*Les Photos préférées des enfants au C.E.S. de Lentillères*, 1974), systématiquement photographiés (*Les Enfants de Berlin*, 1975), soigneusement rephotographiés (*Les Enfants de Dijon*, 1986), il règne une atmosphère ambiguë à mi-chemin de l'iconostase dérisoire à la gloire de la «Jeunesse éternelle» et du mémorial lugubre célébrant l'enfance disparue. *Et in Arcadia ego*. Le monde de l'enfance aussi est miné par la mort. Comme le monde de l'art. Croire en l'enfance comme en une valeur, c'est en effet souscrire à l'idée qu'il puisse y avoir un «Âge d'or», c'est envisager le cours du monde sur le modèle d'une alternance de progrès et de décadences.

L'Histoire n'est pas la perspective privilégiée par Boltanski; c'est pourquoi il utilise la photographie, non pas du côté de la révélation, mais du côté du gel, du figement. Le portrait photographique est dans cette logique une forme de réification de la personne représentée, puisqu'il l'éternise dans un moment qui ne sera jamais plus. Boltanski reste fasciné par ce qu'il appelle la «transformation du sujet en objet». «Dans mon utilisation des photos d'enfants, il y a des gens dont je ne sais rien, qui étaient des sujets, et qui sont devenus des objets, c'est-à-dire des cadavres. Ils ne sont plus rien, je peux les manipuler, les déchirer, les percer.»<sup>9</sup> L'Histoire n'est pas la perspective privilégiée par Boltanski, parce que l'Histoire s'est effectivement figée, arrêtée, au milieu du siècle, quelque part



*Monument: les enfants de Dijon*, 1986, vue de l'installation,  
50 photos n. et b. et coul. et 150 lampes électriques, photos: 28 × 40 cm. à 40 × 50 cm. ch.

entre Auschwitz et Treblinka. La référence à cet épisode lugubre de notre Occident se fait particulièrement précise dans une pièce comme celle des *Archives* de la Documenta VIII en 1987, mais plus encore peut-être dans ces dernières installations de Toronto (Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, 1988) et de Bâle où ce sont des vêtements, et non plus des photographies, qui cruellement nous donnent à voir et même à sentir (puisqu'à Bâle il est possible de marcher dessus) l'absence de personnes présumées vivantes ou ayant existé.

Comment dès lors ne pas stigmatiser les conceptions messianiques et téléologiques de l'art :

Il y a la peur de l'artiste de ne pas savoir, la peur d'être quelqu'un à part, qui vit dans le noir. C'est ce qui explique, à l'époque du Bauhaus, les tentatives de bonheur dans la géométrie, ou dans les années soixante-dix, celles de bonheur dans la politique ou de bonheur dans la théorie, alors qu'il n'y a aucun progrès en art. L'idée de progrès en art est même totalement stupide. Il n'y a aucun rapport entre la science, qui est cumulative, et l'art, qui ne l'est pas.<sup>10</sup>

Cette manière de se désengager de combats qui se revendiquent «généreux» pourrait passer pour une attitude de fuite alors qu'elle s'avère constituer une position on ne peut plus clairvoyante. Boltanski sait combien cette volonté de bonheur «à tout prix» et de «transparence» est une supercherie; en quoi elle fait le plus souvent le lit aux manipulations idéologiques les plus douteuses. Boltanski préfère se confronter aux doutes et aux contradictions inhérents à sa position et à sa condition d'artiste plutôt que de contribuer à promouvoir un «ailleurs» idéalisé ou des «lendemains qui chantent». «Peut-être que douter, utiliser la photographie et non la peinture, essayer de dire une chose et son contraire, jouer avec un code... constituent chez moi une attitude politique.»<sup>11</sup>

Cette attitude est en réalité une véritable méthode. Toutes les actions, toutes les évaluations de Christian Boltanski se trouvent ainsi soumises à l'épreuve du doute et de la déstabilisation. Ainsi, il se revendique totalement peintre alors qu'il utilise presque exclusivement la photographie et les objets les plus dérisoires. C.B. signifie par là son ambition de s'inscrire dans une catégorie majeure



*Archives*, 1987, installation photographique.



*Les 62 membres du Club Mickey en 1955* (détail), photographie  
n. et b. avec cadre de tôle et verre, 1972, 30,5 × 22,5 cm.  
Coll. Mme Ileana Sonnabend.

des Beaux-Arts avec des techniques et des objets qui n'en relèvent pas. Ses œuvres, de la même manière, jouent sur un aspect magique et religieux en même temps qu'elles se veulent en être la dénonciation: «Mon activité se situe dans le domaine du religieux, mais je souhaite qu'à l'intérieur de chaque pièce se trouve un élément qui la contredise, qui pose question.»<sup>12</sup>

Boltanski occupe chaque fois une position impossible, sans pour autant forger l'espoir de surmonter ou de résoudre la contradiction. Ainsi, il se dira simultanément, sincère et douteux, grandiose et minable; il parlera de son art comme d'une œuvre «grand public» et à la fois «pour initiés». La seule explication qu'il puisse donner de cette manière de procéder, est elle-même prise en tenailles entre deux directions.

J'ai souvent pensé, mais je n'en suis pas très sûr, que cela trouverait sa source dans ma culture/non-culture juive. Un rapport étrange



*Détective*, 1973, installation photographique. Coll. Art Institute, Chicago.

avec le divin, le sentiment d'être à la fois l'élu et le dernier des hommes, me poussent à affirmer puis à me contredire, à pleurer et à me moquer, à dire que je fais de la peinture sans faire de la peinture... [...] De toute façon, cela demeure très flou chez moi; je n'ai aucune culture juive. Je suis comme les Indiens qui, dans les westerns, servent de guides aux soldats: ils ont tout oublié, mais quand ils ont bu, il leur revient des danses indiennes...<sup>13</sup>

Cette manière de dire une chose et son contraire, à l'instar du prêcheur douteux de la *Nuit du chasseur* montrant alternativement LOVE sur une main et HATE sur l'autre, n'est pas une «pirouette» opportuniste destinée à se ménager plusieurs portes de sortie. C'est du rapport à la vérité qu'il est ici question. La logique contemporaine nous a appris à comprendre comment une proposition ne pouvait jamais être définitivement vraie ou fautive en elle-même. Tout dépend en effet de la situation dans laquelle cette proposition se trouve énoncée. Ainsi, une proposition vraie dans une situation peut s'avérer fautive dans une autre. Personne n'est en effet à l'abri de ces retournements du vrai et du faux, à la faveur desquels se laisse précisément entrevoir une forme, non pas de Vérité, mais de Réel. «Dans l'une de mes premières interviews, je jouais le rôle du jeune homme désespéré et tourmenté. Pendant que je parlais, je me disais: je joue bien, ils me croient... Mais quand je suis sorti, j'étais affreusement déprimé, parce qu'en fait c'était une vérité que je me cachais à moi-même et que je ne pouvais me dire que sous l'apparence du jeu.»<sup>14</sup>

Cette historiette montre exemplairement combien il est présomptueux, pour ne pas dire fallacieux, de prétendre vouloir déterminer un deuxième degré des choses. Ainsi, il ne faut pas considérer le travail photographique de Boltanski du milieu des années soixante-dix uniquement

comme un travail sociologique (et conceptuel) concernant le goût moyen. Il est en effet trop facile de dire qu'il s'agit de se mettre à distance des stéréotypes. L'observateur, c'est une évidence épistémologique, fait bien lui aussi partie de l'observation. Ce n'est pas parce que les photographies prises par Boltanski à Venise sont les mêmes que celles prises au même endroit par le plus commun des touristes, qu'il s'agit de parodie ou de dérision. «Ce sont d'abord mes photographies, précise Boltanski, et je les trouve très jolies. Quand je les revois aujourd'hui, elles ont pour moi une valeur d'usage, je veux dire qu'elles me rappellent mon été 1975.»<sup>15</sup>

La pratique de l'art n'est pas une pratique pure; c'est même cette impureté qui garantit son émotion. Et il ne saurait y avoir d'art pour Boltanski sans émotion. C'est pourquoi l'artiste est plus du côté du saint que du côté du héros. Les héros sont par essence infaillibles, il ne peut rien leur être pardonné. Le saint, lui, n'a pas besoin de faire des actions d'éclat, il lui suffit de faire de sa vie un exemple, même avec des petites choses insignifiantes. «Un saint peut n'avoir fait qu'une chose discrète: par exemple, le fait de rester toute sa vie dans une cellule n'est pas une action héroïque. Giacometti est l'exemple même du saint qui n'a rien fait d'héroïque.»<sup>16</sup>

Les saints sont par nature du côté de l'image. Ils sont par ce qu'ils montrent, plus que par ce qu'ils disent. Boltanski aime évoquer ces anachorètes, brouteurs, stationnaires, stylites, qui au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle après notre ère peuplaient les déserts de Syrie et de Palestine. Beuys, Warhol, Gilbert & George sont pour lui les descendants directs de ces figures d'exception. «Pour moi, les deux grands saints actuels sont Warhol et Beuys. Je crois qu'ils sont



CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI A 5 ANS 3 MOIS DE DISTANCE

*Christian Boltanski à 5 ans 3 mois de distance*, envoi septembre 1970.

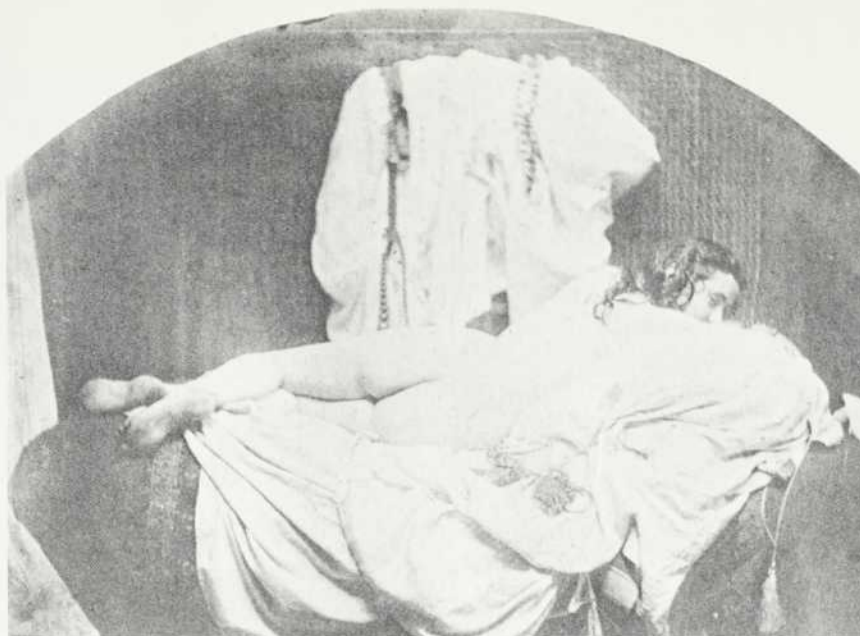
d'ailleurs la même personne, Beuys étant le saint optimiste, dans la tradition chrétienne, et Warhol le pessimiste, l'ange noir. D'ailleurs, tous les deux s'aimaient beaucoup, et tous les deux ont eu des vies exemplaires.»<sup>17</sup> Faire de sa vie un exemple: tel est à l'évidence le programme insensé auquel, depuis plus de vingt ans, Christian Boltanski s'est consacré. «Vous savez, ma Mère, disait à sa Supérieure une religieuse qui manifestement s'y connaissait, pour l'humilité, je ne crains personne.»

#### NOTES

1. «Christian Boltanski, la Revanche de la maladresse», entretien avec Alain Fleischer et Didier Semin, *art press* n° 128, sept. 1988, p. 6.
2. Renard, Delphine, «Entretien de Christian Boltanski. Anthologie critique», catalogue du Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1984, p. 73.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
5. Entretien A. Fleischer, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
7. Semin, Didier, *Boltanski*, Paris, art press, 1988, p. 65.
8. Entretien D. Renard, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
9. Entretien A. Fleischer, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
11. Entretien D. Renard, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 72-73.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
16. Entretien Fleischer, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Bernard Marcadé est organisateur d'exposition et critique; il collabore à *art press*, *Flash Art* et *Studio* et est l'auteur de *L'Éloge du mauvais esprit* aux éditions de la différence. Il vit à Paris.

English translation on p. 71.



*Nude*, unknown nineteenth-century photographer.



Courbet, *Le Repos*.

**SOME NOTES ON**

# **PHOTOGRAPHY DEMOCRACY AND THE PUBLIC BODY<sup>1</sup>**

**M A R K L E W I S**

Mendel Grossman,  
*Anonymous Communards  
 in Their Coffins*,  
 May 1871.



U.S.A. Sam Falk *New York Times Magazine*



*Family of Man*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955.

*I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society  
 but the people themselves . . .* Thomas Jefferson



South Africa. Margaret Bourke-White *Life*



Iran. Henri Cartier-Bresson *Magnum*

We might be forgiven for thinking that the use of photography as a medium for critical artistic production is a development of the last few years. Certainly the myriad exhibitions and other activities that have been organised to celebrate the (most recent) "arrival" of photography on art's centre stage, bears witness to a re-writing of the histories of the medium and its apparatus. And it is in the context of such re-writings that it would perhaps be appropriate to consider some assumptions implicit in current presentations of photography; in particular, assumptions that lie behind the curatorial claims of those who wish to celebrate what we might call a "photographic critical difference." In this celebration, there is often little attention given to the conflicting desires that have so overdetermined the photographic image with respect to its supposed criticality, and which today have left us with a veritable frenzy of claims about "the photographic" and, indeed, with a new specular image of "contestation."<sup>2</sup>

I wish, in this paper, to suggest one or two generally held beliefs about photography and to ruminate on the extent to which they have permeated, indeed predicated, current critical discussions of "photographically-based" artworks. The title of the panel for which this paper was originally written was *Photography After Modernism*, a panel that was mandated to address such works. Although titles of this nature are to some extent only the nightmares of conference organisers as they try to find umbrellas under which many different people may sit, it nonetheless seemed to me to be an apposite reminder of one of the ways that photography is currently understood and organised critically. If, in what follows, my arguments seem overly schematic and the positions I identify somewhat crudely characterised, it is simply because I wish to foreground some general assumptions about photography, assumptions which are not necessarily those of anyone in particular, but which nonetheless produce, perhaps unconsciously, a title such as *Photography After Modernism*.

## HISTORIES

There is an often mentioned characteristic of photography, so repeated in fact that it has perhaps now ceased to inspire either enthusiasm or dissent: it is said that photography is a "popular" medium; that it can speak directly and with little interference to a public; to a general public. That photography is the medium of choice for the documentation of families, holidays and friends is considered to be evidence of this publicity. As part of its history, as part of its technological development — but more likely because of a desire that both predates it and exceeds it — photography, in some circles, has taken on the right to speak for the popular, to be the (democratic) representative of the people.

If this communicative imperative is part of photography's popular project, then it would not be surprising to find that it has remained an (unconscious) *a priori* of much critical thinking about art practices that use photography; and one moreover that, like other unconscious formations, has been constructed adversarially in relation to an Other. If photography is perceived as embodying a democratic exigency, it presumably can only do so in relation to a perceived exclusivity on the part of other mediums and practices. It is my contention that this Other — this body against which photography will be able to demonstrate its democratic imperative — is in fact Modernism.<sup>3</sup>

To argue this here is not to try and further celebrate the "democratic" nature of photography in general, nor to lend credence to the narrow view of Modernism (held by those who would simultaneously condemn and accept the definition of Modernism as staked out by MOMA and other institutional sites) that has castigated it for being elitist and conservative. Rather, what I wish to do is to begin to suggest that this oppositional logic — a logic that is so characteristic of our thinking about art and its histories and which here pits photography "against" Modernism — has in fact seriously curtailed our understanding and thinking about representation; that ultimately it has provided us with a very problematic, and even regressive, model. This confrontation merely exemplifies and gives substance to a whole range of oppositions that shadow discussions of photography and of representation more generally; and not least that division of labour that seems to haunt almost every discourse on photography: namely, art and photography. These oppositions, continually situate photography adversarially, and ultimately produce the idea of photography as a democratic technology delivering and answering to a democratic ideal, in other words, a public.

Of course photography is not the only practice for which such claims have been made, albeit in different ways. Painting, according to the language of civic humanism which guided eighteenth century writers such as Shaftesbury and Jonathan Richardson, represented *public* virtue, and it was further believed that when a subject looked at a

painting, he (sic) could be persuaded to act in the public interest.<sup>4</sup> This performative function of painting was theorised at a time when not only was "the public" a very narrowly defined field (including only those men of property able to spend leisure time in contemplation of the meaning of Patriotism and Civic Duty), but also when the activity of painting itself was restricted to members of the Academy and their immediate circle. Now while it is true that for someone like Shaftesbury, even painters could not be included as part of the public body (he argued that painters were only mechanics able to execute allegories of public virtue designed by gentlemen such as himself),<sup>5</sup> it is still the case that the relationship between those who produced these public embodiments and those that read them were very closely connected in terms of class and social milieu: the circle of production and consumption was controlled and identifiable. However when the artist becomes a photographer, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish his/her production from the public body which is now both photographed and photographing. Despite contestations to the contrary that arise from a simple celebration of this "confusion" and the democratizing moves it supposedly enables, this is a serious, even pivotal question: for art to exist institutionally, it logically must demarcate the space of "non-art," a space that has increasingly become identified with "popular culture." Photography is able — and in this capacity it is not inherently different from other mediums — to problematize that very division; to problematize, not to erase, for there is a difference. It can call into question the way in which non-art or popular culture is in fact discursively constructed by art. It can remind us, as Michel de Certeau does, that the beauty of popular culture for art is "the beauty of the dead." It can do all this, not because it is historically and technically inevitable, but because it can respond to the present cultural formation politically.

The very closeness of photography to this "dead" production, the possibility that it might in fact be popular culture, is what causes the anxiety for "difference," an anxiety not exclusive to discourses on photography, but perhaps felt most acutely there. However, to settle too quickly on a definition of "difference" (from art, let's say, but also from "out there"/popular culture) is to run the risk of foreclosing the possibility of maintaining the question of "difference" as *difference* and instead to turn it into a matter of ontology.

Having suggested that some current discussions on photographically-based art practices enjoy a structural (albeit ambivalent) relationship to the idea of the photographic embodying a democratic moment or exigency, it might be useful here to examine some of the ways in which the latter has come to be a photographic imperative within a more general history. Two things spring immediately to mind — there are many others of course, but for the moment I will advance the following.

## TECHNOLOGIES

Photography is understood, predominantly, as the (necessary) result of a continued technological refinement, as a series of modifications and improvements of a founding invention — "the invention of photography." In other words, it is understood as the realisation of an inevitable trajectory. Of course it is this very technological enthusiasm that has tended to keep photography, at least within some quarters, at the level of an irritating question: "Is it art?" Photography then, is situated on the side of the technological, and therefore defined oppositionally to all that is considered not to be under the rubric of technology.

A good example of how this operates is to be found in the way different practices are currently categorised: in books, at conferences, and across the North American museum circuit particularly, we read often, we hear often, about "artists who use photography." As I have already said, this nomination is presumably supposed to alert us to the fact that these people are to be distinguished from photographers, photographic artists, and even artists, *per se*. Now putting to one side the very obvious questions that are begged by such an announcement — there being very little discussion in catalogues and in magazines about "engineers who use photography," "doctors who use photography," etc. — I believe that this nomination tells us much about the constant struggle between "art and technology," between "authority and reproduction," between the "subjective and the indexical," and so on. Moreover this nomination bespeaks, perhaps more clearly than we would like, how photography on the one hand is often cast as an adversary of art — or, to be more specific, as an adversary of Modernism — and on the other, how photography is to be "re-inscribed" in order for it to become part of art's "project." For the assumption is always that in order for art to make use of photography, to take on photography as its own, it must first "re-invest it with a new subjectivity."<sup>6</sup>

This establishment of a division of labour between artists who use photography and photographers *per se*, reminds us again how photography is understood to be "popular": massively disseminated and apparently unauthorised, it lies waiting, even begging, for the gifted hand of the artist to reclaim it as art within her/his own practice. It is not difficult therefore to see here how photography is located, albeit mainly unconsciously, as both a potential source for art and provides a repertoire of material with which to replenish art's depleted auratic reserves, as well as a profound anxiety that threatens to undo and undermine the integrity of art itself. Insofar as photography figures as this double-edged motif for art, it repeats the fetishistic relation that characterises the way in which so-called dominant discourses function in relation to a perceived Other.

But it is not only "conservative artists" and writers who subscribe to this oppositional logic and to this structure of disavowal. For many, this adver-

sarial relation, rather than being the subject of a profound melancholia (how can artists continue to work in the face of such ambivalence?), is in fact massively celebrated. It is the adversarial character of photography — or so it is claimed — that gives photography its emancipatory and radical potential.

This argument, in all its vicissitudes, is by now familiar territory. In its most articulate presentation, substance and logic are acquired via a reading of the famous Walter Benjamin essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Put as succinctly as possible, and at the risk of flattening Benjamin's argument somewhat, it is claimed that photography, following a long line of historical technologies, prepares Western representation for a "democratic" imperative. The withering away of the *aura*, a massive dissemination of reproductions, and a general legibility of the image will finally allow art — in the form of photography — to challenge the privileged and private economies of painting and sculpture (for instance).

It is clear that Benjamin's argument depends, in part, on a technological optimism. But as recent writings on Renaissance literature have argued, there is more than one way of reading the effect of such technologies. Stephen Greenblatt, in his essay "The Word of God in Mechanical Reproduction," has suggested that the introduction of the printed word had a profound effect not only on the reading of theological texts but, crucially, on the relation of that reading to the text's production.

According to Greenblatt, in the early era of print culture "the book" could have a "presence" (or *aura*) that no hand written text could ever have. Greenblatt is writing here in the context of a discussion on the early Protestant movement's rejection of Catholicism and the latter's reliance on formal auricular confession and "the power of the keys." Central to this rejection was the publication of books such as William Tyndale's *The Obedience of Man*, a book that was designed to be absorbed, to provide a "way of being in the world and to shape the reader's inner life." Tyndale's book and many others like it refuse the institutional framework that had previously controlled the experience or representation of identity in the Middle Ages, a framework which demanded that interiority be subordinated to an "intimate verbal transaction." Greenblatt argues that Tyndale's printed words do not serve "the spoken" but have an absoluteness, an integrity and finality:

Distance from the scribal hand, production in relatively large quantities, mechanisms of distribution far distant from the author and printer, refusal of subordination to a ritualised verbal transaction — the very lack of *aura* — all that we may call the abstractness of the early protestant printed book — give it an intensity, a shaping power, an element of compulsion that the late medieval manuals of confession never had.<sup>7</sup>

The relevant point here is that before the Protestant investment in the "power" of the printed book, the moment of the text's production was not separated nor isolated from its reading: the two depended on each other symbiotically. At the same time, the newly re-produced or printed texts placed the moment of reading — that is to say, the

moment of the text's legibility within a private and interiorised arena — in the home where the book became a veritable extension of the reader's self and was to be *absorbed* and not studied. This helped to turn reading into consumption and located the text's undecidability, and contestations over its discursive legibility, elsewhere.

Thus, paradoxically, a device that, according to one argument, would seem to provide evidence of an increased challenge to privileged readings — and in one important respect it certainly does do precisely that — can in fact be understood as precipitating, in part, the closure of undecidability or a contestation of meaning. All of this is to suggest that the so-called democratizing moves enabled by technology are not to be considered simply, and only, as a broadening of the popular constituency, nor as an increased enfranchisement of the "community's" claim to the meaning of a work of art. This is not to say that, in the case of photography, the problem with Benjamin's anticipatory enthusiasm for the possibility of the end of auratic production, is that Benjamin simply, and inevitably, failed to take into account the complicated ruses by which art and the market would re-invest photography. It is rather to suggest that any argument that is predicated on an oppositional logic of high to low art, or of Art to popular culture will by necessity inscribe within itself the partial impossibility of its own project. It is also to suggest, and in the spirit of Benjamin's own conception of historical enactment, that Greenblatt's analysis is less a displacement of Benjamin's than a complement.

#### LEGIBILITIES:

It is not only the technology of photography — which according to some is less the technology of photography *per se*, than that of post-Renaissance representation<sup>8</sup> generally — that has encouraged many to understand photography as the deliverer of a democratic representation. For the "public legibility" of the photograph, as that which apparently allows a general public to understand its representation without the aid of a privileged semiotic de-coding, is dependent on the indexicality of the photograph: that is, on the ability of the photograph to provide evidence of a real time and place, such as a past that lives presently for me now, as I stand before the image. If abstraction in painting was understood as alienating to an "uninitiated" audience, then photography required only that the subject be a citizen, ready and willing to see the conditions of her/his democratic — at least in potential — existence.

We are now aware of some of the elisions that are necessary for such a theological investment in the project of photographic indexicality. We are aware too, that this evidential logic is not without its problems and contradictions. I have already indicated that the mutual inscription of photography within painting, and painting within photography, make claims of photography's indexical specificity, over and above painting, difficult to sustain. But there are also many critical projects that have interrogated the different institutional

sites within which the photograph is located, in order to demonstrate that photography's truth claims — its indexicality — is overdetermined by considerations of power, control and sexuality.

For instance, it has been argued that the so-called birth of photography is not accidentally coincidental with the rationalisation and contemporaneous hypostatization of other modern ideas and institutions like the penal system/prisons, modern medicine/hospitals, and the general surveillance of society by police. Photography and these institutions share a discursive base and are part of an imagination that requires the constant monitoring of subjects, regardless of how they are to be defined (healthy, delinquent, poor, etc.). All these institutions issue a demand for the recognition and visibility of their respective subjects and photography is able to develop partially in response to just such demands.

I can mention here J.M. Charcot and his production of photographs used to demonstrate his "Passionate Attitudes" where each picture features a woman grotesquely acting out the symptoms that Charcot *wants* to be visible. This visibility is a prerequisite for Charcot's perceptual epistemology. It would seem then that discussion and articles on "doctors who use photography" would be more than interesting if we were to try and understand the way in which indexicality — and therefore a democratic imperative — is inscribed within the photograph.

What I am trying to suggest here is that the desire for indexicality, a desire for an image whose legibility will be commensurate with a newly enfranchised (democratic) public, this desire is one that both proceeds, and exceeds, photography. Photography, when it is oppositionally defined, can only really answer that desire, in an answer that will run the risk of missing or (escaping) the specificity of photography. I could go further and say that photography is less a popular medium by and for the public; instead, it is an apparatus that has helped to *produce* the popular, and that very public.<sup>9</sup>

In suggesting this, it is now necessary for me to return to where I began and consider the relationship of photography to Modernism. I began by proposing that, inscribed in much thinking on photography is the idea that it is a democratic medium, that the investment in it as a radical emancipatory practice is based in part on the perceived elitist — even totalitarian — nature of its Other which for my purposes here I am calling "Modernism." Of course in order for this opposition to work, both Photography and Modernism must be very narrowly defined, and as I have already indicated, their mutual imbrication must be disavowed. To read Modernism as a practice bearing witness to a tyrannical foreclosure of history is to perform an extremely partial reading of Modernism. To undertake such a reading it is necessary, as Roland Barthes would say, "to forget all the rest." For instance, in order to read Photography against Modernism, it is necessary to forget such photographic practices within Modernism as the Russian constructivists, the Dadaists, the Montagists, the

Surrealists, etc. All these practices were, and are, part of Modernism, and all have employed photography in a way that has allowed them to respond to the historical and political specificity of their respective moments and geo-historical locations. If we are going to say "Photography after Modernism" or "Photography against Modernism," we must first return and attend to the ways in which photography is always already part of that very Modernism.

In order to problematise the opposition between Photography and Modernism, it has been necessary for me to describe the most obvious of positions — positions that some might claim serve my purpose as Straw Dogs — but it is also worth emphasizing that there are many other discourses that describe an opposite, and so similar, logic. But though these discourses will recognise the importance of photography to Modernism, wanting to bracket or even refuse the indexical and democratic imperative of photography, they will, in the last instance, respect and predicate the discursive network that pits one against the other.

We are by now over-familiar with the tired and very tedious photographs that have attempted to employ a "generic" Modernist style (an imitative project that is dependent on a very narrow reading of Modernism as a succession of "forms" or "styles"), in order to distance themselves from photography. These are photographic practices that strain after the affect in their mimicry: copious "abstract photographs"; and "formalist photographs" whose production art schools, in particular, have encouraged. Such photographs attempt to deny their indexical relationship to social reality; they deny that they are photographs at all.

## ADOLF - DER ÜBERMENSCH



John Heartfield,  
Hitler photomontage.

SCHLUCKT GOLD UND REDET BLECH



Richard Hamilton,  
*Just What Is It  
That Makes Today's  
Homes So Different,  
So Appealing?*, 1956.

These are, as I say, moves that we are now familiar with, but we need to consider how we can extract or locate a similar logic elsewhere, even where we might least expect to find it. The exhibition *L'Amour Fou* — curated by Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston — stands as an excellent curatorial example of an attempt to rescue photography from "the outside," from its marginalisation within certain readings of Modernism (most specifically, Surrealism) which have traditionally privileged painting and writing. Of course the Surrealists were not particularly faithful to any medium but employed writing, photography, painting, montage, etc., according to circumstance. This is not without its problems: consider the representation of women in many of the surrealists' works in this respect, notwithstanding the arguments that Rosalind Krauss makes about the *informe*. Still the "rescue" attempt made through the staging of *L'Amour Fou* was remarkable for its decontextualisation of photography. In its passion to place photography on centre stage, the exhibit proceeded to pull the various photographic practices out of their real historical intertextuality. The exhibition became an exhibition of photographs. Certainly the photographs were no longer considered to be either simply indexical, nor mere documentary anecdotes for a surrealist history. But they became

art photographs, literally displacing painting and writing: the magazines and journals where the images were originally published were put away "safely" in small glass containers so as not to interfere with, nor break up, the flow of photographic perfection. To position photography as absolutely central to the surrealist project, re-establishes the very problem that the exhibition set out to abolish. Now there is a new dominant: a new emperor perhaps, but still the same old clothes.

#### CRITICAL DIFFERENCES

If the aesthetic "difference" was only a straining after the affect, then let me return to the question of how photography is now to be defined, both institutionally and critically. It is quite clear that photography does not share the same limits and history as painting; it has neither the latter's historical embodiment of a highly refined public constituency nor, more specifically, its stricter division of labour between those who produce the work and the public that is "out there." Critical arguments made by many writers concerning postmodernist photographic practices — particularly in journals like *October* — were predicated on acquiring for photography a materialist aesthetic in opposition to a perceived idealist (transcendental) one in painting, especially in the context of the very reactionary "return to painting" of the late 1970s. They successfully showed how the canonization of American photography had involved an attempt to have the photographic image aspire to the condition of painting. In order for this to happen the photograph had to renounce its materialist and mechanical characteristics and subsequently had to be defined as the unique view of a "gifted" artist while its medium was specified according to the very narrow reading of Greenbergian Modernism provided by John Szarkowski.<sup>10</sup>

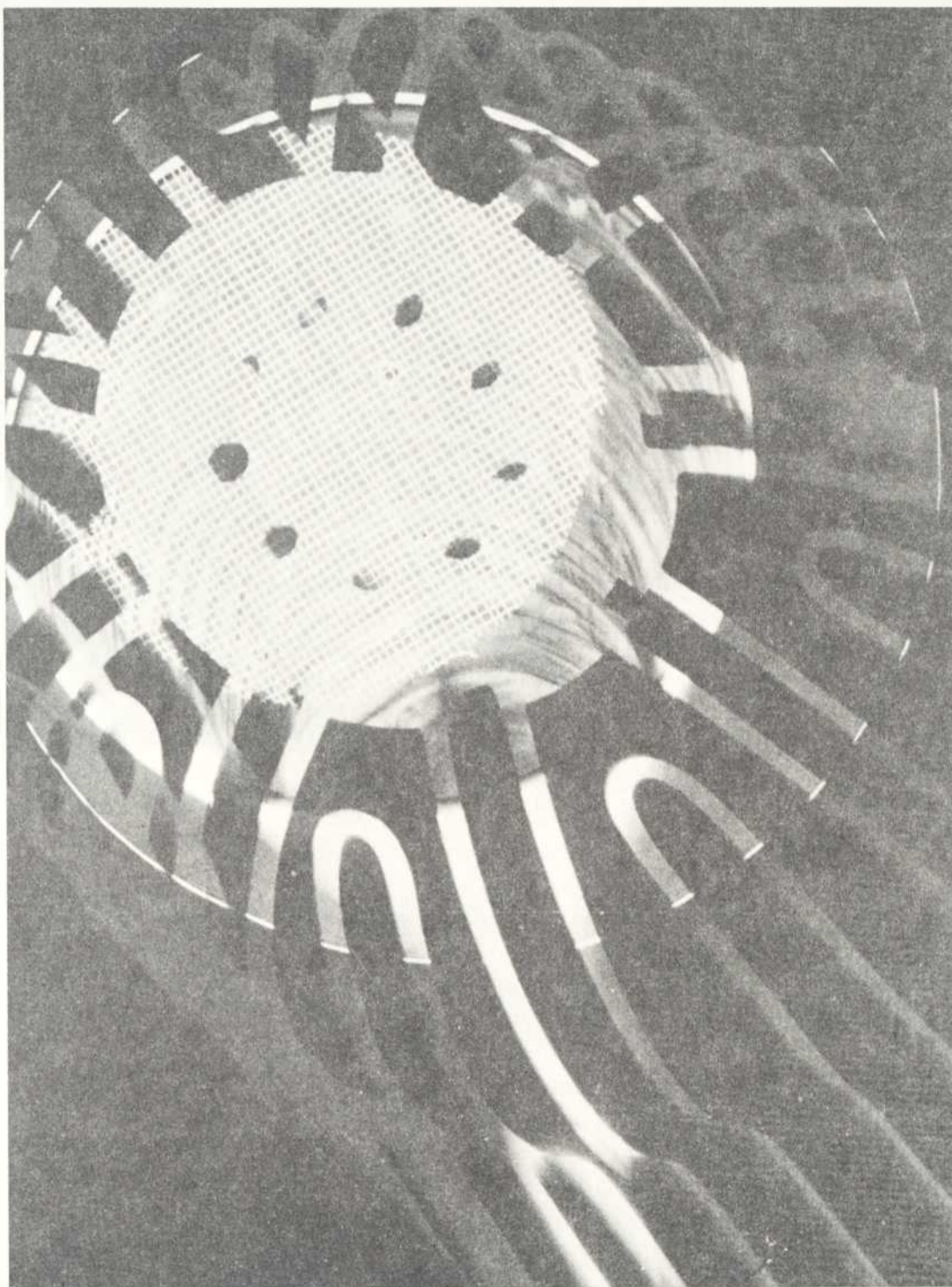
The struggle, for those trying to bring (some) photography into the Modernist canon was, as I have suggested, to try and prove that certain photographs were not, in fact, photographs at all; at least not in the way that they were "popularly" defined as documents or mementos, etc. This struggle was all the more urgent given photography's uneasy status in the museum. As photography was, and remains, a dominant form of representation "out there" in the world, it became increasingly difficult for the photographs "inside" the museums — that is, inside the market — to mark their aesthetic difference. It could be argued that current debates about photography, and specifically with regard to contemporary art practices, have in some respects displaced this problem onto one concerning how some photographic works are able to mark their "critical difference" (and therefore retain their right to a space inside the museum), a critical difference that is thrown into sharp relief against all other images "out there" which continue to be, simply, photographs. This position of a "critical difference" for photography is crucially dependent on the sense of an "out there," where a public form of photographic representation with its legibility as a so-called popular document, provides both a

source of "radicality," and an "object" to be critiqued for the newly defined production.

It has been argued that photography is the natural and logical successor to the apparatus of painting, that their common technical and historical ground is traversed via the *camera obscura*. According to this argument, the objectification of the subject — as the public body — is more rigorously and efficiently accomplished through the photographic apparatus. For those concerned to question the way sexual difference is constructed, this has been a fundamental *difference* for the

be able to perceive this "difference"; a difference that the museum has always rushed to embrace. To put it another way, if perhaps too simply, in order to condemn photography, it is still the case that the "critical" image is required to speak democratically, in order to identify a "real" public, rather than an objectified one.

We need to recognize the very real importance of practices that have attempted to both critique the photographic apparatus and at the same time propose new and different publics. Simultaneously, we need also to bear in mind that definitions con-



Laszlo Moholy-Nagy,  
*Photogram*, 1922.

photographic apparatus, a difference that feminism has reminded us is crucial to our understanding of the way power is embodied within patriarchy. However, I want to pause before confirming that all that it is possible to do with photography is to show this objectification, this policing of the public body. For in order to demonstrate the "reactionary" history of photographic practices "out there" in the world, the museum (or market) works will necessarily have to be predicated on both the belief that they are critically "different" from the former (that is, not caught within the same network of power relations) thus disavowing considerations of complicity and culpability and the belief that their legibility is such that a public will

cerning the capacity of photography to do precisely that — whether because of indexicality, legibility, mass means of production and dissemination, etc. — have also helped to place the photograph more properly within the museum and the market, an emplacement that continues a long tradition of defining art in terms of its hostile, and parasitic, relationship to the world "out there," the world of, apparently, popular culture. With photography defined in such a way, its histories are subtly re-written. At risk of being forgotten are those practices which have employed photography not so much to critique popular culture, but in order to refuse the conception — and construction — of popular culture as a homogenous Other that is

seen to be "outside," and threatening, and so in need of domestication. If the aesthetic is to be dismissed as a mark of "difference" (for this always runs the risk of collapsing arguments back into the dead-end formalist mire of Szarkowski and others), then the affirmation of a "critical difference" will always be at the expense of some other readings, of readings yet to be defined that, for now at least, are outside of any institutional site.

## DEMOCRACY

The question of photography in relationship to its "democratic" imperative is further complicated when we consider the extent to which this imperative necessarily presupposes a totalitarian Other. As Claude Lefort has suggested, opposition — the division between inside and outside — has allowed for the representation of what he calls "the people as one"; this is a representation that lies at the foundation of totalitarianism. In totalitarian thinking there can be no division other than that between the People and its enemies, which is a division between the centre and the outside. The centre, as inside, cannot entertain any notion of division or difference. The outside, as radical Other, is that which is the representative of all that is old, of all that would thwart the will of the people as one.

The birth of photography and the inauguration of debates about a popular means of representation are roughly contemporary with the emergence of democracy. And it is tempting to see the dissemination and legibility of the former as helping to precipitate a further enfranchisement of "the public" in the radical possibilities of the latter. Photography may well be a popular medium; it is part of our everyday life. It does not necessarily require a specialized reading,<sup>11</sup> making it seem worthy of the democratic epoch that it shadows and informs; moreover, it is a medium which is able to respond to a public body that is now expanded to include everyone, regardless of how they are to be defined. However, as I have suggested above, a specialized reading may not be required, but photography nonetheless participates in a policing and interpolating of that very public body, and according to specific formations of power and control. I could say that we need to recognize that an access to, or "popularisation," of the means of representation is both the result of "a legitimate struggle on the part of marginalised or disempowered constituencies and a process of calculated dissemination designed to increase the register of social control."<sup>12</sup>

Now if the public body is both enfranchised and policed through photography — as it is by other mediums — then it would make little sense to establish as its *sine qua non*, its radicality, or its opposition to an *ancien régime*, the regime of painting and "high modernism." For this would be to re-establish too simply, and too quickly, the centre-outside division, that division of a totalitarian logic. As Lefort says, "the campaign against the enemy is feverish. Fever is good, it is the signal within society that there is some evil to combat."

To oppose Photography against Modernism as a

democratic/popular medium, overlooks the fact that Modernism is precisely a response to the emergence of that form of social organization that has come to be called Democracy. Democracy inaugurates the experience of the unspeakable, of an uncontrollable society; of a society where there is a separation of the civic sphere from the state. It is precisely in this form of social organisation where it is no longer possible to locate power and authority centrally. Power appears, as Lefort puts it, as a *Lieu Vide*<sup>13</sup>; as an empty place.

Modernism responds to this contradictory and changing cultural formation; the practices that I mentioned earlier that employed photography are part of that response. This is a response that, unlike the logic of a totalitarian rhetoric, recognizes that there is a difference within as well as without; that in fact there can be no outside as such. Therefore, there can never be a photographic practice which is not at once always Modernist, that is not, in other words, fractured and disseminated across a multiplicity of sites, that "performs" in response to the impossibility of ever finally and completely reconciling difference. If photography shares with other mediums a general democratic imperative, it is only insofar as it has no other choice than to be at once both cause and effect of that very social organisation, democracy. To argue otherwise — to suggest that photography is inherently, differently democratic and that it is this, over and above other mediums and practices, for reasons of its technological and social evolution — is simply, and rather paradoxically, to employ the logic of a totalitarian argument that refuses to acknowledge the cracks that are already within photography; and so, within Modernism.

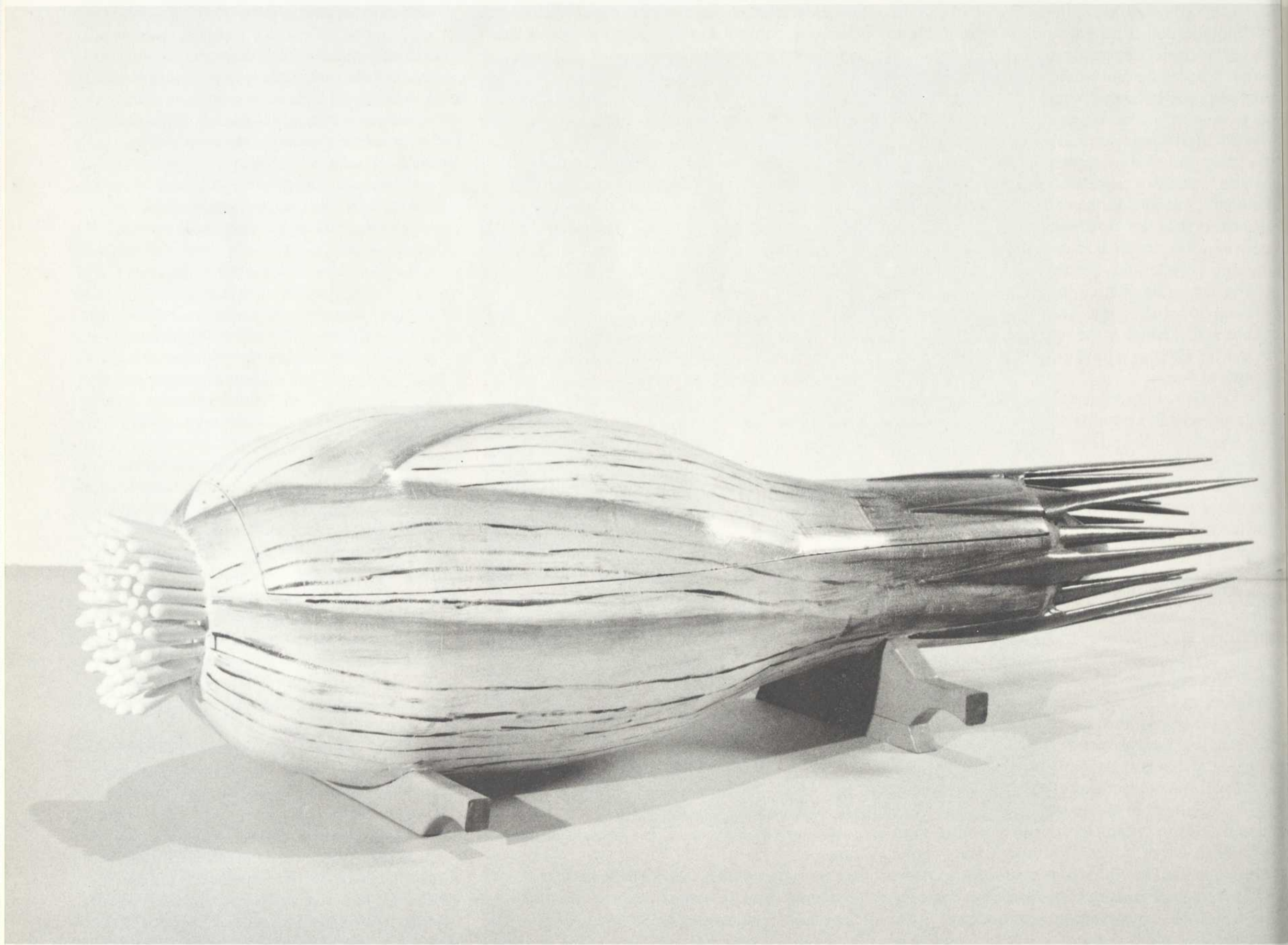
## NOTES

1. This paper is based on a talk given in Toronto in November 1987. Thanks to Tom Folland for his suggestions. Acknowledgements are also due to fellow members of Public Access whose discussions have provided me with some of the ideas for this paper.
2. We should note here that nearly all the current crop of art exhibitions which claim photography as one of their common denominators, propose some form of contestation: of the traditional subjectivities of painting; of history; of sexuality; etc. And while clearly all these projects are possible and even necessary, it is the extent to which they are premised on a "photographic difference" that would be the cause for some theoretical concern.
3. The term postmodernism within art discourse has become for some almost synonymous with works that either employ, or are derivative of, photography. It could be argued that if in one sense the "post" signals an "after" modernism, it also indicates an opposition to it; much in the same way as "post-feminism" is a term that is often used to undermine or dismiss feminism.
4. See John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
5. "When Shaftesbury required a painting to be produced which would exemplify his theory of painting, he felt himself obliged to invent and compose the picture himself, engaging a 'workman' for its mere execution, or the merely manual part of the task, by whose 'hand' Shaftesbury brought his invention 'into practice.'" (John Barrell, *ibid.*) *The Judgment of Hercules*, painted by the "master painter" Paolo de Matthaëis was one

such paintings "brought into practice" from a plan published by Shaftesbury as part of his *Characteristicks* in 1713.

6. See Thierry de Duve, "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint," *Artforum*, May 1986; also Yve-Alain Bois: "Painting: The Task of Mourning," *Endgame* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1986).
  7. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (University of Chicago Press, 1980). Thanks to Andrew Payne for bringing this book to my attention.
  8. Although it is commonly maintained that photography inherits the technologies and pictorial space of the quattrocento, there are a number of writers and art historians who now claim that this is not strictly speaking true, or, at the very least, that it only tells part of the story. Svetlana Alpers in her book *The Art of Describing* makes a convincing claim for a difference that exists between the art of the north and the art of the Renaissance and quattrocento. She characterizes the former as an art of naturalism and the latter as one of realism. In a long footnote to the second chapter of her book in which she sums up her understanding of the debates concerning whether photography is art, Alpers claims that photography is in fact an art of describing rather than "the logical culmination of the Albertian tradition of picture making." According to Alpers, all arguments concerning the status of photography *vis-à-vis* art, whether they are affirmative or negative, have in common the notion that *art* is an Albertian picture. For Alpers, the only way to understand properly the photograph, and its relationship to art, is to unshackle it from the Albertian tradition and consider it, along with the Dutch art of describing and Impressionism — for instances — as a "constant artistic option in the art of the west." See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1984). Thanks to Monika Gagnon for pointing out this footnote.
  9. See Mark Lewis, "The Technologies of Public Art," *Vanguard*, Nov 1987. See also Michel de Certeau's "The Beauty of The Dead" in *Heterologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
  10. In this respect see Victor Burgin (Ed.) *Thinking Photography*, (Macmillan 1982); Abigail Solomon-Godeau's *Photography at the Dock: Collected Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989 — forthcoming); Christopher Phillips' "The Judgement Seat Of Photography" in *October #22* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982).
  11. See "The Public Imaginary" co-written by Mark Lewis, Janine Marchessault and Andrew Payne in *Public 1* (Toronto: Public Access Collective, 1988).
  12. However if you are a "doctor who uses photography" or a "police official who uses photography" or even a "racist psychologist who uses photography," specialised readings will certainly overdetermine the image.
  13. Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986).
- Cet article a été écrit, à l'origine, pour une table ronde sur la pratique photographique intitulée *Photography After Modernism*. À partir de différents thèmes offrant un contexte aux discours critiques actuels sur la photographie, l'auteur met en lumière certaines idées reçues qui, inconsciemment, ont pu produire un tel titre. Il décrit l'usage des termes «à l'extérieur de», «contre» et «après» comme étant des positions inhérentes à la logique des points de vue totalitaires, et introduit une nouvelle façon de penser les origines du modernisme, dont l'apparition répondrait à l'organisation sociale de la démocratie. De même, il en fait ressortir la capacité d'absorber des formations culturelles à la fois contradictoires et changeantes.**

UNE ENTREVUE AVEC JEAN-HUBERT MARTIN ET ANDRÉ MAGNIN



LE

PARIS

budgetaire

mis apr

que s'ou

de la Tex

Centre P

ir de th

il est an

Musee A

directeu

l'œuvre

don tran

vivants

sur plus

alles du

de la Vil

Pour

designer

l'artiste

contemp

ment?

notions

dans la

res cu

mêmes

Un e

ver le c

guace

ressour

nes pra

l'ensem

se renc

fonctio

de la T

d'idée

provier

Magici

don à c

Plus

exposit

missair

commi

nous o

Pou

exposit

J-H.

porain

vivants

dans s

qui im

# LES MAGICIENS DE LA TERRE

VERS UN CHAMP « MONDIAL » D'INVESTIGATION ?

R E N É V I A U

Kane Kwei, *Cercueil «oignon»*, 1988,  
bois sculpté et peint, 70 × 265 × 70 cm.

PARIS – C'est dans une période de tension budgétaire, administrative et syndicale, et quelques mois après la nomination d'un nouveau président, que s'ouvre, le 18 mai, l'exposition *Les Magiciens de la Terre* au Musée National d'Art Moderne du Centre Pompidou. Le projet, au départ, devait servir de thème à une édition de la Biennale de Paris. Il s'est amplifié en passant sous la responsabilité du Musée National d'Art Moderne dont le nouveau directeur, Jean-Hubert Martin, était aussi le maître d'œuvre des *Magiciens de la Terre*. Cette exposition trans-culturelle réunit des œuvres d'artistes «vivants», de toutes provenances géographiques, sur plus de 10 000 mètres carrés, tant dans les salles du Musée d'Art Moderne qu'à la Grande Halle de la Villette, du 18 mai au 14 août.

Pourquoi ce titre, *Magiciens de la Terre*, pour désigner une exposition réunissant des œuvres d'artistes contemporains occidentaux et d'artistes contemporains de pays dits en voie de développement? «Avant tout pour ne pas considérer les notions d'art ou d'artistes comme allant de soi dans la production d'objets visuels puisque d'autres cultures n'appliquent pas à ces objets les mêmes concepts que la culture occidentale».

Un concept aussi ambitieux ne peut que soulever le débat sur des questions telles que la prégnance de la communication visuelle, le besoin de ressourcement ou la volonté de légitimer certaines pratiques, voire un débat sur la pertinence de l'ensemble de ce «safari muséologique». En faisant se rencontrer des réseaux repliés sur leur propre fonctionnement, les organisateurs des *Magiciens de la Terre* entendent dissiper un certain nombre d'idées reçues sur la production artistique qui provient d'ailleurs qu'en Occident. En ce sens, *Les Magiciens de la Terre* se veut «la première exposition à couvrir un champ mondial d'investigation».

Plusieurs semaines avant l'ouverture de cette exposition imprévisible, Jean-Hubert Martin, commissaire de l'exposition et André Magnin, un des commissaires adjoints des *Magiciens de la Terre* nous ont livré leur point de vue.

**Pouvons-nous «décrire» le concept de cette exposition mondiale d'artistes contemporains?**

J.-H.M. : Lorsque nous parlons d'artistes contemporains, il est clair que nous parlons d'artistes vivants. Nous utilisons ce terme de contemporain dans son sens le plus large et le plus simple, celui qui implique les gens avec qui nous vivons mainte-

nant et non pas dans le sens restrictif où on l'entend habituellement dans le milieu de l'art qui évoque plutôt les artistes liés avec la dernière phase de la modernité occidentale. Il s'agit ainsi d'artistes vivant aujourd'hui et venant du monde entier et non uniquement des réseaux que nous connaissons déjà entre l'Europe, l'Amérique du Nord, le Japon et quelquefois une pincée d'Amérique du Sud.

**Combien d'artistes seront présents?**

J.-H.M. : Cent artistes. Le chiffre ne correspond pas à un plaisir des décimales mais plutôt à cette ambition d'aller chercher des artistes dans beaucoup de pays qui ne nous permettait pas d'en avoir moins d'une centaine. Cependant, nous ne voulions pas trop d'artistes. Certaines *Dokumenta* énormes où il y avait environ 165 artistes me paraissaient très difficiles à assurer pour le public.

**Quelle a été votre approche méthodologique pour cette entreprise qui apparaît avant tout comme une enquête?**

J.-H.M. : L'enquête a d'abord porté sur des communautés artistiques ou sur des lieux sur lesquels nous avons déjà des informations ici à Paris. Nous avons consulté des sources écrites; rencontré beaucoup d'anthropologues et de gens qui voyageaient. Nous avons eu recours à de nombreux informateurs locaux, critiques, directeurs de musée, etc. C'est toujours sur la base d'un minimum de connaissances déjà acquises que nous sommes partis, moi ou un de mes collaborateurs, dans un pays. Quelquefois nous avons eu affaire à un ensemble, à de véritables communautés artistiques. Notre travail a alors consisté à isoler celui que nous considérions comme le «leader» au sein d'un groupe. Celui dont il nous semblait que les capacités d'invention et de création étaient les plus fortes.

**André Magnin, comment se sont passés vos séjours au Canada?**

A.M. : Je voudrais tout d'abord préciser que je n'ai pas fait exclusivement des voyages au Canada. Je ne suis pas un spécialiste du Canada. Ce qui m'intéressait au départ, c'était de voir la production d'artistes Kwakiutl, Haïda et Ojibwa tandis que Jean-Louis Maubant, directeur du Nouveau Musée de Lyon-Villeurbanne, se chargeait du volet «occidental», si on peut dire, du pays. Nous avons une banque d'informations et d'images. Certains noms nous intéressaient au départ. Il nous fallait tout de même vérifier sur place. Je me suis adressé, dans un premier temps, à certains collectionneurs qui ont bien voulu nous ouvrir leur collection. Ces visites là-bas ont confirmé notre intérêt pour certains artistes notamment Norval Morrisseau, mais il

avait, me disait-on, disparu de la circulation et restait introuvable. C'est finalement sur la Côte-Ouest où je suis allé pour voir les œuvres d'Indiens Haïda que je l'ai trouvé. Après une visite d'atelier, cela s'est soldé par une invitation de participation.

**Cette approche «d'enquête» est-elle différente de ce que fait habituellement un conservateur de musée?**

J.-H. M. : Pas tellement, à mon avis. Mon métier de conservateur, surtout à la Kunsthalle de Berne, me faisait chercher des artistes relativement jeunes, d'une trentaine d'années ou moins. C'est un peu cette méthode que j'ai voulu étendre au reste du monde. Aller à Düsseldorf, à Los Angeles ou à Copenhague voir ce qui se passe en voulant sortir des sentiers battus. Il y a là des choses qui sont connues mais ce n'est pas ce que nous voulons voir. On veut surtout aller dans les ateliers. Quelquefois, on ne parle pas la langue. On ne comprend pas très bien tout autour de soi. On communique parfois très peu même en parlant anglais, un anglais parfois très sommaire. Donc, on se fie beaucoup aux autres sens. À ce que l'on voit. À ce que l'on entend. À toutes sortes de sensations et à des appréciations souvent intuitives qui ont beaucoup à voir avec le flair. On ne comprend pas toujours de façon rationnelle ce que veut dire l'artiste. On cherche cet espèce de moment extraordinaire où l'on sera touché, où l'on sentira qu'il y a quelque chose de neuf.

Les gens nous demandent tout le temps, à propos de cette exposition: mais comment allez-vous expliquer le contexte de tous ces artistes qui viennent d'un peu partout? La plupart des visiteurs de musées ne comprennent rien au contexte des jeunes artistes de leur propre pays que l'on montre. Maintenant, Beuys a été assimilé. Mais il y a vingt ans, quand nous voyions les premiers Beuys, qui comprenait réellement ses œuvres? Ce sera tout à fait du même ordre quand nous allons montrer des choses venant d'autres cultures et d'autres civilisations.

**D'un côté, vous aurez des œuvres d'artistes contemporains occidentaux, basées sur l'innovation, et de l'autre, il y aura des œuvres plus proches d'une certaine idée de la tradition. Comment envisagez-vous cette cohabitation?**

J.-H.M. : Il faut relativiser dans les deux sens. D'une part, il n'y a pas de culture dans laquelle des modèles sont répétés stricto sensu. Même quand un modèle est répété, cela se fait toujours avec une part d'apport personnel, d'invention et d'évolution stylistique. Cette répétition n'est donc pas complètement statique. D'autre part, l'Occident a ten-

dance à mettre en valeur les ruptures dans l'histoire de l'art. Cependant cette même histoire de l'art pourrait aussi être vue sous l'angle de la continuité.

On peut se demander si un peintre qui peint des tankas tibétains est un artiste, ce dont nous ne doutons pas du tout. C'est un art savant. Il y a une tradition. Il faut des connaissances. Une technique est requise. Ces gens sont vivants. Ils existent. Il y a des tas de gens qui voyagent et qui vont au Tibet. Des Tibétains viennent ici. Alors pourquoi, un jour, ne pas mettre ces gens ensemble dans le même espace et leur demander de nous montrer chacun leur production? Ils ont peut-être des choses à se dire. Étant donné qu'il s'agit d'être vivants aujourd'hui, cela vaut la peine d'être tenté.

**Faut-il craindre le danger de hiérarchie entre les artistes occidentaux et les autres, ne serait-ce que par rapport à l'utilisation de la technologie à laquelle bon nombre d'artistes des pays du Tiers-Monde n'ont pas accès?**

J.-H.M. : J'ai travaillé pour que tout le monde soit sur un même pied d'égalité. Par ailleurs, l'art n'a rien à voir avec le développement technologique. Il y a aujourd'hui des types qui travaillent avec un bout de papier et un crayon et qui font des choses merveilleuses et géniales. Pas besoin de vidéo. La hiérarchie reste purement technique.

**Au Canada, certains artistes Inuit répondent avant tout à la demande du marché en répétant une tradition qui n'exprime plus la réalité qu'ils vivent quotidiennement.**

A.M. : On trouve cela aussi à Montmartre où des artistes vendent aux touristes japonais et américains.

J.-H.M. : Dans les galeries d'avant-garde, les artistes ne répondent-ils pas aussi aux besoins du marché? La règle est de toujours innover. Mais dans tous les cas, quels qu'ils soient, nous avons affaire à des gens qui produisent quelque chose et, par conséquent, le monnayent. Même si, en Papouasie ou en Nouvelle-Guinée, il s'agit davantage de troc.

**Oui, cela s'entend. Mais il est vrai que les collectionneurs ou les connaisseurs préfèrent acheter des pièces d'une culture donnée datant d'un certain nombre d'années plutôt que des pièces qui viennent d'être faites.**

A.M. : Certaines coopératives inuit, au Canada par exemple, sont des grandes surfaces d'os de baleine, travaillés à la va-vite. C'est un art d'aéroport. Néanmoins, on peut identifier des artistes qui ne sont pas tombés dans cette complaisance. Ils continuent à travailler en profondeur, indépendamment du marché de masse. Paulosee Kuniliusee, un artiste Inuk invité pour les *Magiciens de la Terre* est de ceux-là.

J.-H.M. : À cause de notre méthode, nous sommes obligés d'aller sur le terrain, voir sur place l'artiste en plein travail. Des paramètres et des critères différents ont joué, mais il nous fallait trouver des créateurs qui mettaient vraiment une énergie personnelle dans leur travail.

**Pouvez-vous nous citer quelques noms d'artistes occidentaux?**

J.-H.M. : Marina et Ulay Abramovic, Christian Boltanski, Stanley Broun, On Kawara, Mario Merz,

Claes Oldenburg, Nam June Paik, Per Kirkeby, Jeff Wall...

**Comment faire pour éviter le côté «olympiades» de l'art en représentant autant d'artistes de nationalités différentes?**

J.-H.M. : Le projet n'a pu se réaliser que dans une indépendance totale par rapport aux circuits politiques officiels, nationaux ou internationaux. C'est-à-dire une indépendance financière, entre autres, qui n'a pas été facile à obtenir. Il aurait été pratiquement impossible de faire une exposition de ce type-là avec l'Unesco car les conditions auraient été trop draconiennes.

**Comment concevez-vous l'accrochage?**

J.-H.M. : Nous voulions éviter les regroupements géographiques. Les regroupements à partir de comparaisons et de rapprochements formels nous semblaient trahis, car vous pouvez avoir des formes très proches d'une culture à l'autre mais avec des significations très diverses. C'est donc beaucoup plus en fonction de leur rôle dans leur propre culture que les objets ont été regroupés. Vous trouverez ainsi un ensemble d'œuvres venant de contrées très différentes mais qui ont trait à la mort, aux rites fondamentaux. Vous en trouverez d'autres placés sous le signe des mythologies de la création, des ancêtres fondateurs, des représentations cosmiques, etc. Mais nous avons aussi essayé le plus possible d'isoler les artistes en présentant plusieurs pièces de leur travail comme s'il s'agissait d'une exposition personnelle. Ils seront donc représentés par plusieurs œuvres chacun, par des œuvres monumentales et dans bien des cas par des œuvres faites sur place, car soixante à soixante-dix pour cent des artistes présents sont venus travailler sur place.

**Le fait de ne pas connaître au départ la majorité des artistes choisis et de travailler avec des œuvres qui n'existent pas, puisqu'elles seront construites ou assemblées sur place, n'ajoute-t-il pas à cette dimension de risque qui est au cœur de ce projet. Comment avez-vous vécu ce risque?**

J.-H.M. : Jusqu'ici, on dort bien parce que nous avons vécu tout cela comme une grande aventure. L'exposition, déjà entre nous, suscite beaucoup d'interrogations et de discussions. Cette aventure devrait donc proposer un grand débat. C'est très excitant. Cela nous permettra, je l'espère, de reviser certaines catégories un peu trop rigides sur lesquelles nous travaillons habituellement.

**Au sein de votre concept d'exposition, quel est le rôle de certains artistes de nos centres d'art qui ont des liens privilégiés avec les cultures non occidentales, qui travaillent sur les chocs, les confrontations entre notre culture et ces cultures, de ces artistes qui se sont distingués par l'intérêt qu'ils ont porté à d'autres cultures?**

J.-H.M. : Ils sont le noyau dur des artistes occidentaux. Ce sont aussi des artistes qui viennent du Tiers-Monde ou d'Asie comme Nam June Paik et d'autres dont l'œuvre reflète certaines des caractéristiques de leur culture d'origine. On Kawara est japonais. Ulay Abramovic a vécu en Australie avec des aborigènes. Alfredo Jaar, qui est du Chili a un projet typique. Boetti travaille avec des femmes afghanes qui brodent des poèmes souffi.

**Selon vous, y a-t-il un parallèle à faire entre cette exposition et l'émergence des littératures et des cinémas d'ailleurs, d'Inde, de Chine, d'Afrique?**

J.-H.M. : Pas uniquement avec la littérature et le cinéma mais encore plus, en ce qui me concerne, avec la musique, les arts du spectacle et le théâtre, la danse où depuis quelques années on n'hésite pas à faire venir des troupes entières de régions souvent très éloignées. Je crois que les craintes que nous avons entendues à savoir qu'amener quelqu'un d'Inde ou d'ailleurs, ici, le déstabiliserait complètement ne sont pas fondées. Je ne crois pas à ce type de traumatisme. Tous dans le monde ont envie de voir un jour la tour Eiffel. Il n'y a pas de raisons de le refuser aux autres.

**Quels sont vos objectifs: briser un isolement, intégrer de nouveaux artistes à des circuits de diffusion, ouvrir le champ?**

J.-H.M. : Nous voulions ouvrir le champ et faire un constat de l'existence de la création en arts visuels en dehors de l'Occident. Il y a un sous-entendu qui traîne parmi nous depuis trop longtemps selon lequel il n'y a de l'art vivant que chez nous, aujourd'hui. Notre première étape a été de nous demander si cela était bien vrai. Dans un deuxième temps, nous nous sommes dit: il faudrait tout de même aller y voir avant de le dire. Le résultat, on le verra dans cette exposition.

A.M. : Nous voulions tirer à boulets rouges sur un grand nombre d'a priori non fondés.

