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# Colin Campbell La belle histoire d'Art Star

Eric CAMERON

Les bandes magnétoscopiques de Colin Campbell révèlent sa personnalité sous deux aspects; la structure du véhicule de son œuvre et la situation personnelle de l'artiste. Ce sont là sources constantes de l'art moderne, mais dans le contexte des années 70 (dans le sillage du prétendu art conceptuel), ce sont les éléments autobiographiques qui apportent le plus grand défi; ils sont l'élément qui donne à son art un droit à l'originalité et ce qui l'expose à des fautes de goût qui peuvent en altérer la qualité.

A l'origine, la bande magnétoscopique était un moyen de documenter une représentation; il attribue à Dennis Oppenheim une influence décisive; mais alors que l'exécution, dans le cas de ce dernier, place la personne de l'artiste dans un type de relation avec son milieu de façon à hausser l'ensemble à un niveau de généralité, l'exécution de Colin Campbell tourne l'attention du spectateur vers la personnalité même de l'artiste dans ses aspects les plus émotivement sensibles. *True/False*, de 1972, est une œuvre-clé (fig. 1). La tête et les épaules paraissent d'abord de profil puis de face, tandis qu'il multiplie les déclarations sur sa vie intime: «Je suis en partie juif... Je me masturbe encore... Je suis hétérosexuel... J'ai horreur du coke... J'ai attrapé des morsions.» Et ainsi de suite. Après chaque déclaration, il fait une pause et dit: «C'est vrai». Une autre pause, et il dit: «C'est faux». La tension produite par son effort pour rester impassible se transmet avec force; de temps à autre il avale difficilement.

Colin Campbell décrit la télévision comme un «convoyeur de la réalité». Ce qu'il veut dire, c'est que l'intimité, du format et du contexte domestique, et que l'instantanéité de la présentation de l'information, procurent un sentiment de familiarité qui pourrait nous faire croire que nous fûmes témoin des événements qu'elle relate et pourrait nous rendre difficile de ne pas nous arrêter dans la rue pour parler à quelqu'un qui n'aurait que lu la nouvelle. C'est l'aspect de ce moyen d'information que scrute *True/False*. La bande magnétoscopique documente un spectacle, mais sans neutralité. En fait, c'est le postulat de la connaissance personnelle, intime, contenu implicitement dans ce médium qui est contesté. La télévision nous donne le sentiment de bien connaître une personne, mais, si nous la rencontrons, nous ne pouvons être sûrs de quoi que ce soit à son sujet.

La ligne de pensée est valable et l'importance de l'œuvre est indiscutable, mais il y a des erreurs dans sa formulation. Le profil rigide et les vues de face évoquent l'impersonnalité des photographies de casiers judiciaires beaucoup plus que la franchise sans façon de la télévision, mais l'image achoppe surtout parce que les questions soulevées sont trop graves pour l'envergure de l'œuvre. Cela résulte, en partie, de son manque de compréhension de la télévision, et, en partie aussi, de sa conception de l'art. La télévision est ambivalente dans ses prétentions à des relations directes avec la masse, car elle est à la fois privée jusqu'à un certain point, mais aussi très publique. Il nous arrive de voir une célébrité aux prises avec des questions d'une extrême importance, mais nous savons bien qu'elles échappent pour beaucoup à nos connaissances; et cependant, dans des situations comme celle du Watergate (et contrairement à *True/False*), nous décelons très souvent la vérité et nous savons si celui qui parle la dit ou la cache. La télévision elle-même corrige les excès de Colin Campbell quand nous voyons un personnage familier d'une pièce ou d'un jeu de société prétendre qu'il ou qu'elle emploie *Lemon Pledge* ou mange des chocolats Rowntree; et, pour que nous

nous posions des questions, il n'a même pas besoin de dire «c'est vrai» ou «c'est faux». Colin Campbell n'atteint ce niveau qu'une fois; quand il dit: «J'aime Sackville».

