

## Tom Phillips Tom Phillips

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Volume 20, Number 82, Spring 1976

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/55035ac>

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Publisher(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

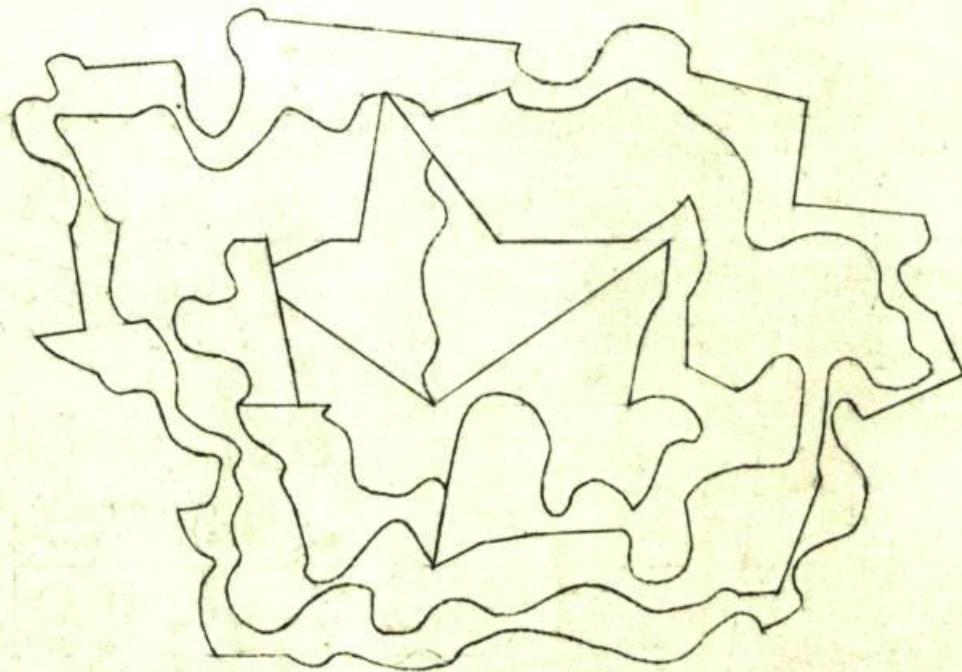
0042-5435 (print)  
1923-3183 (digital)

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Cite this article

Bourget, J.-L. (1976). Tom Phillips. *Vie des arts*, 20(82), 60–93.



# Tom Phillips

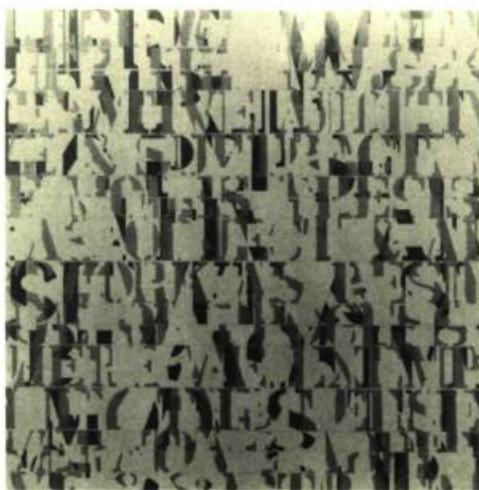
Céline aimait se comparer à Seurat. Il déce-lait une ressemblance entre les points de sus-pension, dont il rythmait sa prose pour lui don-ner le rendu de la langue parlée, et le pointillisme qu'utilisaient les néo-impressionnistes pour augmenter la luminosité de leurs tableaux. Céline et Seurat ont aussi en commun d'avoir élaboré des techniques hautement artificielles et prenant beaucoup de temps pour produire certains effets (de vérité ou d'émotion) aux-quals ils s'attachaient par-dessus tout. L'obser-vateur pressé croit saisir le principe de tels procédés, mais leur complexité, leur exigeante minutie n'apparaissent qu'à la loupe. Enfin, ces procédés rompent si nettement avec les con-ventions inavouées (de la peinture, du roman) que le spectateur/lecteur a d'abord tendance à les percevoir comme jeu ou provocation.

