



Faculty of Art

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## Notebook pages

Patton, Andy

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Jamelie Hassan; *Water margins*; 1984; 6 large watercolours on paper with inscriptions and floating elements and lily pads in pond;

## ◆ NOTEBOOK ■ P A G E S ◆

BY ANDY PATTON

Portions of these pages were delivered as a lecture at Oboro in Montreal in May, 1989. All pages are rewritten from notebooks which I have kept for more than ten years.

### RHETORIC AND MAKING

Last spring, A Space in Toronto held an exhibition titled "Nationalism: Women and the State", in which Mona Hatoum, Lani Maestro, Barbara Louder and Jamelie Hassan took part. As part of the exhibition, the gallery also held a panel discussion

with the artists, and it's that discussion that I want to talk about briefly.

What struck me at the time was that all of the artists involved attempted to justify their art in terms of its presumed ability to change people's political consciousness. With the exception of one comment by Jamelie Hassan — where she compared the generations of imagery

involved in the production of her videotape with the generations of women involved in its storyline — none of the artists spoke at all about the material works they had made. The obvious point is that the changing of political consciousness does not necessitate the making of those specific artworks or the use of the particular materials. Journalism or political organizing could do the same job, and if efficacy is the criterion, they might be better for the job. No one spoke of the objects that surrounded us in the gallery. Nothing was said that required the making of those objects, in those materials: grainy videotape; large black and white blow-ups; tiny imitations in clay of Inuit soapstone carvings (carefully and deliberately mistranslated from photographs of carvings); scattered rubble, tagged and numbered; stained old bed sheets on which drawings were done; text scrawled on the walls of the gallery. It was the actual, material works that were left out of the discussion and that always seem to evaporate from our speaking in favour of some larger meaning that both justifies and subsumes them.

The artworks of our time seem to be increasingly evangelical. (Perhaps this is true just of the culture and place where I live, the Protestant, moralistic culture of English-speaking Canada.) I do not mean to say that these works are Christian or fundamentalist, though it may be worth questioning whether they are still inflected by that moral culture. But, like the TV evangelists, the works are meant to win converts. They are produced to convince. They are meant to change what their audience thinks, feels, how they act. In this way they are still modernist, believing that art is capable of fundamentally changing the world. (A utopianism of which I am sceptical.) The problem, for me, is that the works are always moral, always justified, always ratified by something that came first, was in place long before the work was made. The work thins out to a representation that illustrates and promotes. In a way that I am not sure I can articulate, this is an impoverishment, not only of the artwork, but of the sense of what it is to be alive that comes to us through the work. Everything must be returned to that which ratifies the work and to that which is therefore understood to ratify our lives.

(I should probably make it clear that I do not see only "political art" as evangelical. Any work meant to convince and to illustrate, justified by something prior to it, is equally evangelical. And certainly not every work of "political art" is merely evangelical. Some seem so passionately expressive I have the sense that they needed to be made — even if their cause should fail — and that something in them will outlast that cause's success or failure — just as certain Christian religious works are important to me even though I don't care at all about the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. There is something, then, about expression or passionate commitment, some "in-itself" quality that can qualify or even outrun an evangelical streak.)

At any rate, I resent this kind of evangelism not sim-

ply because it instrumentalizes the artwork — making it a tool at the service of the superego — but because it is an image of life that is instrumentalized, subjugated by some truth. I would rather see a work that reaches towards what Montale called "the end of the illusion of the world as representation."

Perhaps this argument is partly one about materiality, since so many of the works that I would call evangelical seem to me to constrain their materials and lacquer over them a morality, a representation of some imagined absolute truth or good. And so they seem less material or less in the world than they could be and less resistant.

### MONTALE'S TIME AND OURS

Style perhaps will come to us from the sensible and shrewd disenchanted, who are conscious of the limits of their art and prefer living it in humility to reforming humanity. In times which seem marked by the immediate utilization of culture, by polemicism and diatribe, our salvation perhaps lies in useless and unobserved labour: our style will perhaps come from good usage. —Eugenio Montale

I've saturated myself in Montale's poetry for more than fifteen years, and I sometimes think that his work has influenced me more than that of any artist. Of course the work of other artists has influenced me, in ways that often have been very direct or practical, but what I'm thinking of here is more a tenor of thought and feeling, an intimate relation to life.