**Une exposition comme celle-là suppose une production très coûteuse. Cela soulève la question des priorités à travers une institution comme le Musée d'Art Moderne. Où s'inscrit *Les Magiciens de la Terre* dans la liste de vos priorités?**

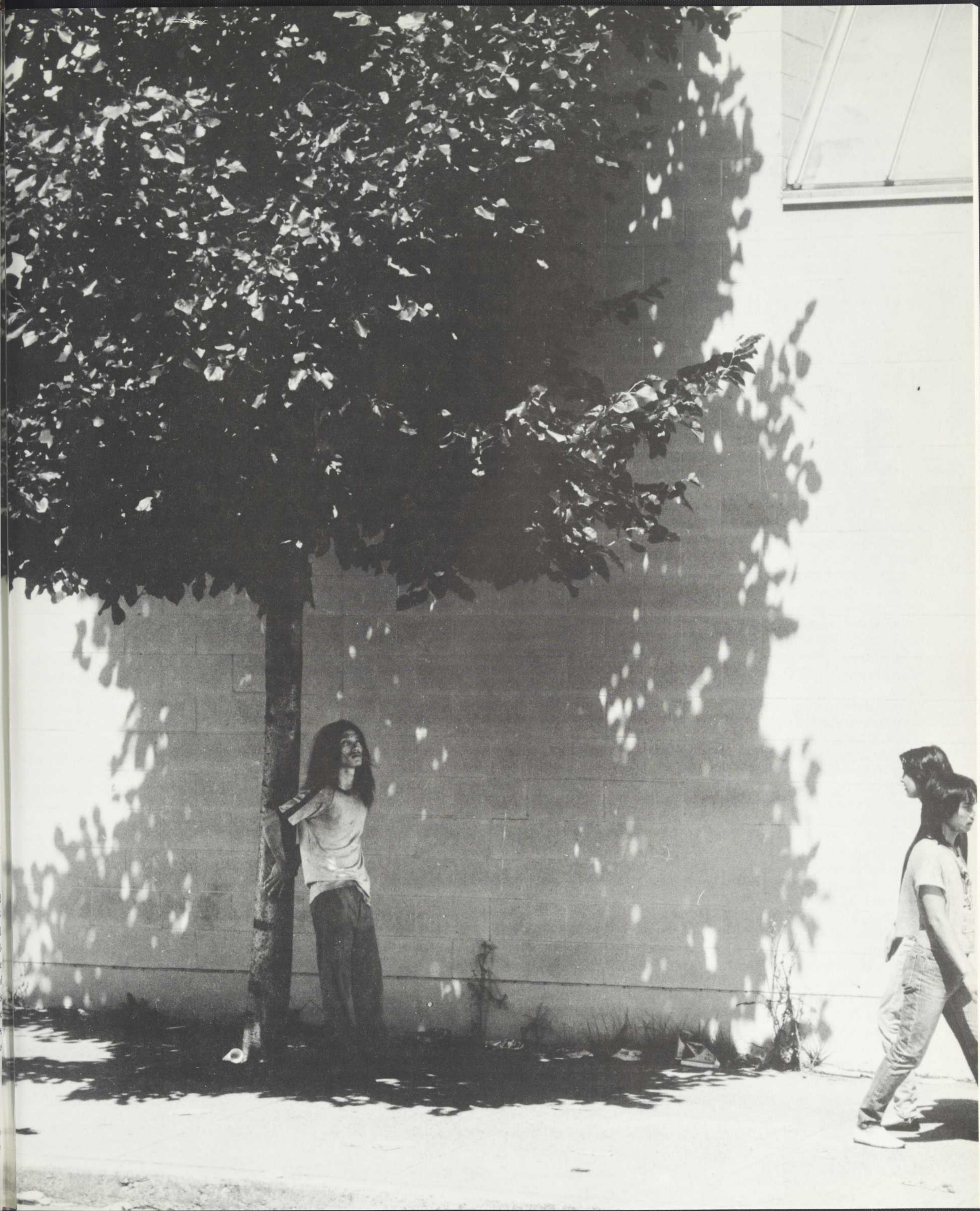
J.-H.M. : C'est la grande priorité. Vous le pensez bien puisque j'ai passé plusieurs années à ce projet. C'est aussi une priorité pour le Centre Pompidou car il a toujours été dans sa vocation de lancer des manifestations et des expositions qui initient un débat, une discussion, et qui permettent de revoir certaines questions sous un autre angle. *Les Magiciens de la Terre* sont tout à fait dans la tradition du Centre Pompidou.

René Viau est un critique d'art et un journaliste vivant à Paris.

René Viau interviews Jean-Hubert Martin and André Magnin, curators of the exhibition *Les Magiciens de la terre*, presented at the Musée national d'art moderne of the Centre Pompidou. *Les Magiciens de la terre* is original in that it places the emphasis on the diverse geographical origins of the one hundred artists it brings together. This interview explains how, and from what basis, the exhibition was mounted, as well as the problems, and ensuing debates, which such juxtapositions can bring about.

Jeff Wall, *Tran Duc Van*, 1988, cibachrome présenté dans un caisson lumineux à lumière fluorescente, 229 × 290 cm.

aire entre  
ratures et  
ne, d'Afri  
ature et le  
concerne.  
le théâtre.  
hésite pas  
gions sou-  
aintes que  
u'amener  
stabilisera  
e crois pas  
monde ont  
y a pas de  
solement,  
ircuits de  
mp et faire  
on en arts  
a un sous-  
trop long-  
t que chez  
e a été de  
i. Dans un  
il faudrait  
re. Le résul-  
rouges sur  
ppose une  
la question  
comme le  
Magiciens  
?  
s le pensez  
à ce projet.  
Pompidou  
e lancer des  
initient un  
nt de revoir  
e. Les Magi-  
tradition du  
journaliste  
Martin and  
on Les Magi-  
sée national  
ou. Les Magi-  
it places the  
al origins of  
gether. This  
at basis, the  
he problems  
xtapositions  
né dans un cadre  
me 229 x 290 g



(Un sonoportrait sur disques du nouveau jazz d'ici paru durant les années quatre-vingt sur étiquette Ambiances Magnétiques.)

Alors que le Festival international de musique actuelle de Victoriaville prépare déjà sa septième édition pour l'automne prochain, que le Festival international de jazz de Montréal célèbre quant à lui cette année son dixième anniversaire, nous avons cru bon de faire le point, pour cette occasion, sur le jazz le plus expérimental ou novateur qui s'invente au Québec, celui d'Ambiances Magnétiques. La contrepartie aux États-Unis, par exemple, de ces chansonniers de la post-modernité improvisée, serait des musiciens(nes) comme Greg Osby, Steve Coleman, Cassandra Wilson, Kip

morte; Wondeur Brass: *Simoneda, reine des esclaves*. (Un treizième disque devrait paraître ces jours-ci, soit *Bruire* de Michel F. Côté.)

En respectant l'ordre chronologique, il nous faut donc commencer avec Conventum, un groupe de transition qui participe autant de la fin des années soixante-dix que de la période spécifiquement discutée ici.

#### CONVENTUM: LES REELS ENGAGÉS

Élaborée de façon collective à partir de canevas individuels, la musique de Conventum est une sorte de synthèse-mosaïque entre divers courants de musiques progressives et un certain folklore moderne. Surprenantes et sinueuses, insoumises, tragiques, ironi-

exprime à la fois le blues du pays en devenir et une détermination à y vivre debout. C'est cette même vitalité et fierté qu'on retrouvait dans l'oeuvre de Jean Carignan par exemple, dans un autre contexte, et dans celle de Félix Leclerc disparu récemment.

Du reel, à la valse, à la fanfare, au minimalisme (dans les «critticotteuses») et au bruitisme occasionnel, c'est à un folklore éclectique et renouvelé que nous convie Conventum. Il prolonge à sa manière (par la qualité d'émotion, les idées et les aspirations) l'apport des chansonniers d'autrefois, (de la Bolduc même à Félix Leclerc, Gilles Vigneault et autres) fusionné à celui du blues américain et du jazz.

R A Y M O N D G E R V A I S

# M O N T R É A L

Hanrahan, Terri Lyne Carrington, Geri Allen, John Zorn, Michele Rosewoman, Bill Frisell, Fred Frith, Wayne Horwitz, etc.

L'année 1989, c'est bien sûr celle des célébrations du bicentenaire de la révolution française. Or, le jazz, musique du vingtième siècle, a souvent été défini comme étant une pratique révolutionnaire en ce qu'elle a, entre autres, remis l'attention sur l'improvisation, l'invention spontanée, dans l'instant (l'improvisation comme mode de composition.)

1989, c'est aussi l'année où on a beaucoup parlé des orages magnétiques qui ont touché le Québec et mis K.O. notre système hydro-électrique. Le jazz dont il est question ici, hybride, très ouvert, difficile à situer, constitue globalement une sorte de «tempête magnétique» qui, à sa manière, aurait ébranlé les fondements mêmes de l'histoire conventionnelle comme de la pratique jazzistique chez nous.

Cette nouvelle musique d'improvisation implique donc aussi une nouvelle «gestion de l'énergie», une nouvelle façon de s'investir dans le processus de création. Pour en juger, nous discuterons des principaux enregistrements parus, cas par cas.

Le catalogue Ambiances Magnétiques comme tel comprend douze titres. Ce sont: René Lussier: *Fin du travail*; Robert M. Lepage — René Lussier: *Chants et danses du monde inanimé*; André Duchesne: *Le Temps des bombes*; Conventum: *Réédition 1977-1979-plus* (album double); Jean Derome — René Lussier: *Soyez vigilants, restez vivants, (vol. 1)*; Jean Derome — René Lussier: *Retour des granules (vol. 2)*; Wondeur Brass: *Ravir*; Pierre St-Jak: *Oeuvralgique*; Les Poules: *Contes de l'amère loi*; Les quatre guitaristes de l'apocalypso-bar: *Tournée mondiale/été 89*; Robert M. Lepage: *La Traversée de la mémoire*

ques et grinçantes, les mélodies de Conventum ont fait figure d'étranges et de nouvelles dans le Québec bleu-bleu-bleu des années soixante-dix. Dans sa guérilla don-quichottesque contre les moulins à musique utilitaire, Conventum a cherché à se distinguer par une volonté constante d'éviter les clichés et les modes tout en cherchant la proximité des publics populaires. (Notes de pochette)

Conventum est donc un groupe de transition qui, chevauchant les années soixante-dix/quatre-vingt, a établi des liens entre le folklore d'ici, la chanson à texte, le jazz et le rock amalgamé à des préoccupations socio-politiques globales. Un groupe instrumental surtout, et difficile à situer comme le furent le Komuso à cordes ou le duo Dionne-Brégent par exemple, à la même époque (alors que l'EMIM était plus directement «jazz» au niveau de l'expression; l'EMIM n'était pas un groupe cependant mais une association).

L'album double de Conventum (une réédition) comprend des enregistrements datant de 1977 à 1982; que des compositions originales dont la plupart sont signées André Duchesne en collaboration avec divers membres du groupe. Parmi les titres au programme, citons: «Les Reels du Conventum», «À l'affût d'un complot», «Le Bureau central des utopies», «Le Reel des élections», «Fanfare», «Chorégraphie lunaire».

Le son et un phrasé typiquement «folk» prédominent ici. Il n'y a pas de vents (pas de saxophone), pas de batterie associée au jazz (sauf pour une pièce datant de 1982, la dernière dans la chronologie, avec une nouvelle édition de Conventum dont l'approche plus individualiste et axée sur le solo fait directement référence au jazz).

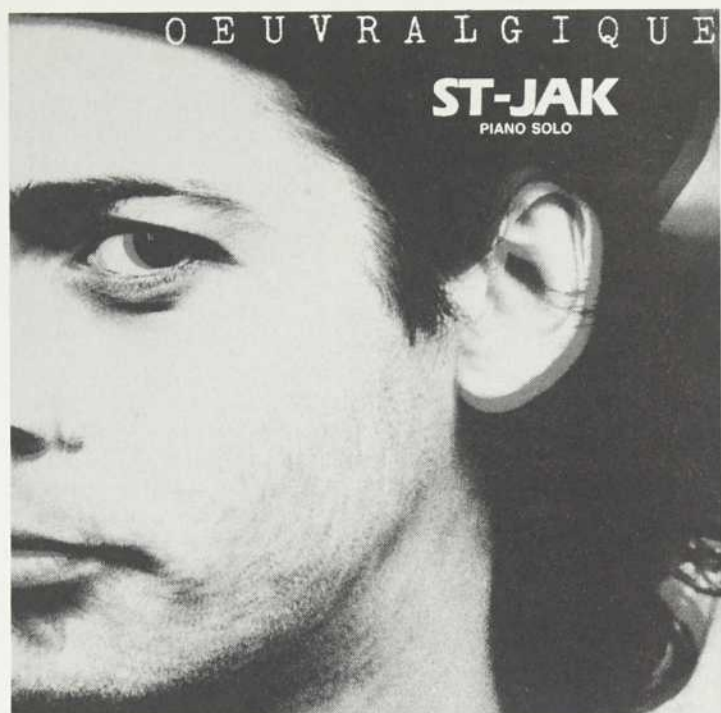
Quoi qu'il en soit, le violon est, pour l'essentiel, l'instrument primordial dans cette musique axée sur les cordes. Il donne la couleur, un son du terroir à ce jazz tout autant nostalgique et mélancolique parfois, que protestataire, urgent, et qui

Signalons ici en guise de parenthèse que le saxophoniste-compositeur Walter Boudreau avait lui aussi cherché auparavant à marier le folklore et le jazz dans une pièce comme «danse» (enregistré pour Phonodisc) de la même façon que la «valse à grand-mère» du quatuor de jazz libre du Québec (gravée pour London et RCI) anticipait déjà l'ultérieure «valse des fous» de Conventum.

En ce qui concerne les reels adaptables à tous les courants actuels en musique, il faut rappeler aussi le travail de Dominique Tremblay et Philippe Gagnon du début des années soixante-dix, lequel participe un peu à sa manière du même désir d'ouvrir le folklore d'ici sur l'univers, de le régénérer via de nouvelles sources d'inspiration, de nouveaux apports de l'extérieur.

Le Centre d'essai le Conventum fut pendant plus de six ans un lieu de rencontres et d'échanges culturels, d'où le nom du groupe. Le mot Conventum signifie aussi une réunion d'anciens au présent, et les ombres des grandes voix ancestrales qui ont célébré le pays et sa quête d'autonomie résonnent à nouveau ici, différemment sans doute, mais quand même. Folk urbain? Rock and Reel? Jazz? De quoi s'agit-il au fait? Si cette musique hybride, mais cohérente, n'est pas vraiment du jazz au sens habituel du terme, elle reste une musique intègre qui se voulait surtout populaire et visait, sans renier la qualité, à initier un nouveau public à l'art de l'improvisation.

Les principaux musiciens qui ont participé aux sessions d'enregistrement de 1977 et 1979 sont: Jean-Pierre Bouchard (guitare/flûte à bec), Bernard Cormier (violon, percussions), André Duchesne (guitare), Jacques Laurin (contrebasse), René Lussier (guitare), Jean Derome (flûte) et Alain-Arthur Painchaud (récitant).



St-Jak, *Oeuvralgique*, ST-J 8888 (pochette de disque). Wondeur Brass, *Simoneda*, vol. 2, Ambiances Magnétiques, AM012, 1987 (pochette de disque).

# M A G N É T I Q U E

JEAN DEROME — RENÉ LUSSIER:  
LE DUO-ORCHESTRE

Jean Derome (flûtes, saxophones, claviers, divers) et René Lussier (guitare, percussion, divers) sont deux des personnalités les plus en vue de la nouvelle musique d'improvisation au Québec. Tous deux ont été associés à une foule de groupes différents: René Lussier à l'EMIM, la Gum, Jonas et Conventum (qui l'a fait découvrir entre autres aux amateurs) et Jean Derome à Nébu, dès le milieu des années soixante-dix, puis à l'EMIM lui aussi, Jonas, Éboulements, musique ludique, la grande aventure, Misterioso, etc. Derome avait, de plus, enregistré deux disques auparavant avec le groupe Nébu, précédant ceux commentés ici. Sa plus récente composition d'envergure est une suite pour mini-big band intitulée: «Confitures de Gagaku». Le big band est une entité quasi inexistante chez nos «jazzmen» magnétiques et ce, pour toutes sortes de raisons économique, esthétique et autres. On a donc, la plupart du temps, favorisé le solo, le duo et les petites formations très diversifiées. Cette oeuvre élaborée de Jean Derome nous laisse cependant deviner la richesse et le potentiel que représenterait le format du grand orchestre pour ce nouveau jazz d'ici. Montréal qui compte déjà trois ou quatre big bands traditionnels pourrait sûrement tirer avantage de l'avènement d'un big band polyfree magnétique dans l'avenir, ou Big Bang Jazz... (cf: *Confitures de Gagaku*, disque Victo 05).

Quant au deuxième membre de notre tandem, René Lussier, il apparaît lui aussi dans plusieurs disques dont un premier album solo, pour Ambiances magnétiques intitulé *Fin du travail* avec, parmi ses collaborateurs invités, Jean Derome. Suivirent un album en duo avec Robert Lepage (*Chants et*

*danses du monde inanimé*), deux autres albums en duo avec Jean Derome et un tout dernier gravé avec le guitariste Fred Frith dans le cadre du Festival international de musique actuelle de Victoriaville. Intitulé *Nous autres*, cette rencontre au sommet nous permet de signaler ici l'entrée du festival de Victoriaville dans l'arène des producteurs de disques de jazz actuel au Québec, témoignant avec prégnance et acuité de cette atmosphère fin de siècle improvisée que nous vivons intensément aujourd'hui.

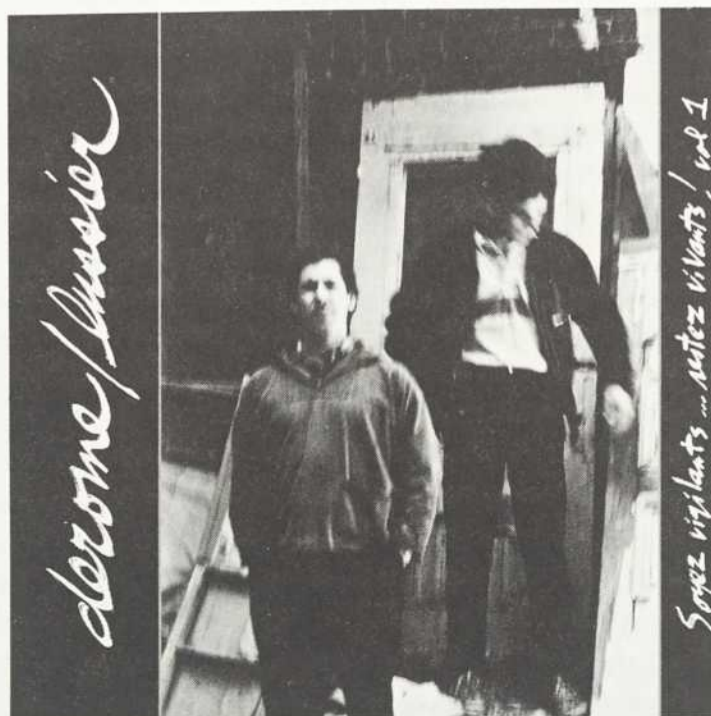
De fait, cet «autre jazz», qui repousse constamment les limites appréhendées du possible, est représenté à divers degrés au Québec par les organismes suivants: le Festival de musique actuelle de Victoriaville, la galerie Obscure à Québec, ainsi que Traquenart et le festival de jazz de Montréal (et

aussi à la radio, au réseau F.M. de Radio-Canada).

Par ailleurs, le jazz qui se crée en général dans la région de Québec, si l'on se fie aux disques disponibles, est très différent de celui qui se pratique à Montréal. La musique composée/improvisée que joue par exemple les formations Mara, Ogane Song et Ndajé est très axée sur un habile mélange de jazz et de musiques ethniques d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique du Sud (du Brésil entre autres). Denis Hébert au piano et Maurice Bouchard aux saxophones en sont les voix dominantes.

Quant à Montréal, les choix se partagent entre diverses approches: le jazz classique d'après le modèle américain surtout, le jazz d'Ambiances magnétiques et quelques cas isolés. À cet égard, le J.I.M. (jeu d'improvisation musicale) présenté au Spectrum au printemps dernier a permis de vérifier, lors de diverses confrontations successives, les grandes différences qui existent entre les musiciens de chaque clan: les vieux routiers issus du bop et les jeunes loups de l'après free-jazz. Un face à face symptomatique et passionnant dans l'«arène post-moderne» du jazz assiégé.

Au plan national, Montréal fait peut-être, aux yeux de certains, un jazz plus littéraire, narratif, comme éclaté, fragmenté, d'un lyrisme exacerbé ou plus conceptuel et qui remet profondément, radicalement, en cause les modèles d'origine (et ce peut-être plus que partout ailleurs dans les autres villes canadiennes). À ce sujet, le critique torontois Mark Miller disait, dans son plus récent et important ouvrage sur le jazz canadien (*Boogie, Pete and the Senator*, Toronto, Nightwood Editions, 1987, p. 27): «La musique improvisée la plus originale au Canada vient des musiciens du quartier le Plateau Mont-Royal dans l'est de Montréal, des musiciens comme René Lussier, Robert M. Lepage et Jean Derome».



Derome/Lussier, *Soyez vigilants... restez vivants! vol. 1*, Ambiances Magnétiques, AM005, 1986 (pochette de disque).

Quoi qu'il en soit, une liste des principaux sujets traités par notre duo Derome-Lussier (avec certains collaborateurs additionnels à l'occasion), dans leurs deux derniers disques démontre bien la variété et la complexité de leurs intérêts en dehors du champ de la pratique musicale (celle-ci servant de catalyseur pour réunir l'ensemble en un tout personnalisé et cohérent). Il y est donc question de: la fin du monde, la danse sociale, Shefferville fantôme, les Montagnais, Arthur Rimbaud, les oiseaux, l'industrie forestière, le boudin de Noël, la langue, l'EMIM, le «petit pain», l'armée du salut, la guerre, le corps humain, le Gagaku, Xenakis, Antonin Artaud, Dada, la mort, les enfants, la religion, le pape, Steve Lacy, le carré magique, le droit de parole, le cinéma pour l'oreille «coming to a turntable near you!», etc. Ici, le tragique des «boppers» rejoint le ludique des post-modernes (car Parker, Monk, Gillespie ou Sun Râ étaient multidisciplinaires eux aussi et précurseurs, à leur manière, du happening ou de la performance en jazz). On est donc très éloigné de la stricte réinterprétation des classiques du jazz et des standards dans les styles historiques admis et répertoriés (ce qui est en soi parfaitement valable et valorisant, passionnant même). Il ne s'agit pas ici de dénigrer cet acquis essentiel, fondamental, mais de cerner et de montrer en quoi une autre musique d'improvisation inspirée à l'origine de ce jazz classique a évolué vers autre chose, un autre champ d'expression, trahissant parfois un certain malaise. On devine une volonté de confronter les conceptions traditionnelles du laid et du beau, du vrai et du faux, générant un conflit esthétique-philosophique qui traduit bien la difficulté d'être et les exigences d'une nouvelle génération d'improvisateurs, écartelés, tirillés de l'intérieur et en quête de nouvelles avenues possibles.

D'ailleurs, les photos de pochette nous fournissent à cet égard des indices intéressants. Selon cette information visuelle, Derome-Lussier construisent leurs univers sonores à partir des restes (ou «scraps») d'autres mondes, des ruines de notre civilisation. Ils inventent de la sorte un «jazz des sans-abris», apocalyptique et drôle à la fois, paradoxalement. «Rire pour s'empêcher de pleurer» comme dit un blues célèbre... Cette idée de «déclin de l'empire musical occidental» avait été annoncé, entre autres, par Frank Zappa, par l'Art Ensemble of Chicago, par les poètes «beat» autrefois, par les dadaïstes mêmes au début du siècle. Une citation placée en exergue du «retour des granules» évoque aussi, d'une certaine manière, le monde de Samuel Beckett (écrivain-musicien et pianiste à ses heures): «En hommage à la cendre, au sable, à la poussière, à la «rippe», à la poudre, au pollen, aux miettes.»

C'est dans l'intimité du studio-instrument que nos «crooners apocalyptiques» inventent leurs alliages inédits, y intégrant les acquis de la musique concrète, électronique et techno-pop, sans interdit, cherchant à éviter la routine, la redite, la facilité, en un va-et-vient pulsionnel de la simplicité à la complexité.

Chaque pièce est une petite histoire en soi, à instrumentation variée, qui raconte (avec ou sans

paroles) les aventures et les déboires de l'être post-moderne partagé entre son confort, ses certitudes et une angoisse grandissante, insupportable, que l'humour seul (la parodie, la farce) peut désamorcer, le temps d'une petite chanson, d'une petite danse improvisée au bord de l'abîme. (Les notes complémentaires à l'intérieur de la pochette sont à cet égard des plus utiles et explicites.)

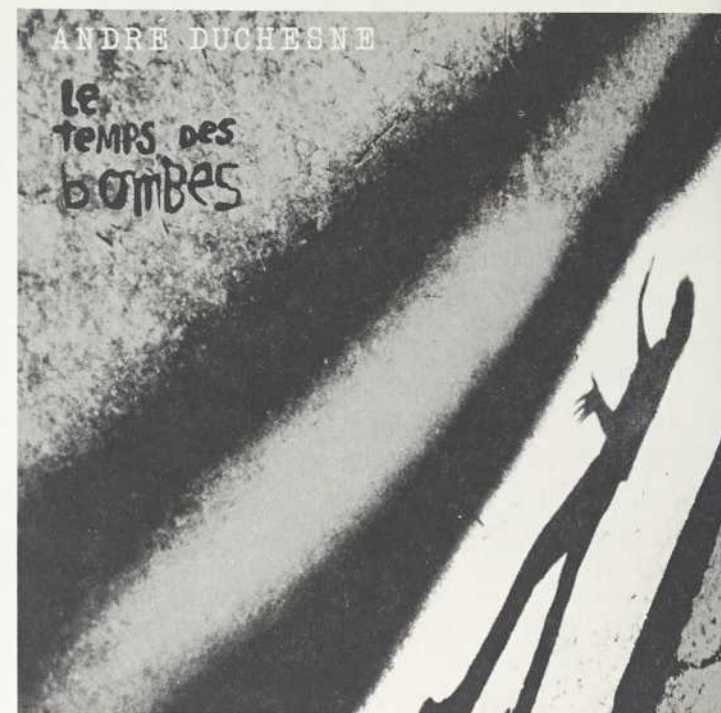
De Jean Derome comme de René Lussier, il y aurait beaucoup à dire mais l'espace encore une fois ne permet pas un commentaire bio-discographique plus élaboré.

#### ANDRÉ DUCHESNE: LE PASSEUR

Nous avons évoqué André Duchesne plus tôt, celui qui fut sans doute l'âme dirigeante de Conventum. Duchesne est un auteur-compositeur engagé, qui partage ses activités de création entre la chanson (parfois le théâtre musical) et la composition instrumentale à références poétiques et littéraires sous-jacentes. Il a gravé deux disques pour Ambiances Magnétiques, soit: *Le Temps des bombes* (avec René Lussier, Jean Derome, Pierre Cartier et Bernard Cormier) et *Les Quatre guitaristes de l'Apocalypso Bar* (avec Jean-Pierre Bouchard, René Lussier, Roger Boudreault et Chris Cutler). Le «Passeur», c'est celui qui fait le lien, qui transmet le savoir des aînés aux générations suivantes, celui qui maintient la chaîne, si l'on veut, entre la tradition d'une part et le présent en mutations, l'avenir, d'autre part. Au sens figuré, le passeur, c'est également ce personnage qui «fait passer une frontière, traverser une zone interdite,...» (cf. *le Petit Robert*). Cette définition situe bien elle aussi l'action de notre batelier de la post-modernité. (Incidentement, «Le Passeur», c'est aussi le titre d'une de ses compositions endisquées ici.)

Dans ses chansons, André Duchesne, tels Robert Charlebois autrefois ou peut-être Lucien Francoeur aujourd'hui, cherche à perpétuer la tradition des poètes maudits, contrebandiers de la parole, trafiquants de la rumeur publique, socio-poétiquement impliqués (d'Edgar Allan Poe à Bertolt Brecht, Claude Gauvreau, Antonin Artaud et autres) qui tous clament à voix haute les errances et les paradoxes, les injustices et les heurts de notre société. (Dans son deuxième disque, André Duchesne a ainsi gravé «La Chute de la Maison Usher», une suite en quatre mouvements d'après E.A. Poe.)

Dans ses musiques instrumentales pour quatre guitares (renouant avec l'instrumentation de Conventum mais en version électrifiée), le lyrisme est essentiellement le même mais en plus cassant encore, plus excessif. Duchesne ne s'inscrit pas comme guitariste dans la lignée de Joe Pass, Tal Farlow, Kenny Burrell ou Grant Green, par exemple (tous d'excellents musiciens américains). Non. Mêlant plutôt Jimmy Hendrix et les Ventures ou les Jaguars à Nino Rota et Kurt Weill (voilà en partie pour les affinités plausibles), Duchesne traite lui aussi (tels Derome et Lussier) de la question de l'apocalypse, de la fin du monde comme spectacle, comme thème idéal pour un «show ultime» orchestré au bord du néant. Ici, la science-fiction et la futurologie s'amalgament à la poésie «fauve», lunai-



André Duchesne, *Le Temps des bombes* (réalisé à compte d'auteur dans différents studios de Montréal), 1984 (pochette de disque).

re, absurde, pour exprimer par la fête/le cri, dans un climat rutilant, métallique, les tourments existentiels de l'individu «fripé» d'aujourd'hui, son mal de vivre, sa difficulté d'être (à l'écoute, disponible, ouvert). On peut aussi avoir l'oreille en souffrance en cette fin de siècle surchargée, survoltée. À cette situation tendue, Duchesne propose comme thérapie magnétique, une écoute de circonstance.

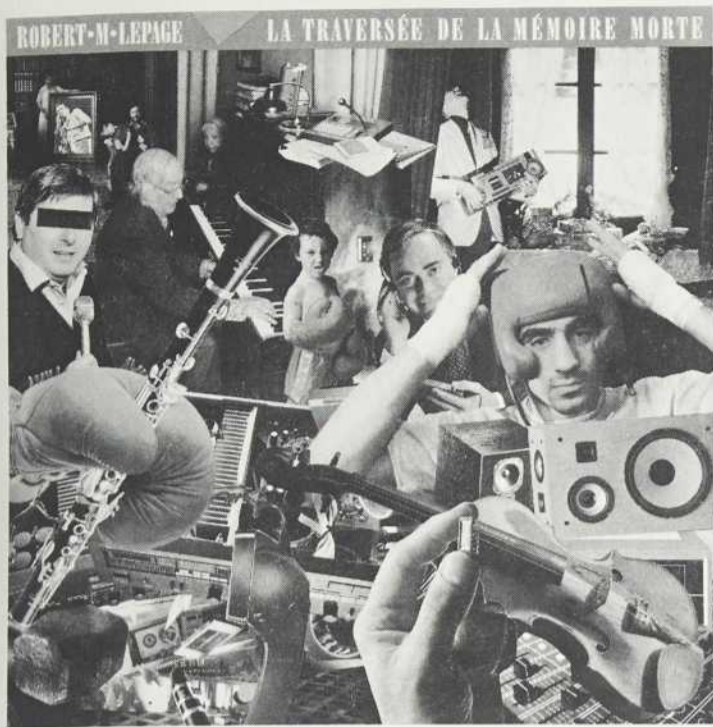
Des musiques étranges furent composées, et partout dans les bars, des quatuors de guitares électriques interprétaient des oeuvres populaires dédiées à l'Ange Hendrix. Toutes les nuits, par les fenêtres de la Maison, on entendait sa guitare-éternité lancer ses mélodies profondes dans l'atmosphère troublée de la planète. (André Duchesne, notes de pochette).

André Duchesne nous convie donc lui aussi à une célébration de la fin, sans artifice, avec humour même et où le jazz regarde la mort en face. Et le jazz est justement une musique qui n'a pas peur de la mort, qui en a même beaucoup parlé et magnifiquement, de King Oliver à Albert Ayler, et autres. Célébration de la vie comme de la mort, le jazz, musique de l'instant, du passage, de l'errance, en transit, n'est-il pas l'art qui, par définition, par essence, exprime avec le plus d'acuité un rapport à la fois jubilant et crispé au temps par où, entre tension et détente, appel et réponse, la vie meurt et renaît constamment à l'audition.

#### ROBERT LEPAGE: LE POÈTE AU BÂTON D'ÉBÈNE

La clarinette est un instrument-clé des débuts de l'histoire du jazz. Négligée pendant des années, elle effectue un lent retour dans l'actualité aujourd'hui. Son histoire l'associe d'emblée à la Nouvelle-Orléans et à la période swing bien que, de Tony Scott à Eric Dolphy, Perry Robinson, John Carter et plusieurs autres maintenant, on la retrouve désormais associée à toutes les époques du jazz. Robert Lepage est, dans ce contexte, l'un de ceux qui participent activement à la réhabilitation de la clarinette en jazz actuel.

Il en joue, cependant, tout autant à la manière des musiciens grecs ou juifs itinérants (les Klezmer par exemple) qu'à la façon des improvisateurs de



Robert M. Lepage, *La Traversée de la mémoire morte*, Ambiances Magnétiques, 1987 (pochette de disque).

tions Sunnyside/Je me souviens.)

Robert Lepage nous convie ici, via une série de climats ou d'atmosphères variés (de la lamentation à la ritournelle et de la nostalgie, parfois, à la parodie) à vivre avec lui un parcours funambulesque orienté avec finesse, sensibilité et créativité. Ses collaborations antérieures l'ayant amené à explorer en musique et en performance les univers aussi différents que ceux de Léonard de Vinci (l'artiste-musicien), de Jack Kerouac (l'écrivain-musicien) et du Far West mythique («alias Will James»), souhaitons qu'il puisse enregistrer un jour cette sorte d'autoportrait sonore qu'il a intitulé «Les clarinettes ont-elles un escalier de secours?».

Ce jazz à programme, à scénario, me semble avoir le potentiel de rejoindre, comme les chansonniers d'antan, un très vaste public si une diffusion adéquate le permet, et ce, sans concession aucune pour autant. Robert M. Lepage (qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec son homonyme, l'homme de théâtre bien connu) pratique aussi l'art de la bande dessinée depuis plusieurs années et son travail de musicien-performeur entretient des liens étroits et naturels avec cet univers. («Une collection de cassettes, c'est une grand b.d., dit-il, une cassette par case... Vos cassettes racontent-elles votre histoire?»). Enfin, Lepage s'est aussi engagé avec des artistes de différentes disciplines dans plusieurs collaborations, la plus récente intitulée «Conversations» le confrontant à du film, des textes et de la danse improvisés simultanément.

#### LEPAGE-LUSSIER: L'ART BRUT

Le duo Lepage-Lussier est un bel exemple de rencontre fructueuse, fertile, qui permet à chacun d'inventer, d'innover tant au plan instrumental ou technique, qu'à celui des idées. Un disque est ainsi paru qui documente bien leur travail: *Chants et danses du monde inanimé* dans la collection «Espèces en voie d'exception». Le titre de l'album paraphrase donc avec humour certaines collections de disques de musiques traditionnelles (ce qui serait à mettre, en partie, en parallèle avec «The Last LP» de l'artiste-musicien Michael Snow autour du même thème).

Les duos saxophone/clarinette et guitare ne sont pas légion en soi, en jazz, mais celui-ci est quand même singulier, différent. C'est ainsi que René Lussier ajoute à son jeu de guitare, un jeu de pieds en parallèle, martellant en même temps ses rythmes organiques sur une plaque métallique amplifiée. À la manière des tapeurs de pied folkloriques, il cite l'univers du réel traditionnel dans un contexte plus éclaté et proche du free jazz, ses pieds d'homme-orchestre lui servant ainsi de batterie.

Conjointement, au saxophone et à la clarinette, Robert Lepage improvise un jeu crispé, prenant, brut, graffitique, à la manière d'Ornette Coleman autrefois (ou d'autres grands solistes «free» de l'époque, tels Charles Tyler, Marshall Allen, Perry Robinson, etc.). Dans ce disque lucide et loufoque, il est question des «peuplades de l'âge des machines», du «vinyle historique», du tiers-monde, de la guerre, du métro, de la quotidienneté, d'actualités,

d'informatique, de machines, donc, à nouveau, de sujets qui influencent de plus en plus notre façon de penser, d'agir, de créer. En bref, tout un programme, «traité» avec beaucoup d'humour, de verdeur, de santé, d'audace et magnifiquement explicité dans les notes de pochette et l'iconographie généreuse qui accompagnent ce disque. (Quelques titres: «Chiens de garde culturels», «Beyrouth à défaut d'être mort»...)

Nous avons parlé des réalisations individuelles de Robert Lepage et de René Lussier précédemment. Ce qui distingue celle du duo, entre autres, c'est qu'elle est en partie associée au travail d'un cinéaste: Pierre Hébert. En effet, lors des projections des films récents d'animation de Pierre Hébert, Lepage et Lussier (auxquels est venu s'adjoindre Jean Derome) improvisent en direct une musique appropriée. (Quelques illustrations tirées du film *le Métro*, ONF, 1984, sont d'ailleurs reproduites ici dans les notes de pochette du disque.) De «Chants et danses du monde inanimé» à «La Symphonie interminable» et à «Adieu Léonard» (pour accompagner l'exposition Léonard de Vinci à Montréal), ce quatuor a su imposer un nouveau spectacle multidisciplinaire original, intrigant, surprenant.

Pierre Hébert est lui-même remarquable en ce qu'il a réussi à inventer sa propre technique de jeu cinématographique improvisé, spontané, gravant sur pellicule en direct, simultanément à l'exécution de la musique, sa propre trame visuelle complémentaire. Ce faisant, il innove par rapport à la tradition du cinéma d'animation et rejoint les musiciens sur leur propre terrain, refusant la convention pour inventer autre chose, du jamais vu, son propre «jazz visuel» en contre-chant. Ici, un cinéaste devient musicien sous nos yeux: plus qu'une simple collaboration, c'est une véritable tentative d'osmose, une entente nouvelle à quatre où la musique ne fait pas qu'accompagner le visuel mais suscite même son invention, lui donne lieu et tribune du même coup, et vice versa. («Musiques cinématographiques à gros plans surprises pour grand orchestre en travelling», c'est ainsi qu'est décrit, en contrepartie, l'album *Fin du travail* de René Lussier.)

Il faut rappeler, en terminant, que c'est Pierre Hébert qui fit venir Ornette Coleman pour la première fois à Montréal, en 1966, afin que ce dernier enregistre avec son trio d'alors, dans les studios de l'ONF, la musique pour le film *Explosion démographique*. Une vingtaine d'années plus tard, le voilà qui travaille à nouveau avec un trio mais dans un rapport très différent, sur une base égalitaire cette fois-ci, où l'image à part entière dialogue en temps réel avec le son. La boucle est bouclée. Seule une musique improvisée d'une telle ouverture pouvait permettre une semblable relation, susciter une telle invention. L'improvisation à ce niveau-là est une pratique des plus exigeantes. Lors du vingt-cinquième anniversaire de la Cinémathèque québécoise au Festival de jazz de Montréal en 1988, Robert Lepage, entre autres, a fort bien démontré, aux côtés de Ran Blake et de Ricky Ford, que certains musiciens d'ici étaient désormais à la hauteur du défi.

## WONDEUR BRASS: LE JAZZ AU FÉMININ

Ce collectif entièrement féminin a édité deux disques avec un personnel un peu différent. Un autre album du trio «Les Poules» regroupe, de fait, trois des quatre membres de l'actuel «Wondeur Brass» et peut donc presque être considéré comme une troisième réalisation du même groupe.

Il y a toute une histoire fascinante du jazz au féminin qui est de mieux en mieux documentée depuis le début des années soixante-dix, à l'échelle internationale. Montréal possède aussi son histoire du jazz au féminin, de Jane Fair autrefois à Lorraine Desmarais aujourd'hui. Le récent Festival international des musiciennes innovatrices en constitue l'un de ses jalons récents les plus prestigieux (orchestré par Wondeur Brass — Productions Super-Mémé).

En tant que collectif féminin, ce groupe cependant reste unique dans la métropole à l'heure actuelle. Il s'agit de Joane Héту au saxophone, Diane Labrosse aux claviers, Marie Trudeau à la basse électrique et Danielle Roger à la batterie. Le jazz new wave que pratique Wondeur Brass s'appuie beaucoup sur les textes lui aussi, sur la voix donc, prolongeant peut-être ainsi, à sa manière, les porte-paroles féminins engagés d'antan, de Marie Savard avec Pierre Leduc ou Louise Forestier avec le quatuor de jazz libre du Québec à d'autres grands noms de l'extérieur, tels Brigitte Fontaine, Irène Aebi, Colette Magny et d'autres (pour la séduction moqueuse, la remise en question des valeurs établies, une certaine fascination pour l'interdit, l'expression d'un cri poétique contestataire, ludique, désinvolte).

Tel ce métronome inspiré de Man Ray qui orne la pochette de leur dernier disque, la musique de Wondeur Brass oscille entre la chanson trouble, inquiète, tendue, et une affirmation plus vitale ou extrovertie de soi, où, l'humour, un certain dadaïsme post-industriel côtoient l'insolite, le plaider, les jeux de mots, un érotisme latent, etc. Ce jazz de fusion électro-acoustique un peu gauche parfois, inachevé, désespéré/lucide, exprime donc tout autant un malaise, une difficulté d'être qu'une liberté reconquise dans l'action, via l'improvisation, le jeu libre, spontané.

Le premier album du groupe avec, entre autres, la présence d'une tromboniste avait une couleur plus jazz et fort attrayante (cf: *Free Fast and Clean*). Le plus récent disque intitulé *Simoneda* se rapproche peut-être plus du rock progressif marginal alors que le collectif «Les Poules» est sans doute plus expérimental d'approche, plus brouillon aussi ou inachevé. En bref, un travail en cours passionnant, brut, essentiel, à suivre. (En ce qui concerne *Simoneda reine des esclaves*, Wondeur Brass précise qu'il s'agit d'une «fable anachronique sur la désuétude du progrès, une histoire d'oiseaux en cage qui raisonnent autour d'un métronome échevelé».)

### PIERRE ST-JAK: OEUVRALGIQUE

Autodidacte, le claviériste Pierre St-Jak signe avec cet album solo une sorte d'autoportrait sonore

où, dans l'intimité, via le piano acoustique (préparé ou pas selon les pièces), il interroge les diverses motivations subjectives, irrationnelles, passionnelles et autres qui sous-tendent sa pratique artistique. Il est le seul pianiste sur étiquette Ambiances Magnétiques, le piano étant un instrument pourtant dominant en jazz traditionnel mais qui doit désormais partager sa place avec toute une variété de claviers (du Cassio maison ou «piano-jouet des post-modernes» aux plus récents synthétiseurs très sophistiqués). Les instruments, les formes, les nouveaux alliages sonores, les rôles, les attitudes..., rien n'est acquis, tout peut être remis en question, tout est en re-définition constante au royaume de l'improvisation magnétique.

De «Brique à braque» à «Rictus» (deux pièces aux titres révélateurs comprises dans cet album solo de Pierre St-Jak), ce disque est le plus introspectif, privé, dépouillé, le moins figolé en somme de tous les enregistrements parus sur Ambiances Magnétiques. Ici, les compositions souples, imprévisibles, semblent avoir été presque totalement improvisées (c'est du moins l'impression qui se dégage de ce jazz fluide et très ouvert).

Si Oliver Jones s'inscrit dans la lignée d'Oscar Peterson (tout en étant très différent), Pierre St-Jak se situerait plutôt, quant à lui, dans le prolongement d'un autre pianiste montréalais: Paul Bley (tout en gardant lui aussi sa propre personnalité). Adeptes d'un jazz transculturel difficile à cerner, la musique de Pierre St-Jak fait tout autant allusion à la musique classique-contemporaine (humour post-Satie, romantisme dissonant, bruitisme intégré) qu'au jazz et au blues plus typique (phrasé mélodique sans emphase inutile, jeu rythmique dur, percussif, parfois répétitif et prenant).

Signalons en terminant que Pierre St-Jak a aussi gravé un deuxième disque sous son nom, à compte d'auteur, en tandem avec l'excellent saxophoniste Claude Vendette (cf: *Existango*, STVE III, 1984).

### MONTRÉAL FIN DE SIÈCLE: LE CABARET PARTOUT

Qu'elle se manifeste dans le champ du ludique expérimental (cf: le JIM au Spectrum en 1988) ou des diverses tendances de la musique actuelle, l'improvisation, dans notre société plus éclatée que jamais (et donc aussi dans l'histoire de la musique au Québec, jazz, contemporaine et populaire), occupe une place d'une importance sans précédent. De fait, le scientifique Hubert Reeves nous indique que Robert Lepage établit même des liens entre le fonctionnement du cosmos et le jazz (une comparaison qu'aurait sûrement appréciée le regretté Fernand Séguin).

Ce jazz d'ici, celui des années quatre-vingt, est fort différent cependant de celui qu'on jouait dans les décennies précédentes à Montréal (ce jazz historique de l'ère du vinyl préservé sur disques est recensé, de ses débuts à la fin des années soixante-dix, dans le précieux ouvrage de Jack Litchfield intitulé: *Canadian Jazz Discography*).

Les musiciens donc, les idées, les formes, l'instrumentation, tout a changé en cette phase d'évolution magnétique. Qu'il s'agisse d'une période de

transition ou pas, le jazz d'ici est désormais plus autonome par rapport à ses modèles d'origine, plus mature, plus original et plus enthousiasmant que jamais. Ce jazz actuel vit cependant de plus en plus la «tentation Glen Gould», c'est-à-dire celle de se retirer, de se développer beaucoup en studio, en lieu clos, loin des salles de concert, en interaction avec la nouvelle technologie d'enregistrement. L'ouverture existe toujours malgré tout comme attitude, comme état d'esprit, mais se manifeste désormais en privé, en secret presque, suivant les multi-pistes de la création en différé.

Le jazz d'aujourd'hui s'invente ainsi beaucoup plus en studio pour être rejoué différemment en concert, en public, alors que c'était peut-être l'inverse auparavant. Le studio favorise la réflexion, l'expérimentation alors que le concert, avec ses risques aussi, suscite une mise en forme et une exécution plus simple et plus accessible, peut-être, de ces résultats.

«Nous sommes, me confiait Robert Lepage, une première génération de musiciens profondément influencés par les machines tout autant que par des êtres humains.» Via ces nouveaux outils, ces machines, les musiciens (dont la pratique est en partie publique) deviennent comme les artistes peintres, sculpteurs, photographes. Ils peuvent désormais, si ça leur convient, réaliser, seul, en privé, une œuvre complexe, se dédoublant à volonté, selon les exigences du projet et en contrôlant tous les paramètres. C'est un peu l'attitude de Glen Gould transposée en jazz alors qu'à l'inverse, certains peintres, par exemple, sentent le besoin de vivre l'expérience du contact direct avec le public comme le démontre les sessions de «peinture en direct» (cf: événements 3 x 4 aux FOUFOUNES ÉLECTRIQUES et au Musée d'art contemporain) où un «big band de peintres» joue allègrement du pinceau, trafiqué ou pas, en une joyeuse re-formulation de la tradition comme de l'avant-garde, la trans-avant-garde en cours.

Quoi qu'il en soit, le jazz de tradition classique (de Louis Armstrong à John Coltrane) cohabite aujourd'hui avec un autre jazz plus difficile à saisir, à cerner, et qui, à l'aide d'une instrumentation électro-acoustique en pleine évolution, via l'improvisation, pige dans toutes les musiques existantes pour inventer une musique nouvelle, inouïe, traduisant ou transcendant peut-être à l'occasion, l'esprit de notre époque, nos aspirations, notre façon de voir, entendre, vivre les choses.

C'est le défi du jazz magnétique actuel que d'innover par rapport à la tradition, d'inventer la tradition de demain, au Québec comme ailleurs.

Raymond Gervais est artiste et vit à Montréal.

**The author creates a "soundportrait" of recent releases on the Ambiances Magnétiques label, on which some of the most original and experimental jazz in Québec is coming out. René Lussier, Robert M. Lepage, André Duchesne, Conventum, Jean Derome, Wondeur Brass, Pierre St-Jak and Les Poules are described as examples of a type of music which questions not only conventional music, but also jazz produced both here and elsewhere.**

# P A I N T I N G

# A N D

# SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

This essay is concerned with painting and sexual difference. For reasons of space, though, it concentrates principally on a British context. However, the debates around painting and sexual difference in Britain have implications far beyond a local context. Given the amount of time and energy sections of the women's movement in Britain have devoted to questions of representation from the early seventies onwards, there has developed an advanced critical culture around the image that needs addressing in general.

## INTRODUCTION

There could currently be said to be three dominant feminist discourses around the question of painting and sexual difference: first, the anti-painting argument, which sees the "ambiguities" or "positivism" of painting (in its Modernist and social realist variants) as a double obstacle to the *specificities* of the representation of gender; second, the anti-functional argument, which sees painting in a wholly positive light; painting stands as a source of radical difference for women, a way of linking up women's bodily experience with a distinct female aesthetic or "visual economy"; and third, the female-centred approach, which defends the descriptive powers of the figurative tradition as the basis for a feminist narrative or mythological painting.

A good deal of painting by women informed by the women's movement over the last ten years or so has implicitly or explicitly taken on these polarized positions. *Women's Images of Men*, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1980, was in many ways an attempt, in tandem with its critical engagement with the bodies of men, to reclaim the



Sonia Boyce, *Missionary Position II*, 1985, pastel on paper, 77.5 x 103 cm.

pictorialized female body for feminist practice against the post-painting critique of those who saw painting as the home and vehicle for the subjugation of women's bodies to the male gaze. Recent defences of Thérèse Oulton and Avis Newman's painting have emphasized a Kristevian-type position of anti-representation as a "modality of feminist dissidence"<sup>1</sup> against both ideological critiques of painting and the sentiment of a female-centred figurative tradition.

Essentially what is at stake here is not just how and with what women artists speak, but how the nature of women's subordination is *conceptualized*, and consequently how women artists conceive their place and function within the culture. Each of these discourses is making a particular claim upon what is more politically *justifiable* for women artists. Thus we need to see the first position as properly a textualist analysis, insofar as it locates art and feminist practice within a general theory of representation in which artworks, as with all forms of symbolic production, are the products of an antecedently coded system of economic, sexual and political exchange. Intervention within such a system can only be effected in any practical sense by women working on and through, the dominant technological means which contain and reproduce its ideologies: film and photography. The second position, by contrast, is radically non-participationist; the possibility of a non-implicit autonomous practice for women will only be found by working outside of a "male constructed" reality of which photography forms a major constitutive part. And the third is quite literally positivistic; actual or imagined representations of women — in all media — form part of a celebratory and positive female iconography which stands opposed to negative images of women in the culture. These are in some sense crude categorizations, but nonetheless they locate the broad areas of ideological dispute under which difference is being played out.

Now, in respect of painting, what has tended to occur through these divisions is a split between painting and criticality for women, reproducing in many ways the deeper split in our culture between the claims for the relative autonomy of art and the necessity for art to be grounded in some cognitively adequate engagement with the world. Thus given that the textualist approach to the production of art has been developed within feminist discourse predominantly outside of painting,<sup>2</sup> painting for women has tended to be reclaimed in *opposition* to claims for art's cognitive status, resulting in a number of instances of women identifying their painting with a repressed, intuitive, feminine Other. In Alexis Hunter's contribution to the *State of the Art* series on Channel 4 in 1987, she said she returned to painting because it allowed her to speak outside of theory. A critique of theory as a critique of the fantasy of mastery is one thing, the equation between a lack of theoretical competence and female creativity is another; in sum, it is to argue from a position of weakness. The consequence of this has been the emergence within women's painting of what the philosopher Jean

Grimshaw has referred to, as a "self-validating female consciousness,"<sup>3</sup> in which the avoidance of questions around the adequacy or inadequacy of theories is defended on the grounds that objective knowledge is male subjectivity. It is no surprise then that the anti-foundationalist critique of representation in post-structuralism has been a common ally in much recent writing by women on painting. A good example of this is Jean Fisher's recent essay on Avis Newman, *On the Margins of Forgetfulness*.<sup>4</sup> "Uncertainty ... is grasped and given value"<sup>5</sup> as the superimpositions and shifts in scale reveal the "limitations of vision"<sup>6</sup> and the impossibility of the "viewer as a coherent subject of knowledge."<sup>7</sup> Newman's rejection of the Renaissance perspectival tradition for the heterogeneous spaces of the palimpsest, releases pictorial space for women from the "tyranny of logic."<sup>8</sup> Now to criticize such a defence of indeterminacy is not to co-opt painting back into a stable perspectivalism, or to deny that Newman's distaste for the pictorialized "positive" female figure is valid; rather it is a question of acknowledging that certain types of writing by women on painting avoid substantive questions over art's relationship to the development of cognitive skills. Little attention has been given to the fact that the attack on representation as mastery, has pushed women's art *back into* the history-less spaces of Modernism.

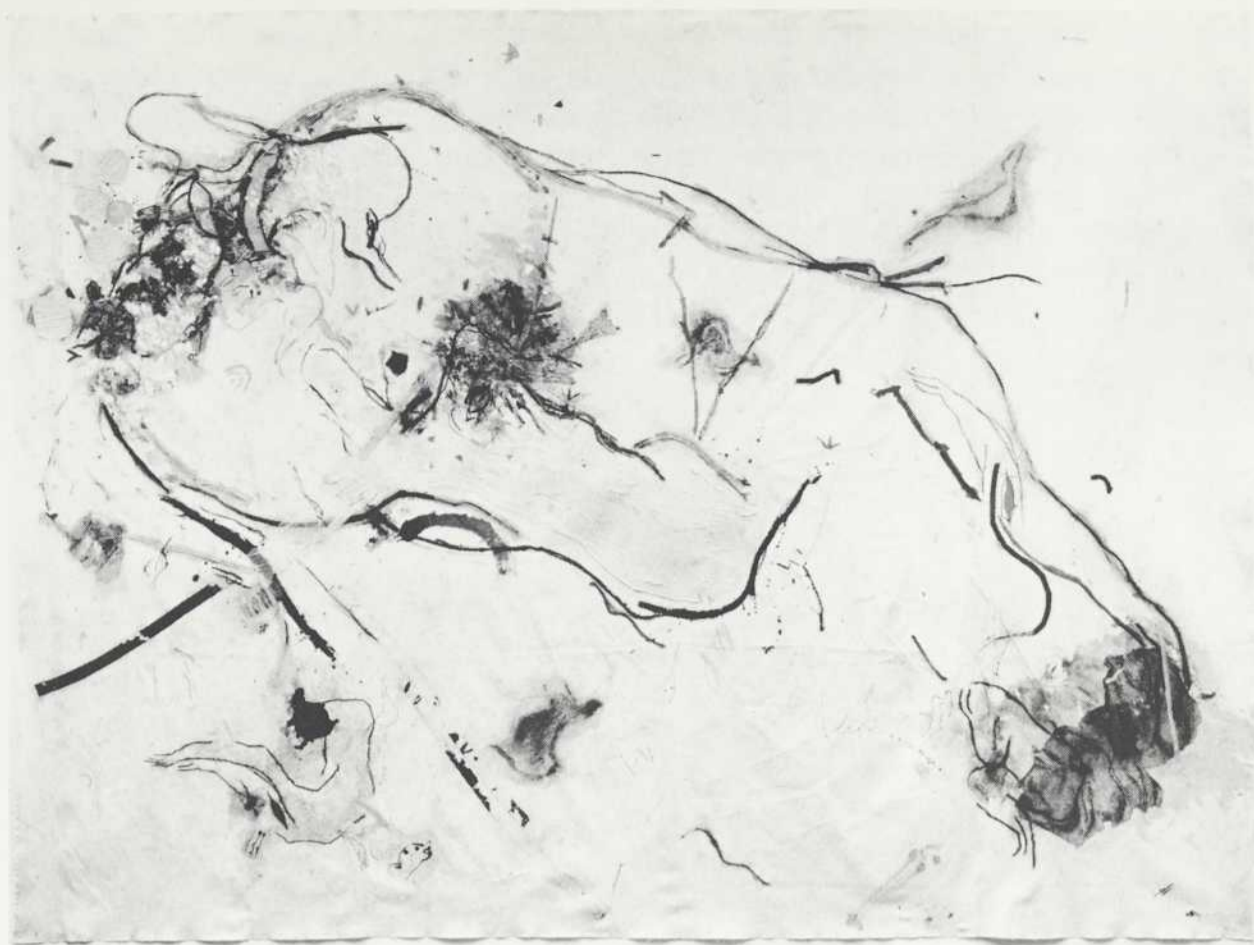
As such, even if there are many problems with a textualist account of the production and reading of artworks (the least of them being that the artwork as textual intervention abrogates the enigmas of subjectivity), the textual position has one clear advantage over its competitors: the pursuit of meaning in art, of conditions of critical contrast, is not to be found on the "other" side of representation, or in any simple transcription of the referent, but in transformational work on those signs, images, symbols, relations and forms of knowledge already active in the culture. If painting by men in the wake of the crisis of Modernism and conventional descriptive realism has barely begun to address these problems, painting by women on such terms is practically invisible.

In short the question of painting *for* women today is how do women represent sexual difference across the spaces of the social without essentializing difference, without turning the pursuit of a female "visual economy" into the language of the Other? *How* and *what* might painting be made of for women today without falling into a form of what Jacqueline Rose has called in another context, "hereditary transmission and style"?<sup>9</sup>

#### GENEALOGIES

Clearly the issue of representation and difference turns on the nature of the means at the producer's disposal. It is no surprise, then, that painting as the site of innumerable contradictions and historical investments in our culture should be so divided as a space of meaning for women. When Mary Kelly in 1981 called for a feminist practice of "statements"<sup>10</sup> against the ambiguities of painting, she was articulating a long held view by feminist

artists that painting offered nothing for women given its power as a site of male dominance. The turn to "alternative" media by women throughout the seventies was a concerted attempt to win back some autonomous space in the face of the sheer weight of this history. The pursuit of a particular female language or *écriture féminine*, and a collective space of opposition became grounded in the theorization of painting and object making as masculine regimes — practices that actively institutionalized the oppression and marginalization of women. This is why photography, film and video have been so important to women artists in the seventies; their means of production and distribution have allowed women to construct and develop a set of resources, an active community of viewers outside of both the dominant nexus of institutional arrangements and the containments of an official art history that was beyond reclamation. For many women artists, therefore, who learnt their history and politics in the early seventies, this involved nothing short of a moratorium on all inherited forms. There could be no backing away from the closures of American Modernism as patriarchal closures; there could be no feminism *and* agnosticism about form, no abstraction and critiques of patriarchy. As a consequence, the feminist displacement of the sexual apositionality of American Modernism took the form, as with much other art of the time, of an explicit discursiveness. The production of statements on their own, as a constitutive part of performances, or as a commentary on stereotypical photographic imagery became the didactic means whereby women could open up the necessary self-sustaining critical distance from the dominant culture. Extensity and density of *reading* therefore became an explicit form of resistance to the pictorial. What was at stake essentially was the gendering of new pleasures. Insofar as pleasure is bound up with knowledge-claims, what we believe in and desire, then art's claims on the aesthetic cannot be separated from who is speaking to whom, and on what terms. This is the base line against which much recent textualist photographic practice has pursued its commitment to the delegitimizing nature of the fragmentary in vision. Since the Godardian extension of Brecht's "alienation" techniques into strategies of anti-narrativity, the breakdown of the voyeurism inherent in spectatorship, the absorptive pleasures of looking, has been a central component value in left aesthetics. To break down the narrative flow or coherence of vision was to immediately involve the spectator in the world of meaning-production itself; the relationship between object and subject is made uncomfortable and reading, therefore, is problematized. The new feminist/deconstructive photography and "post-object" work continues to rework these basic assumptions. Insofar as painting is historically that place where masculine pleasures have been on voyeuristic display, then the only means of constructing other kinds of pleasure *for* women is outside of painting. Thus Kelly sees the discursiveness of her *Post-Partum Document* as a way of *controlling* meaning. And this is what I take her to



Avis Newman,  
*This...the Dream's naval*,  
1983-4, mixed media  
on canvas, 9' x 12'.

mean by the use of the word "statement." Against the too "easily attained"<sup>11</sup> reading of pictorial images of women as sexualized objects the theoretical artistic text asserts an anti-spectacularized relation between looking and meaning. Hence the question of the work's feminism is not to be detached as a "supplement" to the form. The replacement of the pictorial mother in *Post-Partum Document*, with the enunciation of the mother's desire for the child in diaristic form, is clearly an attempt to match the production of the work with the production of a point of entry for a female spectator. Or rather, by splitting off the representation of being a mother from representations of the mother, the fixed nature of sexual identity (mother's and father's) is denied.

Openness, discursiveness, the non-hierarchical use of materials and the elaboration of a "stable" critical context for the reception of the work, have thus not only been central to much post-sixties art's break with the painterly canons of American Modernism (and social realism) but the basis upon which feminism in art has constructed its sense of differentiality; a language of flow and multiplicity that challenges, via its anti-pictorialism, the power of dominant social relations to recoup women as image. The "absent" woman in Kelly's work therefore is very much the necessarily "unpresentable" woman of Lacanianism; because women speak from within patriarchal discourse, from within the Law of the Father, the pictorial visualization of women can only reinforce that asymmetry. Or rather, because women are bound within patriarchal discourse to become objects — never subjects — of their own desire, women's pleasure in self cannot be mediated through the experience of other images of women.

Kelly's Lacanianism then has had a powerful influence on the move against painting by women. For if images and symbols for women cannot be separated from images and symbols of women, the



Thérèse Oulton, *The Heart of the Matter*, 1984, oil on canvas, 244 x 228.5 cm.

representation of identity cannot be divorced from *how* identity comes into play.

However, for a number of women artists this pursuit of an *écriture féminine* began to assume too heavy an ideological embargo on painting. The reduction of painting to the fixed categories of a self-present pictorialism or gender-less abstraction only confirmed women's "lack" of speech and absence within the Western fine art tradition by conferring characteristics on women's art. In the necessary process of divesting women's practice from the containments of this tradition, women saw their practices becoming overly identified with the area of *not*-painting. There has been desire therefore on the part of a number of women artists, including a number who had been working in photography and performance, to make contact with those aesthetic resources that had been left underdeveloped in the pursuit of difference. Essentially painting was reframed within a theory of sexual difference that sought to critique the idea of there being a practice or set of resources that was in the best interests of women, that was more combative of patriarchy than another.<sup>12</sup> This could be said to rest on a contextualist view of art's relationship to language. If all meaning is open to definition and negotiation then the fixing of forms as patriarchal or non-patriarchal is untenable. Painting, therefore, may be in the interests of the power of men (and capital), but its aesthetic resources are not identifiable with those interests; painting does not *carry* sexist bias, but may be promoted given the social and political conditions of its emergence.

Central to this re-engagement with painting is the importance of a post-Lacanian feminism/psychoanalysis (Kristeva, Irigaray) which has directed an understanding of women's entry into culture and language away from an all encompassing negative perspective, away from notions of women *receiving* their place as Other under the dominance of the phallic term.

#### LACAN AND THE POST-LACANIANS

In Lacan's writing sexual identity operates as a law; individuals are divided between those who have the phallus and those who don't.<sup>13</sup> However, for Lacan the woman is not the negative term because she is defined as *not*-man, but because she is transformed into an object of fantasy, of otherness *for* the man. In being the imagined site of plenitude, release and wholeness, woman's otherness serves to secure for man his own self-understanding. In these terms in Lacan's later writing, he talks about women's "anti-phallic" nature as having the status of a counter-truth, as having the capacity to negate the coherence of this otherness. The question then becomes not so much defining in Freud's words "what do *women* want?" but what it means to talk about "woman" at all. It is this "disappearance" of women that many feminist post-Lacanian psychoanalysts have objected to. Reduced to this place of fantasy across the phallic divide, the woman appears as something without corporeal form. Thus, even if Lacan here is objecting to women's status as an absolute category and guaran-

tor of male fantasy, the result of this, of course, is the political extinction of women. Consequently the central objective of post-Lacanian theories of sexuality has been to retrieve women from both the dominance of the phallic term and the divisions of language. As Jacqueline Rose has said:

... femininity is assigned to a point of origin prior to the mark of symbolic difference and the law. The privileged relationship of women to that origin gives them access to an archaic form of expressivity outside of the circuit of linguistic exchange.<sup>14</sup>

In a sense Lacan's insight into the feminine as the excluded other of masculine discourse is inverted; determinate content is given to the so-called negativity of the feminine term.

This has been articulated at its most extensive of course in Julia Kristeva's notion of a pre-œdipal register (unmediated human reciprocity, a non-antagonistic relation with our bodies and others)<sup>15</sup> and in Luce Irigaray's concept of a "female imaginary."<sup>16</sup> Kristeva separates herself from Lacan by privileging the pre-œdipal relationship to the mother. In Lacan our longing for the "archaic" mother can never be satisfied; the divisions of language cut off the relationship to such experiences forever. Kristeva on the other hand argues that the mother is part of us all and that we can reconnect with this realm of experience again by giving ourselves over to those non-dominating, unmediated aspects of our bodily experience — what she calls the semiotic. However, this is not an advocacy of immersion in the pre-œdipal experience, but only one aspect of a continual heterogeneous process, which is neither anarchic or schizophrenic blockage.<sup>17</sup> Kristeva's semiotic then is transmuted into a source of female disruption; identifying the reciprocity of the pre-œdipal moment as a mode of relating that stands to transform existing social relations, she projects the semiotic as that which stands to displace the masculine law of the symbolic, particularly in the realm of art.

In Luce Irigaray's theory of a "female imaginary" though, the notion of a maternal principle becomes radically separated from *any* acknowledgement of the phallic divide. This is based on a more severe critique of Lacan than Kristeva's. In Lacan the Imaginary refers to the ego and its identifications. This tends to be presented in his writing as a kind of snare, since for Lacan imaginary identifications are essentially imprisoning images of the self; the ego is held to be indistinguishable from the imaginary identifications which capture it (Lacan's famous Mirror phase). Thus as a mirage of coherence the subject is seduced into a misrecognition of its own insufficiency. Irigaray however, sees the divisions of subjectivity as simply a phalocratic ruse; why should women accept a subjectivity doomed to insufficiency when, under the Law of the Father, insufficiency is the perpetual mark of woman's otherness? Irigaray therefore argues for a *positive* attitude towards the imaginary, insofar as insufficiency is transformed into a principle of repressed truth for women. Women's exclusion from the phallic order allows them to express their maternal identity — what she calls in *This Sex Which Is Not One* women's "self-affection" — in full. But because this maternal identity is other, it should refuse to

conceptualize itself. The feminine cannot be expressed in a concept because to do so would be to become caught up in what it seeks to undermine. This is why for Irigaray the "female imaginary" above all else is a space of productive "incoherence," a space where determinate, hierarchical meaning is negated, where fluidity and motility rule.