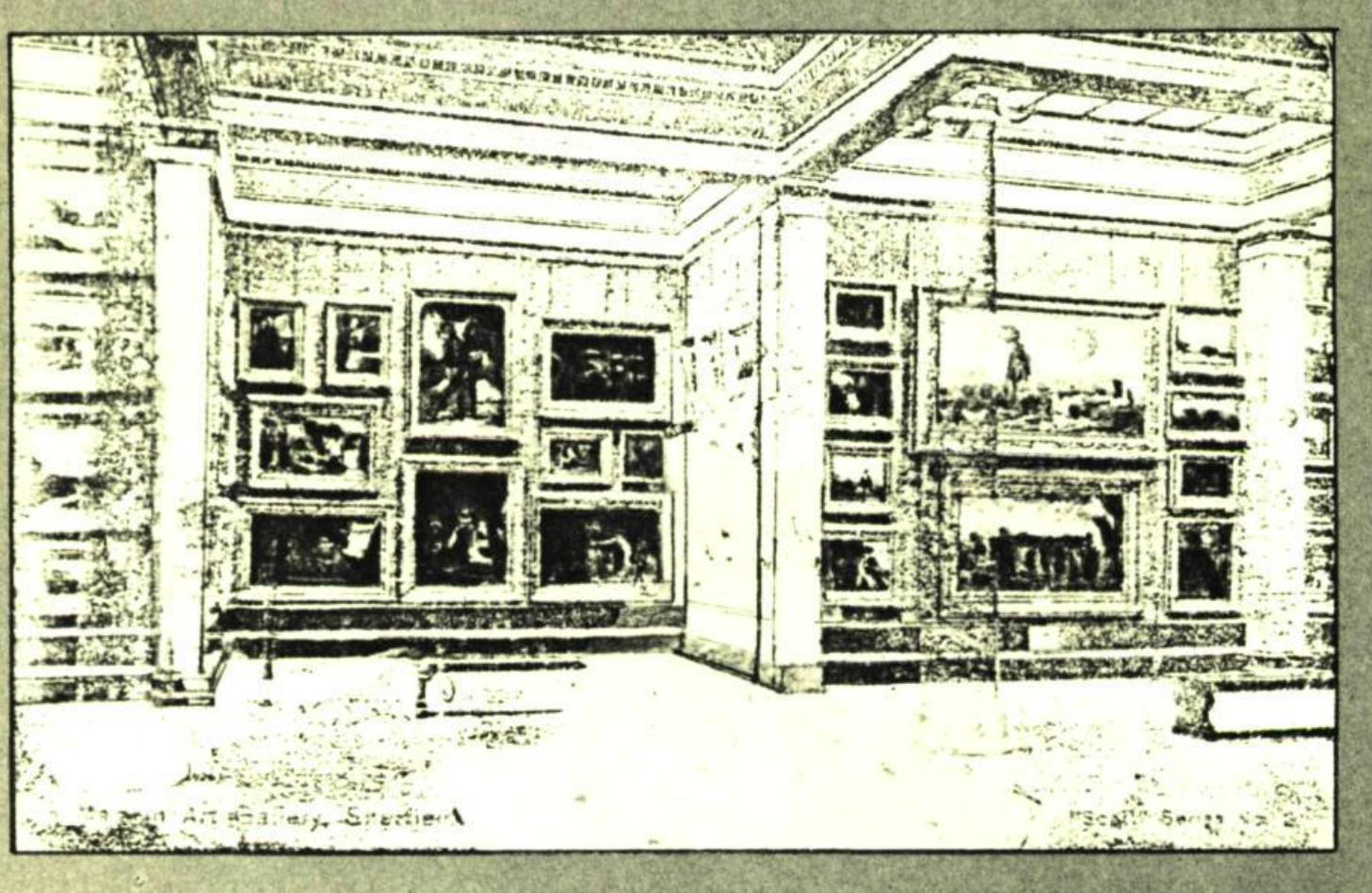
Tom Phillips (né à Londres en 1937) se sert beaucoup des petits points, des virgules de couleurs, quoiqu'il ne prétende pas adhérer aux théories de Chevreul, de Seurat et de Si-gnac: son pointillisme «procède simplement de la décision de travailler avec des couleurs dis-tinctes et du désir d'être précis». Sans doute reflète-t-il aussi l'image télévisée. D'autre part, Tom Phillips, qui rend la tâche des critiques d'autant plus malaisée qu'il fait semblant de la leur faciliter, leur mâche la besogne, a eu une enfance qu'on peut qualifier de célinienne. Il s'en explique longuement dans l'introduction à *Works — Texts — to 1974*, catalogue de sa rétrospective à La Haye et à Bâle (1975). Attachement très fort à sa mère; milieu petit

