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## The Vocabulary of Freedom in 1948: The Politics of the Montréal Avant-Garde

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From the ferment of recent years, Prisme d'Yeux... [whose members are] not galley slaves, tied to a theory they feel compelled to prove, rowing blindly... It supports all other groups which seek to preserve the independence of art.

— Prisme d'Yeux Manifesto,  
February 1948<sup>1</sup>

Without surrender or rest, in community of feeling of those who thirst for better life, without fear of set-backs, in encouragement or persecution, we shall pursue in joy our overwhelming need for liberation.

— *Refus Global*, manifesto of the Automatistes, August 1948<sup>2</sup>

Devant des réalités aussi tangibles, comment oser parler de 'liberté', d'"indépendance", et autres fariboles?

— "Mercure", *Le Devoir*, October 1948<sup>3</sup>

**F**reedom and its synonyms dominated the vocabulary of Canadian artists, intellectuals and politicians in 1948. In February, the issue of freedom divided the Montréal avant-garde into two hostile factions:<sup>4</sup> the Prisme d'Yeux, led by Alfred Pellan<sup>5</sup> and the Automatistes, led by Paul-Émile Borduas.<sup>6</sup> The ideological<sup>7</sup> basis of the debate on freedom is disclosed through an analysis of the clashing definitions of freedom contained in the manifestoes of the contending avant-gardes,<sup>8</sup> and in two works produced by their leaders in 1948: *L'homme A grave* by Pellan (fig. 1) and *Objet Totémique* by Borduas (fig. 2). Furthermore, through an examination of the critical reception of the Prisme d'Yeux and the Automatistes in 1948, and of contemporary politics, one may locate the interface of the aesthetic debate and the most contentious aspect of the discourse on freedom: the strategies to be used against communism in the Cold War, which as one writer noted in 1948, "est l'affaire de tout le monde."<sup>9</sup>

Until the late 1960's, the Prisme d'Yeux-Automatiste conflict was explained as essentially a personality clash between Borduas and Pellan.<sup>10</sup> F.-M. Gagnon's 1973 article, "Pellan, Borduas and the Automatistes: Men and Ideas in Quebec," undermined this traditional explanation, and posited a new one which maintained that the controversy between the rival Montréal avant-gardes was due to a collision of the ideologies of "contestation" and "rattrapage".<sup>11</sup> Gagnon's analysis, while currently the prevailing one, is problematic, however, for although it claims to place the aesthetic debate within the matrix of history, the specific questions of the artistic and political history of the late 1940's are overlooked, and ahistorical conclusions substituted in their place. Moreover, although Gagnon regards the Prisme d'Yeux-Automatiste confrontation as grounded in ideology, he per-



(1) Alfred PELLAN, *L'Homme à grave*, ink on paper, 29.8 x 22.8 cm., coll.: Musée du Québec. (Photo: Musée du Québec)



(2) Paul-Émile BORDUAS, 7.48 or **objets totémiques** 1948, oil, 55.8 x 46.9 cm, coll.: Mme Vianney Décarie. (Photo: Yvan Boulerice)

ceives only the manifestoes of the competing vanguards to be ideological, while their paintings are excluded from the parameters of ideology; he does not explain why the written word is permeable to ideology, but the painted image is not. The problems with which this paper will deal, therefore, are those which Canadian art history has ignored: the examination of the verbal and visual ideologies<sup>12</sup> of the competing Montréal avant-gardes, and the historical factors which shaped them.

The *Prisme d'Yeux* and the Automatistes first clashed openly at the annual meeting of the Contemporary Arts Society (C.A.S.),<sup>13</sup> which had functioned as the official representative of modern art in Québec since its founding in 1939. At the February 9 meeting, Borduas was elected President, despite opposition from the *Prisme d'Yeux*, for as Borduas later wrote to Luc Choquette, "Il y a d'ailleurs trois ans que je contrôle la majorité des voix à la C.A.S."<sup>14</sup> Alleging that Borduas' accession to power threatened the pluralist character of the C.A.S. (and along with it, freedom) several members of the *Prisme d'Yeux* withdrew, prompting Borduas' resignation as well;<sup>15</sup> like the *Prisme d'Yeux*, he alleged that authentic liberty was no longer tenable within the C.A.S. As John Lyman, the founder and past President of the Society later noted, "aesthetic liberty... became the instrument of sectarian contention."<sup>16</sup>

The tactics of the avant-garde<sup>17</sup> partially explain why Borduas suddenly repudiated the Society whose presidency he had so recently sought and secured. By holding its inaugural exhibition on February 4,<sup>18</sup> and breaking its ties with the C.A.S. barely a week later, the *Prisme d'Yeux* defined itself as the newest and most autonomous avant-garde in Montréal, a position previously occupied by the Automatistes alone.<sup>19</sup> Faced with a new, distinct avant-garde which labelled the Automatiste dominated C.A.S. anathema to freedom, Borduas was compelled to repudiate the Society if he was to salvage the Automatiste's reputation as the penultimate avant-garde. Borduas himself noted a year later that the Automatistes needed to define themselves in opposition to both the C.A.S. and the *Prisme d'Yeux* in order to be regarded as the most "progressive" wing of the Montréal artistic hierarchy: "In short, the left and the right of the contemporary movement — positions which the public does not differentiate — had to separate out."<sup>20</sup>

The polarization of "left" and "right" occurred over the issue freedom, at the heart of both the C.A.S. confrontation and the manifestoes printed by the *Prisme d'Yeux* and the Automatistes in 1948. The *Prisme d'Yeux* released its manifesto at its inaugural exhibition in February and again at its second exhibition in May.<sup>21</sup> This brief document associates apoliticism with aesthetic freedom:

We seek a painting freed from all accident of time and place, and of restrictive ideology; and conceived without interference of literary, political, philosophical, or other influences which can adulterate its expression and sully its purity.<sup>22</sup>

The delineation of aesthetic freedom as a function of art disentangled from political concerns, and as a return to the halcyon era of art for art's sake, affords striking parallels with that of liberal Quebec intellectuals<sup>23</sup> who characterized apolitical freedom as the ultimate goal of culture. Maurice Blain, for example, casts freedom as the object and most laudable product of literature, while insisting that cultural freedom remain immune from the solicitations of politics:

Il ne s'agit plus... d'une acceptation de consigne, ou du service d'une formation politique... La vocation réelle de l'écrivain nous apparaît comme un effort de dépassement et de libération.<sup>24</sup>

Adamant that art be divorced from politics, liberal francophone intellectuals were also immersed in the campaign against communism, a major issue of the provincial election campaign of 1948.<sup>25</sup> Communism was construed as hostile to cultural, political and personal freedom; Guy Cormier summarized the position of francophone liberals when he declared, "nous ne pouvons suivre Marx. Notre conscience y répugne, et qui plus est notre intelligence y répugne... L'International russe [a un] caractère fasciste."<sup>26</sup> Ignoring the expressly political complexion of the anti-communist debate, writers who advocated a strict separation of art and politics frequently infused cultural commentaries with anti-communist sentiments, as is revealed in a book review in *Le Quartier Latin*, the student newspaper of the Université de Montréal:

Le Parti immuable... avance, recule; commande, décommande; récompense, tue; tue, récompense... Le Parti est alors apparu sous son vrai jour, c'est-à-dire: une individuation despotique et orgueilleuse.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, while the fusion of politics and art signified the sacrifice of aesthetic freedom, the conflation of anti-communism and culture did not.

The *Prisme d'Yeux* manifesto also insists that the toleration of diversity secures liberation. Like the C.A.S.,<sup>28</sup> the *Prisme d'Yeux* welcomed "paths which take opposite directions, but which, like night and day, fire and water, are all equally possible and true."<sup>29</sup> The *Prisme d'Yeux*, therefore, regarded commitment to a single set of aesthetic precepts, notably Automatism and academicism, as the antithesis of freedom, but perceived acceptance of contradictory ones as the guarantor of freedom.<sup>30</sup> Eclecticism, however, while superficially motivated by the desire to remain unimpeded by the claims of a specific artistic or political group, and characterized by a refusal to adopt a specific position on various issues, did in itself actually denote a position taken in 1948: through their eloquent silences, the *Prisme d'Yeux* inadvertently

aligned itself with a group having identifiable political and cultural biases, namely francophone liberalism.

The twin principles of non-committal apoliticism associated with anti-communism and the attempted reconciliation of contradictions as means to achieve freedom, define the position of francophone liberals during the 1948 provincial election. Contemptuous of the reactionary social policies and notorious corruption of the incumbent Premier, Maurice Duplessis, these intellectuals nevertheless reluctantly supported him<sup>31</sup> on the key issues of anti-communism and its corollary in the '48 campaign, provincial autonomy<sup>32</sup>; liberals agreed with Duplessis' belief that "[la centralisation est] la mère du communisme, ce qui nous montre la nécessité de l'autonomie de la province."<sup>33</sup>

Despite their assertions that art be divorced from politics, both the *Prisme d'Yeux* and liberal intellectuals nevertheless acknowledged that the artist remained wedded to political realities, wittingly or not. Madeleine Gariépy, the art critic for *Notre Temps*, inserted the following comment in a review praising art which appeared devoid of specific meaning, but which possessed a ubiquitous, albeit nebulous, "richesse de fond".<sup>34</sup>

[La peinture] est l'expression plastique d'une époque troublée et inquiète où l'homme se trouve aux prises avec des problèmes nouveaux et difficiles.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, while condemning political content in painting, Pellan noted that "Art should be a healthy by-product of society... The great artist echoes the dominating social accents of his age."<sup>36</sup> Pellan was thus suspended between the necessity of apoliticism to ensure aesthetic freedom and the desire to be 'of his time.' The recognition that purely representational art was bankrupt, and that complete abstraction would alienate his public, further complicated the artist's plight, especially one like Pellan who maintained a populist approach to art: "I myself, want to paint for people."<sup>37</sup> How then, does *L'homme A grave* address these antipodal demands, and what do these contradictions and Pellan's attempted reconciliation of them reveal about the aesthetic ideology of the work?