This pursuit of the contours of a particular "female imaginary" has played a large part recently in the theorization of a non-sociological type of painting against the anti-painting arguments of Lacanian feminists. Acknowledging both Kristeva and Irigaray's prioritization of the maternal, a number of women artists have sought to link up painting to a female visual economy based upon the rejection of woman into the post-œdipal circuit of symbolic exchange. Refusing the descriptive and demonstrative as forms of representation which stabilize this circuit of exchange, women's self-representation is located within a pre-œdipal register of *indirect* representation. Embracing the fugitive and ambiguous as a poetic discourse of female *nay*-saying, non-representation (though this is a highly unsuitable designation) takes on a radical, de-legitimizing function. I have already mentioned this position in connection with Jean Fisher's writing on Avis Newman. In recent writing on Thérèse Oulton this approach is perhaps at its most theoretically explicit. Thus Peter Gidal sees Oulton's shifting, molten forms as a disavowing and stable female identity.<sup>18</sup> The paintings cannot be consumed, he says, as part of any spectacle of the female. Likewise Rosa Lee in her essay "Resisting Amnesia: Feminism, Painting and Postmodernism," in *Feminist Review*, sees the refusal of determinate meaning in Oulton as freeing painting for women from the tyranny of "any one fixed interpretation."<sup>19</sup> Oulton's work signifies a "new, non-representational artistic language."<sup>20</sup> Like Gidal and Fisher, Lee's arguments are based on a rejection of representation as positivistic:

The case against *representation* in painting ... rests on the view that it relies on pre-given meanings and codes which have been ideologically determined. It is only through overthrowing dominant structures and forms of "recognition" (in which are included the structures of representation) that the issues of sexual difference and existing power relations can be challenged and different meanings produced. Deconstruction provides no more than a *reinterpretation* of the structures and forms of recognition, producing what amounts only to the odd stylistic difference in any particular practice.<sup>21</sup>

A "female imaginary" then is best served by a concept of the feminine as outside of the divisions of language; painting's escape from the dominant cognitive functions of textual intervention or recoding is a far more radical — non-complicit — means of resisting women's objectification under patriarchy. Setting aside the complacent equivalence between deconstruction and the fixture of meaning, the obvious consequence of such a position is the conceptualization of negativity in the form of absolute negation. Dephallicization simply becomes a reverse symbolic order in which the maternal as form of unfixing serves as a kind of transcendental signifier. This is why this kind of



Rose Garrard, *Frameworks*, 1983, installation view; photo: Edward Woodman.

thinking on representation (which Kristeva, unlike Irigaray, always held back from in her theory of the semiotic) collapses the question of difference uneasily and ironically into those Modernist spaces that such theory sought to extract itself from. Thus in what sense does Thérèse Oulton's refusal of "fixtured" in representation offer a practical resistance to women's "negative entry" into culture? On the contrary it would seem that the place of entry is reduced to the silent and absent, that very realm of "non-mastery" as truth from which both the stereotypes of femininity and the critical distancing of Modernism has been constructed. In effect Lee and Gidal's defence of Oulton in terms of the radicality of non-representation recodes high-Modernism under the auspices of radical feminism. And just as the former collapsed into managerial self-interest, the latter has led to a situation where to just name

yourself as a feminist artist is to claim a moral backing for your work and actions. As Michele Barratt has said of the implications of radical feminism:

Men have one reality, women have another, and women's culture can be developed as a separate activity. To adopt this view is of course to abandon the project of transforming the world into a place less dominated by traditionally "masculine values."<sup>22</sup>

The central problem therefore with the pursuit of a "female imaginary" free of the dominant circuit of exchange between men and women is to render meaningless the social construction and reproduction of femininity and masculinity, how men and women variously experience their path to femininity/masculinity through images and discourses. The refusal to participate in this dominant circuit of exchange, far from being an act of resistance to meanings already in place, simply leaves them in

place. And this is what I mean by there being a clear conflation of interests between a would-be autonomous "female imaginary" and the closures of Modernism. In separating "self-expression" from any external cognitive and political constraints, both divorce the representation of the body from its social figuration, from those determinants of class, race, nationality and sexual identity which give it communicable meaning.

#### HISTORICIZING THE BODY

The political and aesthetic implications for women and painting are clearer — or somewhat clearer. There is no separate or subtended maternal imaginary or language to reclaim, no female "modality of dissidence," that might sustain a realm of values outside of the divisions under which men



Sue Atkinson,  
*Landlocked Air America,  
 Plane Flies Over Home  
 Office Washing Line:  
 on its way to Libya,*  
 1985-6, mixed media.

and women actually experience gender under capitalism. There is only one space of struggle: history itself. This is why a number of women, critical of both non-representationality and photographic practices, have sought to re-position women within painting as *historical* subjects. However, we should not confuse this with a kind of female-centred type of painting noted at the beginning, though there are convergent problems, as the rejection of non-representation has tended to licence a retreat back into a conservative sociological realism and "positive images." Two British women painters who have courted precariously with this conservatism, but nonetheless point to a move beyond its containments, are Rose Garrard and Sue Atkinson. Rose Garrard's early series of portraits of "lost" women artist (Artemesia Gentileschi, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Judith Leyster) with its anomalous meeting between "old master" conventions and feminist inscription, kitsch and painting-as-object, offered some kind of interrogative space for women's entry into representation. Working *with* representation (in this instance painting's possible continuity of resources for women) and *on* representation (painting as an historical exclusion zone for women) the series recovers, in an empirical sense, a set of expressive resources recently denied women artists, yet at the same time, through the adulteration of these received resources dismantles the idea of there being such a thing as a painting tradition for and by women that can be simply reclaimed, as argued for example in Germaine Greer's sentimental *Obstacle Race*. On the contrary, the very act of copying the self-portraits suggests there is no possibility of the recovery of lost values; only the ceaseless reinscrip-

tion/imaginative transformation of the antecedent in the pursuit of new meanings. The metaphor of the frame therefore is a key component of the series. The frame of history, of painting, of women's subordination, is signified as something that has to be negotiated in all its messiness, that has to be in a sense stepped outside of, and worked within, simultaneously.

If the implications of this work have not been taken up by Garrard — unfortunately Garrard has swapped an interrogative mode for the comforts of "Women's Art" — it nevertheless points to the possibility of thinking inside painting as a source of publicly reclaimable meanings for women. This approach also stands behind Sue Atkinson's work, although the majority of her painting so far has tended to present an unproblematic conversion of social/ist realism into feminist realism. In her series on Greenham Common (1985-7) with its sociological emphasis on "being there," she frames the contingent (gestures, discarded objects, debris) as cyphers of a positive disruption of a colonized landscape. The sense that women are being represented here as the combatants of modernity, rather than its victims, is central to the value of the work and to Atkinson's work as a whole; but the form of this work in this instance (the narrative or genre "snapshot") is incapable of generating those signs that would aesthetically embody this symbolic "decolonization"; all we get is a documentator's commitment to notation. In these terms the virtue of these paintings is precisely diagnostic, for they in a sense foreground the very problem of how women represent their public relationship to the spaces of modernity. In effect how do women represent the projective aspects of this entry (pro-

jective insofar as feminism as a cultural and political transformation of "masculine values" implies that men have to learn *from* the experience of women) without falling into the sphere of "positive images"? For paintings of female solidarity at Greenham Common and elsewhere are no less susceptible to the conventionalizing of social critique than their counterparts in the workerist pantheon of socialist realism.

In a recent work Atkinson seems to have taken on board such criticisms in an attempt to break with the technical academicism of the Greenham series. Thus in *Laundered Air America Plane ...* (1987) for example, Atkinson sets up a canvas of a sky with an American bomber behind a line of clothes stiffened by paste (a hand made tie and dye dress picked up at Greenham, a t-shirt picked up at Wapping during the printers' dispute in 1987, and a hat picked up in Northern Ireland). By placing the signs of domesticity and the gender division of labour up against the "larger" public sphere of politics, with the accompanying sense that it is women who sustain practically the political culture of men, the continuing expansion of women's critical participation in such public spaces is a given, a kind of structural focus; private and public are made coextensive.

Another British woman artist who has engaged with the problems of representing new public spaces for women is Sonia Boyce. However Boyce is in no strict sense a painter. In fact, as a collagist/drawer, she has declared her opposition to the prioritizing of painting in the culture. This would seem to exclude her from the argument at hand. But nevertheless she provides some interesting pointers, particularly in the light of the fact that, on

occasion, she does include painterly marks in the work as if to suggest that the category of painting for women might be best carried over and away from any media-specific definition of its resources. Drawing on various painting conventions (genre, narrative) that, like Garrard and Atkinson, open up the female body to its social placement, she offers the possibility of new content spaces for women's critical self-representation. Thus her emphasis on patterning, derived in part from the interior of her own black working class home, allows her to place the black female body in a setting that is vivid in historical and local detail, and not just anecdotal. By foregrounding the decorative, she creates a convincing metaphoric space for images of her own path to feminism and black consciousness. The pleasures in solidarity taken from the representation of urban black working class culture are confronted by their obverse: the signs of a kind of maternal religious claustrophobia (*Missionary Positions*, 1985).

Collectively, what is at stake here in the work of these women is the production of another set of artistic competences: a reclamation of those "second-order" cognitive and aesthetic skills and resources (the parodic, iconographic, quotational, image and text) that both non-representational and female-centred sociological or mythological painting practices have excluded or devalued. In other words, feminist consciousness *in art* is no less bound up with the determining conditions of modernity in representation than the work of men: painting must find its conditions of critical contrast out of both the fictive and conventionalized animations of representation, and the real itself — those real conditions of existence in which men and women find themselves. Consequently, the problems of painting that face women and men today are not to be divided across any separate or untranslatable scale of values. Criticism of Thérèse Oulton's non-representationality is then unacceptable on the grounds that because women's experience is qualitatively different from men's, generalizable critical evaluations cannot be made. Or that because women's entry into the public spaces of modernity of necessity invokes the pleasures of solidarity *in difference*, then criticism of the sociological representation of such solidarity is neither here nor there. Rather the question is: With what means is it possible for painting to map out vividly onto a real world of structures, agencies and signs, of conditions of the production of subjectivity under capitalism, and remain aesthetically *mobile*? Clearly if such a question implies that value in art is to be secured in aesthetic performance, this rests in part, paradoxically *on* the Modernist critique of representation: that references alone cannot secure interest in painting. The Modernist link between anti-academicism and a rejection of the naturalistic rendering of the world of appearances still holds, insofar as Modernist painting's various commitments to strategies of "awkwardness" — surface agitation, anomalies in scale and reference, the use of "non-artistic" materials — is the basis upon which mobility is to be secured. Thus it is not my intention to criticize Oulton and

Newman's work as attempted practices of *negation*, but that such strategies in their hands tend to fall into what T.J. Clark has called, in an essay on Greenberg's view of Modernism, "practices of purity."<sup>23</sup> In pushing Modernism's critique of representation into a critique of representation *as such*, the social referent disappears in fear of its complicity with the dominant culture. "Negation negates itself because it cannot help but posit the object it seeks to destroy,"<sup>24</sup> to quote Terry Eagleton.

#### CONCLUSION

The need to recognise that without cognitive constraints disaffirmation in art inevitably collapses into forms of "hereditary transmission and style" is thus central to the issue of painting's "missing discourse" for women. For it is recognizing that such constraints are in a sense gender-blind, that allows women to *use* painting, to establish that "double discourse" of criticism and self-criticism that Jane Gallop has argued is an absolute necessity if women are to signify beyond the antinomies of same and other. As Gallop has said:

Women need to reach "the same": that is, be "like men," able to represent themselves. But they also need to reach "the same," "the homo": their own homosexual economy, a female homosexuality that ratifies and glorifies female standards. The two "sames" are inextricably linked. Female homosexuality, when raised to an ideology, tends to be either masculine (women that are "like men") or essentialistic (based on ascertainable female identity). The latter is as phallic as the former for it reduces heterogeneity to a unified, rigid representation. But without a female homosexual economy, a female narcissistic ego, a way to represent herself, a woman in a heterosexual encounter will always be engulfed by the male homosexual economy, will not be able to represent her difference. Woman must demand "the same," "the homo" and then not settle for it, not fall into the trap of thinking a female "homo" is necessarily any closer to representation of otherness, an opening for the other.<sup>25</sup>

The idea of women reclaiming an historical/critical mastery within painting then is not to be identified with any would-be category of Women's History Painting, but with the *reterritorializing* of painting for women outside of the polar identity logic of "abstraction" and "figuration." The attempt to "tell the truth" of women in representation as a negative "female imaginary" or a positive sociology falls prey to the very phallic logic it seeks to depose.

Essentially, if we are to break out of such binary thinking we need a theory of subjectivity that takes account of what women and men *share* at the same time as acknowledging what divides us. The problem with Lacanian and anti-structuralist theories of the subject (though Kristeva is a partial exception) is that by positing gender as constituted in and through its relations to the Other, the *intersubjective* constitution of subjectivity is denied, resulting in the absurdity, *pace* Irigaray, that men and women inhabit different worlds. The Irigarayan choice between identity and non-identity fails to take account of subjectivity as an interlocking interplay of sameness and difference. Genuine difference, as Gallop intimates, is inseparable from a notion of relationality, the need to think and deny identity simultaneously.<sup>26</sup> Which is another way of saying of

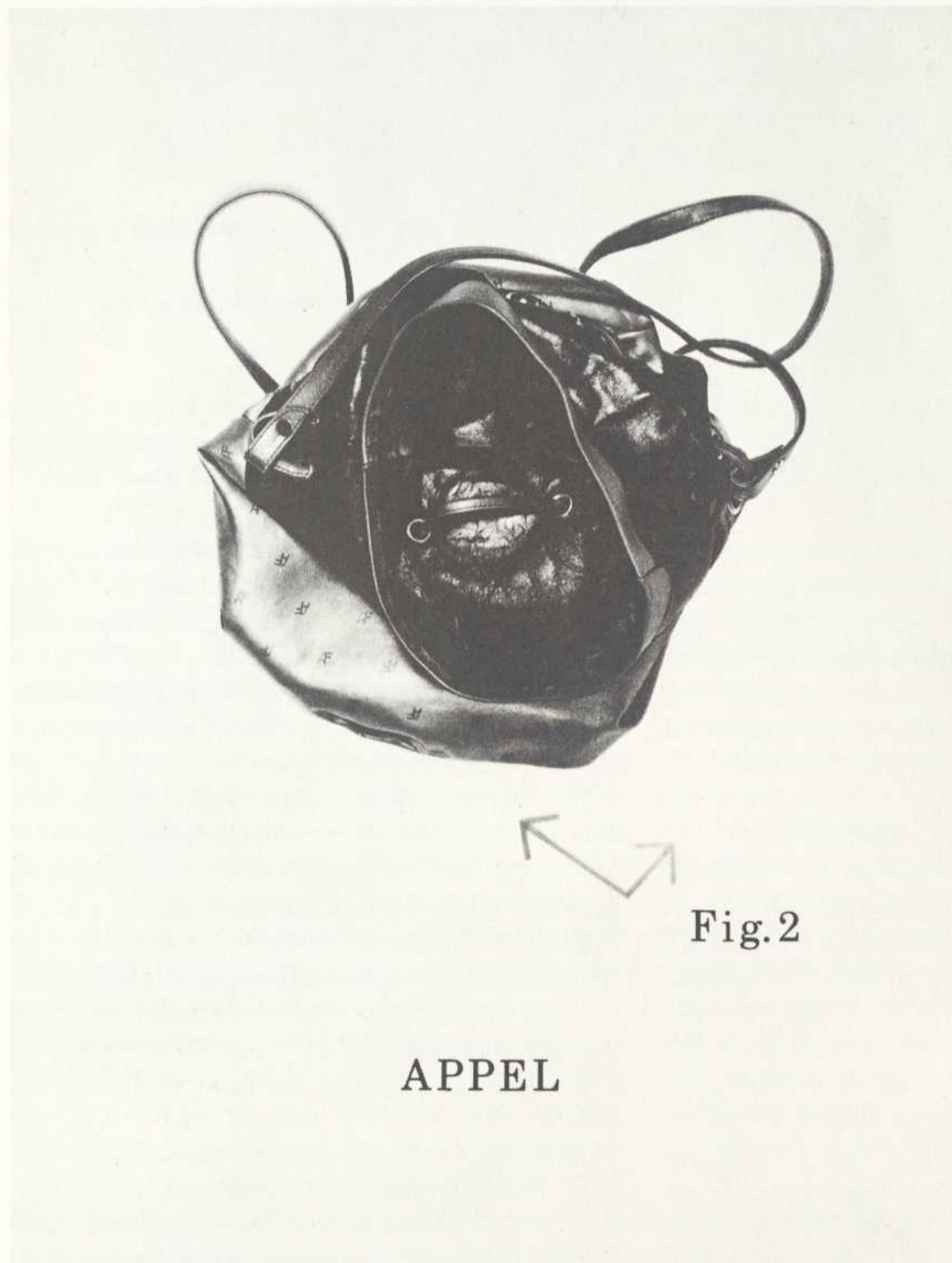
course, that women's pursuit of difference in painting can only figure itself through the problems that constitute painting's pursuit of reference and aesthetic vividness in the culture *as a whole*.

#### NOTES

1. Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (MacMillan, 1982).
2. See for example Grizelda Pollock's essay "Feminism and Modernism," in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985*, edited by Rozsika Parker and Grizelda Pollock (Pandora, 1987).
3. Jean Grimshaw, "Philosophy and Aggression," *Radical Philosophy* 47 (Autumn 1987), p. 18.
4. Jean Fisher, *On the Margins of Forgetfulness* (Lisson Gallery/Renaissance Society publications, 1987).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
9. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (Verso, 1985), p. 3.
10. Mary Kelly, "Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism," *Screen*, vol. 22, No. 3, p. 62.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
12. See Michele Barratt, "Feminism and the Definition of Cultural Politics," in *Feminism, Culture and Politics*, edited by Rosalind Brunt and Caroline Rowan (Lawrence and Wishart, 1982).
13. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (Tavistock, 1977).
14. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
15. See for example Julia Kristeva's "Woman Can Never Be Defined" in *New French Feminisms*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivon (Schocken, 1981).
16. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Cornell University, 1985); see also Margaret Whiteford, "Luce Irigaray and the Female Imaginary," *Radical Philosophy*, 43, 1986.
17. Kristeva, "Woman Can Never Be Defined," *op. cit.*
18. Peter Gidal, *Fugitive Theses re: Thérèse Oulton's The Passions No. 6 and the Metals paintings (1984)* (Gimpel Fils publications, 1984).
19. Rosa Lee, "Resisting Amnesia: Feminism, Painting and Post-modernism," *Feminist Review* No. 26, Summer 1987, p. 24. For a similar kind of perspective see Jean-François Lyotard, "Presenting the Unpresentable: the Sublime," *Artforum*, April 1982.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 18-19.
22. Michele Barratt, "The Concept of Difference," *Feminist Review*, No. 26, Summer 1987, p. 31.
23. T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, Edited by Francis Francina (Harper & Row, 1985), p. 55.
24. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (Verso, 1981), p. 92.
25. Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*, *op. cit.* p. 74.
26. See Drucilla Cornell and Adam Thurschwell "Feminism, Negativity, Intersubjectivity," in *Feminism as Critique*, edited by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Polity, 1987); see also Peter Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration* (Verso, 1985).

John Roberts is an art critic living in London, England.

# MARY KELLY



Mary Kelly, *Corpus*, 1985, preliminary artwork: black and white photograph and chinagraph.

It's late and I'm looking up an emergency treatment for  
 cystitis in a self-help manual called "Woman's Body." The  
 index directs me to L 23. En route I catch a glimpse of a  
 hideous diagram, keep going, then turn back, M14: The  
 Process of Aging. What do I find so compelling about this  
 graphic destruction of the female figure from age 0 to 80.  
 I resist. She looks much too old for 50, obviously based  
 on the down-to-earth-had-a-hard-life-and-glad-it's-over  
 type. I will never look like that, or will I? Brutal, statist  
 fact, there it is. I am reducible to example. I ~~lose~~ age  
 muscle strength and mental capabilities past their prime. So  
 my son had a point asking me if I would still be able to  
 play with him when I was 40. Though it could be worse,  
 (c) fertility ceases, and then (f) old age: spine drops, hearing  
 impaired, character changes and brain disorders possible.  
 God, why go on. It's already started. Is it irreversible? Anne  
 told me she could remember the exact day, hour even, when  
 she became an older woman. One morning she woke up,  
 looked down at her breasts and realized they had lost  
 their independence. She was laying on her side, she em-  
 phasized the importance of her vantage point since it was  
 in that very position she had previously observed two  
 perfectly autonomous hemispheres defying the laws of  
 gravity. That day, they sloped, no, she said slithered to the  
 right as they surrendered to some imperious genetic  
 signal saying "Take a break." I asked how old she was  
 and had to laugh when she said 25. But now, reading in  
 reverse I notice (c) continuous loss of nerve cells from the  
 age of 25, then (b) peak of physical energy over at 12. Final-  
 ly their optimistic introduction, "The aging process begins  
 surprisingly early and efforts to slow it down are simply  
 guesswork." Organic, inevitable, yet we are obsessed with  
 avoiding it. Anne is right, women are not at one with nature,  
 they are at war with it. The victor becomes a legend like so  
 many aging film stars, forever "fabulous and forty-two"  
 meanwhile, the vanquished who refuse to dye their hair or just  
 don't give a damn become old bags, or possibly old ladies  
 if they smile.

by JENNIFER FISHER

With *Interim* your work continues to investi-  
 gate the construction and representation of subjec-  
 tivity. In *Corpus*, which is Part I, you're concerned  
 with the body, but you chose to present so many  
 elements: the clothing, the citations, the signa-  
 tures, the marking, the masquerade references,  
 the framing, the many voices of the story. It's a very  
 complicated text: everything is layered yet there is  
 no collapse. All the elements hold each other in  
 tension. Does this strategy articulate the contin-  
 gent struggle involved in meaning?

The tension is very important. I want it to work in that way. Even *Post Partum Document* wasn't an attempt to resolve the problem of feminine identity, but really to question it by juxtaposing things like the personal narrative with the diagrams which refer to another kind of discourse, often characterized as masculine. In *Interim*, I wanted to integrate the theoretical overview more, but without losing the tension you spoke of. I wanted to use it in the accessible form of short stories. I put a lot of my analysis of these events into the structure of the stories. You read them in a group of three,

that isn't quite known in the work, something that refers elsewhere. It's really important that they take you outside of the immediate space of the picture, or voice of the narrative, placing you within a discourse of history.

**In this work, indexical representation predominates. Your handwriting imprints personality on a symbolic story, the lines and creases of the images of clothes are also traces of the body of the wearer, much like the lines in the palm of the hand. Is it your intention to evoke such a powerful presence of the body of the artist?**

image, so to speak. The textual material, of course, invokes a symbolic sign system, but I used handwriting in particular, in order to invest the work with a texture of the body. Not the body of the artist as author or originator, of course; although, having dispersed the perceptual idea of the body, I did want to gather it together again from these other somatic sources, because, by not using representational images of women, I've often been accused of being iconoclastic, removing the possibility of pleasure in the work.

You have used Charcot's typology of the five



## Extase

The white dress is part of a plot to escape. From what I'm not quite sure, but all through the cold, dark and indifferent winter I have been planning it. Learned academic by day, and by night, secret reader of holiday brochures and savor of maple sugar candy, planning how the three of us would meet in Miami, happy family reunited—father, mother, child, against a backdrop of blue sky and pounding surf of course. I have told no one. Finally, the day arrives. I pack the suitcase with devotion, the way a bride would do her trousseau: no jeans, no boots, no leather jacket or coat of any kind and nothing black, only brightly colored blouses, loosely fitting trousers, shorts, halters, high-heeled shoes and all the jewelry I ever wanted to wear and didn't have a chance to. And the dress. I refuse to wear a coat even to the airport in anticipation of the happy metamorphosis that will inevitably take place when I emerge eight hours later. And it does. The air is hot and thick. I feel it soldering the bits and pieces of my body into something tangible. Entirely I can be seen, imagine men are looking at me, even look at them sometimes. Soon, they arrive, seem much shorter, fatter, whiter than I had remembered, but it doesn't matter. We are together, I am glad. What's more, today is Easter Sunday. Naturally, I'm wearing the white dress—simple, silk, smocked bodice, gathered at the waist, full skirt falling just below my knee, and thinking, thank god, no one will see me (I mean everyone is in New York) and wonder who am I wearing this for anyway. Not him, he doesn't notice and the prospect of negotiating Disneyland has already given him a headache. Then my angelic son tells everyone, "Look at my Mommy!" The riddle solved. I am transported in a halo of fluorescent light to the land of "good-enough mothers." The motel manager, waves his magic wand and says, "Please come with me into the dining room where you will feast on champagne, strawberries and cream, the Seven Dwarfs will play the Brandenburg Concertos and I'm quite sure you will live happily ever after." And we do.

Mary Kelly, *Corpus*, 1985,  
preliminary artwork: black and white  
photograph and chinagraph.

which makes you shift from one way of constructing the body to another: the first one is more superficially about the image, the second exposes it to the scrutiny of medical science, and then the third contorts it, in an emotional sense, to the point of parody. So you're making an analysis while you're reading. Perhaps the image panel also problematizes the story by looking over your shoulder as you're doing this. Then there are the titles, which of course refer to Charcot's passionate attitudes: even if you didn't know who he was, you'd still acknowledge it as another reference, something

I didn't think of it that way myself. I purposely didn't use a found object the way I did in the *Post-Partum Document*; there, it really invoked the kind of presentified absence of the child which could be very strongly cathected by the woman looking at it. In *Corpus* I wanted to refer more to the displacement of that kind of "reality." With regard to media images of women, I wanted to show how these flat, glossy surfaces, themselves, become objects. So it's translated into this skin, the laminate on the surface; it has a physical presence but it's still in the realm of the iconic, a figurative



Mary Kelly, *Corpus*, 1985, installation view at Powerhouse Gallery, Montréal, 30 panels, 4' x 3' laminate photo positive and screenprint on plexiglass; photo: Daniel Roussel.

passionate attitudes of the woman hysteric: Menace, Appel, Supplication, Érotisme, Extase, and exchanged them for articles of clothing. Can you comment on these?

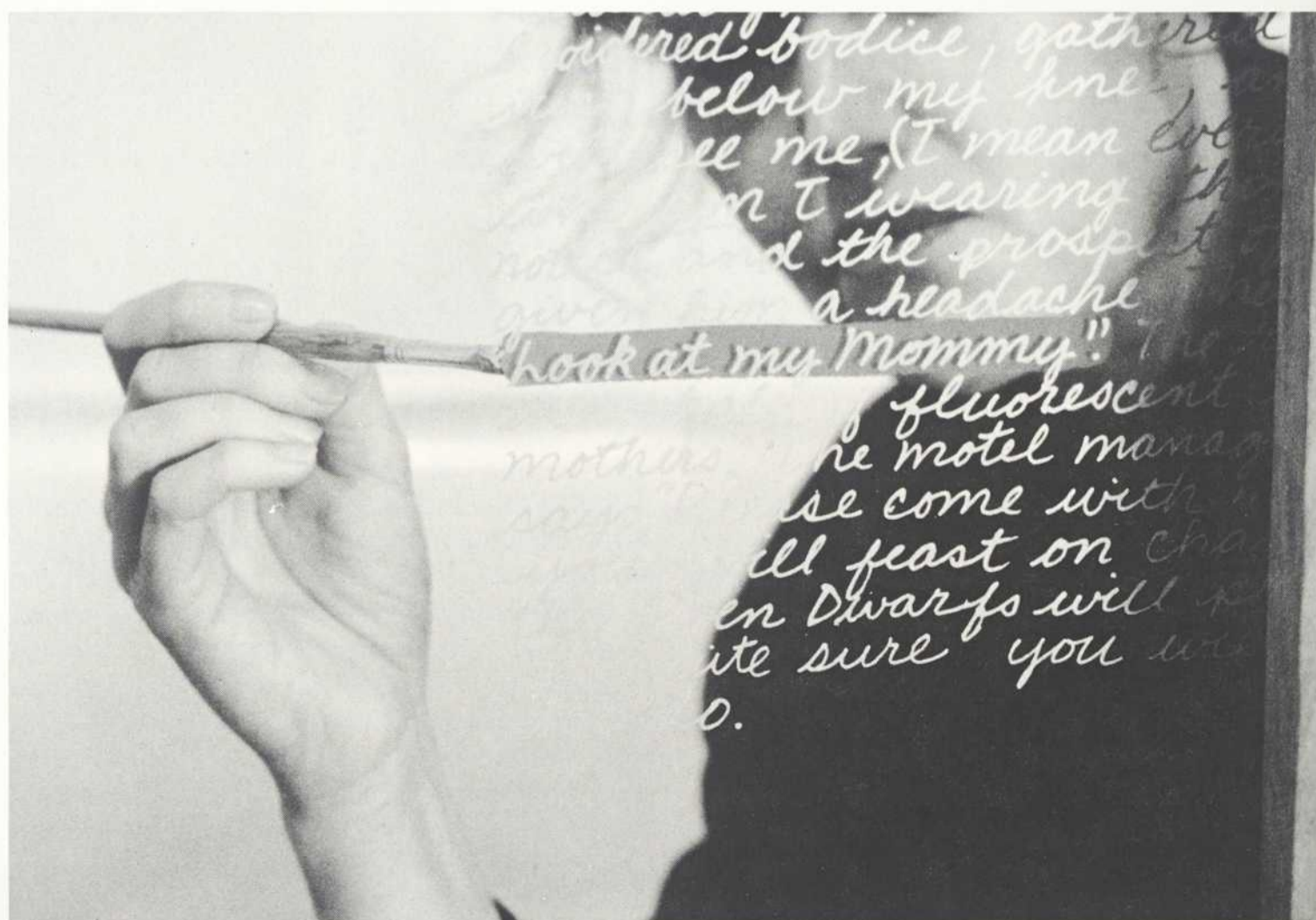
Well, I started, again, with what was significant for me. The leather jacket obviously relates to the story about the uniform and is very specific to the profession of "the artist," but I wanted it to have a familiarity that might be recognized in any professional situation. It became emblematic of that desire to be, as the character in the story says, "like a man." Psychoanalytically then, this is a very interesting idea: why do I want to wear that? Or, why does a woman want a uniform? You start to think about the difference between the masquerade and the display; the way that masquerade has the unconscious intention, I suppose, of making you silent, passive, "to be looked at." The display, the uniform, installs you in a kind of hierarchy, but not as something to be looked at. It's almost getting rid of the visual so that you can be heard. This is why we see so many men in boring suits and ties.

With the handbag the story suggests the desire to impress someone else with your "good taste" as it were. We all have this kind of item in our wardrobes, something that we feel terribly proud of. In fact it expresses the way desire is caught up in the desire of the other and how it's translated into the needs and demands of a particular economic system. So in terms of advertising, there is a curious desire to identify with those images. The shoes, as you noticed, are very old boots; so, I was intrigued to hear someone say that they were high heeled shoes. I thought that was provocative because, in terms of fantasy, they may have been revised to constitute a fetish. In terms of the story, it's really quite interesting, too, because this is about an exchange of identity between two women. But who represents the woman? Perhaps you could say

that this is exactly how the hysteric experiences her body — as the body of another woman. In a sense, when she dresses up, these effects take on a fetishistic character in much the same way that they do for men; in order to feel herself attractive, she sets these conditions. Some of the more familiar representations of the hysteric exemplify this. The woman is shown pulling off her clothes with one hand and protecting herself with the other; she's both man and woman at the same time.

Everyone has something like the black nightgown that they never wear. This one was given to

me by my mother; it's something that she had. It's very old, it's very beautiful, and it's absolutely never worn! This is where the work changes from something believable, like the jacket, into something conspicuously about the fantasy of a particular moment, of a particular body or particular relationship. I think it even becomes ambiguous in formal terms — its shape, and this marks a turning point in the series. Reading the story that goes with it you might think: "My God, how did he get stuck with her?" I mean, you have actually relinquished any identification with that kind of precocious



Mary Kelly working on *Interim*, 1985.

femininity by then. Similarly with the white dress that you might have worn once, but usually just hangs in the closet, I think the interesting question there is, who was it for? That story revolves around the woman's relationship to her mother, and it seems to me that it is actually for her mother; it's how she constructs herself as daughter-phallus or what her mother wants her to be.

As the stories become more and more absurd, a lot of different positions are occupied by the viewer. That destabilizing effect is important, because it underlines the pleasure of the joke, which situates you, finally, at a distance.

**You have said that as women get older there is this choice; either laughter or madness. In a sense, you allow that release of laughter by making the stories absurd.**

I think that was crucial for me in doing the work, uncovering all this material that we would rather not deal with, I was trying to exorcise it. I thought, really, what is at stake here? I'm sure everyone has witnessed the fact that some women really do lose touch. They aren't able to reconstitute their identity somehow beyond the body of the young woman or outside of the relation to a child. So you have the woman whose children are grown up and she can't cope. Or, interestingly, the woman who didn't have children, who no longer being able to gain a certain sense of power through her body and then, not having a child either, finds it very difficult to reconstitute her pleasure, her desire. So what Michèle Montrelay was saying about the joke, about sublimated pleasure and the necessity for the adult woman to construct her sexuality in a field that goes beyond sex, made a lot of sense to me, and it became the central thesis of the work.

**The stories were constructed from conversations you had with women. Can you explain how you developed them?**

I kept many notebooks rather than literal recordings of what was said. I would remember certain phrases, keep track of them and then use them as a kind of archive. They were important first of all to establish the themes for the four parts of the larger project *Interim* which I'm still working on. Part I, *Corpus* is about the body. This seemed to be the most immediate issue when women talked about ageing, but there were also other concerns, for example Part II, *Pecunia* is about money. Part IV is concerned with power — how we *don't* have it — I mean it in the very limited sense of institutions; Part III with history, and with history, I mean rather specifically how women talk about their past. In terms of my particular age group, our youth coincided with the beginning of the woman's movement. So we have a political history too. These are the themes that make up what I think is the broader discourse of ageing.

I'm not using the same kind of writing strategies in all of the sections. I used the first person in *Corpus*, but I don't intend to use it in all of the other parts. Because the text is absolutely central for me, it's also an image, treated very much the way you would a brush stroke or any other kind of chiseled or painted mark. The typeface as well as

the details of tense and person are always important. I really used only a few "found" phrases that had to be put in a context, or scene, which is the story. This is rather different from, say, Jenny Holzer's aphorisms or Barbara Kruger's appropriations. It's original writing, which takes a long time, I'm also visualizing it, the scale, its conjunction with other image material, there are many constraints, like the length of it and so forth.

**Do the women that you had conversations with represent a particularly western point of view?**

Yes. They're my friends or people that I met when I was travelling, discussions that remained indelible after the event. That's the way I worked with *Post-Partum Document* too. It was initially from my own experience because I felt that this was necessary in order to have something with immediate resonance that you could then, not necessarily deconstruct, but engage in other levels of analysis.

**The narratives are very accessible. They get your curiosity going. It's the actual writing that draws the viewer through the installation, like reading someone's journal.**

It is a tremendous risk, using the personal or the experiential in any way. Usually artists opt for one thing or the other. On the one hand you'd have, for instance, the cultural feminist position that would simply reinforce the personal or on the other hand, you'd have what could be referred to as mainstream practice which is, almost invariably, abstracted, metadiscursive and denies the experiential as content. What they put in its place is style or whatever establishes the artistic subjectivity of the work in terms of form. So what I've done is to combine the systems, refuse the reduction, but also running the risk of criticism from both camps.

**When you consider the audience for your work, do you imagine an individual viewer or a collective group with particular interests?**

Well, that follows from the previous answer, because I was consciously straddling these two camps. I didn't want to lose the feminist audience. The work is founded in the debates of the women's movement and I want to historicize that. But also I want that material to intervene in the context of art.

**You've often been paired with people like Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger. What is your sense of the differences?**

The *Post-Partum Document* was started in 1973 and finished by 1979, so it coincided with the first wave of conceptualism. But the *Document* wasn't shown in the States until 1983; although it was seen in Europe and Canada before that. Barbara and Jenny emerged around 1977. This is when critics like Craig Owens and Benjamin Buchloh were saying that it was primarily women artists that were holding onto the ideals of critical practice that conceptualism represented. There were no visible women in the first effort, except perhaps Hanne Darboven; now there are quite a few women represented in the so-called New Criticality. I think that *Interim*, because it comes out of the later period, is much more polemical with that work, but it also maintains the political and historical "project" emphasis of earlier work like Hans Haacke's.

It's a definitive move away from one-liners.

***Post-Partum Document* appeared as a book and *Interim* as a catalogue. Do you see these publications as documents or do you see them as book-works in their own right?**

Well, with *Post Partum Document* the demand for the book came after the installation, and so we just reproduced the original work for this.

With *Interim* I'm hoping to do the artwork for the book rather independently from the installation version. The catalogue was done from the flat artwork so it was clear and readable, and not at all as nuanced as the work in the installation.

**The frames get lost also. In *Corpus* they're very significant, representing crucial interfaces between the work and the external world.**

For me, the book is always a compromised form, I don't know what you can do about that. I mean, I'm really in love with the installation as a way of maintaining a layered experience of the piece. It just does so much more. But I am also pleased that there is the possibility for the work to reach a wider audience in book form. I thought if I designed it specifically for the book, that I wouldn't feel such a loss. But now I think I feel this even more so, probably because at the beginning I always think through the project three dimensionally.

**The poster and catalogue for *Interim*, like the back cover for the *Post-Partum Document* book, show a picture of you. These both function as markers for your work.**

Those two photographs were taken by Ray Barrie. I think because he knows me and the work very well, he comes up with an interesting image. In relation to *Post-Partum Document*, that parody of the Madonna and child with tape recorder worked rather well. I first did it as a publicity photograph, thinking that you couldn't really get an idea of what the work was about if you just reproduced one section from it. Again, he set up the photograph for *Interim*. How can you understand what it's about if you just see one panel? With the image of me, looking through the text, a lot of what the work is about comes across in the specific form of photography. They are photographs, not photographs of work.

**There is an impeccable quality to this work. How important is control to you?**

Certainly my strategies with the work are very considered but no one is ever in complete control. There are lot of things, of course, that I don't understand about the work. That's why I'm interested in what you see and what you have to say about it.

Jennifer Fisher is a writer living in Montréal.

**Mary Kelly est ici interviewée dans le contexte de son projet en cours *Interim, Part I, Corpus*. Elle décrit quelques-unes de ses stratégies qui questionnent la construction et la représentation de la sexualité. *Corpus*, en particulier, examine la reconstitution du désir chez les femmes d'âge moyen. De plus, l'entrevue situe le travail de Kelly dans le discours féministe actuel.**

## SYLVIE BOUCHARD

Galerie Chantal Boulanger, Montréal, 10 décembre-4 février

Dans cette exposition, toutes les œuvres que présente Sylvie Bouchard sont peintes à l'aquarelle. Aquarelle sur papier pour les formats réduits, aquarelle sur bois pour les imposants tableaux forestiers. Dans le premier cas, la compatibilité entre le médium et le support étant de longue date reconnue, on se bornerait à noter que dans un certain contexte de réhabilitation (auquel on a fini par s'habituer), on avait encore peu (re)vu l'usage de cette peinture légère. En regard d'une historiographie classique de l'art, l'aquarelle sur bois n'est pas par contre ce qu'on pourrait appeler une association usitée... Elle retient d'autant l'attention que le support ligneux est une présence qui ne s'escamote pas dans le travail de Sylvie Bouchard: il a une texture, un poids et une épaisseur.

Les pièces de résistance de l'exposition sont ces grandes peintures exécutées sur des panneaux de bois, dont chacun est constitué de planches emboutevées que l'on persiste à voir malgré le calfeutrage des interstices. La nature d'un tel support rappelle aisément les peintures sur panneaux et les retables des églises du Moyen-Âge et de la Renaissance. Il y a là une analogie technique qui, loin de se réduire à la désignation nostalgique d'un métier ou d'un rapport révolu au matériau, s'emploierait plutôt à renforcer les effets de flottement et de détachement temporels qui caractérisent l'iconographie. Un peu comme s'il avait été important de signifier dans le matériau même de l'image la force d'une durée et l'érosion que peut exercer le temps sur un objet jusqu'à le détacher parfaitement de son tissu historique d'origine. Sur le grain du bois qu'elle laisse transparent, l'aquarelle est une sorte de révélateur à double emploi, qui lie au caractère onirique des paysages qu'elle dépeint celui palpable et accidenté de l'élément qui les retient. Les panneaux des charpentes les plus lourdes ont réagi sous la pression exercée par leur construction de telle sorte que leurs flancs latéraux ont eu tendance à se retrousser, suivant le sens des planches. C'est la raison pour laquelle les œuvres de grande dimension sont affectées d'une surface légèrement cambrée, qui induit dans l'image la sensation d'un repli vers elle-même.

Cette impression d'introversivité s'accorde avec le contenu iconographique

Sylvie Bouchard, 1988, *Sans titre*, aquarelle sur bois, 287 × 290 cm; photo: Don Corman.

manifesté. Dans une ambiance saturnienne, de longs arbres se dressent, secs et dépouillés comme en hiver. Au sommet de leurs troncs, leurs branches sont atrophiées au point qu'ils semblent des schémas ou des squelettes d'arbres: une réduction, presque, à des espèces en voie de fossilisation. La géométrie ou une certaine règle d'ordre et de symétrie règne en ces boisés. D'ailleurs, pour chacun des aménagements sylvestres accroché au mur, la figure du sol se distingue par un tracé en méandres, sorte de version naturalisée par la courbe du carrelage perspectiviste de la représentation en peinture. Les œuvres plus petites font voisiner

les arbres avec des habitations. Au sein de la forêt en pièces détachées que finit par raconter l'exposition, elles deviennent des pavillons isolés ou des abris clos, jouant à la fois le cœur, le centre, la construction, le retrait, le secret.

Ce qui est plutôt remarquable avec ces peintures de Sylvie Bouchard, c'est qu'en dépit de la réserve et même de l'austérité qui frappent les éléments de

tristes, c'est un état sensoriel, une sorte de conditionnement climatique de la perception agissant par la stase et par l'imprégnation.

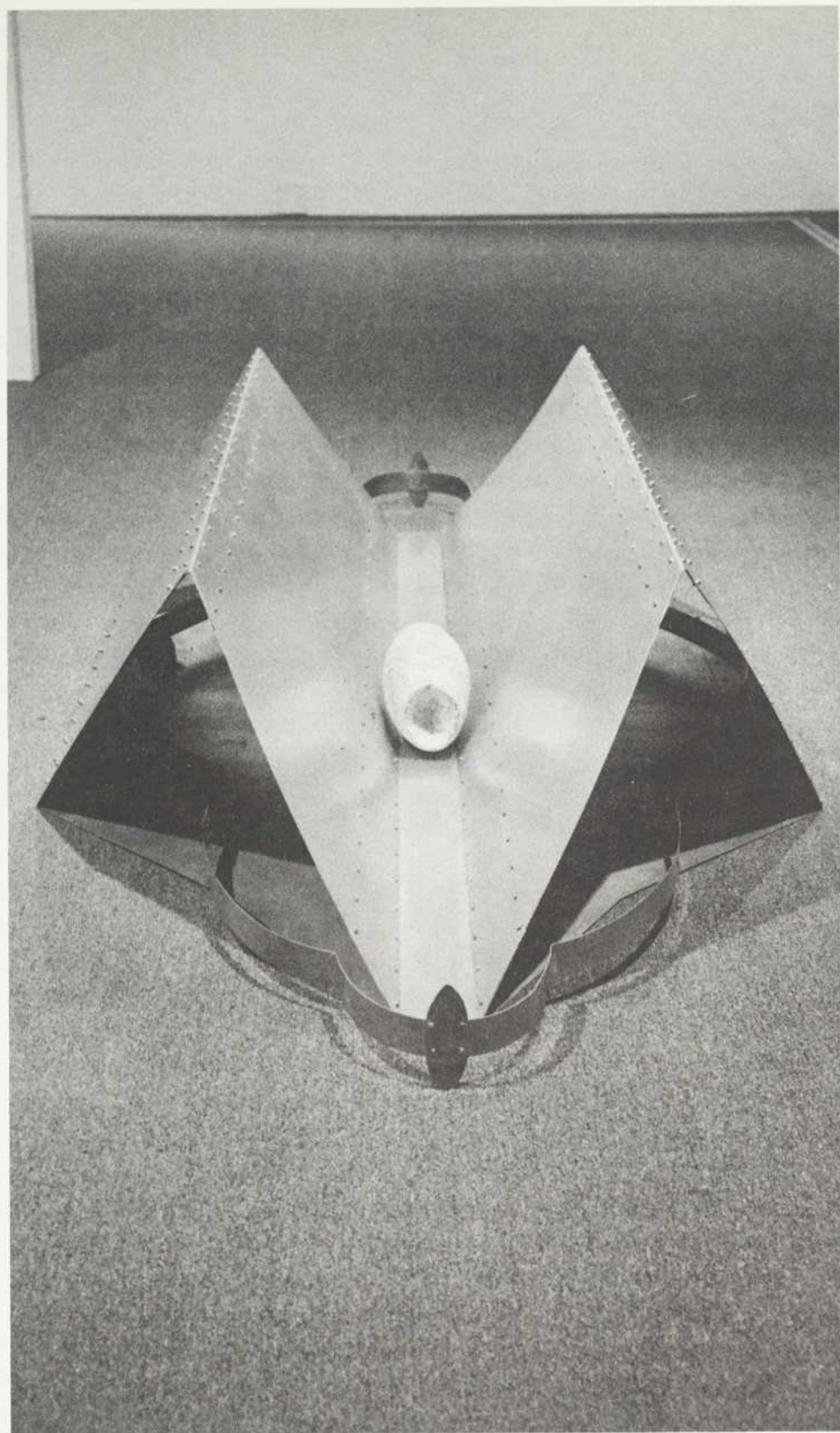
Cette orientation contemplative, elle est encouragée par des connotations de fixité, d'engourdissement, d'intériorité, de vide, de suspension temporelle, de réflexion ancrées dans la façon d'écrire l'image. Bien sûr, la promenade reste possible à travers ces vues sylvestres mais, à bien des égards, elle prend des allures de *mezzo del cammino*. On pourrait en effet comparer ces empreintes et cette nappe sinueuses, cette route elliptique entre les troncs hauts à la perte du droit chemin dans la sombre forêt. L'expérience dantesque du milieu du chemin de la vie est celle du trajet immobile, de la vitesse du surplace, du lieu de l'exil; celle d'une mort momentanée. Les paysages déserts et taciturnes de Sylvie Bouchard se plient à de semblables propositions autant d'ailleurs qu'ils se rangent du côté du «sommeil chargé d'ombre», l'état ou la phase liminaire qui, dans la *Divine Comédie*, précède la grande traversée. S'il y a effectivement une notion de trajet qui travaille les tableaux, elle concerne moins le passage du corps, qui porte d'un lieu à un autre, que le passage du temps, qui impose une durée aux choses et aux êtres, un vieillissement. Or le *mezzo del cammino*, c'est aussi l'expérience de la traversée des âges, la relativisation de la temporalité.

À cheminer sur cette voie interprétative, on pressentirait qu'à la différence d'un passage, même métaphorisé, du corps ou par le corps, le passage dont nous entretenons ces tableaux suppose le corps dynamique absent ou abstrait de l'univers des êtres statiques; à tout le moins, il propose le corps immobile, statufié, qui subit le temps. Par extrapolation, on aurait l'impression que c'est le tableau ou l'image dans les tableaux qui impose sa durée au spectateur, qui lui signifie la posture particulière que nécessite une durée perceptive.

Dans l'exposition, le plus grand tableau a les dimensions d'un mur et s'appuie au plancher de la galerie. Il est flanqué d'un tout petit panneau, juste suffisant pour laisser paraître la figure d'un personnage masculin, assez énigmatique. À eux deux, ils sont une œuvre, la plus puissante en termes de connotation «atmosphérique» et la plus accomplie quant aux éléments, tant formels que représentatifs, mis en jeu dans l'ensemble de l'accrochage. Sur trois longs panneaux aux planches verticales, deux groupes d'arbres particulièrement anémiques encadrent, sur fond obscur, un arbre solitaire et distant, qui est curieusement le plus clair de tous et qui divise en deux parties équivalentes le plan vertical de la surface. Le sol est dessiné comme une surface

## BRITISH NOW: SCULPTURE ET AUTRES DESSINS

Musée d'art contemporain, Montréal, 21 septembre – 8 janvier



Alison Wilding,  
*Blue Skies*,  
1987,  
acier galvanisé,  
argentan,  
granit de  
Cornouailles,  
50,5 × 284  
× 132 cm;  
photo:  
Ron Diamond.  
Coll. Alison  
Wilding.

courbe sur laquelle s'étend une grande flaque blanche menant à l'arbre fantôme. Cette portion de forêt qui s'échappe vers le centre de l'image picturale défie donc, sur le plan de la différenciation chromatique, les règles élémentaires de l'inscription perspectiviste: l'arbre le plus lointain est le plus lumineux alors que vers les bords et le spectateur, les troncs ont des teintes violines de plus en plus éteintes. Le visage en gros plan est aux trois-quarts tourné vers le grand tableau; son regard fixe le spectateur.

Figure belle, idéale, le petit personnage produit dans l'exposition un effet impressionnant. À lui seul, il semble assurer la dimension du souvenir, la fonction mnémotique des lieux fictifs qu'il habite et personnifie tout à la fois. Il fascine et dérouté en raison de sa manière d'interpeller avec insistance le spectateur, de réfléchir son regard, de le renvoyer à l'activité de scrutateur. Il est par ailleurs possible d'attribuer l'ascendant de cette

image d'humain à son aspect singulier. Parce qu'il est presque reproduit à l'échelle réelle et qu'il semble littéralement imprégné dans la fibre ligneuse, le visage rappelle l'empreinte, la trace, le vestige, la *vera iconica*. Et c'est là une autre fonction déictique importante pour cet individu anonyme que de canaliser la perception vers le procédé technique.

Au fond, le *mezzo del cammino* de ce group d'œuvres, ce serait (aussi) la perte de la claire voie iconographique, l'intrication, plus précisément, entre le niveau symbolique ou allégorique de la «forêt» et celui, résistant et matériel, de son énonciation. À part le personnage sans corps, c'est surtout une logique têtue qui habite le décor. Des boisés sur bois ou de l'image d'un matériau sur ce matériau, c'est déjà assez conséquent. De là, on pourrait reprendre le raisonnement d'un tout autre point de vue, pas nécessairement moins dérapant.

— MARTINE MEILLEUR

Par-delà le prétexte de montrer au public d'ici un corpus d'œuvres déjà plus ou moins connues, l'enjeu véritable de cette exposition, et son intérêt, se révèle dans son sous-titre. C'est en effet la notion de dessin qui est ici au centre de l'investigation. La «nouvelle sculpture anglaise» (entre l'objet et l'image) s'offre ici comme un terrain privilégié pour renouveler l'approche de cette notion, en invalidant la recherche d'une spécificité fondée sur le médium (ses outils et ses supports), diluant ses frontières et permettant ainsi de l'envisager en tant qu'acte, essentiellement de tracé et de découpe.

Traditionnellement associé à la peinture, la plupart du temps dans une situation d'infériorité (simple ébauche ou étude), mais aussi quelquefois valorisé pour sa proximité avec l'idée ou l'émotion (grâce à sa rapidité d'exécution), le dessin demeure toujours malgré tout un art pictural mineur, sans spécificité bien établie. Au Québec et au Canada, il a fait l'objet de nombreuses expositions depuis le début des années soixante-dix; certaines l'ont rapproché de la peinture et de la gravure (par son support notamment), d'autres ont rendu compte de son autonomisation, en tant que trace référant à une installation ou comme support de travaux conceptuels, d'autres encore ont élargi la notion jusqu'à y inclure des partitions musicales et chorégraphiques et même des photographies et installations. Pour la très grande majorité cependant, ces expositions se sont attachées à des œuvres dans lesquelles dominaient, de quelque façon, les repères traditionnels du dessin, que ce soit la marque, le support ou le matériau d'inscription.

La proposition de Sandra Grant-Marchand, conservatrice de l'exposition, renverse cette logique d'une définition du dessin, par les caractéristiques du médium. Dépassant l'autoréférentialité moderniste tout en tenant compte des acquis formalistes et sémiotiques, elle invite plutôt à retracer et déceler les manifestations du dessin au sein d'œuvres qui utilisent et mélangent indifféremment les médiums en fonction des besoins de leur énoncé.

Les moyens du dessin n'apparaissent plus inévitablement et seulement déterminés du fait de la trace graphique sur le papier. Le dessiné dans l'œuvre — ce qui nous permet de l'identifier comme dessin — intervient également par la matière même de l'œuvre, tantôt manipulée, assemblée ou construite lorsqu'il s'agit de sculpture, tantôt en surface ou en relief lorsqu'il s'agit de peinture, tantôt composite lorsqu'il s'agit d'installation. L'idée du dessin se transforme en activité sur la matière, se définit au travers des éléments du médium, et c'est ce mode,

surtout, d'insertion du dessin dans le champ de la sculpture qui fait l'objet de notre propos. (p. 20 du catalogue de l'exposition).

On peut tenter de lire cette idée du dessin, se transformant en activité sur la matière, comme étant essentiellement un acte de découpe, comme un tracé qui circonscrit des espaces, qu'ils soient intérieurs et extérieurs (dans le cas d'une forme plus ou moins close), ou contigus (dans le cas d'une ligne ouverte). C'est en effet cet acte qui spécifie le dessin au sein du pictural permettant de le distinguer des modulations de la couleur propres à la peinture. Réciproquement, dans les œuvres conventionnellement considérées comme du dessin, on est ainsi amené à distinguer des procédés qui relèvent en fait de la peinture (les clairs-obscurs notamment).

C'est dans son statut d'ébauche que le dessin donne à voir le plus clairement, d'une certaine façon, ce qu'il en est du dessin dans la sculpture, tout comme c'est d'ailleurs le cas pour l'architecture ou le design de mobilier. C'est là que le travail du dessin s'y expose le plus succinctement, pour ensuite se transposer plus ou moins directement dans la manipulation de la matière. Peu importe alors l'outil, le matériau ou le support qui servent à la découpe, l'acte de dessiner s'y opère, délimitant les multiples espaces de l'œuvre.

Alison Wilding offre un tel exemple d'une transformation directe des matériaux par laquelle se réalise cette mise en forme des frontières. Que ce soit avec la scie, la gouge peut-être ou la meule, le contour se dessine à même le «trop plein» de matière et, peu à peu, se confronte directement à l'espace environnant. Les œuvres de Bill Woodrow reposent, par contre, sur un tout autre mode d'intégration du dessin. Des objets, dont les formes sont dessinées par l'industrie, servent à la fois de contexte, de matériau, de support et parfois de socle. Woodrow y découpe à même la surface une forme qui correspond, grosso modo, au dessin planimétrique du volume de la forme à créer, comme une maquette à reconstituer. L'œuvre finale présente alors à la fois le positif de ce dessin (les surfaces du nouvel objet assemblé) et son négatif (sous forme de vide laissé par la découpe; empreinte attestant de l'acte du dessin). L'un et l'autre sont, de surcroît, désigné par l'espèce de cordon ombilical qui les relie. Le dessin montre ici qu'il est affaire de surfaces, à la fois comme plan et comme enveloppe d'un volume.

Le «Eight Bicycle Frames», aussi de Woodrow, explore une autre dimension. Ici, c'est le volume tubulaire qui est inté-

## CÉLINE SURPRENANT

Galerie Powerhouse, Montréal, 14 janvier–5 février

gré à l'espace pictural sous forme de lignes. Le tracé s'y effectue par le biais de la soudure, recomposant, sur la surface du mur, la représentation conventionnelle des rayons du soleil, tout en laissant subsister certains détails du dessin original de la bicyclette.

Les œuvres de Tony Cragg permettent d'évoquer d'autres manifestations du dessin. Ainsi «Spiral» se structure essentiellement à l'intérieur d'un tracé aux contours nets, alors que la découpe des surfaces supérieures du volume résulte, pour sa part, de la nature même des objets accumulés. «Real Plastic Love», de son côté, imbrique étroitement le tracé et l'opposition des couleurs pour délimiter les contours de ses personnages. On retrouve aussi une utilisation du dessin confronté à des effets proprement picturaux dans la pièce sans titre de 1983 (accumulation d'objets recouverts de striures noires): la forme globale de la sculpture demeure parcellisée; l'effet unificateur du tracé gestuel d'ordre plutôt pictural demeure en tension non résolue avec les formes des différents objets. «Tree», quant à lui, superpose formes usinées et dessin d'un arbre, les désignant dans leur altérité fondamentale.

Enfin, «Spill», de Cragg toujours, introduit à d'autres médiations: que la forme soit imaginée ou pré-existante, son dessin passe par le moulage et le coulage. Ce qui est du même ordre que le procès de fabrication des personnages d'Antony Gormley. Le processus de transfert qui est à

l'œuvre ne confère qu'une forme plus épurée, plus stylisée à une forme déjà existante.

Chez Anish Kapoor, par ailleurs, le dessin est strictement limité à la découpe des formes des objets, la délimitation qu'il établit est troublée par les effets des pigments et leur luminosité. Chez Richard Long, il est délimitation d'un contour ou tracé, aux formes géométriques simples permettant une présentation de matériaux qui allèguent d'une proximité avec la nature. Le dessin de David Tremlett se combine, à mon sens, essentiellement à des procédés propres à la fresque picturale, de par, notamment, son type de manipulations manuelles de la matière. Edward Allington, enfin, offre ici des pièces axées principalement sur la présentation et la problématisation des opérateurs de la perspective classique et ce, autant dans le champ pictural que tridimensionnel.

Cette exposition montre donc qu'en tant qu'acte de tracé et de découpe, autour de formes parfois abstraites, parfois figuratives, le dessin structure tout autant le pictural que le sculptural. En présentant certaines œuvres dans lesquelles les affinités du tracé pictural et de la découpe sculpturale sont manifestes et d'autres dans lesquelles les formes conventionnelles du dessin sont totalement absentes, cette exposition provoque la réévaluation de la notion de dessin et l'extension de sa définition par-delà ses manifestations matérielles.

— JACQUES DOYON

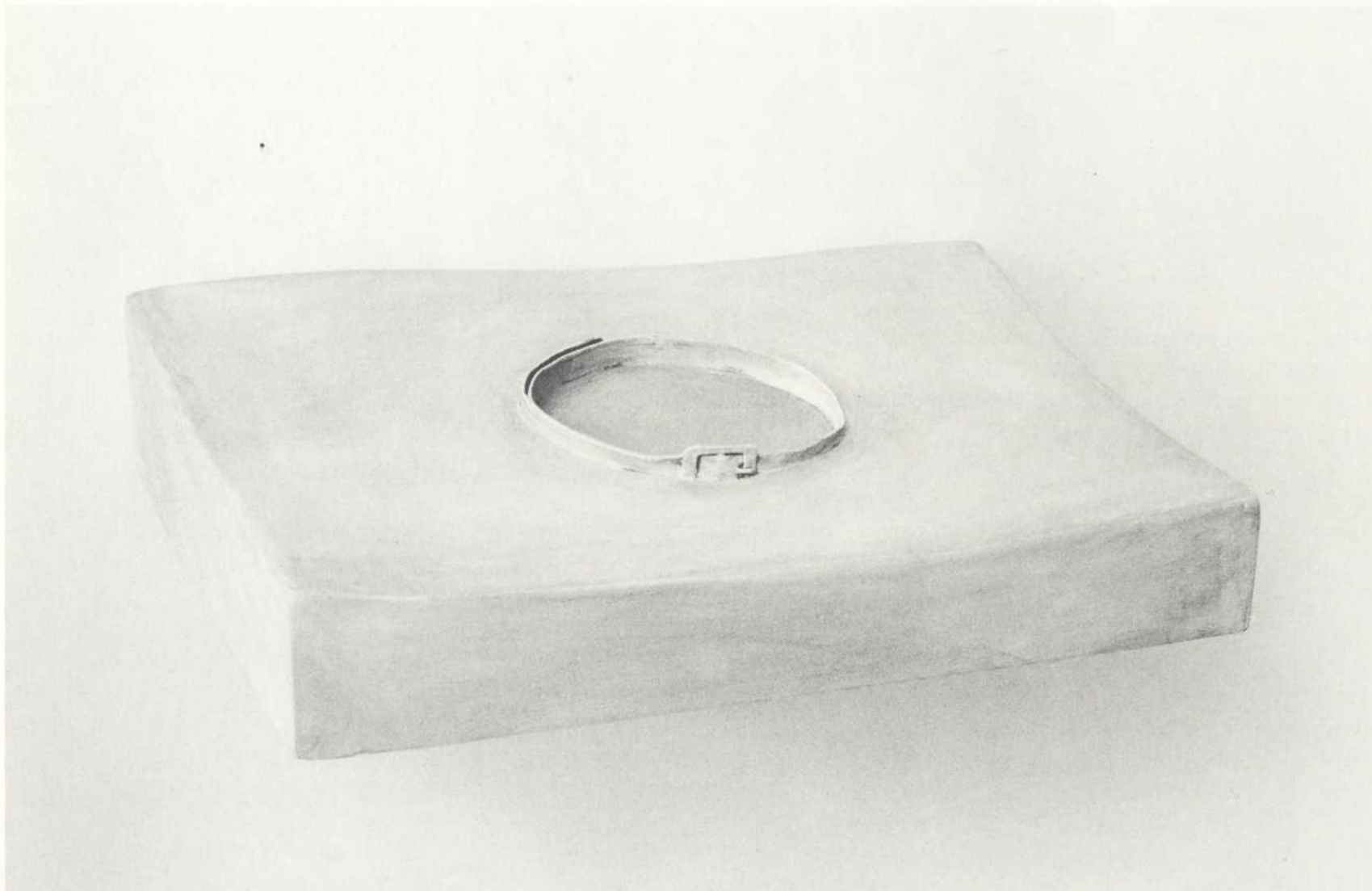
À la jonction des caractéristiques définitoires des pratiques en arts visuels, Céline Surprenant explore en continuité avec son travail antérieur, les avenues hybrides et impures de la production artistique actuelle qui font échec aux spécificités modernistes. Choissant la clarté formelle plutôt que les débordements du kitsch ou du baroque, elle met en scène par les moyens du haut et du bas-relief des images figuratives monochromes qui déploient dans l'espace, leurs creux et leurs pleins ainsi que leurs nuances tonales. Exacerbée par la simplicité représentative de l'univers vestimentaire féminin, la polysémie des signes joue sur les registres peirciens de l'icône, de l'indice et du symbole et s'engage dans moult directions. Le mimétisme, la ressemblance problématisent la représentation de l'identité, de la séduction, du corps, de la mode, de la sexualité, du désir, de la pudeur de telle sorte que les pistes se combinent à un rythme exponentiel où analogies, paradoxes, oppositions se répondent et multiplient les effets pour augmenter l'efficacité plastique et sémantique des œuvres.

Installées parallèlement ou perpendiculairement aux murs de la salle rectangulaire de Powerhouse, les sept propositions récentes, regroupées sous le titre connoté de *La pudeur*, s'offrent au

regard. Posé frontalement, obliquement ou en plongée, celui-ci doit continuellement s'adapter à la position des œuvres fixées à une distance significative de la hauteur des yeux. L'accrochage le plus souvent près du sol amène la vue à s'abaisser vers elles de préférence à la saisie frontale qu'exigent habituellement des objets d'art accrochés à des cloisons murales. Cet écart de l'accrochage traditionnel permet de remarquer la volumétrie des pièces exposées qui ainsi distancient les usages de présentation du travail pictural comme ceux de la recherche sculpturale. Cinq haut-reliefs et deux bas-reliefs s'avancent dans l'espace comme si le plaisir de présenter, de donner à voir débordait. Les œuvres viennent au-devant de nous, initient la rencontre.

Les yeux en même temps que le corps se penchent vers elles, rendus ainsi conscients de leur rôle privilégié dans la perception, dans la relation du spectateur avec les signes visuels. Le corps qui progresse vers l'autre se double par un mouvement du regard qui établit le contact, reçoit les vibrations de la forme, de la couleur, de la texture. Cette façon contraignante qu'a l'artiste de diriger l'angle du regard, située d'emblée que le donné à voir guide l'interprétation. Cette soumission forcée à la mise en place non conventionnelle signifie que le discours interprétatif lié aux instances perceptuelles s'inscrit à partir de l'objet esthétique et de ses variables propres. Cette insistance sur la nécessaire interrelation entre le fait de regarder et d'être vu, pointe de façon antinomique la dépendance de l'objet d'art dans l'attente du regard qui lui rend la vie, lui donne sens.

À l'exception de l'œuvre qui représente un mur de briques, toutes font référence à l'habillement, à ce que plusieurs considèrent comme LA différence significative entre l'espèce animale et le genre humain. Pan de jupe, souliers, bas, gants, sac, ceinture, serre-tête appartiennent au vocabulaire vestimentaire. Le traitement isolé de l'accessoire fait souvent de celui-ci le signifiant unique de chacune des pièces exposées, mais cette succession presque énumérative échappe toutefois à l'aspect documentaire des inventaires ethnographiques. Céline Surprenant évite aussi, malgré un dispositif de présentation qui s'apparente au socle ou au plateau, la réification fétichiste de la vitrine. Chez elle, la mise en valeur individuelle ou encore fragmentée de quelques-uns seulement des éléments du costume, se distancie du vêtement-image photographique analysé par Barthes. Ici, les signes que sont les représentations des parures, se présentent seuls en l'absence du corps,



Céline Surprenant, *Sans titre*, 1988, médias mixtes, 52 × 74 × 12 cm; photo: David Bate.

d'un corps qualifié comme féminin à cause de la présence d'attributs sexués selon les normes des stéréotypes et de la mode qui eux aussi, à l'instar du langage visuel, forment des systèmes complexes de signes.

