

Erected in 1937, the *Endless Column* is part of a series of columns of varying proportions and materials that commenced in 1918. *Calculated Comparisons* interprets infinite extension to mean an interlacing narrative frieze constructed from the resemblances between the material properties of each of the blocks in a criss-crossing horizontal line of intervals.

Calculated Comparisons compels one to ponder ambiguities peculiar to the perception and mental recollection of material properties rather than to recreate the phenomenon of process as was the case with *130.56 m²/9*. Dufour's serialism, when detached from these theatrical overtones which echo the Process phase of late 60's Minimalism, is able to signal a larger embodiment of Classicism. This is not to say that Dufour is a Neo-Classical artist, rather it is to pin point the persistence with which an allegory can symbolically refer to similar instances of labor intensive logic as they have been classified as a "family resemblance" with the term "Classicism" in an antiquarian past.

Is Dufour's logical/pseudo-mechanical/pseudo-photographic dependency on stylistic sources intelligently progressive or stultifying? The cynicism within this paradox is the essential "life" of Dufour's work. A domestic vernacular and his self-consciousness within stylistic conventions combine to uphold and at the same time to satirize the necessary dependency of art upon its own history. *Calculated Comparisons* is an allegory of this kind. It is redeemed from being an intoxicated hero worship through its genuinely negative critique of art's secular appeal.

DEAN HOFFART

NOTES

1. Refer to Douglas Crimp: "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" *October* No. 15 Winter 1980.
2. The logical breakdown of this attitude is examined by Jack Burnham in *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1968.
3. El Lissitzky, "Prouns", 1921 in *El Lissitzky* (Köln: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1976) as referred to by Dufour and cited in the exhibition catalogue.

HURLBUT/MARTIN/MASSEY/ SINGLETON

Art Gallery of Ontario
June 5 - July 19, 1981

The formal system of a work does not stop at the work's physical boundaries; its meaning is integrated into a larger formal structure of theory, art history and the museum/gallery, a system for the production of value, in which criticism plays a part. Criticism must bring that structure to articulation; and through this process of meaning, criticism undermines the larger formal system as well as itself. Without this bringing to consciousness by criticism, the system will continue to "interpret" meaning, ultimately by creating it, and in the end producing future work whose internal structure and resulting experience mirror that of the institution. Criticism's violence attempts to break that structure; its destructiveness sides with that of the excluded viewer: the viewer is absent from this formal structure, while still playing a function for the work within it.

In approaching this exhibition, we must bear in mind three different claims: that of the catalogue; that of the exhibition; and that of the works of art themselves, although each mutually reflects, supports and confirms the others.

The catalogue is in no way an articulation of the totaliz-

ing unconscious apparatus of the museum; its stated intention, in this case, was to follow a proposal put forward by the painter Ron Martin to the Art Gallery of Ontario: "Martin's rationale for the show," writes Roald Nasgaard in the catalogue, "however was based on criteria different from the usual curatorial ones of shared styles or themes or historical contexts. For, if the group holds concerns in common, it is on rather more fundamental terms. Though the other artists were younger than himself, Martin felt it important to show together because 'the spirit of their work is in agreement with my own.' The basis for their agreement, Martin explained, was that 'their work refers to the subject and the conditions the subject exists in, and only secondarily to the existence of art objects'. That points to the two central issues around which the exhibition revolves. First, the problem of subjectivity or the quality of the self as it relates to the production and appreciation of a work of art. Second, the problem of how, if the importance of the art object *per se* is minimized, the work must manifest the experience of subjectivity so that it can be felt to be true, both for spectator and artist." Whether their work escapes the determining conditions of the art gallery is another question. Or perhaps the question is rather how the artists direct that operation and are responsible for it, as the curator Nasgaard complies with the artist Martin.

Outside this representation of the art, there are the specific claims made in Martin's statement and reiterated by the catalogue: subjectivity; the disappearance of the value of the art object. How has subjectivity become possible in contemporary art in the museum, or rather, how has it been sustained? Subjectivity can only be taken as a value within the conditions of the art gallery: its problem is that it is taken as a value rather than as a crisis of the subject. As for the lessening of the importance of the art object *per se*, there are no objects more obdurate than these, and no exhibition that has conferred as much value on contemporary art as the AGO's in its presentation, in which the artists are complicit. But there is some truth: in its disappearance, the object becomes the institution.