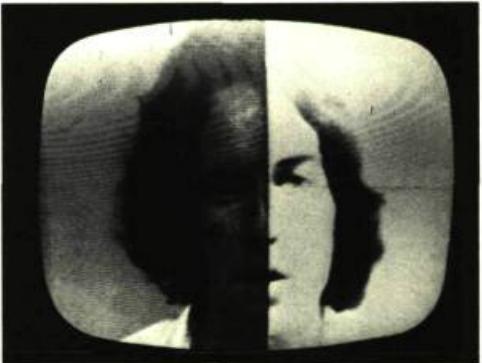
Il y a d'autres rapports avec l'art pour l'art. Les arts — et particulièrement, peut-être, les arts visuels — communiquent fortement le sens de la participation avec les perceptions mêmes de l'artiste. Une peinture n'a pas de sens seulement par son sujet, mais aussi par le parti pris, les intentions, de la personnalité qui l'a conçue. Notre attention peut se porter d'un côté ou de l'autre, mais une distinction importante s'impose. Si l'art de Rembrandt nous porte à nous intéresser à sa personnalité et à nous demander s'il mépriserait le coke, c'est parce que nous sommes sensibles à sa personnalité à travers son art comme élément de la qualité de cet art. S'exprimer honnêtement n'est pas en soi une qualité artistique si l'expression nous ennuie ou nous détourne d'elle. Bien plus, il est des questions que l'art ne saurait élucider. La vie et la mort, une réelle angoisse humaine, peuvent nous émouvoir trop fortement pour être transposées dans ou par l'art, pour nous permettre d'en savourer l'expérience comme art et de transformer ainsi, en quelque sorte, en plaisir personnel le malheur du prochain. Impossible d'imposer un embargo sur quelque aspect particulier de la vie. Ce qui est de bon goût se définit mieux par le goût que par un décret pourvu que l'on comprenne que le goût sous-entend la question de savoir comment et où l'art doit prendre place dans la vie et dans la société. *True/False* exige que nous marquions plus d'intérêt pour l'œuvre qu'elle n'en offre de raisons, et par des questions trop sérieuses ou trop personnelles pour être soulevées dans un contexte artistique.

Cette œuvre s'articule autour des connotations de la télévision; d'autres manipulent l'information — le contenu de l'image. *Real Split* (fig. 2) présente la photo d'une moitié du visage de l'artiste, coupée juste au milieu et occupant une moitié de l'écran, tandis que Colin Campbell ajuste pour ainsi dire sa tête, derrière la photographie, pour remplacer l'autre moitié. Plus tard, il applique de la peinture sur son visage, améliorant ainsi le mariage avec la photographie; une fois, en accroissant la plasticité de ses propres traits et, une autre fois, en réussissant à se donner une expression passablement féroce. Les questions jumelles de l'illusion de la réalité et de la réalité de l'illusion proviennent non seulement de la présence physique de la tête mais aussi de la projection de la personnalité alors que les deux moitiés explorent les plus infimes possibilités d'adaptation.

*Janus* (fig. 3) met en présence le corps nu de l'artiste et sa photographie grande nature. Il s'en approche et finit par l'embrasser. La caméra tourne lentement autour des deux figures entremêlées. La juxtaposition s'harmonise mais ce jeu subtil ne fait qu'intensifier le choc porté à notre sensibilité. En voyant les deux figures mâles, nous pensons d'abord à un acte homosexuel. Quand l'immobilité du deuxième corps nu devient évidente, elle peut nous paraître sculpture, encore qu'elle conserve des connotations érotiques, et l'on peut évoquer le mot «pygmalionisme», employé par les psychologues pour désigner l'amour physique des objets d'art. Si nous n'y voyons qu'une photographie et en déduisons qu'il n'y a pas plus d'activité sexuelle que dans l'acte de se frotter le corps à un morceau de carton, nous croyons quand même au narcissisme et à l'auto-érotisme en nous rendant compte qu'il s'agit de sa



1. Colin CAMPBELL  
*True/False*, 1972.



2. *Real Split*, 1972.

propre image. D'être confrontés non seulement à la révélation de la sexualité de l'artiste mais aussi à des aspects de la nôtre ne diminue en rien le choc.

Inutile de nier la logique interne de l'œuvre ni la sensibilité qui permet de rejeter les détails inutiles et de coordonner le reste pour le choc ou l'agression, mais l'œuvre blesse une *sensibilité* plus profonde, parce que les questions sont trop grandes.

Cette réaction n'est pas qu'émotionnelle. Dans d'autres bandes, l'emploi du mot *réel* évoque des problèmes philosophiques que nous savons trop bien être au-delà du domaine de l'art. Sur une bande, l'artiste a rasé un côté de son corps et l'a poli à l'huile; à mesure que tourne la caméra, il répète: «C'est ainsi que je suis réellement», jusqu'à ce que les mots, à force de répétitions, se dissolvent en un son pur (fig. 4). Dans une œuvre plus récente, les mots «c'est réel» paraissent en alternance, en caractère gras, puis sur la même feuille de papier, et «ceci est un montage». La logique du paradoxe repose sur le vague du pronom démonstratif «ceci» (qui doit être précisé par un geste de la main ou par une phrase); nul besoin de l'accabler sous tout le poids de la réalité.