*Mais l'araignée de la haie  
Ne mange que des violettes.  
(Rimbaud)*

bourgeois, ennuis d'argent, dont il essaie de se tirer par des spéculations mesquines qui échouent immanquablement; l'équivalent de la mère dentellière de Céline, c'est le maître d'école qui dessinait des enluminures go-thiques.

On objectera peut-être que ces éléments n'apparaissent pas dans l'œuvre de Tom Phillips. Je répondrai qu'à mon sens, son œuvre n'est pas seulement la suite, ou la somme, de ses peintures. Phillips simultanément fait de son œuvre une chronique, un mémento de sa vie, et de sa vie tout entière une œuvre. A cet égard, le nom qui s'impose n'est plus celui de Céline, mais celui de Proust (rapprochement qui n'est pas fortuit, car les deux plus grands écrivains français de ce siècle n'ont qu'un antagonisme de surface; ils sont, pour ne citer qu'un ou deux exemples, également obsédés par le style, par la vie recomposée en laboratoire, et par la société d'avant 1914). Dans sa démarche, Phillips me semble lié aux peintres réunis dans l'exposition *Pour Mémoires* (Bordeaux, Paris, etc., 1974), qui essayait d'illustrer le thème proustien d'une peinture *nostalgique*. Ce qui caractérise l'œuvre de Phillips, c'est que chaque image s'y réfère à une image antérieure et est elle-même, en puissance, la source (philo-logique) d'une image à venir. C'est l'*«enfilade de copies»* dont parle Barthes dans *S/Z*, ou plutôt, comme dit Marina Vaizey, le jeu du télé-phone: ainsi, le drapeau britannique déployé sur la couverture de *Works — Texts* est une image de Phillips peinte d'après la photo d'un





Mapping Art Galleries Sheffield (cyclic Scott series 2 : printed in Hessian ; published in Birmingham). Outline of Painting Project. v. manuscript

A HUMAN DOCUMENT.

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One morning, however, he arranged his affairs so as to be ready to follow the Princess, and mounted his carriage. He had just started when his master, who was passing by, stopped him. "I have been to see my son this morning," said he; "the horses stampeded him, and he fell into his master's hands. I have sent him to you, and you will be kind to him." The master took the boy into his carriage, and sent him to his son. The boy was very ill, and died the next day. The master was grieved, and said to his son, "I am sorry for your loss, but you must be patient, and bear it like a man." The boy replied, "I am sorry for my loss, but I will bear it like a man." The master was pleased with this answer, and said, "You are a good boy, and I will reward you for your good behavior. You will be a good soldier, and I will give you a commission in the army." The boy was very happy at this news, and said, "I will be a good soldier, and I will serve my country faithfully." The master was very pleased with this answer, and said, "You are a good boy, and I will reward you for your good behavior. You will be a good soldier, and I will give you a commission in the army." The boy was very happy at this news, and said, "I will be a good soldier, and I will serve my country faithfully."

the castle, were indeed, in proportion to the size of the village, the most remarkable feature of the place; dwelling, and above all, the towers, which were spoken of as primitive, but yet well-preserved, with all the magnificence of Gothic architecture. In which, if the roof and outer walls would himself have been destroyed, in the course of a long time, by the ravages of the weather, it was the towers, walls, and roof-slopes of its towers, which, like the fortresses of the Pyrenees, still remained, and were described by the people as being the best preserved in Western Europe.

