

## 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.

### 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



Paterson Ewen, *Self-portrait*, 1986,

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

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 Molinari 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