Deux œuvres qui présentent Colin Campbell dans le rôle de vedette artistique, *Sackville, I'm Yours* (fig. 5) et *Smile* (fig. 6) justifient toutes mes objections. Elles sont œuvres de qualité. A l'époque, Colin Campbell était professeur à l'Université de Mount Allison, Nouveau-Brunswick. Dans chacune, il personifie un artiste de réputation internationale devant un interrogateur imaginaire. Déclinant d'abord l'invitation avec nonchalance, il est amené à discuter de son succès à Sackville, au Canada, et ailleurs. Interviennent des éléments personnels: son affection (évidemment ironique) pour la ville et la répétition de mots: «Art Bank», «Art Gallery», «Annie» et «Dorothée». Il n'est pas précisé que l'interview est télévisée, mais l'œuvre tire plein parti de l'à-propos de la connotation. On le voit nu dans les deux spectacles, et, à titre de vedette, il fera évidemment parade de sa sexualité. Il donne ainsi l'impression de «ne rien cacher» au sens littéral aussi bien que métaphorique. Tout cela est aussi artificiel et ouvertement malhonnête que le sont toujours des interviews de ce genre. Il joue un rôle, et, très conscientement, le charge, et cependant il est peut-être bien naturel à un niveau quelconque de la réalité ou de la fantaisie. Cette œuvre empiète sur toutes ces questions de réalité ou d'irréalité que d'autres exploitent avec trop d'ardeur, mais, parce qu'il y a empêtiement, elle évite l'accusation de grossièreté et paralyse les mécanismes de défense qui nous permettent d'oublier les grands problèmes pour continuer à vivre au jour le jour. Les incidents sont en eux-mêmes triviaux, mais leur insignifiance même nous conduit beaucoup plus loin vers ces questions fondamentales de vie et de mort que l'art est incapable d'appréhender. Parce que tout se présente comme un artifice, on se prend à s'intéresser à de menus faits. Lui a-t-on vraiment servi du thon en casserole chez le président? A-t-il vraiment monté six étages dans un ascenseur avec Annie (vraisemblablement Anne Brodsky, directeur d'*Arts Canada*)? Dans l'affirmative, qu'est-ce que ça signifie? Il y a tellement de duperie évidente qu'il y a carence d'indices fiables; la signification générale est laissée à l'imagination du spectateur.

Dans *Smile*, Art Star, après quelques préliminaires, sourit à la caméra et garde son sourire environ dix minutes. La fixité de l'expression trahit les sentiments qu'elle est censée

communiquer mais, par contre, l'immobilité de l'image peut faire douter de la présence réelle de l'artiste devant la caméra. Dès qu'elle s'immobilise, l'image pourrait être une photographie (comme dans *Janus* et *Real Split*), mais une photographie semblable au ralentissement de séquences sur un écran de télévision.

Le sens de l'humour, les éléments autobiographiques, les effets combinés de vérité et de fausseté, et, par-dessus tout, le scénario, suggèrent un parallèle avec d'autres évolutions récentes de l'art. Le mot «conte» flotte pour ainsi dire dans l'air et suggère l'idée de mouvement. Dans un contexte plus large, cela peut représenter une libération nécessaire des pressions de l'excès d'intellectualisme dans l'art post-minimal (tout comme, pour Colin Campbell lui-même, cela diminue sa tension émotionnelle). Mais il ne s'agit nullement de pas en arrière. Le pendule ne recule jamais, et il ne fait que déplacer des questions différées.

William Wegman fournit bien une base de comparaison, mais, et c'est caractéristique, les bandes de l'artiste américain sont brèves et précises, d'une minute tout au plus en certains cas, et si les questions soulevées sont à l'occasion aussi invraisemblables que la naissance d'un enfant sans bouche, le traitement dissipe le trauma émotif, et nous nous perdons en conjectures sur l'histoire elle-même et sur la manipulation des sentiments. Visuellement, l'image d'*Art Star* sur l'écran est plus scientifiquement et romantiquement posée, le déroulement est plus lent et nous fait saisir le sens de toutes sortes d'insinuations.

L'approche moins subtile de l'artiste canadien s'explique par le contexte d'une situation plus provinciale. Dans sa forme, l'œuvre contredit assez curieusement les sentiments ironiques de *Sackville, I'm Yours*, mais si l'exagération est reliée à la réponse anticipée d'un auditoire moins sensible, ces accusations conviendraient à la scène torontoise de l'activité présente de Campbell tout aussi bien qu'à celle de Sackville. D'autre part, la grossièreté relative ne peut se dissocier de la virilité que par la terminologie et peut représenter une possibilité de développement et de raffinement au-delà du stimulant d'un art qui montre les effets d'un excès de sophistication. Ce pourrait bien être le cas de Colin Campbell.