1. Tom PHILLIPS  
*Golden Section Study*, 1965.  
Crayon sur papier: 21 cm 6 x 31.8

**2. Here we exemplify**, 1969-1970.  
Huile sur toile: 60 cm 5 x 60,5

3. Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield, 1973.  
Graphique: 17 cm 8 x 21.6.

4. Un document humain, page 63

5 Un document humain, page 228

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A HUMAN DOCUMENT.

In 1893 rich brownish-yellow exudate vulgaris was obtained from the

This is full of florid and ornate flourishes, much  
swelling and suggesting a Victoria and Albert  
museum. The electrophoretic and  
other boxes of prints

"Now, then," said Mrs. Schuyler, "and I hope of course you have," Mr. Schuyler at his usual very grave and serious air, "that identifies the horses which were present at the robbery and research will be made to find them, and finally reward the vigilante for his services."

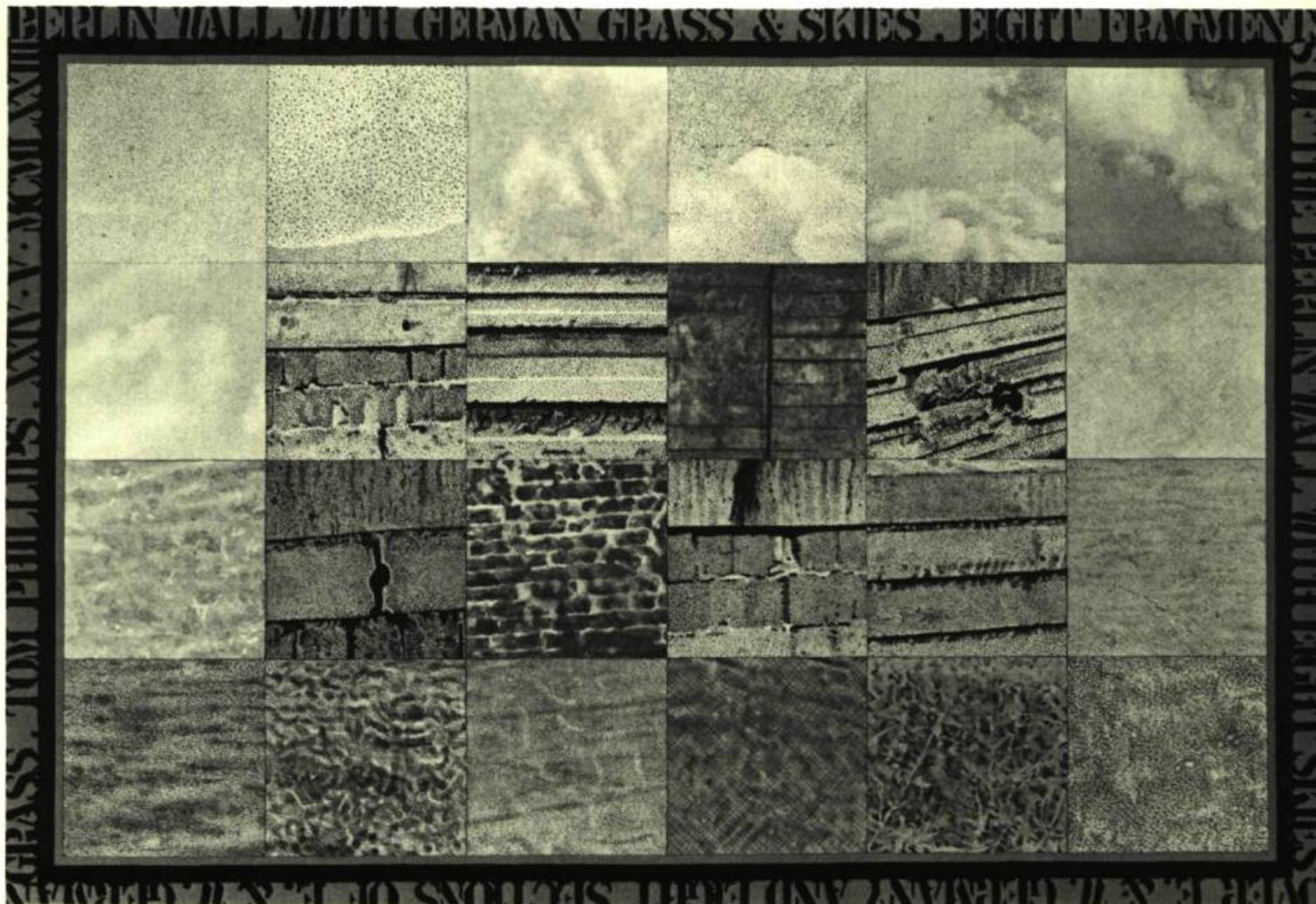
your right; and for the same reason being placed in the middle of the floor, it causes you to walk in a straight line.