Qu'il soit parure, accessoire, habit, le référent vestimentaire supporte toute la production exposée: tantôt imitation, tantôt matrice, tantôt moulé. Cette conjonction de la représentation de l'objet référent réel peint et du moule établit une dynamique entre la peinture et la sculpture. Ces tensions de plein et de vide, de formes en relief et en creux s'interpellent les unes les autres dans un dialogue formel qui jouxte dans une deuxième opération à la technique sculpturale du moulage, la couleur peinte. Après avoir sablé, poli le plâtre de la construction du plateau, Céline Surprenant recouvre cette surface trimensionnelle de couches superposées qui comme celles de la mémoire, condensent le pigment pour lui donner les vibrations d'un travail dans l'épaisseur de la couleur plutôt que dans l'opacité. La lumière semble alors filtrée de l'objet-tableau dont l'effet est accentué par l'éclairage soigné de l'exposition.

La simplicité de l'énonciation représentative s'effondre devant le jeu complexe des référents imités, réels ou encore par le biais indiciel de la trace laissée. En effet, ces constructions se présentent tantôt comme des moules libérés de l'objet qui leur donne forme, tantôt au contraire emplies de la présence réelle de l'objet toujours là tels ces couliers, ce sac à main ou cette ceinture dont la fixité renvoie aux pieds, à la main, à la taille, comme si le temps venait de suspendre la pose. Dans plusieurs pièces, cependant, c'est par l'absence de l'objet, par le creux de sa déjà présence que s'inscrit le référent. Cette présentification par l'absence, par le fantôme moulé de ce qui a déjà été là, cite non seulement l'index dans la photographie mais reproduit le lien de l'outil à ce qu'il instrumente. Par définition, l'ustensile est pris dans une structure de renvoi de quelque chose à quelque chose qu'Heidegger a déjà décrit ainsi: «l'ustensile est essentiellement quelque chose pour» Tel un signe iconique, l'ustensile, en l'occurrence l'accessoire, tient lieu de. À nouveau opère la mise en abîme d'un système de signes par un autre système de signes: le langage vestimentaire déjà investi par le code de la mode est travaillé ici par le langage visuel.

Instrument de séduction, l'ornement renvoie à la femme soumise aux distorsions du «fashion model»: image idéalisée pour l'homme ou identification narcissique. Jamais là, absent, le corps dont les cilices modernes témoignent, se révèle être celui qui est l'objet de toutes

les attentions, de tous les supplices: la taille qu'on sangle, le cheveu qu'on retient, le pied qu'on enchâsse. Ainsi va la chaîne signifiante qui en mimant l'absence, en traduisant le non-dit, renvoie à la présence du corps, de ce corps individuel, privé qui est le lieu, l'espace, le réceptacle des conventions sociales qui le recouvrent. Le référent fait surface par le biais de l'outil qui opère le renvoi: la ceinture appelle la taille qui à son tour introduit la robe, puis le corps qui reçoit la robe et de là, à la personne qui porte la robe et aux conventions de la coquetterie et de la pudeur.

En représentant le costume et ses accessoires soumis aux aléas de la mode, des rôles sexuels, des stéréotypes, Céline Surprenant pointe la dimension sociale du vêtement qui sert à mettre l'individu le plus souvent féminin en représentation devant l'autre, devant le regard de l'autre. De plus, le désir y tisse le non-dit des fantasmes à l'image de ce qui est là sans y être, reprenant ainsi toute la complexité du signe visuel dans sa fonction indicielle. Devant nous, sous nos yeux, une extraordinaire métaphore du dit et du tu, du montré et du caché qui mime la nécessaire présence du spectateur par rapport aux œuvres visuelles pour combler les avenues sémantiques que l'artiste a aménagées, laissant le sens s'installer au gré des ouvertures pratiquées dans ses œuvres.

L'économie des moyens plastiques et iconiques que privilégie Céline Surprenant à laquelle se greffe une prédilection pour l'anonymat, favorise une mise à distance par rapport à la représentation narrative. Autonome, chacune des œuvres échappe à la linéarité du récit et ce, malgré les écueils de la citation, du fragment ou du titre aux possibilités verbales enga-

geantes. Mise en scène de certains artifices de la séduction, paradoxalement, cette exposition évite l'exhibitionnisme formel privilégiant une certaine retenue dans l'organisation des signes qui laissent *in absentia* toute la place à un examen de la représentation, de la représentation du corps de la femme. Mise en lumière aussi des ambiguïtés de la coquetterie et du confort qui manifestent l'ostracisme des obligations, de ce qui doit se faire ou du comment cela doit se faire, doublant les conventions qui gèrent les relations entre les sexes et les codes qui régissent les échanges.

Avec cette exposition, Céline Surprenant présente une réflexion appuyée par une connaissance de l'histoire de l'art et des idées. Entre le privé des émotions et le public des codes vestimentaires, elle expose un travail simple, retenu et contrôlé qui nous laisse nous engager dans le désir de s'approcher, de toucher, de connaître. Et à la fin, c'est comme si nous avions apprivoisé un peu mieux le sexisme, la fragilité des sentiments et la subtilité de l'évocation qui laisse la place aux mémoires personnelles et sociales. Remonte alors le souvenir des œuvres de Mary Kelly présentées un mois auparavant sur les mêmes murs et avec lesquelles le travail de Céline Surprenant soutient la succession mais aussi la comparaison. Elle apporte la mise en perspective et la sincérité d'une artiste plus jeune qui, avec réserve, mais assurance, réussit la fragile symbiose de la forme et du contenu féministe comme semble le métaphoriser la rencontre du papillon et de la fleur dans l'œuvre intitulée *L'Amour attrapant un papillon* où deux mains (celles de l'artiste?) sortent sous le rideau de scène pour organiser le rendez-vous.

— FRANCINE PAUL

## LOUISE ROBERT

Galerie Graff, Montréal, 19 janvier – 14 février

On aura dit et écrit, très justement, que la peinture de Louise Robert en était une faite pour l'oeil, que le regard y était le principal convoqué, le premier (et longtemps) retenu. On aura dit et écrit également, toujours aussi justement, que le corps se faisait présent dans les tableaux de Louise Robert. À plusieurs égards, bien qu'à des niveaux différents, cela demeure le cas dans cette exposition où le corps se fait insistant et le regard est épris. En fait, il y a récurrence de certains composantes dans ces nouvelles œuvres, et d'une certaine «gestuelle» aussi, mais il s'en dégage une «prégnance» qui leur est singulière.

Comme auparavant, la surface de la toile se trouve marquée d'une main attentive; à certains endroits, il s'agit de gratta-ge, à d'autres de lacération ou encore de traces de pigment laissées par les doigts. À chaque fois, le poids du geste se sera laissé sentir; il ne s'agit pas de marques faites au hasard, sans pour autant être des signes posés avec calcul. Je n'en déduirais pas néanmoins un heureux compromis, ou un parfait entre-deux entre l'imprévisible et l'intentionnel; je pencherais plutôt pour une certaine forme de «concours de circonstances» concernant à la fois l'artiste et l'oeuvre à peindre; l'histoire de l'artiste, celle de l'art, et

même l'histoire *en général*, se faisant agissantes lorsqu'elles confrontent la surface à travailler, lorsque, pourrait-on dire, elles entrent en oeuvre.

Comme auparavant encore, mais avec une plus grande éloquence (il y en a plus ou on nous le montre encore plus), apparaissent les diverses couches de l'oeuvre qui percent plus ou moins péniblement la matière qui les recouvre ou qui se présentent sous diverses formes ou diverses apparences. Il y aura l'écriture, la rature, le «barbouillage», le voile ou la transparence, la densité du pigment ou son opacité, et toutes ces choses quelques fois confondues. Les mots tracés ajoutent-ils de la couleur sur la toile ou laissent-ils voir des couches colorées qui se seraient empilées? Il y règne une forme de désordre qui embrouille les limites entre les creux et les saillies et qui laisse voir, en somme, une toile prise dans les épaisseurs de l'écriture, du dessin, de la couleur, mais prise aussi entre la profondeur du néant et la limite fragile, en fait difficilement perceptible ou repérable, de la surface.

Il y a des trous dans la peinture de Louise Robert, voire même des gouffres qui entraînent moins le spectateur que la peinture elle-même qui semble, à certains endroits, vouloir s'enfouir dans la profondeur du noir. Ou peut-être est-ce la noirceur qui envahit la surface de la toile. À d'autres endroits, par ailleurs, c'est la couleur, ou quelques fois le presque blanc, qui s'accapare l'espace du tableau, comme si, trop pleine, elle débordait. Il y a des lieux de l'oeuvre d'où jaillit la couleur; comme si le fond ne cherchait qu'à rejoindre la surface. En somme, c'est une curieuse bataille qui se livre ici, bataille dont l'enjeu ne semble pas être celui de prendre l'espace, mais de le travailler. Il y a des traces, des lacérations, des superpositions qui se jouent sur et de la surface de la toile, lesquelles sont autant d'interventions *dessinées* et *colorées*. C'est l'écriture qui se fera dessin dans ces tableaux, les autres traces ayant plus d'affinités avec la pâte pigmentée.

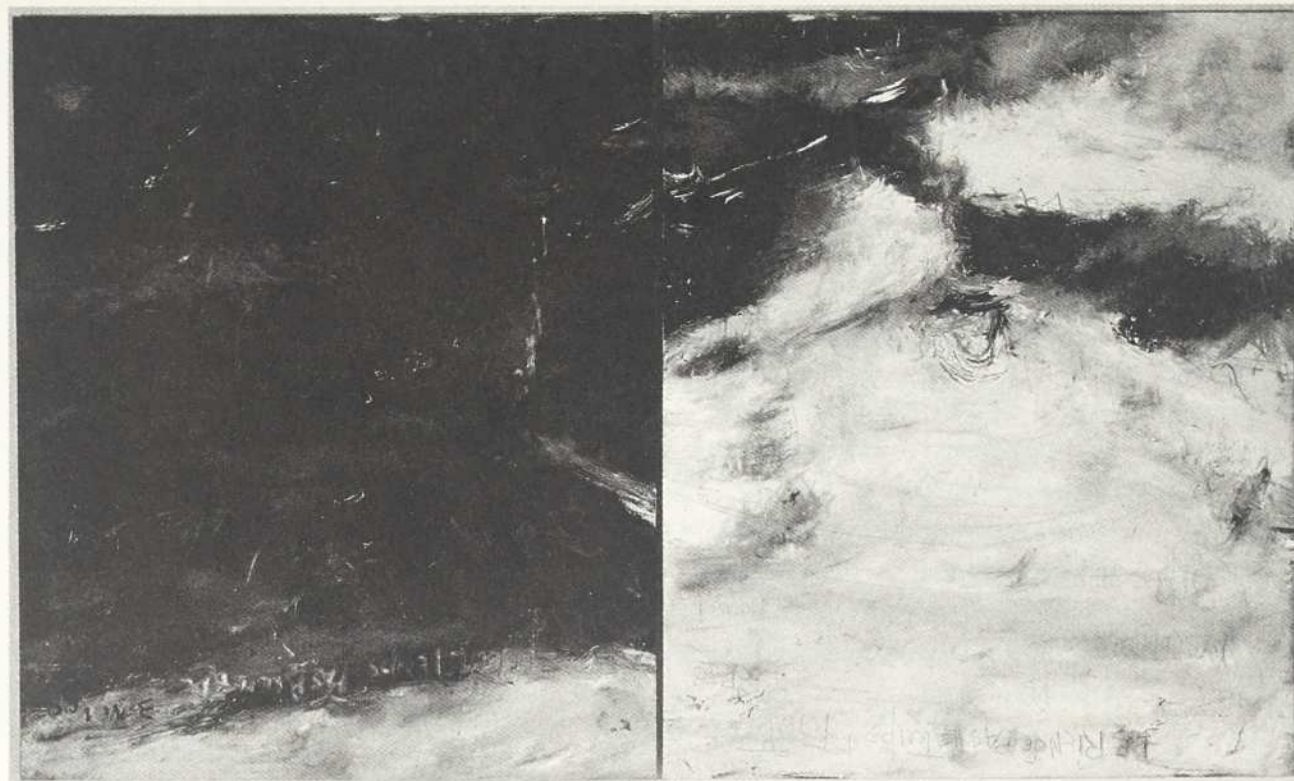
La pâte, la couleur, occupent singulièrement l'oeuvre de Louise Robert; non lisses, elles offrent des reliefs qui, encore, traduisent autrement les choix de l'artiste en s'accaparant *tangiblement* le regard extérieur: «peinture essentiellement à voir, à toucher de l'oeil» (René Payant, *Louise Robert*, Montréal, Galerie Curzi, 1977), où la texture et le texte se lisent sans pour autant se répondre. Il n'y a pas nécessairement de correspondance entre ce qui est écrit et ce qui est peint, si ce n'est que l'écriture et la peinture constituent toutes les deux la matière de l'oeuvre. Là, par ailleurs, où les deux feront corps, c'est dans la signature et dans la date de l'oeuvre. Il y a, en effet, à cet endroit une intégration des unes dans

l'autre, qui manifeste un aspect autoréférentiel à la fois de l'œuvre et de l'artiste. En somme, grattée ou tracée dans l'épaisseur de l'œuvre, la date ou la signature ne figure pas comme une strate *en plus* dans l'œuvre, car alors ce serait reconnaître que l'œuvre est construite par plan, par étage, ce qui ne semble pas être le cas. Il apparaîtrait plus exact de parler d'un travail d'enchevêtrement ou de croisement des plans. À la limite, nous serions même portés à croire qu'il n'y a pas de fond tant les plans se bousculent; ou encore que celui-ci est sans limite, sans fin. Comme l'abîme ou l'éternité.

Le travail de Louise Robert en est un sur la matière, une matière que voit et sent le regard, mais une matière qui lui échappe aussi. Entre la fluidité de ses couleurs claires et l'insondable des lieux sombres, la *peinture* offre peu de prises. Un effet-nuage, pourrait-on dire. C'est là un paradoxe pour une oeuvre qui incite si fortement le toucher. Non parce que la main voudrait sentir les reliefs de la surface de la toile, mais parce que le corps se sent convoqué. Comme s'il pressentait l'effet de l'oeuvre: un sorte d'effleurement qui proviendrait de toutes parts et l'atteindrait en entier. Telle une nuée très sombre ou opaque.

On ne peut dire que le travail de Louise Robert soit systématiquement fait à partir d'éléments qui s'opposent, mais on peut remarquer cependant que souvent, il se trouve fait de combinaisons qui tranchent: transparence/opacité, blanc/noir, clair/sombre, écriture/peinture. Plusieurs compositions impressionnent par leurs juxtapositions contrastées, d'autant plus lorsqu'elles mettent en évidence le rapport entre la densité et l'opacité des plans (ou formes) noirs et la clarté et l'évaporé des surfaces (ou formes) blanches (n° 78-152 *Déserts imaginaires*); une mise en évidence de tons et d'effets différents.

Oppositions ou contrastes, il y a toujours une double composante dans les oeuvres de Louise Robert, laquelle s'est développée ici et a débordé du cadre, entraînant avec elle un rapport latent à l'autoréférentialité et une relation également latente, entre la peinture et l'écriture. Quelques oeuvres se présentent en diptyque, d'autres, par deux, ou même par trois, mais sans nécessairement être accrochées l'une à l'autre. Dans tous les cas, il n'y a pas de dépendance de l'une par rapport à l'autre, seulement des similarités *informelles* ou picturales, ou des contrastes dans les formats. Dans certains cas, la limite qui sépare le diptyque se fait dure, abrupte, et confère ainsi une autonomie à chacune des parties (n° 78-159 *Ça ressemble à quelque chose*). Une tache ou une traînée de couleur les liera virtuellement. Il arrive que, lorsque plus petite, la toile qui forme un couple avec



Louise Robert,  
N° 78-158A. *De rien de pas  
le temps de tout De tout le temps  
pas rien de de,*  
1988, huile et crayon sur toile,  
183 × 153 cm

une autre, fasse figure d'exergue ou encore de citation (n° 78-153 *Traces sans retour*). Comme si elle donnait le ton au texte/peinture qui l'accompagnait, ou encore comme si elle l'exprimait par d'autres traits, d'autres taches pour le faire mieux ou autrement comprendre. Une citation, néanmoins, qui proviendrait du même *corpus*, une autocitation. De latente qu'elle était, la relation entre la peinture et l'écriture devient évidente si l'on ajoute encore l'aspect brouillon de ces toiles, et j'entends par brouillon, cette copie de travail qui prend du caractère, justement, à force d'être travaillée. L'oeuvre ressemblerait ici à un beau manuscrit.

Il semble y avoir unanimité devant ces nouvelles oeuvres de Louise Robert: on sent une maturité, peut-être même un dépassement. Et pourtant, le travail de Louise Robert a peu changé ou du moins a-t-il conservé ce qui, depuis longtemps, le caractérise: écriture, rature, voile, date et signature «intégrées» dirigent encore le sens de ses oeuvres. De même, le regard extérieur et la présence du corps déterminent toujours le style de sa peinture. Peut-être est-ce l'affaire d'un effondrement plus marqué des plans de la toile, ou le caractère prégnant de la matière paradoxalement impalpable, ce que d'autres pourraient désigner, dans chacun des cas, comme un effet ou un produit pulsionnel.

Ces oeuvres sont d'un attrait singulier, qui est difficile à pointer, à cerner, on sait seulement qu'il est là. À croire qu'il se cache dans les épaisseurs de la toile, dans les profondeurs de la matière ou dans la densité des couleurs, à croire qu'il soit le secret gardé par ces mots qui apparaissent sur la toile et qui nous laissent dans l'inexplicable: *De rien de pas le temps de tout De tout le temps pas rien de de.*

— THÉRÈSE ST-GELAIS

## MARIE A. CÔTÉ, JOSEPH BRANCO, FRANÇOIS LACASSE

1592, boul. Saint-Laurent, Montréal, 14 janvier – 12 février

Dans l'exposition «Janvier», le titre posait une énigme: pourquoi un nom de mois et une virgule pour regrouper trois artistes? Indiquant une temporalité précise et ponctuelle, janvier ponctué d'une virgule est à la fois un référent unique en même temps que l'inscription du dernier instant de son identité. Interpellant sa suite, ce mois, ainsi donné comme étant en train de passer, est par son étymologie celui du dieu Janus dans la mythologie romaine: dieu traditionnellement représenté avec la particularité que sa tête est pourvue de deux visages distinctement opposés l'un à l'autre; il partage donc ses regards entre la gauche et la droite, entre l'avant et l'arrière... Cette identité dédoublée peut être posée dans un rapport de symétrie avec l'idée que le mois de janvier marque un seuil (ni avant – ni après, ni dehors – ni dedans) en ouvrant et en fermant une année. Or, la question étant de savoir pourquoi trois artistes ont décidé d'exposer leurs productions récentes dans un espace entièrement aménagé par eux-mêmes (les enjeux politiques d'un tel choix ne seront pas débattus ici) et ce, sous l'intitulé «Janvier», nous proposerons donc une trajectoire de lecture qui se préoccupera de voir comment chacun peut être abordé à partir de ce que sous-entend métaphoriquement ce mois, ce dieu: «référentialisme» de passage et de transfert, instabilité et indétermination face au visible... C'est de ces points de vue que nous questionnerons tour à tour une sélection d'oeuvres(s) (symptomatique) de la production exposée (notons que l'espace d'exposition était divisé de manière à séparer physiquement les artistes) de chacun d'eux.

Il y a, dans le va-et-vient de notre

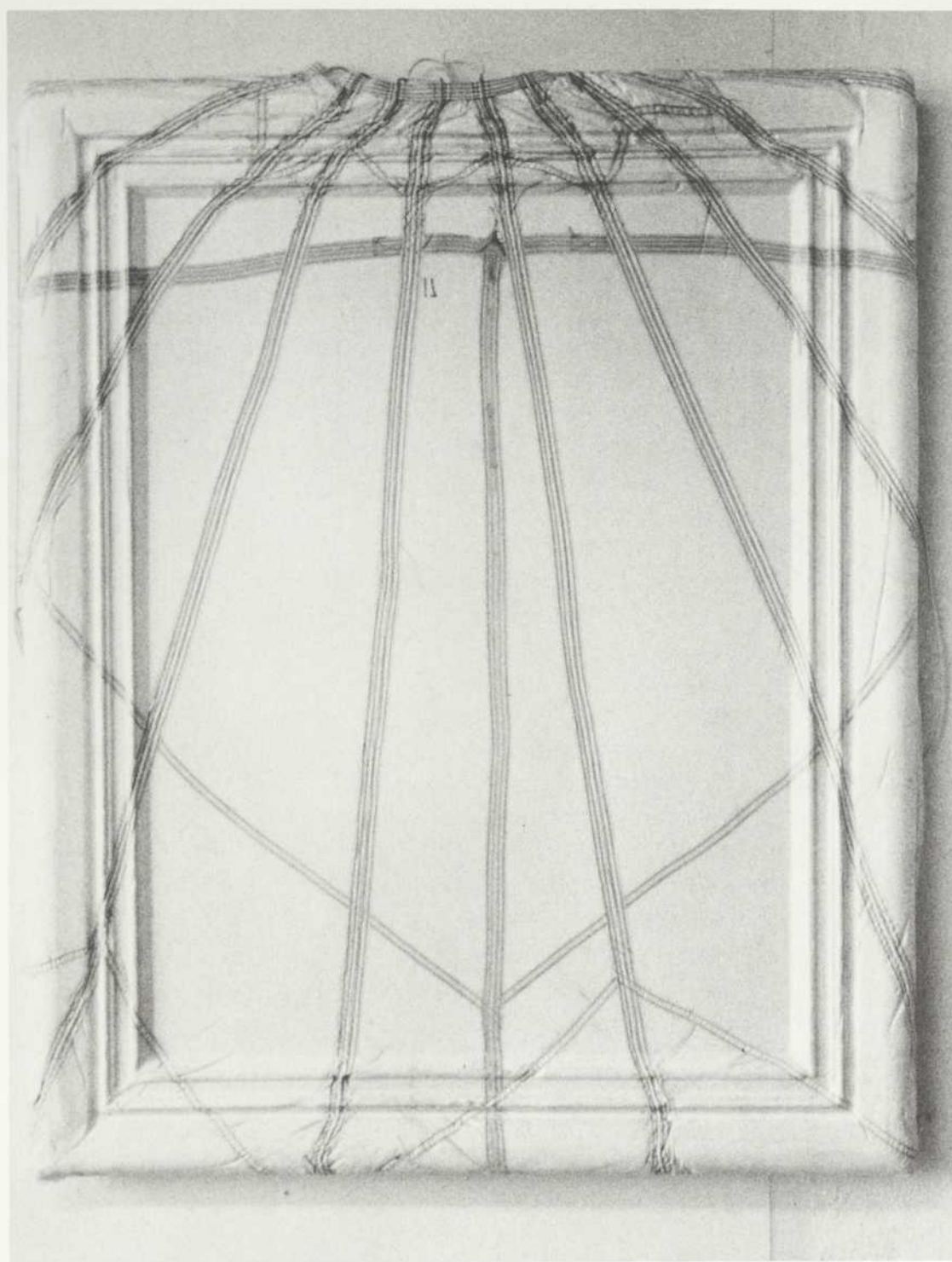
regard traversant le visible et dans les rencontres hasardeuses du regard avec le «réel», des emplacements, des objets, des oeuvres qui exorbitent la pensée hors du champ visuel. Il arrive que notre regard soit pris en captivité (pour avoir été trop captivé) par une pensée qui désire poser le réel à distance, dans son optique propre. Or, lorsqu'un peintre semble se préoccuper de mettre-en-oeuvre une production picturale qui n'oublie pas le sens premier de la peinture, qui est de rendre (du) visible, mais que cette visibilité rendue ne soit qu'un prétexte pour repousser le regard éventuel et le suspendre dans la pensée, que cela peut-il faire prévaloir? Et comment, au juste, cela peut-il être opérant? Par quelles stratégies, donc, les peintures de François Lacasse donnent-elles à voir quelques conditions du disparaître de l'espace visible?

Présentant six grandes toiles (toutes irréproductibles de par leur excès dans le travail du détail et du coloris), nous nous attarderons donc plus précisément à décrire une de ses oeuvres en y entrant par un détail: au bas, sur la surface peinte du coin gauche d'une grande toile (300 X 150 cm) sans châssis fixée au mur, nous lisons ce minuscule énoncé griffonné en noir à fleur de pigments bleu, blanc, gris, verts entremêlés nuageusement: «à la mémoire de... R.P.». Aussitôt lu, ce détail s'efface du regard pour s'introduire dans l'illisibilité de nos mémorisations. En même temps, ce détail fait figure d'admoniteur, indiquant en sourdine tout le programme d'une peinture (aussi comme pour l'ensemble de sa production) qui se préoccupe de rassembler des ressemblances à des oeuvres qui ont été fétichisées par les discours des historiens de l'art. Mais les ressemblances dans à la

mémoire de... (le détail peint est également l'intitulé du tableau, avec l'ajout des initiales «R.P.») n'ont rien des identités fidèlement reconstruites à partir d'un modèle; composé de quatre grandes plaques picturales (deux carrés, deux rectangles) qui se voient intimement sur une même surface de toile étendue en largeur, comme une phrase, ce tableau reçoit (au moins) quatre citations d'oeuvres ou de manières de peindre et chacune de ces citations semble avoir oblitéré ou absorbé sa source. Le premier carré à gauche présente une surface brune-rouille-rouge qui aurait dissimulé (la dissimulation accroît le désir de voir) en ses dessous, le tracé grossièrement dessiné en relief des contours de l'autoportrait au miroir convexe de Parmigianino. On se souvient du flou périphérique de cet autoportrait qui, déformant l'identité représentée, entraînait une anamorphose dans l'analogie. Destabilisant le système albertien de retranscription naturaliste, cet autoportrait introduisait le peintre comme sujet s'affirmant (s'autolégitimisant dans sa propre langue) en dehors des limites de la représentation... Cette dissociation du sujet et du représenté trouve son écho dans l'écart que Lacasse prend face à la retranscription de la «semblance» du modèle: en flouant l'autoportrait de Parmigianino sous un sfumato, la lisibilité d'une donnée appartenant à une pensée esthétique se trouve à être substantivée, lisiblement renflée. Ainsi, ce premier quart de tableau exorbitait sa visibilité sous les couches de la constitution d'un sujet historique.

En bas de ce carré, un petit rectangle présente un condensé de manières de peindre des nuages; une averse de noms propres arrose ici la lecture: Titien, Tintoret, Twombly... Le mélange brouille la ressemblance aux modèles tout en rappelant une communauté de peintures à la mémoire. La ressemblance ressemble donc plus à l'idée de ressemblance qu'à un dédoublement représentationnel... À droite du carré et du rectangle, un long rectangle vertical blanc divise le pan des couleurs puisqu'à la droite de cette forme, un grand carré noir-vert termine la surface peinte. Espace blanc sans entité, blanc-manger pour le visible, simple lieu de transfert.

Le carré noir-vert est séparé par deux espaces triangulaires égaux qui se répondent l'un à l'autre par un appel symétrique. Le triangle du haut (la diagonale qui produit les deux triangles commence à la gauche au coin inférieur du carré pour le traverser jusqu'au coin opposé) porte une surface sourde et mate alors que celle du triangle du bas est éclatante par le brillant du vernis. Dans le triangle du haut, deux formes (noir plus atténué) flottent dans un équilibre précaire, alors qu'une seule paraît s'enfoncer dans la



Joseph Branco, 1988, *Parachute*,  
fibre de verre, acrylique, 121 × 147 cm; photo: Mario Béliste.

surface de celui du bas. Ces détails, qui donnent l'effet d'une totalité morcelée, rappellent par leur disposition le tableau *Narcisse* du Caravage. Seulement, de la représentation en miroir (Narcisse et son reflet) qu'a produite le Caravage, Lacasse aura retenu quelques morceaux disposés discontinuement dans un espace bi-triangulaire; en haut le réel, en bas le reflet; parcelles anatomiques, les formes inscrites en chaque espace peuvent être identifiées dans un rapport de contiguïté avec le tableau-source, mais elles renvoient aussi à une dislocation de la description ovidienne de cet instant stratégique du récit de Narcisse. Retranscription de miettes de séquences descriptives («Narcisse contemple, couché sur le sol [...] ses joues imberbes, son cou d'ivoire, sa bouche charmante [...]») et de fragments d'un tableau, ce quart d'oeuvre distribue du visible de manière lacunaire en disséminant le corps-texte-tableau-source sous le noir peint.

Cet effritement des identités par leurs devenir-détails est symptomatique de l'ensemble de la production picturale de Lacasse: pensant l'histoire de la peinture

et de ses appendices textuels en termes de communauté irréductible à l'unité ou à l'identique, il fait se voiser et s'étreindre des bribes de visibilités et lisibilités sur des surfaces peintes qui articulent une pensée du visible dans des enchaînements à perte de vue.

Il est parfois ludique d'avoir accès à un système de représentation en lequel des rapports entre les éléments qui le construisent se déploient à travers des modes de spatialisation ouverts et variés. L'ensemble des oeuvres (six installations regroupées sous l'intitulé «Des relations») que présentait Marie A. Côté offrait la possibilité à de multiples intrigues visuelles d'être distribuées en des contextes d'apparaître changeant de code, d'échelle de proportion, de matériaux, d'éclairage, de références... En empruntant à l'architecture du cirque et à sa quincaillerie de spectacle toute une série de formes et d'objets (tentes, trempins, éclairages dramatisés et projections d'ombres disproportionnantes, estrades, socles...), les oeuvres *Façade*, *Aires de jeu* et *Le Petit Véhicule* rendaient un effet visuel similaire à celui d'un souvenir-

écran. Souvenir précis d'une image claire d'un événement passé, détail infime mais éclatant d'un rêve, le souvenir-écran est une vue isolée de la pensée, à partir de laquelle elle peut reconstituer rétroactivement, par analogies, tout un récit (onirique ou réel). Le cirque étant, par ses mécanismes représentationnels, un système à engendrer des images mnésiques emblématiques, Marie A. Côté en dispose donc en dispendant la panoplie d'instruments de mise-en-spectacle dans des vues déterminantes pour que le regard puisse jouir de la circularité de ses souvenirs; anamèse de jongleries formelles et clowneries métonymiques...

Comment évoquer un paysage sans le représenter? Comment substituer quelque chose qui serait l'allusion à une présence, à quelque chose qui serait devenu absent? Comment une oeuvre pourrait-elle se statuer en tant que métaphore de la nature, en n'en réinterprétant visiblement aucun aspect? Une métaphore étant le glissement d'un sens littéral à un sens figuratif, comment une oeuvre peut-elle nous mettre en présence du paysage en le présentant en retrait de ce qu'il représenterait? À suivre le modèle albertien du tableau comme «fenêtre» qui exhibe une vue que l'on traverse du regard, l'idée de substitution d'un paysage réel en un dispositif perspectiviste de captation du réel ne pose pas de problème au laisser-voir autre-chose que nécessite le métaphorique pour avoir-lieu. Or, puisque les trois tableaux-paysages (*Parachute*, *Tente*, *Bâche*) de la série «Conversation/Communication» de Joseph Branco ne suivent pas ce précepte albertien, voyons comment il se font signes absents de paysage.

À partir du moment où le travail de peinture se pense par le mode d'exécution du formel, chaque élément constituant l'ensemble d'une oeuvre est sujet à être déplacé de son corps strict et de son statut habituel pour être hypertrophié ou néantisé... Sur cette question, le cadre n'a historiquement pas cessé de modifier ses fonctions autour des tableaux. En ce qui concerne ces trois oeuvres de Branco, les cadres font tableaux; le moule d'un cadre et d'une surface plane intérieure à ce cadre aura été utilisé pour opérer un changement d'état en trois différents types de tissus; un parachute, une tente et une bâche de camion. Une partie de chacun de ses tissus aura été démembrée de sa nature et de sa fonction premières pour être transformée en tableau encadré. Dans un sens littéral ou usuel, le moule du cadre est donc apprêté d'une nature métaphorique puisqu'il sert à déporter des objets en des écarts de dissemblance à eux-mêmes; d'un parachute à un tableau, la chute métaphorique est longue.

À prendre le moule du cadre comme métaphore archétypale du principe de

représentation, elle figurerait ici au travers d'une sélection d'objets, qui dans l'aléa des circonstances seraient devenus des oeuvres. Avant d'être présent comme oeuvre, chacun de ces objets avait une fonction bien précise en liaison avec la nature... Forme de prologement de notre rapport physique avec les paysages, ces objets seraient des métaphores des différentes catégories de nos modes d'observation et de conversation avec la peinture de paysage: *Parachute*; vertige du regard à vol d'oiseau, vue panoramique; *Bâche*; traversée linéaire des paysages par les voies routières; *Tente*; habitache temporaire du regard dans la nature... Représentations d'absences de paysages? Oui: habiter, se transporter, se laisser chuter à l'intérieur de métaphores n'a pas de relation causale avec le visible... captivité du regard dans la pensée. Peinture-paysages pour la pensée hors du visible.

— MARC ARCHAMBAULT



Haim Steinbach,  
*Untitled (erotic man, hobby horse)*,  
1987, mixed media construction,  
61 1/2 x 40 x 24 3/8";  
coll. Andrew Ong, New York;  
courtesy Sonnabend Gallery and  
Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York;  
photo: © 1987, David Lubarsky.

## THE BI-NATIONAL: AMERICAN AND GERMAN ART OF THE LATE 80s

### AMERICAN ART

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts; Boston.  
September 23–November 27, 1988

Städtische Kunsthalle, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Kunstverein  
für die Rheinlande und Westfalen; Düsseldorf. December 10, 1988–January 22, 1989

### GERMAN ART

Städtische Kunsthalle, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Kunstverein  
für die Rheinlande und Westfalen; Düsseldorf. September 24–November 27, 1988

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts; Boston.  
December 16, 1988–January 29, 1989

The Bi-National between these two countries is actually in four parts. Each of the exhibitions, representing fifty-four artists, are shown simultaneously in their respective cities: Boston and Düsseldorf. They are then restaged, the American selection ranging from Ross Bleckner to Meyer Vaisman, exchanged for the German selection featuring artists as diverse as Michael Bauch to Rosmerie Trockel.

If indeed this is a view of art in the eighties, then presumably there is something of importance, other than the work,

to consider as we close in on the end of the decade. What we are invited to consider, then, is the significance of the two exhibitions placed in their present contexts of museum installations; the selection of artists; the combination and grouping of individuals in relation to each other; and finally the individual work itself. It is therefore expedient to approach the two exhibitions separately in considering the conditions that seem to reflect the National cultures, as far as this selection of individual artists permits.

### AMERICAN ART

Richard Serra once noted certain important implications photographic reproduction has for sculpture, cautioning against the suppression of the real content of sculpture — the temporal experience. He stated that, to experience sculpture, one is localized to a particular time and place and any deviation is a deception: one that occurs through the consumption of sculpture (or painting for that matter) in pictures. In many ways, the experience of American art in the Bi-national conjures up this deceit, not so much as a denial of the physical conditions of objects, but as a deliberate inverse of this concern, in art produced explicitly for its "pictorial" qualities. Pictorialism, as a principle, functions here as a direct response to pressures of consumerism (either as a critique or in complicity with those structures) that seem to indicate a strong shift in orientation for recent American Art. Consider Jeff Koons, St. Clare Cemin, Haim Steinbach, Annette Lemieux as well as the elegant photographs of James Welling in this context.

This work functions within a discourse of consumed objects/ideas (ideas are also objects) as exemplified by Mag Webster and Robert Gober who trade in

"images" of sculpture that are historically familiar and already understood. Gober's 8' x 4' plywood sheet, titled *Plywood* and merely propped against the wall, points to the simultaneous presence of John McCracken and Donald Judd. Webster, with her large earth rectangle on a copper sheet attached to some form of copper conductor exiting from the gallery ending up outside somewhere, implicitly quotes earth-art concerns enforced by the current ecological debate. (I tried to follow the path of the wire conductor, leading through a small seminar room, down a fire escape until a locked door blocked my path.) These are immediate impressions that seem to suggest a form of nostalgia, paradoxically felt as something familiar, yet experienced as something absent. This form of nostalgia, not to be associated with the facile sentiment of melodrama, is a reckless attempt at replacing something currently experienced as irretrievable, a loss, represented here by its similitude-emptiness. A form of culture "bleakness" as testified by the day-glo paintings of Peter Halley. The patterned repetitions in both Christopher Wool and Philip Taffe's paintings, together with the repelling industrial fibre-glass surfaces of Tim Ebner, and the alienating sculpture of Tishan Hsu, expose that same form of "industrial bleakness."

For a few of the artists represented, sculpture is a deliberately conceived duplicity of the object-status or "thingness" of sculpture, exchanged for the *idea* of sculpture. Indeed, Jeff Koons is adroit at casting stainless steel "consumed" commodities within this discourse. Steinbach, on the other hand, works in the reverse. By selecting the "real consumer" object, (more recently valuable antiques) and by means of formal combinations and groupings, Steinbach plays on the "transient order of values" to use his term, values that are imbued with meanings of which economics is just one factor in this structure. Annette Lemieux is biographical but, like St. Clair Cemin, relies on traditional processes in her practice, exposing childhood recollections in bronze, painted canvas or appropriated photography.

The questions raised by this work centre on its status as a sign, "as abstractions labeled 'replica,' 'commodity-from' or 'displaced desire'" as noted by Thomas Crow in his excellent Catalogue essay, *Versions of Pastoral in Some Recent American Art*.

#### GERMAN ART

On the other hand, the question of context is crucial to the production of a number of German artists. As Jürgen Harten asserts in his introduction to the catalogue, *Introduction: Critical Remarks on Topicality*, "The works of art in the Bi-National have been selected in order to try out a context — temporarily and provisionally — that is produced by them just as much as they are subjected to it." The context they contemplate is a historical one, reflected in an inquiry pronounced by the integrated disciplines of painting, sculpture and photography; not for their structural or semiotic content, but for their legitimate status as tools for the investigation of meaning inside the culture in which they are produced and upon which they are meant to reflect.

In one room, Gerhard Merz's Homeric message "I am also an architect," portrayed in his usual manner, resonates against the layered wall-like presence of Imi Knoebel's *boxes* at the opposite end of the hall. Playing off of these two in the same space, Axel Hütte's large architectural photographic triptych depicting Venetian architecture, is a dialectic of perceived and experienced space; the space of architecture. This probe into Architecture, as a means to invest meaning into art, ranges from the idealised context of Ludger Gerdes and Thomas Huber, to the direct physical manipulations of material and space by Harold Klingelhöller, Stephan Balkenhol and George Herold. Gerdes' black lacquered architectural relief continues his analysis of the "cul-

tural producer," as does Thomas Huber with his *Storeroom* paintings. For these artists, the question of culture seems not to revolve around any specific situation, but originates in the form of architecture: for what it embodies in terms of surface, space, and symbolic and economic structures that all add up to an expression of culture-architecture as meaning. This signifying process takes on an inverted form in Werner Büttner's contrived "primitive" wood carvings, suggesting past colonial occupations and possessions. What Büttner points to, is the question of selective interpretative strategies used by museums to decode artifacts (one functional aspect of architecture), in this case, a replica of indigenous cultures. By extension, this becomes a poignant reflection on the structures determining the relevance of exhibitions, which he is at the same moment a part. A concern also noted by Gerdes, when he states that the museum allows "... us to go beyond our respective time and our provinciality, to preserve things that are no longer in their original context." On the other side of this debate, Albert Oehlen, Jörg Immendorf, Ulrich Horndash, Heiner Blum, Bruno K. and perhaps even the alpine landscapes and murky smoke filled battle scenes of Michael van Oefen mediate on being German. Bruno K. is perhaps extreme. By filling up space with odds and ends that

elude to typically Germanic themes of heroism, victory and even authority (Victory cross symbols double as aeroplane propellers), as well as a photograph featuring the artist in a crash helmet as some sort of pilot, unfortunately attempts to mystify the artist on one level as Hero. Neither is the work a sympathetic response to the space, nor does the presentation manage to transcend the reference to second World War memorabilia.

The legacies of Beuys and Warhol are indeed the paradigm for this apposition between America and Germany. One can't but wonder whether this selection of Americans would have had the same line up if a similar Bi-National was organised between a South American country, for instance. Nazi emblems and references used by Mike Kelly, David McDermot and Peter McGough, and Heiner Blum's photos of G.I.'s call attention to this compatibility. While at the same time, the inclusion of artists such as Merz and Immendorf, indeed, play into the current image of what is perceived, from this vantage point, as German Art.

Opposing cultures are pitted against each other emphasizing differences in political and economic structures, as well as unique concerns that reflect local as apposed to broader based national issues. This contest reveals a surprising similarity for both countries, yet a difference

exists in where the accent on these issues is placed, and how and in what context these concerns are debated. On the one hand, there is evidence from Germany of art being produced with a solution to the limits of history in mind, as a practice based on restoration in its many forms. On the other, American artists appear not to take on the same sort of responsibility, but expose instead the limits of such a reevaluation of the past by repeating it and, in so doing, place themselves tenuously in the context of the present. Let me propose my version of the tale of the spider and the bee as an analogy for the Americans and Germans respectively (prompted by J.G. Merquior, in *Spider and Bee: Towards a Critique of the Post-modern Ideology*). The spider, as the story goes, weaves from its belly a web and in so doing, one can say, refers to itself through a form of "self-citation." The bee, by comparison, returns to nature for its honey, thereby shaping a link with its exterior — a network of references. To phrase it in another way, this represents an affirmation of culture that, at the very least, is submitted to the scrutiny of a rational critique. (As coincidence would have it, honey and bees wax, transformed by Beuys' hands are forever to be read as an "elixir" for social sculpture.)

These exhibitions provide a singular occasion to examine how two distinct, influential cultures pronounce their respective issues through the presence of individuals while attending to the demands of their communities. At the centre of this intersection, between the two parts to the Bi-national, the exhibition succeeds in assimilating the viewer while attempting to unite the broad and often irregular surface of the "recent past."

— TREVOR GOULD



Michael van Oefen, *Obne Titel*, 1987, oil on canvas, 100 × 90 cm; private collection.

## THE NEW URBAN LANDSCAPE

The World Financial Center, New York, October 14 – December 15

Amidst the numerous and varied architectural and artistic interventions recently visible at Battery Park City, twenty-eight sculptural installations were featured at the exhibition *The New Urban Landscape*, staged in autumn 1988 at the new "World Financial Center." The sponsor of the exhibition was the developer of the four-tower complex, Olympia & York Companies (U.S.A.), the corporation owned by Toronto entrepreneurs, the Reichmann brothers, and categorized by the New York Times as "Manhattan's largest commercial landlord." The exhibition celebrated the opening of the public spaces at the World Financial Center, designed by architect Cesar Pelli. The show was more or less international in scope: while most artists were American, there were works by artists from West Germany, France, England and Japan. Canada was represented by Kim Adams, Alan Belcher and Henry Jesionka.

A certain curatorial *laissez-faire* seemed to emerge as a guiding principle of the show, symbolized in the exhibition design concept by architects Frank Gehry; and David Childs and Audrey Matlock of the New York office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. It consisted of an unobtrusive pattern of yellow grid lines, set out on the floor so as to represent the Manhattan street grid. The temporary exhibition space itself was otherwise sparsely finished in white-painted gypsum board, and the location of the works appeared to be completely autonomous with respect to the yellow vectors on the concrete floor.

The title, *The New Urban Landscape*, could have been understood as a direct reference to the newness of Battery Park City, a state-sponsored development built on landfill, comprehensively planned by urbanists Cooper/Eckstut (now split into Eckstut with the Ehrenkrantz Group and Cooper with Jaquelin Robertson), and based on urban planning principles derived from traditional, that is to say, early 20th century cities.

*The New Urban Landscape* might well have been a more oblique reference to the ebullient real estate market and thus the spectacular and astonishing overbuilding which has taken place in Manhattan in the 1980s, a time when urban property investment was indeed the goose that laid the golden egg. Or perhaps the title referred to the specific urban landscape of the glistening World Financial Center, a collection of short and middling-height towers located on the riverside esplanade right across the highway from Manhattan's tallest skyscrapers: the twin towers of the modern World Trade Center



Judith Barry, *Adam's Wish*, 1988, video projection; photo: Jon Abbott.

by Yamasaki; renowned for the lengthy shadows they cast. The stubbier Pelli towers, along with the primary public space — the Winter Garden, a monumental glass-roofed great courtyard sheltering sixteen 45-foot tall palm trees — were conceived to rival Rockefeller Center as a popular city landmark.

Whatever the interpretation of the title, the thematic of the exhibition did not solicit a consistent reaction from the participants, a rather heterogeneous group, selected, according to the exhibition brochure, as representative socially-engaged artists and architects. Consequently, the result, although well-organ-

ized, was curiously unfocused as a total event. Specific artists did however hone in on their own particular subjects with sharpened teeth and a delicate awareness of the fox-in-the-chicken-coop situation. One obvious issue was the omnipresence of the generic corporate environment so flawlessly executed at the World Financial Center: home to Merrill Lynch, American Express, Dow Jones, and Oppenheimer & Company. Postmodern in flavour, the seamless normality of the architecture provided a foil for works which either slid themselves into its vocabulary so as to call it into question, or introduced themes such as the mechanical,

the natural, the oneiric, to act as counterpoint. Given the tension of some inevitable antagonism inherent in many of the installations, an attitude of polite respect for the irreconcilable reigned over the entire affair.

The site-specific installations which made up the show were to be found in varying degrees of subtlety within the designated exhibition space: in either of the two grandiose foyers adjoining each end of it, or in the landscaped grounds outside. Farthest away from the executive playground, and closest to the street, was the most overtly militant work, the bus-stop by Dennis Adams and Andrea Blum, *Landfill: Bus Station*. A low concrete bench collided with its sharp angle into a back-lit photo of a South African funeral cortege. There was no lack of temerity in its controlled accusation. Matt Mullican's bland satire of a logo on a heraldic banner hung outside above an array of entrance doors. It displayed four fields in yellow and black: a male head in profile, its cranium a void, and the other three emblems consisting of a globe, four dots, and the cranium hole repeated in a square with a stem. Also visible from the street was Martha Schwartz' playful reversal of grass turf and curtain wall, *Turf Parterre Garden*, and the jokingly aggressive car accident sculpture by Vito Acconci, *Garden with Fountain*, crashed into the glass wall from both inside and outside with water squirting at it. Another interior/exterior work was the extravagantly elegant interpretation of a *favela*, by the Japanese sculptor Tadashi Kawamata. The sculpture was sited heroically inside and outside in a cascade of found lumber.

Between the North Gatehouse and the esplanade, at the centre of the South End Avenue cul-de-sac, a construction by architects Morphosis, *Room Compressed*, held up the concept of nature by means of a steel and lumber frame in which was suspended a rather humiliated-looking tree and its root ball. Inside the North Gatehouse, Judith Barry positioned a spindly-columned black baldaquin whose proportions could not have been more ultra-mannered, and whose dome made a screen for a video-projection, *Adam's Wish*. In the video, a young man wafts through dream spaces, awakening cyclically as Adam on the Sistine Chapel, falling down and through air to the domed Gatehouse, flipping through architectural interiors as if switched from channel to channel. This video baldaquin was decisively de-centred in its placement beneath the dome and beside the flamboyant monumental stair of the North Gatehouse. In the riverside foyer, Jacques

Vieille's *14 Arborvitaes*, multiplied enclosed tree-in-lattice sculpture, managed to reconstruct the outsize scale of the interior somewhat by simply filling the space. Tucked into an exterior corner, beside the bank of entrance doors leading to the cul-de-sac, was one of the more difficult to locate pieces, Dan Graham's *Triangular Structure with Two-Way Mirror Sliding Door* installed so that it was exceedingly well camouflaged into the curtain wall, even though its detailing was of a marginally different technology. Inside it, the sliding door closed, the tiny triangular space was quadrupled by the effect of the two-way mirrors. The work functioned with an urbane furtive discretion, seizing and identifying the anonymity of the individual. On the far side of the cul-de-sac, Kim Adam's very large and evident work, *Chameleon Unit*, assembled various found cabs and heavy equipment fragments into a kind of suggested temporary accommodation, all brightly painted a vivid green. In the bridge connecting the North and South Gatehouses, two quasi-octagonal buildings serving as public entrance-ways to the complex, Haim Steinbach located a sweet-smelling wooden wall construction of rough planks, a knurled branch bench and two stuffed owls in a glass window case. This partial cabin demurely split, with glorious rusticity, the flow of pedestrian traffic in the suspended corridor.

On the autonomous yellow floor grid of the exhibition space itself, the works were so numerous as to have been a bit crowded, almost like a fall fair, allowing the larger works to dominate by their sheer physical size. Joel Otterson's chunky towers of tubing on coasters enclosed live white chickens. Nam June Paik's skyline of television screens on antique consoles were tuned to wink and blink enigmatically, reproducing the urban skyline. Alan Belcher's large, semi-cylindrical concrete block wall striped with construction photographs, *Office Complex 88*, was difficult to perceive only because it required a more generous area around it to be read fully. Richard Wentworth's suspended steel plate house-icorns, entitled *Neighbour, Neighbour*, was more appropriately scaled to its surroundings, but it would seem to have deserved more tranquil quarters. Jon Kessler had built a noisily elaborate textile mill mechanism to fabricate grey flannel suits right in the middle of the space. Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Ceremonial*

*Arch Honoring Service Workers in the New Service Economy* commemorated, using carefully collected work gloves, those who work at building urban systems. Stephen Willat's panels, *Signs and Messages from Corporate America*, explored the personal concerns of people who work at the World Financial Center, documenting the small objects they use to demarcate their particular micro-environments. Other installations in, or adjoining, the exhibition space were by artists Liz Phillips, Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzler, Justen Ladda, Kunst Brothers, Michael Kalil, Susan Hiller, Robert Price, and architects Jean Nouvel, and Craig Hodgetts and Hsin-Ming Fung.

It is not exactly an American tradition that a large Canadian corporation heavily involved in the ferocious Manhattan real estate industry launch its latest urban venture by funding the work of carefully selected and controversial artists and architects. How does one understand this phenomenon? Although the exhibition confidently billed itself as a public event about the public urban environment, it did not directly address a number of issues vital to its very existence. One might almost suspect that it was precisely this lack that brought the project to fruition. An essential element was left wanting: the critical framework which would have defined a coherent position with respect to Olympia & York's sponsorship and willingness to function as public art broker. The opportunity was there to ask about the nature of the public welcomed to view the exhibition and to analyse the means by which public art may intervene in an essentially privately determined urban development. Obviously this range of issues, even though broached in various individual art works, would have had to be orchestrated with some degree of awkwardness. A thoughtful consideration would have voiced all manner of harsh criticism, constituting a reasonable reaction given the serious concern about the forces controlling contemporary urban environments. In leaving the unspoken undisturbed, a more biting critical occasion was missed. The art seemed a bit stranded and sometimes the better for it. There was a sense of disconnected cacophony. It was rather urban, you might say like a traffic jam far below. Even so, it was possible to affirm that *The New Urban Landscape* provided a positive, enthusiastic response to the question, can socially-engaged art be popular and successful, too?

— MARIE-PAULE MACDONALD

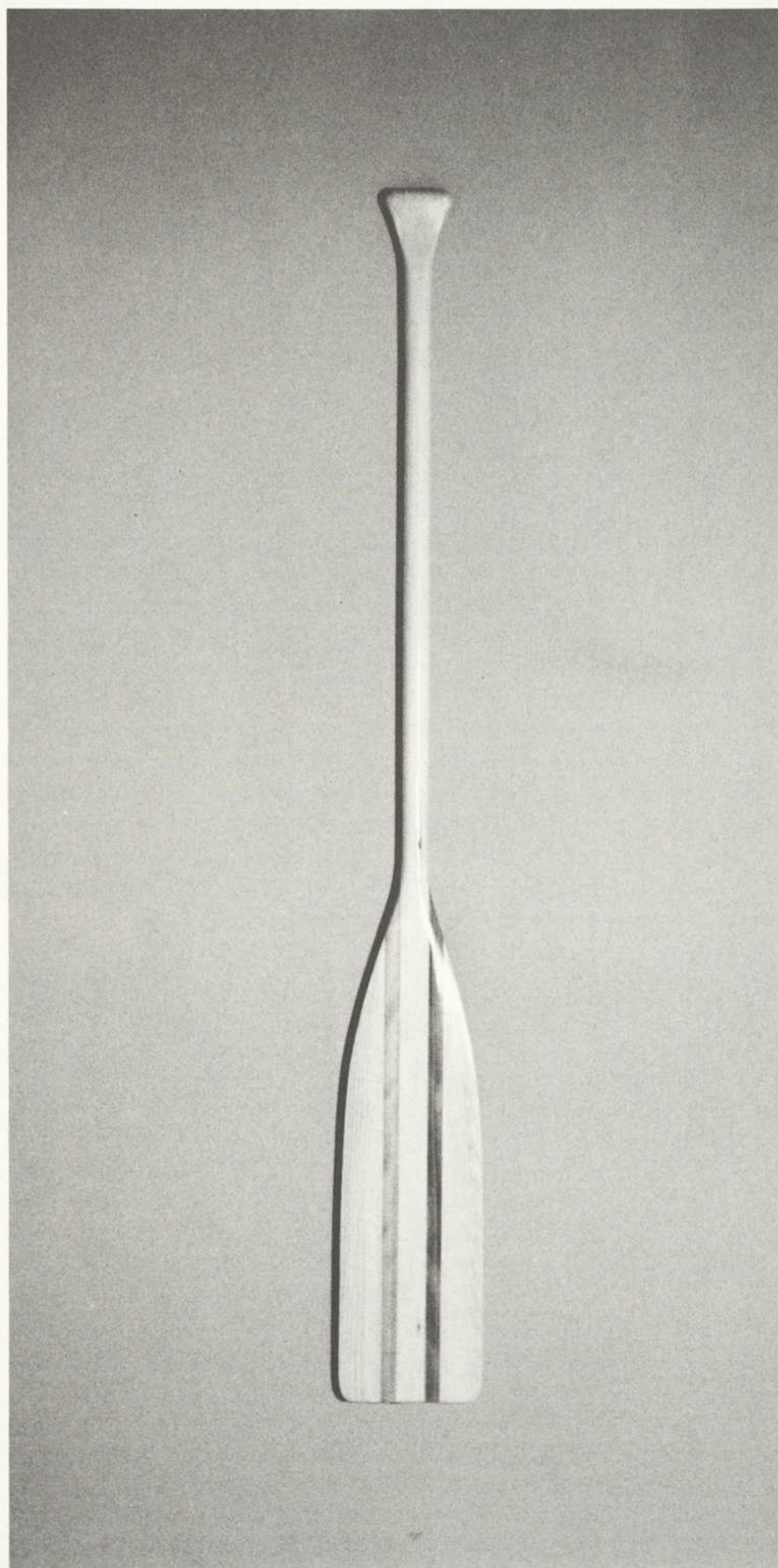
## BILL BURNS

Article, Montréal, March 11 – April 9

The word "paddle" does not appear once in Harold Adams Innis' *The Fur Trade in Canada*, the now classic historical-economic analysis of the significance of the Canadian fur industry. There are, though, many references to the canoe, the essential means of transportation for the fur industry and the indispensable medium for the colonization of Canada, and to the *coureurs de bois*, the primary contact, the front men for the European empires. There are, as well, innumerable

references to the natives or "savages" with whom they traded. But the paddle is conspicuously absent from Innis' acutely detailed account.

The paddle itself, as an implement in the means of propulsion, handled and stroked for hundreds of years by these fur traders and, for many centuries before them, by the aboriginals who perhaps invented it, may be likened to the wheel. Like the wheel, the paddle's true origins are lost to history, shrouded in the mists



Bill Burns, *21 Panel Canoe Paddle Painting* (detail), 1989, black and white photograph; photo: Canadian Canoe Paddle.

of antiquity: the myth of the original stroke... Also like the wheel, whose ideal form (its roundness) is derived from its ideal utility (its capacity to reduce friction), we may assume that the paddle at some point in its history attained a form whose essential design could not be improved. Thus, having acquired a prototypical, utilitarian shape, that shape itself then became a convention. It is a given that is taken for granted, a symbol agreed upon or recognized by society in general as one which automatically denotes the object — the paddle. In this sense a photograph (of the paddle) with its high-level iconicity could be said (after Barthes) to have a “purely ‘denotative’ status” in relationship to its subject (the paddle-object).

But it is Barthes’ interpretation of the connotative, which allows “the imposition of second meaning,” and of polemy, where an open-endedness or a multiplication of meaning may take place, that we must rely upon in any reading of Bill Burns’ latest exhibition *The Canadian Paddle Exhibition*.

Burns began his paddle works several years ago while living in England. At the time, he was making works which were interactive, engaging the audience with pieces such as *Gabo Corner Headrest*, a schematic, facemask-like structure, fixed in the corner of the gallery, into which the viewer was invited to place his/her head, thereby forcing participants into considering their position within the production of meaning and conceivably, by extension, as subjects within the discourse of the institution itself.

By Burns’ own account, much of this work was inspired by the convenient accessibility of cheap materials and detritus-like commodities available in the nearby Brick Lane market. During these extended scavenger hunts, he came across many objects which were eventually integrated into his work — the paddle becoming the eponymous element in interactive works such as *Paddle Shoe: For a House with Flooded Basement* and *Paddle Viewer*. However, the reluctance of restrained English gallery-goers to participate forced Burns to consider his alternatives which led to the more conventional, passive, representational works such as *Loudspeaker Painting*, *Smashed Kipper Painting* and *Green Paddle Painting*.

Burns’ exhibition at Articule consists of three separate elements, or more precisely installations, two of which are connected by their paddle theme. The first element, and perhaps the most difficult, entitled *21 Panel Paddle Painting*, consists of seven large, unframed diptych paintings (each individual panel is approximately 6’ x 2’), each pair separated from the preceding one by a large,

framed photograph equal in scale to the diptych panels. The panels in each diptych are painted in different but corresponding (in colour and value) monochromal encaustic, reminiscent of early Brice Marden paintings. In a very direct, objective way, almost scientific or archival in their representation, the seven flat, black and white photos each present a wooden, laminated paddle of the same design. The piece, over forty-five feet in length, occupies one entire wall in the gallery.

First impressions of this somewhat disproportionate installation (in relation to the other elements in the show) leave one thinking that the painting components are somewhat superfluous, just more pretty colours carried in an exotic medium, and that the photographs of the paddles are rather dull, flat, perhaps even uninteresting. There seems to be nowhere to go from here. Interest is deflected. Meaning as such, appears at once totally denotative in the unequivocal, pseudo-scientific photographs of the paddles, each one the same as the next, while at the same time the paintings, in their juxtaposition with the photographs, and no matter how mundane they may seem — perhaps because of that — are puzzling and provoke a search for meaning. The work seems to have the peculiar quality of being “fixed” and unfixed at the same time leading one critic (Kathleen Fleming), perhaps out of frustration, to aptly sum up the whole work with the rather humorous designation of “colour field and stream painting.” The usual, perfunctory conclusions as to the inherent references to similar painting and photographic practices are made; but without that extra something to anchor the meaning, we must either let our imaginations supply the bottom for that anchor or, hoping to find some clues elsewhere, move on to the next element.

Across the room from the large painting, the second paddle theme installation offers some of that anchorage. Here, two maquettes of proposed paddle projects bracket a prototype for a plastic paddle, all under plexi-vitrines. The tiny maquettes (approximately 10” x 4” each) are dwarfed by the painting on the other side of the gallery. *Canoe Paddle Deforestation* depicts a forest decimated by heavy equipment, all that remains being a small woodlot in the shape of a paddle. *Paddle Drome*, a sort of stadium of the absurd — complete with Visa and Mastercard ads, detailed light installations, and a tower displaying a huge paddle icon — proposes bleachers reflecting a playing field in the shape of a paddle.

Here we have something we can understand — especially with *Deforestation*. An irony is set up between the destruction of forests for the production

of, among other things, paddles, which in the contemporary context are used by recreation and nature buffs in their escape from the tedium of urban life. Only the forests are now being ruined by that same voracious consumer society. In a similar way, *Paddle Drome* draws attention to the spectacle and farce of modern sporting events. This reference becomes even more acute if we consider its context within Canada: Olympic hysteria, downtown domed stadiums and steroid-junkie athletes. In both cases the paddle is used as a vehicle to arrive at the larger, more socially-based issues of the environment, the economy and the leisure-spectacle. This conveyance analogy is reinforced by the presence of *Prototype for Plastic Paddle*, a flesh-coloured wooden paddle set under plexi between the two maquettes. In order to get from one maquette to the other, we move over this model — a contradiction in itself due to its ambiguous position as a proposed solution to ecological devastation (deforestation) by replacing wood with plastic as the material of construction, and the fact that it is actually made from wood. That we leave a site of deforestation to arrive at a playing field whose crazy, incongruent paddle-shape defies the logic of any present day spectator sport, is no more inconceivable than the notion of logging companies meticulously carving an aestheticized shape from the woods they harvest.

If sports and industry here refer to the social, then it is the ridiculous aspect of

Burns’ paddletopia, with its humorous celebration of the paddle, which defers didactic closure. This playfulness provides the viewer with an active role in the completion of the message. Playfulness in its subversion of the absolute is backed up by the contradictions represented: i.e. destruction vs. production; economy vs. ecology; leisure vs. work, etc. A dialectics of sorts, at play between these oppositions themselves, engages the viewer in the production of meaning.

Contradiction exists as well in the third, but unrelated installation, *Chocolate Hand Grenades*. Here, the destructive weapons are now fashioned from chocolate, defused by the ironic use of a material, which, while not necessarily wholesome, provides pleasure through consumption. The terrors of death and destruction are inherent in the objects signified, while at the same time they are undermined by the supposed sweetness and edibility of the substance used to represent them.

Finally, like the beaver, a central character in Harold Innis’ report on the fur industry (and whose tail was perhaps the original inspiration for the shape of the paddle), the paddle has become — for Bill Burns’ at least — a symbol of Canadian culture. And as a symbol, again like the beaver, the Burns’ paddle, with its somewhat forced *canadianicity*, carries with it many contradictions, presenting us with the opportunity for *some* serious reflection perhaps, and with a few good jokes as well.

— BOB WILKIE

## JANA STERBAK

Galerie René Blouin, Montréal, February 18 — March 18

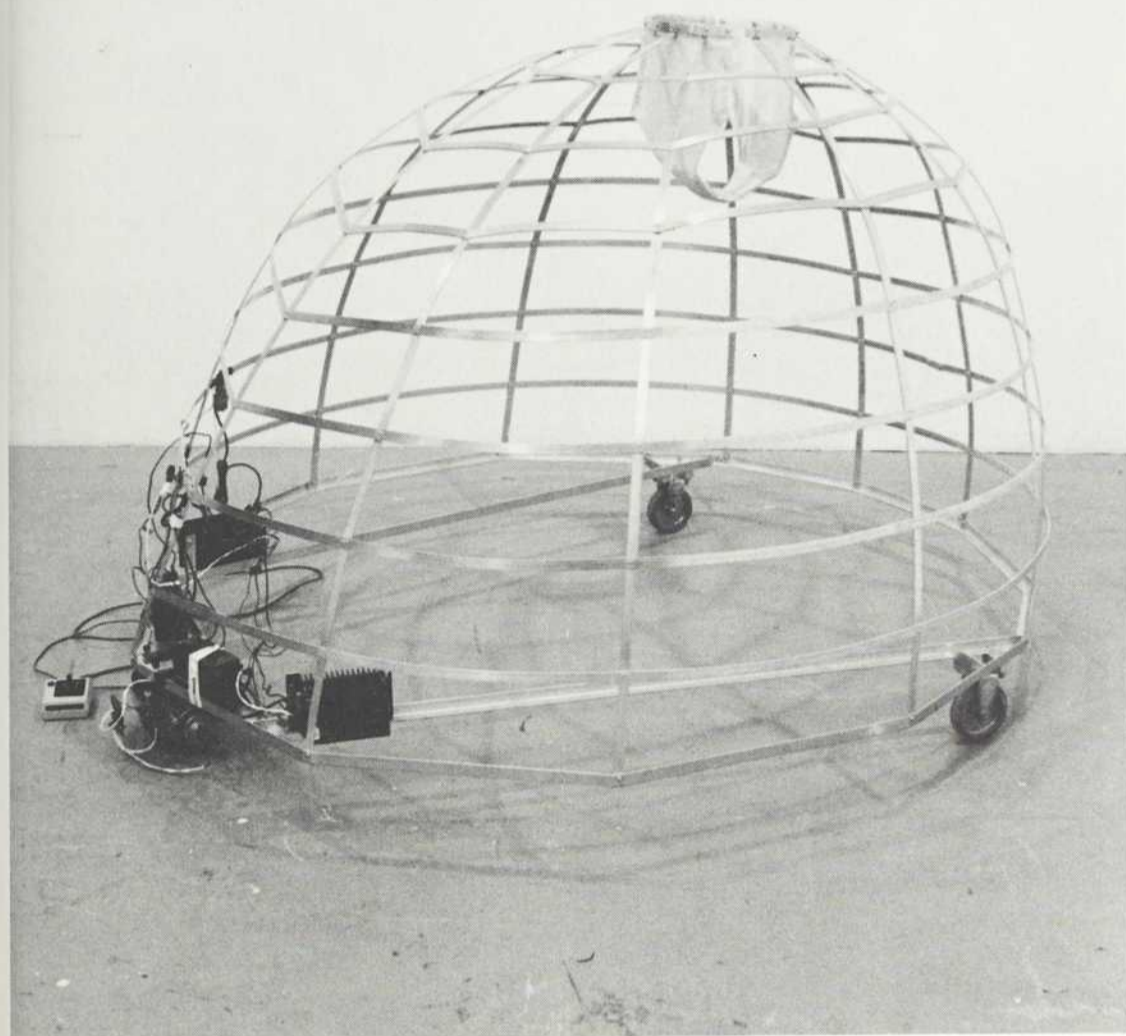
In the artwork of Jana Sterbak, the contemporary proposition of finding an adequate social space for the individual body is aroused in a disquieting physical sense. In her recent exhibition, *Remote Control* (1989) and the previously shown *Standard Lives* (1988) and *Attitudes* (1987) regenerate the dystopic vision and dark humour of her past projects surrounding the body.