The relation of his work to his time helps me think about our own moment, and to work on it. Montale is often extremely difficult. I read one poem off and on for ten years before I could see what the setting was. To understand the difficulty of his poetry, and the validity of its private voice, it must be placed against the background of Italian Fascism, which was then on the rise. With Fascism there was an infiltration of rhetoric, of high-flown bombast, in all fields of state-sponsored poetry, prose and art. Fascism filled the air with its fake grandeur and the sense that comes through in Montale's work (even filtered through a myriad of different translations) is of someone opposing the rhetoric of the public realm with a voice that nurses ways of being that are in eclipse.

(Montale, as a citizen, did what he could early on to oppose the Fascists. He was one of the first signatories of the Anti-Fascist Manifesto and as a result lost his job at the noted Gabinetto Vieusseux library in Florence.)

After the defeat of the Fascists and the end of the war, a younger generation of poets was writing and calling for a poetry of explicit political engagement. They were joined at that time by many of Montale's genera-

tion. When Montale continued to sustain his gnarled and difficult written voice, he was criticized for his lack of engagement, for his work's apparent lack of politics. It is interesting that one of his few defenders among the engaged poets was Pasolini, the leading light of the younger generation, who argued that Montale's hermetic verse had been a form of passive resistance to fascism. Certainly it should be pointed out that the demand that poetry should be explicitly engaged politically emerged in Italy *after the war*, when to do so did not entail the same sort of risk as such an engagement would have *during* the time of Fascism.

There is a parallel between Montale's time and our own, although I don't want to say that our times are fascist. Still, more and more, the public realm is clogged with rhetoric from all sides, and even that issuing from the side on which we align ourselves thickens the air with a bombast all its own, and with an evangelism that strains to control every aspect of our public and private lives. Within the art scene, it cannot have escaped notice that now every work is declared to be radical. Each exhibition "deconstructs" and "subverts," though nothing changes as a result of this radicality. This language comes more and more to mirror the language and structure of advertising where each product is saleable because it is "new" or "bold" or "improved" in an always unspecified way. Against this culture of promotion that fills our public domain, Montale's difficult, recondite, object-like poetry is always useful to me, sustains itself year after year, as an indication of how it might be possible to work in *this* time and place. His line about "the unknown gesture expressive of itself and nothing else" haunts me, and tells me to purge my work of rhetoric.

#### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE:

**P**erhaps it seems that Montale's work was merely a retreat into a private and rarefied world. But remember where this privacy took place, and of what materials it was built. Its construction, its voice, found its material in two things which are always social: language, and the literary tradition of Italy. No poet can ever retreat into a private realm in their work, since what their work is made of is collective. And this privacy is something that takes place, or is created, in public — not only in language but in books and through the agency of readers. An opposition between public and private is in the end, unworkable in this sphere of culture since even what appears as a private realm, or a retreat from the public stance, can only be constructed from a foundation in what is social.

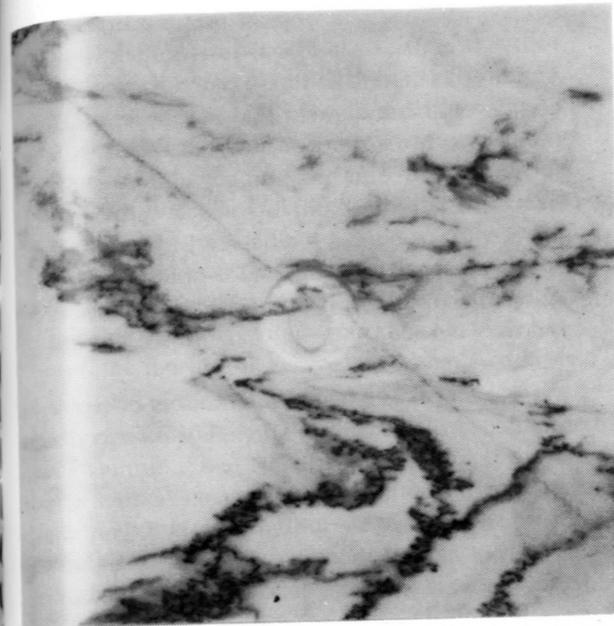
#### A NEW BODY:

**L**ately the body is being understood in a totally new way, one that is quite different from anything that distinguished the eras immediately

preceding our own. It appears, for instance, to have nothing in common with the body-centred works of the 60s and 70s and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty which served as their critical support. The change from those modes "back" to representation eclipsed that understanding entirely. This new approach is the result of a whole series of representational practises and researches — feminisms, gay liberation, those researches stimulated by Foucault's work, the AIDS crisis — to name only those most obvious to myself. What these all share is an attention to documents through which society constructs, delimits and controls the body. But what strikes me so forcefully about this new comprehension is its ornate, even florid, quality. This has become visible through many different manifestations including, to name just two, the recent lecture series "Counter Talk", which was put on by the Public Access collective in Toronto (and which featured speakers as diverse as Jane Gallop, Philip Monk, Nicole Brossard, Simon Watney and Arthur Kroker), as well as the recent trio of *Zone* books: *Fragments Towards a History of the Human Body*. Neither of these are simply neutral presentations concerning the body. Instead they are highly articulated, even over-articulated speculations, examples of a wonderful decorative art. It leads me to wonder if John Mays hadn't been right when he wrote that "theory is the highest form of the decorative," that of all discourses it was "the one most ambitious to be free of time, the unknowing that haunts mortal life" — and so connecting theory, ornateness, and the body in a way that I find entirely convincing.

There are two ways to approach this new body of theory. The first, more classical way, is to view these ornate studies as more or less transparent representations, to regard them as disclosing the truth about past notions of the body or about different cultures' constructions of it. This is fair enough. But if we are really to understand that the body is not simply "given," not simply natural or unconscious, but socially constructed, then we must also approach the body of these new texts in the same way and read them not as revealing truth but as constructions. Intuitively this seems right to me: something new is happening in these texts, the body is being woven through with texts in a way that may never have occurred before. A new body, not simply a new understanding of the body, is being formed. (And so we should understand "textuality" not simply as a literary concept, but a bodily process, something somatic that takes place in texts, between them and between their bodies and our own.)

And I think it's important not simply to read through these texts, but to look at them, at their florid accumulations of detail, their fascination with the Other, with ornamentation — to look at their bodies, those beautifully made books which are almost sacramental for the intelligentsia. Sometimes I think that we are entering a new kind of manuscript culture, where the book — that mass-produced item which always seems to



Christine Davis; *Passion*; right panel: b/w photograph, glazed birdseye maple frame, glass, left panel: marble engraved O; each panel 16" x 16".  
Photo: courtesy S.L. Simpson Gallery

render language (or prose) transparent — is more and more replaced by effects that conjure up something like the medieval manuscript. That tactile object was always copied by hand, always decorated and illuminated lovingly and carefully, so that the text and the body were always being interwoven. At any rate, if we are saying now that the body is "written" — and if to say that is to say that we believe that the body was always written, in every society and in every time, though always in different ways — this still discloses the fact that this is being said *now* and not then, and therefore the body is being written now.

(And if you want some examples of artists whose work seems to be to be issuing from this new body, I would mention Marc de Guerre and Christine Davis — since it was in their recent work that I first began to sense that some strange new body was being formed. In each case the body is being presented in a manner that accentuates both the consciousness of it being a social construction, and of it being woven through highly elaborated instances of textuality. In Davis' case, the body is written and interrogated through the ostentatious display of codes through which it could make its appearance, of materials — often lavish in themselves — that could serve as grounds for figuration, and texts that both propose and slip away from figuration at the same time: a kind of ellipsis in which the body stalls before it can quite appear. In De Guerre's paintings the body is woven through elaborate decorative patterns, which give the impression that the body — literally a woman's torso — is being threaded through or written into the body of something like an illuminated manuscript or Islamic tiles (themselves often stylizations of Islamic writing, and therefore an integration of two realms that are distinct in

our culture: the written and the decorative. The effect is of a body that is written and stylized at the same time, stalled in a pattern that decorates thought and desire and distributes looking everywhere across its surface instead of focussing vision into a centre.)