We can be  
can be myself again.

卷之三

卷之三



6. Le Mur de Berlin, 1973. Lithographie; 43 cm 2 x 57,2.

drapeau réalisé d'après une précédente image du peintre, dont la source était un détail d'une carte postale berlinoise (retouchée). La peinture de Phillips constitue une sorte d'«archéologie du savoir» (Foucault), à la fois du savoir de la peinture, de son histoire et du savoir de Phillips lui-même. Pour donner de son travail une rétrospective de 1962 à 1974, il peint (à partir de 1972) une série de soixante tableaux récapitulatifs, chaque année étant représentée par cinq tableaux. (Maintenant qu'il est presque à jour, va-t-il peindre des tableaux prospectifs et non rétrospectifs?) Le numéro quatre, *Analyse d'un tableau de maître*, se réfère et à l'histoire de la peinture, puisqu'il explicite le rythme de Tintoret (*Saint Georges et le Dragon*), et à la préhistoire de Phillips, puisque l'original (le cahier de copies originales sur lequel il dessinait quand il était étudiant) est perdu, mais ici restitué. Il est frappant de noter que le premier tableau où, de son propre aveu, Phillips a trouvé son ton de voix personnel, s'intitule *Petite histoire de l'art* (ou *Un peu d'histoire de l'art?*), 1965. Depuis une dizaine d'années, Phillips enlumine ce *Humument* qui est un palimpseste-à-rebours, une version multiplement interpolée de *A Human Document*, du victorien W. H. Mallock, dont il peint presque entièrement les pages, laissant surnager quelques mots, quelques phrases, qui apparaissent dès lors comme décodées, déchiffrées, grâce

à la grille que leur impose l'artiste. Tout se passe donc comme si Phillips en mettait en lumière le sens original, primordial, se contentant d'obscurcir l'in-signifiant de Mallock.

La tentative de Phillips est d'essence encyclopédique. De là, les multiples références culturelles des tableaux: citations latines, poètes français, emblèmes à la Poliphile, histoire de la peinture, musique allemande, ... A quoi s'ajoutent des commentaires politiques (le Mur de Berlin, l'apartheid, ...). Mais il faut bien voir que références, citations, bribes de savoir, ne constituent nullement la signification des tableaux, mais seulement leur matériau. De même, le sens d'une encyclopédie n'est pas son contenu, mais son mode de classement et, éventuellement, ce qu'elle laisse filtrer. Si l'image envoie le texte (*A Humument*), inversement le texte est présent à l'intérieur de l'image, dans ses marges, en introduction et en conclusion au catalogue. Il est donc clair que Phillips n'explique pas son œuvre, mais que celle-ci doit être considérée comme l'ensemble de l'image et de sa glose proliférante. L'œuvre de Phillips, en réalité, ce n'est pas tel ou tel drapeau, pas même le dernier en date (sur la couverture citée), mais cette couverture sur laquelle l'historique de l'image se superpose à l'image. L'image est, si l'on veut, la partie émergée de l'iceberg, dont le texte nous indique, en pointillés, la partie submergée. (On

pourrait donc voir là une certaine tautologie. C'est le principe du *renvoi* dans les dictionnaires.)