*L'homme A grave* is one of a series of drawings which Pellan executed in 1948, inspired by a reading of "Volontairement," from Paul Éluard's *Capitale de la Douleur*.<sup>38</sup> The punning title of the work is typically surrealist; and characteristic of Pellan's antipathy towards commitment to a single position, as it has several alternate meanings: the first rate man engraves, the man engraves, the serious man, the heavy man, the man is aggravated. When considered simultaneously, these epithets evoke the position of the artist in 1948, subject to a series of pressures, both artistic and social, which Pellan acutely felt. According to Reesa Greenberg,

Pellan deliberately changed the titles [of the drawings inspired by *Capitale de la Douleur*] in an attempt to obscure their source, in response to the current anticommunist climate in Quebec... A non-communist, Pellan preferred not to have his art interpreted on the basis of a political affiliation with the most vocal European communist Surrealist, Éluard, nor for that matter with the Montreal *Automatistes*.<sup>39</sup>

Considering the tension existing between Pellan and Borduas, in 1948, Pellan's self-censorship on the surrealist source of the series of drawings to which *L'homme A grave* belongs, is comprehensible as an avant-garde tactic of self-definition in contradistinction to another rival avant-garde. Pellan's fear of being regarded as a communist through affiliation with Éluard, however, is more problematic than he and Greenberg suggest.

Whatever Éluard's subsequent political convictions<sup>40</sup> and their influence on his poetry, *Capitale de la Douleur* owes its allegiances to surrealism, not communism; its introspective, individualistic and often hermetic qualities were, in fact, precisely those which caused the Parti Communiste Français (P.C.F.) to regard the Surrealists as the poets of the alienated but politically naive and self-indulgent bourgeois intelligentsia.<sup>41</sup> The lack of political consciousness and the absence of communist ideas in *Capitale de la Douleur* is scarcely surprising considering Éluard's attitude towards the P.C.F. at the time he wrote it: in 1926, Éluard, like several other Parisian Surrealists, was flirting with the notion of collaborating with the P.C.F. in fomenting revolution, but the flirtation remained an idealistic one, and did not solidify into a wholehearted acceptance of either the cultural or political policies of the P.C.F.<sup>42</sup>

While the non-communist tenor of *Capitale de la Douleur* and the fact that it was written prior to Éluard's active involvement with the P.C.F. make it difficult to understand Pellan's anxiety about being regarded as a communist through affiliation with it, the status of Éluard among Québec's critics in 1948 adds further dimensions to this problem. Only the most conservative critics judged Éluard as a specifically communist writer<sup>43</sup>; these critics, however, were also those who had castigated Pellan's art as "bolchevistic" because of its similarity to the modern art of France, which they regarded in an apocalyptic light as inherently atheistic and communistic<sup>44</sup>. It is therefore unlikely that Pellan avoided mentioning the influence of Éluard on his art for fear of antagonizing these hysterically anti-modernist critics, who vilified his work even without knowing of the Éluard connection. Among Québec's liberal literati, Pellan's sympathetic audience, however, Éluard was extremely popular, and his allegiance to the P.C.F. was overlooked. Liberal intel-

lectuals placed Éluard in the pantheon of twentieth-century French culture, along with many School of Paris artists (several with communist connections) who Pellán quite overtly imitated and for whom he often expressed admiration.<sup>45</sup> Jean-Marc Léger's article on surrealism in *Notre Temps* is characteristic of the image of Éluard which liberal intellectuals presented to their public:

[Le surréalisme]... renfermait des éléments véritablement constructifs et... il répondait à un besoin. Comment expliquer, autrement, l'étendue et la profondeur de son succès et qu'il ait pu rallier des artistes aussi authentiques qu'un Éluard, un Aragon, un Ivan Goll (chez les poètes), qu'un Miro, un Masson et, pour un temps, un Fernand Léger (chez les peintres).<sup>46</sup>

Aware of Éluard's political connections, Quebec liberals avoided mentioning them in their panegyrics on him, for despite their cultural liberalism, their fealty to the adamantly anti-communist political status quo led them to omit such details as Éluard's membership in the P.C.F. Nevertheless, because it was the liberals of Québec who formed Pellán's audience, his refusal to acknowledge Éluard as the source of his inspiration for his 1948 drawings on the grounds that it would jeopardize his non-communist status, remains somewhat tenuous.

Pellán's attempt to conceal the connections between his art and *Capitale de la Douleur* does become comprehensible when one recalls the *Prisme d'Yeux* manifesto's edict against "the interference of literature... which can adulterate its [art's] expression and sully its purity."<sup>47</sup> Pellán's artistic output of 1948 was entirely inspired by literature, and therefore violated the aesthetic code articulated in the *Prisme d'Yeux* manifesto; public admission of this fact would have severely compromised both his own credibility and that of the *Prisme d'Yeux*. Moreover, the *Prisme d'Yeux*'s vilification of art with literary connections must be seen as a subtle thrust against the Automatistes, who had often been accused of producing overly "literary" art, a charge motivated by the fanciful titles which many of them gave to their paintings, and by the fact that automatism was a technique first used by surrealist writers.<sup>48</sup> By using poetry as a source of artistic inspiration, Pellán transgressed a major article of faith of the *Prisme d'Yeux* manifesto, but by obscuring this fact, he could nevertheless appear to uphold its principles and still measure his distance from the "literary" Automatistes. That Pellán's career in 1948 was so fraught with contradictions is not necessarily an indication of hypocrisy on his part, but rather is an example of his propensity to regard dichotomies as natural, and the reconciliation of them as a bid for aesthetic freedom.

Both the title and figurative content of *L'homme A grave* refer to graphic art. The central image of the work may be read as an emblem of the graphic artist: a hand grips an etcher's stylus and inscribes an encoded message on a plate. In 1948, graphics occupied a prominent position in the lives of the Prisme d'Yeux artists, for they were working on *Les Ateliers des Arts Graphiques*, a magazine jointly sponsored by the Ecole des Arts Graphiques de Montréal and the provincial Ministère du Bien-Être Social et de la Jeunesse.<sup>49</sup> Regarded as avant-garde within Québec, but by the English press and the Automatistes as passé,<sup>50</sup> *Les Ateliers* repeats the main tenets of francophone liberalism and the preoccupations of the Prisme d'Yeux.

In an article in *Les Ateliers*, Jacques de Tonnancour, the principal author of the Prisme d'Yeux manifesto, advances graphics as the bridge between the "old" and the "new," associating graphics with tradition and any style post-dating Cézanne with modernity.<sup>51</sup> In *L'homme A grave*, the references to graphics and their expression through modernist styles function as a visual analogue of de Tonnancour's perception of the role of graphics in the visual arts. Pellan's synthesis of two main branches of the School of Paris, cubism and surrealism, also relates to the old/new dialectic.<sup>52</sup> By 1948, cubism occupied a position of respectability within the aesthetic cosmos of Québec; by virtue of its respectability, it had lost its avant-garde, and hence, aggressively modern allure.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, surrealism continued to be viewed as a distinctively modern adjunct of contemporary art;<sup>54</sup> its execration by conservative critics only enhanced its veneer of novelty.<sup>55</sup> Through allusions to the old and the new, the figurative and stylistic components of *L'homme A grave* appear as a fulfillment of the criterion of aesthetic freedom — duality — celebrated in the Prisme d'Yeux manifesto: "Prisme d'Yeux rallies to the oldest theory of art... to that of the cave man [and] to the most contemporary of 20th century man."<sup>56</sup>

The reconciliation of both the distant and recent past with the onrushing present also formed a dominant motif of liberal anti-communist thought. Linking the rural, pre-war economy of the province with tradition, and the urban, industrialized post-war economy (and its concomitant problems) with the present,<sup>57</sup> liberal intellectuals contended that communism would swallow up the urban and working poor, unless the government rectified some of the new problems faced by them; mild social reforms would accomplish this goal, while leaving the essentials of the political structure intact.<sup>58</sup>

In *L'homme A grave*, the combination of references to graphics and both traditional and avant-garde modernist styles, elements which betokened the old and the new, is a visual reworking of the ideology of francophone liberalism, which simultaneously insisted on its claims to the present and future by presenting itself as modern,<sup>59</sup> but which established the validity of those claims by remaining firmly tied to the values of the status quo; likewise, liberals asserted that freedom could

only be preserved by successfully amalgamating the old and the new, without damaging any of the old assumptions.

While the figure of the graphic artist dominates *L'homme A grave*, another, smaller, inverted man appears on the right hand side of the work, beyond the rectilinear forms evocative of a wall. Reference to the poem which inspired the drawing and to the title of the work itself suggests this figure represents the public persona of the artist. Éluard's poem, "Volontairement", deals with the relationship between the private, creative existence of an artist and his life in the "outside" world:

Aveugle maladroit, ignorant et léger  
Aujourd'hui pour oublier,  
Le mois prochain pour dessiner  
Les coins de la rue, les allées à perte de vue  
Je les imite pour m'étendre  
Dans une nuit profonde et large de mon âge.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, *L'homme A grave* refers to "l'homme" not "les hommes" suggesting that the drawing, like the poem, deals with two different incarnations of a single individual, the artist.

The business suit, hat, and tie of the inverted man intimate that he represents the public persona of the artist. The wall separating the artist at work in the studio from his existence in the outside world reproduces the liberal prescription for aesthetic freedom: liberals contended for the autonomy of art, and alleged that if it were jeopardized, it would be pressed into the service of political propaganda, and more specifically, communist propaganda.

The treatment of the two figures' eyes reinforces the dichotomy between the public and the private, the social and the artistic: those of the inverted man are hypnotically wide, while those of the artist are stitched shut. However, the schematic dilated eyes of the public self also appear in the grid structure emerging from the interior of the artist's head, implying that while he must literally shut his eyes to the outside world, the imprint of what is seen beyond the studio can never be entirely effaced.

