

Figuration On the Dark Side

Betty Goodwin

Galerie René Blouin, of Montreal, from September 27 to
November 1, 1986

James D. Campbell

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2. Zina, de Ken McMULLEN

le montage dans ce type de cinéma n'a plus pour fonction d'arrondir les angles, ni de faire oublier les modalités d'écriture ou du récit (comme d'aménager des transitions douces et invisibles d'un plan à un autre ou entre les séquences). Au contraire, il vise à laisser des traces, comme pour refocaliser l'attention du spectateur.

Cependant, toute cette *mouvance* ne recèle pas que des aspects positifs. Ainsi, les rapprochements d'un film à l'autre de certains habitués du Festival permettent de constater un assagissement général de leur écriture au sens large. Par exemple, tout en étant stimulant, *Down by Law* rappelle un peu trop une manière de faire qui frôle l'*autocitation* et la mise en œuvre de

recettes-maison: analogie dans la typologie des personnages, système de signes repérables qui permettent au spectateur d'être en terrain connu (références à *Stranger Than Paradise*).

Aussi la dimension socio-politique semble être passablement évacuée au profit d'un recentrement radical sur l'individualité, sur l'exploration du moi, dans le cadre de relations interpersonnelles. Mais lorsqu'il refait surface, rarement, le politique est-il abordé d'une façon subtile, donnant au projet filmique et à sa recherche formelle sa justification. Voyez *Zina*, un pur chef-d'œuvre injustement écarté par la critique québécoise lors de la remise du Prix Alcan, décerné pour la première fois, cette année.

Zina recèle, en effet, toutes les caractéristiques de la *différence* tant recherchée, tout en correspondant au caractère de nécessité que l'on attend d'une œuvre. Ici, la référence au mythe suggère un parallèle, au lieu de s'y appesantir, entre la destinée d'Antigone et celle de Zina (née Bronstein) dans ses rapports difficiles avec son père (Trotsky). Pour le reste, effets de rupture, signature du cinéaste par des moyens narratifs et des audaces d'écriture stupéfiants d'habileté et d'intelligence, assumant pleinement leur propre justification, exploration convaincante des combinaisons spatio-temporelles appliquées au modèle psychanalytique (voyez ces travellings aériens plongeant littéralement du sommet de la montagne vers le refuge du père/Trotsky, ou ce long plan-séquence au mouvement complexe mais combien souple donnant une profondeur au texte lu, suggérant visuellement, sans verser dans la plate illustration, le désir de Zina de voir son père, ou ces images mentales et ces images du quotidien traitées semblablement afin d'abolir la séparation artificielle entre le réel concret et le domaine du rêve ou du subconscient – passage qui s'effectue trop souvent au cinéma au moyen d'artifices), détournement de l'utilisation classique du flash-back et d'autres procédés (entrelaçant le retour sur le passé et la prémonition) qui ont pour fonction de déjouer les stratégies narratives classiques, métissage fertile entre le documentaire et la fiction, entre la couleur et le n/b – le réalisateur allant jusqu'à brouiller en finale ses propres codes afin de provoquer un effet de confusion voulu, etc., tout y est, tous les principes du *nouveau* cinéma sont mis en application dans ce film exemplaire...

1. A Montréal, du 16 au 26 octobre 1986. Cf. *Vie des Arts*, XXVI, 106, 86; XXVII, 110, 68; XXVIII, 114, 83; XXIX, 118, 81; XXX, 122, 91.
2. En réalité, après les vagues successives de l'expérimental, de l'alternatif, de l'underground, du cinéma «autre», etc., il faudrait plutôt parler aujourd'hui d'un cinéma *différent*.

James D. CAMPBELL

FIGURATION ON THE DARK SIDE: BETTY GOODWIN

Betty Goodwin's recent exhibition *cum* installation¹ marked an auspicious beginning for that gallery – and for the new Montreal gallery-going season.

Few of her peers have been so consistently adept at recognizing and visualizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. In this show – arguably her strongest to date – this 'shadow-self' is given full play.

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It is a truism, perhaps, that consciousness of – much less attempting to depict – the dark side of the human personality requires considerable moral effort. Few critics have acknowledged the extreme moral stance Goodwin assumes in her work. That the 'shadow' is a moral problem and one she has sought to pose in a highly dramatic but entirely unaffected fashion in her figuration has gone largely unnoticed.

The crux of the drawings on view here – and in some significant way their starting-point – is a preoccupation with the human body and its gestures. Ordinary poses take on a hieratic intensity that never becomes banal. The deeply-felt humanity of her images is always attested to – even when the lived-body



takes on the limbs of a tortured beast. Anthropomorphic images are always rendered more achingly human through the depiction of some peculiarly human expression or gesture – usually one of pain.