(A later note: After seeing Rob Flack's and Regan Morris' work recently — especially in the context of the *Homogenius* show at Mercer Union — it struck me that perhaps their work too could be considered in this light. In Flack's case, where the body, a hand for example, is written over with decorative elements; in Morris' work, the manner in which the painting makes its appearance as a body, as skin, and at the same time is treated with a poignant and elegant sense of decoration.)

#### CRITICISM:

art as the representation of the whole truth has of the past. It is therefore all the more surprising to note the continuing application of a norm of interpretation which seeks to retore the universal claims which art in fact has abandoned. — Wolfgang Iser

**A** few years ago, when I was thinking about art and its public role, it struck me that perhaps today the artwork *and* its critical reception, together, play the same public role that the classical artwork once did. Certainly it seems obvious that criticism became an industry at the very moment when modernist artworks began to refuse universal claims to truth — in order to provide to the public what the works refused.

What Iser has noticed is that criticism and the art-

work function very differently, that they propose different relations to truth and the revelation of meaning. More accurately, he is saying that how the artwork functions since the birth of modernism is different from how it did before, but that criticism still functions as it did classically, as though nothing had changed.

It is a commonplace now to say that, since modernism, artworks no longer propose a universal truth for the viewer, or claim to be able to represent truth. (But this is true still only of a small range of works, the majority still do proceed on this basis.) Criticism seems willing to acknowledge this, but then, in its interpretations of works, proceeds as though revealing some universal truth that the artwork contained but failed somehow to release. In doing so, the critical text enacts older, universal notions of truth in spite of its surface recognition of the more fragmentary, particular structure of modernist (and post-modernist) artworks. And similarly, specific contents and gestures that the critical text notes, are usually undone by the actual writing of the text itself.

For example, this paragraph on the artist Laiwan (In these examples I omit the author's name, since my point is not to criticize particular writers but to indicate a widespread tendency.):

Take her name for example: she signs with only a single name — 'Laiwan'. She rarely uses her family name, her father's name. She assumes another name which is not her, at least not her complete name — only half so — therefore half real. Hence the name is a pseudonym, one which does not include a father nor, for that matter, a husband, but only her given name. Herself alone. It is not a changed name so much as an altered one, altered by the exclusion of The-Name-of-the-Father — the symbolic order instituted within the individual as language, as defined in Lacanian terminology. Thus Laiwan writes her name as a gesture, a symbolic act countering another.

What strikes me about this passage (from a useful article on the artist) is that while the writer says that Laiwan writes her name so as to exclude the Name-of-the-Father, so as to constitute herself as "herself alone," he undoes that gesture by legitimating that action through reference to a father, a father in theory, Lacan. What the text says is quite opposite to what it does. It seems to me that it is undoing what it seems to value in the text.

To take another case, a critic writes a catalogue on the work of Mary Scott:

In her recent works Mary Scott seems to propose the possibility of a different body. This is neither the humanist body of the Renaissance, the rationalized body of the classi-

cal age, nor the ironic body of 'post-modernism,' rather it is the body of our late modern age. This body is the site of darkness and sorrow. It is a body of embarrassment and failure, of sentiment and mortality. A body of fluids and spaces. It is a recent body, a body of lived experiences, a body of moments which cannot be represented or figured symbolically. It is a body which can only be recognised in the process of its own making — it is unravelled, it is sewn, it is flayed, it is read.