In addition to the eyes which are sewn together, other images of control and silence appear in *L'homme A grave*: the lips of the artist are firmly pressed together, the encoded message on the plate remains incomplete, the sheaf of papers (or are they posters, already tacked up?) remain blank, walls proliferate around the hand and plate, constraining them, and the inverted man's limbs are contorted, as if pulled by the invisible strings of a marionetteer. Themes of order and control also threaded liberal anti-communist rhetoric; liberal intellectuals maintained that controls must be placed on communism in order to preserve the democratic freedom they perceived existing in Québec. When, for example, Duplessis invoked the Padlock Law<sup>61</sup> to close the communist

newspaper *Combat* in February 1948, liberals rallied to defend him from the criticism of both the English press and federal Liberal politicians. An editorial in *Le Devoir*, the influential Montréal daily and locus of liberal sentiments, articulates the liberal position on Duplessis' actions:

Une législation pour empêcher la diffusion du communisme est donc chose légitime. Ceux qui revendique la liberté de la presse à ce sujet pourraient aussi bien invoquer la liberté du commerce en faveur des trafiquants de narcotiques.<sup>62</sup>

The implications of Pellan's work communicates a similar ideological construct which conflates freedom and control: the artist is free because he is immune from the political coercions of the outside world, but also free because his freedom is subject to a multiplicity of controls. Freedom, therefore, is gained through the suppression of freedom.

Pellan's dependence on surrealist imagery and cubist techniques also relates to the correlated concepts of freedom and control; both Pellan and his critics perceived surrealism as evidence of spontaneity, while cubism inferred control. Pellan believed that "surrealism has added to the richness of the artist's raw material. That material should still be filtered through the conscious mind."<sup>63</sup> He further subscribed to the "use of the new material of deliberate free-association and the spontaneous sub-conscious within a classical framework,"<sup>64</sup> a framework identified with cubism. Critics praised this conjunction of opposing tendencies; in a highly positive review of the *Prisme d'Yeux*'s second exhibition, Madeleine Gariépy commented.

*Prisme d'Yeux, c'est-à-dire des regards différents jetés sur des réalités diverses dans une lumière qui est autre. Prisme d'Yeux, symbole plastique de la diversité des expériences humaines et des transpositions multiples qu'elles donnent dans le domaine de l'art.*<sup>65</sup>

In contrast, art lacking the harmonious integration of the liberated and the ordered engendered cultural chaos and tyranny, effects associated with communism in liberal polemics,<sup>66</sup> Art which appeared to combat these effects through a celebration of the harmonious, controlled and free, concepts associated with liberal democracy, should be supported. As one critic noted in a laudatory review of a *Prisme d'Yeux* artist,

Aujourd'hui, comme autrefois, l'Art c'est l'ordre, l'équilibre, l'harmonie. Il faudra toujours lutter contre l'obscurité, le désordre, l'incohérence... qui sèment la confusion dans les esprits.<sup>67</sup>

For liberal francophone intellectuals, the works of Pellan and the formation of the *Prisme d'Yeux* symbolized the vitality of Québec's culture. While modern in a limited and general sense, *L'homme A grave* did not challenge any of the aesthetic norms previously made acceptable by the C.A.S.; commented one anonymous critic in *Le Canada*, "un nouveau mouvement est né... Rien de nouveau."<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the defenders of the *Prisme d'Yeux* did not seriously oppose any of the political or cultural positions of the status quo, but instead defined and codified them. Consequently, works such as *L'homme A grave* were perceived by the status quo as a testament to the supremacy of the culture arbitrated by them, and to the validity of the variant of freedom on which it was theoretically based. With the advent of the *Prisme d'Yeux*, Québec's intellectuals could proudly declare:

Ces sociétés, il en faut applaudir l'éclosion. Elles sont le signe de notre santé intellectuelle et elles ont, dans notre culture, un rôle de premier plan à jouer: celui de répandre la connaissance de l'art, d'en favoriser l'appréciation et de collaborer à la création d'un commun langage de vision... Nos yeux sont fixés sur eux, amicaux et expectatifs.<sup>69</sup>

Like the *Prisme d'Yeux*, the Automatistes repudiated the incursions of politics into art. Moreover, in their manifesto, *Refus Global*,<sup>70</sup> they expressly denounced the right and the left as forces against freedom:

Friends of the present regime suspect we support the Revolution. Friends of the Revolution say we protest what now exists but only to transform and not to displace it. The United States, Russia, England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain: sharp-fanged inheritors of a single decalogue.<sup>71</sup>

As art historians have frequently pointed out, the Automatistes' formulation of freedom as the fruit of the eradication of communism and conservatism, antagonized francophone liberals.<sup>72</sup> While such critics as Laurendeau and Pelletier offered tepid support for the *Refus Global's* critique of social and religious abuses, they ultimately vilified the group for failing to countenance disparate ideologies, their ultimate criterion of freedom:

Car M. Borduas vaticane comme un prophète avec un mépris total pour toute démonstration et preuve rationnelle... Voilà qui tend à nous fixer dans un climat sectaire... ce dogmatisme nouvelle manière ressemble trop à celui que l'auteur condamne. Voilà le comble de la loufoquerie dangereuse.<sup>73</sup>

The hostile reception given the *Refus Global* within Québec, however, was also a function of a fact uniterated by the liberal francophone press: although the manifesto's vociferous denunciation of communism conformed with a fundamental tenet of liberalism, its attack on other, equally important components of liberalism was the real motivation for liberal condemnation of the manifesto.

While francophone liberals inveighed against the *Refus Global* as too dogmatically polemical and as an effrontery to universal truths, anglophone liberals lionized it.<sup>74</sup> The state of English Canadian liberalism in 1948 largely explains why it supported this group of French-speaking artists. To be a liberal in post-war English Canada signified a repudiation of both the radical left and the reactionary right; Lester Pearson described the battle which liberals perceived themselves to be fighting in 1948;

it is wherever free men are struggling against totalitarian tyranny of right or left. It may run through the middle of our own cities, or it may be on the crest of the remotest mountain.<sup>75</sup>

The war on the right was to be waged against Duplessis, regarded by anglophone liberals as the incarnation of corrupt conservatism.<sup>76</sup> Significantly, it was the Automatistes' apparent denunciation of the Québec status quo and Duplessist values which secured their esteem among English Canadian liberals. In a review of the *Refus Global* in the federally funded periodical, *Canadian Art*,<sup>77</sup> Donald Buchanan hailed the Automatistes for fighting forces of oppression within Québec:

'automatisme' is an attempt by a group of Quebec artists to throw off the strait-jacket of... restrictions in education and culture and to create for themselves something new.<sup>78</sup>

Anglophone liberals' hostility towards Duplessis' reactionary nationalism, and their concomitant support for a fully bicultural federal state also predisposed them to sympathize with the Automatistes' condemnation of that nationalist cultural conditioning which kept them "French and Catholic by resistance to the conquerer, by an irrational attachment to the past."<sup>79</sup> The sudden interest of anglophone liberals in the culture of Québec, motivated by subscription to a federalist biculturalism which was most receptive to the new, anti-traditionalist culture of Québec,<sup>80</sup> is apparent in the January-February 1948 issue of *Canadian Art*, a special issue devoted to the art of Québec. Significantly, little mention is made of Pellán and other *Prisme d'Yeux* artists, whereas its only article on an individual group of artists, and the only one in French in an otherwise uniformly English periodical, deals with the Automatistes.<sup>81</sup>

The Automatistes' antagonism towards the status quo *per se* responded to another area of liberal thought: anticommunism.<sup>82</sup> To anglophone liberals, hostility towards the status quo symbolized the vitality of Western-style freedom, in contrast to communist regimes where dissent was not tolerated:

Democracy does not mean preservation of the status quo... We must demonstrate by deeds and not merely by words that democracy is a more dynamic, humanitarian creed than communism.<sup>83</sup>

While hostility towards the left and right was perceived as a manifestation of cultural liberation by anglophone liberals, they simultaneously defended the notion of political contentless art. "Political content" was generally understood as Marxist content:

The age of radicalism is happily ended... Liberals no longer measure literary values by the yardstick of political orthodoxy... They are disenchanted but free... Marxist categories are not applicable in the realm of literary values.<sup>84</sup>

The Automatistes' denunciation of politically involved art, and their rejection of political extremes parallels this prescription for aesthetic freedom.

While the Automatistes denounced partisan politics as ultimately oppressive, they did not relinquish the idea of a political morality, however nebulous. Political morality, insofar as it was defined, signified commitment to the overturning of "the inexorable regression of collective moral power," achieved by breaking with "all conventions of society," and characterized by a refusal to "remain silent."<sup>85</sup> The decisive act of rupture was the first step in artistic emancipation, as Leduc noted in a letter to Borduas regarding his break with the C.A.S.:

L'attitude décisive que vous avez prise vis-à-vis de la Société d'art contemporain et les déchirements qu'elle a pu entraîner apparaissent comme le prélude à une série de ruptures libératrices dont nous nous réjouissons et qui s'annoncent dans un avenir rapproché.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly, in his letter of resignation from the C.A.S., Borduas indicts Maurice Gagnon for his "complète nullité dans la lutte engagée." Couched in the language of existentialism, the Automatistes linked commitment, the decisive act, and freedom itself, links which the *Prisme d'Yeux* sought to deny.