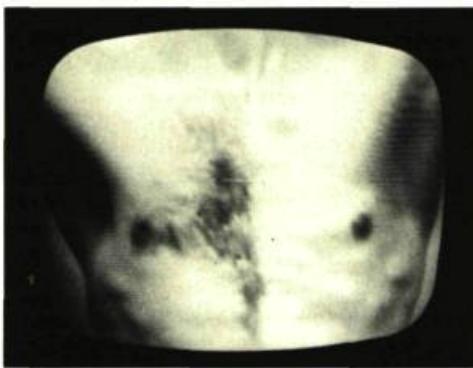
Les œuvres dont j'ai parlé datent pour la plupart d'un certain temps: *True/False*, *Real Split* et *Art Star*, de 1972; et *Janus* et *This is the way I really am*, de 1973. J'ai préféré limiter ma discussion à ces œuvres, en partie parce que je suis plus sûr des réactions qu'elles provoquent chez moi, et aussi parce que les questions de qualité restent les mêmes dans les œuvres plus complexes qui suivent. Il se peut, toutefois, que nous puissions voir en elles non seulement un enrichissement qui élève l'art au-delà des limites de l'exécution et aussi un début de solution aux problèmes qui n'en finissent pas de nous inquiéter. Je tire ces déductions surtout de *Love-Life*, de 1974, où l'artiste, sur un fond de paysage ou dans un appartement où l'on aperçoit une forme indistincte, lit des extraits de lettres d'amour expédiées par diverses personnes. L'image et la narration agissent parfois d'une très belle façon l'une sur l'autre. Le sérieux fondamental et la franchise émotionnelle des ouvrages précédents demeurent, mais dans une forme adoucie qui transcende constamment ce qui subsiste d'exagération.

(Traduction de Willie Chevalier)

English Original Text, p. 67



3. *Janus*, 1972.



4. *This is the Way I Really Am*, 1973.



5. *Sackville, I'm Yours*, 1972.



6. *Smile*, 1972.

(Le tout, ½ pce; blanc et noir; bande magnétoscopique; son.)

of the female students became interested in unrecognized cultural manifestations, such as the art of the *patenteux* with Lise Nantel, Louise de Grosbois and Raymonde Lamothe. After the October crisis, Lise Landry created at the Salon des Métiers d'Art in 1970, among the S.P.A.Q. (Society of Professional Arts of Quebec), a contentious situation relating to war measures: on the evening of the vernissage, her painting, *Mensonge*, was unveiled, showing a patriot accompanied by a few lines from the F.L.Q. manifesto; to our knowledge, no other work of art conveyed such a political message at that time.

This attempt at an evaluation of the relationships maintained by women with the plastic arts is therefore centred around the two following axes: the integration of art into society brings out the double difficulty for women of participating in this, first as women, then as artists. The second axis is linked around the notion of art and dispute: the challenge of one of the functions of art, which consists of revealing the social contradictions touching on woman and society in general, is one of the major concerns of women artists. It is for this reason that their integration into official art is all the more problematical.

#### Epilogue

Tanya Rosenberg, putting the last touch to her male cache-sexes exhibition at the Powerhouse Gallery (autumn, 1974), was heard to say: "You must be dangerous." At the vernissage of the *Montréal plus ou moins* Exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts of Montreal (Summer, 1971), six ladies in wedding dress majestically climbed the museum stairs, then, turning around, used their veils like a J-cloth to dust the columns of the portico. A flabber gasted lady gasped: "Oh, but you were so beautiful!"

1. The catalogue of the exhibition is, none the less, introduced by a text by Fernande Saint-Martin.
2. Yves Robillard, *Underground vs Overground, ou comment s'en sortir, s'il y a lieu, ou bien y rester, en l'occurrence, in Québec Underground*, Montréal, Ed. Médiant, 1973. Vol. III, p. 107.
3. Rosalie Garon, *Les Créateurs en arts plastiques de la région métropolitaine de Montréal*, Research Bureau of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1974; 159 p.
4. Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy*.
5. Rosalie Gagnon, op. cit.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

had the tag tied to him on several occasions. There are, however, some fundamental differences between his work and the work of painters such as Alex Colville and Ken Danby. His technique of handling paint, his use of colour and, most important, the frontality of his composition place him closer to the New York colourist school than the eastern realists.

The favourite medium of Canadian realists is egg-tempera and the technique for application is modelled on the Renaissance masters. They build up the colour base into a solid, but subdued hue. Even when Lindner used egg-tempera for a few years in the mid-sixties, he worked much more openly and tended to rely on the blocking out of colour areas as is commonly done in water-colour. In fact, his work in all mediums is closer to water-colour technique than either the multi-layered, build-up of colour of the old masters or the direct application of colour of many of the contemporary abstract painters.

Lindner's sense of colour developed under the influence of artists such as Jules Olitski and Kenneth Noland, who led the Emma Lake Workshops in the early sixties. Before these New York abstract artists came, Lindner's work was characterized by the subdued hues which one also finds in the work of the new realists. Lindner, however, has moved into a much richer palette and favours areas of strongly contrasted colour. Sometimes, the contrast is emphasized by a form. For example, a leaf of bright green will stand in front of darker, softer mosses. But often the contrasting colour or tone will be independent of the forms. For example, a sunlit section within an area of moss. He has accepted, in part, the creed that painting has to do primarily with colour. Subject matter is for him a source of form and colour but it is in itself of secondary importance in the painting.