Mais l'encyclopédie, c'est à la fois l'infinie variété, et la somme, le tout, le savoir comprimé, condensé dans un seul livre. Mallarmé: «Le monde est fait pour aboutir à un beau livre» (citation aimée de Tom Phillips). Et encore: «S'il y a un mystère du monde, cela tiendrait dans un premier-Paris du *Figaro*.» De même, chez Phillips, le catalogue de couleurs (*Farbenverzeichnis*), série de bandes qui permet à l'artiste de recycler la peinture inutilisée, a laissé place au «terminal grey», au gris-de-la-fin-de-la-semaine, mélange, synthèse, kaléidoscope des résidus non utilisés dans le Farbenverzeichnis. L'œuvre de Phillips a (provisoirement, on espère) abouti à un beau catalogue. Cette tentative de synthèse, de *Gesamtkunstwerk*, serait bien dans l'esprit victorien, si l'humour, l'ironie, le calembour, l'appel au hasard malicieux (le mystérieux Hollandais C. LOOPSEEND est le télescopage de C.L.O.S.E.D. et de ... O.P.E.N.; c'est aussi, ajouterai-je, LOOP'S END = la boucle est bouclée, et, contradictoirement, LOO.SE END = la fin est ouverte) ne venaient en affirmer le caractère salubrement moderne; l'encyclopédie, Dieu merci!, n'est pas close.

English Translation, p. 93

By Jean-Loup BOURGET

But the hedge-spider  
Eats only violets.  
(Rimbaud)

Céline liked to compare himself to Seurat. He sensed a similarity between the points of suspension which helped to give his prose the rhythm of speech and the pointillism used by the Neo-Impressionists to heighten the luminous quality of their paintings. Céline and Seurat are further similar in that they both developed highly artificial and time-consuming techniques in order to produce the supreme ends, on the one hand, of realism, and on the other, of emotional truth. The hasty observer might believe that he has grasped the principle underlying such methods, but their complexity, their exacting detail require careful scrutiny. Indeed, these procedures are so opposed to implicit conventions (of painting, of the novel) that the viewer/reader will initially look on them as deliberately playful and provocative.

Tom Phillips (born in London in 1937) makes much use of suspension points and of commas in colour, although he does not claim to follow the theories of Chevreul, Seurat and Signac. His own pointillism "merely proceeds from decision to work in separated colour and the desire to be accurate". It probably also reflects the television image. Then again, Tom Phillips' childhood can well be described as Célinian. In his introduction to *Works — Texts — to 1974*, the "catalogue" for his retrospective exhibition in the Hague and Basel (1975), a lengthy description of his early years shows how he can complicate the critics' task while seeming to prepare the way to an understanding of his aims. As in the case of Céline, there is the strong maternal attachment, the lower middle-class upbringing, constant money problems and the inevitable failure to solve them by petty speculation. Céline's lace-making mother takes the form of the school-master who traces the illuminations of mediaeval manuscripts.

It might be objected that these elements are not apparent in Tom Phillips' work. I should reply that, to my own mind, his work is not simply the succession or the sum total of his paintings. Phillips simultaneously turns his work