The Automatistes' insistence on freedom as a challenging moral problem, and their perception of the necessity of clinging to a political morality, parallels the tone of anglophone liberal anti-communist rhetoric. English liberals believed that if Western culture was to remain

immune from politics, it was imperative to wage a moral war against communism on all fronts, as apolitical culture was possible only in a liberal democratic society. The specifically moral rather than partisan tone of the liberal anti-communist crusade is revealed in a speech made by Saint-Laurent in April 1948:

We must constantly remember that the union of the free world... will possess overwhelming strength only if it is based on moral as well as material force; if its citizens are bound together not merely by a hatred of communism, but by their love of free democracy.<sup>87</sup>

The Automatistes also perceived the defence of freedom as an ineluctable imperative at a time when "the H hour of total sacrifice is upon us."<sup>88</sup> Similarly, anglophone liberals defined freedom as a response to both domestic communism and the spectre of a nuclear finale to the Cold War. These critics lauded Borduas for creating what they perceived as an appropriate aesthetic response to the crisis of freedom in the Cold War; Stuart Keate, for example, commented in *Time* magazine that Borduas and the Automatistes embraced "a new civilization and an atomic age art."<sup>89</sup> In 1948, the "atomic age" denoted not only the advent of the nuclear bomb, but also the Cold War, and hence, for anglophone liberals, the anti-communist struggle. The social significance of art in the Cold War world was candidly remarked upon by a writer for *Canadian Business*:

...socialism is constantly on the offensive. This attack can be met only by... telling something of what free enterprise has done for this country... using cultural materials.<sup>90</sup>

Anglophone liberals expected art to respond to the crisis of communism without renouncing its claims to apoliticism; they also perceived surrealism as a logical response to global political tensions related to the Cold War:

Much of the current anxiety... is no doubt caused by the world's increasing destructive potential... the implications of the destructive deployment of the U235... [does] not contribute to our sense of security in a world where actual warfare may only be held in abeyance... These factors... form the background, conscious and unconscious for painters of today. ...They do influence this expression... There is an increasing interest in non-objective and surrealist abstraction... His [the artist's] involvement is concerned with exploring the concepts of art forms and stating them in the audacious terms of today.<sup>91</sup>

Such pessimism, and its effect on art, was also shared by the Automatistes:

Two world wars have been necessary to bring us to a recognition of this absurd state. The terror of the third will be conclusive.<sup>92</sup>

Informed by the cataclysms of the world of which they were a part, the Automatistes believed that painting must respond to this world, yet remain detached from its political realities; furthermore, they believed that only automatism could articulate freedom in the face of the extremities of the political situation:

Il est évident que ces formes peintes correspondent à des désirs qui ne peuvent s'exprimer dans les cadres de la société actuelle.<sup>93</sup>

What then, does *Objet Totémique* do with such a conception of freedom?

First, it abjures those traditions which the Automatistes regarded as loaded with political connotations. For them, figurative or anecdotal art, whether fused with modernist styles or not, had been corrupted by the left. Commenting on social realism, Pierre Gauvreau stated:

Il s'accommode facilement de toutes les exploitations techniques selon le stage d'évolution du pays où il est pratiqué: en URSS, il se résume au plus grossier trompe-l'oeil porteur d'anecdotes édifiantes; en France, il adopte volontiers un aspect plus évolué qu'il exploite à des fins politiques en restaurant l'anecdote édifiante dans le cubisme, le fauvisme, etc.<sup>94</sup>

Also incompatible with genuine aesthetic freedom was cubism, not only because it was a style so closely associated with the *Prisme d'Yeux*, but also because it had been co-opted by both the right and the left for political purposes. In a letter to *Le Canada*, Riopelle stated:

Ne voit-on pas les peintres des ateliers d'art sacré aussi bien que les peintres ralliés aux partis politiques de gauche, utiliser chacun de leur côté les découvertes cubistes à des fins de propagande?<sup>95</sup>

The Automatistes' censure of the traditions of recent artistic history<sup>96</sup> corresponds to the anglophone liberal polarization of aesthetic freedom and tradition:

The...prerequisite for true self-expression is freedom from tradition... [and] the obligations imposed by social conventions and social consciousness.<sup>97</sup>

For Borduas, only superrational automatism could express freedom without entailing its sacrifice to political norms, as it was dependent on the emotional and unconscious realms of man which he regarded as quintessentially apolitical.<sup>98</sup> In *Objet Totémique*, the loose brushstroke, lack of finish, and abstract forms attest to Borduas' attempt to allow the unconscious mind to prevail. To English liberals, the exploration of psychological reality by Western artists affirmed the existence of the liberty uniquely enjoyed by the liberated artist in a liberal society. Furthermore, such artists epitomized the essence of aesthetic excellence, defined by one critic as belonging to:

one who has achieved radical freedom from social restraint and conventional order, who has penetrated the walls protecting our world of reality and has there, in the realm of dreams and somnambulist phantasy, encountered the unconscious springs of our imagery.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the spontaneous brushstroke, the forms of *Objet Totémique* are harmoniously organized into a series of horizontal and vertical elements which are played off against one another to produce an image of stability. The formal structure of the work implies that the unfettered psyche produces forms which though rough hewn, coalesce into an ordered and integrated whole; it thus functions as a visual expression of Borduas' conviction that psychological liberation could produce a new, harmonious social order in which "man is freed from chains to realize a plenitude of individual gifts."<sup>100</sup> Anglophone liberals also accorded psychological freedom a pre-eminent role to play in the restructuring of the post-war world; as the literary critic, Charles Glicksberg noted, "The revolution... must take place within the heart. It is man who must be transformed."<sup>101</sup> The new credo of the liberated psyche, however, contained political undercurrents for English liberal intellectuals, those disenchanted Marxists who had lived in political limbo since "confessing their past sins"<sup>102</sup> of Marxist dalliance in the 1930's. For them, the "revolution of the heart and psyche"<sup>103</sup> not only appeared as a means of attacking the old enemy, the right, but also the new enemy, the left:

Freudianism convinces man that the effort to establish a more humane world order will no longer be achieved by a bloody class war. Dictatorships of the left and the right stand accursed in the eyes of all free men.<sup>104</sup>

Such works as *Objet Totémique*, however, were not viewed by Borduas as simply nebulous commentaries on aesthetic and social freedom, but as containers of a specific set of meanings, discernible through an analysis of their titles and forms.<sup>105</sup> *Objet Totémique* suggests connections with primitive, ritualistic art, and particularly with the totem poles of the Northwest Coast Indians of British Columbia.<sup>106</sup> The vertical elements of the work, with their multi-faceted planes of colour, may

indeed be read as a carved pole, while the horizontal bands at the left and right evoke rippled sand of a beach in the distance. In the late 1940's anglophone critics perceived the conjunction of avant-garde and primitive art as a symbol of the artist's reaction against the contemporary world and as a means for probing the unconscious:

If there is any modern art to which... ['modern primitivism'] might apply... it is to be found when the artist's responses to a situation in his own world reproduces in its essentials the attitude of the primitive to his; when that is, an emotional conviction so profound, so vital, that the conscious intellect has no chance to interfere.<sup>107</sup>

Anglophone critics considered both primitivism and spontaneous, unconscious content in art as evidence of the artist's ferocious need to maintain and acquire personal and aesthetic freedom by delving into the collective unconscious and there abutting its uncorrupted freedom. At the same time, however, they also saw these characteristics as disinterested reactions to the contemporary political situation, and expected this art which they regarded as inherently apolitical to lead society out of the current political morass:

Living in a world that seems more fettered and crippling than ever before... [we] are feeling the urgent need of an art that is symbolic in its true sense, that can be for us the talisman of a new faith, without which there can be no will to live.<sup>108</sup>

While the assimilation of the new canons of the primitive and unconscious in *Objet Totémique* fulfill Borduas' desire to escape the corrupted traditions of both figuration and cubism, reminiscences of these traditions still prevail in it. The space existing in *Objet Totémique* is an emphatically cubist one, while the easily deciphered forms indicate that figuration has not been completely forsaken. Both Borduas and his critics avoided the apprehension of such incongruities, thereby evading the troubling conclusion that his art was not as radically modern and apolitical as it superficially appeared, precisely because of the presence of those traditions which he regarded as hopelessly retardaire and politically potent: figuration and cubism.

Anglophone liberals were equally inconsistent in their assessment of the position of freedom in the post-war world. While condemning partisan politics, they called for an "end to ideology"<sup>109</sup> only in order to more thoroughly combat communism. Furthermore, they consistently aligned themselves with the policies of the federal Liberal party and Liberal government, while disavowing any specific partisan position. When these intellectuals upheld Borduas and his art as exemplars of universal freedom, therefore, they were actually only celebrating their

own definition of freedom, the liberal one, spelled with both an upper and lower case "l"; in Borduas, anglophone liberal intellectuals perceived a reflection of themselves, hostile to the left and the right, faithful only to freedom itself:

...that such thoughts should have been put thus directly on paper by a group of artists [in the *Refus Global*] does prove what diverse stirrings, sometimes direct and clear, sometimes confused and incoherent do exist in French Canada today. Let us hope that such freedom of thought will not be crushed out too arbitrarily.<sup>110</sup>

In conclusion, in 1948, the fight for freedom was simultaneously aesthetic and political, with the two realms interpenetrating one another. Catalyzed by Cold War politics, the schism between French- and English-Canadian liberalism widened over the definition of freedom, a division which informed the verbal and visual ideologies of the Montréal avant-garde. The *Prisme d'Yeux*, in eclectically assimilating everything, and, as its name implies, refracting everything, articulated the major tenets of Québec liberalism; in contrast, the Automatistes, in their "refus global" rejected everything connected with the liberalism of Québec's intellectuals, but in so doing became unexpectedly aligned with the position of anglophone liberalism. By accepting everything and rejecting everything, the *Prisme d'Yeux* and the Automatistes not only came to blows with one another, but also, despite their avant-garde facades, aligned themselves with the status quo, albeit different and contending ones.