If we consider the determination of this subjectivity, we enter upon the claims of the exhibition: only the museum presumes not to present itself, but the artworks in their immediacy. And the history of the museum is a history of the maintenance of that immediacy. The history of subjectivity, in fact, coincides with the history of the bourgeois epoch, which, ironically, is exactly the epoch that the catalogue essay chooses to recount as the historical ground of the art displayed here: bourgeois subjectivity's last refuge is the museum. When the Marxist critic Georg Lukács asked "How far is commodity exchange together with its structural consequences able to influence the *total* outer and inner life of society?", the museum claimed exemption for its maintenance of a qualitative, organic temporality. Since capitalism's "rational objectification conceals above all the immediate — qualitative and material — character of things as things" (Lukács), the work of art was thought to restore the subject — artist and spectator — fragmented by capitalism's destruction of the traditional work process.

With this assurance, the museum feels, that having passed through modernist transparency and post-minimalist contextual assault on that transparency, it finally has achieved a position of authority. (No less is the conferral of authority evident than in the very title of the exhibition, in the names that designate the presence of art: Hurlbut/Martin/Massey/Singleton. Paraphrasing an earlier exhibition at the AGO — *Structures for Behaviour* — we could call this exhibition "Structures of Authority.") Because the spectator is a mere moment in the work, excluded through the operation of the work, subject to it in subjectivity, he or she is like the capitalist worker — a mere source of error. The total is always a way of bringing the spectator — that heterogeneous other — into identity with the whole through the representative of the work. The museum reproduces the commodity model as its own system.

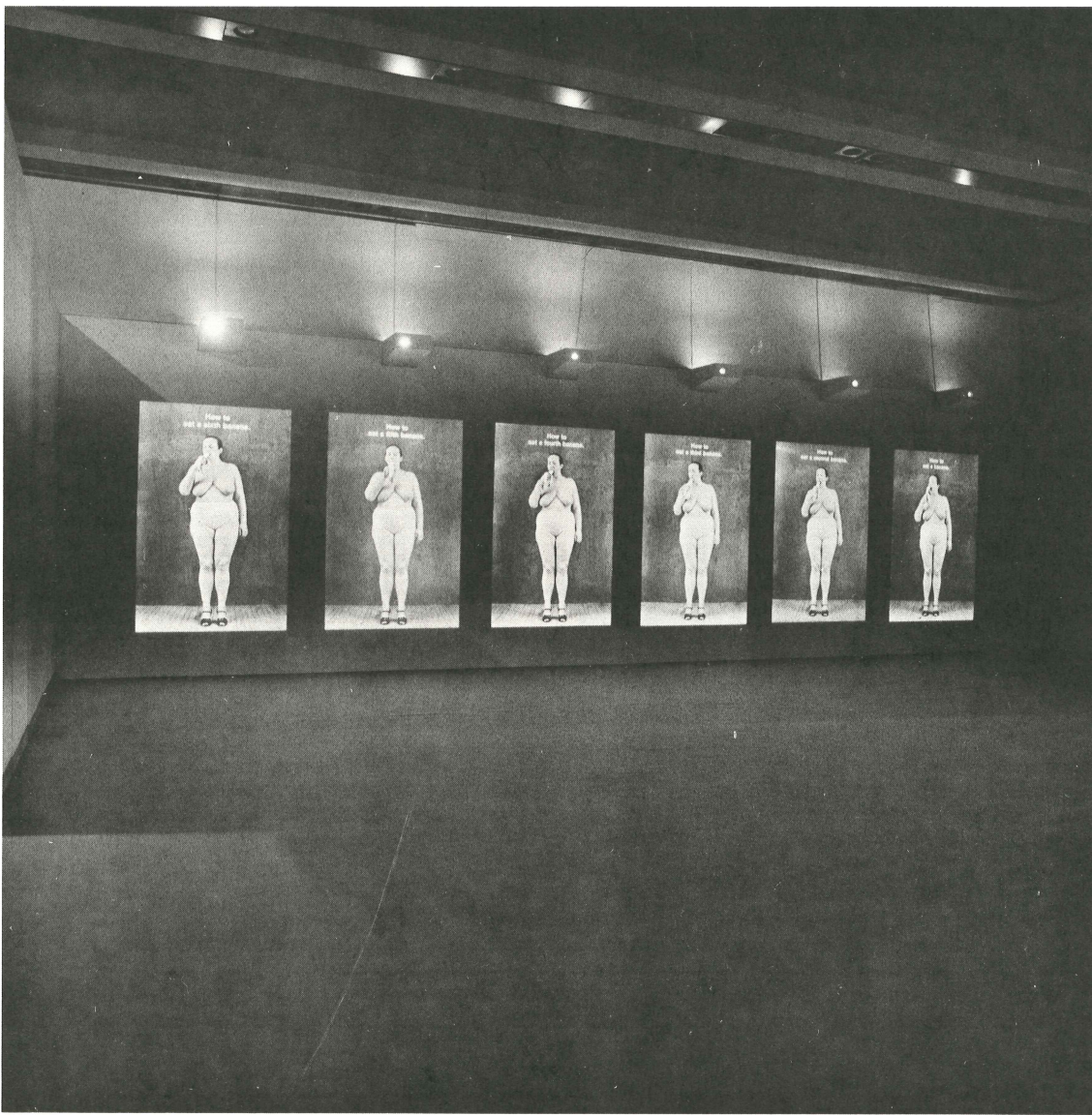
Nowhere is this commodity fetishism more apparent than in the works' presentation through the function of lighting. Not only does it turn the object of presentation — the work — into the subject of a theatrical aura, it is the apparatus, the transparent screen, through which something is seen: in this institutionalization of the look, the spectator is the reverse point of perspective, subjected to the look. On every level, identity is achieved through eliding concept into concept, concept into structure and structure into context through the ideal instrument of light.