*Remote Control*, installed in the main room of the gallery, recalls the modernist grid of minimalist sculpture yet is easily identifiable as a crinoline. This “undergarment,” borrowing its shape from the invisible support for full-skirted fashions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, consists of an aluminum armature on wheels, panties of raw canvas, and a small robotic motor attached by wires. The starkness of this skeletal structure appears as a revelation of what was concealed by the rich

fabrics and embellishment associated with upper-class costumes of the past. The unveiled nakedness of this metal, after this beautifying layer was stripped away, is perhaps more indecent than the bared flesh.

In its varied states as a static sculpture, a kinetic sculpture and as the focus of a performance, *Remote Control* functions polysemically: immobile, the construction alludes to Mario Merz’s domed structures; in motion, the silent battery-powered machine becomes an automaton orbiting relentlessly around a pillar; in full performance for an audience at the opening, *Remote Control* transformed into a ballgown-vehicle supporting a young woman passenger.

This live performance, unobtrusively directed by the artist, complicates the corporeal translation of power relations. A woman “model” is maneuvered into the



Jana Sterbak, *Remote Control*, 1989; photo: Louis Lussier.

crinoline by two men, and the joystick of this futuristic toy is manipulated by another man. Quietly *Remote Control* glides and lurches across the floor. Once the performer is suspended within this apparatus, her body is literally trapped and her feet no longer touch the ground. She attempts several poses, but these prove impossible to sustain due to bodily discomfort.

When the woman is given the control-lever, or when it is taken away, a symbolic transference of power takes place. She may experience the (taboo) pleasures of claiming and/or surrendering power but, even despite an ostensible shift in her favour, the restraining mechanism remains. If the spectator of this work is positioned as a voyeur, the undergarment promises an illicit spectacle. But the model's suffering is implicated in any pleasure the spectator derives.

When occupied, the contraption's unpredictable trajectory urges restive movements from the audience. When dis-

embodied, *Remote Control* assumes a cybernetic independence with affinities to the technologia our bodies negotiate on a daily basis. While the monotony of its programmed behaviour allows for a less threatening viewing experience, the remoteness of the control becomes a political metaphor of more immediate concern. Given the garment's historical reference, the juxtaposition of a vulnerable human body against constricting metal frameworks groups the discourse of fashion with repressive systems considered by Michel Foucault: penal and medical institutions which imagine and discipline the body. This is evident in the variety of ways corsets, girdles, chastity belts and high heels have confined and distorted women's bodies through normative processes relating to concepts of beauty.

Today as in the past, a woman's ability to adorn herself according to the prevailing code is one of the main avenues to personal empowerment and pleasure,

while paradoxically reaffirming the status quo. Benetton adds, for example, suggest that donning similar sweaters will dissolve the specificities of ethnicity, class and gender in a universalizing rhetoric of fashion. Sterbak's work refuses such easy solvency and, instead, locates precisely those painful gestures inherent in conformity.

On view in the gallery office, *Standard Lives* profiles the mediation of public and private demeanour. This reinvented dress-maker's measuring tape, laser-printed on transparent vinyl, features Letraset human figures accessorized with the possessions of daily life, rather than the usual numbers. Stylized drawings evoke America's post-war mores in a filmic gauging of time, illustrating with flattened stereotypes the ideology of consumption: a couple gets married, a man rushes off to work briefcase in hand, a kneeling woman scrubs floors, etc. The tape symbolically measures up individual aspirations for status against suburban paradigms. In this period of so-called "Post-feminism" and "Real Women" when these icons hold nostalgic currency, *Standard Lives* transparently reveals the reactionary basis of this lament.

*Attitudes* focusses on the most intimate of domestic furnishings. On a bed in a smaller room, the artist has scattered pillows of different shapes and sizes which whisper the language of social institutions that dictate the ethics of sexual relationships. Their embroidered typefaces read: Reputation, Disease, Virtue, Jeunesse, Avarice, Sexual Fantasies,

Looks. "Disease," for example, is reintroduced into the discourse of sexuality with the advent of AIDS, acknowledging a radical redefinition of sexual practice in the 1980s. The pillows' mixed messages beget a hotbed of unrest, where restful sleep, love and the myth of sexual liberation are displaced. Simulating handiwork, the embroidery on the pillowcases is machine-made. When a woman artist makes use of a traditional medium like embroidery, some feminists are quick to interpret this as a recuperation and elevation of devalued craft practices. While this analysis is legitimate, Sterbak's sardonic comment on technology replacing authentic needlework may be lost in such a reductive reading. *Attitudes* is unfortunately not shown to advantage in this space. In a similar installation at Ydessa Gallery in Toronto, the pillows were spread out on several beds in a larger room. The beds were more inviting, and the room darker. The pillows' linguistic terrorism in this more allusive space resonated in ways discouraged by this recent installation.

Instead of purely contemplative artwork, Sterbak presents new objects of counterfeit use-value. These artifacts rely on high technology for their manufacture, and absurdly, have the potential for endless replication. The artist's transformation of materials into eccentric commodities conflicts at the contentious site of the body, disclosing new locales for aesthetic inquiry.

— KITTY SCOTT

— JOHANNE SLOAN

## JOHN MASSEY

Galerie Chantal Boulanger, Montréal, February 11 – March 11

Everything is light, precise, and clear in light space. In dark space everything is obscure and mysterious. One feels as if in the presence of the unknown, in its positive value, the phenomenon of "mystery" seems the best and the most immediate way to express this characteristic trait of lived obscurity.

Eugene Minkowski,

*Toward a Psychopathology of Lived Space*

*From the Dawn's Early Morn, Until Twilight's Last Gleaming*, a recent work by John Massey exhibited along with examples of his graphic oeuvre at Galerie Chantal Boulanger, which takes its title and a literal cue from the American national anthem, is virtually unprecedented in its treatment of space. Unprecedented because the space in question is "lived" in the sense that it is not a dead space: it requires a human subjectivity to energize its immanent meanings. It is not a space reduced, then, to mere geometrical rela-

tions — whatever the architectural parameters of the original rooms in which the work was set, phenomenological analysis takes precedence over the geometric conception of space — but a dynamic sphere in which life unfolds and psychopathologies thrive like hothouse flowers.

Massey's works are interesting because they work from the premise of, and modelize, the very nature of the space that any installation securing a somatic compact with the observer, or allowing that observer to literally enter it, generates. While the work at Galerie Chantal Boulanger had its origins in an installation made recently for the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh — in which the spatial environment was perhaps more totalizing by virtue of occupying different rooms which the observer had to enter and experience — the present work is no less effective. Why? Because one still has to move back and

forth in front of it in order to ascertain the disparities of dark and light space and to assess its reflective character.

In his installation *Twilight's Last Gleaming* at Ruimte Morguen in Holland late last year, Massey worked from a similar thematic with ten framed photographs: views of a scale model of the interior of the Ruimte Morguen space. In an accompanying text, Massey wrote: "The rooms in these photographs have the quality of an empty stage set. The enactment about to take place is a transformation of the present into history. The viewer is the central player. The other two figures in the set are the unlimited potential of the space itself, and the limited representation of it ... The photographs represent a perfect but absurd sense of reflective space."

In this work, the interior space becomes a sort of dream womb, with no exterior; everything is self-contained. The isolated interior constitutes a reflective paradigm for the way in which space envelops and sustains us, or even for the way it can become attuned to pathological states. It is now widely known that space is affected in de-socialisation and dissociative disorders as well. The "light space" in Massey's work is akin to socialized space, whatever recesses of being may be held in abeyance therein. The "dark space," by contrast, is a morbid space. This is not just a theory or a metaphor. As Minkowski said: "The morbid world is organized in terms of dark space."

In all his installation work, Massey is not interested in the vagaries of perceived space or represented space, or even subjective or objective space, for that would be a sterile concept. He is interested in something more vibrant, something, perhaps, more sinister: a lived space, a space that works on the body and involves the psyche. That such a space can be a magnet for, or manifestation of, darker states of feeling comes across in a very direct and unmediated fashion in his work.

In his prints, the sense of a claustrophobic space enclosing fragments of a monstrous body is almost palpable; this space hems one in or becomes the unstable backdrop for the manifestation of the body's deformation. This space that is arbitrarily closed-off so as to dramatize the rendering of a body that has become the phenomenal register of externalized psychological states, confers an extradiscursive meaning on the deformation of the self within the space.

Massey himself has said: "From the

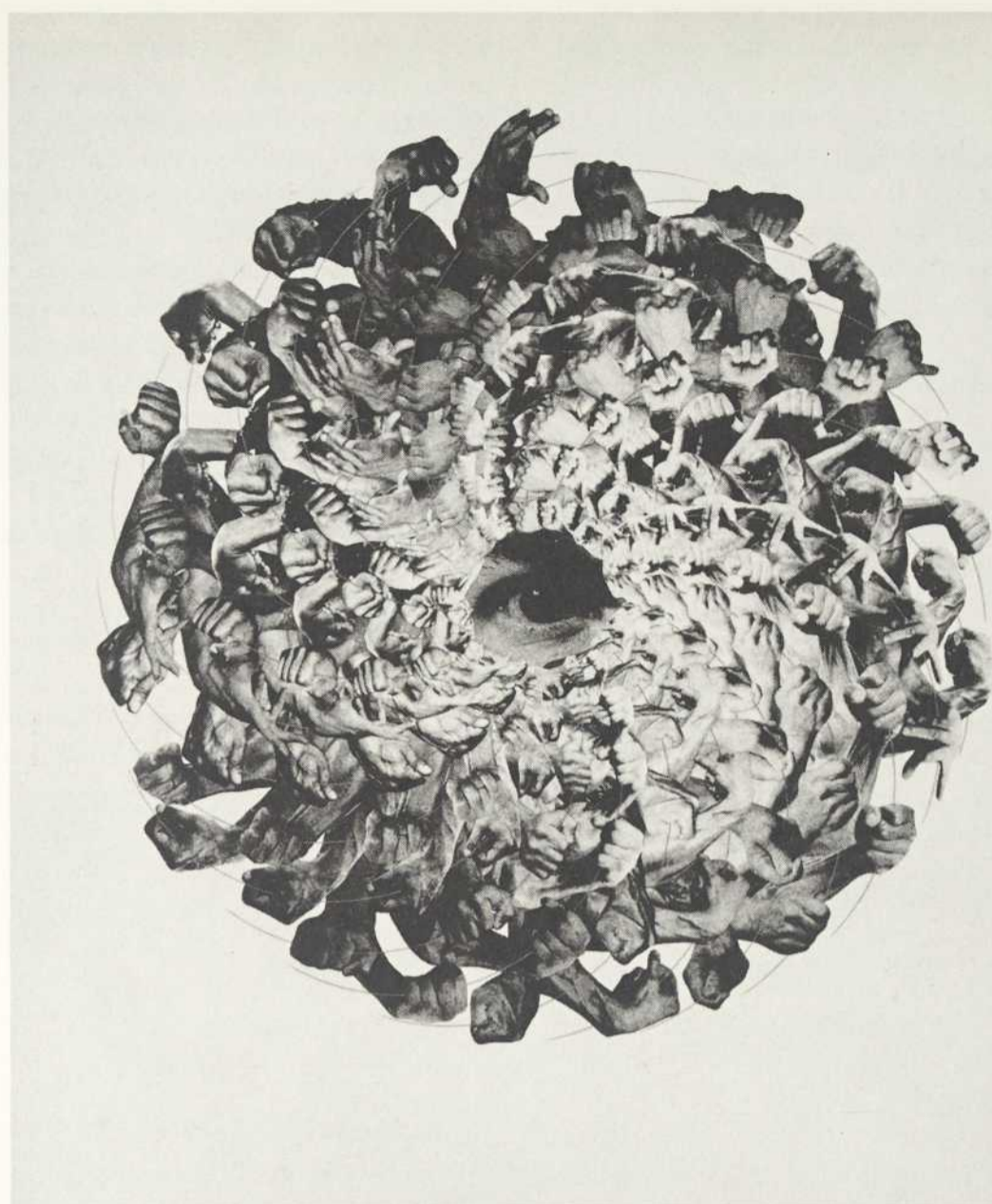
beginning, I have viewed architecturally enclosed space as being analogous to a mental landscape that could be made corporeal by the presence of a living body. It has been the drama of how we do or do not grasp as we stand within it that has led me to construct so much of my work..." It is the corporeity of space that Massey seeks to capture, space as the fleshly envelope of the carnal subject who lives inside it. For if his concern with spatiality emphasizes its lived aspects, his parallel concern is with a lived-body, an embodied being; that is, the body as a single unit upon which are inscribed a host of nightmarish significations. Massey uses his own body as host for those inscriptions; the uncanny body in his prints becomes somehow archetypal, laden with bodily contexture and dark states of consciousness.

Massey's carnal subject, then, does not have the identity of Cartesian dualism and the "ghost in the machine" (even if Descartes' notion of an "intimate union" between mind and body was remarkably perceptive for his time), but registers the recognition of our embodiment; our being *incarné* in a *corps propre*.

In his preoccupation with a space and a body which are lived, Massey opens up a proverbial Pandora's box of imagination without limits, in which things as seemingly disparate as psychoses and space are invoked with carnal idealism (that reflects an understanding of the flesh before its conceptual fractionating into matter and mind). Massey seeks to meaningfully imbue both in his work, and in the observer who experiences that work, a totalizing state of feeling generated by the specific treatment and use of spatiality that not only binds him to an installation in its very spatial integrity, but which effectively binds his body to the life-world. He takes a cue from the German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller's words to the effect that "things jostle each other hard in space" — a truth especially redolent of sundry depressive, pathological states.

In the works of John Massey, space and body are phenomena made explicit. He reminds us that different spaces are always lived in terms of their human meanings. How and why we possess or fail to possess, are attuned or are not attuned, to various spaces bears interesting witness to the workings of an "inclined space" that is permeated through and through with embodied states of feelings as often inchoate and irrefragable as they are lucid and telling.

— JAMES D. CAMPBELL



John Massey, *Black Eye*, 1989,  
photolithograph and silkscreen, 26 × 28½"; photo: Peter MacCallum.

## ENCHANTMENT/DISTURBANCE

The Power Plant, Toronto, November 18 — January 8

Art is not there to provide perceptions in direct ways. It produces deepened perception of experience. More must happen than simply logically understandable things. Art is not there to be simply understood, or we would have no need of art. It could then just be logical sentences in the form of a text for instance. Where objects are concerned it's more the sense of an indication or suggestion.

Joseph Beuys

Curator Renée Baert employs her recent exhibit at The Power Plant as a vehicle for confronting the limits of art criticism by constructing a dialogue between viewer and viewing context which focuses on the primary and powerful experience felt in response to a presence inscribed deep within each of the works of art. This presence is at once mysterious and full of wonder. It enchants because it entices; it charms, it captivates, and it wills. But this presence also disturbs because it cannot be articulated. This presence constitutes a subjective realm which can be felt but it cannot be expressed through the modes of modernist and postmodernist discourse which prevail. Without words to articu-

late it, this presence expresses itself itself as an absence, a negative area which evokes an experience of awe. Baert makes us concretely aware of this rich unexplored territory. She also addresses the need for describing, expressing and identifying its complex nature which pushes beyond the limits of the present discourse. She draws attention to what lies hidden in a work of art: a magnitude of suggestions, sensations and associations which colour and enrich what lies in full view of the observer. This deepened awareness of the construction of perception through viewing affects the way our understanding of knowledge is conceived and the manner in which meaning is interpreted in the activity of viewing a work of art. This perception strikes at our comprehension of individual and cultural identity, at our notions of memory and history. It addresses the fundamental basis for artistic production and the need which, Baert believes, underlies this activity.

In recent dialogue with Donald Kuspit, Louise Bourgeois spoke of her need to make art: her need to express in form

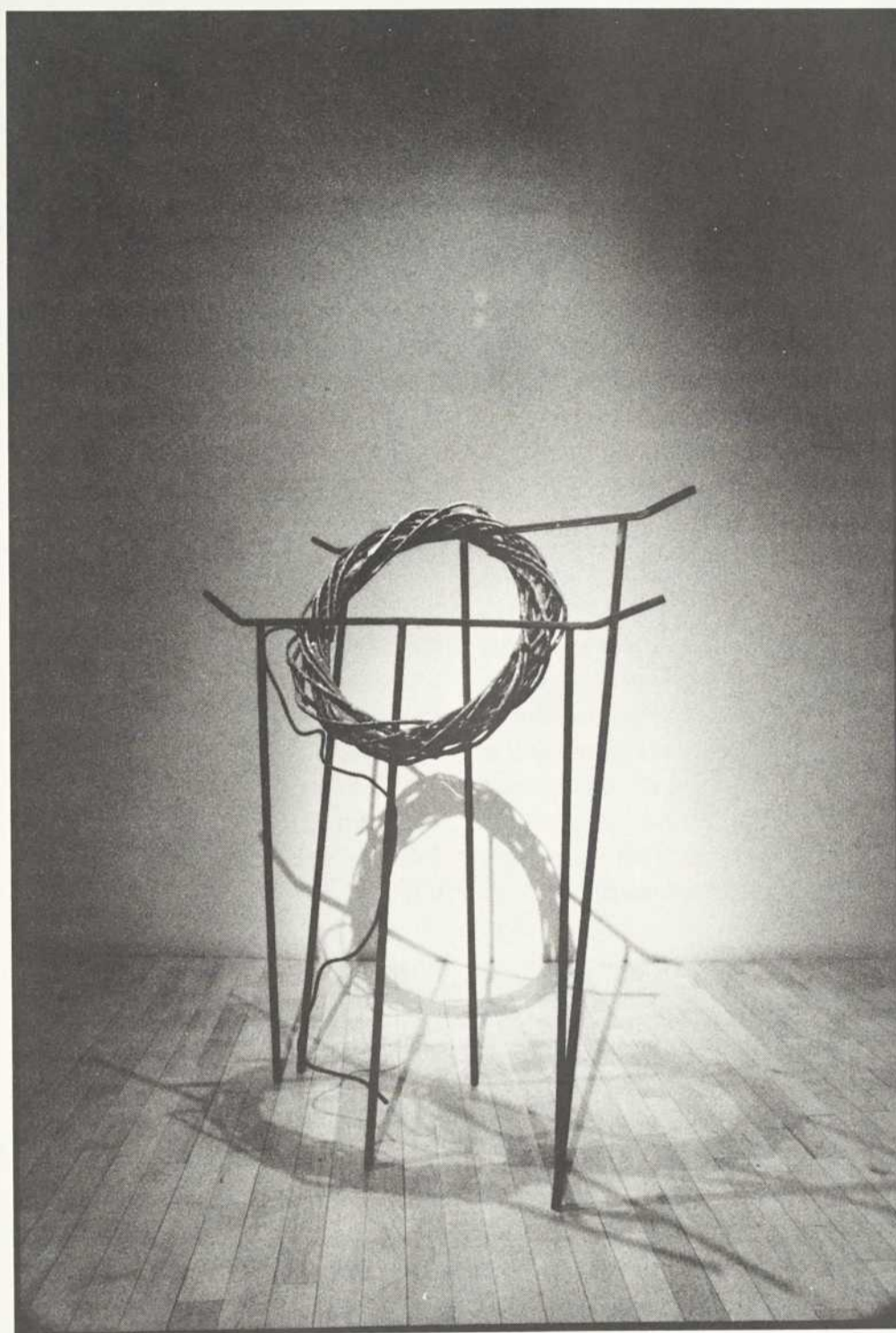
what would otherwise be inexpressible; her willful desire to overcome the negative space of a stone cube until it becomes an image. She states that she takes it over with her fantasy, her life force, and she puts it to the use of her unconscious. For Bourgeois, making sculpture is directly linked to her experience of living. It is the suggestion of this struggle, the pain and strength of endurance, which her large iconic bronze sculpture — *Henrietta*, 1985 — embodies in its prosthetic form. It hangs independently, isolated in the central hallway which divides the east and west galleries of The Power Plant. As a viewer, I came upon it unexpectedly. I was both attracted and repelled by its sight for it is hard and beautiful, sensual and sexually suggestive of the physicality of its owner. Spontaneously, in the isolated context of this moment, the viewer is allowed a forbidden glimpse of a private, intimate territory of a woman's body. This disclosure is erotically charged and captivating. With the next glance, the discarded limb hangs austere and cold, framed by the neutral grey concrete walls of the gallery. My experience of this work resonates with rich visceral associations. This experience is highly subjective; I feel it through my senses, through associations which are both personal and culturally defined. My felt response to Bourgeois' work deeply affects my interpretation of its meaning yet this enchanting, disturbing experience is not addressed by current modes of art's critical discourse. With *Enchantment/Disturbance*, Renée Baert addresses the issue that subjective feeling is generally absent from both modernist and postmodernist discourse.

Baert takes the familiar feminist positioning of the "other" to provide territory to question the authority of representation in art. To accomplish this, she prescribes that the work selected for this exhibition must be critically established in both modernist and postmodernist critique. Because she believes that these practices are anti-aesthetic, she states that the potential for experiencing and recognizing visual pleasure is severely repressed. She makes an implicit analogy between the repression of subjective feeling in the visual arts with the oppression of women's experience in patriarchal culture. Patriarchal thinking operates as an oppositional binary system which excludes women's experience, whereas contemporary feminist inquiry accentuates *différence*: it embraces paradox and ambiguity; sensuality, sexuality, mystery and multiplicity. Within the patriarchal order of traditional art discourses, there is no place for another view; there are no words to speak of these "other" presences, nor to recognize their existence. Because this experience cannot be

logically reasoned through this particular discourse, it is absent. Baert observes that "the sterile voice of academic discursiveness," objective analysis, firmly represses any indication of feeling — whether pleasure or pain — from emerging as a legitimate site for discussion. Baert's deliberate choice of art which carries the authority of current critical tradition allows her to explore freely the "other" significant qualities which these works share. In fact, she notes in her catalogue essay, there is no code of critical language in place to

meaning is produced in this different subjective context. By making this intervention, Baert provides access to discussing the experiences of enchantment and disturbances as distinctive presences in each work displayed.

Baert believes that these dominant modes of art critical discourse fail both artist and viewer because they disavow any form of aesthetic experience which might be suggested or indicated within the surface of object or text. They tend to repress any connections viewers may



Martha Townsend, *Wreath*, 1986,  
iron rod and wire, stick wreath, 98 × 75 × 31 cm; photo: Peter MacCallum.

formulate this connection. Patriarchal discourse privileges theory over experience. Baert constructs a feminist framework for recognizing the significant role "experience" plays when viewers respond to the exhibition. By structuring our view of the work as if we are experiencing a single object, she focuses attention on the interconnections which inform our recognition of its meaning. Our experience of these connections is given presence as "intertextuality." Baert creates a structure for analyzing the way

make between art and life; for example, in the process of comprehending John Scott's *Trans-Am Apocalypse*, 1984-88. His discomfiting union of divine revelation with the Occult inextricably unites apocalyptic fear in the *social* realm with the intimate confrontation of its full, complex, terrible reality which the viewer/*subject* identifies unconsciously, and then consciously, within this black, portentous metal body, scratched with revelatory, ominous markings. Likewise, viewers tend to inhibit their desire to

penetrate the private, sensual surface of *Trou de mémoire, la beauté inattendue*, 1988, by Geneviève Cadieux because this image discloses the realm of the *subject*. It harbours memories of violation, suffering, and healing which can only be experienced through the body. Our powerful recognition of loss is triggered by the anti-personal, public context Cadieux uses to present the scar. Baert embraces new possibilities of critique which hold the recognition of meaning in ambiguous associations triggered when the surface of the object is penetrated into a complex, unknown beyond. To speak of this experience, to address its significance for establishing meaning, identity, knowledge and reality risks a reordering of the relationship between art and life, the individual and society; something I feel most art critics resist because it requires re-evaluation of their essential stand for viewing and speaking about art.

Baert intends this exhibition to be a different way of viewing art. She constructs a discourse for visual analysis based in subjective experience of the viewing process. Rather than focussing on the disconnection of paradox, for example, in the binary split of public and private spheres, she recognizes their co-existence. She privileges both conscious awareness and subliminal sensation as expedient means for establishing meaning in art. She stresses a synthetic view of art and life, linking the common with the universal, the concrete with the ephemeral. In this way, she speaks of "wonder" in Toby MacLennan's *The Mouth of the Sky*, 1988, and "deception" in Marcel Odenbach's video tape, *As If Memories Could Deceive Me*, and "disillusionment" in Barbara Steinman's *Borrowed Scenery*. She expresses "the fragile edge" which separates life from death and unites them in Martha Townsend's, *Wreath*.

My initial viewing of this exhibition was marked by an experience of disorientation. This was a necessary bridge to understanding Baert's innovative curatorial practice. By expanding familiar critical and viewing frames of reference, she engaged my attention, bringing into focus the experience of sensations and associations which occurred while viewing these works, a step which still disarms and captures me. This is critical for experiencing "wonder," for discovering mystery and magic often denied. By creating a critique which includes the realm of subjective experience, she invites us to explore different critical territory. This frees viewers to re-orient themselves to what they see and feel. Baert makes an original step into theorizing emotion which deserves critical attention. This step both enchants and disturbs.

— JANICE ANDREAE

## MINA TOTINO

Western Front Gallery, Vancouver, February 7 – 24

Food, fur, cosmetics and dead bodies are some of the perishable items subject to cold storage. Mina Totino's exhibition *Cold Storage* takes items of "femininity" as subject and freezes them in the ambiguous spaces of her canvases in order to examine these specimens in their excess, their guise, their position in our psychic makeup. By doing so, she effects a masquerade in which she plays the fine line between asserting that Western constructions of femininity are defunct because they are patriarchal impositions, while, at the same time, asserting that they are desirable because of their propensity for play and trickery.

The gallery is filled with twenty small flower paintings and three large tapestry-like canvases edged in coloured fringe, filled with images culled from fashion magazines, art history and interior decoration. In this presentation of detail and decoration, Totino's strategy of masquerade attempts to create a gap between representation and its referent. As Mary Add Doane writes,

The effectivity of the masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible and readable by the woman.

"Film and the Masquerade:  
Theorising the Female Spectator,"  
*Screen* vol. 23, No. 3-4, 1982.

Masquerade, while it represents Western notions of femininity does so in terms of extremes and display. In her article "Womanliness as a Masquerade," (*Formations of Fantasy*, Methuen, 1986), Joan Riviere points out that masquerade and "womanliness" are synonymous. Masquerade, on the one hand, is used by women to hide possession of masculinity, to avert disapproval from men who feel threatened and would likely punish women for their competition with them. On the other hand, "Womanliness" by its very construction is a mask which covers darkness and enigma with innocence and passivity effecting a similar threatened reaction by men. Whereas Riviere psychoanalytically symptomatises the condition of femininity and its close relationship to the masquerade, Doane attempts to position it as a critical strategy. And although Totino's work favours Doane's use of masquerade, it is at the same time caught in the double bind of Riviere's analysis. Masquerade oscillates between asserting itself as parody, as a way of fooling patriarchy and being complicit with constructions of patriarchal femininity.

The most obvious demonstration of this oscillation is at play in the twenty small flower paintings. These are Totino's



Mina Totino,  
*Ornamental Flowers*,  
oil on tar paper;  
photo: Stan Douglas.

"Sunday" paintings, quite literally the warm-ups for the big stuff. These gesture paintings recall wall paper, ornament and, in some instances, are identified with the history of the amateur and the "feminine." In other instances these works evoke flowers painted by Manet and Delacroix, inhabiting this iconography as art historical quotation, revision and appropriation. In both cases flowers signified pettiness, prettiness, mortality, morality and vanity. The difference being that the latter was self conscious while the former was not.

Totino's paintings are an exaggeration of Manet's and Delacroix's critical inhabitation. Her flowers are dried, dead; void of vitality, they are painted quickly, placed haphazardly on the surface without any container or context. While they evoke a sense of ornament and abstraction, design and decoration, verisimilitude is effaced. They recall industrial formations as they are painted on tar paper and placed in a grid. Delicate preciousness, painstaking exactitude and the fussiness of rendering exact nature are transformed into quickness, gesture, repetition and seriality.

Totino's masquerade repeats itself in the three large paintings that disguise themselves as either glossy fashion magazine layout or domestic architecture. In *Dawn and Dusk of the Same Day* the canvas is divided into a page spread. On the left is a woman from a lingerie ad: her back to us, she is clad in black stockings, garter belt and long gloves. On the right is a version of Michelangelo's *Dawn* which guards the Medici tomb in Florence. Below is a rectangle of expensive imitation-wood wall paper. The women are both images created by men and are

polar representations of femininity: one of fertility, production, daylight, the other of promiscuity, expenditure and night. It seems as if Totino's strategy here in title and placement is to disrupt polar construction in order to transgress boundaries, erase isolation and recuperate these images as desirous for women. After all, Totino has remade these images for herself and her female spectators. Through the centre, acting as cut line and decorative border, is a section of barely discernable text. The text, from Emily Dickinson, attempts to negotiate the poles of the images. In the text a young woman speaks of her relationship with other women in the context of puritan duty mixed with school girl coyness. Although she combines the voices of good girl/bad girl, an overall sense of transgression and naughtiness is evoked. At the same time as this signals a clever and skillful escape from the confines of femininity, it could also be interpreted as the sense flippancy one expresses as self defence when trapped or victimized. Totino shows us that these polarities are "two sides of the same coin." However, in ruling out the confining nature of polarity and in appropriating these images made by men. Totino leaves herself and her spectators still holding the baggage loaded with patriarchal and capitalistic investment and inscription. The difference, it seems, is that this attempt to put the bags in different hands has at least some recuperative potential as the symptomatics of polarity are laid out.

Consistent throughout Totino's paintings are monochromatic spaces filled with barely readable text which hint at a way out of the malaise caused by a play

which illustrates only a self-conscious rendering and imitation of symptomatics. The surface of the paint is highly gestural and the text evokes markings suggestive of scars and lacerations. Skin-like, these sections counter act and pull against the effacement of the living body by representation inherent in the bodies and faces Totino paints. Remnants of Abstract Expressionism loom in the gestural use of paint but these qualities are equally suggestive of applying makeup, a process whereby one can enhance and veil appearance. In Totino's masquerade her paint is used in a similar fashion to makeup. She applies paint on her canvas in order to veil and enhance representations of "femininity."

In *Born Catholic* and *Cold Storage* the division of the canvas, although in some ways still evocative of magazine layout, is more a mimicry of domestic architecture and decoration. Both canvases are trimmed with coloured furniture fringe while *Cold Storage* is divided with intricate flower patterns and bright colours. Moulding drapery, decorative pictures, elements to divide and decorate rooms appear as schematics. In *Born Catholic*, to complicate matters, religion is at issue. The tide and the purple space of the canvas reference the Catholic period of penitence during Lent. During this time of restraint and fasting, purple cloth veils the excess and opulence of churchly adornment. In Totino's painting, a purple coat of paint covers a barely discernable text: "I know a secret about you." Accusatory, judgmental and violating privacy, this comment is directed at a rendering of a woman's head with closed eyes and head turned in defiance more than

shame. This woman turned in defiance brings us out of the confessional and back into the world of fashion and advertising. Her gaze is ambiguous; at once she refuses to be objectified, yet the fact that she appears as representation undermines her look. Then, again, as paint and canvas, she is merely a composition of gesture and material.

Across the room, another woman gazes out of the cool red ground of *Cold Storage*. Dislodged from any kind of identifiable space, she is suspicious and self-defensive. Her gaze is affronting, as if attempting to escape photographic and cinematic codes of the objectification of women. She is accompanied by a monochromatic space filled with another barely readable, obsessively masochistic

text about who is to blame. Totino conducts this masquerade in order to inhabit, appropriate and quote from fashion magazines, art history, and interior decoration. She prompts a quicksilver play that, in its movement between revealing the confining nature of patriarchal constructions of femininity and recuperating desirous representation for women, runs the risk of being unable to create the distance between representation and its object so that the difference between generating a problematic and being complicit is barely discernable. Most important, though, is that perhaps it is impossible for work of this nature to presume an outside. As Totino writes: "precarious positioning—tongue to paint—is art never an extravagance?"

— NANCY SHAW

## JOEY MORGAN

Presentation House, Vancouver, September 23 – October 23

Joey Morgan's most recent work is entitled *Have You EVER Loved Me?*. Its title and initial effect are misleading, deceptive. The title would seem to suggest that this installation is about intimacy, or rather, about failed intimacy. The rhetorical question evokes a dramatic scene at the end of a relationship, or perhaps a child's despair and anger with an abusive or unresponsive parent. In either scenario the atmosphere is charged, passionate, intense. Several other aspects contribute to this reading of the work. Yet a singular focus on intimacy, on the personal and private relationship, is denied by the inclusion of a series of newspaper photographs which document a suicide.

On January 22, 1987 Bud Dwyer constructed a media event to his own purposes: he staged his grandstand exit for an audience of journalists, reporters and photographers whom he knew, who had contributed to the making of his political image. Rather than face incarceration for conspiracy and perjury, the Pennsylvania State Treasurer chose to end his life by placing a gun in his mouth and pulling the trigger. However, by summoning his witnesses, Dwyer ensured himself of renown and an immortality of sorts. Although he was obviously manipulating his spectators, the Associated Press complied, of course, to their benefit as well as Dwyer's: they had a story, while he achieved their attention and was thereby able to "speak" after death despite the legal judgement against him. Photo images of Bud Dwyer's suicide were sent out immediately.

They reappear here, throughout the

sixteen collage drawing's in the installation. Their ubiquity within the work supercedes the intimacy suggested by the title and the immediate impact of the piece as it appears from a distance. Indeed, the suicide images constitute the crux of this work. Their inclusion takes the implicit discourse beyond the personal and subjective into the realm of theories of social control, ethics, and epistemology; and, it most pointedly calls for a consideration (à la Baudrillard) of the

dissolution of traditional criteria and definitions of "reality" consequent to media technology's pervasive and insidious presence in postcapitalist culture. In other words, these images appropriated from a mass communications system make requisite a broader reading of this work; they require a reading that includes but goes further than merely addressing the difficulties of constructing identity and defining desire in relationships. Regardless of the implications of the title, *Have You EVER Loved Me?* demands attention to the effect of media images *per se*—their unrelenting intrusion, and the consequent inextricable embrangement of private and public spheres.

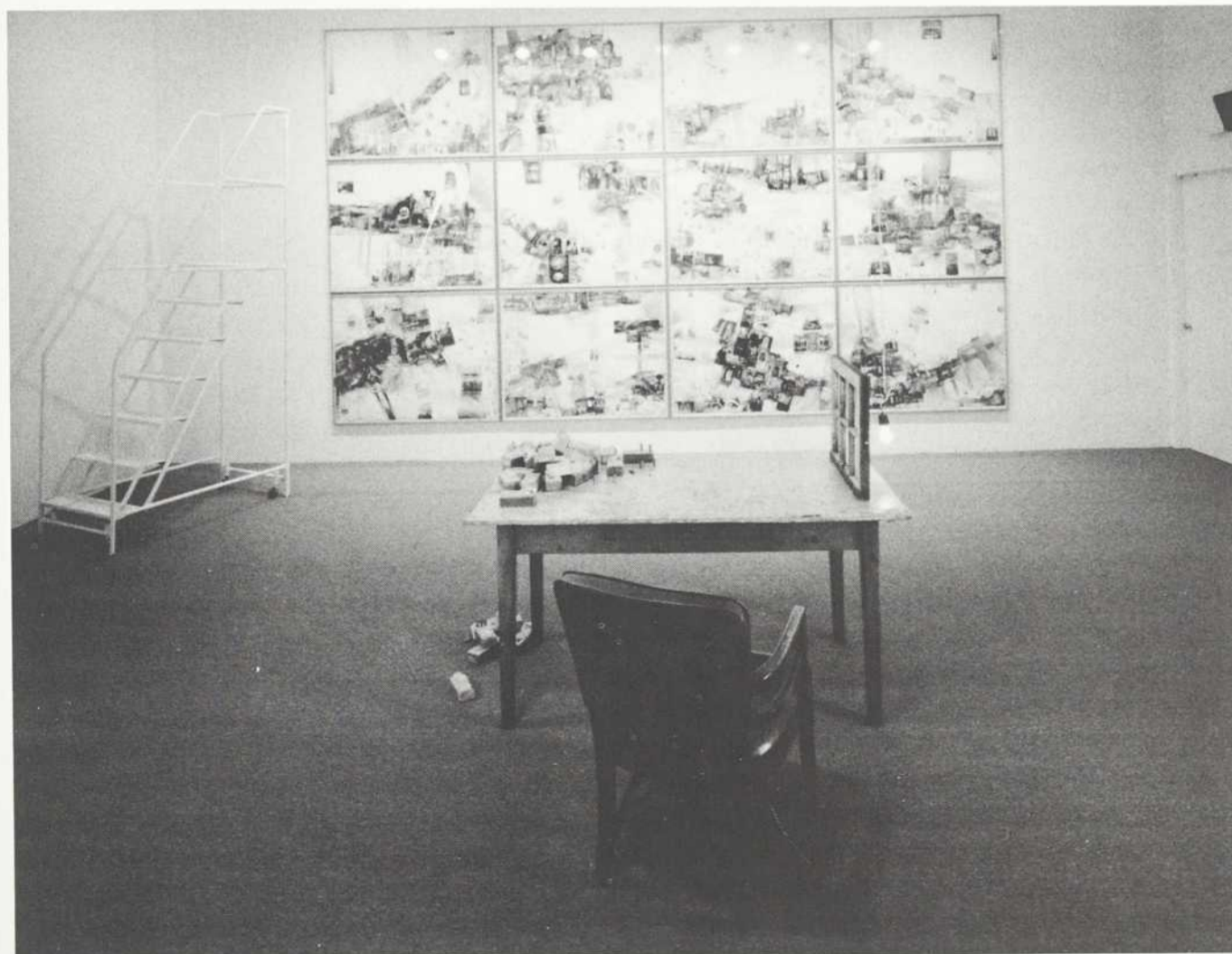
The sixteen collage drawings in the installation are presented in three parts. On the wall opposite the entrance to the room that contains the work, there is a tableau composed of twelve of the 38" x 50" collaged panels in a three by four grid. Their textured but predominantly white surfaces are broken by rectilinear planes of colour which, from a distance, appear as abstract, rather cubist forms resembling shards of glass. Moving a little closer to the tableau, these forms evolve into collaged snapshot photographs, paper fragments and painted areas. The colours are muted, naturalistic. Concentric circular shapes, like crater holes or targets, and smaller bullet-like bits are scattered across the surface of the mural. The details of these elements are initially undecipherable but alluring. The desire to know what is entailed draws the spectator closer, very close to each surface. There is a mobile freestanding lad-

der beside the tableau that invites close inspection, even of the uppermost panels.

In the centre of the room, between the entrance and the tableau, a lightbulb suspended from the ceiling illuminates an old wooden table and armchair. A wood-framed six-pane window is mounted vertically near one end of the table. At the other end there is a pile of wax-covered wooden blocks, with bullets embedded in the wax and others mixed with the blocks on the table. The pile of blocks and bullets has spilled over onto the floor. The wax on the blocks is somehow fleshy. Its textural quality invokes reconsideration of the "skin" of translucent glue, so thick on the collaged panels that it now seems to ooze and drip like blood. The disarray of the blocks and bullets is strangely at odds with the stark but familiar furnishings; it repeats and reflects the now evident violent tumult of splintered images in the tableau panels. Within this *mise-en-scène*, one begins to discern antithetical discourses which effect contradictory impulses. The viewer is momentarily stalled, torn between approach and avoidance.

To one side, a triptych of collaged panels occupies one wall. On the other, there is a single mainly black panel. The impact of this solo collage drawing is equivalent to the other components because of its contrasting blackness and its profusion of Bud Dwyer images, including one image overlaid with red target circles.

The installation also includes a soundscape—an audio collage comprised of music (the "Willow Song" and "Ave Maria"



Joey Morgan,  
*Have you EVER Loved Me?*,  
1988, installation detail.

from Verdi's *Otello*), excerpts from news broadcasts about arrests by Italian police of suspected members of the Red Brigade and by Philippine police of gunmen who shot and killed an army official and then "casually walked away," and the continuous sounds of a newsroom with reporters' voices all in excited conversation that could be (but are not) about Dwyer's suicide. They seem to refer to his act as a "story," and to ironically describe Dwyer as "a natural performer." In addition, a female voice recites (or performs) a compelling "stream of consciousness" monologue which insistently intercedes on the surface of the soundtrack. The incessant clatter of the newsroom, the idyll of Verdi's music, the disembodied authority of the news broadcaster's voice and the intensity of the female voice are at once reassuring and disturbing.

I feel compelled to inspect the large tableau. Up close I see that it contains small bits of text. The very small script is legible only when I am close to the panels. Its scale requires physical proximity — a kind of intimacy. As I read, I recognize the words; they are repeated by the female voice on the tape loop. I read and listen. A narrative of sorts emerges, more from the degeneration of the narrative than from denotative meaning. But also from the increasing urgency of syntax, and the shifting use of pronouns from first to second to third person.

I've had this dream every night since I got here  
Sometimes it seems to be different but really it's  
always the same ...

I guess I still like to think of it as falling in and  
out of love with maybe the chance to get some work  
done in between ... I still don't really understand  
the language ... it's just like bits and pieces  
just a moment there caught in a couple of frames  
like some splintered relic and maybe it's falling  
all together, and maybe it's falling apart.

So Just Talk ... just keep talking ... keep  
talking ... just talk ...

I know this probably sounds like a fairy tale but  
you know it really happened because I read it  
in the news.

But when you ask him and he can't tell you,  
and then you try and explain and he can't hear,  
then what it means is you have to go ...  
one day the balance shifted and although  
her friends tried to persuade her to leave,  
she knew she couldn't risk to be left  
outside his walls, and so in a moment of considered  
passion he strangled her and then waited until dark  
before allowing her body to drift downstream.

At close range the snapshots disclose  
images of cultural icons — familiar sites  
and statuary. There is, however, a curious  
mix of ornate Italian cloistered gardens  
and artifacts such as puttis and evangeli-  
cal portraits, together with the more spar-  
tan architecture of institutions of refuge  
for the insane. There is evidence that the  
snapshots have been affixed to punctured  
target sheets from a rifle range. And,

throughout, there are the photos of Bud  
Dwyer's face as he places the gun in his  
mouth. And all of this splintered and "fall-  
ing apart and falling together," always  
coming back to the dream and the "real-  
ity" of the distorted visage, and the shift-  
ing balance from private to public, and  
the betrayal and transgression. It  
becomes clear that in some respect Bud  
Dwyer transgressed by refusing to follow  
the rules of media journalism: "He knew  
what was in and out of the frame."  
Perhaps he was intent on breaking those  
rules which, at least in his duress, he con-  
sidered "just talk, it's a simple betrayal,  
you know the camera never lies, and he  
knew the rules about what's in and out of  
frame, and so, with deliberate passion, he  
pulls the trigger and turns the game  
around again."

In *Have You EVER Loved Me?* both

imagery and text enmesh the private with  
the public; images of Dwyer's death are  
combined with cultural icons and with  
unidentifiable and mysterious indices of  
private passion, despair and disease (dis/  
ease). The multi-valence of these indices  
is, in turn, signification of the chaos, com-  
plexity and artifice which compound to  
define and construct our culture and thus  
our lives. These imbrications simulate the  
breakdown of traditional codes and con-  
ventions which would simply separate  
private from public spheres. This installa-  
tion also enunciates the perceived break-  
down of psyche, personal and public,  
which accompanies resistance to the  
status quo. Like the socio-cultural pheno-  
mena it examines, and to some extent  
simulates, *Have You EVER Loved Me?*  
manages to be powerfully seductive and  
repulsive.

— ANNETTE HURTIG

## GUIDO MOLINARI

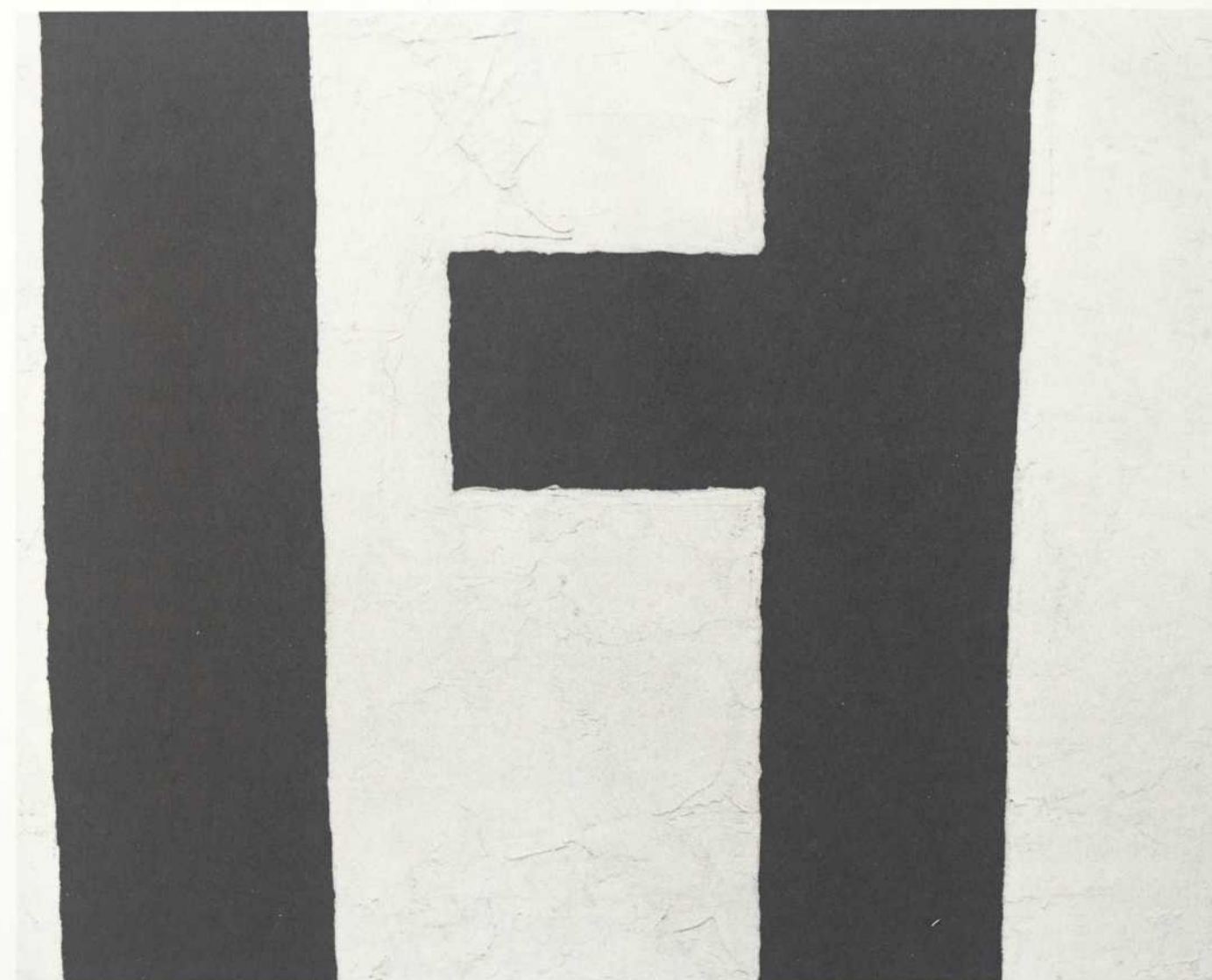
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, January 26 – March 29

There is increasing interest in post  
war modernism. In Canada this interest  
turns to Montréal where the artists were  
more radically modern than elsewhere.  
Among institutions like the Vancouver Art  
Gallery, the concern is with the construc-  
tion of Canadian art history. Among art

historians, the interest lies in the ideolog-  
ical conflicts that characterize the period  
and are reflected in its aesthetic prac-  
tices.

As the title *Guido Molinari 1951–  
1961 The Black and White Paintings* sug-  
gests, the focus is on works from Moli-

nari's formative decade with special  
emphasis on the paintings he produced  
between 1955 and 1958. Occupying a key  
position in the whole scheme is the 1961  
work, *Hommage à Jauran*. As one  
catalogue article puts it, "the Vancouver  
Art Gallery purchased *Hommage à  
Jauran* at that time [1964] and the whole  
of the present exhibition can be seen as a  
persuasive argument for this one paint-  
ing..." From this vantage point, the retro-  
spective view begins and ends at the same  
place — with a confirming nod toward  
the masterpiece. Other perspectives are  
offered to the viewer/reader, but the  
issues not discussed in the catalogue are  
probably more interesting than the ones  
that are. With two essays by English-Can-  
adian art historians and introductions by  
VAG staff, the catalogue has nevertheless  
but one voice — that of Molinari himself.  
This voice seems contained, even con-  
tradicted by an uncertain method in his  
writing, yet Molinari's own influence  
over the choice of works — and thus the  
view they give of his production in the  
1950s seems to have been considerable.  
All but four of the sixty-one works in the  
exhibition belong to the artist who, as  
author of the catalogue proper — that  
is — the list of works, is the real  
organizer/curator of the exhibition. But  
whatever the reason, the catalogue con-  
tains not a shred of the concerns or  
insights of the "new art history," one of  
whose special territories this period of  
modernism has become.



Guido Molinari,  
*Binoir*, 1955,  
oil on canvas,  
60 × 75 cm;  
photo: courtesy of  
Vis\*Art Copyright Inc.

Instead, we learn of struggle and development; of the "landmark breakthrough"; of the achievements of genius. This sort of exercise, which privileges artistic intentionality within the limits of a watered-down Hegelian progression, is in increasing disrepute, for it severs artistic production from other economies and ideologies. These not only strongly affect the making of works of art, but determine how works of art are received. While the catalogue avoids this kind of contextualization, it also eschews a direct explication of Molinari's claim that his paintings contain a truth value. The painstaking descriptions of the aesthetic phenomenology which the works "express" inevitably fails because of this avoidance. That is, the claim that abstraction, particularly in the case of Molinari's practice, will hold the potential to transform man and society is embedded in the core of the tradition of which Molinari sees himself a part. This belief is at the centre of this artist's intentionality. But it is an aspect of the work which is merely, albeit with discomfort, accepted in the catalogue. Molinari's "truth" has utopian and spiritual aspects postmoderns love to disparage. But presenting the work in terms of a "secularized" aesthetic ignores a large part of their poetic and also disallows the appearance of those contradictions which contain the real connections between Molinari's paintings and history.

The texts in the exhibition catalogue, therefore, display more symptoms of cultural disquietude than they attempt to analyse. High on the agenda of both Robert Welsh and James Campbell is the claim that Molinari was as advanced as his American contemporaries. On occasion the giddy prospect that Molinari was more advanced is given an airing. But, in the main, the arguments serve to demonstrate Molinari's distinctiveness and non-derivation from the New York School. In such a spirit Welsh claims that *Juxtaposition* (cat. 14) 1954 (not reproduced in the catalogue), "...in terms of the all-over principle transcends the work of Jackson Pollock..." that the black and white paintings constitute a "landmark breakthrough" for "a pioneer in the use of Hard Edge style." Simply put, this construction of history claims an historical progression beginning with Cezanne, then Cubism, then Mondrian, then Pollock and finally, but not necessarily exclusively, Molinari.

Molinari's distinctiveness is not only argued in the texts. It is argued by the absence of certain kinds of work. Comparisons between Barnett Newman and Molinari are dismissed and the paintings which provoke this comparison are not in the exhibition. Molinari may have transcended Pollock's all-over style in 1954, but in 1955 he could still make a very fine

Pollock pastiche, (cat. 4 in Théberge, 1976 NGC Retrospective) also not in this show.

The catalogue authors refer to comparisons with Franz Kline which greeted the black and white works when they were first seen. Welsh notes that both Borduas and Molinari "have been seen as indebted to the model of Franz Kline in their turn towards a use of black and white pigmentation and simplified planar structures, without any supporting evidence or rationale being offered." But a black and white palette and simplified planar structure are not minor incidents in the works in question. Elsewhere, even Welsh seems tempted by the need to invoke Kline, "one might describe them [the 1958 works] as a hard-edge version of the art of Franz Kline." This is quickly qualified, "although a casual influence seems unlikely." James Campbell is more emphatic. In reference to Rodolphe de Repentigny's review of the 1956 *L'Actuelle* exhibition, Campbell asserts, "his remarks... were... an important prophylactic for the puerile comparisons some critics made at the time with the work of Franz Kline." Who were these critics? According to Pierre Théberge's 1976 retrospective catalogue, which also brings up the Kline comparison in order to dismiss it, they were de Repentigny himself and Noël Lajoie (p. 21). It is difficult to understand the longevity of de Repentigny and Lajoie's casual comparisons — comparisons made to serve a naive but hardly malevolent descriptive function. What is really wrong with comparing Molinari's black and white works, especially, the architectonic works of 1958, with the paintings of Franz Kline? Is it just that Kline is American and that an argument needs to distinguish the Montréal context from that of New York? Admittedly, Molinari's work looks less like Franz Kline's as time goes on. One wonders if they ever really did.

Molinari's own, earlier ink drawings were used by Théberge as the "substitute" for Kline, once this influence is denied. This is what might be on Campbell's mind when he states that he wishes to demonstrate "that Molinari's early but, one might suggest, already entirely mature work, bears the stamp of that implacable logic of vision that is impressed on all his subsequent work." In short the work, according to the views expressed here, gains in importance the more it can be seen to unfold from itself and not by means of the outside stimulation of the New York school. The construction of Molinari's formal development has a familiar ring to it. The struggle to destroy that remnant of pictorial illusionism which still remains in Mondrian for the sake of what is concrete, actual and abstract is part of the modernist discourse of the late

1940s and 1950s. The most important articulation of the value of painting's potential for self-criticality and autonomy was Clement Greenberg. Greenberg's name does not appear in this catalogue although surely not only the artist but the writers owe something of their strategy to him. Of black and white, Greenberg, in 1955, wrote these well known admonitions. "The abstract expressionist emphasis on black and white represents one of those exaggerations or apotheoses which betray a fear for their objects" or "Black and white is the extreme statement of value contrast, and to harp on it as many of the abstract expressionists do — and not only abstract expressionists — seems to me to be an effort to preserve by extreme measures a technical resource whose capacity to yield convincing form and unity is nearing exhaustion" ("American Type Painting," 1955). If I read these passages correctly, Greenberg claims that black and white always signifies construction of form in painting and thus, in abstract work, indicates a regression to spatial illusionism. Coming from the source they do, perhaps these admonitions contain the potential to diminish the uniqueness of Molinari's achievement in the black and white works. Their success rests on the equivalence of the figure/ground relationship, at least in the 1955 works; the 1958 paintings resort to architectonic metaphors. Whether or not this equivalence destroys Euclidian space is as much a matter of faith as it is of perception. The description of the works argues that they have deconstructed form, explored intuitive and energized space, that they "communicate existentially" with the viewer, that they attempt to strip painting "of any ideological bias"; that they achieve "dynamic surface equilibrium — rather than static balance," that they have a radical and "even unprecedented clarity." Whether this is a source of astonishment and pleasure, however, is entirely a matter of culture and discourse. Molinari's work at this time follows the modernist aspiration for pure, child-like, unmediated communication, "non-verbal" and absolute. This is the ideological bias the works contain; for their language is, as Greenberg suggests of the black and white phenomenon as a whole, metaphorical.

Molinari's interest in non-verbal communication originates, we are told, with an experience in 1951.

He awoke late one night with the feverish compulsion to write. He wrote a text that he found extraordinarily meaningful and fell asleep. The next morning he went to the text and found it wholly illegible. Nor could he recollect the nature of what he had written. But what was most striking, for him, was an awareness that it still bore the imprint of that originary desire that drove him to write; that is, the explicit content was missing but the implicit non-

verbal communication remained.

Perhaps Molinari experienced a similar epiphany when he read, while convalescing from tuberculosis as a teenager, this passage in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*: "Art is not an imitation of nature but its metaphysical supplement, raised up in order to overcome it."

There are in these stories and in the early activities like the making of paintings while blindfolded, metaphors of faith. "There is a greater anguish and a more profound universalism in taking into account the tragic evolution of painting than in being disinterested with it." Molinari wrote in 1955, "To be universal, art must not be only defined within the relation of Man and Universe and the plastic universe in particular," meaning, I guess, that only abstract painting which aims to utterly dispell the pictorial illusion of space bears the relation to universality Molinari seeks. This universality is a cultural myth. It disguises history but its construction is "history." The emergence of modernist aesthetics based on universal truths in reaction to Borduas' *automatiste* practices in the Montréal of the 1950s is parallel with the decline of an aesthetic which sought to challenge the status quo in Québec and its replacement by one which wished to consolidate a "Canadian aesthetic." The aim of the 1955 *L'Exposition de peinture canadienne*, which Molinari helped organize was to reveal "the components of an art which might properly be called Canadian." Perhaps there is embedded in Borduas' work too many regional, "provincial" concerns, which will always tie his work to Québec's nationalist aspirations. Molinari's work, seeking universality also wishes to preside over a larger "Canadian" notion of identity as its site of cultural distinctiveness. The discursive framework for the work tends to muffle and silence the very real tensions in Québec about Canada, implying that the works serve higher, non-ideological goals. The exhibition would have been more interesting if it had explored these issues. The need to confirm Molinari's stature is too evident; as it is a need which only raises the spectre of his insignificance. Do we look at Molinari's works in order to feel Canadian or do we look at them, as Molinari suggests, to experience a purifying reduction?

There is probably room for a multiple response. The works are impressive and exacting within their own logic, although it is impossible to accept their spiritual and utopian claims. We look for other, perhaps social, pressures to explain their other qualities: like the non-porous, enamel surfaces. In terms of Canada, a sense of unease is created by an English construction of a history that belongs to Montréal.

— SCOTT WATSON

## ESPACES RÉVÉLATEURS

Ginette Bouchard, *Témoins silencieux (1984-1988)*, Maison de la culture Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, du 26 janvier au 26 février 1989. Michel Campeau, *Les Tremblements du cœur*, Galerie Dazibao, du 23 novembre au 18 décembre 1988. Freda Guttman, *Cris et chuchotements (1980-1982)*, Galerie Dazibao, du 1<sup>er</sup> au 26 mars 1989. Louis Lussier, (*sans titre*), Galerie Oboro, du 19 novembre au 18 décembre 1988. Geoff Miles, *Foreign Relations: Re-Writing a Narrative in Parts*, Galerie Optica, du 26 novembre au 18 décembre 1988. Normand Rajotte, «*Dans les coins oubliés, à la recherche des dieux tranquilles*», Galerie Dazibao, du 1<sup>er</sup> au 26 février 1989. Sylvie Readman, *Inventaire d'une image*, Galerie Oboro, du 12 janvier au 5 février 1989. John Di Stefano, *Désirs-Idées*, Galerie Articule, du 4 au 29 janvier 1989. Anne-Marie Zepetelli, (*sans titre*), Galerie Dazibao, du 1<sup>er</sup> au 26 mars 1989.

### LIMINAIRE

Plutôt que m'essayer à une apologie de la chronique, je préfère m'en remettre à ce jugement tranquille, extrait de la chronique *Corps scéniques* de Gilbert David: «La chronique est un art hybride, à l'intersection de l'essai et de la critique.» Après tout, les pages qui vont suivre peuvent sans peine y acquiescer. La photographie même, me semble-t-il, pourrait s'y inscrire. Sise au carrefour de la pure reproduction technique et de la représentation sémiotique, elle a été l'objet, ces dernières années, de nombreux débats que ne feront sûrement pas diminuer la création du Musée canadien de la photographie contemporaine à Ottawa et cette année-événement de la photo (1839-1989).

Cette nouvelle chronique, baptisée «Espaces révélateurs», s'est attribuée un certain nombre d'objectifs. Le premier en est encore au niveau expérimental; il s'agit de trouver un ton et d'essayer un discours critique sur la photographie. Cet objectif de tenter une parole et de forger, peut-être, un vocabulaire qui lui soit spécifique, ne doit pourtant pas se refuser à intégrer tout ce qu'un nouveau discours critique sur l'art a pu apporter à nos connaissances artistiques et aux outils critiques qui s'y mesurent. Le savoir théorique, tout autant que la connaissance pratique du médium, me permettront —

du moins, je l'espère! — d'approcher cette symbiose. C'est dire que le ton de cette chronique ne sera ni purement descriptif ni uniquement spéculatif. Aidée d'une certaine pensée critique, il faudra, de la description même des travaux commentés, tenir une parole critique et faire décoller l'œuvre du descriptif pour l'approcher de sa portée symbolique. Tout cela est affaire de langage, évidemment; de celui que l'on tient sur quelque chose. De force, quasiment; comme on le ferait d'un masque. C'est pour cette raison, et aussi à cause de la fortune théorique des sciences du langage, que la logique discursive de certaines opinions, de certaines praxis, sera aussi abordée. La pratique, oui, bien sûr; mais aussi la logique qui la soutient.

Cet angle d'approche explique aussi mon titre. L'«espace révélateur» est aussi celui du papier sur lequel viennent tout aussi bien s'inscrire images et mots; espace, dans un cas comme dans l'autre, laissé à la pensée et au réel pour se représenter. (Un survol exhaustif des expositions photographiques montréalaises n'est pas mon propos. Certains événements seront donc écartés non par manque d'intérêt, mais parce qu'ils ne sembleront pas faire partie de l'ensemble plus ou moins coordonné de la réflexion sur une praxis photographique artistique.)

### RHÉTORIQUE DE L'IMAGE

Il y a une tendance chez les jeunes photographes à tirer partie des effets les plus essentiels du médium; comme ceux du genre très grossier qu'un novice se met aussitôt à expérimenter. Ils font ainsi leurs premières armes sur des épreuves solarisées, avec images négatives et collages. Essayant de raviver un certain intérêt pour cette magie candide, ils en tirent souvent des images à mi-chemin entre une naïveté voulue, volontiers pataude, et une originalité baroque.

Louis Lussier, à Oboro en automne dernier, est de ceux-là. Ses images négatives, parfois brouillonnes, affectionnent le *set up* apparent d'éléments simples, isolés; sorte de *still photography* gauche dont il montre le travail grossier. Ces épreuves ont le caractère un peu hésitant et artisanal des premières photographies du siècle dernier. Ces vétustes impressions par simple contact (non par négatif interposé) et leur procédé de *print out*

(on lave, du papier, les solutions chimiques qui n'ont pas réagi plutôt que de révéler chimiquement l'image par réduction des sels métalliques) donnaient cette même apparence fruste de papier sommairement imprégné de solutions.

Ces effets premiers sont la rhétorique même du médium photographique. Outils essentiels bien qu'un peu oubliés par la vague des multidisciplines (il ne faut pas oublier que les arts visuels et l'histoire de l'art ont cherché, à une époque de doute spéculatif et d'autoreprésentation critique, leur contestation dans l'image photographique; ils y ont vu un exemple parfait d'une certaine instrumentalisation et mass médiatisation de l'art), ils réapparaissent aujourd'hui comme cherchant une nouvelle spécificité du médium, à partir de ses plus obligeants et bêtes «effets spéciaux» (pour ne pas dire spécieux!).

L'exposition de Sylvie Readman à Oboro en janvier dernier, intitulée *Inventaire d'une image*, allait dans le même sens, bien qu'utilisant des moyens fondamentalement différents. D'une maison louée aux États-Unis pendant l'été, elle avait ramené des photos qui, mieux observées, témoignent de la position d'étranger des estivants. «Nous avons vécu parmi ces objets pendant une semaine dans une relative indifférence. [...] Toutes ces choses et effets personnels laissés pour les besoins de la location, témoignaient en fait de l'absence des propriétaires et nous renvoyaient notre image d'intrus dans ce lieu.» (Extrait du communiqué de presse de l'exposition.)

Intriguée par cette indifférence, elle revisite la maison à l'aide d'une image qu'elle recadre et agrandit au moyen de plusieurs générations à la photocopieuse couleur. Ce faisant, elle tire un parti outrancier du *blow up* photographique bien connu (merci à Antonini!). Ces éléments rhétoriques primaires de stylisation de l'image achèvent donc de rendre à tout jamais étrangère cette maison scrutée à la loupe. D'agrandissement en agrandissement, le grain devient outrageusement présent, déformant les objets, les déréalisant à l'extrême. Il n'y a plus de commune mesure entre le petit pot de fleurs posé sur la table et la copie granulée d'un quelconque objet rondet aux contours imprécis et à la couleur indéfinissable, modifiée, menacée par le grain multicolore. Cette violence faite à l'image devient presque une allégorie sentencieuse de l'impératif de la vision et de l'importance de la lumière ici décomposée en un spectre visible en chaque grain. Granulation, texture, contraste et couleurs sont les constituantes les plus essentielles et les moins discutées de la photographie. Ils subissent ici un choc et un joug qui en illustrent toute la portée. Cette rhétorique est constitutive du

médium et on ne peut plus la voir, ainsi qu'on l'a fait à la fin du siècle dernier, comme un pastiche du pointillisme impressionniste. On ne peut plus limiter la rhétorique comme genre à une simple ornementation, à un tour de main supplémentaire et coquet (cette vision est encore celle qu'on entretient à l'égard de la rhétorique; alors qu'elle aussi est l'art de penser du langage). Elle est une manière de constituer et de penser le réel reproduit.