This is not to say her moral stance is not also, one suspects, a psychotherapeutic measure for the artist herself, a deliberative attempt to achieve in her mark-making a kind of reconciliation and relief after immense suffering. Suffering is, of course the latent theme of the work. No contemporaneous artist is as gifted at embodying *pain* in figuration with such terrifying facticity – but always with an intimacy that leads the sensitive viewer into an empathic compact with the work.

Goodwin's visualization of the dark side of human nature has an ineluctably emotional cast and a somewhat obsessive quality that only heightens its dramatic ethos. She reminds us that, as Jung said, emotion is not an activity of the individual but *something that happens to him*.

This figuration is concerned with the lower levels of the personality, riven with and actuated by uncontrollable emotions and behaviour that is wholly primitivistic in nature. These figures, one suspects, are not only passive victims of their effects; but incapable of moral judgment or victimized by its absence in others.

I was always reminded of that amazing passage at the end of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* when I viewed these works, apropos "the injuries that human bodies do to those who love them". Goodwin tries to capture those aspects of the *Shadow* that cause such injury as they resist any moral control and subsume consciousness itself, plunging the subject into a chaos of uncontrolled desire.

Intense pain, harrowingly conveyed as a fundamental truth of lived-experience, pervades Goodwin's figuration. Despite a curious flaccidity that has crept into some of her figuration – paradoxically as she attempts to better hone her representational skills – which renders more problematic the communication of suffering rather than intensifying it, two of the works in the group entitled *How Long Does It Take Any One Voice to Reach Another* (1985-86) are amongst the most compelling she has ever executed.

But it should be pointed out that the significance of this show in the history of the work lies in its blurring



2. *Carbon*, 1986.
Installation à la Galerie René Blouin.
(Photos Brian Merrett, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal)

of the distinction between an exhibition of drawings proper and an installation.

In the main room, one wall is covered with nine overwhelmingly vertical aluminum panels – a new medium for Goodwin and one heavily gessoed – on which she renders a dramatic 'shadow-play', carrying to its highest pitch the theme of suffering and injury, vulnerability and violence that has always been operative in her work, and involving the viewer in its very enactment.

Black shadow shapes besiege helpless figures who desperately confront them and seek to cast them off. But, it is implied, they are Siamese twins, the terrorized figures the vessel of their shadow's manifestation. This is a demonic struggle, a Dark Carnival of the soul, and has singular impact as such. A portent of this was seen at the Aurora Borealis exhibition last year, but here it is realized on a larger scale and in more depth.

Single figure drawings occupy three of four sides of a central structural pillar in the gallery. They hearken back, as individual figures, to antecedent works. (One depicting a fragile figure in a foetal posture, is especially convincing.)

These frozen figures seem to be floating in some dreamlike space, a substance less like the water it at first seems than the externalized unconscious of their creator: oceanic, all-encompassing... a medium ideally suited to serve as a context for the rendering of a body, in time as well as this problematic space. But it is a medium that belies its appearance for it is one redolent of hazard.

Colour is used with what has become a characteristic eloquence and restraint that indicates the artist's concern that it only be used when and if it can meaningfully add to or enhance the work. The reddish, watery translucence of the field often reminds us of am-

niotic fluid or blood, the field a womb or coffin. So colour is not an end in itself but a means of proceeding into the work and nurturing it towards its gestation. These works symbolize the birth of a noema that is manifest by virtue of Goodwin's clarity of intention, and one might add that the image of the artist conceiving of and consciously intending the work, seeking a way of ingress through trauma into the essential structure of her own intentional life, is very apparent here, as the processual marks left on the field confirm.

The body seems so vulnerable amidst the violence and dynamism of the context in which it finds itself, leaving a pattern of traces and marks in its wake – and so always affects its context – as it negotiates its passage through it. This delineation of passage is more than a process of differentiation, but a very touchstone of our humanness. In a world fraught with hazard, weary of sense, the body strives to locate itself by virtue of its own idealized poses, frozen for an instant; suspended in time, as it were, between pole and tropic.

In the suspended poses of swimmers, lifeguards and divers, Goodwin disclosed for us – with considerable personal integrity – a unique and hypnotic vocabulary of images that at once bewitch us on an aesthetic level with a fine rendering of contour as drawing and also touch our emotive selves by virtue of their beguiling intimacy. In the drawings exhibited here, Goodwin moved beyond this stock repertory of compelling poses, adopting a more extreme moral stance and revealing a new vocabulary emphasizing the centrality of the Shadow. This demonstrates she is still in a continuing period of great creative ferment.

Few shows nowadays continue to haunt us after we have left the gallery. In Goodwin's case we are haunted by a question: From what *caesura* of the heart have these bloods-stained wraiths seeped forth?

That an answer continues to elude us; that the question should be asked at all, proves just how utterly necessary Goodwin's work is.

1. Betty GOODWIN
Do You Know How Long It Takes For Any One Voice to Reach Another, 1986.
Montréal, Collection particulière.

1. At Galerie René Blouin, of Montréal, from September 27 to November 1, 1986.