But if this work is a body which cannot be represented or figured symbolically, why then is the writer so easily able to represent it within his text? Similarly, why does the text make these highly concrete, extremely particular works into a universalized truth by saying that it is "the body of our late modern age"? Why is the body — which in her work is always cut away or depicted in representations that are no longer legible — so clearly depicted within the text. The absence of the body, its illegibility — the work's way of breaking up representation (while still maintaining it, barely) is not registered in the text, which seems predicated still on the ability of language to say completely, to speak fully even of its own stated inability. (As when the text states that the work is "a body of moments which cannot be represented...") And why is the body of the critical text so rational, so devoid of the "embarrassment and failure," "fluids and spaces," "lived experiences" which it praises in the work? If the critical text really believed that Scott's work was "the body of our late modern age," how could it continue as it does: how could its own body be so little contaminated by *that* body.

I said of the first section of critical writing that I quoted that I believed it undid what it saw the work as doing. Of this second example, it would be more accurate to say that it is trying to repair Scott's work, to weave back together what she has unwoven, to clarify the representations she has damaged and rendered illegible. Through interpretation, her work is restored to a realm of meaning, clarity, legibility and accomplishment that replaces the prickly particularity and struggle that marks her work. The critical text, then, speaks of a work specific to our era, but it performs a classical artwork, a classical regime of interpretation.

I want to return to Montale in order to quote a section from a short essay in which he discusses the obscurity of his writing, and in particular, an image of two jackals on a leash — which has unleashed pages and pages of interpretation over the years.

The obscurity of the classics ... has been partly unravelled by the commentary of whole generations of scholars: and I don't doubt that those great writers would be flabbergasted by the exegeses of certain of their interpreters. And

the obscurity of the moderns will finally give way too, if there are critics tomorrow. Then we shall all pass from darkness into light, too much light: the light the so-called aesthetic commentators cast on the mystery of poetry. There is a middle ground between understanding nothing and understanding too much, a *juste milieu* which poets instinctively respect more than their critics, but on this side or that of the border there is no safety for either criticism or poetry. There is only a wasteland, too dark or too bright, where two jackals cannot venture forth without being hunted down, seized, or shut behind the bars of a zoo.

But I would rather say that it is the work, *not* its obscurity, that has been unravelled. The work can only be its effects, or: it can only be known through its effects. If the work as it is read seems obscure, it is certainly relevant to look up allusions and citations to other texts or events, for example. But to use that knowledge to resolve all difficulties. Knowing too much is itself knowing too little, in its disregard for the difficulty of the work. The text, the poem, the artwork is an opportunity for struggle, not conquest. And "meaning," fully unveiled, is only a way of trying to seize the work and to undo all the resistance it offered. Perhaps this is why, when I read Montale, though I have read whole books on his work, and though I refer to the notes certain translations offer at the back, in the end, they don't seem to help — as though these things can be known, *but not inside the poem*. Just as in a poem, references to the world outside it never feel as though they were fully or completely formed, but instead are always in a process, of forming — or decaying — referentiality.

#### REPRESENTATIONS:

**I**n reading a poem, images of the world begin to appear and coalesce, then start to fade, and perhaps something else begins to make its appearance. But nothing ever stabilizes entirely. If it did, perhaps there would be no need to read the work again, the image of its world would be durable enough on its own, in memory, to last. But I return to certain works — particularly in poetry and art — because their worlds, those which are only created as the work creates its references, only occur in the reading or the viewing. They are only sustained there. Sometimes our thinking about imagery seems too simple. And in our artworks things are too thoroughly embodied — as though they could last, they could embody some truth, as though we could rely on them.

The language of the 60s still is valuable to me, when figuration was thought of as "illusion." I prefer the image that is structured on illusion, the sense that could disappear from the picture, as though the slide projector that

throws its image onto the work could at any moment be switched off, the suggestion of the image-work that is somehow slightly de-materialized or insubstantial, not images, but the ghosts of images that haunt us and yet are not entirely believed. Is this possible in realms like painting, with its bodily physicality, or photography, in which images always seem a kind of proof? Otherwise we are left with images that are only images of their own certainty and a relation of the image to the viewer that is only one of recognition. If it were somehow possible, what I would prefer as a model of representation would be something like permanent Etch-A-Sketch — that child's toy: you drew into its silver surface and, shaking it, made all that had appeared there vanish. Something durable enough that it could last and enter time, last long enough to sustain consideration through different epochs, different understandings — and yet still felt as though the durability of all our depictions was about to be shaken ...