J'ai réuni sous ce thème et pour les besoins de la cause l'exposition *Désirs-Idées* de John Di Stefano à Articule bien que son travail s'approche lui aussi des mécanismes d'appropriation par la photographie de démarches intellectuelles et émotives de la connaissance. Dédoublement d'identité et fragmentations corporelles viennent ici représenter l'univers particulier d'une recherche que la photographie s'approprie; indûment selon moi. Modulée ainsi, la photographie devient un simple support, apte à recevoir une multiplicité d'intentions sur lesquelles elle n'a que peu d'impact. Ce qui lui manque alors, c'est une forme perçue comme *nécessaire* à cette expression. Cette démarche, rendue sensible par les explications périgraphiques de l'exposition par le report de citations érudites, se borne à un objectif personnel que le médium illustre mais ne relance pas. Elle s'y greffe dans une relative indifférence.

### LIEUX FÉTICHISÉS

À première vue, les expositions qui suivent semblent participer du pur processus de «monstration» de la photo. Le commentaire en est absent; l'interprétation possible, réduite au niveau zéro. Elle montre, voilà tout! Et pourtant...

Celle de Ginette Bouchard en est un exemple. Intitulée *Témoins silencieux*, elle réunit des photos réalisées selon un procédé au platine très en vogue vers la fin du siècle dernier. Découvert en 1873, celui-ci est disparu du marché vers 1916 à la suite d'une hausse phénoménale du coût du platine. L'avantage de cette technique réside dans le fait que ce sel métallique, au contraire du sel d'argent plus obsolète, est très stable. Sa longévité peut aller très loin (trois cents ans, disent les experts).

La partie la plus révélatrice de l'exposition, et qui dépasse le seul intérêt des «alternative processes», est celle de la série dite des «témoins silencieux». À l'aide des ruines de villas américaines de Sarasota pastichant maladroitement l'architecture italienne ou grecque, d'un atelier de sculpteur déserté à Stuttgart ou des sépultures à l'abandon du cimetière de Montmartre, les photographies de Ginette Bouchard monumentalisent le temps. Elles suspendent le sens histori-

que du devenir social, autant, d'ailleurs, que le fait la simple existence des villas croquées, elles-mêmes véritables erreurs historiques. Erreur ou détour temporel, snobisme écartelé peut-être aussi, la pratique «alternative» de Ginette Bouchard dépasse la marginalité de processus techniques *revisited*. Une certaine part d'autospéculation entre en jeu dans ce suspens apparent du sens (Jean Arrouye, «Crise en photographie», *Etc*, vol. 7, p. 30-32) et cette monumentalisation du temps figé contamine jusqu'à notre conception de la photo. Retour sur une pratique de pure monstration, sur cette «coalescence du signe et du sens» (Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'Image précaire. Du dispositif photographique*, Paris, Seuil, 1987, 220 p.) que célèbre la pratique intemporelle de Weston, par exemple, le désir de fixer au-delà du temps l'essence même de la chose vue, échappée des contingences temporelles, le *sub specia aeternitatis*, est ici apparent. Même la très grande longévité de l'épreuve, inaltérable et indifférente aux intempéries du temps, reproduisant ruines et tombes, présente le procédé comme partie prenante, témoignage critiqué (finement et ironiquement) de cette interprétation. Ma seule réserve, c'est que cette finesse ne fait pas taire la fétichisation pure et simple du procédé remis à jour. Il nous reste à pousser plus loin le travail critique commencé sur les possibilités virtuelles, fussent-elles rhétoriques, plastiques ou autres, de ces procédés anciens, passé la mélancolie érudite des fans de l'instant figé.

Le travail de Normand Rajotte, présenté à Dazibao, va aussi à l'encontre d'une certaine forme de représentation monumentale du monde inerte. Les sites qu'il a photographiés ne sont pas composés ni extraits du réel ou harnachés d'une perfection glacée dans la reproduction de l'échelle des contrastes. L'hyperstylisation d'un Ansel Adams, par exemple, opérée à partir d'une instrumentalisation — promue au rang artistique — de la technique photographique, n'est pas du ressort de cette exposition. Bien au contraire, d'une photo à l'autre, on a la curieuse impression d'un déjà-vu. C'est que cette saisie de lieux archétypaux ne les isole pas de leur environnement. On se surprend à les suspecter d'être des photos réintégréées aux lieux qu'elles ont saisies et, ainsi restituées, photographiées à nouveau. Le monde, de catalogué et reproduit froidement qu'il était, redevient foisonnement, multitude.

Ce refus d'isolement formel finit par brouiller les traits maîtrisés attribués à la «belle» photographie. Ce refus d'une saturation sémantique résulte en son contraire; une désémantisation qui, elle, n'est qu'apparente. Cela suppose une attitude philosophique totalement inverse. Dans



Normand Rajotte, 1987,  
*Dans les coins oubliés,  
à la recherche des  
dieux tranquilles*,  
photo n. et b.

le refus de la quintessence révélée dans l'ultime du moment, transparait un certain retour d'une «présentation du sujet en tant qu'infini en devenir» (Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *op. cit.*, p. 175). Cette modélisation archétypale — ces temples de la nature — va donc à l'encontre d'un moment bien particulier de monstration froide, indigente et perçue comme spécificité absolue de la photographie.

#### NARRATION

Le courant narratif en photographie soulève encore passions et interrogations. Certains y voient un abandon de la spécificité du médium, un asservissement à l'endroit du littéraire. D'autres célèbrent la possibilité retrouvée d'en venir à l'auteur-photographe.

Michel Campeau, à Dazibao, offre sans doute la plus belle preuve de la pertinence de cette vision. *Les Tremblements du cœur* réunissent quelque cinquante photos réparties en séries autonomes mais complémentaires. Chacune est introduite par une courte strophe qui guide le lecteur (pardon! le spectateur!). Issues d'albums de famille, de vacances familiales, de plateaux de tournage et d'écrans de cinéma, ces photos poursuivent une même quête, posent une même question: celle de l'origine. La plus grande force de cette série est d'imposer rapidement sa thématique, avec une part d'ombre dans la succession des séries; petit jeu ou petit jour dans les liaisons sémantiques opérées conjointement par les images et les textes (à moins que ce ne soit que de simples sous-titres?). Le plus étonnant et le plus touchant dans cette opération, c'est de voir l'écran du papier devenir un étrange miroir sans tain. L'objectif de Michel Campeau le porte à se représenter lui-même. Nous devenons ainsi à notre insu photographes nous-mêmes, voyeurs invités timidement par le

véritable photographe. Le papier frémit de tous ces regards qui s'échangent par-devers lui. Cadre traversé, prisme violé, l'appareil n'existe plus. Notre œil est conduit et contrôle la vision d'un monde, en découpe la chair. Cette main qui soutient l'appareil, le bras flou sis aux confins du cadre, est-ce l'indice d'une invitation à traverser le miroir? Est-ce une main tendue? Chose certaine, cette illusion du contact tactile est troublante. Nous sommes regardés en train de voir *qui* nous incite à le dévisager ainsi. Chassé-croisé des regards par-delà l'appareil!

Comparativement à ces *Tremblements*, les *Foreign Relations*, sous-intitulées *Re-Writing a Narrative in Parts* de Geoff Miles, présentées à Optica, m'ont fortement déçu. Ses cinq panneaux regroupant chacun cinq photographies établissaient une certaine forme de narration, appuyée en cela par le renforcement des allusions littérales. Cinq narrations suivaient donc un cours parallèle, entachée du commentaire périphérique des autres séries.

Cet essai trop formel souffrait des aléas d'une écriture froide. Désireux d'écrire le monde en ces formations idéologiques, en ces clichés les plus ouverts, Geoff Miles a péché par outrance d'intellection. Son travail reste un essai valable mais trop sérieux et trop pédagogique: l'antichlimax d'une narration tremblée.

Une même déception m'attendait pour la série de Freda Guttman: *Cris et chuchotements (1980-82)*. Ici, le travail a si manifestement changé, s'est si fortement modifié en cours d'élaboration que le regroupement des images ne semble plus possible. La dernière série de petites photos couleur, réunies en un seul grand encadrement, est plus convaincante. En celle-là, enfin, la femme et le voile, cette vitalité de l'intime et du drapé, du camouflé à demi, présente un plus grand intérêt. Ce qui déçoit quand même, c'est

que les préoccupations datent un peu. Un tel type de regard autobiographique où chaque image devient miroir pour l'auteur-sujet et fenêtre obscure d'alcôve pour le spectateur, cette distance étrange du regardeur au représenté, est une duperie qu'on a depuis lors démasquée ou pointée du doigt ou commentée plus heureusement. Cette sorte d'image-obstacle qui ne sait que tirer partie de la fonction de voyeur laissée comme seule possibilité au spectateur me semble dépassée. Seule sa dernière série, comme je l'ai dit, semble reconnaître cette caractéristique. Le drap s'y fait omniprésent jusqu'à nous faire croire qu'il est effectivement drapé sur l'image, qu'il l'enrobe et nous la dissimule. Enrobée puis dérobée: l'image trouble notre perception.

Quant à cet objectif revendiqué par l'artiste de vouloir représenter «des objets de relations domestiques parlant de l'expérience féminine», il me semble que le retour fréquent, plus haut, du terme de «voyeur» le commente déjà assez. Ajoutons qu'il est clair ici que cet effort manque sa cible. L'appareil n'est plus ici qu'un miroir plat, il ne commente ni ne critique. Miroir du côté du producteur-sujet de l'image, il devient vitre dérobée du côté du spectateur. L'appareil renvoie à leurs images respectives chacun des deux pôles de la représentation. Confiner l'un et l'autre des adhérents à leur rôle, les renvoyer à des univers de sens que l'opération de saisie n'altère pas; le sens et la finalité d'une œuvre ne sont certainement pas là.

Sur l'autre mur de cette salle, Anne-Marie Zeppetelli rencontrait mieux son objectif. Présentation d'un journal intime en images, où l'une va même jusqu'à s'acaparier un poème, son exposition regroupait des photos diverses et rejoignait un parcours en zig-zag. Les larges photos couleur aux teintes chaudes, jaunes et rougeâtres regroupaient miroirs, colifi-

chets, babioles, doux riens et souvenirs. Comme provenant d'une table de chevet chaque jour dérangée par une main qui s'y maquille, un regard qui se noie en son miroir. Ici, le miroir est hors champ, la plupart du temps, hors cadre. Aucune complaisance en ces images mais de la pudeur, beaucoup de pudeur. On ne s'y étale pas; on suggère. On n'y célèbre rien; on questionne. Et on ne pousse pas la naïveté jusqu'à espérer voir s'y retourner un sens trop strict. Certaines images sont ainsi des coups d'œil lancés à l'extérieur avec, comme avant-plan, une image transversale dont on ne peut rien distinguer. Proviens-elle d'un simple reflet, ou est-ce le pourtour flou d'un carreau? À moins que ça ne soit un collage embrouillé! Ici, la fenêtre vibre, reprend à son compte le travail même du viseur. Elle aussi retourne et renvoie une image. Comme si elle s'efforçait de devenir verre de visée, cette plaque givrée qui arrête et fige les images, nous les offre aussi à apprécier, à juger ou à écarter. Elle est cette plaque vibrante où s'accomplit le choix des images. Elle est l'avant-saisie, l'avant-cristallisation de ces choix sur le celluloid. Puis interviennent une série d'images noir et blanc, proprement carrées et où les sujets se bâtissent un intérieur. Photos d'ombre et d'intériorité, où chevelure, visage flou, cuisses nues obscurcies par l'ombre de tout le corps penché, cachent en la révélant une intimité proposée avec pudeur.

Ces images ont la très grande qualité de tenter de bâtir une narration en respectant et en jouant de toutes les possibilités typiquement photographiques. Elles construisent leur objet à l'intérieur du cadre limité de l'appareil. La narration qu'elles ébauchent est encore maladroite, certes; elle hésite sans doute un peu encore. Mais elle essaie aussi (et c'est là sa force) de ne reposer que sur la rhétorique même du médium. Elles la recherchent et en fondent certaines bribes; bien que peut-être en s'y brûlant un peu les doigts et en y risquant à tous les coups une certaine cohérence. En bref, disons qu'elles n'escamotent pas les virtualités intrinsèques de l'image-photo pour ne dépendre que d'un langage plaqué sur elles comme un supplément... ou une béquille.

— SYLVAIN CAMPEAU

*Balzac, opus 2,*  
montage d'extraits de romans de Balzac;  
conception et mise en scène de Téo Spsychalski;  
production du Groupe de la Veillée,  
au Théâtre de la Veillée; photo: Richard Tongas.

## T H É Â T R E / T H É A T R E

### c o r p s s c é n i q u e s

La rédaction de PARACHUTE félicite Gilbert David dont le travail de chroniqueur théâtral a été reconnu à deux reprises cette année.

En effet, l'Association québécoise des critiques de théâtre lui a décerné le Prix Jean-Bérault pour la critique, dans la catégorie textes longs, pour la saison 1987-88 pour son article «Mémoires du théâtre», paru dans le n° 50 de PARACHUTE. Plus récemment, l'Association for Canadian Theatre History / l'Association d'histoire du théâtre au Canada lui accordait, à son tour, le French Language Essay Prize 1988, pour un article paru dans le n° 52 de PARACHUTE: «Une dramaturgie à deux vitesses».

## D'UNE SAISON L'AUTRE : LE FACTEUR MISE EN SCÈNE

### (I) Devant les œuvres du répertoire

À propos de *Roméo et Juliette*, d'après Shakespeare, adaptation de Pierre-Yves Lemieux; mise en scène de Serge Denoncourt; production du Théâtre de l'Opsis; à la Salle Fred-Barry, du 16 février au 18 mars 1989. *Autour de Phèdre*, propos et mise en scène de Jean-Pierre Ronfard; production du Nouveau Théâtre Expérimental; à l'Espace Libre, du 19 avril au 13 mai 1989. *Balzac, opus 2*, montage d'extraits de romans de Balzac; conception et mise en scène de Téo Spsychalski; production du Groupe de la Veillée; au Théâtre de la Veillée, du 10 au 27 février 1988. *La Belle Aubergiste (La Locandiera)* de Goldoni; mise en scène d'Albert Millaire; production du Théâtre Populaire du Québec; au Théâtre Centaur, du 8 au 19 février 1989. *La Cerisaie* d'Anton Tchekhov; mise

en scène de Guillermo de Andrea; une coproduction du théâtre du Trident et du Théâtre du Rideau Vert; au Théâtre du Rideau Vert, du 20 janvier au 13 février et les 19 et 20 février 1988. *Le Cycle des rois (Richard II, Henry IV, et Henry V)* de Shakespeare; mise en scène de Jean Asselin; production d'Omnibus; à l'Espace Libre, du 30 mars au 14 mai 1988. *Dom Juan* de Molière; mise en scène d'Olivier Reichenbach; production du Théâtre du Nouveau Monde; du 6 au 31 octobre 1987. *El gran teatro del mundo (Le Grand Théâtre du Monde)*, montage de textes du Siècle d'or espagnol; mise en scène de Jean-Pierre Ronfard; production du Nouveau Théâtre Expérimental; à l'Espace Libre, du 10 janvier au 25 février 1989. *L'Éveil du printemps* de Frank

Wedekind (traduction de Jean-Luc Denis); mise en scène de René Richard Cyr; une coproduction du Théâtre Petit à Petit et du Théâtre de Quat'sous; au Théâtre de Quat'sous, du 21 mars au 13 mai 1989. *Le Malade imaginaire* de Molière; mise en scène d'André Montmorency; production du Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, du 4 au 29 octobre 1988. *Le Mariage de Figaro* de Beaumarchais; mise en scène de Jean-Luc Bastien; production de la Nouvelle Compagnie Théâtrale; au Théâtre Denise-Pelletier, du 18 octobre au 30 novembre 1988. *Le Misanthrope* de Molière; mise en scène d'Albert Millaire; production du Théâtre Populaire du Québec; à Montréal, au Centaur, du 4 au 14 février 1988. *Phèdre* de Racine; mise en scène d'Olivier Reichenbach; production du Théâtre du Nouveau Monde; du 12 janvier au 6 février 1988. *Roméo et Juliette* de Shakespeare; mise en scène de Guillermo de Andrea; production du Théâtre du Nouveau Monde; du 11 avril au 11 mai 1989. *Songes d'une nuit d'été* de Shakespeare (traduction de Michelle Allen); mise en scène de Robert Lepage; production du Théâtre du Nouveau Monde; du 12 avril au 7 mai 1988. *La Tempête* de Shakespeare; mise en scène d'Alice Ronfard; production du Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes; à l'Espace GO, du 15 mars au 2 mai 1988.

Il y avait — et il y a toujours — des réputations usurpées, des gens qui n'ont rien à voir avec le théâtre, de faux metteurs en scène, de faux acteurs, de faux scénographes, etc., qui n'ont pas le moindre talent. C'est la corporation elle-même qui doit les démythifier, qui doit changer la vie des gens de théâtre. C'est elle qui doit se réévaluer.

Giorgio Strehler, *Un théâtre pour la vie*



## LA MISE EN SCÈNE, ENTRE LA TRANSPARENCE ET L'OPACITÉ

La mise en scène est un art de la mémoire: celle, centrifuge, du théâtre dans son fonds mythique et historique, mais aussi celle, centripète, d'un sujet-artisan dans son désir. C'est aussi un métier complexe qui réclame une grande polyvalence techno-esthétique, un esprit analytique et de multiples savoirs<sup>1</sup>. L'imaginaire scénique dont la mise en scène est le creuset a, pour se déployer avec quelque consistance, bien sûr besoin de s'appuyer sur une connaissance approfondie de l'être humain, mais cette plongée dans le domaine psychique doit, pour parvenir à une certaine élévation de la conscience, être doublée d'exigences dialectiques assez vertigineuses — ce que l'on pourrait pointer en nommant la transparence et l'opacité comme les deux pôles entre lesquels oscillent les choix d'un créateur scénique pour une représentation donnée<sup>2</sup>. De telles dispositions ne s'acquièrent pas du jour au lendemain. On ne s'improvise pas metteur en scène. Le théâtre au Québec se heurte à cet égard à une absence de tradition forte — la mise en scène moderne remonte ici à une quarantaine d'années tout au plus — et elle se bute, dans le milieu théâtral, à une persistante attitude anti-intellectuelle qui est faite d'un mélange indigeste d'ignorance bêtifiante et de mépris démagogique — du genre «Le public ne comprendrait pas.» ou «Le monde aime ça de même.»...

Sur un plan plus pratique, la mise en scène ne saurait être le résultat d'une simple addition: composer une distribution + diriger les acteurs + établir une mise en place. Ces trois tâches principales (il y en a d'autres), si elles sont essentielles, ne sont que des moyens en regard de la vision qu'on est en droit d'attendre d'un artiste. La maîtrise technique *prise comme une fin en soi* ne peut qu'engendrer des représentations qui masquent sous leur soi-disant «efficacité» leur manque de pertinence éthique, sociale et esthétique. Car la mise en scène, pour relever d'un art, doit aussi assumer une responsabilité qui se matérialise dans une «écriture» scénique où se manifestera une «morale de la forme»: ainsi, «[...] l'écriture est une fonction: elle est le rapport entre la création et la société»<sup>3</sup>. En ce sens, la mise en scène relève, dans sa matérialité même, d'un engagement: elle se signale à nous par sa politique du signe. Si on se dérobe à cette réflexivité, la démarche d'élaboration du discours scénique débouche sur un spectacle mondain (conventionnel) ou une célébration creuse (littérale) du Texte (alors sacralisé), même si, parfois, une virtuosité toute formelle parvient à jeter de la poudre aux yeux; en d'autres mots, la représentation théâtrale est alors victime d'une fixation

fonctionnelle: en apparence, donc, ça marche, mais à vide.

### METTRE EN SCÈNE LE RÉPERTOIRE: OÙ? QUAND? COMMENT? POURQUOI? POUR QUI? PLUSIEURS QUESTIONS SANS RÉPONSE

Prenons Racine. Olivier Reichenbach a voulu nous convaincre que sa *Phèdre* se passait vraiment en Grèce «vers le 15<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C.» (cf. le programme). Le décor monumental de Claude Goyette cherchait à fonder visuellement l'historicisation de la tragédie: le palais de Thésée était en grosses pierres de taille; un lourd escalier traversait le deuxième plan scénique et venait écraser les personnages de sa discutable «authenticité» archéologique. Les costumes pseudo-archaïques de Véronique Bornoën allaient dans le même sens: leur richesse, toutefois, était ridiculisée par le choix gratuit du metteur en scène de laisser les personnages pieds nus... en contradiction avec l'étalage complaisant d'une telle conscience vestimentaire. Par ailleurs, la mise en scène a voulu ritualiser la tragédie à travers la présence incongrue d'un trio de prêtres-musiciens qui y allaient de leurs petites simagrées liturgiques — Thésée aussi était montré dans ses rites, nous distrayant de l'essentiel. Mais la Grèce mycénienne est-elle vraiment l'ancrage historique principal d'un texte qui se penche sur les rapports entre le désir et le pouvoir? Racine n'est-il pas un auteur du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle aux prises avec des valeurs sociales «monstrueuses» dont sa tragédie exhibe les figures pour en «libérer» cathartiquement ses contemporains?<sup>4</sup> Qu'en est-il aujourd'hui? Quels sont les enjeux actuels de ce jeu tragique? Non, le metteur en scène ici fait dans la Grande Messe culturelle et il n'a, de toute évidence, aucune idée de ce qu'il est en train de monter. Plutôt que de parasiter l'univers racinien avec des effets pittoresques, Reichenbach aurait mieux fait d'apprendre aux acteurs à unifier leur manière de dire l'alexandrin, car c'est là, dans le matériau rythmique du vers et les images *textuelles* que se loge le défi artistique. Une telle recherche de la «couleur locale» pour des textes à caractère tragique est vaine — déjà Antoine la dénonçait dans sa fameuse *Causerie sur la mise en scène* de 1903. Quand on ne sait pas quoi dire, on fait du remplissage. Cette *Phèdre* boursoufflée et prétentieuse a eu, pour une fois, le sort qu'elle méritait: le public a dûment assassiné par des rires cette entreprise insensée.

Le même Reichenbach ne s'est pas mieux débrouillé avec le *Don Juan* de Molière. Malgré un décor qui tentait de dénoter l'actualité de l'œuvre en montrant un plateau flanqué de hauts murs de béton d'où sortaient des gargouilles —

une métaphore décorative qui se contentait d'être un clin d'oeil —, le spectacle est resté privé de toute tension, sans surprise et sans invention. La direction d'acteur a laissé Albert Millaire (*Don Juan*) à ses effets de voix (ou à ses clichés aristocratiques) et Anne Bédard (*Elvire*) à son inexistence corporelle et vocale. Seul Raymond Bouchard (*Sganarelle*) insufflait un peu de vitalité dans cette présentation paresseuse et superficielle. En fait, comme il arrive trop souvent au Québec avec les auteurs classiques, la mise en scène n'a fait ici qu'illustrer tant bien que mal l'écume du texte et n'est pas arrivée à matérialiser une interprétation conséquente. Au surplus, on n'arrive jamais à comprendre, devant de tels pensums scéniques, ce qui a conduit le metteur en scène à choisir cette œuvre plutôt qu'une autre, en quoi son choix fait sens pour lui et pour nous, ici et maintenant. Cette approche simpliste et anhistorique nous prive de toute relation vivante avec des œuvres nécessairement datées — une partie du plaisir ne vient-il pas des écarts que la distance autorise? Se réclamer de l'«universalité» des œuvres classiques est un alibi facile — pour ne pas avoir à risquer du sens? —, et on assiste, la rage au cœur, à une telle entreprise de liquidation par laquelle on se débarrasse des *différences* dont les grandes œuvres sont porteuses et qui doivent être prises en compte pour en réamorcer la charge symbolique, et nous parler.

### UNE IMPUDENTE MÉDIOCRATIE

*Le Misanthrope* et *la Belle Aubergiste* (*la Locandiera*) par Albert Millaire, *le Mariage de Figaro* par Jean-Luc Bastien, *la Cerisaie* et *Roméo et Juliette* par Guillerme de Andrea sont cinq autres exemples récents de mises en scène médiocres de textes classiques, à croire que ces praticiens ne connaissent du théâtre que ce qu'ils ont vu dans les sous-sols d'église des années cinquante. Ne peuvent-ils méditer l'enseignement des Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Craig, Appia? Comment peuvent-ils soutenir un tel amalgame de vieilleries et de généralités brouillonnes? Nous sommes en présence ici, ne nous le cachons pas, d'un provincialisme satisfait de son savoir-faire, d'un académisme vermoulu qui se donne des airs de grandeur en faisant payer la note à une société (qui mérite mieux) et d'abord à l'ensemble du milieu artistique qui compte des artistes autrement plus solides et mieux préparés, qu'ils ne le sont, à lire, ce qui s'appelle lire, des œuvres du patrimoine dramatique mondial.

Prenons quand même le temps d'examiner les failles de cette médiocratie théâtrale qui ignore être contemporaine des Strehler, Brook, Mnouchkine, Stein, Krejca, Vitez et Planchon, qu'on ne me

dise pas que ces grands metteurs en scène viennent d'ailleurs et qu'ils ont les moyens de leur imaginaire: qui s'en donne la peine peut les fréquenter, et l'argent n'a jamais donné ni enlevé du talent.

Albert Millaire ne s'embarrasse pas d'analyses, c'est un agent de circulation. Entre ses mains, *le Misanthrope* n'aura été qu'un être hautain, victime de son intransigeance, qui jetait son venin sur une aristocratie que le metteur en scène prenait plaisir à caricaturer jusqu'à se complaire dans la grosse farce de collège. Sans aucune subtilité, la majorité des acteurs débitaient leurs vers en oubliant de faire entendre la complexité de leurs affrontements. Or, à travers sa sincérité à toute épreuve, c'est «contre le mensonge qu'[Alceste] part en guerre, non contre le train de vie des courtisans qui l'entourent»<sup>5</sup>. Dans un décor qui se voulait luxueux mais qui donnait l'impression d'un salon de parvenu, lequel se serait entiché d'«antiquités» recyclées par la section Décoration de Radio-Canada, l'Alceste, joué aussi par Millaire, s'écoutait déclamer et, dans un costume austère de petit seigneur, faisait grise mine à tous les courtisans enrubannés, sortis tout droit d'un carnaval.

Le Théâtre Populaire du Québec affectionne le pompiérisme. Avec *la Locandiera*, Millaire substituait cette fois à la fine description par Goldoni des comportements de trois classes sociales dans leurs rapports à l'amour et à l'argent, un banal boulevard qui arborait le titre populiste de *la Belle Aubergiste*. Qui plus est, on avait installé cette mascarade sans âme dans un décor de carton-pâte dont l'italianité de carte postale en disait long sur les références plastiques et du scénographe et du metteur en scène. Pour tout dire, ce théâtre à rabais est demeuré effrontément indifférent au réalisme pré-moderne du texte goldonien et à la dynamique des objets qui désignent des conditions sociales antagonistes. Tout cela fut versé au compte du pittoresque, en une forme de séance appliquée. C'est là un théâtre tout ce qu'il y a de sclérosé. «Le pire, notait Peter Brook sur le théâtre embourgeoisé d'il y a déjà vingt ans et plus, c'est qu'il y a toujours un spectateur qui éprouve du plaisir devant un spectacle aussi lugubre.»<sup>6</sup>

Jean-Luc Bastien n'a pu faire mieux avec *le Mariage de Figaro*: il participait à un concours de joliesse — par exemple, tous les costumes, du comte Almaviva au simple jardinier, paraissaient sortir de chez le pressier: ce fut le triomphe de l'aseptisation. La direction du jeu est restée incolore et les personnages étaient comme des mannequins dans une vitrine de grand magasin. Je garde encore le plus vif souvenir de la production du Théâtre du Nouveau Monde par Jean-Louis Barrault

en 1972, lequel avait réglé avec minutie et vivacité cette «folle journée». Rien de tel avec le devoir ennuyeux que livrait Bastien. Son Almaviva (Robert Lalonde) y était, de bout en bout, un aristocrate dépassé par les événements, un hurluberlu égaré dans des appartements qui tenaient du clinquant plus que du raffinement luxueux : c'était se méprendre sur la détermination, la force de caractère et sur l'autorité du comte — que tous craignent avec raison. Pourquoi en faire un demeuré? Quant à Figaro (Guy Nadon), son jeu faisait au mieux dans la tradition du valet sautillant, nerveux et impertinent, au pire dans le cabotinage qui cherche à sauver la mise d'un spectacle dépourvu de colonne vertébrale et d'épaisseur.

Guillermo de Andrea complète ce trio de tâcherons avec deux pavés assommants : *la Cerisaie* et *Roméo et Juliette*. Le chef-d'œuvre de Tchekhov ne pardonne pas l'incompétence et les solutions de facilité. Faut-il rappeler l'insistance avec laquelle l'auteur a précisé qu'il avait écrit une comédie et non un drame larmoyant? Certes, sous le rire réclamé par le dramaturge, on peut trouver une couche d'émotions — en partie refoulée par les personnages — et de douloureux secrets, mais l'ironie tchekhovienne a tôt fait de dénoncer une mise en scène qui abandonnait les interprètes à la sensiblerie et aux trucs de composition. Situé dans un décor intemporel, d'une exigüité qui empêchait toute différenciation proxémique — le plateau du Rideau Vert a des limites qui devraient se refléter dans les choix de la programmation<sup>7</sup> —, cette *Cerisaie* était d'une platitude mur à mur, désespérante par la démission du metteur en scène face au ronronnement de ses acteurs.

*Roméo et Juliette* souffrait de la même imprécision dans la direction d'acteurs. La scénographie intelligente de Claude Goyette et les solides éclairages de Michel Beaulieu n'arrivaient pas à compenser pour une distribution faiblarde, à commencer par un Roméo (Roy Dupuis) mou et absent. Mise à part la fraîcheur et l'assurance d'une Geneviève Rioux en Juliette, on cherchait en vain dans cette superproduction bâclée une étincelle d'énergie vraie qui puisse nous convaincre que cette pièce vaut autant que le mythe qu'elle a engendré.

#### SHAKESPEARE : NOUVELLES TENTATIVES D'APPROPRIATION

Notre seul grand metteur en scène shakespearien depuis l'après-guerre aura été Jean Gascon, décédé en 1988. Mais depuis deux ans, après une très longue absence de la dramaturgie shakespearienne sur nos scènes, on a assisté à un renouvellement d'intérêt pour le réper-



*Le Cycle des rois* (*Richard II, Henry IV, et Henry V*) de Shakespeare; mise en scène de Jean Asselin; production d'Omnibus, à l'Espace Libre; photo : Pierre Desjardins.

toire du barde anglais. On a beaucoup parlé (et accueilli chaleureusement) le «printemps shakespearien 1988» qui a offert trois productions (et cinq pièces), réalisées par des créateurs de la nouvelle génération : Jean Asselin, Robert Lepage et Alice Ronfard. Tous trois ont ceci en commun qu'ils ne se sont pas, selon la célèbre formule de Brecht, laissé intimider par les classiques. Il en est résulté des spectacles inégaux, mais dont la vitalité interprétative, un rien iconoclaste, et la poésie scénique, faite d'images fortes, de contrastes audacieux et d'une rythmique bien maîtrisée, ont marqué un point tournant dans la courte histoire de la mise en scène au Québec.

Jean Asselin aurait pu être moins boulimique : bien qu'amputé de plusieurs scènes, son cycle des rois (*Richard II, Henry IV et Henry V*) s'étirait, en perdant du souffle, jusqu'au conflit franco-anglais de la bataille d'Azincourt (1415) et le mariage de Catherine de France à Henry V. Mais la clé de voûte de cette entreprise fut l'installation d'un dispositif scénique architecturé (conçu par Yvan Gaudin), une sorte de blockhaus hérissé de poignées d'appui et percé d'ouvertures de diverses dimensions, ce qui permettait à une troupe pourtant réduite de quatorze comédiens (pour quelque cent cinquante rôles) de renouveler sans cesse la dynamique des conflits et ce qui favorisait un jeu corporel rigoureux aux dimensions franchement épiques — un héraut, non présent dans le texte original, accentuait d'ailleurs la distanciation que la facture parodique des costumes et des accessoires (faits de bric et de broc) n'avait de cesse d'entretenir. Devant un tel parti pris ludique, on aurait pu craindre que le drame en sorte amoindri ou dévalué. Ici

et là, il est vrai, les excès burlesques, voire des gags proches du *slapstick* — surtout dans *Henry V* — menaçaient d'assimiler le propos shakespearien à un malencontreux *remake* de *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux*, mais dans l'ensemble la proposition d'Asselin tenait le coup : Shakespeare lui-même ne juxtapose-t-il pas la saine lâcheté d'un Falstaff aux discours hypocrites de comploteurs sanguinaires? La représentation réussissait notamment à mettre en lumière chez Richard (Jean Boilard) le destin d'un roi engagé dans une «Passion laïque» (N. Frye), comme elle a su rendre avec justesse le roman d'apprentissage du prince Henry (Nathalie Claude), entre Falstaff (Robert Gravel) et Henry IV (Jean-Pierre Ronfard). Au total, cette trilogie respirait la santé, l'énergie tonique, et il ne me reste plus qu'à souhaiter voir Asselin se colletter à d'autres projets d'envergure.

Pour sa part, Robert Lepage abordait avec *le Songe d'une nuit d'été*, une difficile comédie féerique. Sa réputation déjà bien établie de concepteur scénique de haute volée a eu un peu à souffrir d'une direction qui anesthésiait les relations amoureuses du quatuor des jeunes gens : Hermia (Hélène Mercier), Lysandre (René Gagnon), Démétrius (Jacques Lusier) et Hélène (Élise Guibault). Lepage s'en est peut-être trop remis à un ballet mécanique qui mettait à profit un dispositif scénique complexe : un plateau tournant, prenant la forme de l'île britannique, sur lequel étaient érigés trois escaliers en colimaçon de quatre mètres débouchant sur le vide cosmique d'une nuit étoilée. La traduction inspirée, musicale à souhait de Michelle Allen, la musique d'inspiration orientale de Daniel Toussaint, les costumes baroques de

Meredith Caron, la trouvaille d'un Puck (Markita Boies) accroché à une lune vagabonde, tout cela créait une atmosphère empreinte de merveilleux et de fantaisie. Mais le jeu, par ailleurs, allait du mauvais (Égée, Thésée et Hyppolyta), au passable (le quatuor déjà nommé), sans réussir à éviter l'insipide (Titania et Obéron), mais en préservant une bonne mesure de grotesque (surtout bien rendu par Rémy Girard en Bottom). L'imaginaire de Lepage, tout à fait à l'aise avec la machinerie et les jeux de scène brillants, s'est heurté ici à la magie du verbe shakespearien qui réclamait son dû : ce déséquilibre entre la facture visuelle et la prestation des comédiens aura entaché toute la représentation et empêché que le spectacle ne dépasse le niveau d'une froide fantasmagorie, privée des résonances charnelles et des pulsions sexuelles qui forment la substance de cette comédie des métamorphoses, véritable conte philosophique sur l'inconstance des sentiments amoureux et sur les appétits libidinaux.

De son côté, Alice Ronfard m'aura procuré un intense ravissement avec sa réalisation de *la Tempête*. Sans doute y avait-il dans sa distribution des points faibles — la cour d'Alonzo et le duo Stephano-Trinculo —, mais la réflexion sur le théâtre comme espace du Double, accueillait une expérience utopique concrète, qui ne saurait être qu'une île imaginaire certes, mais «où il n'y [aurait] pas de souveraineté et où pourtant chacun de nous [serait] roi»<sup>8</sup>, cette vision, d'un nouveau monde qui se réalisait sous nos yeux, était menée de main de maître. Pour commencer, Prospero était lui-même dédoublé en figure féminine active (l'excellente Françoise Faucher) et en narrateur, représentant l'Auteur (Gabriel Gascon) dont la

présence sur les trois écrans où se manifestaient les gestes magiques de l'ancien duc de Milan, renforçait la « méditation poétique sur les relations entre le langage, la réalité et la vérité »<sup>9</sup>.

Le théâtre cultivait ainsi sa précieuse appétence mythique tout en avouant ouvertement ses subterfuges et, si je puis dire, son mode d'emploi. C'est que, pour le Shakespeare de *la Tempête*, qui signe là, croit-on, son testament de dramaturge, l'œuvre théâtrale « devient discours sur le monde et discours sur elle-même »<sup>10</sup>. Dans son va-et-vient entre vérité et fausseté, certitude et incertitude, illusion et réalité, *la Tempête* questionne — et Ronfard à travers elle — la nécessité problématique d'une vision unificatrice de l'ordre moral (Prospero), social (Alonso) et naturel (Caliban). Or le pouvoir immense de Prospero (à travers un discours performatif qui impose par la force une réconciliation) se dénonce à la fin comme faculté intrinsèquement coercitive<sup>11</sup>, ce qui conduit le magicien, après qu'il eût d'abord libéré Ariel, à renoncer à sa puissance et, peut-on penser, à restituer par son départ son île à Caliban. D'où une fin douce-amère puisque le mariage annoncé de Ferdinand et de Miranda, qui célèbre le triomphe de l'amour, a pour pendant la prise de conscience par Prospero d'une dernière illusion concernant le monopole du sens, à savoir que « la vérité n'est pas une touchant les choses humaines, que le sens n'est jamais fixé hors d'une violence qui l'impose »<sup>12</sup>. Alice Ronfard, par une judicieuse intégration de la vidéo, de l'amplification sonore des voix et de la danse à l'action dramatique, a su restituer la réflexion shakespearienne, en exploitant toute la riche matière idéologique. Caliban, joué comme une furie par Louise Laprade, incarnait cette altérité toujours actuelle, comme signe d'une Femme expropriée de son espace symbolique, mais aussi comme métaphore de la féminité, sinon de l'instinct, face au monde administré (Prospero) qui a pris de nos jours un « visage humain » sans pour autant se priver d'imposer ses lois d'exclusion. À cela, Shakespeare-Ronfard répliquait que l'humanité aura toujours besoin d'utopie, mais en veillant à ce que celle-ci ne devienne jamais l'occasion d'une nouvelle domination. Pour notre plus grand plaisir, le théâtre incarnait ce lieu de changement, en avançant des possibles, tout en se sachant incapable de se substituer au monde réel.

Quelques mots, pour terminer, sur une autre expérience d'appropriation du texte shakespearien. Je veux parler de l'intéressante adaptation par Pierre-Yves Lemieux de *Roméo et Juliette*, dans une mise en scène de Serge Denoncourt. La représentation à laquelle j'ai assisté m'est apparue ne pas être jouée avec assez d'assurance — le rythme, aussi, y demeurait

cahotique. Néanmoins, j'ai été sensible à la réécriture qu'on nous proposait en choisissant de montrer les deux jeunes amants se donner la mort *ensemble*, à la manière d'un pacte de suicide aux échos très actuels. Dès lors, à l'encontre d'une fatalité dont, dans le texte d'origine, Roméo est le jouet, parce qu'il croit à tort que Juliette est morte alors qu'elle s'est plongée dans une profonde léthargie en buvant une liqueur funeste, Lemieux et Denoncourt ont opté pour une résolution plus directe — en renouvelant l'impact scandaleux d'un choix solidaire des protagonistes — qui pointe un doigt accusateur en direction d'une société — la nôtre — faisant fi de sa jeune génération qui retourne contre elle-même la violence structurelle dont elle est l'objet. Denoncourt, grâce à des chants chorals inquiétants et à un parti pris pour le récitatif, a orchestré ici un puissant lamento aux accents émouvants, au sein duquel une distanciation bien comprise mettait à nu l'intransigeance d'une collectivité enfermée dans sa loi aveugle; ainsi, dans l'attente de jouer l'une ou l'autre scène, les acteurs restaient à vue sur des bancs disposés de chaque côté de l'aire de jeu, construisant devant nous une fable réactualisée, tout en exhibant les ressorts cachés par des interventions réfléchies. En plus de renoncer au romantisme éculé dont on entoure trop souvent le célèbre couple tragique, *À propos de Roméo et Juliette* présentait une recherche rigoureuse qui confirmait que la mise en scène connaît ici un approfondissement critique qui, souhaitons-le, rejallira sur l'ensemble de la pratique théâtrale.

RONFARD, SPYCHALSKI,  
MONTMORENCY ET CYR :  
LE RÉPERTOIRE À RÉINVENTER

Il y a ceux qui font des pièces du répertoire comme par devoir ou pour s'attribuer une aura artistique à bon compte : ils gèrent le patrimoine dramatique en ne regardant pas à la dépense ostentatoire, mais sans rien lui donner en retour; en un mot, ils font du gaspillage. Il y a ceux qui retrouvent dans les textes majeurs de la tradition un tremplin à leur propre imaginaire : ils exercent leur métier dans le respect des enjeux symboliques des grands textes avec lesquels ils entrent en dialogue de façon serrée. Il y a aussi ceux qui poussent un peu plus loin leur questionnement des œuvres, qu'ils ne tiennent pas pour acquises et qu'ils labourent avec la ferveur des chercheurs de trésor, en prenant soin de toujours associer les spectateurs à leurs aventures, à leurs risques. Je voudrais maintenant accompagner quatre créateurs de la scène qui ont à l'égard du répertoire une approche provocante, mais au-delà en quelque sorte de l'opposition entre le

respect, même inventif, et l'irrespect primaire.

Ronfard, d'abord, un infatigable débuteur de nouveaux « anciens textes », a présenté cette saison deux spectacles étonnants de gravité et de simplicité, directs et insolents de dépouillement vrai : *Le Grand Théâtre du monde* (El grand teatro del mundo) et *Autour de Phèdre*. Ronfard pratique au contact de ces œuvres un art de l'essentiel. Il se trompe parfois, comme si son cuisinier prenait le dessus sur son démon<sup>13</sup>, mais on ne s'ennuie pas en sa compagnie, ni avec ses complices du moment. Ce n'est pas pour rien qu'il revendique si haut un travail autogestionnaire : il y trouve une énergie infiniment renouvelable que les gérants de l'industrie culturelle et certains directeurs artistiques de nos institutions théâtrales croient pouvoir acheter avec un coûteux plan de marketing et un discours inflationnaire, par attachés de presse interposés. Bref, coup sur coup, Ronfard a exposé un état des textes du Siècle d'or espagnol et des pièces sur Phèdre, de l'antiquité à Racine; il a fouillé ainsi dans la mémoire de l'espèce et il a redécouvert pour nous — en cultivant le don de l'émerveillement — le passage qui nous relie à des temps révolus. Pour *El grand teatro del mundo*, il met son monde à table — le public qui suit le jeu théâtral en contre-plongée est assis sur le pourtour d'un tréteau cruciforme : passions païennes et grands mystiques, sur fond d'Inquisition et de corrida. Lope de Vega, Calderon, Tirso de Molina tissent leurs éphémérides, mais ça n'est déjà plus tout à fait ailleurs ni autrefois puisque les mandarines que mangeaient à leur époque Don Juan et Christophe Colomb, nous les mangeons aussi, ici et maintenant, avec tout le reste : mantilles et mystères, or et sang, séduction et sacrifice. Quant à Phèdre, il y a, avec la franchise d'un coup au cœur, Marthe Turgeon, implacable, désespérée, souveraine, qui se jette avec ivresse et clarté dans la musique exigeante de l'alexandrin et dont toutes les cellules parlent dans l'enclos délimité par un ruban rouge, collé simplement par le maître du jeu au sol de l'Espace Libre. Ce sont là des moments quasi indicibles, de ceux qui marquent à jamais la fibre intime d'un spectateur qui sait écouter.

De son côté, Téo Sychalski poursuit inlassablement la quête de la plus grande authenticité possible pour l'acteur, au service de l'humain. Sa trajectoire, depuis son arrivée au Québec au début des années quatre-vingt, est impressionnante : de *Till l'espiègle*, *le journal de Nijinski* (1982) aux *Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge* (1988). On entend parfois dire au sujet du Groupe de la Veillée, où Sychalski a jusqu'à tout récemment établi ses quartiers, que la discipline y serait autori-

taire et que la création y serait trop encadrée... Est-il nécessaire de répondre à de tels préjugés? Il est vrai que Sychalski — quand on se donne la peine de lui parler — ne manque pas de mots cinglants pour qualifier le style de jeu et le mode de répétitions d'une grande partie de nos théâtres — avec les résultats que l'on sait. Comment lui donner tort, même si on peut ne pas adhérer à son esthétique. Pour ma part, j'ai toujours appris quelque chose de la vie de l'esprit et en assistant à ses spectacles j'y suis toujours stimulé à réfléchir sur le théâtre. Pour rester dans le cadre de ma présente réflexion, je voudrais considérer ici la recherche qui a conduit à *Balzac, diis ignotis*, de sa première version en 1985 à la plus récente que j'aie vue, en février 1988. Sur une période de trois ans, entrecoupée d'autres travaux, le spectacle balzacien s'est peu à peu épuré, resserré, densifié, en préservant une orientation sauvagement romantique où le sublime côtoyait le trivial, avec pour pivot fabuleux le destin de Raphaël, le jeune héros suicidaire de *la Peau de chagrin*. Un tel matériau romanesque offre une résistance certaine à la théâtralisation; la représentation se nourrit chez Sychalski de cette résistance : le metteur en scène se place dans une zone périlleuse où la littérature et l'être des acteurs, s'exacerbant l'un l'autre, comme deux entités apparemment irréconciliables, finissent pourtant, au prix d'une longue période de macération, par devenir un vibrant oxymore, un soleil noir, une obscure clarté dont la trace sémantique et les dépôts sensibles relèvent d'une rigoureuse alchimie rythmique. Par exemple, les correspondances entre la musique de Rossini et l'exaltation verbale et physique des actants du récit — qui s'affiche comme parabole —, ces correspondances ouvrent tout un champ de théorisation concernant une poétique de la représentation théâtrale — ce que je me promets d'explorer davantage prochainement. Pour l'heure, j'avancerai, d'une part, que ce type de travail radical — on comprend qu'il puisse rebouter les sentimentaux et agacer les histrions — pose la question fondamentale de la présence réelle/fictionnelle de l'acteur, et, d'autre part, que le théâtre, quel qu'il soit, trouve là un seuil brûlant qu'on ne peut éviter de considérer, sauf à vouloir perpétuer les formules culinaires et les recettes passe-partout.

J'ai gardé pour la fin l'examen du travail sur le répertoire de deux créateurs paradoxaux — André Montmorency et René Richard Cyr — que je respecte dans leur désir de remuer les braises de la tradition et qui, en même temps, me rendent perplexe du fait de leur penchant pour l'hyperbole, c'est-à-dire la surenchère dans le spectaculaire. La surthéâtralisation a certainement ses mérites, mais



*L'Éveil du printemps*

de Frank Wedekind

(traduction de Jean-Luc Denis);

mise en scène de René Richard Cyr;

une coproduction

du Théâtre Petit à Petit

et du Théâtre de Quat'sous,

au Théâtre de Quat'sous;

photo : Robert Laliberté.

NOTES

avec elle, la tentation est grande, me semble-t-il, de se servir de quelques images fortes pour ensuite en saturer le déroulement de l'action scénique, plutôt que de chercher à les ouvrir à des développements plurivoques, sinon à des oppositions articulées.

Pour un, André Montmorency a privilégié la farce dans *le Malade imaginaire* qu'il a complètement dépsychologisé. Avec son spectacle, nous étions à la foire — et un peu au music-hall — : l'hôpital où s'était réfugié Argan — à moins que celui-ci n'ait voulu transformer sa propre demeure en dispensaire pour mieux entretenir son hypocondrie? — était une auberge espagnole : s'y bousculaient des malades en goguette, cobayes d'une médecine expéditive, une Toinette (Pierrette Robitaille) envahissante, une Béline névrosée, une Louison vénéneuse et, bien sûr, l'apothicaire et tous les gens de robe. On riait beaucoup. Diafoirus père et fils, en couple burlesque, étaient manchots, chacun d'un bras différent. On jetait le produit des lavements d'Argan sur le pas de la porte, si bien que le devant de la scène qui figurait une rue en terre battue, était un bourbier que les visiteurs, le nez pincé, devaient franchir avec difficulté en passant sur des planches. Etc. Le spectacle envahissait toute la scène et les jeux parallèles étaient abondants, au point qu'on en perdait un peu de vue Argan... Mon premier mouvement devant une composition si étourdissante est qu'il ne faut pas boudier son plaisir — qui est si rare au théâtre. Mais le talent de Montmorency pour la mise au point de feux roulants pourrait aussi faire une place aux subtilités des caractères et au comique de mots; la surcharge d'effets parasitaires pouvait laisser une impression d'agitation gratuite. De même, l'idée d'intégrer à son programme déjà substantiel le person-

nage de Molière jouant Argan, réellement malade et bientôt agonisant, surveillé anxieusement par les membres de sa troupe (jouant tous les autres rôles), manquait finalement de crédibilité : il aurait fallu que la scénographie, les costumes, l'éclairage et le style de jeu reflètent concrètement cet ancrage historico-théâtral. En revanche, le long final avait l'ampleur d'un grand tableau tragi-comique : Montmorency faisait se succéder le triomphe affolant de la médecine et l'enterrement de Molière par la compagnie, mi-attristée mi-indignée, réussissant à évoquer par un cérémonial aux gestes éloquents l'époque où le métier de comédien était l'objet d'excommunication.

René Richard Cyr, pour sa mise en scène de *L'Éveil du printemps* de Wedekind, a aussi été attiré par la surcharge. La première partie imposait d'emblée une image saisissante, citant les angles aigus et la vision morbide de l'expressionnisme dont l'auteur allemand est le précurseur : une forêt d'arbres penchés, encore sans bourgeons, comme pétrifiés, entre lesquels se dressaient quelques pierres tombales, accueillait un groupe d'adolescents grouillants, maladroits, habités par leurs curiosités sexuelles naissantes, et s'épiaient les uns les autres, à l'affût du moindre secret, et se prêtant à des jeux pervers. Tous les acteurs étaient remarquables, entiers et impudiques, Anne Dorval (Wendla), Patrice Coquereau (Moritz) et David LaHaye (Melchior) en tête. La deuxième partie fut plus laborieuse — le texte lui-même n'y étant pas étranger : la mise en accusation par Wedekind d'une société obscurantiste tombait plutôt à plat, par son manichéisme facile, confronté à une société comme la nôtre où la problématique sexuelle a pour le moins changé de présupposés et où, également, les valeurs culturelles — que l'on pense

seulement à l'avortement — se sont, malgré tout, beaucoup déplacées... Il aurait fallu renoncer à l'image de la première partie plutôt que chercher à donner le change par des effets faciles (la fumée et la musique tonitruante); la redondance rattachée à l'image d'une Nature (morte?) s'accommodait mal de l'invasion des codes répressifs — en gommant du reste le contexte historique d'une Allemagne déjà militariste qui, par souci de productivité, contrôlait sévèrement les mœurs. En somme, Cyr est resté prisonnier d'un environnement qu'il a cherché à exploiter au maximum — jusqu'à faire ligoter les «méchants» adultes aux arbres. Bien curieusement, la bacchanale qui achevait le spectacle, pendant laquelle tous les adolescents, mais chacun pour soi, s'abandonnaient à des spasmes frénétiques jusqu'à s'écrouler d'épuisement, dévaluait involontairement le discours libertaire défendu jusque là, comme si cette soudaine décharge des instincts refoulés se soldait par un engourdissement bien proche de la mort. René Richard Cyr, heureusement, n'a pas ménagé ses acteurs qu'il a poussés à donner le meilleur d'eux-mêmes : son spectacle préservait ainsi une tension, même si le texte de Wedekind n'a pas été vraiment confronté à nos conditions de vie actuelle. Je souhaite que l'exigence admirable dont Cyr fait preuve dans la conduite de ses comédiens, puisse être reportée sur lui-même, ce qui le conduirait à intégrer à ses futurs projets — je ne doute pas qu'il les mérite — des éléments structurants qui fassent sens et qui donnent à sa vision une plus grande épaisseur.

(À suivre : II. Le théâtre d'images et l'écriture dramatique/scénique.)

— GILBERT DAVID

1. Sur les rapports au savoir instaurés par la mise en scène, voir le remarquable texte de Jean-Marie Piemme, «Savoir et pouvoir : la mise en scène», dans *le Souffleur inquiet*, Essais sur le théâtre, Bruxelles, Alternatives théâtrales 20-21 / Ateliers des Arts, 1984, p. 65-75.
2. Voir «La transparence-opacité du signe théâtral» dans *l'École du spectateur* d'Anne Ubersfeld, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1981, p. 43 sq.
3. Barthes, Roland, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, Paris, Gonthier, «Bibliothèque Médiations», 1965, p. 17.
4. Dans *Sur Racine* (Paris, Seuil, 1963), R. Barthes conclut son étude de *Phèdre* par cette phrase qui pourrait inspirer un travail scénique substantiel : «Tout l'effort de *Phèdre* consiste à remplir sa faute, c'est-à-dire à absoudre Dieu.», p. 122.
5. «Introduction» par Edouard Lop et André Sauvage, dans *le Misanthrope* de Molière, Paris, Éditions Sociales, coll. «Les Classiques du peuple», 1963, p. 77.
6. Brook, Peter, *L'Espace vide*, Paris, Seuil, 1977, p. 27.
7. On n'ose imaginer ce qu'y deviendra le *Richard III* monté par Brassard la saison prochaine...
8. Frye, Northrop, *Shakespeare et son théâtre*, traduction de Charlotte Melançon, Montréal, Boréal, 1988, p. 269.
9. Marienstras, Richard, «La littérature élisabéthaine du voyage et *la Tempête* de Shakespeare», dans *le Proche et le Lointain*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, coll. «Arguments», 1981, p. 255.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Même quand une action est posée, comme ici, au nom d'un Bien supérieur, il y a là l'aveu d'une usurpation du droit au libre arbitre — quoi de plus actuel dans un siècle qui a pratiqué la torture dans sa volonté de changer le monde «pour son bien».
12. Marienstras, *op. cit.*, p. 269.
13. Je fais ici allusion à la réflexion de Ronfard sur le théâtre, intitulée «Le démon et le cuisinier / Notes en vrac», que l'on trouve dans *Jeu*, n° 25, «Questions de mise en scène», Montréal, 1982, p. 25-39.

## PATERSON EWEN: PHENOMENA PAINTINGS 1971-1987 MONK'S DREAM

For the exhibition *Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings 1971-1987* the curator of the exhibition, Philip Monk, has written an introduction and an essay for the catalogue. The essay is divided into several sections, called respectively: I. Signs in the landscape; II. "How rain falls and how lightning works"; III. "Phenomena-scapes"; IV. Method; V. Image; and VI. Conclusion. The catalogue also contains extensive footnotes to the essay, a highly selective list of exhibitions and a chronology which states only: "1925 Born in Montréal, Quebec. 1947-50 Studied at Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, Montréal, Quebec."! The catalogue contains many colour reproductions and additional black and white ones of work by the artist and by Mike Snow and Robert Smithson. There are also smaller black and white figures of three of Ewen's large figure/portrait paintings (in my opinion, his masterpieces). None of these was included in the exhibition, so clearly the curator was focusing on another aspect of Paterson Ewen's painting.

### JUST A GIGOLO

In many ways Monk's essay is like a novel by a Canadian in which the Canadian references are omitted and replaced with American ones in order to satisfy a U.S. publisher. The following contemporary artists are mentioned in Monk's text: Snow, Smithson, Jackson Pollock, Richard Serra and Robert Morris. The lone Canadian contemporary of Ewen cited is Mike Snow, which is curious since there is really very little connection between Snow's works, or methods of working, and those of Ewen. Ewen's use of various materials and his methods of working are more traditional, including his emphasis on the transformation of those materials and his use of relatively familiar compositions. A much stronger case can be made for parallels between Ewen's paintings and similar, symmetrical works by Arthur McKay (*Effulgent Image*, 1961) and William Ronald (*Gitane*, 1959); that is, centred images with painted borders, and McKay's use of scraping on hard grounds to make an image.

Because of the emphasis on traditions of recent American visual art, Monk's essay fits into the long Canadian tradition

of sanitized and a-historical writing about individual artists, using what are imagined to be international criteria or canons of practice.



Paterson Ewen, *Self-portrait*, 1986,

acrylic on gouged plywood, 96" x 48"; photo: courtesy of Carmen Lamanna Gallery.

### EVIDENCE

In order to understand the significance of *Phenomena* to Paterson Ewen it is important to know something of his history and of the real context of his work and ideas; this is most certainly not provided by a two-line chronology. Ewen married the artist Françoise Sullivan (a signatory of *Le Refus global*) and he lived in Montréal with her and their children until 1967. His son Geoffrey has recalled that "I have a memory of everyone going out to look at meteor showers, or if there was a particularly beautiful moon that would be pointed out as something to

look at and see. There would be some discussion and excitement if there was the prospect of a comet." In the late fifties and early sixties he was closely associated with Guido Molinari, Claude Tousignant, Henry Saxe and Jacques Hurtubise who were the leading edge of Montréal visual art at the time. In 1967 he moved to London, Ontario where he has lived since, except for a few months in Toronto. Ewen is unique in this respect. There has long been a cordial relationship between Montréal and London artists, particularly Ewen's friends: Molinari, Tousignant, Saxe, Hurtubise and their contemporary Charles Gagnon. This relationship predates Ewen's move to London by about five years, but Paterson Ewen is the only Montréal artist to have actually moved to London and to have worked extensively there.

In London he quickly became a friend and colleague of most of the important artists working in that city, from David Rabinowitch to Jamelie Hassan.

### PLAYED TWICE

It is important to examine the influence of surrealism and phenomenology on artists in Montréal and London and to look at the extent to which phenomena were discussed in London. Perhaps this can provide us with part of the intellectual context of Ewen's work and ideas about phenomena, which Philip Monk has not done. London, in the forties and fifties was a small city of around 75,000; it did not have the wealth of contemporary painters, sculptors and intellectuals that existed in Montréal at that time. What was it about the climate in London that later led all the important artists there to become involved with visual phenomena and intensely interested in the significance of things seen? Why did they reflect constantly on things and ideas in the air and why did loaded and intense conversations erupt all the time, including 1967 when Ewen arrived?

Surrealism had an early influence in London dating from Selwyn and Irene Dewdney's friendship with Lionel Penrose who worked in London from 1938 to 1945; he was the brother of Roland Penrose, and a friend of Alix and James Strachey, translators of the Standard Edition of Freud's writings. Irene Dewdney has said recently that surrealism was a consuming interest for both her and her husband, and coincided with the first publication of Freud in English; this interest carried forward into their pioneering work with art therapy in the late forties at Westminster Hospital, the same veterans' hospital where Paterson Ewen stayed when he first arrived in London. Jack Chambers was taught by Selwyn Dewdney in the late forties and they remained

close friends. Chambers' paintings show elements of surrealist imagery, like most of the other artists who worked in London in the early fifties including Wally McMurran, Don Vincent, Larry Russell and Bernice Vincent. I refer here to depictions of surreal objects, sometimes in deep space. In Montréal, the take on surrealism after 1946 had more to do with automatic and non-figurative painting. There was practically no non-figurative painting in London before 1960 and little after that. Selwyn Dewdney quit painting completely in the late fifties and he was quite critical of non-objective painting, calling it "mental masturbation." These attitudes set the tone for the antagonism that existed (and exists to this day) in London toward traditional modernism, a view shared in part by both Ewen and Molinari.

When Chambers went to Spain to study at the Escuela Central de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in 1953, he entered a hotbed of existentialism, where students would pick up *Libération* as it appeared on the Madrid newstands forty-eight hours after publication in Paris. Copies of that journal were circulated among the students and existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty were read and discussed by Chambers and his friends. He had also discussed Sartre with Ross Woodman in London around the same time, and Sartre's play *No Exit* was first produced in London in 1953. Later Chambers read Charles Olson's essays enthusiastically. David Rabinowitch, one of Ewen's first contacts in London was a devoted reader of William Carlos Williams, who shared the views of Olson and Ezra Pound on the primacy of objects as the source of ideas. Olson and Williams believed that the poem is exterior to the poet and that the poem should be treated like an object with its own autonomy, as an object rather than as a symbol. Williams extrapolated the notion of knowledge from phenomena to the writing of poetry. Louis Dudek, the influential Montréal poet, describes this line of thinking in the following way:

The ultimate result of this kind of critique of abstract thinking, combined with a corresponding linguistic analysis and with the rise of empirical science, is the view that words are merely words, and that reality resides in the particulars of existence.

This rejection of symbols can be observed in the mature work of Molinari and Tousignant, where Molinari rejects the use of horizontals because of their allusion to landscape and where both painters emphasize the sheer optical action of colour and tone in both sequence and intensity. These attitudes can be called many things but really the observance and manipulation of phenomena is

a primary activity of human beings.

In contrast to Montréal, artists in London were collecting odd objects. Royden Rabinowitch had a collection that included a yellow, perforated plastic, practice football, a discus and a three-dimensional mathematical model. He found two of these things in a sports shop on one of his regular rounds of browsing in all kinds of stores.

Meanwhile, David Rabinowitch wrote in 1964 that "How something is observed is its essence. This can only be what is meant by 'content'"; he has also spoken of long talks with Paterson Ewen shortly after Ewen's arrival in London, when they discussed formalism. Rabinowitch was critical of the influence of formalism on Ewen's work. As for David Rabinowitch, he was engrossed in observations of a herd of cattle at the intersection of highways #22 and #4 and of their various locations in a pasture there. About the same time, Ron Martin discovered that objects seen through a window would appear to grow smaller as one moved closer to the window itself; he was also fascinated by a glass globe/lamp shade that became flat when the light bulb in it was switched on. But of these artists, Royden Rabinowitch was most deeply committed to searching out odd objects and Chambers, most deeply committed to the depiction of objects and to seeking out levels of interpretation of those objects. Chambers regarded the world with intense scrutiny, looking into things, because he was not educated in modernist painting in the way that Ewen had been in Montréal.

Paterson Ewen brought to London a thorough grounding in the most sophisticated modernist painting in Canada, that of Montréal in the fifties. He was also a part of the surrealist legacy of Paul-Émile Borduas and of Automatism; "the image wants out, my hands and eyes are ready for the attack on the plywood. That is to say the images living in my head for years do not impede the images which come out more quickly. Thank God!" (Ewen). Surrealism, and then existentialism, were of course the dominant topics of discussion in Montréal in the forties and fifties. Merleau-Ponty was compulsory reading, along with Sartre, among Montréal's intellectuals. Phenomenology informs existentialism as it informs the modern American poets. Pound and Williams had close connections with modern English language poets in Montréal, like Dudek: "[But] modernism with the Imagist theory at its origin is a resolute attempt to found a poetry on actualities and to find the truth in mere particulars." Dudek sounds a bit skeptical here. Ewen was on the periphery of these ideas and activities at first, but when he met the Automatistes and then began to exhibit with Denyse Del-

rue and La Galerie du Siècle, he became close to the artists associated with those galleries. They were the very artists who were the heirs of the mainstream in Montréal that grew out of John Lyman, Borduas and Les Plasticiens. (However, Ewen and Molinari were both unimpressed with Borduas' automatism since Borduas still took visual clues from nature which involves intention not automatism.) Ewen's young son Vincent published verse in Dudek's *Delta* magazine. Ewen also maintained close personal contact with Borduas, then (1955) living in New York, driving there to visit him with Molinari. It is at this time that Ewen first began to show interest in Philip Guston, who will reappear later in this essay.

#### STRAIGHT, NO CHASER

In the context of many of the artists working in London from the sixties to the present, Paterson Ewen, in his large landscape and weather chart based work, must then be seen as a painter thoroughly grounded in classic Montréal modernism, turning to the use of non-conventional materials while at the same time returning to a more direct or visceral method of painting developed from his earlier, pre-Plasticien work. He was also turning to the use of weather diagrams and other scientific data as subject matter, rather than to observed nature, although that didn't cease altogether (*Moon Over Tobermory*, 1981). His new subject matter was used as a framework for traditional looking, rather formal painting, and that forms part of its appeal.

It is instructive to look at two other artists who were emerging in London in the late sixties. Bob Fones and Chris Dewdney shared many interests in common with Ewen but both were taking observation and invention to extremes, using highly sophisticated diagrams and charts of their own invention; not as frameworks for compositions, but as strange and untraditional objects with layers of meaning, curious parodies of science, geology and psychology. Others like Doreen Inglis, Dave Gordon, Jamelie Hassan, Kerry Ferris, Spring Hurlbut, Ron and Tom Benner were using unusual materials like tar, sheet metal, foam rubber, artificial flowers, lace, milkweed seeds, dried fish, etc. Gordon was making galaxies and star maps out of wood, fibre glass and Christmas tree lights; and he, Tom Benner and Don Bonham were after a look of roughness or "funkiness."

The *Warehouse Co-op Exhibition* was organized in the spring of 1970 by artists who felt left out, or outside, of London's new artistic establishment (consisting of the artists who were in the exhibition, *The Heart of London*, curated by Pierre Théberge of the National Gallery). Things

were happening in London, and people were moving there to get in on it, and to teach in two new art departments. That fall another group show (including Ewen) took place in a vacant auto showroom on Avenue Road in Toronto. All of the artists involved were looking for Toronto dealers; Paterson Ewen had left the Dunkelmann Gallery a year or so previously. Ewen's connection with these loose groupings of artists indicates his outsider attitudes which were discernible in both Montréal and London, and accounts for the numerous artists and styles he has been associated with. It is also important to realize that he arrived in London and associated with artists whose work was evolving rapidly. It is possible that the Rabinowitch brothers were responsible for tearing down Ewen's most recent influences (formalism and a certain beaux-arts look), and that Ron and Tom Benner, and Don Bonham and Doreen Inglis were responsible — by working prolifically in a robust fashion — for encouraging the intense activity in Ewen's own work, and for its own rapid development which, in turn, led back to a personal authenticity for which only Ewen is responsible.