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## Notes:

- 1 Prisme d'Yeux manifesto (untitled), cited by Guy ROBERT in *Pellán, His Life and His Art*. trans. George LACH (Montréal: Éditions du Centre de Psychologie et Pédagogie, 1963), p. 49, 51.
- 2 *Refus Global* in *Paul Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings 1942-1958*, ed. François-Marc GAGNON and trans. Dennis YOUNG (Halifax and New York: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1978), p. 54.
- 3 "Mercure" (pseud.), "L'actualité: Les grandes amitiés," *Le Devoir*, 5 October 1948, p. 1.
- 4 "Avant-garde" is usually used to conjure up an image of a group of artists who "[break] through all the confines, fly on ahead of the mass of their contemporaries... [They] can never be turned into establishment figures... The function of the avant-garde is to stretch the human mind and spirit, to pull man in new and unsuspected directions..." (Douglas COOPER, "Establishment and Avant-garde," *Times Literary Supplement* (London), 3 September 1964, p. 823). Unlike Cooper and most other chroniclers of "avant-garde" art, I do not use "avant-garde" in a qualitative sense; instead, I use the term to denote two groups of artists working in Montréal in 1948 that defined themselves *as groups* by giving themselves particular names (the Automatistes and the Prisme d'Yeux), issuing manifestoes, and exhibiting together under the group's banner; that aligned themselves with modernity; and that coalesced out of their members' similar aesthetic and political goals, in addition to personal and professional links.  
 Until 1948, the Montréal avant-garde had presented a unified public front via the Contemporary Arts Society; nevertheless, within the Society there had been previous international disagreements, but these were mild compared to the degree of hostility which erupted within it in 1948. On conflicts within the C.A.S. prior to 1948, see: Claude GAUVREAU, "Révolution à la Société d'Art Contemporain," *Le Quartier Latin*, 3 December 1946, pp. 4-5; Claude GAUVREAU, "L'épopée automatiste vue par un cyclope," *La Barre du Jour* no. 17 (January-August 1969) pp. 48-96; Lise PERREAULT, *La Société d'Art Contemporain* (M.A. Thesis, Université de Montréal, 1975); Bernard TEYSSEDER, "Fernand Leduc, Peintre et Théoricien du Surréalisme à Montréal," *La Barre du Jour* no. 17 (January-August 1969) pp. 224-270; Christopher VARLEY, *The Contemporary Arts Society: Montreal, 1939-1948* (Edmonton: The Edmonton Art Gallery, 1980).
- 5 The founding members of the Prisme d'Yeux were: Louis Archambault, Paul Beaulieu, Léon Bellefleur, Jean Benoît, Albert Dumouchel, Gabriel Filion, Pierre Garneau, Arthur Gladu, Lucien Morin, Mimi Parent, Alfred Pellán, Jeanne Rhéaume, Goodridge Roberts, Jacques de Tonnancour, Rolland Truchon and Gordon Webber. Although the manifesto of the group pointedly professes a desire to remain leaderless, Pellán was regarded as its informal leader by the press, especially as many members of the Prisme d'Yeux had been or were his students at the École des Beaux-Arts.
- 6 Members of the Automatistes who signed the *Refus Global* were: Magdeleine Arbour, Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Bruno Cormier, Marcelle Ferron, Claude Gauvreau, Pierre Gauvreau, Muriel Guibault, Fernand Leduc, Thérèse Leduc, Jean-Paul Mousseau, Maurice Perron, Louise Renaud, Françoise Riopelle, Jean-Paul Riopelle, and Françoise Sullivan. Although Borduas was never declared the official leader of the group, he functioned as its *de facto* head, because of his senior age and prestige, and because he had taught many of the Automatistes at the École du Meuble.
- 7 The term "ideology" raises certain difficulties given the current debate on its meaning and application to art history currently being carried out by T.J. Clark, N. Hadjinicolaou, and O.K. Werckmeister, among others. This paper is dependent on the definition provided by CLARK in "Preliminary Arguments: Work of Art and Ideology," *Proceedings of the Caucus for Marxist Art History* (Chicago, 1977), p. 3: "Can we agree on the following working definition of *ideology*? (Probably not, but let's proceed.) Ideologies are those systems of beliefs, images, values and techniques of representation by which particular social classes, in conflict with each other, attempt to 'naturalise' their own special place in history. Every ideology tries to give a quality of inevitability to what is in fact a quite specific and disputable relation to the means of production — it pictures the present as 'natural', coherent, eternal. It takes as its material the real substance, the constraints and contradictions, of a given historical situation — it is bound to refer to them somehow or other, bound to *use* them, otherwise what content would it have, what (distorted) information would it convey, what would it be *for*? But it generalises the repressions, it imagines the contradictions solved."
- 8 The manifestoes of the Prisme d'Yeux and the Automatistes provide one of the major routes of access into the ideologies of these two groups, for they constitute their theoretical justification and naturalisation. cf. Harold ROSENBERG, "Collective, Ideological, Combative," in *Avant-Garde Art*, *Art News Annual* no. 34 (1968) ed. Thomas B. HESS and John ASHBURY, p. 75: "No matter how radical its effects, an action is not avant-garde without an ideology to

characterize it... More unequivocally avant-garde than actions retrospectively labelled advanced is the action that *arises out of* the ideology. With most twentieth-century avant-gardes the ideology comes first and shapes the action, as well as accrediting it."

- 9 Michel ROY and Paul ROLLAND, "La terreur rouge du grand soir", *Le Quartier Latin*, 14 December 1948, p. 3.
- 10 The origins of this interpretation lie with not only the very personal tone of much of the 1948 confrontation, but also with an early interpretation of it forwarded by John Lyman in "Borduas and the Contemporary Arts Society," an essay in the exhibition catalogue by Even H. TURNER, *Paul-Émile Borduas 1905-1960* (Montréal: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1960): "...as Paul developed he began to expect of his companions the attitude of disciple... Pellán returned to Montréal and he, too, with his followers joined the Society. Thus it became divided into two factions each of which sought to prevail" (pp. 40-41). Guy ROBERT's 1963 book, *Pellán, His Life and His Art* (*op. cit.*) further entrenched Lyman's assessment of the reasons for the split in the Montréal avant-garde when he quoted Pellán on Borduas: "Borduas was a bad friend, because he had no time for anybody unless they worshipped him... Borduas behaved like a petulant and moody adolescent" (p. 54). Writers who have contested the explanations which place the personalities of Pellán and Borduas at the centre of the 1948 confrontation include Claude GAUVREAU, "L'épopée automatiste vue par un cyclope" (*op. cit.*); Marcel FOURNIER and Robert LAPLANTE, "Borduas et l'automatisme," in P.-E. Borduas, *Refus Global et Projections Libérantes* (Montréal: Éditions du Parti Pris, 1977); François-Marc GAGNON, "Pellán, Borduas and the Automatistes: Men and Ideas in Québec," *Artscanada* 29 (December 1972/January 1973) pp. 48-55. Gagnon's article provides the most sustained critique of the personality clash explanation; although I disagree with his interpretation, Gagnon's works on this period are the most valuable ones available to the student of modern art in Québec.
- 11 In "Pellán, Borduas and the Automatistes," (*op. cit.*), GAGNON associates Pellán with "the ideology of rattrapage" and Borduas with "a critical attitude... towards the ideology of rattrapage," an ideology which he labels as "contestation" (p. 51). Serious problems are raised by Gagnon's terminology, in part because he neither provides a detailed definition of "contestation" and "rattrapage," nor how these ideologies specifically relate to the circumstances of the clash in 1948. His reliance on the word "ideology" further complicates this semantic problem: while "ideology" is used colloquially to signify a "political doctrine," it has acquired an entirely different meaning in historical and art historical analyses (see above, note 7). Gagnon appears to hover between the two definitions, for he uses "ideology" in the colloquial sense in order to perform a kind of art history which attempts to take into account historical factors, and therefore is related in certain, very limited respects to the work of art historians who use "ideology" in a sense dependent on Marx's understanding of the concept. (see: Karl MARX, *The German Ideology*, 1845-46.)
- 12 cf. Nicos HADJINICOLAOU, *Art History and Class Struggle*, trans. Louise Asmal (London: Pluto, 1968), p. 16: "every picture is an ideological work independently of its quality. In this sense, the world that it reveals is the world of an ideology... The ideology of a picture is literally a visual ideology, and not a political or literary ideology; it can only be found within the limits of a picture's two dimensions, even though at the same time it has specific links with other kinds of ideology which may be literary, political, philosophical, and so on."
- 13 Pellán and Borduas had had previous disagreements, however, as Gagnon notes in "Pellán, Borduas and the Automatistes," (*op. cit.*) as well as in his recent book, *Paul-Émile Borduas: Biographie critique et analyse de l'oeuvre* (Montréal: Fides, 1978).
- 14 BORDUAS to Luc CHOQUETTE, cited in PERREAULT, *op. cit.*, p. 88. Perreault says the letter was written on February 3, 1948, but it appears more likely that it was written on February 13.
- 15 A chronology of events is difficult to reconstruct as various dates for the resignations have been provided by different sources. PERREAULT (*op. cit.*, p. 88) gives the date of Borduas' resignation as February 3, whereas GAGNON maintains in "Pellán, Borduas and the Automatistes" (*op. cit.*, p. 54) that it occurred on February 7, while he notes in his biography of Borduas (*op. cit.*, p. 235) that it occurred on February 13, a date which seems to be the most plausible one.
- 16 John LYMAN, "Borduas and the Contemporary Arts Society," *op. cit.*, p. 42.
- 17 The seminal work on the relationship between the avant-garde and society is Renato POGGIOLI's *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald FITZGERALD (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968). For a more critical approach to the avant-garde, see Nicos HADJINICOLAOU, "Sur l'idéologie de l'avant-gardisme", *Histoire et Critique des Arts* (July 1978), pp. 49-79.