#### TIME:

**E**xperiences of time — not history — are always personal. A moment opens up, the way an eye dilates: suddenly you are in the city. When I'm in New York, I often go to the Met to study Velasquez's portrait of Juan de Pareja, his assistant. I was looking closely at it, its construction, the greenish-grey brushmarks swept over the reddish ground, the heavy rough-textured canvas, when suddenly the whole thing transformed itself before me, and I could feel the whole force of Velasquez's personality just as you do at certain moments in a conversation, or argument. Perhaps suddenly *seeing* that those brush marks were the trace of an actual hand, they were undone. And what I saw or felt was not something like worship for an artist I admire but the opposite: the knowledge that even Velasquez had been captured by time, had lived and died, that he did not live in the medium history, as though it were his air (as it seems after reading all that art history). He lived in his time. The only real difference between him and any other person is that somehow he found a way to reach across a gulf of centuries, that space where voices fade. And this is not immortality at all: the person he was is definitely dead. But some force or print or voice that was his — that was him — still has its force, though not in the work that is the historical object displayed there in the museum. It exists only in the work that is suddenly unwoven, or unmade, that becomes an un-object in a moment, for a moment. Is there any value to this invisible network of correspondences and echoes that seems to have come from beyond the grave?

The time of culture. What I value is that the lifespan of cultural objects is longer than our own. This has nothing to do with the idea of "immortality," or other mythologizing notions. I think that it is something simply concrete and observable that our culture moves more



Diego Velazquez; *Portrait of Juan de Pareja*; Metropolitan Museum of Art

slowly than we do and outlasts us and that it is still part of our being, a place where we can work, even if we don't live in its span. I'm not sure that I can ever articulate why this seems so important to me, but I value this possibility of speaking to those who are not even born, across the gulf of unimaginable time, as much or more than I value speaking to those alive today. I would suggest that such questions and values are fundamentally religious — if the work were not so discredited today.

What is transmitted is nothing other than the power to transmit. The power to adhere to the text, the power to engender: tradition, like the body of engenderment, is the point of passage through which the invisible allows itself to be spoken, through which the flux issuing from the infinite takes form, link by link ... Like the eye of the needle, it allows the thread of theophanic becoming to move through time and weave its fabric.<sup>2</sup>

And there's something else about time, something which became clear to me when I was studying a friend's work — Jamelie Hassan's large piece, "Water margins." The piece is made up of many elements: ceramic tiles (like a fossil memory), texts from the Chinese novel "Water Margins," floating in a pond beside real waterlilies, and two groups of watercolours. The smaller ones are texts about stages in China's history. The larger ones, six feet high, depict the lilies at different stages in their biological cycles. Some are at the point of blooming, others fade, some look dormant or ragged. And over the image of each watercolour is a single work that seems to label the image. Taken together, they construct a sequence of historical development: "Primitive," "Matrilineal," "Patrilineal," "Slave," "Feudal," "Revolutionary." So the sequence culminates in the imagined emancipation of revolution, which overcomes class society by overcoming history.

But the work also held another possibility or level, one that structured time in a way that could not be collapsed into history or contained by it. The images of the lilies for example, were not set up in sequence biologically — so the work did not compare history with biology or claim one to be as natural as the other. But still, I couldn't see that the images of the lilies were captured or fully explained by the texts they carried. If they were meant to illustrate their texts, they failed. Instead they seemed to float independent of the history that their texts named, to exist in a different realm. Time rather than history opened out, meaningful in itself, without reference beyond itself to some goal.

It surprised me to see this in a work that would be labelled as political art. Almost every work that might fall under this order seems to subjugate everything in life to the service of history, to the idea of history as progress toward its own overcoming. Like Christianity, what is

given to us day-to-day, or what we could take for ourselves, is to be suspended, for the greater good that will come. Hassan's work instead seemed to place itself in a place where the demands of history were able to collide with a sense of the goodness of lived time, the moment that does not derive its value only from the distant goal. Or rather, these two did not collide — since it seems that they can not, in experience, meet. Instead the work offered these two absolutely opposed ways of life: ways that we cannot resolve into some new order, but only flicker between in some measure that can only be decided in practice, in life.