Another technical change which has occurred in Lindner's painting in the last ten years is the use of frontality. He has moved the central subject to the front of the canvas so that the form extends beyond the edges of the canvas. Lindner shares with the new realists an interest in microscopic detail. He has brought his subject matter up close enough so that he can concentrate on what interests him. But he does not share the realists' fascination with reproducing the texture of objects. Lindner's texture is always technical. That is, he varies his pen, pencil or brush strokes to suggest textural variations, but there is no attempt to fool the eye. Lindner does not use frontality as an occasion for the rendering of the texture of the subject. Frontality is for him a compositional device which makes the subject matter, in the first instance, abstract. By spilling the form over the edges of the canvas, Lindner forces the viewer to accept the form as form before the subject matter is recognized. His paintings are first of all abstract and then realistic. All painters, of course, strive for formal, abstract qualities in their work, but Lindner, like the abstract expressionists and the colourists, is primarily interested in the formal aspects. As a realist, he does not see painting as only formal, but he has moved as far as he can in that direction without painting abstract.

Frontality is not peculiar to realist painting. The geometric forms which are projected onto the canvas area by Kenneth Noland or, in Canada, by Kenneth Lochhead are examples of frontality in abstract work. Their concern is to emphasize the edges of the canvas as edges rather than as the window frame imposed on

western art by the Renaissance. The huge colour areas of Olitski are also frontal in that the colour has been released from form and brought to the surface of the canvas as colour. Lindner's use of frontality is much closer to the use by these abstract artists than to the close-up views of some of the eastern realists.

Having said all that, I find that, in his most recent paintings, Lindner is using close-up views much like other realists, rather than the full frontality of several years ago. Composition is one of Lindner's strengths and several of these new paintings are strong even though the colour is more subdued and the framing more traditional. "Apple" is an example of dynamic composition. The painting has a strong focal point and the surrounding forms are both diverting and harmonious with the centre. "Peeling Birch" is the closest to the former frontal placement of the subject. It shows clearly the different use of paint from that of the egg-tempera painters. Although Lindner's water-colour technique is very tight compared to traditional water-colours, it still retains that basic wash, open area, blocked-in colour variation which makes the medium so fresh and immediate.

Lindner's recent work has been shown at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris in December. From there it is moving to Brussels and London, before returning to Canada. The Victoria Art Gallery will show the paintings and drawings on their return to Canada.

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#### COLIN CAMPBELL: THE «STORY» OF ART STAR

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By Eric CAMERON

The videotapes of Colin Campbell evoke a double level of self-reference: to the structure of the medium through which the work is conveyed, and to the personal circumstances of the artist. These are the perennial sources of modern art, but in the context of the 1970's (in the wake of so-called 'conceptual' art), it is the autobiographical elements that provide the greater challenge: they are what give his art its claims to originality and they are what expose it to lapses of taste that may undermine its quality.

Videotape was used initially as a means of documenting performance: he speaks of Dennis Oppenheim as a crucial influence; but whereas performance, in that case, sets the person of the artist in a particular relationship to his environment that readily projects itself onto a level of generality, Colin Campbell's performances turn the attention of the viewer on the artist's own personality in its most emotionally sensitive aspects. *True/False* of 1972 is a key work (figure 1). In it, the artist's head and shoulders appear first in profile then in full face, as he repeats a series of statements about his own personal life: "I am part Jewish... I still masturbate... I am heterosexual... I snort coke... I have had crabs" and so on. After each statement he pauses, then says "True"; then pauses; then says "False". The tension of his effort to retain an impassive expression communicates powerfully; he swallows hard from time to time.

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#### ERNEST LINDNER'S ABSTRACT REALISM

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By Terrence HEATH

Ernest Lindner has become known for his depiction of the rich plant life of the northern Saskatchewan forest. For the last ten years, his close-up studies of decaying tree stumps and bright coloured mosses have received national acclaim.

During those same ten years, there has been a strong movement toward realism in painting in some regions of Canada. Various labels have been attached to the new representational work; magic realism and high realism are two of them.

To the casual observer, Lindner's work would seem to fit into this new realism and he has

Colin Campbell describes the television medium as a "conveyor-belt of reality". What he means is that the intimacy of scale and domestic context, and the immediacy of its presentation of information give a sense of familiarity that might make us feel we had actually witnessed the events it reports, and might make it hard for us not to stop and speak in the street to someone we had only seen reading the news. It is this aspect of the medium that *True/False* probes. The videotape documents a performance, but it does not contain it neutrally. Indeed it is the inference of intimate personal knowledge implicit in the medium itself that is challenged. We feel that television allows us to know the person well, but when it is put to us, we cannot be sure of anything about him.

The insight is a valid one and the piece of unquestionable importance, but there are rough edges. The rigid profile and full-face views suggest the formality of criminal-records photography rather than the casual directness of television, but mainly the piece founders because the issues raised are too big for it to contain. In part, this is a failure in his understanding of television, in part, in his understanding of art. Television is ambivalent in its mass-oriented intimacies, private to a point, but also very public. At times we will see a celebrity confronted on issues just as important as these, but then we are very well aware that the issues are outside the privilege of our acquaintance, and yet in such situations as Watergate (and unlike *True/False*), we very often can tell what the truth is, whether the speaker tells it or not. Television itself corrects Colin Campbell's excesses, when we see a familiar character from a play or parlour-game claim that he/she uses Lemon Pledge or eats Rowntree's chocolates, and they do not even need to say "True — false" to just make us wonder. At only one place does Colin Campbell hit this level, when he says: "I like Sackville".