- 18 The first exhibition was held for one night only at the Art Annex of the Art Association of Montreal. The exhibition was widely reported in the French press, but largely ignored outside Québec.
- 19 The Automatistes held their first exhibition in 1946, and had maintained a relatively high public profile since that time, in part because several members of the group frequently wrote provocative articles in and letters to the press. The Automatistes appear to have been more sensitive to their public image as an avant-garde and more thoroughly versed in the strategies of avant-gardism than were the Prisme d'Yeux artists. Claude GAUVREAU's article, "L'épopée automatiste" (*op. cit.*) is revealing on this point: "Leduc était le plus convaincu du bien-fondé de l'attitude de Borduas à l'égard de Pellan... Il voyait déjà à quel point il était nécessaire de centupler l'efficacité d'imposition de la tendance moderne la plus progressive en la rendant autonome et homogène" (pp. 52-53). In addition to understanding the necessity of internal cohesiveness, the Automatistes comprehended the importance of demonstrating antagonism towards not only the status quo, but also towards rival avant-gardes, as is revealed in a letter written to *Le Canada*, 8 November 1948, in response to an interview in which Agnès Lefort praised Pellan and reproached the Automatistes: "Il est naturel pour les corrompus et les impuissants qui se sentent irrémissiblement attaqués dans leur corruption et leur impuissance de chercher par tous les moyens à sauver leur peau. Le dynamisme de la pensée surrationnelle est un effroyable péril certain pour tous les tièdes et tous les exploités" (p. 4).
- 20 Paul-Émile BORDUAS, *Projections Libérantes* (1949), in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
- 21 The second exhibition of the Prisme d'Yeux was held at the Librairie Tranquille, May 15-29, 1948.
- 22 Prisme d'Yeux manifesto, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51.
- 23 Mainstream francophone liberalism in the post-war period found expression in such periodicals and newspapers as *Notre Temps*, *Le Quartier Latin*, and *Le Devoir*. Partisans of liberalism in Québec tended to belong to the educated, professional sector of society, who wrote for and read these publications. The essential characteristics of liberalism in 1948 in Québec are best summarized by the editor of *Le Devoir*, Gérard FILION, in an editorial on 28 February 1948; although his comments concern his perception of the role of *Le Devoir*, they apply equally well to the perception of liberals of their role in society: "*Le Devoir*, journal indépendant, nationaliste, et catholique, fondé et maintenu à coups de sacrifices, ne tombât entre les mains d'un parti politique... *Le Devoir* est un journal indépendant qui discute les idées, les actions et les omissions des hommes et des partis politiques... *Le Devoir* est la conscience politique du peuple canadien-français" (p. 4).  
That mainstream francophone liberals formed a significant sector of the Prisme d'Yeux's audience seems clear when one considers the guest list at their first exhibition, which contains many names associated with post-war francophone liberalism: Maurice Gagnon, Jean Simard, Robert Élie, Pierre-Carl Dubuc, Jean LeMoine.
- A small group of anti-clerical and anti-nationalist group of "new liberals" contested the claims of mainstream liberalism in the late 1940's; these liberals expressed their views in strongly partisan Liberal newspapers, *Le Canada* and *Le Clairon* (Saint-Hyacinthe). The positions adopted by these newspapers and their writers on both political and cultural matters bear a strong resemblance to those expressed by anglophone liberals.
- 24 Maurice BLAIN, "Engagement de la littérature", *Le Quartier Latin*, 26 October 1948, p. 4.
- 25 cf. Guy LEMAY, "La campagne électorale est terminée: la parole est à la population," *Le Devoir*, 27 July 1948: "Plusieurs questions importantes étaient en jeu... mais les questions les plus discutées ont été l'autonomie provinciale et l'anticommunisme" (p. 3). For an analysis of the relationship between anti-communism and provincial autonomy, see Richard DESROSIERS, *L'Idéologie de Maurice Duplessis (1946-1955)* (M.A. Thesis, Université de Montréal, 1971), Chapter I. See also Herbert F. QUINN, *The Union Nationale: Quebec Nationalism from Duplessis to Levesque* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), Chapter VI.
- 26 Guy CORMIER, "Propriété privée et propriété commune," *Le Quartier Latin*, 16 March 1948, p. 3.
- 27 Jacques PARENT, "Mains Sales et Communisme," *Le Quartier Latin*, 16 November 1948, p. 3.
- 28 The C.A.S. constitution makes clear its catholic approach to modern art in Article 2, which states that the object of the Society is "to give support to contemporary trends in art." Only academicism was censured by the Society in its constitution: "All professional artists... who are neither associated with, nor partial to, any Academy, are eligible as artist members"

- (Article 3). (Cited by Christopher VARLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 39).
- 29 Prisme d'Yeux manifesto, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
  - 30 As F.-M. GAGNON has pointed out in "Pellan, Borduas and the Automatistes" (*op. cit.*), "Jacques de Tonnancour claimed the right of free expression for many individuals having in common a desire for independence; but at the same time this desire was to be expressed through the vocabulary of the École de Paris" (p. 54).
  - 31 On the close relationship between liberals and the Union Nationale, see Gilles BOURQUE and Anne LÉGARÉ, *Le Québec: La question nationale* (Paris: Maspéro, 1979); and Gérard BOISMENU, "Politique économique au niveau provincial: le duplessisme," in *Le Québec en Textes*, ed. Gérard BOISMENU, Laurent MAILHOT, Jacques ROUILLARD (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1980), pp. 90-98.
  - 32 An editorial in *Le Devoir* on July 27, 1948 criticizes both the Liberal Party and the Union Nationale, but counsels the voter to choose the latter party as the lesser of two evils.
  - 33 Maurice Duplessis quoted in *Le Devoir*, 27 July 1948.
  - 34 Madeleine GARIÉPY, "A la Société d'Art Contemporain," *Notre Temps*, 21 February 1948, p. 6.
  - 35 *Ibid.*
  - 36 Paul Duval quoting Pellan in "The Work of Alfred Pellan," *Here and Now I*, 3 (January 1949) pp. 53-54.
  - 37 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
  - 38 Reesa GREENBERG, *The Drawings of Alfred Pellan* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1980), p. 145. Although I disagree with her on many points, I am indebted to Greenberg's research on the relationship between Pellan's 1948 drawings and Éluard's poetry, an aspect of Pellan's career which has formerly been ignored.
  - 39 *Ibid.*, p. 66. Greenberg's comments are based on a 1979 interview which she conducted with Pellan.
  - 40 Éluard joined the Parti Communiste Français (P.C.F.) in 1927, along with four other Surrealists: Breton, Aragon, Unik, and Péret. The Surrealist-P.C.F. alliance was an uneasy one, as the P.C.F. doubted the Surrealists' reliability and commitment to the Party, while Éluard and Breton were "put off by the oppressive atmosphere in the Party under the narrow, sectarian and fundamentally anti-intellectual leadership of Barbé and Celor" (David CAUTE, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960* (London: André Deutsch, 1964), p. 97). Together with Breton and Crevel, Éluard was expelled from the P.C.F. in 1933; the Surrealists were expelled for having attacked, among other things, "the wind of cretinization blowing from the U.S.S.R." (Maurice NADEAU, *The History of Surrealism*, trans. Richard HOWARD (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), p. 208). Éluard rejoined the P.C.F. in 1942, and remained a member until his death in 1952. On the relationship between the French Surrealists and the P.C.F. see: Robert S. SHORT, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," *Journal of Contemporary History* I, 2 (1966) pp. 3-25; Jean TOUCHARD, "Le Parti Communiste Français et les intellectuels (1920-39)," *Revue française de science politique*, XVII, 3 (June 1967) pp. 468-83; André THIRION, *Révolutionnaires Sans Révolution* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1972).
  - 41 See, for example, Pierre NAVILLE, *La Révolution et les Intellectuels. Que Peuvent faire les Surréalistes?* (Paris: 1926).
  - 42 Indicative of the Surrealists' ambivalence towards the P.C.F. was their refusal to abandon publishing their journal, *La Révolution Surréaliste*, and to devote their energy exclusively to the party's paper, *L'Humanité*. As SHORT has noted (*op. cit.*), the contents and title of *La Révolution Surréaliste* "caused consternation and moral outrage" among the leaders of the P.C.F. (p. 10).
  - 43 In "Bilan du Surréalisme," *Revue de l'Université Laval* 3 (November 1948), Auguste VIATTE wrote, "le surréalisme... pouvait sembler une entreprise de démoralisation au service du communisme... Éluard, Breton, Aragon, n'adhéraient-ils pas au parti communiste?" (p. 234). In reality, Viatte's condemnation of surrealism embraces most of modern French culture, for he subsumes writers as diverse as Flaubert and Éluard under the rubric of surrealism.
  - 44 See, for example, René BERGERON, *Art et Bolchévisme* (Montréal: Fides, 1946) and Clarence GAGNON, "L'immense blague de l'art moderniste," *Amérique Française* VII, 1, 2, 3 (1948) pp. 60-65; pp. 44-48; pp. 67-71.
  - 45 In an interview with Paul Duval in *Here and Now* (*op. cit.*), Pellan said, "For me, Giotto, Poussin, Léger, Klee and Miro are great painters... I embrace the surrealism of André Masson,