This apparatus of presentation and the language of presence and immediacy that surrounds this art produce the "frame" of a work. The fact that Spring Hurlbut's large-scale plaster construction is illuminated by raking spotlights does not call the work itself into question. Titled *The Wall*, the work has none of the functional value of its name as it is laid over a linen wall of the gallery, although it plays on a wall's connotation as an existential thing, approached in the authenticity of experience that produced the surface and gestural markings by the artist. What is sustained over that dimension of surface and what is communicated the catalogue says is "a quality of movement that differentiates the activity from the merely functional.... physical expressions of internal feelings." What it communicates is its scale, partly created and contradicted by a broad cornice that sets it as an object in the space and gives it a further reference to a wall and perhaps to the context of the old gallery. But the activity enunciated by the language of ethical seriousness and existential authenticity is contradicted by the very conventionality of that cornice which posits the gallery as a convention in which these activities are symbolically engaged. What is communicated finally by this work is a language of belief of the "truth" of these works. This language, substantiated by the gallery and common enough by now to have lost its truth, has been promoted by Ron Martin: "Martin speaks fully conscious of the meaning of his words. The other artists would concur with his convictions, and it is the basis of their mutual respect." (Roald Nasgaard)

Ron Martin's black paintings of the past six to seven years are substantial masses of hand-worked paint that oppose themselves as bodies to the viewer. Martin's ambition, which is modernist, has been to create paintings that are autonomous masses that call for autonomous acts: the artist in making and the viewer in seeing. From the material base of the painting object, through the "material" act of looking, Martin has tried to generate a philosophy of looking and an ethics of action — observed from the limits of this process. The wholeness of the experience must originate within the limits of the experience to be effective, for the artist and viewer alike: such is the work's modernism. Today with our faith in immediacy and presence shaken, it is not certain within the conventions of the art gallery that this engagement can lead to an ethic, and whether the representational and consequential can so simply be opposed. "The implication of spontaneous action is that everything external to the action itself is irrelevant," Martin writes in the catalogue; but this exclusion effaces the very structure of support that brings that work to meaning within the gallery.

The language of Martin that surrounds this work and brings it to a certain being (the language that brought the exhibition into being) has been refined over the making of the different groups of black paintings while the work itself has grown more contrary to the language. The artist's restrictive strategy recently has produced work that at times appear both narrative and decorative, characteristics that call Martin's modernist ambitions into question; or the work simply and disjunctively contradicts that language. Freed from these intentions, the paintings positively fulfil the sensual conditions set for their existence outside the metaphysics of the artist's exemplary act. But our reduced expectations for the work obviously is not shared by the artist.

The paintings in this exhibition oppose two types of



Becky Singleton, *How to Eat Heinz Spaghetti with Tomato Sauce*, 1981, detail, 4 sets of 6 b/w 35 mm. slides each, Art Gallery of Ontario

Photo courtesy: Art Gallery of Ontario

mass, based on the opposition of subtraction and addition of paint: in the first, black paint was allowed to set and was then torn from the canvas; in the other, the worked and kneaded acrylic massed in clumps. Within each painting, distinctions of look are caused by the change in the opaqueness or sheen in the black surface and light; that is, they are open to the movement of the viewer. Distinctions are made between the paintings in each series, but none of the paintings can be judged in relation to another painting — that is judged by quality — or analysed in terms of technique or formal comparison of part to part or part to whole. Ultimately, for Martin, they cannot be approached outside the wholeness of their experience, through history, language or intention.