There are other points to do with art as art. The arts — and especially the visual arts, perhaps — communicate very strongly the sense of participation in the artist's own perceptions. A painting signifies not only the content of its painted subject but also the bias of the personality that envisaged it. Our attention may be directed either way, but there is an important distinction to make. If Rembrandt's art causes us to have an interest in his personality and to care whether he snorted coke or not, that is because we have first responded to the sense of the personality we get from the art, as an aspect of its quality as art. Honest self-expression is not automatically an artistic virtue if it bores or alienates us. Moreover, there may be issues that are beyond the competence of art to handle. Issues of life and death and real human anguish may strike our emotions too powerfully to allow us simply to savour the experience as art, and to that extent to turn another's misfortunes to our own pleasure. There is no possibility of an absolute embargo on particular aspects of life. What is in good taste is better defined by taste than by prescriptive formula, provided only it is understood that 'taste' encompasses the question of how art ought to locate itself in life and society. *True/False* demands that we care more deeply than the work gives us reason to care, and about issues that are too serious or too personal to be raised gratuitously in an art context.

This piece hinges on the connotations of television; others manipulate the information-content of the image. *Real Split* (figure 2) has a photograph of half the artist's face, split right

down the centre, occupying one half of the screen while Colin Campbell adjusts his head behind the photograph to restore the other half. Later he applies paint to his face, at one stage achieving a better blend with the photograph, at one time enhancing the plasticity of his actual features and at another generating a quite ferocious expression. The twin questions of the illusion of reality and reality of illusion relate not only to the physical presence of the head, but also to the changing projection of personality as the two halves explore the minute margins of plausible accommodation.

*Janus* (figure 3) sets the artist's nude body in relation to a life-sized photograph of himself. He moves against it and eventually kisses it. The camera moves slowly over the interlocking figures. The harmonies are carefully resolved, but this refinement at a formal level only adds momentum to the subject's sledge-hammer assault on our sensibilities. When we see it initially as two male figures, it reads as a homosexual act. When the immobility of the second figure first becomes apparent, we may interpret that figure as sculpture, and still carrying erotic connotations, the act may elicit the term "Pygmalianism" that psychologists use to describe the physical love of works of art. When we see it is just a photograph and understand that the activity is no more sensual than brushing one's body against a piece of cardboard, yet the realisation that it is his own image, raises issues of narcissism and auto-eroticism. That it undoubtedly confronts us not only with the revelations of the artist's sexuality but with aspects of our own goes nowhere to mitigate the shock.

There is no denying the internal consistency of the work or the sensibility that enables it to pare away irrelevant details and co-ordinate the rest for the assault, but there is a broader sense of "sensibility" that the work offends — because the issues are too big.

It is not only at an emotional level that this criticism applies. In other tapes, the use of the word "real" evokes philosophical problems that we know too readily are beyond the competence of art to deal with. In one tape, the artist has shaved one side of his body and "polished" it with oil; as the camera moves over it he repeats the phrase: "This is the way I really am" until the words, through repetition, dissolve into pure sound (figure 4). In a more recent work, the words "This is real" appear in bold print alternating with, and eventually on the same sheet of paper as, "This is an edit". The logic of the paradox hinges on the indeterminacy of the demonstrative pronoun ("this" needs to be specified by a gesture of the hand or another sentence); there is no need to burden it with the whole weight of the problem of reality.

Two pieces in which Colin Campbell appears in the role of Art Star, Sackville, I'm Yours (figure 5) and Smile (figure 6) meet all my objections. They are works of high quality. At the time Colin Campbell was a faculty-member at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. In both pieces he plays the role of an artist of international reputation facing an imaginary interviewer. At first nonchalantly declining the invitation, he is drawn into discussion of his success in Sackville in Canada, and beyond. Personal elements creep in, his affection (evidently ironic) for the town, and a sort of pseudo-name-dropping: "Art Bank", "Art Gallery", "Annie" and "Dorothy". It is not specified that the interview is a television interview, but the piece capitalises on the appropriateness of the connotation. He appears in

the nude in both works, but then being a star implies that he will flaunt himself sexually. Also it suggests that he is "concealing nothing" in a literal as well as metaphoric sense. The whole situation is as artificial and as pointedly dishonest as interviews of this type always are. He is acting a part and quite consciously over-acting it, and yet the part he is acting may be himself — on some level of fact or fantasy. The piece impinges on all those issues of reality and unreality that other works court too strenuously, but here because it only "impinges", it avoids the accusation of grossness, and circumvents the defence mechanisms that enable us to keep the big issues out of the way and get on with the day-to-day business of living. The incidents in themselves are trivial, but because of their very triviality, are able to engage our sympathies more completely and take us willingly a good deal further in the direction of those fundamental life-and-death matters that seem beyond the competence of art to tackle. Because the whole thing presents itself in the guise of artifice, one finds oneself caring more about the fragments of fact that may intrude. Did he really have a tuna-fish casserole at the President's? Did he really ride six floors in a lift with "Annie" (presumably Anne Brodsky, Editor of Artscanada)? And if he did, what does that signify? In this context where so much is evident deception, we are given no reliable clues; the broader significance is left entirely to the imaginative projection of the viewer.