- Klee and Miro" (p. 55). It is significant that despite Pellan's reluctance at being connected with a writer with communist connections, he did not hesitate to align himself with artists such as Picasso and Masson who had belonged to the P.C.F.
- 46 Jean-Marc LÉGER, "Porter l'obscur à la lumière; Situation du surréalisme," *Notre Temps*, 1 May 1948, p. 5.
  - 47 Prisme d'Yeux manifesto, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.
  - 48 cf. Géraldine BOURBEAU, "Monsieur Borduas et l'automatisme," *Liaison* II, 13 (March 1948): "l'automatisme (essentiellement langue écrite) ne peut apporter... absolument rien en peinture" (p. 175).
  - 49 The Automatistes had collaborated with the future members of the Prisme d'Yeux on the first issue of *Les Ateliers*; on this point see F.-M. GAGNON's biography of Borduas (*op. cit.*), pp. 213-14.
  - 50 cf. for example, the comments of Leduc writing to Borduas on the first issue of *Les Ateliers*: "je vous avouerai qu'il m'a été très pénible de constater votre (je pense au groupe) présence à la *Revue des Arts Graphiques* tout ce qu'il y a de plus bourgeois et de plus conformiste par la présentation de plus réactionnaire par les textes" (letter dated 17 July 1947, quoted by F.-M. GAGNON in *Borduas: Biographie critique, op. cit.*, p. 214). See also Guy SYLVESTRE's lukewarm review of *Les Ateliers* in *Canadian Art* V, 3 (Winter 1948) p. 152.
  - 51 Jacques de TONNANCOUR, "Considérations sur le graphisme," *Les Ateliers des Arts Graphiques* 2 (1949), n.p.
  - 52 Paul Duval alluded to this duality in Pellan's work in "The Work of Alfred Pellan" (*op. cit.*): "Alfred Pellan is the *enfant terrible* of Canadian art. He is the acknowledged leader of the Montreal School — that singular cultural bridge between the Old and the New Worlds" (p. 53).
  - 53 Cubism had become an "acceptable" style in Québec by the early 1940's; see, for example, Eliane Houghton BRUNN, "La Volonté du Cubisme," *Amérique Française* I, 7 (August 1942), pp. 23-28.
  - 54 See, for example, J.-M. LÉGER, "Surrealism" *op. cit.*
  - 55 Surrealism's most bitter critic prior to 1948 was René BERGERON, who attacked it as communistic in *Art et Bolchévisme* (*op. cit.*). In 1948, surrealism was attacked most vociferously by Auguste VIATTE (*op. cit.*) and Hyacinthe-Marie ROBILLARD: "Le manifeste de nos surréalistes," *Notre Temps*, 4 September 1948, p. 4; "Le Surréalisme; La révolution des intellectuels," *Revue Dominicaine* LIV, t. 2 (December 1948) pp. 274-82; "Réponse à la lettre de Pierre Gauvreau sur la mort du surréalisme", (letter) *Le Canada*, 7 January 1949, p. 4.
  - 56 Prisme d'Yeux manifesto, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
  - 57 World War II prompted an increase in industrialization and urbanization in Québec; on the effects of these changes see: Kenneth McROBERTS and Dale POSGATE, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis* (revised edition), (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980); Roland PARENTEAU, "L'industrialisation du Québec et ses conséquences," in *Le Québec en textes, 1940-1980* (*op. cit.*), pp. 45-59.
  - 58 On this point, the thinking of liberals coincided with that of the church. In "Le manifeste communiste de 1848. II — Influence et Rayonnement," *Relations* VII, 90 (June 1948), Girard Hébert counsels Catholics to thwart communism by ameliorating the conditions of workers: "La deuxième conclusion, c'est la nécessité de travailler à l'amélioration des conditions de vie des masses ouvrières, puisque le communisme, doctrine de révolte, ne peut se développer que dans une société qui connaît les mécontentements et la misère" (p. 173). Similar ideas had previously been articulated by Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno*.
  - 59 Liberals perceived their very mild anti-clericalism, tepid support for unions, and receptiveness to international culture as the key differences between themselves and the political status quo.
  - 60 Paul ÉLUARD, "Volontairement", in *Capitale de la Douleur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1926), p. 41.
  - 61 The Padlock Law was passed in 1937 as "An Act Respecting Communist Propaganda"; QUINN (*op. cit.*) comments, "Under this act Duplessis as Attorney General, was given extensive powers to close, or padlock, any premises used for the purpose of 'propagating Communism or Bolchevism'" (p. 126). See also: Bernard SAINT-AUBIN, *Duplessis et son temps* (Montréal: Les Éditions de la Presse, Ltée., 1979), Chapter XV.
  - 62 Paul SAURIOL, "La Loi du Cadenas," *Le Devoir*, 1 March 1948, p. 1.

- 63 Pellán quoted by DUVAL, "The Work of Alfred Pellán," *op. cit.*, p. 55.
- 64 DUVAL. *ibid.*, p. 55.
- 65 Madeleine GARIÉPY, "Exposition Prisme d'Yeux," *Notre Temps*, 22 May 1948, p. 5.
- 66 cf. Maurice FRAIGNEUX, "Communisme et esprit moderne," *Notre Temps*, 20 March 1948, who associates partisans of communism with "le chaos et le désespoir" (p. 1).
- 67 Maurice HUOT, "Mimi Parent", *La Patrie*, 4 June 1948.
- 68 "Prisme d'Yeux est consacré," *Le Canada*, 5 February 1948. *Le Canada*, a Liberal newspaper, was one of the few newspapers to greet the advent of the group with less than complete enthusiasm; see, for example, the editorial, "Pour nous en faire voir de toutes les couleurs!," 6 February 1948. On the perception of the Prisme d'Yeux as modern, but not radically so, cf. Berthelot BRUNET, "Notre peinture vraie et les vieux modernes," *La Patrie*, 22 May 1948: "Ces peintures... ne semblent révolutionnaires que pour ceux qui ont négligé de se mettre à l'heure dite avancée, une heure que les plus réalistes ont adoptées."
- 69 Jean SIMARD, "Autour du Prisme d'Yeux", *Notre Temps*, 14 February 1948.
- 70 The *Refus Global* went on sale at the Librairie Tranquille on August 9, 1948; a draft of the manifesto, however, had been written by the end of 1947.
- 71 *Refus Global*, *op. cit.*, p. 52, 48. In his private correspondence, Borduas was even more adamantly anti-communist. In a letter to Riopelle, for example, he wrote, "Les communistes sont d'un égoïsme immédiat dégoûtant... Ils font plutôt figure d'opresseurs que de libérateurs." (Quoted by F.-M. GAGNON, *Borduas: Biographie critique, op. cit.*, p. 207).
- 72 The most complete bibliography of contemporary reactions to the manifesto is "Réactions de Presse," *Études Françaises* VIII, 3 (August 1972) pp. 331-38. The only francophone critic who gave the *Refus Global* extremely strong support was Charles Doyon, the art critic for *Le Clairon* (Saint-Hyacinthe); cf. his comments in "Refus Global," 27 August 1948: "Ce que plusieurs d'entre vous éprouvent silencieusement, ce que de rares précurseurs ont rêvé, ce que ceux de ma génération ont prévu est ici dévoilé... C'est un cri de détresse suscité par l'écoeurément des jeunes devant une génération d'assis et d'encenseurs" (p. 5). The receptiveness of Doyon and *Le Clairon* to the political content of the *Refus Global* is understandable given the paper's political position: a Liberal newspaper, it constantly took aim at Duplessis and the Catholic church. The other major Liberal newspaper in Québec, *Le Canada*, also provided a sympathetic account of the *Refus Global*; see LAFCADIO, "L'underground de l'esthétique: 'Refus Global'," 23 August 1948, p. 3. Moreover, *Le Canada* printed an enormous number of letters from the Automatistes without editing or rebutting them. The volume of letters from the Automatistes to *Le Canada* suggests that newspaper's subscribers constituted a major sector of the Automatiste's public.
- 73 Gérard PELLETIER, "Deux Ages, Deux Manières," *Le Devoir*, 25 September 1948, p. 8.
- 74 cf. Madeleine GARIÉPY, "À la Société d'Art Contemporain," *Notre Temps*, 21 February 1948: "Fait curieux à noter, ce sont surtout des canadiens-français qui vont de l'avant. Pourtant, ils trouvent souvent le public anglo-canadien plus intéressé à leurs oeuvres que le public canadien-français" (p. 6). It should be noted that both the Automatistes and the Prisme d'Yeux received a frosty reception from conservative anglophone critics such as Robert Ayre; see, for example, AYRÉ's "Recent Developments in Canadian Painting," *J.R.A.I.C.* XXV, 1 (January 1948) pp. 10-14. Conservative critics regarded Quebec as a backwater of provincialism and cultural retardation, and any evidence to the contrary produced enormous anxiety for them, as it called into question their conviction that the culture of English Canada was superior to that of French Canada. The English Canadian avant-garde of the 1930s also viewed the rise of the Prisme d'Yeux and Automatistes with alarm, for these groups challenged the hegemony of the old Canadian avant-garde; see, for example, Paraskeva CLARK's letter to *Canadian Art*, V, 4 (Spring-Summer 1948), p. 21.
- 75 Lester B. PEARSON, *Words and Occasions* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. 72. At the time of this speech, Pearson was an employee of the Department of External Affairs under Louis Saint-Laurent, then Secretary of State for External Affairs. As Jack GRANATSTEIN and Robert CUFF have pointed out in *Ties that Bind. Canadian-American Relations in War Time: From the Great War to the Cold War* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1975), in the 1940's intellectuals increasingly clustered around civil service jobs, especially those of an executive rank; they further note that "this group of professionals... conceived themselves to be part of an international governing class" (p. 117). While Granatstein and Cuff do not examine the implications of the supportive role which intellectuals played in the formulation and administration of government policy, such analyses have been undertaken by American historians insofar as the relationship between American intellectuals and American politics is concerned. "The Cultural Cold War,"

by Christopher LASCH (reprinted in *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969) offers an analysis of this relationship which applies with equal validity to Canada in the post-war period: "Intellectuals were unusually sensitive to their interests as a group and... they defined those interests in such a way as to make them fully compatible with the interests of the state. As a group, intellectuals had achieved responsibility for the machinery of education and of cultural affairs in general. Within this sphere — within the schools, the universities, the theater, the concert hall, and the politico-literary magazines — they had achieved both autonomy and affluence, as the social value of their services became apparent to the government, to corporations, and to the foundations. Professional intellectuals had become indispensable to society and to the state" (p. 94).