Robert Crumb was at the height of his popularity (both Gordon and Snow expressed admiration for his work), and many painters were looking at Philip Guston's late work which appeared to be influenced by him. This included both Ewen and his close friend Gordon, partly because the established New York artist had the courage to make a drastic change in his work, a change that incorporated the introduction of subject matter into a body of non-figurative work; this had a real parallel with the situation Ewen found himself in. But Ewen was not making a dramatic break with his earlier work, as Monk asserts; he was in some ways returning to an earlier way of working. If we examine Ewen's small landscapes we can see a consistent roughness and spontaneity from his early work (showing some influence from Goodrich Roberts), to landscapes done within months of his arrival in London, to his recent, sublime watercolours and pastels on hand-made paper. In most of these works there is a direct reflection of landscape and other observed natural phenomena. Murray Favro recalls taking the train back to London with Ewen in the late sixties, and he recalls Ewen showing him some imported artists' materials — types of Conté crayon and so on — that he had purchased in Toronto for use in some new work. Favro remembers his enthusiasm for what he was about to begin. But the work that appeared shortly after that was the first large, gouged, plywood paintings. Favro concluded from this conversation that Ewen looked at what he was

doing rather than at what he planned to do; the working took over from the prior idea. Was this closer to Automatism?

## NUTTY

Perhaps the most distasteful aspect of Monk's essay is the underlying emphasis on exterior validation:

Nor through Ewen's description of his working method do we picture the traditional landscape artist [sic]. Rather we might think of other contemporary practices and recall photographs of Jackson Pollock at work or Richard Serra flinging molten lead into the corner of a wall, both interacting directly with materials in creating an "image" or product.

If alienation from the natural world was something Ewen was trying to overcome and, as Robert Morris emphasizes it is the turn to the natural world that is concomitant to working in material, then it is the material form of working that overcomes that alienation, rather than the fact of depicting or representing nature in itself.

Monk seems to believe that Pollock, Serra and Morris represent a standard that Paterson Ewen's activity has met, and that Ewen's work and ideas are significant by comparison to that standard. In holding this belief, Philip Monk is a part of a Canadian tradition going back to Clement Greenberg, David Gilhooley et al.

## IN WALKED JOSEF

Robert Morris is a product of his culture. His views reflect Jackson Pollock's emphasis on the physical act of painting. There is a coherent, formal quality to most major American art from the sixties and seventies and its hegemony has only begun to pass. It is instructive to compare Morris and Josef Beuys to see the difference between a recent German visual art practice and the previously dominant approach practiced in the United States. A few years ago works by Morris and Beuys were hung opposite each other in an exhibition. The work exhibited by Morris was a hanging felt piece, consisting of a piece of felt, cut and hanging from the wall in a

draped fashion. Beuys was exhibiting a felt piano warmer, which was covering a grand piano, with even the claws on the bottom of the legs covered. Consider that Morris had previously made triangular shapes to fit the corners of a room, out of stretched canvas, painted white, and that Beuys had made similar work except that he filled the corners of the room with fat, a material with great personal significance for him. In contrast to Morris' formal and material emphasis, there is an unruly, organic quality to Beuys.

Paterson Ewen occupies sort of a middle position with formal elements present, but his work possesses also an unruly quality, with references to things seen and to troubling feelings. In this respect he is more than a doctrinaire modernist; he is, in fact, in the mainstream of Canadian thought, with its attendant skepticism.

It has also become clearer that the exclusion of his large figure/portraits from this exhibition looks like a willful distortion of his body of work by a curator intent on forcing him into another tradition. Paterson Ewen's work thus becomes alienated from a culture that he has helped create. We can only guess at the reasons for all this, but we are probably witnessing a curator groping for coherence and legitimacy at the expense of one of Canada's major painters, a key figure who provides an important link between the major Montréal and London artists of the sixties and seventies. How else can the omission of the major portraits be explained? How else can the omission of a real chronology be explained?

## CRISS CROSS

The act of representation doesn't happen outside of a milieu. Philip Monk's essay suggests a hermetically sealed history of painting that implies nothing less than a dislocated landscape. This totally contradicts the artist's intentions, which are, to connect!

— GREG CURNOE

## HISTORY EVAPORATES: PHILIP MONK AND PATERSON EWEN

Earle Birney once said that Canada was haunted by its lack of ghosts, and it's true that history is often something we recognize by its absence. What I want to look at is something which might be typically Canadian: a catalogue essay where a history could have been written, a history that might have emerged from the engagement of one of our brightest and most controversial critics with the work

of one of our finest artists. I'm speaking of Philip Monk and Paterson Ewen, and the essay in question is the one Monk wrote to accompany the exhibition he curated for the Art Gallery of Ontario, *Paterson Ewen: Phenomena, Paintings 1971-1987*. How we deal with artists, how we use their works and place them in a history is always important, since in interpreting them we are defining ourselves and

others. But in this case, it is not only the artist (and our use of his works) that is important. Here the writer also is of special interest since Monk, in slightly more than a decade of work, has been central to many of the debates through which different communities in the Toronto art scene came to recognize themselves.

In the introduction to his book, *Struggles with the Image*, Monk discusses his shift from independent critic to the institutional position as curator of contemporary Canadian art at the AGO. He insists on a certain continuity between his earlier writing and curating when he says that "If curating, however, can be seen to be a type of writing, a writing with objects, then one has the concrete means to demonstrate that history which is lacking."<sup>1</sup> Curating, then, is not the end of Monk's writing, but a new attempt to fill in the blank which is our history. His clearest statement of this commitment is probably the article "Colony, Commodity, and Copyright: Reference and Self-Reference in Canadian Art" which first appeared in the summer of 1983 in *Vanguard* magazine (and is reprinted in his book):

The history of art in Canada is short. That is to say, there is no history. Or there are many. This is one of them. I would like to think that this is more than one more history of Canadian art; that this essay could trace a significant development in Canadian art. But given the geniality that has passed for criticism in this country, anything that is produced and written about is put into a history — a history of autonomous subjects, of individualistic expression, etc. It is put into a history, not given a history. If it were given a history then we might learn of its conditions of production as well as the conditions of its reception of influences. The latter is a context of misunderstanding as well as understanding. Understood, this art is more likely to make its own authentic history, not repeat one from elsewhere, consume it as a system of signs. This reception, moreover, is a response, or a failure of response to its own context and history. Failure to respond is also a condition of its context.<sup>2</sup>

I don't want to reiterate that failure to respond which Monk correctly identifies as part of our problem. If artworks can fall into a void, fall out of history, works of criticism too can pass through the network of their distribution, be consumed and never be called back.

What I want to do in this essay is simply to hold Monk to his word — which is, incidentally, something I learned from him, since it was Monk who used to insist that we "take the work at its word." I want to insist on his insistence on history. Shortly after he took up his position at the AGO, he wrote that "the measure of competency of a curator should be: *how many histories is one capable of?*"<sup>3</sup> I want to accept his standard for judging a curator's work and use it to assess his own presentation of Ewen's work. What I want

to argue is this: Monk does little to give Ewen's work a history. But this is not simply a kind of omission: the very way in which Monk reads the work evaporates the possibility of his giving it a history. His close readings of the work as a text, whatever their value, act to sever the threads by which the work is woven into the world.

I'd like to quote at length from the introduction to Monk's essay, since it's there that the decisions which structure his presentation of Ewen's work are laid out:

The focus in the exhibition is on the plywood landscape paintings. If the landscape paintings constitute a break in both the image and practice of Ewen's work, it is logical to limit the exhibition to what most fully exemplifies that break, rather than try to lead up to it with earlier works as if to keep the career within the narrative model of the retrospective. Needless to say, the notion of the retrospective is implicitly questioned in this presentation. In accordance with this conviction, the catalogue text avoids the narrative pull of a history and concentrates on the materials and methods of Ewen's practice. Insofar as the images of Ewen's works are discussed they are treated in their sign function where image and appearance are brought together in the materials of presentation. If phenomena can be recognized as a type of sign, their transcription in art is a further semiotic interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

In this one paragraph, all the parameters for the presentation of Ewen's work are laid out, in decisions which will be fateful for the possibility of Monk's fulfilling his own demand for curation. Four significant ideas are clear: history is equated with the retrospective; the work is to be treated as a purely material set of practices; the exhibition will be based on the belief that a radical break occurred in Ewen's work and is central to an understanding of it; and lastly, the imagery will be dealt with only as signs.

Monk was right not to serve up the, by now, standard retrospective. His more limited survey was far more focused. And together with Matthew Teitelbaum's exhibition from the Mendel, *Paterson Ewen: The Montréal Years*, a view of Ewen's career was possible which seemed more considered than what a retrospective might have offered. But enormous problems for the writing of a history are created when Monk equates the retrospective with "the narrative pull of a history" — as though the retrospective were the only way of situating works historically. In doing this, Monk is already scrapping his project, which is to write histories, since there are obviously other ways to proceed, other ways to propose histories. If this were not so, if his equation held, then his own standard of judgment — "how many histories is one capable of?" — would be senseless. Only one history, always structured by the retrospective model, would ever be possible.

What this discloses is a strange passivity that accepts as final the most obvious and most stultifying institutional form for history and surrenders to it, abandoning history altogether. If what Monk wanted was "to demonstrate that history which is lacking," all that we are left with is the repetition of its absence.

When Monk writes that "the catalogue text avoids the narrative pull of a history and concentrates on the materials and methods of Ewen's practice," he restricts his relation to the work in such a way that the possibility of writing a history is undone. Perhaps this occurs as soon as he makes an opposition between history and materiality. But it takes place as well when he restricts the work to its materiality in the most obvious sense. By limiting our attention to the object alone, to what lies only within the rectangular limits of the plywood sheets, Monk eliminates all readings that might lead from the object to the world beyond its limits. Such a notion of the work is obviously dependent on the idea that there is such a thing as "the work itself," an ideal text which can be clearly delineated from all that surrounds it, from the viewer, and from what has been called the act of reading, or the performance of the text. Here Monk falls back on the classical notion that meaning is something that resides in the text alone. Such a concept is highly suspect, and such decisions about what is to constitute the work establish its autonomy from the daily-life world, severing it from the social. Something Edward Said wrote is appropriate here:

It is not too much to say that American or even European literary theory now explicitly accepts the principal of noninterference, and that its peculiar mode of appropriating its subject matter (to use Althusser's formula) is *not* to appropriate anything that is worldly, circumstantial, or socially contaminated... Textuality has therefore become the exact antithesis and displacement of what might be called history.<sup>5</sup>

It would have been possible to work through a much more frayed sense of what constitutes a work, recognizing that it is difficult and perhaps impossible to ever fix the point at which the work ends and the world begins. Instead Monk constructs a delineation of the work which pries it out of the world — as though to protect it from contamination — as though giving it not a history, but a purity.

But I think that there is a certain validity to the opposition Monk sets up between the work understood historically and the work understood purely as material — as though the work were something objective. One stance does seem to preclude the other. In reducing the work to its materiality alone, Monk aligns himself with a strategy of writing which produces the illusion that his interpretation is objective, and this is incompatible with

any understanding of the work as existing in history. Tzvetan Todorov explained it in this way:

The human sciences, and literary studies especially, suffer from an inferiority complex with respect to the natural sciences, and they would like to follow the latter's lead; but to do so is to sacrifice their specificity, forgetting that their "object" is precisely not an object at all, but another subject. This fascination with "real" science can take several forms. Already in his earliest writings, Bakhtin shows that we tend to substitute for the real object of the human sciences (or literary studies) a reality that is purported to be more immediate, more tangible than their own. Two types of empirical objects are available for this enterprise: the text can be dissolved into its materiality (a form of objective empiricism) or it can be dissolved into the psychic states of those that precede it and that follow it felt by those who produce or perceive such a text (subjective empiricism).<sup>6</sup>

What Monk has done is what Todorov calls "objective empiricism," a writing which reduces the work, to its materiality alone to produce a text which seems to be objective. Yet the point is that there is no empiricism, no object, and no final truth in the interpretation of texts such as artworks; or, for that matter, history.

It is always difficult to speak of what has been lost. No longer present, perhaps never having been present, such things seem beyond language's potentials. But the Russian linguist and scholar Bakhtin was able at least to gesture toward what disappears in this reduction of the work. In one of the last of his writings — notes really — he wrote that he was:

Against shutting oneself in the text... The resulting formalization and depersonalization: all terms are of a logical nature (in the broad sense of the term). I, on the other hand, hear *voices* everywhere, and dialogical relations among them.<sup>7</sup>

When Bakhtin speaks of voices, what I hear is a possibility of emancipation, a way that is indicated beyond the world of reified objects, of things which can no longer address us. In trying to establish Ewen's work as something objective, or his own voice as objective, Monk recapitulates the condition of the artwork isolated in the museum: a relic, an ineffectual artefact detached from all the contexts which gave it meaning.

The reduction of the work to materials and methods, to the status of an object (not an utterance), also structures Monk's relation to an audience and to history. Bakhtin put in this way:

The exact sciences are a monological form of knowledge: the intellect contemplates a *thing* and speaks of it. Here, there is only one subject, the subject that knows (contemplates) and speaks (utters). In front of him there is only a voiceless thing. But the subject as such cannot be perceived or studied as if it were a thing, since it cannot remain a subject if it is voiceless, consequently, there is no knowledge of the subject but dialogical.<sup>8</sup>

To my mind this passage — "in front of

him there is only a voiceless thing" — describes Monk's relation to the work accurately enough. In Bakhtin's language, a monological relation to the work (and at the same time, to the reader) is established when the work is reduced to an object, to materials and methods. The work is an object; a truth about it (not an interpretation) is delivered to the reader. It is easy enough to understand the desire to establish for oneself the illusion of an objectivity that could sweep aside all of the ridiculous or mythologizing statements about artists and artworks. Similarly, when Bakhtin speaks of the intellect that contemplates a thing, it is important to recognize that this relation between writer and artwork is not Monk's failing alone, but the result of a history of specialization — one which not only reduces the work, but reduces the writer from person to intellect.

But through this relation of monologue, of intellectual voice before a voiceless thing, Monk endangers his project of giving a history to the work. History is not an object, nor, as Bakhtin argues, is the artwork. Their meanings emerge only through an endless process of conflict and dialogue, which find resolution only provisionally, and then not through the revelation of truth but through moments of consensus. The problem for the writing of history can be restated this way: if the artwork is something objective, if it can be reduced to its materiality alone, if a truth about it can be declared, then history also is being sensed as an object, cut away from all human agency. Such a history is no history at all. It can only be a suggestion that our time, our own situations, are frozen.

And to reduce Ewen's work in this way is to profoundly misconstrue it. Emphasizing the materials and methods as inputs, Monk leaves out any attempt to deal with what results from the complex interaction of the two, or their relations, to aspects which seem to extend his focus — the effects of colour for example; or scale, texture, composition, all of which are material. Similarly, Monk avoids all the emotional qualities which viewers ascribe to the work and with which they invest it. (And this seems to be simply an adherence to our own moment's particular intellectual orthodoxy which ignores the difficult fact that viewers have emotional relations to certain artworks.) All of these are avoided, as are all questions of the relation between beauty and the ecological, which I see as central to these works. And so this reduction closes off the opportunity for us to relate to the work before us, to the natural world and its phenomena which are depicted there as something more than objects to be dominated by the extension of our knowledge. In this way Monk

eclipses the readings and the uses of the work which are most crucial to our real-life crises — in particular, to the mounting ecological disaster we have created. Am I justified then in seeing in Ewen's work, not something that already exists, but instead, something which does not have material or objective existence: a hope perhaps, an opening?

To study the materials and methods only, cut away from the complexity of the work, is not to study the work but to reduce it. And this reduction depicts it as something autonomous, outside history and society. Why then is Monk so captured by the material if his emphasis elsewhere has repeatedly been to demand histories? In his essay on Shirley Wiitala (which appeared at roughly the same time as the one on Ewen), Monk never deals at all with the material level of the work, even though her brushes and canvas are no less material than Ewen's routers and plywood. Ewen's are simply less traditional for painting. What is it that captures Monk then, and demands attention?

The obvious answer is one which is almost traditional to modernism — that the use of materials we are not used to in painting makes obvious the constructedness of the works, the materiality of signs, and calls attention to the limits of painting's conventions. These perhaps are still valid, though wearing thin, and my sense is that they do not answer the question of how Monk's text was captured by the material. I think though that Northrop Frye wrote something that can begin to provide an answer:

Discussions about Canadian literature began, in English Canada, about a hundred years ago, when it was still uncertain whether the condition was one of genuine pregnancy or merely wind. At that time the commonest argument advanced was that in a young and newly settled country the priorities were material ones, and that literature and the other arts would come along when economic conditions were more advanced. This argument makes little sense: in a genuinely primitive community, like that of the Eskimos, where food and shelter are requirements that have constantly to be met, poetry (and other arts, such as carving) leaps into the foreground as one of the really essential elements of life. Something similar may be true of new societies that are not primitive: seventeenth century Puritans in Massachusetts wrote poetry and carried on their pamphlet war against the Anglican establishment. It is also possible, in modern times, for the centrifugal movement from the main centres to reverse itself, for works of culture to be export goods coming out of a small community...

No: Canadian assumptions about the low and late priority of creative activity were mercantilist assumptions, and signified the acquiescence by Canadians in their role as producers of raw materials for manufacturing centres outside of Canada. What got the priority were engineering modes of communication, the fantastically long and expensive rail-

ways, bridges, and canals that sprouted out of the nineteenth century Canadian landscape. It was no more natural for Canada to produce such things than to produce major developments in literature or painting, but they were produced because they fitted the premises of Canadian mythology at that time.<sup>9</sup>

Monk's concentration on Ewen's materials, and his reduction of the work to them, is not simply the result of an international tendency toward an institutional sort of materialism, nor that Ewen's materials are relatively unique for painting, but instead because they have particular historical resonances which are specific to Canada. They awake that mercantilist sense of ourselves as exporters of raw material, and the assumption that material priorities must outrank cultural ones. It makes sense to point out the affinity between Ewen's work and "engineering modes of communication," especially when considering his use of materials together with all the notations of weather systems and other scientific charts. Perhaps Monk's reduction of the work to the purely material then can be seen not just as a problem for his historical project, but also as an effect of the work, though one which is registered unconsciously.

The idea of a break in Ewen's work is central to Monk's essay. He argues that "if the landscape paintings constitute a break in both the image and the practice of Ewen's work, then it is logical to limit the exhibition to what most fully exemplifies that break." The problem, for Monk's program of writing the history that is lacking, is that the concept of the break served only to lead us out of history, not into it. Instead of an articulated history, this model only gives us a simple binary structure of "before" and "after" which does little to illuminate the complexities of what occurred in the works. It isolates the plywood works from all that preceded them, and divides the landscapes on plywood from the ones which also use plywood but depict figures. But certain works muddy the concept of the break, and its binary handling of time. Certain works in the Montréal Years show were done with saw-blades (the *Black-Out* and *Alert* series), and these presage his later procedures with tools as well as his treatment of surfaces in the plywood paintings. Both of these are still constrained by Ewen's continuing use of traditional oil paint, but it is hard not to see a glimmer of what he was to accomplish later. Similarly, there are other works which propose, hesitantly, the formal organization which later works use much more dramatically; for example, the centering composition, and the use of a circle inside a square in the *Insignia* series.

Monk's notion of the break though is still workable as a kind of armature for the exhibition, as a way of focusing on the

plywood landscape works alone, which after all are what Ewen is best known for. But it must be recognized that in the works both a break and continuity can be seen. Both must be addressed if a history is to be written, one which can address the complex development of the works, and not simply those we admire most, or which best suit some already-existing model of history or the artist's career. Monk rightly rejects the retrospective model, which projects a sense of continuity and unity of purpose at every point in the artist's career. And yet relying on the model of the break — that revolutionary great leap forward into the new — is no less a cliché than the retrospective. One projects continuity and humanist growth, the other projects the break with tradition and history, returning us to all the myths of a tired modernism. It is odd that what Monk does, through his insistence on the break, is to prepare the ground for Ewen as the mythological modern artist: the one who initiates single-handedly a radical change in art, uninfluenced, unforeseen, without debts to the past. If the retrospective model can be questioned and discarded, what necessitates the use of a model which is equally dubious?

But even if we were to accept the idea of a break, it still could lead into the history which Monk demands of curation. He writes for example in the first sentence of his essay:

In 1971, Paterson Ewen produced a series of paintings that broke radically with both his former practice of painting and the traditions of that medium.

It is commonly known, as Matthew Teitelbaum makes clear, that this break follows directly upon the major geographic and personal break in Ewen's life — his move from Montréal to London, Ontario. This must have had radical effects intimately, since the move entailed leaving his wife, children, and an entire network of friends and acquaintances. In his catalogue essay, Teitelbaum quotes Ewen's comment that his "previous life" in Montréal was something whose "structure collapsed... more or less all at once." None of this "proves" that this uprooting or collapse caused the change in Ewen's work. (The concepts of both "proof" and "cause" are inadequate for history.) The point I want to make is that if one perceives that a dramatic break occurs in the work and uses that to structure an exhibition, and if a correspondingly dramatic break occurs in the artist's life immediately before the change in the work itself, then this sequence of dramatic changes calls out for some investigation of the relation between them. Artists live in actual worlds whose events contaminate the work. And this investigation is all the more necessary given what Monk has said about the measure of a curator's com-

petence, the stress he has laid on the writing of histories. Yet no inquiry follows, the text remains confined within the physical limits of the work. Which gives Monk's writing a curious, airless quality as though it, and the work, took place nowhere.

But let's look into this break...

When I had the chance to see the Montréal Years show, it seemed apparent that Ewen's work, whatever its merits during those years, took place within the limits of a very specific understanding of what painting could do, and that this "internalized sense of things" was dominated by the treatment of surfaces, the sense of paint as matter and scale which had been suggested by the work of Borduas and Goodridge Roberts. All of these, all understandings of what could be done, were changed within a few years of Ewen's move to London. It is obvious that he did not simply move from one location to another, but from one very specific set of demands on painting into a new and very different local culture. In fact, it was almost a different world. What Ewen did, was to leave the city of Borduas and Moli-nari for the city of Curnoe and Chambers.

It is always difficult to generalize about an art community as surprising and complex as London's but I want to point out certain emphases there that may have pushed the transformation of Ewen's work. The most obvious difference between the London and Montréal scenes at that time was that leading artists in London were by and large far more interested in the possibilities of representational work. And certainly the London community was much more strongly oriented toward recording the influence and events of daily life. From the internationalist standpoint of the time, Montréal's concentration on abstract painting was much more advanced. What London offered Ewen were, from that standpoint, ways of working which were officially more retrograde since representation had been superseded in some way that was permanent. From our present perspective, artists in London were maintaining certain possibilities which were in dispute and which would only later become relevant again.

Relative to most cities in Canada, London was also distinctive for a considerable amount of experimentation with materials which were not traditional in art, and this was particularly true in regard to painting. Artists there were experimenting in painting with tar, metal strips, plywood — all materials which Ewen would use. Similarly, there was a considerable interest in scientific charts and diagrams, though in this case, I'm not certain whether they were actually used as imagery for works before Ewen. The point is that both the materials and imagery Ewen was

to develop in his work were at hand in London in a way they were not in Montréal. Anyone could have purchased plywood, or tar, or metal strips for example and used them in a painting anywhere: the materials were there. In London however they were in use, and that exploration was ratified by a community.

Ewen's move was more than a shift in geography, or in painting cultures, or from a francophone to an anglophone city. It was also a move from a city which was seen to be central to Canadian art to one which seemed more marginal. Harold Innis repeatedly pointed out how technical experimentation tends to occur most rapidly at the margins of a culture or nation, not at the centre, and I believe that this effect was part of what encouraged the material play and the apparent freedom from the then-current internationalist understanding of what painting should do.

At any rate, I think that if Monk had been committed to writing a history, then this perceived break might have been an important place to start from. It might have been the point of departure for a history, beginning with the works and moving outward from them into the specific community which sustained their development. Instead, the idea of a break functions only as a way out of history, a means of abstraction.

Actually, it's not entirely true that Monk gives no history to Ewen's work. But the one gesture toward a history that he does make continues to abstract the works. In his essay, Monk refers to the influence and works of Michael Snow, Robert Smithson, Jackson Pollock, and Richard Serra. He focuses attention primarily on two ideas: on Snow and the notion that "landscape" (as a genre) is now "part of a process that resulted in an end for viewing itself," and on Morris' interpretation of Pollock's work as showing how the body and the materials could interact directly, thus overcoming in part our alienation from nature. Both are useful points to make (even though what Monk says about Snow and viewing as an end in itself seems right about Snow but less relevant to Ewen). But in the absence of any other history this gesture is troubling. The only history which Monk asserts is the history of contemporary art, which only serves to reassert that art is something autonomous, with its own separate history. And together with his reduction of the work to materials alone, this amplifies the autonomy of artworks from the world. If Monk's sequence of names can be considered a history, it is one which suits an institution, and no-one else.

With the exception of Snow, all the artists Monk refers us to are members of the New York school of the fifties and

sixties: and even Snow lived in New York during the time Ewen began to work on plywood. This of course says nothing about the relevance of the connections Monk is making. The point I want to make is that Monk is reiterating a dangerous notion about the writing of history: that the best way of understanding an artist's development is by way of internationally known figures, rather than by investigating the influence of those around him or her. Obviously, there is no point in discounting the value or influence of artists in world centres such as New York, particularly when their work is widely known. (And in Teitelbaum's catalogue, for example, Ewen's trips to New York, his exhibitions there, and the influence of Abstract Expressionism on his work are well documented, as well as the influence of artists such as Giuseppe Capogrossi, and the Americans Hyde Solomon and Angelo Ippolito.) But it is foolish to simply discount those with whom the artist had a day-to-day contact.

And certainly it's odd that Monk would disregard Monk's local milieu in Montréal and London and the influence of those around him, given Monk's own insistence in the early eighties that one had to begin with "the local and the real." After all, it was Monk who wrote, quite correctly, about the city where he lives that "Toronto is neither New York nor Germany, let alone Italy. Yet there is a desire to institute a discourse in Toronto on the order of elsewhere — on the authority of that production, legitimation and history."<sup>10</sup> Yet that is what is occurring here, and now, in Monk's own text.

I have already criticized Monk's unquestioning use of the break as a model, but in terms which were too abstract. Northrop Frye was more specific:

It is still perhaps the absence of a revolutionary tradition in Canada, the tendency to move continuously rather than discontinuously through time that has given Canadian culture one very important and distinctive characteristic.<sup>11</sup>

Thinking of what Frye has said, I think it is more important for us to ask whether concepts such as the break clarify work such as Ewen's and its development in time, or whether it is a model which cannot accommodate itself to the conditions of work and time here. The break from tradition has an obvious relevance in Europe, with its relatively older societies (especially when considering the work of Manet for example, or modernists like the Cubists). Its relevance changes when it is applied to the study of art or time in the U.S.A. — a nation which was born out of a revolution and whose mythic structure centres on the demand for the new. There the break is a model which becomes a cliché through overuse. In Canada, its validity must be reconsidered again in a very young nation worried about its con-

tinuity and founded in part by those who rejected the American Revolution's break with the past. Monk's use of the break as a model for Ewen's work may well be the attempt to legitimate the work by a standard which is dominant elsewhere; and relevant elsewhere.

So I am not convinced that the break is very useful here. I see our art not as revolutionary, but as considered; not new, but slow. These are not values which are legitimate under standard modernism. Obviously Ewen's work changed after his move to London, but is the change radical or revolutionary? I admire the plywood paintings greatly, but the obvious fact is that they are still paintings after all, an evolutionary form, not a revolutionary one — and one which may for that very reason be well suited to our peculiar history. And similarly, what Ewen returned to again and again was landscape; hardly shocking for Canadian sensibilities. That continuing exploration of landscape is evidence of symbolic research which has been important in this culture since Europeans first set foot here. If Ewen's work has any importance to us, then there must be values which are not encapsulated at all by modernist notions such as the radical break with history.

If Monk's use of the break is problematic, his discussion of Ewen's imagery only in its terms of "its sign/function" is no less so. While it sounds as though he will read everything that appears in the work as signs, he in fact does not, restricting his discussion instead to one specific range of imagery. What he focuses on is Ewen's well-known use of arrows, dotted lines, maps and such — diagrammatic markings. This set of signs is notable for being a very clearly conventionalized means of notation, a kind of writing really, which in the work is used to describe the processes — not the appearances — of weather systems. What he leaves out are all the more traditional mimetic modes which Ewen increasingly relies on after 1977 or so.

Before 1977, the plywood works display a certain kind of "writing the surface," marking it with schema which relay to us a basic scientific understanding of the process which underlies, say, the precipitation cycle. After 1977, Ewen seems to concentrate increasingly on transcribing the transitory appearance of weather. The modes of depiction change, since different ends require different means. Where Ewen earlier would rely on a "fluffy cloud shape" that signified clouds in a general way, after 1977 or so, the works use modes more related to Impressionist effects: light and mood become important to the work. By this time Ewen's routing and scraping of the surface have changed as well, and suggest different readings. Earlier the surface effects were confined to marking, writ-

ing, and diagramming into the wood and these were usually linear, like hand-writing. Essentially, the wooden surface was carved by knowledge. After 1977, these linear notations are dropped in favour of a surface which is blistered and torn up over most of its areas, and this increasingly suggests erosion, destruction, and weathering. Especially when this surface treatment is considered together with imagery — such as the *Bandaged Man*, the *Right-Angle Tree* (where a very solitary tree is broken in half through its trunk) or those great paintings of the moon (deeply eroded, without atmosphere, and which always suggested a face to me, perhaps even Ewen's face) — it seems difficult to avoid believing that the works speak of being weather-beaten both by natural forces and by the battering life dishes out.

Monk only deals with those linear markings which I refer to as "writing the surface." And because he only studies those signs, and not those means which Ewen utilizes after 1977, an implicit opposition emerges in his essay between those linear notations and the more mimetic modes of the later works. It seems clear that Monk favours those schematic, roughly scientific markings, and directs our attention to them and away from what occurs in the later works, as though the works were being reconstructed in his text. But to do this, to restrict his discussion to a very limited set of signs out of all the markings which Ewen uses, is to ignore the history that the work declares, forcing the work back into a certain mode instead of attempting to recognize what has occurred.

But there is some recognition in Monk's text of this change. He writes for example that "Recently, with the latest cycle of paintings, we wonder whether some of the paintings take on a more symbolic charge, an interpretation that would resonate perhaps through all his earlier work."<sup>12</sup> What is important here is not just the recognition of a change in the work, but the understanding that this demands not only a different interpretation, but a different kind of interpretation. It seems to require the discarding of the semiotic approach which Monk announced but did not carry out. But if Monk is right in seeing this symbolic aspect to the work, then this makes the work (and the interpretations it suggests) appear far less radical, which puts his reliance on "the break" in further doubt. And it is curious that Monk would write this recognition of change into his own text, and then not pursue it. Since I first saw Ewen's work in the late seventies, it has had a magnetic symbolic resonance for me, so I am sceptical that this is something new to the work. But even if Monk comes late to this view of the work, his

text suggests both an acknowledgement of this dimension and a reluctance to countenance it by working such an interpretation through. History here seems to enter the text and be simultaneously disavowed.

In his introduction, Monk quickly makes an opposition between history and his concentration on materials and methods — which makes the writing of history impossible in his text. Perhaps the examination of imagery restricted to its sign function alone also makes it impossible to see the work as existing in time or in history. The idea of the work as a system of signs is only possible if, first, a decision has been made to view the work synchronically, as though it existed and were displayed only on one plane of time. The work must be frozen. History necessarily involves interpretations, where different times are compared with each other, and sequences of changes are established. In the language of linguistics, the idea of the work read as signs involves a focus on structure rather than on process, and it is only through a sense of process that history can seep into the analysis of a work.

But this is too abstract, and Monk himself has shown elsewhere how semiotics and history are opposed in the concrete conditions which make us a culture of reception:

This desire to institute a discourse from elsewhere to support a local practice has to order its form — and thus its content as well — as reception. This form, the form of reception, is the condition of our art here. It is a semiotic strategy on the same order as advertising. That is, it puts itself into place and maintains itself as a system of signs within an already determined system. That system comes from elsewhere, and it is disseminated under the conditions of semiosis itself. The consequences: semiotics replaces history...<sup>13</sup>

But the form of reception is the form not only of our art but of our criticism as well, and semiotics has replaced history in Monk's text. Perhaps history is all that can differentiate us from reception, or make our situation something more than a blank slate on which anything can be written.

I have a final problem with Monk's insistence on discussing the imagery only "in its sign function," and that is that this seems to preclude any examination of what the works as signs signify. For one of the most obvious things about the works is that they are landscapes. But because Monk places so much emphasis on the break, he is forced to devote a certain amount of space to dealing with the obvious contradiction that the exhibition's focus on the landscape entails. The break is an image of radicality which is at odds with Ewen's almost continuous allegiance to the landscape as a genre. What Monk argues is that Ewen's use of that genre is not a return to the traditional. He writes

for instance:

As terms "landscape" and "image" are precisely what I wish to avoid, insofar as they are traditionally conceived. Rather inasmuch as Ewen's turn [to the landscape (A.P.)] is not a return, we have to reconstitute the break his work made, partly by putting it into relation with other practices that might have nothing to do with landscape or painting.<sup>14</sup>

What Monk really wants to reconstitute is the avant-garde, and it is this adherence to an inadequate model of art and history that results in such a strange argument. This turn is not a return; the paintings are not landscapes. But surely this is dubious when even the abstract work in the Montréal Years exhibition showed affinities for the landscape genre, and the critical reception of those works in their time noted this repeatedly. And again this argument makes little sense in the context of Canada's visual culture, given the centrality of landscape modes here. Obviously Ewen makes his contributions to this genre, and does not merely repeat what went before. There can never be any pure return. But in turning away from the obvious — that the works are still landscapes, and are received as such — Monk again abstracts the work from culture, history, and place.

Almost any reference to the land leaps out in this peculiar cultural context of ours. Its role and meaning are far too complex to sort out adequately here, so I will resort to one more quotation from Frye to indicate something of what I think is involved:

American culture has followed the Western pattern, which grew out of the Biblical rejection of what it called "idolatry," that is, the belief that there was something numinous or potentially divine in the natural world. For the Western tradition, man must seek...God or...ideals through...social institutions. Nature is not to be worshipped or even loved: it is to be dominated. Canada has tried hard to follow the same pattern, but its society has been less cohesive, and the individual poet or painter finds that it keeps disintegrating: it is hard for him to visualize either the audience in front of him that he is trying to reach or the audience behind him out of which his imagination has grown. In this situation the natural world keeps pushing insistently through the gaps in the mental society. I see constantly in Canadian culture, more particularly in its poetry, a sense of meditative shock produced by the intrusion, because it so often looms up with greater urgency than the poet's social, political, or religious outlook is prepared to allow.<sup>15</sup>

If Frye is right at all, then this can help us see not only Ewen's work, but Monk's. Monk is as thoroughly entangled in this all too Canadian struggle as Ewen is through his inability or unwillingness to acknowledge what sort of imagery makes its appearance on those sheets of plywood, and what it entails for its viewers here in Canada and its history. The land looms up in Ewen's work, and with a greater urgency than Monk's social and

political outlook is prepared to allow.

Each of the separate ways Monk approaches Ewen's work evaporates the possibility of writing a history. Taken together, it becomes impossible for Monk to demonstrate that history which is lacking. And I would argue that his other catalogue essays for the AGO share the same inability to situate works historically. Even his essay on Shirley Wiitala — which in its own terms is a remarkable tour-de-force — still fails in terms of what Monk insisted should be the sole measure of a curator's worth: "How many histories is one capable of?" For that essay too remains abstract, unwilling to deal with the subject matters that appear in her paintings: it is resolutely ahistorical.

What I believe to be occurring in Monk's writing is this: the writing is being captured entirely by a mode of reading the work that makes it impossible to situate it in history, in a world. That mode is one which is known in literary circles as close reading, or practical criticism. Every way of approaching a text accomplishes certain ends, and prohibits others. Each mode has its blind spots. In the case of practical criticism and close reading (which was developed in the 1920s by H.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards) its strengths are precisely what evaporate the historical perspective. Each interpretation must be referred back to the text and demonstrated there. "Show me in the text." After the excesses of the Victorian era, this approach was progressive: it served to strip away some of the presuppositions about the author or the text which readers brought with them. But the problem with this mode is that it reads the reader always deeper *into* the text and inhibits any centrifugal motion that might send the reader outward from it. The text becomes "the text itself," an autonomous object, and it is just that insistence on the text, always the text, that establishes the illusion of objective readings that is so compelling, that captures the reader in a text without history, in a text outside the world.

Monk's virtuosity in close reading has

been obvious from his earliest criticism; what has become visible more slowly is a disposition to the ahistorical which has been papered over by his calls for the writing of histories. In spite of his insistence publicly on the centrality of history, close reading and the ahistorical have become exacerbated in his writing since Monk joined the AGO, as though this were in part an effect of the institution itself. At any rate I think it is clear that if Monk is to live up to his own standard for curation, this can only be accomplished by supplementing his mode of reading the work with some other mode that can encompass the historical; or else by abandoning his present mode completely. The only other option would be to abandon his own demand for the writing of histories, leaving us still haunted by that same lack of ghosts.

— ANDY PATTON

#### NOTES

1. Philip Monk, *Struggles with the Image* (Toronto: YYZ Books, 1988), p. 17.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
3. Philip Monk, "Presentations," *Artviews*, Fall 1987, p. 26. The emphasis is Monk's, not mine.
4. Philip Monk, *Paterson Ewen: Phenomena, Paintings 1971–1987* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1987), p. 11.
5. Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge and London, England: Harvard University Press), 1983, p. 3.
6. Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, translated by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 19.
7. Quoted in Todorov, p. 21.
8. Quoted in Todorov, p. 18.
9. Northrop Frye, *Divisions on a Ground: Essays in Canadian Culture* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), p. 16.
10. Monk, *Struggles with the Image* ..., *op. cit.*, p. 185.
11. Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
12. Monk, *Paterson Ewen* ..., *op. cit.*, p. 29.
13. Monk, *Struggles with the Image* ..., *op. cit.*, p. 185.
14. Monk, *Paterson Ewen* ..., *op. cit.*, p. 15.
15. Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

américaine et internationale dans les années cinquante. Se démarquant volontairement et radicalement de toute évaluation d'ordre esthétique, des œuvres produites à cette époque, Guilbaut se propose plutôt de révéler «la face cachée de cet épisode: les relations entre avant-gardes et politique, entre style et idéologie, entre peinture et histoire». La thèse qu'il défend est donc de montrer comment la percée de l'avant-garde américaine n'a pas reposé uniquement sur des raisons esthétiques — comme le soutenait et le promulguait l'école de Greenberg — mais, et peut-être même davantage, sur des raisons politiques et idéologiques.

Par le défrichage minutieux de nombreux livres, revues et journaux de l'époque, en cernant ainsi étroitement le contexte de la *Guerre Froide*, Guilbaut tente de démêler l'écheveau complexe des relations entre l'art et la société. Il brosse un tableau fouillé du climat social dans lequel s'inscrivirent les artistes majeurs de l'époque; par là, il tente de démontrer l'adéquation qui n'a pas tardé de poindre entre les valeurs propres des artistes et les valeurs de la *nouvelle Amérique*, terre de liberté; par là, il tente également de démontrer le glissement et la «récupération» qui se sont opérés entre ces valeurs individuelles et individualistes, et les valeurs de l'Amérique McCarthiste. L'intérêt du livre, outre celui de la thèse elle-même, est de ramasser, en quelque sorte, cet énorme dossier du «fait social» de cette époque décisive et de le questionner en terme de *stratégie idéologique*. Le titre, quant à lui — *Comment New York vola l'idée d'art moderne* —, réfère bien sûr à Paris qui perdit à cette époque son statut de capitale culturelle du monde occidental. Guilbaut repose ainsi directement (dans son texte même) et indirectement (notamment par le titre quelque peu provocateur mais aussi par plusieurs aspects de sa thèse) la question de l'anti-américanisme, celui, amer, qui anima la scène parisienne dans les années soixante. C.D.

Kim Levin, *Beyond Modernism: Essays on Art from the 70s and 80s*, New York: Harper and Row, 1988, 258 p., illus. b & w.

Although the binary modernism/post-modernism showdown has become an overfamiliar spectacle of late, the polemic continues to elicit responses from all and sundry in the art world. Kim Levin, in anthologizing some of her reviews and articles from the past two decades, has attempted a re-contextualisation of these texts in relation to the ongoing post-modern debate.

While also contributing to specialised

## LIVRES ET REVUES / BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

### OUVRAGES THÉORIQUES / ESSAYS

Guilbaut, Serge, *Comment New York vola l'idée d'art moderne*, Nîmes, Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, collection Rayon Art, 1988, 345 p., ill. n. et b.

Le livre de Serge Guilbaut analyse le «phénomène» qu'a constitué l'émergence et la domination de l'expressionnisme abstrait new-yorkais sur les scènes

## B E Y O N D M O D E R N I S M

essays on art from the 70s and 80s



KIM LEVIN

art publications such as *Arts Magazine* and *Art News*, Levin is perhaps best known as art critic for *The Village Voice*. Writing for this masthead, renowned as the arbiter of politico-aesthetic style for the New York intelligentsia, Levin is addressing a more heterogeneous readership. It seems appropriate then, that the recently written segments framing the older articles consider the issue of changing styles in a broader cultural sense. Levin identifies a generalised "shift of consciousness" apparently occurring somewhere around 1968, against which the transition from moribund modernism to expedient postmodernism can be measured. Although the problematic of oscillating symbolic values paralleling social and political developments remains largely unresolved, this lack of closure is at least partly deliberate. Levin admits (in 1988) to a suspicion of rigid methodologies, and the stylish nomenclature of contemporary art criticism is perpetually invoked and revised.

It is not only hindsight which provides Levin with a glimpse of rupture; the articles of the early seventies are testaments to a somewhat disquieted consciousness that, in the context of social upheaval (Vietnam, the civil rights movement, feminism), the paradigms of modernism are being justifiably undermined. Lucas Samaras' psycho-sexual imagery, William Wegman's use of humour and anecdote, the narrative motif in Californian art, were recognized at the time as powerful challenges to formalism. Levin states that "all changes can be traced ... to a strong desire to make things real." She traces, for example, how the formal grammar of minimalist sculpture underwent semantic transformation in Land Art, when positioned in relation to conventions of landscape representation, property, or ecological phenomena. The spectre of authenticity reappears more problematically in

discussions of contemporary practices; Levin alternately derides "cultural cannibalism" while valorizing the evacuated meaning in David Salle's pastiched styles. The author ultimately avoids a static definition of postmodernism, instead evoking the metaphor of mapping new territory (superseding Rosalind Krauss' prototypical modernist grid) to describe a multiplicity of shifting art practices.

The writing style over the years is as much an indicator of changing sensibilities as the art itself, ranging from stream-of-consciousness about the seventies California scene to cynical descriptions of the eighties New York artscape. The diatribes (Neo-Expressionism is a *bête noire*) tend to be more convincing, and more entertaining, than the vindications, where the favored artist's heroic gestures seem to inhibit the author's critical voice. J.S.

Marin, Louis, Jean-Charles Blais.

*Du figurable en peinture,*  
Paris, Blusson Éditeur, 1988,  
118 p., ill. n. et b. et coul.

C'est la troisième publication d'une nouvelle collection qui a déjà fait paraître deux ouvrages de Florence de Mèredieu: *Antonin Artaud, Portraits et Gris-gris*, et *André Masson, les dessins automatiques*. Le livre de Louis Marin ne dépare pas cette collection de luxe: grand format, reproductions d'une qualité remarquable des œuvres récentes de Jean-Charles Blais, et surtout, un texte consistant qui deviendra une référence indispensable sur le travail de Blais. À partir de certaines notions: la mélancolie, l'écorchement, la transsubstantiation, le fragment et le sublime, l'auteur commente l'œuvre du jeune artiste français en s'interrogeant sur les conditions d'existence de la figuration dans la peinture. L'essai de Louis Marin présente un intérêt certain pour quiconque s'intéresse aux positions récentes de la peinture, «au plan d'une théorie de l'art, sinon à celui de son histoire».

Près de quatre-vingts reproductions d'œuvres, de nombreuses planches en couleur, des notes biographiques ainsi



qu'une bibliographie complète, voilà un très beau livre qui présente les avantages combinés de l'ouvrage théorique et du catalogue à la pointe de l'actualité. Cb. B.

*Sight Works: Volume One: Several Enquiries*, edited and introduced by Marysia Lewandowska; essays by Bill Burns, Desa Philippi, Elspeth Probyn, Caroline Wilkinson; works by Andrea Fisher, Marysia Lewandowska, Antoni Malinowski, Shelagh Wakely, Caroline Wilkinson, London: Chance Books, 1988, 100 p., 19 illus, b. & w.

Replace the signifier "site" here with its homonymic other "sight" — the privileged sense of *all* visual art, and the object of a psychoanalytically informed debate within that discourse (Mulvey, Burgin via Lacan) — and the result will be the clever, if slightly perplexing title of this book *Sight Works*.

In her Introduction, Marysia Lewandowska admits to this implied contradiction, intending "to abandon an assumption of clarity with which titles are invested," thereby invoking "the double location sight/site," and finally indicating how both terms as they appear in the book are structured around the problem of "where to see" and "what to see" rather than in terms of their exclusiveness. Conspicuously absent from the book's title is the title of the event(s) it attempts to catalogue: *The Drawing Room* project, which transpired over a five week period. Each week a different artist (Lewandowska et. al., see above) would occupy, work in, and finally, on the Sunday of each week, "exhibit" in a triangular room in an abandoned central London building.

Although Lewandowska roughs out the intentions of the exhibition, situating it theoretically and, to a lesser degree, politically; and although in the final sentences of her introduction she states explicitly that the book is not a "process of documentation," one is left with a lack, a desire to know more about the space, the "site." Is it a residential building? Was it really a drawing room at one time? If so, what of the history that accompanies it? Who occupied it? Why was it abandoned? What of the squatters fleetingly referred to in the intro? How did they interact with the artists, the artwork? Etc.? All this is left to conjecture as the accompanying essays and illustrations offer little intuition to the *specifics* of the place itself.

Nevertheless, this lack of specificity is offset by a more general discussion concerned with the *concepts* of sight, site, local, locale and location both in the introduction and to a greater extent in the (in)sight(ful) essays that follow.

Desa Philippi problematizes the homonymous pun sight/site beginning with a

questioning of "the nature of site-specific work outside the gallery," and how "the site as it were, became a free floating signifier which could attach itself ... to an astounding number of objects." Quoting Foucault's discussion of the panopticon, she points out how the "site becomes a specific point of a collision of forces — social, political, cultural — which can be distinguished from the particular building types ... where they are enacted." She ends her piece by posing the lack of *sight* as a sort of removal from *site*. The specular sit(e)uates us all.

In his amusing, somewhat poetic ruminations, Bill Burns allegorizes the site, beginning with what arguably could be considered the very *first* site, Eden. Here, in today's terms, the "museum plays the role of the New Jerusalem, the white light of the eternal city divorced from nature" where "the artist carries the baggage of man gendered by patriarchal doctrine." But he ends with a more up to date metaphor, "the cyborg artist, the mixture of flesh and machine," who "finds solace in plural space," and who "neither dreads nor celebrates the electronic terrain."

The last essay, and perhaps the most interesting one, does not deal at all with "site" (nor sight) as it refers to the discourse of art as such. Elspeth Probyn employs a feminist analysis to distinguish between, but at the same link, the terms locale, local and location. She uses the "concept of 'locale' to designate a place that is the setting for a particular event." She takes this "place" as both a discursive and non-discursive arrangement which holds a gendered event, the home being the most obvious example." If "locale" is place then, she sees the "local" as practice and in particular she points to "feminist practices which are directly stitched into the place and time which give rise to them." Finally, "location" is a method of delineation, but a circumscription of knowledge which renders certain types of experiences as "true" and "scientific" while excluding others. The other in this case being the experiences and knowledges of women which "are not brought to light and silently circulate as 'women's intuition,' 'ritual,' and even 'instinct.'" Location then is an epistemological process, a *siting* which excludes, debases or even dismisses as unscientific or invalid the experiences of women arising from the local and the locale.

While *Sight Works* overlooks, to some extent, the event or site which gave rise to its publication, it certainly provides a place for a useful and broadened discussion of the issues it addresses. B.W.

**Vision and Visuality:**  
**Discussions in Contemporary Culture,**  
**Number 2, Hal Foster, ed., Seattle:**  
**Bay Press, 1988, 135 pp., illus. B. & W.**

This is the second volume in Dia Art Foundation's series of texts based on public discussions of various aspects of contemporary culture. Unlike the first book, which attempted to engage a wide range of topics, this less ambitious, but no less thought-provoking volume concentrates on one theme, or rather one theme broken into two optics: as the title *Vision and Visuality* implies, the theme of sight oscillates back and forth between a "physical operation" and a "social fact."

As Hal Foster suggests in his Preface, neither can be separated neatly from the other; thus the physiology of visual perception is imbricated within its historical and social conjunctures, and the social construction of sight is in turn mediated by the body. Within this double-scene, this self-professed "little book" seeks to "slip these superimpositions out of focus, to disturb the given array of visual facts" as a critique of the monolithic nature of the scopic regime; to restore, in Foster's words, a thicker description which would account for perspectival differences that are eradicated in an essentialist vision of vision. The difference that lies between vision and visibility thus opens an *écart* into which can be wedged, if not a third view, at least the recognition that the friction between those two views undermines an apparently seamless totality.

The "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," as the title of Martin Jay's lead-off essay suggests, would thus be perhaps a more fitting title for the book, and more honest as to its theme. Despite Foster's claim, the tension between the physical and the social is systematically erased as both terms are subsumed under the catch-all of domination. Jonathan Crary, who deals explicitly with the rise of physical theories of visual perception, provides a fascinating account of the shifting field

that traces the erosion of the optics of Cartesian perspectivalism, but the fissures that open up are immediately closed off again: "The subjective vision that endowed the observer with a new perceptual autonomy and productivity was simultaneously the result of the observer having been made into a subject of new knowledge, of new techniques of power."

This is not to condemn the book by any means, but it should be noted that the supposed totality of power is, ironically, propped up by a totalizing critique. If one were to put forward a criticism, it would be that the book pays far too much attention to painting, and little, if any, to other media. Here, another indirect tribute to dominant traditions can be detected, in the way that all other visual forms are evacuated from the field of vision constitutive of this text. Jacqueline Rose provides an interesting exception, and the fact that her discussion of representation relative to sexual and racial identity sends her to an examination of "alternative" film may be symptomatic, since once difference finally arrives at the forecourt, painting is notably absent. Disappointingly, this section reads like an addendum, and lacks the subtlety and sophistication of the critiques thrown at the regime it intends to undermine.

That the search for alternatives does not carry the same weight as the analysis of the power of the scopic regime does not detract from the significance of that analysis, but it also speaks perhaps of another kind of subtle domination. Rose seems to inadvertently point this out by raising the issue of gender. Here, other media and the "other" sex appear within the horizon of the text for the first time, challenging the unified visions of the other essays. The risk that this book runs is succumbing to the *folie du voir* that reduces all practices to subjugated forms, or views them with the tunnel vision that excludes precisely the difference it presumes to celebrate. *K.D.*

## CATALOGUES / CATALOGUES

**Public, «Il n'y a pas d'«art français»»,**  
**Grenoble, Magasin,**  
**Centre national d'art contemporain de**  
**Grenoble, 1989, 157 p., ill. n. et b.**

Conçu et réalisé par Nadine Descendre et Philippe Cazal, ce numéro de la revue *Public* est consacré à l'exposition d'un certain «art français» négligé, dont la force a été de se «réapproprié, entre autres, les mécanismes de fonctionnement, les icônes du système de représentation et du discours de la communica-

tion» dont il a été privé. Ces artistes de la Résistance s'inscrivent, selon les conservateurs, dans la tradition d'une démarche rationaliste spécifiquement française et caractérisée par une investigation conceptuelle n'escamotant aucunement le paradoxe de sa matérialisation. Sont donc réunis, au nom d'une cohésion issue d'un travail «avec & pour» la médiatisation soutenue par les moyens, classiques, d'une pensée esthétique qui le fonde en tant que projet critique: Richard Baqué, Information Fiction Publicité, Bertrand



Lavier, Marylène Negro, Gérard Collin-Thiébaud, Ange Leccia, Patrick Tosani, Jacqueline Dauriac, Jean-Luc Vilmouth, pour nommer les moins négligés!

Le texte de Nadine Descendre fait de son intitulé provocateur, «Il n'y a pas d'«art français»», la prémisse d'une démonstration par la négative; sa teneur historique, procédant selon un parcours des modèles de la raison depuis Descartes, produit l'effet d'une insertion presque naturelle du filon artistique ici privilégié, dont le projet «désigne du doigt un «esprit français»». Reste à savoir, alors que la cohérence et l'intérêt de cette réunion d'artistes ne font aucun doute, si l'exclusivité théorique qu'on leur accorde n'est pas quelque peu audacieuse!

Est aussi soulevée, avec ce numéro dont la conception graphique prend de façon fort intéressante la relève de l'accrochage, la question du statut de l'exposition qu'on aurait bien évidemment tort de qualifier ici de *fictive* même si elle n'a lieu qu'en ces pages. Dans une section intitulée «Album», la fonction documentaire du catalogue d'exposition se voit déplacée de façon ironique. Bien que les reproductions renvoient à des expositions réelles, on ne pourrait qualifier de *réelle* leur référence indirecte à celle qui est présentée ici. *C.B.*

**Saturne en Europe, Strasbourg,**  
**Les Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg,**  
**1988, 161 p., ill. n. et b. et coul.**

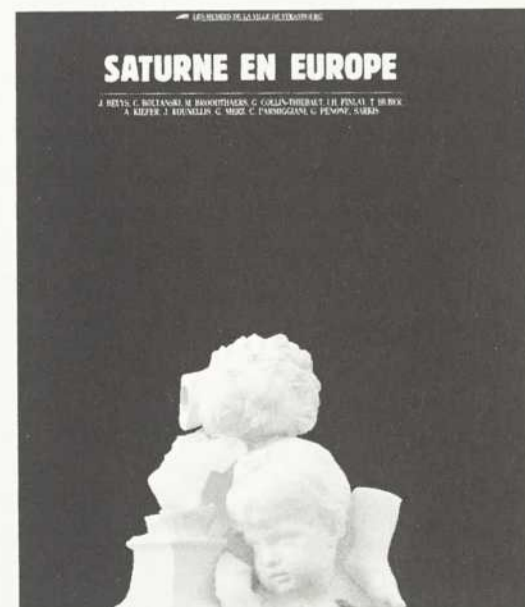
Le catalogue *Saturne en Europe* a été publié à l'occasion de l'exposition du même nom, qui s'est tenue à Strasbourg à l'automne 1988. Les œuvres — toutes d'artistes contemporains européens de stature internationale (J. Beuys, C. Boltanski, M. Broodthaers, G. Collin-Thiébaud, I.H. Finlay, T. Huber, A. Kiefer, J. Kounellis, G. Merz, C. Parmiggiani, G. Penone, Sarkis) — ont été regroupées autour de la *mélancolie*, mélange de tristesse et de tempérament inspiré, humeur

«noire» associée à l'influence de Saturne. Dans l'espace que définit le passage de la figure symbolique à la figure de rhétorique qu'est la mélancolie, dans cette exposition, dans cet espace, se développent les textes de Jean Starobinski, Adalgisa Lugli, Remo Guidieri et ceux des conservateurs, Roland Recht et Françoise Ducros.

Par divers biais sémantiques, ces textes traitent d'œuvres, de la mélancolie, du rapport des deux, avec comme arrière-fond constant, cette forme de ruinisme et de désillusion douce-amère associées à la postmodernité. La couverture du catalogue reproduisant une œuvre de Kounellis est, à cet égard, particulièrement représentative du ton de l'ouvrage: corpus hors pair, finesse d'érudition, solidité théorique, brillance de la démonstration; mais aussi culte — culte de la nostalgie et du manque, culte littéraire de la nuit et de la mort, du fragment et de l'ironie. Peut-être le lien entre la théorie romantique et les œuvres postmodernes n'a-t-il trouvé jusqu'à cette exposition et ce catalogue, meilleur lieu conceptuel pour s'énoncer, meilleurs propos pour en nuancer les affinités et les différences.

À partir des corollaires du procédé allégorique dont relève la mélancolie (ambiguïté, équivoque), prenant à partie le rapport de la mélancolie au passé, le texte de Starobinski aborde la question de la coupure épistémologique qu'opèrent les années quatre-vingt en regard de la modernité. Ainsi, «la mélancolie étant une problématique liée à l'actualité du sujet, à la conscience qu'il manifeste de ne pouvoir s'échapper dans l'utopie sociale», on peut dire, selon Starobinski, que les années quatre-vingt relèvent de la mélancolie en ce qu'elles «proclament la fin des avant-gardes en réaction contre les utopies des années soixante». Le texte de Starobinski, traversé des écrits de Benjamin sur le romantisme allemand, met alors en œuvre la délicate filiation du romantisme et de la postmodernité.

Le texte d'Adalgisa Lugli (*Mélancolie et collections*), à travers plusieurs concepts-clefs, opère une relecture de tout un corpus d'œuvres anciennes (de la Renaissance italienne principalement)



traitant de la mélancolie. Le texte de Remo Guidieri (*L'Europe après la pluie*) est dédié à Joseph Beuys: texte non plus sur la mélancolie, mais mélopée — allemande —, «conscience du désastre», «Krisis». La deuxième demie du catalo-

gue comporte les textes des deux conservateurs qui analysent chaque œuvre en regard de ce thème de la mélancolie, faisant que l'on ne sait plus trop — de l'œuvre ou du propos — lequel annexe l'autre. C.D.

## PÉRIODIQUES / PERIODICALS

Raymond Bellour et Anne-Marie Duguet, dir, «Vidéo», *Communications* (48), Seuil, 1988.

Débordements et passages: ce sont les mots-clés structurant cette belle anthologie qui situe la vidéo comme *question* et qui se déploie selon une tension intertextuelle. La pratique nous est proposée comme processus d'interrogation de la représentation, du sujet, du regard, comme fissuration des limites entre disciplines et surtout comme remise en cause de la théorie (dans son sens habituel d'explication, d'évaluation, de construction de sens). À lire à ce propos le texte de F. Jameson qui, *via* une lecture sociale et (post)structuraliste du «flux total» de l'image électronique, poursuit sa réflexion sur l'impossibilité interprétative dans l'ère postmoderne. La multidisciplinarité des approches de *Vidéo* et la lecture intertextuelle à laquelle il incite participent de ce bouleversement théorique: le texte de J.-P. Fargier est indicatif à cet égard... défense obsessionnelle d'une spécificité paradoxalement mouvante de l'image comme Corps.

Soulignons d'abord ce tracé de l'utopie qui se tisse à travers les essais anglo-saxons. Il faudra lire le texte de G. Youngblood à la lumière de celui de P. Wollen portant sur le positivisme technologique de l'entre-deux Guerres. S'y développe une réflexion utopique qui postule la possibilité d'une renaissance de la communauté *via* le développement d'une communication de type conversationnel qui mettrait en échec le potentiel également destructeur du télé-communicationnel. Ici, comme dans l'avant-garde historique, la technologie incarne la Femme dans son ambivalence: simultanément castratrice, destructrice, maternelle et libératrice. Wollen explique que c'est cette ambivalence même qui ancre la foi avant-gardiste dans la technologie en tant que science de contrôle de l'incontrôlable, de rationalisation de l'irrationnel. Cette réflexion qui tend à proposer la technologie comme fantasme masculin ne sera malheureusement pas reprise au sein de l'anthologie. Elle fonctionne comme un excès qu'il serait nécessaire de reprendre. Autre excès: M. Sturken soutient que l'utopie, active dès les débuts de la vidéo comme critique du social et des moyens traditionnels de production et de diffu-

sion, a été minée par les institutions modernistes. La liste des «grands vidéastes» sur laquelle repose l'histoire (formaliste) de la vidéo serait donc à redéfinir... mais cette liste n'est pas substantiellement modifiée au sein de ce numéro. Cependant la critique aiguë du déterminisme technique déployée par l'auteure agira sur le texte d'E. Couchot qui tient une lecture pour le moins progressiste des développements technologiques.

Deuxième tracé théorique de l'ouvrage: celui du scopique entamé par P. Virilio. La vidéo/télé fusionne et confond apparences transmises et immédiates: du point de vue urbanistique, il conviendra dorénavant de parler de téléprésence et de réalité trans-apparente. Le scopique est repris par A.-M. Duguet qui situe la vidéo dans ses rapports au minimalisme et à l'art conceptuel, comme pratique de la théâtralité et critique de la représentation. L'installation vidéo met en scène un théâtre du percevoir: c'est un dispositif opérant le procès du regardant de la *costruzione leggittima*. Selon M. Gheude, l'incrustation *télé* maintiendrait l'extériorité quattrocentiste du regardant: bien que cette technique de multiplication en surface des images décuple les points de vues, elle positionne le sujet face à une image plate qu'il n'est pas possible de pénétrer. D'où, comme le proposent M.-E. Mélon, P. et C. Dubois, une *logique scénographique de la surface*. L'examen de films alliant techniques cinématographiques et vidéographiques explique comment la vidéo, en raison même de cette esthétique de mise à plat de l'espace, permet de rendre une réalité «infilma-ble»: en trouant l'image, elle ouvre un passage continu permettant au regard de traverser l'écran de part et d'autre. L'extériorité du regardant est affectée. Explorant une méthode similaire d'*interpénétrations* cinéma-vidéo, R. Bellour voit dans la vidéo une pratique de l'autoportrait où le «je» se déploie comme errance, absence à soi, totalité ouverte, imprévisibilité, où le moi se constitue d'après toutes les voix qui le traversent. Ainsi, si la vidéo est effectivement une pratique de questionnement et de débordement, d'ébranlement du regard, c'est qu'elle cherche à décrire un moi postmoderne paradoxalement indescriptible. Retour à l'impossibilité interprétative de Jameson... C.R.

## LIVRE D'ARTISTE / ARTISTS' BOOK

Nicole Jolicœur, *Charcot: deux concepts de nature*, Montréal: Artexes, 1988, 96 p., illus. b. & w. and col.

This recent artist's bookwork presents itself with an apparent simplicity that economically disguises the complexity of its content. In slightly more than eighty pages, the images reproduce line drawings (many of Jolicœur's own), photographs, diagrams, and even synoptic tables. These are cued to texts to deliver a narrative that mixes fragments of Charcot's biography—and "autobiography"—cleverly turning a speaker's words against himself in a tour-de-force that is a stunning picture of the difference that a century makes to credibility.

The "two concepts of nature" are, most simply, two "geographies": Charcot *père's* obsessive cataloguing of hysterics in the Clinic at La Salpêtrière; and Charcot *fil's* descriptions of his travels to subpolar regions. Two pivotal sets of

metaphors, then, where the languages of medicine and science thicken with double meanings, shed less light on their objects of scrutiny—Woman or wild Nature—than on the men purporting to describe them. Such observations in the "book of nature" repeat Rousseau's, and later Comte's, telescoping of natural and moral worlds in a single hierarchical one, where developing Science could be used to arbit social questions. So scientifically defined natural "differences" could be used to produce, and maintain, social inequalities. So Augustine, surrounded by images of female hysterics in Charcot's amphitheatre, could become the public hysteric; and, like the photographic images taken of her, she too begins to see everything in black and white.

Jolicœur's playful bookwork is a serious reply to Charcot's chilling, "I register what I see." She shows us that this is not an observer to be trusted. And certainly not one to be believed. C.L.

## TITRES CHOISIS / SELECTED TITLES

### Ouvrages théoriques / Essays

- Bloom, Barbara, *Ghost Writer*, Berlin Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, 1988, 22 p., illus. b. & w. and col.  
 Campbell, James D., *An Interpretive Paradigm: The Rayons and Sculpture of John Heward*, Montréal, Dictions, 1988, 105 p., illus. b. & w.  
 Drudi, Gabriella, *Robert Motherwell. Notes romaines*, Paris, La Différence, 1988, 127 p., illus. n. et b. et coul.  
 Labelle-Rojoux, Arnaud, *L'Acte pour l'art*, Paris, Les Éditeurs Évidant, 1988, 384 p., ill. n. et b.  
 Starobinski, Jean, *Garache*, Paris, Flammarion, 1988, 167 p., ill. n. et b. et coul.

### Catalogues / Catalogues

- Gerhard Merz *MCMLXXXVIII*, Le Consortium Dijon, Les Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg, Musée de Grenoble, 1988, n. p., ill. n. et b. et coul.

- Images critiques*, Béatrice Parent conservatrice, Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1989, n.p., ill. n. et b. et coul.  
*L'Avant-garde russe et soviétique. Oeuvres de la collection Costakis*, Pierre Théberge et Janet Brooke, Montréal, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, 1989, 175 p., ill. n. et b. et coul.  
*Muntadas Stadium*, Daina Augaitis, curator, Banff, Walter Phillips Gallery, 1989, unpagé. *Muntadas Stadium*, Doug Wong Music, 1989, compact disk.  
*Perspective 88 Fastwürms*, Barbara Fischer, curator, Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1988, 31 p., illus. b. & w.  
*Richard Serra 10 Sculptures for the Van Abbe*, organised by Hendrik Driessen, Eindhoven, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1988, 40 p., illus. b. & w.  
*Three Decades. The Oliver-Hoffman Collection*, Bruce Guenther, curator, Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, 1989, 128 p., illus. b. & w. and col.