In *Smile Art Star*, after a few preliminaries, smiles for the camera and holds the smile for about ten minutes. The fixed expression belies the feelings it is supposed to communicate, but beyond that the immobilisation of the image may challenge the actuality of the artist's presence before the camera. Once the image stops moving it might just be a photograph (like *Janus* or *Real Split*), but a photograph brought down to the low resolution abstraction of the television roster.

The sense of humour, the autobiographical elements, the interplay of true and false, and above all, the narrative content suggest parallels with other recent developments in art. The word "story" seems to be in the air and offers the possibility of developing into a movement. In a broader context it may represent a necessary release of the pressures of over-intellectualism in post-minimal art (just as for Colin Campbell personally, it relaxes the tensions at an emotional level). But it does not represent a swing back. The pendulum never swings back, but only relocates deferred issues in a new context.

William Wegman presents a basis of comparison, but characteristically the American artist's tapes are brief and to the point, barely a minute long in some cases, and if the issues raised are occasionally as over-charged as a child's being born without a mouth, the treatment rapidly defuses the emotional trauma and leaves us musing on the structure of the story and its mode of manipulating our sentiments. Visually, *Art Star*'s image on the screen is more self-consciously and romantically poised, the delivery is slower and nudges us to grasp all sorts of loaded innuendo.

The more heavy-handed approach of the Canadian artist must relate to the context of a more provincial situation. Formally, the work gives a peculiar backlash to the ironic sentiments of "Sackville, I'm Yours", but if overstatement is related to the anticipated response of a less sensitive audience, those accusations could fit the Toronto scene of Campbell's present activity just as well as Sackville. On the

other hand, comparative "crudeness" may be distinguished from "virility" only by the bias of our terminology, and may represent a possibility of development and refinement beyond the impetus of an art showing the effects of over-sophistication. With Colin Campbell, this could be the case.

The works I have discussed were mostly produced some time ago: *True/False*, *Real Split* and the "Art Star" pieces in 1972; and *Janus* and *This is the way I really am* in 1973. I have preferred to limit the discussion mainly to those pieces, in part because I feel surer of my own reactions there, and in part because the critical issues on which the question of quality pivots remains the same in the more complex works that follow. It may be, however, that in these works we see, not only an enrichment that carries the art definitively beyond the limits of performance, but also a measure of resolution of those aspects that still cause anxiety. I find these indications most strongly in *Love-Life* of 1974 where the artist reads sections of love letters sent to him by various people, as an accompaniment to images of landscape and an apartment within which a figure can be seen indistinctly. The fragments of visual and verbal narrative interact in a way that can be very beautiful. The fundamental seriousness and emotional directness of the earlier work remains, but in a mellowed form that may almost consistently transcend the residue of overstatement.

## THE FLY AND THE ELEPHANT

By Virgil HAMMOCK

*The following text was presented at the A.I.C.A. meeting held in Dresden, September 1974.*

There are two kinds of imperialism — one is economic and the other is cultural. While both are, of course, bad, the latter is far more insidious. As long as a country is able to hold on to its cultural identity, even if it is physically controlled by another nation either by the force of economics or actual occupation, it is a nation, but loose that identity and you lose everything. Is there really such a thing as national identity in this age of internationalism? The answer must be an unequivocal yes. The visual arts are international in many ways, in Western society mostly in form, but the artists are not. What makes a Dürer or Cranach German, or a Van Gogh Dutch? Is it the language they spoke? No, not really, because it is not necessary for me to understand either German or Dutch to enjoy the works of these artists, but neither must I understand these languages to see that there is a difference in their work that could only be attributed to something called a national spirit. As a Canadian, this issue concerns me, as our identity, if we have one, is in danger. The danger, I am afraid, is brought on as much by my fellow Canadians as it is by that more familiar bogey-man, the United States. Perhaps it would be fairer, at the outset, if I identified myself: I am a naturalized Canadian citizen, who was born in the United States and moved to Canada over seven years ago in an attempt to find a new, perhaps less hectic, life for my family and myself. I have found a

new life, but I am troubled by what I see as a gradual erosion of my country's cultural values and the failure of her artists and critics to fight back.