(I should mention one other aspect of the work that could not be subsumed entirely to history and its regime: the decorative beauty of the watercolours. These suggested to me the work of the great Mexican muralists and thus could be interpreted as having an allegiance to their political work, which seems right to me. But still, the decorative always seems to proclaim its own validity for beauty as though beauty and emancipation were somehow connected.)

The Russian poet Joseph Brodsky wrote somewhere that poetry is the restructuring of time — something that sounds formalist but is anything but, even though it puts its focus away from the surface of subject matter in the poem. I would argue that painting too always involves the restructuring of time, if the work is successful. Perhaps it seems obvious that some work on time is performed in any temporal art such as film, music or poetry are; but, I'm not sure that this is true. Too often it seems that those kinds of art only exist in time, unconsciously. In some way, an art like painting or photography seems more capable, rather than less, of dealing with time because of their physical unchangingness. Time swirls around them. Everything around them changes, while they remain physically the same but changed in meaning. Something invisible has shifted. Certainly, such works have to be perceived in time, even though they do not exist in time in the way that music and poetry. The lag in grasping what seems as though it could be seized all at once brings time into view for me more clearly than those arts that can only be apprehended through time, and where that expectation precedes the work. Colour acts not only spatially or emotionally, but temporally; for instance, as discriminations emerge and slowly an emotional and intellectual sorting-out occurs. In the work of someone like Morandi, who painted his little still-lives of those same domestic objects over and over through several decades, what emerges is a sense of time that is redeemed, even a dark time, through something that is both modest and intensely disciplined. In his work time has no image, since everything is always still, but it is there — not in any one work, but running through all them, all their repetitions and shifts, a current outside depiction that orchestrates everything that appears.

The question is, how to put time into a work? (Which is not the same as simply spending time on it.)

This seems to be anything but a question of technique. Perhaps time can only enter the work, not through the time you take to produce the work, but through the whole time of relating to it, of soaking in it and of saturating it with looking and with contemplation.

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. — Northrup Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*

If Frye is right, and I believe that he may be suggesting something important, then we have to consider our notions of time and especially of modernism as they have been applied to Canadian art. Most artworks are still legitimated and promoted by presenting them as new, bold, radical, revolutionary, etc. — under the sign of modernism and its equation of the avantgarde with radical political change. While this equation between art and the political appears specious to me, it is still clear that this break with traditions upon which modernism is based had value in the nations of Europe, with their relatively older and more homogenous societies. Their more deeply rooted class structure and cultural traditions almost demand an avantgarde to create space by rebelling against the academy. The relevance of modernism changes when it is applied to artworks in the U.S.A., a nation born from a revolution, whose mythic structure centres on the demand for the new. There the radical dynamism of a more-or-less unrestrained capitalism is mirrored by the always-new artwork, marketed in much the same way as a bold new fabric softener might be. Modernism there seems a cliché. Here in Canada, the understanding of time as discontinuity, proposed by modernism, must be reconsidered in a young nation worried about its continued existence and founded, in part, by those who rejected the American Revolution's break with the past. I see Canadian work *not* as revolutionary, but as considered; not new, but slow — as though time was being explored in a different kind of contemplation than, for example, in the U.S. But given what I wrote about time in Morandi's work, perhaps it might be worth questioning how wide the domain of modernist experiences of time is, even in Europe.

#### Notes

1. Eugenio Montale was an Italian modernist poet who began to publish in the 1920's. Generally regarded as the greatest Italian poet of the century, and the greatest since Leopardi, his work is notorious for its difficulty. He was often criticized for being insular, private and hermetic — even though Montale insisted that he had never made anything deliberately obscure.

2. Charles Mopsik, "The Body of Engenderment in the Hebrew Bible, the Rabbinic Tradition and the Kabbalah," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part One*, Zone Books, NYC, 1989.