into a chronicle, a memento of his life, and of his life, in turn, he makes a *corpus*. From this point of view, it is not Céline who springs to mind, but Proust (the association is a valid one as the antinomy between the two greatest French writers of the twentieth century is superficial). To give but one or two examples, they are both equally obsessed by style, by life, reconstituted, as it were, in the laboratory, and by pre-1914 society. Phillips' approach seems to me to relate him to the artists represented in the exhibition *Pour Mémoires* (Bordeaux, Paris, etc., 1974) which was an attempt to illustrate the Proustian theme of *nostalgic* painting. Characteristic of Phillips' work is that each image refers to a previous one, being at the same time the potential (philological) source of an image to come. It is the "succession of copies" described by Barthes in *S/Z*, or rather, as Marina Vaizey has put it, "the telephone-game". For example, the British flag unfolding on the cover of *Works — Texts* is adapted from the photograph of a flag, itself painted by Phillips, whose source was a detail from a (re-touched) postcard of Berlin. Phillips' paintings constitute a kind of "archeology of knowledge" (Foucault), of painting, of its history, and of Phillips' own knowledge. With a *retrospective* of his work from 1962-1974 in mind, Phillips begins in 1972 a series of 60 "recapitulatory" pictures, each year being represented by 5 paintings. (Now that he has brought it almost up to date, will the next step be *prospective*, rather than *retrospective*?) Number 4, *Analysis of Old Master Painting*, alludes both to the history of painting, since it renders Tintoretto's rhythm explicit (*Saint George and the Dragon*), and to Phillips' own prehistory, the original, his student sketchbook of *original copies* being lost — and in this way, "restored". Significantly, the first painting in which, according to the artist himself, he found his personal touch, is called *A Little Art History or A Little of Art History*, 1965 (note the ambiguity). For ten years now, Phillips has been illuminating the *Humument*, which is an inverted palimpsest, a multiple interpolation of *A Human Document* by the Victorian writer W. H. Mallock. He paints over the pages of the book almost completely. Certain words still float to the surface, now deciphered and decoded, thanks to the grid superimposed by the artist. It is as if Phillips were bringing the original, primordial meaning to light by blocking out Mallock's non-signifiers.

Phillips' endeavour is essentially encyclo-

paedic. Hence the multifarious cultural references contained in his works. Latin quotations, French poets, emblems in the manner of Poliphilus, the history of painting, German music, ... In addition, political commentaries (the Berlin Wall, apartheid, ...). But these allusions in no way constitute the meaning of the whole. They are the raw material. Similarly, it is not the content of an encyclopaedia which is meaningful, but its system of classification and, possibly, what filters through the rubrics. If the image invades the text, (as in *A Humument*), conversely, the text is present in the image, in its margins, in the catalogue's introduction and conclusion. It is clear then that Phillips does not *explain* his work, but that it should be considered as the whole constituted by the image together with its proliferous glossary. Phillips' achievement is not, in fact, such and such a flag, not even the most recent form (on the said catalogue) but the story of the image superimposed on the image. The picture is, so to speak, the visible part of the iceberg whose underwater bulk is indicated by a pointillist text. (There is a kind of tautology at work here. It is the cross-reference principle of the dictionary.)

However, an encyclopaedia is both the infinite variety and the sum, the entirety, knowledge compressed and condensed in book form. Phillips likes to adapt Mallarmé: "Everything in the world exists to end up as a fine book". Or, to quote Mallarmé again: "If there is a secret of the universe, it would be found in a leading article of the *Figaro*". And so, Phillips' catalogue of colours (*Farbenverzeichnis*) a series of strips for the recycling of unused paints, gives way to "terminal grey", to the end-of-week grey, a mixture, a synthesis or kaleidoscope of the unused residues of the Farbenverzeichnis itself. Phillips' work has, provisionally, let us hope, ended up as a beautiful catalogue. This attempt at synthesis, at a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, would be well within the Victorian spirit, were it not for the humour, the irony, the pun, the appeal to mischievous chance (the mysterious Dutchman C. LOOPSEEND is the telescoping of C.L.O.S.E.D. and of... O.P.E.N.; it is also, I should add, LOOP'S END = the closure is closed, and paradoxically, LOO.SE END = the end is open). Thanks to these qualities, the summation is healthily modern. The encyclopaedia, thank God, is not closed.

(Translation by Eithne Bourget)

La Maison Reitman se réjouit de la réouverture du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal et,  
à cette occasion, présente aux Administrateurs et au Personnel du Musée ses meilleurs vœux  
de réussite dans toutes leurs entreprises.

Reitman's