THE IMPOSSIBLE LIFE OF  
CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI

BERNARD MARCADÉ

It was under the most confusing — and exceptional — circumstances that Christian Boltanski made his way into the world of contemporary art. On May 3, 1968, the first day of the student riots, a twelve-minute 8mm film was shown at the Ranelagh, in a box with wheels that could hold six to seven people; its title was enigmatic and, as it turns out, quite prophetic: *The Impossible Life of Christian Boltanski*. This film, together with the conditions under which it was shown, revealed even at this early stage the heart and pith of the work of Christian Boltanski. For it was in neither a museum nor a gallery that Boltanski exhibited his work for the first time. Nor did it involve what is commonly called objects — or works — of art. From the outset, Boltanski's artistic expression centered on paradox and dissimulation. The very title of the film heralded the direction his work was to take; it had the dual stamp of biography and impossibility. His attitude has always stemmed from, and played with, this impossibility; he is creating a form of biography of the impossible while at the same time demonstrating the impossibility (that is the futility) of all biographical endeavour:

A large part of my activity is connected with the idea of biography, but a completely false biography that is presented as such, with all kinds of false documents; you can find this throughout my life: the non-existence of the person, the more you talk of Christian Boltanski, the less he exists. [...] The purpose of a biographical work is to prevent the artist from dying, to surround him with so many known facts about his life that he's no longer dead. In fact, this kind of thing will never succeed because we can't understand everything about someone: everything he did, ate, saw...<sup>1</sup>

Christian Boltanski has always been on the razor's edge, and done things his own way: his attitudes were rather different from the militant ideas then in vogue in artistic circles. The force and prominence of his work is linked with the fragility and precariousness of his aesthetic, moral, or even political positions. "Today, although I've always thought this, I think that art has stopped trying to influence life; art is only art, painting takes in the world but acts very little upon it."<sup>2</sup> This view was expressed in 1983 to Delphine Renard; as reactionary as it may seem, it is an incisive and rigorous (non-romantic) appraisal of the situation of today's artist. Boltanski is demolishing a form of intellectual hypocrisy and demagoguery, which tends to emblazon artistic activity with the most radical, indeed revolutionary, virtues. He mistrusts the all-encompassing views, the "brand images" which impose a world view upon the public. His *Reconstitutions* of the early 1970s, whether photographed (*Recherche et présentation de tout ce qui reste de mon enfance* (1969), *Reconstitution des gestes effectués par C.B. entre 1948 et 1954* (1972), etc.), composed of objects (lumps of earth, small scissors, sculpted sugar, plastiline reconstructions, etc. (1970-71)), or even sung (*Reconstitution de chansons qui ont été chantées à C.B. entre 1944 et 1946* (1971)), all appeal to the memory of the perceiver. They leave the viewer free to imagine, remember, and identify. "For me, a painting is in part created by the person who looks at it, who 'reads' it with the help of his own experiences."<sup>3</sup> Here Boltanski is borrowing from Duchamp's famous dictum: "It is the

viewers who make paintings." His perception, however, is less "optimistic." His *Reconstitutions*, like his *Images stimuli* (1976) or *Images modèles* (1975) make no pretense of promoting a new visual world. On the contrary, they testify to the fact that we are destined to share a common store of images. "I don't want the viewers to discover, but to recognize."<sup>4</sup>

Thus is it possible to understand his desire, a recurrent one, to disappear in the gaze of others. This position smacks of both extreme humility and extreme pretense. It proceeds in fact as much from a desire for self-effacement, similar to Rimbaud's attitude ("Je est un autre"/"I is another"), as it does from the very Warholian desire to "be a machine," to melt into the world of the image to the point of personally becoming a pure collective representation. "I always think the artist is a kind of machine, working at being others, and that his desire to make things is tied up with the desire to suppress his own life."<sup>5</sup>

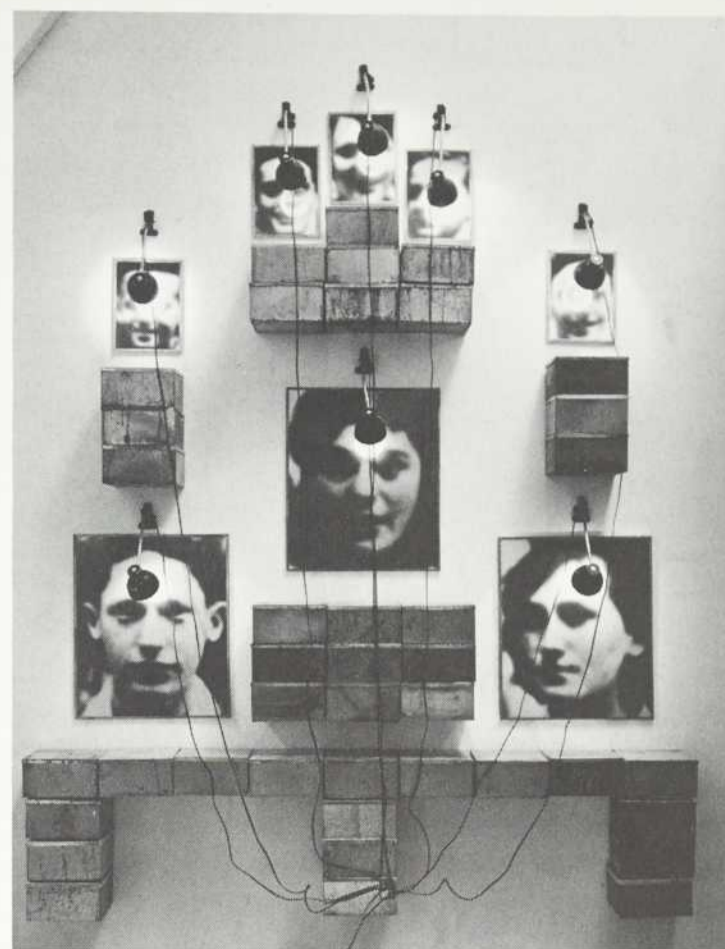
Boltanski wants us to speak of his works as if they were those of a dead artist. When Didier Semin was writing his 1988 monograph on the artist, Boltanski's attitude was the following: "I didn't want to see him [D.S.] and he must've thought I was dead... I gave him absolutely no information. He was great, he never called me. So it was as if the book was describing a finished body of works."<sup>6</sup> This is not some sort of morbid smugness, or æsthetic coquetry. As far back as 1969, he had made the enactment of his own death the subject and object of a publication: *Reconstitution d'un accident qui ne m'est pas encore arrivé et où j'ai trouvé la mort*. Didier Semin accurately describes Boltanski's original approach to the relationship between the work (subject, author) and death, a very contemporary concern:

There is, of course, the absence of the signature, the collective nature of the work, the anonymity of style or stamp — all the strategies around which modern art revolves. But it is more Boltanski's insistence on maintaining the author in a work that is structurally independent of him that destroys the very idea of an author and the common urge to look beyond the work for a subject that provides the key to understanding it.<sup>7</sup>

In his multifarious activities (letters, photographs, reconstructions, installations, etc.), Boltanski is profoundly aware of the work as a process bound up in its own disappearance.

There can be no clear beginnings in the work of Boltanski. All origins are always/already conditioned by death. Everything happens as if Boltanski had taken up things *at the end*, as if their state of becoming (their ageing, alterations, etc.) retroactively determined their conception and fabrication. Boltanski's first works (*petits bâtons, petits couteaux, reconstitutions d'objets*, in plastiline) thus represent a form of destruction. They are already eaten away in advance. Before being subjected to the ravage of time, they appear already as ruins. This work is thus itself a relic, a group of absurd objects well-suited to appear in those cultural cemeteries known as museums:

The Musée de l'Homme was of great importance to me; I saw huge glass and metal cases which held fragile little objects that were meaningless. In the corner of the case there would often be a faded



*Autel Chases*, 1988,  
photographies n/b, boîtes de métal,  
lampes et fils électriques,  
installée: 310 x 220 cm;  
photo: Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot.

photograph showing a "savage" using these objects. Each window presented a vanished world: the savage was undoubtedly dead, the objects had become obsolete and the method of using them was in any case a total mystery. The Musée de l'Homme seemed to me like a giant morgue.<sup>8</sup>

That Christian Boltanski is obsessed with childhood (memories, portraits, clothes, toys, etc.) is not surprising. The child, in the same way as the "primitive," is the traditional embodiment of "purity" and "authenticity." Art itself proceeds from this ideology, from this fiction. For nothing is less innocent than the world of the child. And nothing more cruel. The ideology of childhood shares with the ideology of art the same belief in happiness and clarity. With a malicious pleasure, Boltanski likes to undermine these concepts. His child portraits are endlessly aligned (*Les 62 membres du Club Mickey*, 1974), methodically accumulated (*Les Photos préférées des enfants au C.E.C. de Lentillères*, 1974), systematically photographed (*Les Enfants de Berlin*, 1975), carefully rephotographed (*Les Enfants de Dijon*, 1986). The effect in each case is an ambiguous atmosphere halfway between an absurd iconostasis and the glory of Eternal Youth and a funereal memorial celebrating lost childhood. *Et in Arcadio ego*. The world of childhood is also undermined by death. As is the world of art. To believe in childhood as a value is like believing in the possibility of a "Golden Age"; it is to view the unfolding of the world in terms of alternating periods of progress and decline.

History is not the perspective favoured by Boltanski; this is why he uses photography, not for its power of revelation but for its ability to freeze time and place. The photographic portrait is in this respect a form of reification of the person represented, for he or she is eternalized in a moment that will never be again. Boltanski is fascinated by that which he calls the "transformation of the subject into object": "In my photos of children, there are people that I know nothing about, who were subjects that became objects, in other words, corpses. They are no longer anything, I can manipulate them, tear them up, put holes in them."<sup>9</sup> History is not Boltanski's vantage point because History stood still in the middle of the century, somewhere between Auschwitz and Treblinka.

In a work such as *Archives*, from Documenta VIII in 1987, the reference to this mournful chapter in Western history is clear, and perhaps even clearer in his latest installations in Toronto (Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, 1988) and Basel; here it is articles of clothing instead of photographs that cruelly make us see and even feel — in Basel it is possible to walk on the work — this absence of human beings who ostensibly exist or once existed.

It is thus not surprising that Boltanski denies any messianic or teleological properties in art:

The artist has this fear of not knowing, of being apart from the rest, of living in the dark. This explains the attempts in the Bauhaus era to find happiness in geometry, or in the 1970s to find it in politics or theory; but in fact there is no progress in art. The very idea is totally stupid. There is no connection between science, which is cumulative, and art, which is not.<sup>10</sup>

Boltanski's position of disengaging himself from these "noble" campaigns may appear as a dodge, an evasion, but in fact his views are extremely penetrating. He knows how much this desire for happiness "at all cost" and for "clarity" is a deceit; how it so often is the source of the most dubious ideological manipulations. Boltanski prefers to confront the doubts and inherent contradictions in his situation as an artist rather than promote some idealized "elsewhere," some "rosy tomorrow." "Perhaps it is my doubting, my use of photography and not painting, my attempts to say something together with its opposite, my playing with a code...that represent a political attitude."<sup>11</sup>

This attitude in fact translates into a veritable method. All Boltanski's actions, all his judgements are subjected to doubt and instability. Thus, he claims to be a painter and nothing else, and yet he uses almost exclusively the techniques of photography and the commonest of objects. This is an indication of Boltanski's ambition to enter into a major category of Art with techniques and objects which are foreign to it. In the same way, his works play upon aspects of magic and religion while denouncing them at the same time: "My artistic activity falls within the domain of religion, but I hope that within each piece is an element that contradicts, that questions it."<sup>12</sup>

Each time, Boltanski assumes an impossible position while giving no hope whatsoever of surmounting or resolving the contradiction. Thus will he ask to be both believed and doubted; he will call his work grandiose and pedestrian, intended for the "initiated" and the "general public." His explanation for this also pulls in two directions:

I've often thought, though I'm still not too sure, that the source of all this is my Jewish culture/non-culture. This strange relationship I have with the divine, the feeling of being both the chosen and the last among men, makes me first affirm and then contradict myself, cry and then make fun of myself, say that I'm a painter without really painting [...] In any case, everything's quite hazy; I've no Jewish culture. I'm like the Indians in the Westerns who act as guides for the soldiers: they've forgotten everything, but after drinking the Indian dances start coming back to them...<sup>13</sup>

This juxtaposition of opposites, like the doubting preacher in *Nuit du chasseur* who shows LOVE on one hand and HATE on the other, is not some opportunistic pirouette designed to open up several exits. What is involved is the question of reality. Modern logic has taught us to understand how a statement can never be absolutely true or false in itself. Everything depends on the context in which the utterance is made. Thus, a statement may be true in one situation and false in another. No one can escape these reversals of the true and the false, from which emerges not a form of Truth, but of the Real:

In one of my first interviews, I played the role of the desperate and tormented young artist. As I was speaking, I was thinking: I'm acting quite well, they believe me... But when I left, I felt horribly depressed because in fact it was a truth I was hiding from myself and could only admit it to myself under the guise of a game.<sup>14</sup>

This anecdote perfectly demonstrates how presumptuous, if not erroneous, it is to try to determine a *second level* in things. One should not regard Boltanski's photographic works of the seventies, for example, solely as a sociological (and conceptual) study concerning the tastes of the general public. In fact, it is too easy to say that it is a question of distancing oneself from stereotypes. It is an epistemological truism to say that the observer is also a part of the observation. That Boltanski's pictures of Venice are taken from the same vantage point as the commonest of tourists does not automatically make them vehicles of parody or derision: "First of all, they're my photographs," Boltanski explains, "and I find them very pretty. When I see them again today, I see their practical value, in other words they remind me of my summer of 1975."<sup>15</sup>

The practice of art is not pure; it is this very impurity that guarantees its emotion. For Boltanski, without emotion there is no art. This is why the artist is more on the side of the saint than that of the hero. Heroes are by nature infallible; there can be nothing in them to forgive. Saints, on the other hand, do not have to perform dazzling feats; it is enough to lead an exemplary life, even through the accumulation of insignificant details. "A saint may have performed only one, very inconspicuous act: remaining in a cell an entire lifetime — which is not a heroic act. Giacometti is the perfect example of a saint who did nothing heroic."<sup>16</sup> Saints are by their very nature closer to the image: they are defined more by what they show than by what they say. Boltanski likes to evoke these simple and stationary anchorites and stylites who peopled the deserts of Syria and Palestine in the 4th Century A.D. Beuys, Warhol, Gilbert & George are for Boltanski the direct descendants of these exceptional figures: "In my mind, the two great saints of today's world are Warhol and Beuys. In fact, I think they're one and the same person, Beuys being the optimistic saint in the Christian tradition and Warhol the pessimist, the dark angel. Moreover, they were very fond of each other, and both of them had model lives."<sup>17</sup>

To make an example out of his life: such is the impossible project that Christian Boltanski has been working on for over twenty years. "Do you know, Mother Superior," said a nun who clearly knew of what she spoke, "when it comes to humility, I need envy no one."

#### NOTES

1. "Christian Boltanski, la Revanche de la maladresse," Interview by Alain Fleischer and Didier Semin, *art press* no. 128, sept. 1988, p.6. [Trans. from the French]
2. Delphine Renard, "Entretien de Christian Boltanski. Anthologie critique," Catalogue of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1984, p.73. [Trans. from the French]
3. *Ibid.*, p.79.
4. *Ibid.*, p.79.
5. Interview by A. Fleischer, *op. cit.*, p.7.
6. *Ibid.*, p.6.
7. Didier Semin, *Boltanski*, *art press*, Paris, 1988, p.65.
8. Interview by D. Renard, *op. cit.*, p.71.
9. Interview by A. Fleischer, *op. cit.*, p.9.
10. *Ibid.*, p.8.
11. Interview by D. Renard, *op. cit.*, p.73.
12. *Ibid.*, p.72.
13. *Ibid.*, p.72-73.
14. *Ibid.*, p.75.
15. *Ibid.*, p.76.
16. Interview by A. Fleischer, *op. cit.*, p.6.
17. *Ibid.*, p.6.

Bernard Mercadé is a curator and an art critic, and also a contributor to *art press*, *Flash art* and *Studio*. He has written *L'Éloge du mauvais esprit* (Paris: éditions de la différence). He lives in Paris.

Translated from the French by Jeffrey Moore.

3e

# Festival International de Nouvelle danse

Montréal

Du 19 au 30 septembre 1989

Allemagne

Belgique

Canada

Etats-Unis

France

Hollande

Japon

**Le festival haute tension, un véritable électrochoc**

Info-festival: (514) 288.1888

Programmation complète

sur demande

---

**K I K I S M I T H**

3 J U I N - 3 0 J U I N 1 9 8 9

**GALERIE RENÉ BLOUIN**

372 OUEST, RUE STE-CATHERINE, CH.501, MONTRÉAL, CANADA H3B 1A2 (514) 393-9969

---

**B E T T Y G O O D W I N**

9 M A I - 2 J U I L L E T 1 9 8 9  
B E R N E R K U N S T M U S E U M

**GALERIE RENÉ BLOUIN**

372 OUEST, RUE STE-CATHERINE, CH.501, MONTRÉAL, CANADA H3B 1A2 (514) 393-9969

---

Le Musée d'art  
contemporain de  
Montréal  
25 ans déjà!

# musée d'art contemporain

## EXPOSITIONS

### ■ Les Dons 1984-1989

Sélection d'œuvres parmi les  
plus importantes offertes au  
Musée depuis cinq ans.

Jusqu'au 4 juin

### ■ Tenir l'image à distance

Œuvres photographiques de 12  
artistes canadiens et étrangers.

Du 15 juin au 3 septembre

### ■ L'histoire et la mémoire

Sélection d'œuvres québécoises  
de la collection permanente  
acquises au cours des  
deux dernières années.

Du 15 juin au 3 septembre

## VIDÉO

### ■ Anicca

Installation vidéo de  
Daniel Dion

Du 14 juin au 27 août

Également à la  
programmation:  
activités d'éducation

Entrée libre au Musée  
Du mardi au dimanche  
de 10h à 18

Cité du Havre  
(514) 873-2878

 MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

D A N G R A H A M

1 9 a o û t — 9 s e p t e m b r e

M A R C E L O D E N B A C H

1 6 s e p t e m b r e — 1 4 o c t o b r e

GALERIE CHANTAL BOULANGER

372, Ste-Catherine o., local 502, Montréal (Québec) H3B 1A2  
Ouvert du mardi au samedi de 12 h à 17 h 30 (514) 397-0044

1<sup>ER</sup> AU 11 JUIN  
EXPO-ENCAN

17 JUIN AU 9 JUILLET  
MICHÈLE LORRAIN  
CLAIRE SAVOIE *peinture / sculpture*

8 SEPTEMBRE AU 8 OCTOBRE  
R O B E R T O  
P E L L E G R I N U Z Z I *installation-photo*

*optica*

3981, BOULEVARD SAINT-LAURENT, SUITE 501  
MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC CANADA H2W 1Y5 (514) 287-1574  
subventions: Conseil des Arts du Canada / ministère des Affaires culturelles  
du Québec / Conseil des Arts de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal

## IRENE F. WHITTOME

*Parcours dessiné  
Hommage à Jack Shadbolt*

*Drawings 1963-1988  
A Tribute to Jack Shadbolt*



photo: Richard-Max Tremblay

18 juin - 3 septembre 1989

Musée d'art de Joliette  
145, rue Wilfrid-Corbeil  
Joliette, Québec J6E 3Z3  
(514) 756.0311

Cette exposition organisée par le Musée d'art de Joliette et sa mise en circulation sont rendues possibles grâce à l'appui du Conseil des Arts du Canada, du ministère des Affaires culturelles et de la ville de Joliette.

May 25 - July 1, 1989

le 25 mai au 1<sup>er</sup> juillet 1989

## DENIS DEMERS

(1948 - 1987)

An exhibition organized by the Concordia Art Gallery, Montreal, with the assistance of the Canada Council.

Une exposition organisée par la Galerie d'art Concordia, Montréal, en collaboration avec le Conseil des Arts du Canada.

CONCORDIA | GALERIE  
ART | D'ART  
GALLERY | CONCORDIA

Concordia University/Université Concordia  
1455 ouest, boul. de Maisonneuve, Montréal H3G 1M8

Métro Guy-Concordia  
(514) 848-4750

Monday - Friday 10:00 - 20:00  
lundi - vendredi 10h - 20h

Saturday 10:00 - 17:00  
samedi 10h - 17h

## A VOIR

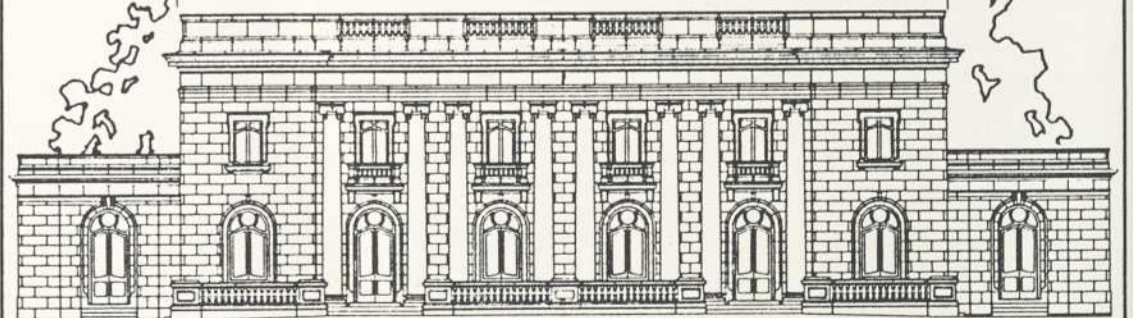
**IMAGES INTERNATIONALES POUR LES  
DROITS DE L'HOMME ET DU CITOYEN**

Exposition organisée par Artis 89

**PLEINS FEUX SUR LE DESIGN**

Ray et Charles Eames  
Estzer Harastzy  
Ettore Sottsass

18 mai 1989 au 3 septembre 1989



**CHÂTEAU  
DUFRESNE**

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS  
DE MONTRÉAL

Mercredi à dimanche  
de 11h à 17h

Entrée par le boulevard Pie IX  
ou 2929, avenue Jeanne d'Arc  
(514) 259-2575

# ELAAC

ENTRÉE LIBRE  
À L'ART CONTEMPORAIN  
1 9 8 9

vous revient pour la 3<sup>e</sup> année consé-  
cutive dans un lieu immense et  
différent, à La Cité de l'Image  
(angle Notre-Dame et Papineau)  
du 27 septembre au 1<sup>er</sup> octobre.

Les galeries membres de l'AGADM  
seront présentes :

Aubes 3935  
Barbara Silverberg  
Cultart  
Daniel  
Don Stewart  
Elca London  
Elena Lee Verre d'Art  
Esperanza  
Frédéric Palardy  
Graff  
J. Yahouda Meir  
Madeleine Lacerte  
Michel Tétreault/  
Art Contemporain  
Samuel Lallouz  
Trois Points

ELAAC grandit et vous présentera  
de nouveaux volets :

### À l'Ombre du génie

Une exposition de 200 artistes  
québécois de renom, en collaboration  
avec la Fondation des maladies  
mentales.

### Coup de cœur

Une dizaine d'installations réa-  
lisées par de jeunes artistes.

Une exposition d'art brut ou 50  
œuvres réalisées par des personnes  
atteintes de maladie mentale.

Et un programme de conférences et  
de tables rondes, sur le thème  
d'art privé/art public, organisé  
par ETC MONTRÉAL

E.L.A.A.C. est une réalisation de l'Association  
des galeries d'art contemporain de Montréal  
1435, de Bleury, suite 806, Montréal Québec H3A 2H7 (514) 843-3334

G A L E R I E

## POWERHOUSE

SHEILA AYEARST  
MARYSIA LEWANDOWSKA

du 13 mai au 4 juin

GAIL BOURGEOIS  
RUTH SCHEUING

du 10 juin au 2 juillet

1989: 16<sup>ième</sup> anniversaire...

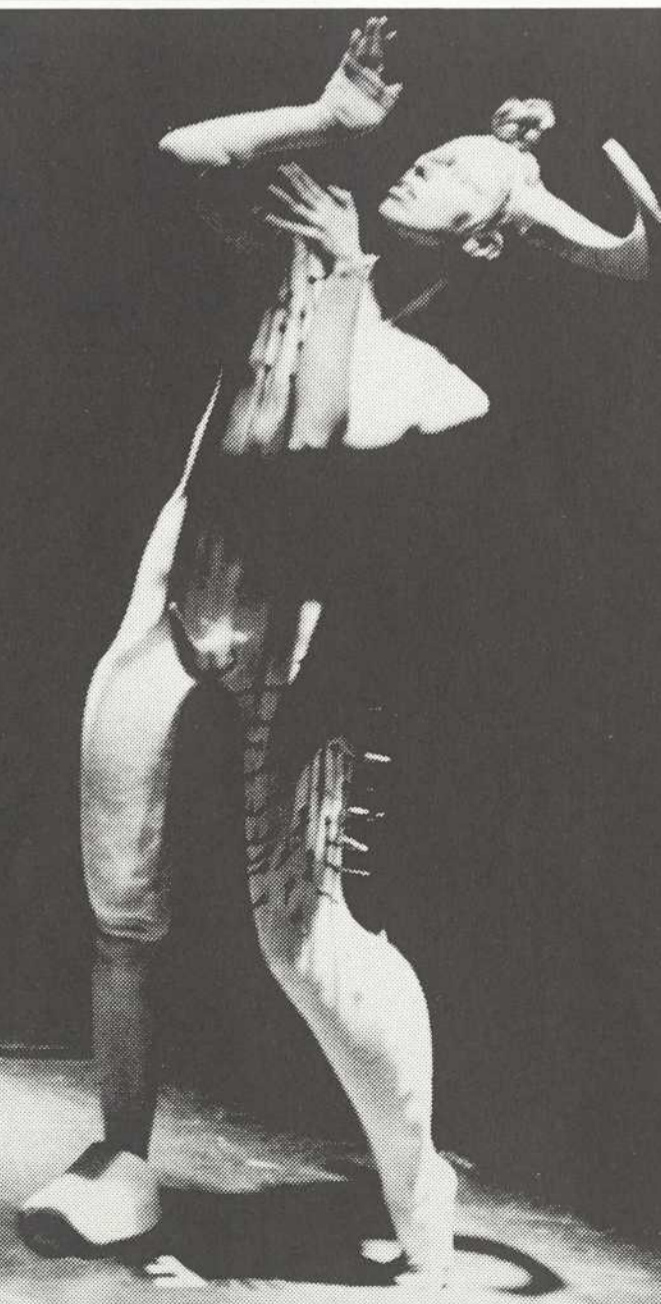
4060, boul. Saint-Laurent, Suite 205  
Mtl, Qc H2W 1Y9 (514) 844-3489

La Galerie Powerhouse tient à remercier le Conseil des Arts du Canada, le ministère des Affaires  
culturelles du Québec ainsi que le Conseil des Arts de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal pour leur appui financier.

EN HOMMAGE À NIJINSKY

(1889-1950)

В ЧЕСТЬ НИЖИНСКОГО



## MARIE CHOUINARD

AU  
MONUMENT  
NATIONAL,  
MONTRÉAL

13 au 16  
septembre 1989  
à 20h30



CONTACT:  
3575, BOUL.  
ST-LAURENT  
BUREAU 516  
MONTRÉAL  
H2X 2T7  
843-9036

MARIE CHOUINARD DANS L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE • Photo : Louise Oligny

---

# MARTINEAU WALKER

---

AVOCATS

AGENTS DE BREVETS ET MARQUES DE COMMERCE

---




WHITTOME, Irene. «Rebirth», gravure rehaussée à l'aquarelle, 1987. Collection du cabinet à Montréal



**Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture**

**TROIS EXPOSITIONS D'ARCHITECTURE  
DÉBUTANT LE 7 MAI**

«L'Architecture et son Image»  
jusqu'au 7 août  
commanditée par CANDEREL

«Centre Canadien d'Architecture: Architecture et Paysage»  
jusqu'en janvier 1990

«Hochelaga Depicta: Documents sur Montréal»  
jusqu'au 14 août

Heures d'ouverture:  
Mercredi et vendredi 11h00 à 18h00  
Jeudi 11h00 à 20h00  
Samedi et dimanche 11h00 à 17h00

1920, rue Baile  
entre les rues du Fort et Saint-Marc  
Téléphone: (514) 939-7000

MÉTRO: Guy – Concordia, Atwater ou Georges-Vanier

**ENTRÉE: 3,00 \$**

**THREE ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITIONS  
FROM 7 MAY**

"Architecture and its Image"  
until 7 August 1989  
sponsored by CANDEREL

"Canadian Centre for Architecture: Building and Gardens"  
until January 1990

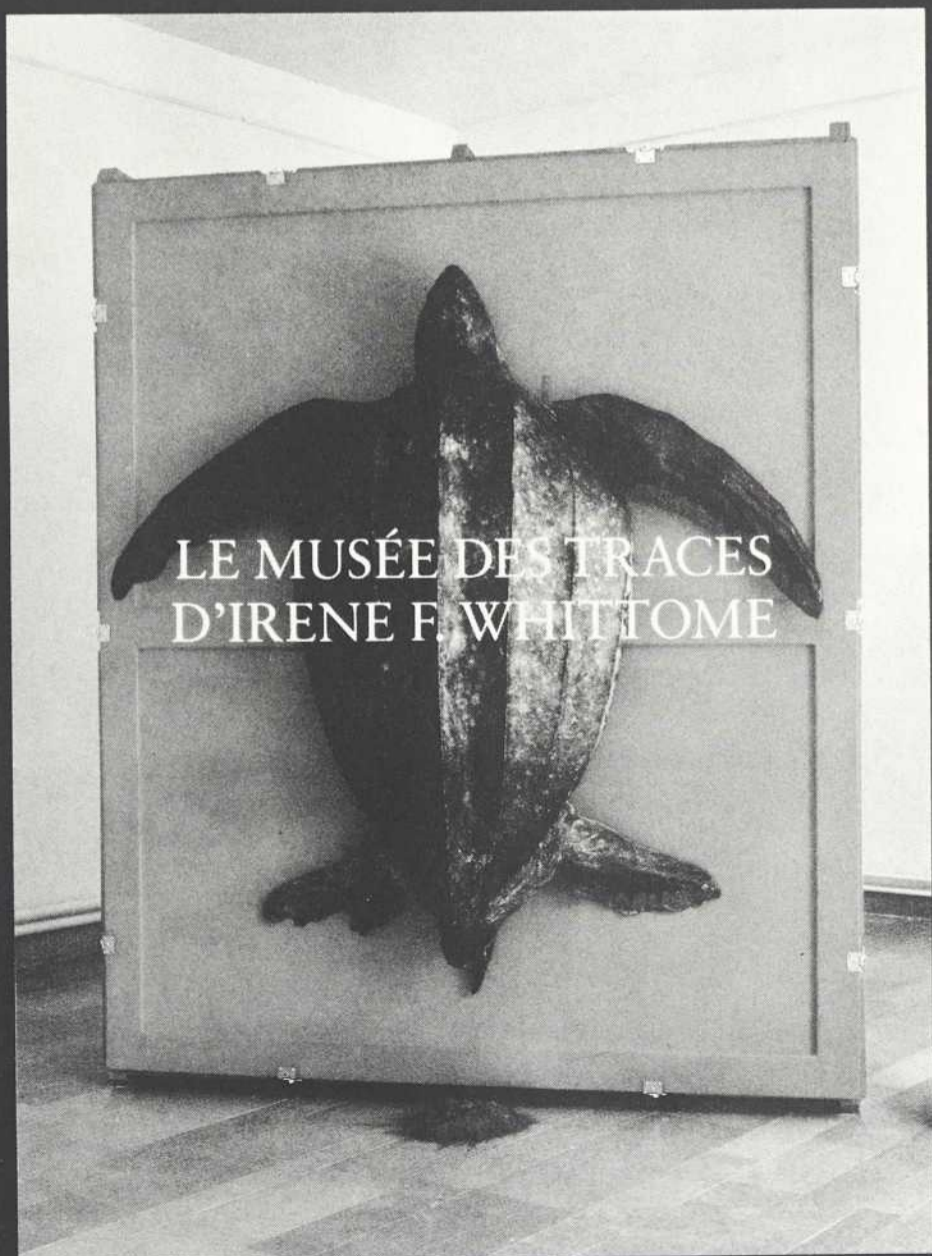
"Hochelaga Depicta: Documenting Montréal"  
until 14 August

Hours:  
Wednesday and Friday 11:00 to 6:00  
Thursday 11:00 to 8:00  
Saturday and Sunday 11:00 to 5:00

1920 Baile Street  
between du Fort and Saint-Marc Streets  
Telephone: (514) 939-7000

MÉTRO: Guy – Concordia/Atwater/Georges-Vanier

**ADMISSION: \$3.00**



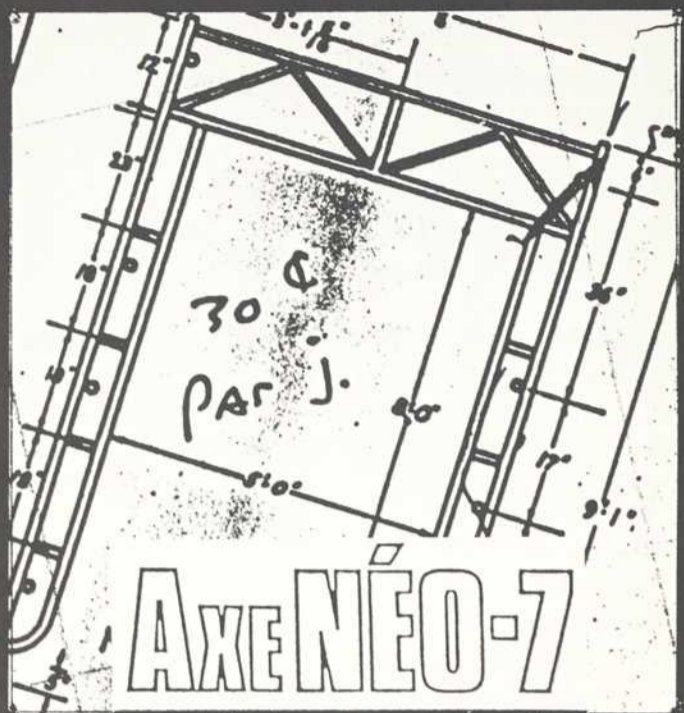
**Les Éditions PARACHUTE publient**

*Le «Musée des Traces» est un projet de longue haleine mené par l'artiste canadienne de renommée internationale Irene F. Whittome. Pur produit de l'imaginaire de l'artiste, ce projet magistral a été suivi de près par l'anthropologue Jacqueline Fry dont le texte relate les origines et l'histoire du «Musée des Traces». Mythologies individuelles et universelles y sont recensées par l'auteure, résultat d'un «compagnonnage» étroit avec l'œuvre.*

commandez votre exemplaire dès maintenant, en incluant votre chèque ou mandat au montant de 18 \$, aux Éditions Parachute 4060, boul. St-Laurent bureau 501 Montréal, Qué., Canada H2W 1Y9 tél.: (514) 842-9805 commandes à l'extérieur du Canada: ajoutez 2 \$.

**Le Musée des Traces d'Irene F. Whittome de Jacqueline Fry**  
Éditions PARACHUTE, Montréal  
25,4 x 20,4 cm.; 64 pages  
ISBN 2-920284-06-1  
1989; 18\$

# EN CONSTRUCTION



À  
Place du Centre, 200  
Promenade du Portage  
H u l l (Québec)  
du 6 juillet au 31 août

## ARTISTES EN ARTS VISUELS UN MESSAGE IMPORTANT POUR VOUS!

Des modifications ont été apportées aux inscriptions au fichier de renseignements pour l'application du **Règlement sur l'intégration des arts à l'architecture et à l'environnement des édifices du Gouvernement du Québec.**

Depuis le 1<sup>er</sup> mai 1989, les **inscriptions** à ce fichier de même que la **mise à jour** des dossiers des artistes déjà inscrits se font à dates fixes, **deux fois par année**. Les dates limites pour ce faire sont désormais fixées au **1<sup>er</sup> juillet** et au **1<sup>er</sup> janvier** de chaque année.

**Première date limite d'inscription ou de mise à jour: 1<sup>er</sup> juillet 1989.**

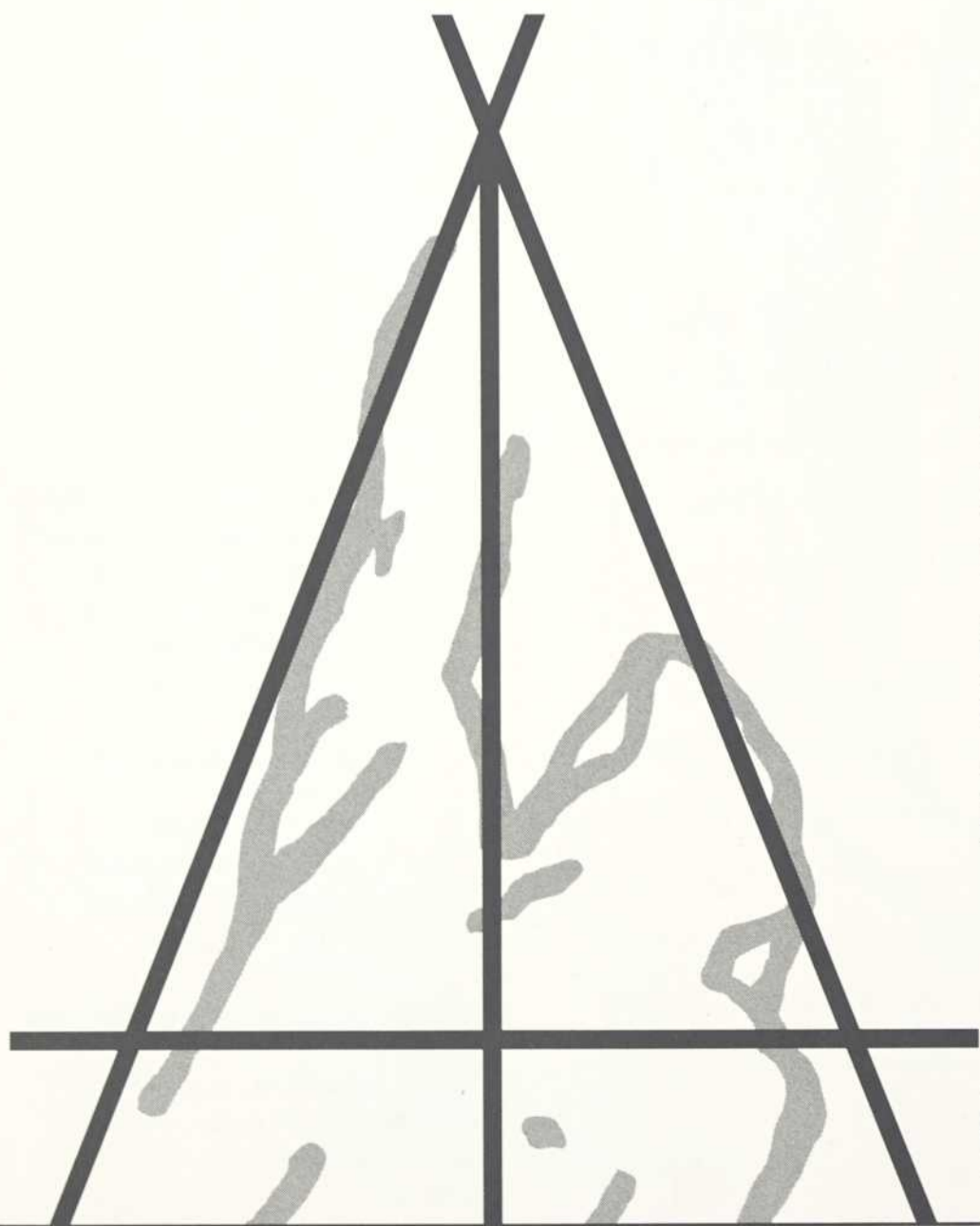
Il est possible de s'inscrire ou de mettre à jour son dossier à la direction du ministère des Affaires culturelles de sa région ou au:

Secrétariat de l'intégration des arts à l'architecture  
Ministère des Affaires culturelles  
225, Grande Allée Est  
3<sup>e</sup> étage, bloc A  
Québec, Québec  
G1R 5G5

Pour plus de renseignements: (418) 643-1678



Québec



## TERRITOIRES D'ARTISTES PAYSAGES VERTICAUX

Le Musée du Québec présente cet été dans divers sites extérieurs de Québec, un événement en art actuel d'envergure internationale.

Quatorze artistes en provenance du Québec, du Canada, des États-Unis, d'Europe et d'Asie sont invités à s'approprier un territoire par la création d'une oeuvre plastique, littéraire, sonore ou photographique.

À Québec, découvrez les Paysages verticaux de: **Danielle April, Dominique Blain, Sylvie Blocher, Daniel Buren, Melvin Charney, Denise Desautels, Fortuyn/O'Brien, Jocelyn Gasse, Angela Grauerholz, Giuseppe Penone, Michael Snow, Robert Stackhouse, Frédéric-Jacques Temple, Shigeo Toya.**

Autant d'artistes à rencontrer du 15 au 25 juin, autant de territoires à connaître et à explorer jusqu'au 1<sup>er</sup> octobre.

Pour renseignements: (418) 643-7975

## MUSÉE DU QUÉBEC

Cette exposition a été rendue possible grâce à la participation financière du Conseil des arts du Canada et des Amis du Musée du Québec, ainsi qu'à la collaboration de la Commission des Champs-de-Bataille Nationaux, de la ville de Québec et de la Société immobilière du Québec.

Le Musée du Québec est subventionné par le ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec.

# BIBLIOTHÈQUE

DU DESSIN  
DE L'ESTAMPE

ET  
DU PAPIER  
DU QUÉBEC

1 9 8 9  
DU 9 JUIN AU 27 AOÛT

A L M A  
case postale 574  
G 8 B 5 W 1  
418-662-6501  
poste: 249  
418-662-2731

Programmation  
disponible  
sur demande



**ABITIBI-PRICE**



# Jack Jeffrey

A N I N S T A L L A T I O N

C O N T E M P O R A R Y A R T G A L L E R Y  
J u n e 9 t o J u l y 8

555 HAMILTON ST. VANCOUVER V6B 2R1  
(604) 681-2700 OPEN 11-5 TUESDAY TO SATURDAY

LES ÉDITIONS PARACHUTE ET LA GALERIE RENÉ BLOUIN  
PUBLIENT

LE DICTIONNAIRE DE ROBER RACINE

*Un ouvrage d'une cinquantaine de pages,  
publié par les Éditions PARACHUTE  
la Galerie René Blouin, révèle l'univers  
fascinant du jeune artiste montréalais  
Rober Racine.*

*À la fois livre d'art et livre-réflexion,  
l'auteur y évoque les fondements des deux  
grands projets auxquels il s'est consacré  
totalement depuis dix ans.*

commandez  
votre exemplaire  
dès maintenant, en incluant  
votre chèque ou mandat  
au montant de 16 \$, aux  
Éditions Parachute  
4060, boul. St-Laurent  
bureau 501  
Montréal, Qué., Canada  
H2W 1Y9  
tél.: (514) 842-9805  
commandes à l'extérieur  
du Canada: ajoutez 2 \$.

**Le Dictionnaire de Rober Racine**  
Éditions PARACHUTE / Galerie René Blouin  
17,8 x 23,5 cm ; 52 pages  
10 illustrations couleurs  
ISBN 2-920284-05-3  
1988

## ESPACE



### La sculpture en revue

**1 an 4 numéros**

- Individu 18 \$
- Institution/Étranger 25 \$

C.P. 878, Succ. C, Montréal, Québec H2L 4L6 (514) 598-8982

cahiers de théâtre  
**jeu**

**JEU 50: un numéro spécial,  
une revue qui fait peau neuve!**

## le théâtre dans la cité

- pulsionnel
- engagé
- critique
- pose de multiples « pourquoi »  
à une cinquantaine d'artistes  
et d'intellectuels  
venus d'horizons divers
- conjugue mémoire et avenir
- interroge le rôle du théâtre  
dans la société actuelle,  
son pouvoir et son sens  
en cette fin de millénaire

# 50

Cahiers de théâtre JEU, 426, rue Sherbrooke Est, Montréal H2L 1J6

288-2808

# CANADIAN MAGAZINES

*for everybody*

Now, 212 publications to choose from!

The new 88/89 Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association catalogue is the one source that describes 212 of the latest and best Canadian magazines.

There's an incredibly wide variety of topics, points of view and special interests.

They're all yours to choose from when you get our current catalogue with its easy-to-use detachable order form.

Fill in the attached coupon today and for just \$2 (to cover postage and handling), we'll send you our new catalogue.

Please send me the new 88/89 CPPA catalogue. I enclose my cheque for \$2 to cover postage and handling.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

PROV. \_\_\_\_\_

POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_

Canadian  
Periodical  
Publishers'  
Association

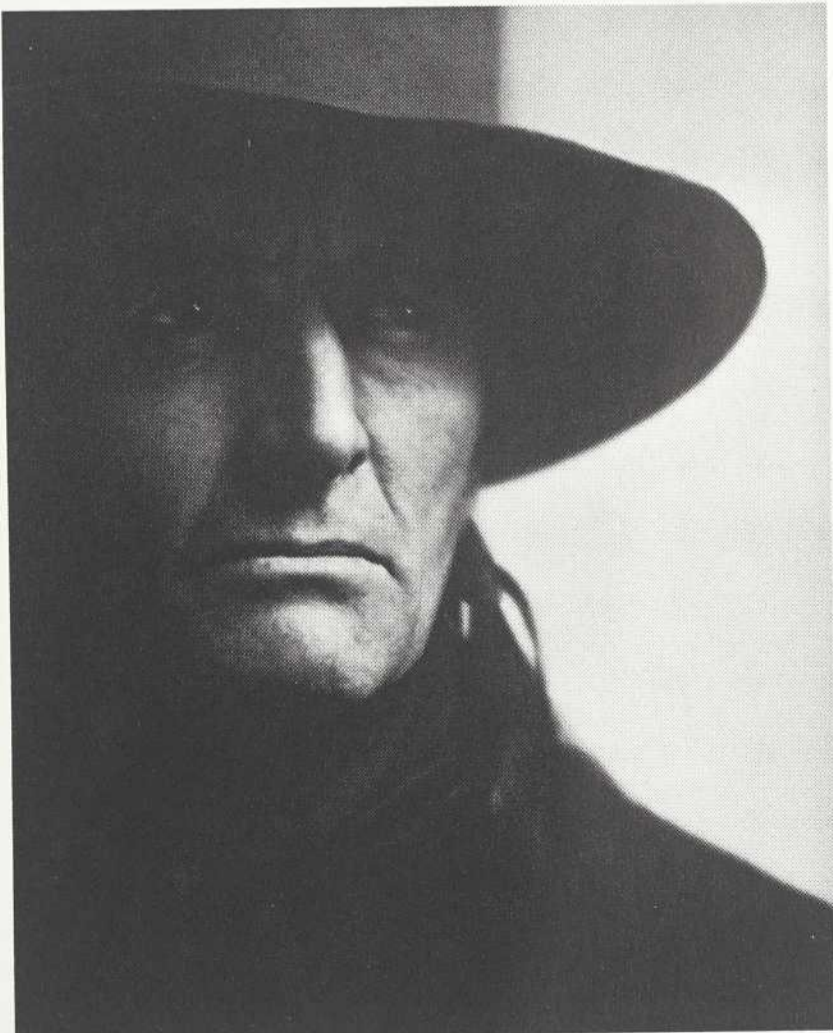
2 Stewart Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5V 1H6

THE SABLE-CASTELLI GALLERY LIMITED

**B E R N I E M I L L E R**

33 Hazelton Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5R 2E3. Telephone: (416) 961-0011

**KARSH**



Yousuf Karsh  
Grey Owl, 27 February 1937

Yousuf Karsh  
Grey Owl, 27 février 1937

## KARSH: THE ART OF THE PORTRAIT

On view at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa  
29 June to 4 September 1989

A major retrospective exhibition presenting the work of this world-renowned photographer. The 200 photographs on view will include Karsh's well-known portraits of personalities as well as vintage prints never exhibited before.

Organized by the National Gallery of Canada in collaboration with the National Archives.

This exhibition has been made possible by a generous grant from IBM Canada Ltd.

## KARSH: L'ART DU PORTRAIT

Exposition au Musée des beaux-arts du Canada, du 29 juin au 4 septembre 1989 à Ottawa.

Une importante rétrospective des oeuvres de ce photographe de renommée mondiale. Les 200 photographies de l'exposition comprendront des portraits bien connus de personnalités et des photos d'époque jamais encore exposées.

Organisée par le Musée des beaux-arts du Canada avec la collaboration des Archives nationales.

Cette exposition a été réalisée grâce au concours de IBM Canada Ltée.

National Gallery  
of Canada



Musée des beaux-arts  
du Canada

Canada

**ED POITRAS**  
Indian Territory

Organized by the Mendel Art Gallery

**ATTILA RICHARD LUKACS**  
Skinheads

Curator: Louise Dompierre

**DESIGNS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING:**  
An Exhibition of Products for the Elderly and Physically Disabled

Organized by the Museum of Modern Art

**IN SITE - ON PLACE: Nurture/Nature**  
Sculpture by **ROBIN COLLYER**

Curator: Louise Dompierre

Public Opening: June 29  
Exhibitions continue through September 10

THE **POWER** PLANT  
CONTEMPORARY ART AT HARBOURFRONT

231 Queens Quay West  
(416) 973-4949

JUNE 22 - JULY 22

# HOMOGENIUS

RECENT WORKS BY GAY ARTISTS IN TORONTO

STEPHEN ANDREWS, RICHARD BANKS, ALAN BELCHER,  
DAVID BUCHAN, ANDY FABO, ROBERT FLACK,  
GENERAL IDEA, MICAH LEXIER, IAN MCKINNON,  
WRIK MEAD, REGAN MORRIS, DAVID RASMUS

# KAWAMATA

TORONTO OUTDOOR INSTALLATION  
AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER

EXHIBITION OF DRAWINGS AND MAQUETTES  
SEPTEMBER 7 - OCTOBER 7

# MERCER UNION

A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART  
333 ADELAIDE ST. W. 5TH FLOOR TORONTO CANADA (416) 977-1412

## GROUP SHOW

JUNE 14 - JULY 8

# VALERIE TERESZKO

Human on  
My Faithless Arm  
JUNE 7 - JULY 8

**Y Y Z**  
1087 QUEEN STREET WEST  
TORONTO, CANADA M6J 1H3 (416) 531-7869

YYZ is sponsored by The Canada Council, The Ontario Arts Council, The Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, The City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council and The Municipality of Metro Toronto, Cultural Affairs Division.

From the National Film Board of Canada

# BEYOND THE SUN: A Portrait of Margaret Peterson

*"Art is a search in rhythm for communion with the gods"*

Margaret Peterson

**VIDEO OFFER \$29.95**



A short melodic video profiling a woman artist and her insight into the process of making art.

A complimentary addition for a variety of art programs.

To order/preview, contact your nearest National Film Board office:

Vancouver (604) 666-0716  
Edmonton (403) 495-3010  
Winnipeg (204) 983-4131  
Toronto (416) 973-9093  
Montreal (514) 283-4823  
Halifax (902) 426-6001



**National  
Film Board  
of Canada**

**Office  
national du film  
du Canada**

On April 18, 1989, Robert Handforth died in New York City after a prolonged and brave struggle with AIDS. Over the past twenty years Robert was known through his work in both the theatre and visual arts communities. From his early days at the Canada Council he went on to assist in establishing Art Metropole and was its first director in 1974-75. He was Co-ordinator at A Space in 1976-77, and ran the 49th Parallel in its initial years. As Cultural Affairs Officer at the Canadian Consulate he helped many artists who came to New York and was a friend to several who stayed. He was an extraordinarily capable and effective professional who will be remembered for the breadth of his knowledge and interests. Robert was respected for his judgement and grasp of timely issues. Among his many achievements was the promotion of Canadian video art with such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art. He will be missed by his colleagues in Canada as well as his many acquaintances in the New York art world. Those who knew him well will remember fondly his witty, often prophetic, observations of contemporary culture.

Robert has willed a portion of his savings to be given to a Canadian artist. This generous act is representative of the quality of his commitment. The executors of Robert's estate with friends and colleagues are establishing a Robert Handforth Fund to supplement this gift which will be awarded by Jessica Bradley, AA Bronson, Regina Cornwell, Ydessa Hendeles and Barbara London. Donations may be sent payable to:

AA Bronson,  
c/o General Idea  
136 Simcoe Street  
Toronto M5V 1W2

April 27 - May 23  
**COLLECTING**  
highlights from  
The Banff Centre's Permanent Collection

June 5 - July 10  
**EYE OF NATURE**  
Part I

June 12 - July 13  
**SAMUEL BECKETT:  
TELEPLAYS**  
organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery

July 14 - July 30  
**ARTISTS' FORUM**  
visual artists at The Banff Centre

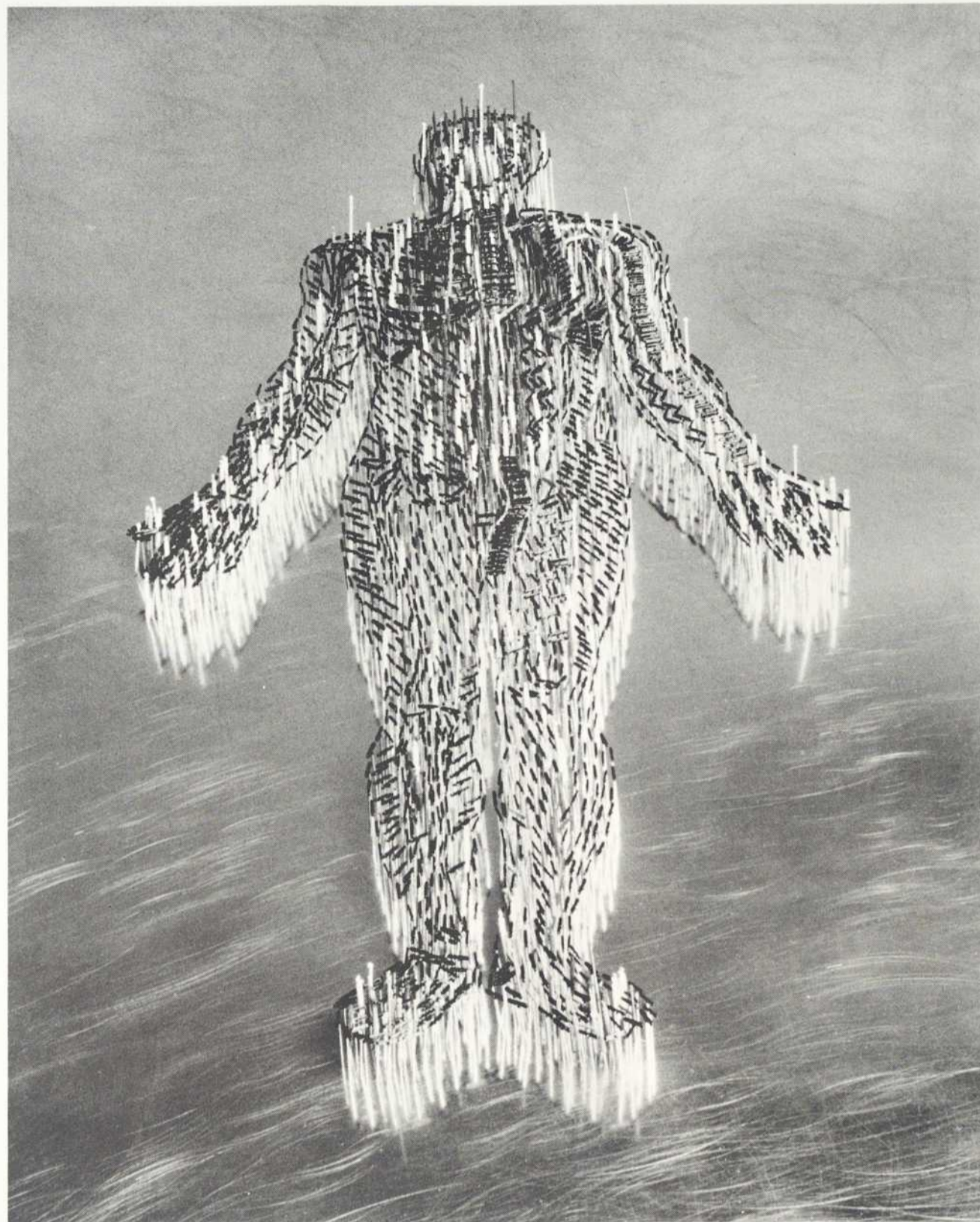
August 3 - September 17  
**EYE OF NATURE**  
Part II

**WALTER  
PHILLIPS  
GALLERY**

BOX 1020, BANFF, ALBERTA, CANADA T0L 0C0 TELEPHONE: (403) 762-6281



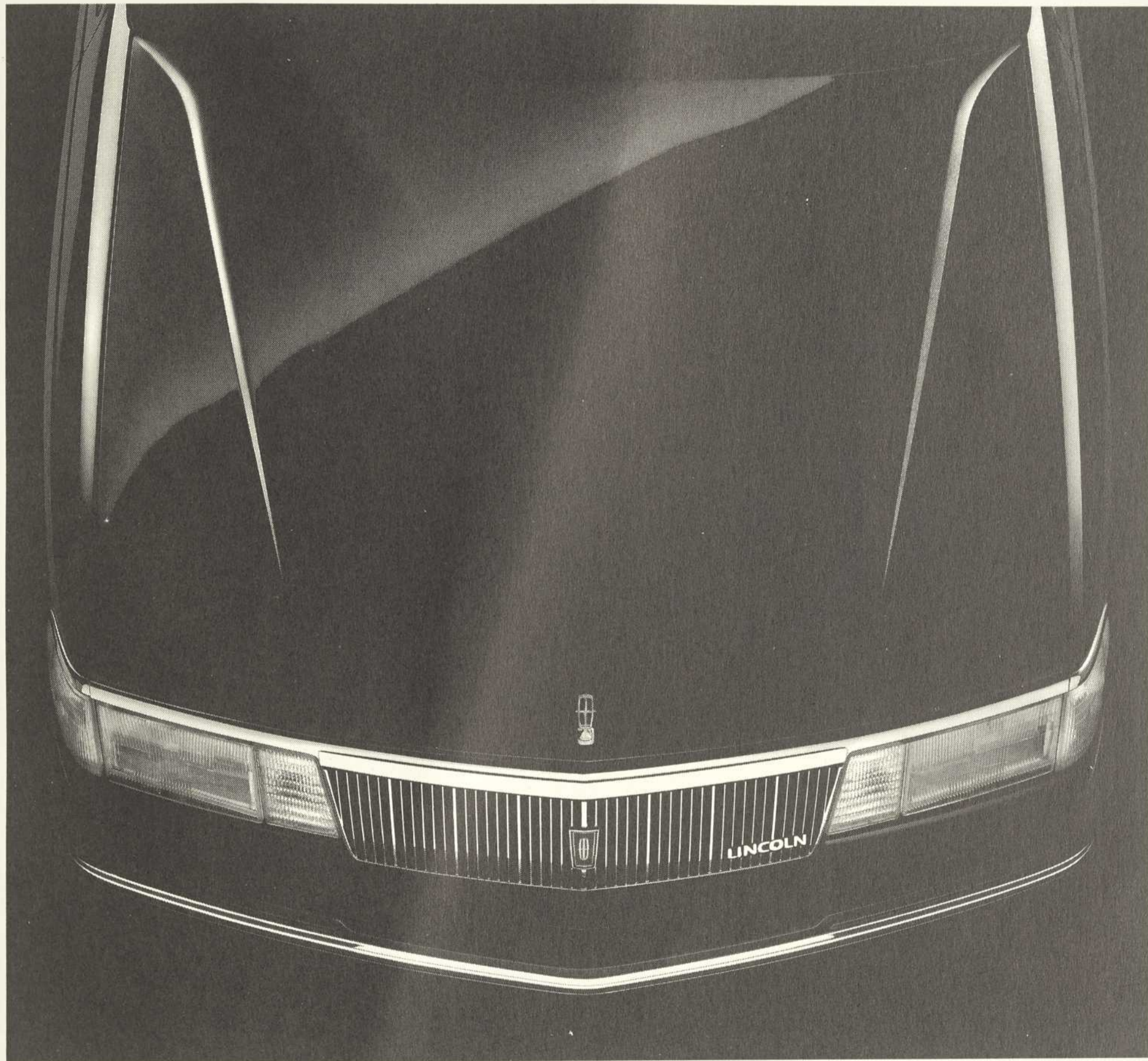
# *Visual* AIDS



GALERIE JOHN A. SCHWEITZER

UNE EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE D'AFFICHES SUR LE SIDA À  
L'OCCASION DE LA V<sup>E</sup> CONFÉRENCE SUR LE SIDA 1-25 JUIN 1989  
42 OUEST, AVENUE DES PINS, MONTRÉAL, CANADA [514] 289-9262

UN  
CHEF-D'OEUVRE  
EN LIBERTÉ.



LA QUALITÉ PASSE AVANT TOUT.

**ANGLETERRE**

NIGEL GREENWOOD BOOKS LTD., 4 New Burlington St., London W1X 1FE

**BELGIQUE**

LIBRAIRIE FNAC BRUXELLES, 16, rue des Cendres, 1000 Bruxelles  
LIBRAIRIE POST-SCRIPTUM, 37, rue des Éperonniers, 1000 Bruxelles

**ESPAGNE**

METRONOM, Carrer de la Fussina, 9, 08003 Barcelone

**ÉTATS-UNIS**

ALBRIGHT-KNOX ART GALLERY, 1225 Elmwood Ave, Buffalo, NY 14222  
ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, Museum Store, Michigan Ave at Adam's St., Chicago, Ill. 60603  
BOOKS & CO., 939 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10021  
HALLWALLS, 30 Essex St., Buffalo, NY 14213  
JAPP RIETMAN Inc., 167 Spring St., New York, NY 10012  
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, Museum Store, 237 East Ontario St., Chicago, Ill. 60611  
NEW MORNING, 169 Spring St., New York, NY 10012  
RIZZOLI, 712-5th Ave, New York, NY 10019  
RIZZOLI, Water Tower Place, Chicago, Ill. 60611  
SAINT MARK'S BOOKSHOP, 13 St. Mark's Place, New York, NY 10003  
SOHOZAT Inc., 307 West Broadway, New York, NY 10013  
VISUAL STUDIES WORKSHOP, 31 Prince St., Rochester, NY 14607

**FRANCE**

**Angers:** LIBRAIRIE CONTACT, 3, rue Lenepven, 49000  
**Bordeaux:** CAPC, Musée d'art contemporain, Entrepôt Lainé, Rue Foy, 33000  
IMAGES NOUVELLES, 15, rue Maubec, 33000  
LIBRAIRIE LA MACHINE À LIRE, 13, rue de la Devise, 33000  
**Dijon:** LE CONSORTIUM, 16, rue Quentin, 21000  
LIBRAIRIE DE L'UNIVERSITÉ, 17, rue de la Liberté, B.p. 1070, 21025  
**Grenoble:** LE MAGASIN, Site Bouchayer-Viallet, 166, cours Berriot, 38000  
**Labège:** CENTRE RÉGIONAL D'ART CONTEMPORAIN, Labège-Inopole, b.p. 126, 31328  
**Lyon:** ESPACE LYONNAIS D'ART CONTEMPORAIN, Centre d'échange de Perrache, 69002  
LIBRAIRIE LA PROUE, 15, rue Childebert, 69002  
LIBRAIRIE RÉVERBÈRE, 4, rue Neuve, 69002  
**Marseille:** LIBRAIRIE PARENTHÈSES, 72, cours Julien, 13006  
**Montpellier:** LIBRAIRIE SAURAMPS, rue du Jeu de Ballon, 34000  
SARL LA LIBRAIRIE, 13, rue des Soeurs Noires, 34000  
**Nancy:** AGENCE DE LA PRESSE, 38, rue St-Dizier, 54000  
**Nice:** GALERIE LATITUDE, 33, ave de la République, 06300  
LIBRAIRIE À LA SORBONNE, 23, rue Hôtel des Postes, 06000  
**Orléans:** LIBRAIRIE ALPHABET, 14, rue de la République, 45000  
LIBRAIRE LES TEMPS MODERNES, 57, rue de Recouvrance, 45000  
**Paris:** FLAMMARION 4, Plateau Beaubourg, 75004  
GALERIE DURANT-DESSERT, 3, rue des Haudriettes, 75003  
LIBRAIRIE ARTCURIAL, 9, ave Matignon, 75008  
LIBRAIRIE AUTREMENT DIT, 73, boul. St-Michel, 75005  
LIBRAIRIE LA HUNE, 170, boul. St-Germain, 75006  
MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE, Librairie, 9, rue Gaston St-Paul, 75016  
**Rennes:** FORUM DU LIVRE, 5, Quai Lamartine, 35000  
LES NOURRITURES TERRESTRES, 19, rue Hoche, 35000  
LIBRAIRIE LE FAILLER S.A., 2, Place du Palais, 35000  
**Toulouse:** LIBRAIRIE OMBRES BLANCHES, 48, rue Gambetta, 31000  
**Villeurbanne:** LIBRAIRIE ART DIFFUSION, 11, rue Docteur Dolard, 69100

**HOLLANDE**

ARTLINE GALLERY, Toussaintkde 67/68, Den Haag  
ATHENEUM BOEKHANDEL, Spui 14-16, Amsterdam  
DE APPEL, Brouwersgracht 196, Amsterdam

**ITALIE**

GALERIE STEIN, via Lazzaretto 15, 20124 Milano  
LIBRAIRIE FRANÇAISE, Piazza Ognissanti 1 R, 50124 Firenze  
SCHEMA, via Vigna Nuova 17, 50123 Firenze  
STUDIO G7, via Val d'Aposa, 40123 Bologna

**PORTUGAL**

GALERIA COMICOS, Rua Tenente Raul Cascals, 1B, 1200 Lisboa

**SUISSE**

LIBRAIRIE KIOSQUE DU BOULEVARD, 25, boul. du Pont d'Arve, 1205 Genève  
LIBRAIRIE DESCOMBES, 6, rue du Vieux-Collège, 1211 Genève  
STAMPA, Spalenberg 2, CH 4051 Basel