I would like to speak a little more about the ideas of international or universal language of some forms of art and see how they hold up. I believe that for purposes of comparison we can relate music and the visual arts in their universality, as does the American philosopher Morris Peckham, who calls painting 'visual music.' Music too, despite its claimed universality, has more than its share of nationalism or national spirit and I am not talking of the more obvious examples like Janack, Dvorak, or Smetana, but rather the change that takes place when Bach transcribes Vivaldi or Villa-Lobos' transcription of Bach and the same thing happens in painting with Ruben's interpretation of Titian. Italian becomes German or Flemish, German becomes Brazilian. These examples are far from mere copies but beautiful transformations from one national spirit to another. It is that gap in between that is so very hard to explain.

What internationalism generally means in the visual arts today is a kind of cultural homogenization, and like this process it may be healthy, but it is, as well, boring and without chance. Many American painters, Pollock among them, have tried to point out the international flavor of painting, but, as has been recently pointed out by such American critics as Max Kozloff, these same artists were confusing Americanism with 'universalism.' Not uncommon thinking among imperialists, even unconscious ones like Pollock. Of course, the United States has no monopoly on imperialism. In the visual arts since World War Two the U.S. has been the most important centre in the world. With Canada being the U.S.'s closest neighbor and a majority of its people sharing a common language, we could hardly escape its influence.

It is not my place here to belittle the very real accomplishments of American art. I believe, as do many, that its very success spelled out its eventual failure. The rebellion was replaced by big business and genius by profit. Nor do I wish to give the idea that much of the art of the Communist world is any better because it has not been tainted by Capitalism. The only difference seems to be that in the non-capitalist world bureaucrats replace capitalists as the tastemakers, but the end result in either case is not art. In fact, very seldom does direct government intervention in the creation of art, no matter how laudable its motives, result in anything remotely memorable, much less important in the history of art. Of course, there were the Russian experiments of the period immediately following the Revolution, but we all have a pretty good idea of what happened there and, eventually, it was the West not Russia, who benefited from the truly original genius of her artists, who were in my opinion the most important group of artists in the first half of this century. Even so, most other modern nations have an even worse record as far as government interference in their art goes. Examine, for instance, the official art in Germany during the Nazi period or that of Italy during the era of Fascism or for that matter, the art in the People's Republic of China today. I would have to admit that many of the examples that I have named have had different functions than that of so-called High-Art, but I would draw to your attention how elegantly the art of a Wagner, Beethoven or Dürer speaks of German spirit or what better spokes-

man is there for the French Revolution than David.

During the world-wide Depression of the 1930's the United States did provide a measure of economic aid to many of the artists without a great deal of interference under the terms of the WPA or Work Project's Administration, but the vision was not there to continue nor did they even bother to care for the works that were produced under this programme, as recent research has pointed out.

I have called this paper 'The Fly and the Elephant' and for good reason — it has been said that when the United States coughs, Canada catches pneumonia. What this means in simple terms is that while we are a large country in area and natural resources, we have a small population in comparison with our neighbors to the South. But what is more important is the economic power of the United States and its control of secondary industry over the whole North American continent, which reduces Canada somewhat to the status of a banana republic, although a favoured one. Canada was never conquered by force of arms, but by the forces of economics and our culture, such as it is, or was, is not strong enough to stave off this invasion. Culture in Canada is something like the Canadian Edition of *Time Magazine*, eight pages of Canadian news, or the more euphemistic term, Canadian content stuffed into the American Edition. The problem is that many of our children grow up thinking that their country is an insert. Thank God for Watergate, because it has given Canadians, as well as Americans, a chance to rethink their values. But, before I am given the label of a typical anti-American, and one of the worst kind, an American anti-American who, rather like a convert to a religion or political dogma show more zeal than those born to the faith, let me say, right now, that one of the shames of our country is the wasted effort by many of our artists and intellectuals in becoming professional anti-Americans rather than professional pro-Canadians. In fact, I believe there is a good living to be made in Canada as a professional anti-American. Certainly there are a number of second-rate artists in Canada today whose only virtue seems to be being born in Canada and they are making the most of it. Even failed exiles have returned after years in the United States to drape themselves in the Canadian flag while singing the national anthem in an attempt at a new career.

A major problem in Canada is in communications and the control of the media. Most Canadians watch American television, which is readily available to most of our population and again many watch the American product because it is thought to be 'better,' as are American magazines, books, movies and popular music. Although at best a subjective judgment, I would use the word easier in this case, as the American mass product makes, as it is designed, very little demand upon the mind. Once again, I would remind you that I don't want to demean the real American accomplishment in the arts and many other areas, but these are not the things that are bombarded into our midst by the media masters. The danger is, of course, that many Canadians have a better picture of American Society than they do of their own and this includes the arts. One of the problems in thinking yourself or your culture second-rate is that they very well may become just that, second-rate. Art galleries in our country feature exhibitions by European and American artists at the expense of our own artists. This is not surpris-