The set-up of these oppositions, the strategy of making, the difference in sameness of a series of paintings displayed in the gallery make us question the lack of a directing intention and whether the work is an "organic" growth independent of formal act, especially when the "gap" between these two series was filled in Martin's last exhibition at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery by a build up of paint from canvas to canvas that turned the display into a narrative ensemble. The specificity of the material — which we are to read as the trace and presence of the artist's material act — tends toward an illustrative and decorative organicism — metaphorically embodying a representation that is deeper than this organic look. In the end we are driven, through the language of the artist, to associations of chaos brought to form and origin in the act of the artist, all of which we recognize, against the

artist's desire and intention, as a formal act: the origin is also an institution.

According to Roald Nasgaard, Becky Singleton "is very little attracted to the use of materials; much more important is the structure of language and thought. She is attracted to film images and to photographs because they present the identity of things without reiterating their physical existence. The problem is to create in a work a structure or series of relationships that are equivalent to the way we think." For the AGO this work took the form of a double series of six projected images in one room and a series of six 16mm film projections in another. A film or slide projection is the pure structure of the perspectival cone of vision and the institutionalization of the look by industrial reproduction. When an artist attempts to mimic the "structure" of thought in art through these devices, or any other, the result is an empty structure. False identity with thought is created by this empty structure of projection: material is absent, and if the image loses its substance in this identity, its only function is to distinguish difference in number and name as in *How to Eat Heinz Spaghetti with Tomato Sauce*. This simple positivism is modified by the "semiotics" of identity and identification in these so-called "differences" of name products; but in the end the work only reproduces itself in presentation and commands the reproduction of the viewer in turn.

At least John Massey seems more aware of the conditions of the exhibition and the determining figures of the institution. In *Fee, Fie, Foe, Fumm* he made an at-

tempt to structure the experience of awareness of the viewer through the body in that space, as well as to provide an excess of content or experience beyond that tautology.

Unlike the structure of presence of Martin's paintings or Singleton's empty structure of projection, Massey is concerned with what is made visible, at what level of appearance, between subject and object. For this reason, the models of the gallery space Massey situates in its space are also models of appearance. None of the three models are identical at once in detail or texture to the space; and each are receivers of projections or sources of amplification from the mainly visible (and metaphorical) slide projectors or tape players that are triggered by sonars. Passing from corner model to model, and triggering the slides or tapes, the viewer is returned to the full scale of the gallery in the fourth corner where there is no model, only two large speakers implanted in the wall. Conscious of that position (and aided by the track of the tape at this point), the viewer's attention is thrown back to the space of the gallery and to a review of the successive positions and self-projections within the space: the body is the reception of the piece.

The body is the reception of the piece, and yet the viewer is continually undercut in movement by the sonars: from a position in the empty space of the centre of the room where the viewer could possibly control the work, the piece does not function. The manipulation of the body in such successive stationing does not release the body from mere reception, even with the introduction of the heterogeneous material of images and sound of differing intensities and emotional resonance. The work exhausts itself in this succession, but maintains its hold on the viewer through its structure. What is presented by the work beyond this structure of itself and the institution (besides the model-space relation) that the artist found preliminary to expression, and does it ever escape, or does it merely fetishize the gallery through the models (the slide projection has as its subject fetishized women's lips)? For in terms of its content, Massey has chosen the most connotated way beyond societal conventions — the fear, sexuality and threat of the images and soundtracks (signified in the title of the piece). This projection onto the viewer in the convention of the art gallery, without fully offering these conventions to the viewer, maintains the authority of the piece. There is no subject-object relation, rather a subject-intention (the artist's intention) relation: the originator — the artist — knows and speaks the truth of the work. Detained in these conditions, the viewer can only abandon the work or destroy it for himself or herself.

PHILIP MONK

PORK ROASTS: 250 Feminist Cartoons

University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery
April 1981

Ever since May 4, 1972, when Grace MacInnis suggested during a status of women debate in the House of Commons that rude male MPs "might be called MCPs" she knew that humour was on her side. As sole female MP she saw that her tart words for a recalcitrant government were not being heard. Then the taunt: The male members paused, recognized what the new initials meant, then laughed and applauded. Nine years later, *PORK ROASTS: 250 Feminist Cartoons* is receiving this same kind of applause. It is an important exhibition of recent feminist cartoons, curated by Vancouver independent art critic and art historian Avis Lang Rosenberg. The Canada Council can be quite proud of its sponsorship. The curatorial task represents a large challenge imaginatively met by Ms. Rosenberg. Over one