- 76 English liberals nevertheless remained fascinated by Duplessis' tenacity in Québec politics, albeit expressing their fascination in condescending and self-righteous tones; the most characteristic example of this kind of thinking is Stuart KEATE's "Maurice the Magnificent", *Maclean's Magazine*, 1 September 1948, p. 7, pp. 71-75; see also Harold H. MARTIN, "Quebec's Little Strong Man," *Saturday Evening Post*, 15 January 1949, pp. 17-19, pp. 102-04.
- 77 At the time, *Canadian Art* was funded by the federal government through the National Gallery of Canada; see "Canadian Art", *Food for Thought* 10 (May 1950), p. 58.
- 78 Donald BUCHANAN reviewing the *Refus Global*, *op. cit.*, p. 86. The issue of cultural oppression, in Québec had been dealt with previously by Louis MUHLSTOCK in "An Excess of Prudery", *Canadian Art* V, 2 (Christmas 1947): "These are only slight examples of the backwardness and narrowmindedness of the province I live in... As artists we must be free to paint and exhibit what we feel. Here we are not free... If we are silent about it, we have no one but ourselves to blame" (pp. 76-78).
- 79 *Refus Global*, *op. cit.*, p. 45. The stress which liberal intellectuals placed on biculturalism and federalism also relates to the Cold War. Liberals believed that an internally unified Canada, fortified by a strong defensive alliance with other Western countries provided the only security against the Eastern Bloc nations. By attempting to prove their commitment to a fully bicultural country, liberals hoped that they could overcome the resistance of Quebec to international political commitments, which was based on a suspicion that Ottawa's external affairs' policies were designed to protect English Canada alone. See: Howard A. LESSON, *External Affairs and Canadian Federalism: the History of a Dilemma* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston of Canada, 1973); Escott REID, "Canada and the Creation of the North Atlantic Alliance, 1948-1949", in *Freedom and Change: Essays in Honour of Lester B. Pearson*, ed. Michael FRY (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), pp. 106-35.
- 80 Many liberal intellectuals believed that Quebec's emergent modern culture afforded the possibility of becoming the basis of a truly national culture; see, for example, John K. B. ROBERTSON, "Art in Canada," *Here and Now* I, 1 (December 1947): "Where — except perhaps in Montreal — are the 'schools,' the rebels, the theories, which mark a dynamic cultural situation and which would, perhaps, in their resolution, bring a truly national culture?" (p. 77).
- 81 Maurice GAGNON, "D'une certaine peinture jeune... ou l'Automatisme," *Canadian Art* V, 3 (Winter 1948); pp. 136-38.
- 82 Little has been written on the Cold War, especially insofar as it relates to Canadian liberalism; the best source on this subject is GRANATSTEIN and CUFF, *Canadian-American Relations in Wartime* (*op. cit.*). Substantially more has been written on the Communist Party, however; see Ivan AVAKUMOVIC, *The Communist Party of Canada. A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975) and Norman PENNER, *The Canadian Left, A Critical Analysis* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1977).
- 83 Louis SAINT-LAURENT, quoted by Blair FRASER in "Where does St. Laurent Stand?" *Maclean's Magazine*, 15 September 1948, p. 7. The relationship between Saint-Laurent and English Canadian liberalism is an important one, but it has been neglected by Canadian historians. Although Saint-Laurent's origins were French Canadian, the kinds of policies he supported in the House of Commons as Secretary of State for External Affairs, and later as Prime Minister, were antithetical to those espoused by most francophone liberals in the years immediately following World War II. See, for example, SAINT-LAURENT's article in the pre-eminent liberal periodical, *The Canadian Forum*, "Canada and the U.N.," XXVIII, 329 (June 1948), pp. 49-50.
- 84 Charles GLICKSBERG, "Literature and the Marxist Aesthetic," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XVIII, 1 (October 1948), p. 84.

- 85 *Refus Global*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.
- 86 LEDUC to BORDUAS, 8 March 1948; quoted by F.-M. GAGNON, *Borduas: Biographie critique*, *op. cit.*, p. 235.
- 87 SAINT-LAURENT, *House of Commons Debates*, 29 April 1948.
- 88 *Refus Global*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
- 89 Stuart KEATE, "L'Automatiste," *Time*, 18 October 1948, p. 22.
- 90 Murray TEVLIN, "Business and Culture," *Canadian Business* XXI, 8 (August 1948), p. 45.
- 91 Charles COMFORT, "Observations on a Decade, 1938-1948; Canadian Painting, Sculpture and Printmaking: Transition," *J.R.A.I.C.* XXV, 1 (January 1948) pp. 7-8.
- 92 *Refus Global*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
- 93 Pierre GAUVREAU, quoted by Tancrede MARSIL in "Gauvreau, Automatiste," *Le Quartier Latin*, 28 November 1947, p. 5.
- 94 Pierre GAUVREAU, "Arbre généalogique de l'automatisme contemporain," *Le Quartier Latin*, 17 February 1948, p. 3. cf. Gauvreau's remarks to those made by Arthur M. SCHLESINGER in *The Vital Center* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), a book which enjoyed enormous popularity among liberal intellectuals in both English Canada and the United States: "The conclusion is clear... Let them [Soviet artists] create only compositions which officials can hum, paintings which their wives can decipher, poems which the party leaders can understand" (p. 79).
- 95 Jean-Paul RIOPELLE, "En marge des propos de l'artiste Agnès Lefort," *Le Canada*, 5 November 1948, p. 4.
- 96 The Automatistes' attacks against recent artistic styles may also be seen as an avant-garde tactic; by describing current modernist styles as passé, an avant-garde is able to place itself at the forefront of artistic history. In "Arbre généalogique de l'Automatisme contemporain" (*op. cit.*), Pierre GAUVREAU provides a summary of modern movements, but significantly, places automatism at the head of them: "Il appartient aux Automatistes canadiens d'apporter leur effort à la libération de l'objet peint... Ils le feront prochainement" (p. 3). Similarly, in "La générosité en fuite," *Le Quartier Latin*, 30 January 1948, Claude GAUVREAU catalogues a variety of modern styles before concluding, "Dans notre décade... les recherches surréalistes et automatistes constituent l'avant-garde" (p. 3). cf. Borduas in "Commentaires sur des mots courants" (released with the *Refus Global*) in *Paul-Émile Borduas: Ecrits/Writings* (*op. cit.*); after reviewing various stages of art history from "the beginning of Christianity" to the twentieth century, Borduas concludes that "[painting] has finally opened to us a vast domain, until now taboo and unexplored, the province of angels and devils: surrealism" (p. 77).
- 97 Dr. H. LEHMANN, "Art and Psychology," *Canadian Art* VI, 1 (Autumn 1948), p. 17.
- 98 cf. Borduas' definition of Superrational Automatism in "Commentaires sur des mots courants" (*op. cit.*): "Unpremeditated plastic writing... During the process, no attention is given to content... Complete moral independence with regard to the object produced... It hopes: an acute knowledge of the psychological content of any form, of the human universe—in short, the human universe itself" (p. 74). Borduas believed that great art could not become politically corrupted: "The items of this treasure reveal themselves, inviolable, to our society. They remain... incorruptible... They were ordained spontaneously outside of and in opposition to civilization" (*Refus Global*, *op. cit.*, p. 50).
- 99 LEHMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- 100 *Refus Global*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
- 101 GLICKSBERG, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- 102 *Ibid.*
- 103 *Ibid.*
- 104 *Ibid.*
- 105 cf. BORDUAS, "Commentaires sur des mots courants," *op. cit.*: "The secrets of these pictures are encoded in their forms" (p. 78).
- 106 This connection has already been pointed out by F.-M. GAGNON in his biography of Borduas, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
- 107 Doris SHADBOLT, "Our Relation to Primitive Art," *Canadian Art* V, 1 (October-November 1947), p. 16.
- 108 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

109 This phrase was current in both Canadian and American politics at mid-century; it was first coined by American "new liberals" to signify their repudiation of the extreme right and left; see SCHLESINGER, *The Vital Center*, *op. cit.*, and Daniel BELL, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: The Free Press, 1961). Although he does not make the connection between liberals' call for an "end to ideology" and the *Refus Global*, F.-M. GAGNON notes in his biography of Borduas (*op. cit.*) that "le manifeste souhaite la fin de l'ère des idéologies" (p. 241).

110 BUCHANAN, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

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L'utilisation du vocabulaire politique de la liberté  
parmi l'avant-garde artistique montréalaise en 1948.

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**E**n 1948, l'avant-garde montréalaise est divisée en deux factions hostiles: le groupe Prisme d'Yeux, sous la direction d'Alfred Pellan, et les Automatistes, sous celle de Paul-Émile Borduas. Les deux groupes entrent ouvertement en conflit en février 1948, à l'occasion de la 9<sup>e</sup> réunion annuelle de la Société d'art contemporain. Au cours de cette réunion, Borduas est élu président, ce qui amène le groupe de Pellan à se retirer de l'association, décision qui entraîne elle-même la démission de Borduas et de plusieurs de ses partisans. Toute la dispute porte sur une question qui, en 1948, était au centre des discours des intellectuels et hommes politiques canadiens ainsi que l'un des thèmes dominants des manifestes des deux groupes d'avant-garde: la signification de la liberté dans le contexte de la guerre froide.

Dans la manifeste du groupe Prisme d'Yeux, la liberté est définie comme étant essentiellement apolitique et tolérante à l'égard de la diversité; cette définition est fortement tributaire de l'idéologie prônée par l'intelligentsia libérale du Québec, groupe dont les préjugés politiques sont nettement favorables au gouvernement provincial en place. Dans un manifeste intitulé *Refus Global*, les Automatistes soutiennent, eux aussi, que la liberté authentique doit être à l'abri de toute considération politique; en même temps, ils attaquent les valeurs à la base même du statu quo politique et intellectuel de la province, probablement pour indisposer les partisans de Prisme d'Yeux, le gouvernement provincial, la presse et les intellectuels en général.

Malgré ses détracteurs aux Québec, *Refus Global* reçoit l'appui des intellectuels libéraux du Canada anglais, qui voient dans le manifeste une illustration de leurs propres convictions: hostilité envers l'establishment politique et culturel francophone, antipathie envers les extrémistes de gauche et de droite et, conséquemment, fidélité au "centre vital", position politique à laquelle se rattachent les libéraux anglophones.

Les idéologies verbales des deux groupes ressortent clairement à la lumière de la conjoncture historique de 1948, des critiques dont a fait l'objet chacun des groupes et d'une lecture attentive des textes eux-mêmes. En outre, l'examen minutieux du style et du contenu de deux oeuvres produites par les leaders de deux factions avant-gardistes, *L'homme A grave* de Pellan et *Objet Totémique* de Borduas, révèle des idéologies opposées l'une à l'autre, mais tout à fait conformes à celles qui apparaissent explicitement dans les manifestes publiés la même année.

En 1948, la liberté fait l'objet d'un débat esthétique et politique animé, les deux tableaux s'interpénétrant. Catalysée par la guerre froide, la scission entre le libéralisme des Canadiens français et celui des Canadiens anglais s'amplifie en raison même de la définition donnée par les uns et les autres à la liberté; c'est cette division qui sera à la base des idéologies verbales et visuelles de l'avant-garde montréalaise. En assimilant tout de façon éclectique pour le réfracter, comme son nom l'indique, le mouvement Prisme d'Yeux reprend les grands principes du libéralisme francophone. Dans leur «refus global», les Automatistes

rejetent au contraire tout ce qui est relié au libéralisme des intellectuels du Québec et, ce faisant, prennent indirectement position pour le libéralisme anglophone. Par leur acceptation globale et par leur refus global, les partisans de Prisme d'Yeux et les Automatistes en sont venus non seulement à se quereller, mais, en dépit de leur façade avant-gardiste, à soutenir, chacun à leur manière, le statu quo.

Judith Ince