

Excerpted from the book:

Source/Derivations: Allan Harding MacKay

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With the third of his *Source/Derivations* installations, AHM moved for the first time from art history (however comparatively recent) to art more-or-less present, from ideology to idyll to elegy, from allegedly "dead" art to art recent and living, if profoundly about death-in-life. Art premised in the real-time commemoration of dead soulmates. The explosion of variants is even more than before a product of the photographic and electronic processing of the painting on which the work offers a commentary, if not a gloss: that of the observing Self on the observed and yet observant Other.

Ron Benner's massive six-panelled photo-painting of 1975-76, *As dark as the grave wherein my friend is laid*, is at once a memorial to co-workers killed on the job and a *memento mori*, a warning to the curious who would wander, if they could, too deeply into the dark heart of the image. Matthew Teitelbaum's analysis of the content and methodology of this monumental piece, in the catalogue of the 1988 Mendel Art Gallery exhibition, *Ron Benner: Other Lives* (where AHM first saw the work), provides a backgrounding complement to the insights that AHM has so painstakingly extracted from it. Its quotation here serves to remind us that the *Source* component of each of these installations is as integral to the whole as the *Derivations*:

As dark as the grave wherein my friend is laid builds on indictment and condemnation to realize a personal memorial. The work takes as its subject a local train crash, an early- morning-after-long- night train crash. It is a guttural scream. Not merely because Benner, then a railway brakeman, was on the spare board at the time and could have been on the train, but because railway workers knew better than anyone how management practices led to the use of diesels which, at the time of the accident, were worn down after twenty-five years of service.

The work highlights the original, highly publicized newspaper photograph which declared the disaster. The six panels of *As dark as the grave* are progressively blackened to a point of almost total darkness. Each image records a previous image, is sequentially obscured through applications of tar, and rephotographed for applications of tar once again. Its resolution, its final image, is a blackened surface revealing only the number of the fire-destroyed train. *As dark as the grave* is a gravesite and its marker. It is both a testimony to the men who died tragically, and an interrogation of the newspaper photograph which has made spectacle out of grief.

As dark as the grave cuts through the edge where form and content may be confused.... The tar in *As dark as the grave* forsakes its material sumptuousness for its specific identity as a material for railroad repair. It is part of the image - read content - as a material of manual application and healing. It is part of the industrial life of the railroad workers in a job marked by erratic workshifts and constant travel.

The incrementally blackened blowup of the news-photo calls forth ghost-memories of similar, earlier images for instance, of a locomotive dangling from the railway station wall it

has abruptly punctured, thanks to the failure of the buffers to stop it when it ran out of track, or of a German troop train blown up by the French near Mézières in August 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War (fig. 72). Scattered throughout the archives, libraries and mediamorgues of the world are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of equally disturbing documentations, literary, photographic, filmic and televisual, of spectacular derailments and collisions caused by equipment-failure, metal fatigue, track debris, human error, crossed signals, sabotage, drunk driving, war, or what are actuarially euphemized as "acts of God."

Learning, subsequently, that RB laid the blame for the accident he solemnizes in *As dark as the grave* on shortsighted management policies had a special pertinence for me as I reacquainted myself with the locomotive-long work in the AGW's new Devonshire Mall gallery space a few hours before the opening of *S/D III*, for earlier that bitterly cold, snow-blowing day I myself had travelled by Via Rail from Toronto to Windsor. Throughout the duration of the trip, my thoughts had reverted involuntarily to the theme of railway disaster, prompted by the lengthy pauses as our torpid progress was interrupted again and again, usually in the middle of open fields or at the far edges of unidentified sidings. Presumably, because behind time, we were waiting for through-traffic. What if some signalling mistake were to place us on the wrong track at the wrong time? What if, during one of the frequent white-outs, a snowmobile or truck were to plough into us at a level crossing, still a surprisingly frequent occurrence in this half-wild country? And how long would my ride, kindly provided by the curator of this exhibition, be willing to wait for me at the Windsor station? Would there be enough time left in the day for me to complete all the gallery business I had pencilled into my calendar? Only toward the end of the protracted journey were these unscheduled, increasingly nerve wracking stops explained by a conductor's overheard remark that the hold-ups could be blamed on a recent spate of layoffs, which forced an undue reliance on automatic switches whose heat-boxes were unable to handle the extreme weather conditions.

RB's title is derived, of course, from that of the posthumously patched-together Malcolm Lowry novel, *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid* - which in turn is taken from line in an elegy by the Metaphysical poet Abraham Cowley.² Benner explains in conversation that his interest in Lowry coincided with the choice he made while travelling extensively throughout Canada and the northern United States as a railway worker. He decided to commit himself as an artist to crossing cultural borders, to "going" - a project facilitated by the purchase of an Amtrak pass and his access to free travel on freights, thanks to his possession of conductor's and brakesman's rail cards.

Spurred by an interest in indigenous New World agriculture and in the revolutionary politics of the 1960s, RB undertook his first trip to northern Mexico in 1973. In preparation for this adventure, he began reading Lowry's *Under the Volcano* "as a way of knowing more about Mexico. I wanted to know what's south of the U.S. -Mexican border." He purchased a second copy of the novel in the bookstore of the Museum of Archaeology in Mexico City and ploughed through it over the course of a month, while staying at a student residence in a rundown quarter of the capital. "I guess I was ready for it this time," he remarks.

After thoroughly acquainting himself with Mexico City through "walking and walking and looking around," RB then resumed his journey, travelling by rail through Central and South America. As he immersed himself in MesoAmerican history and culture, he became aware that, whatever his evocative powers, Lowry had had "very little understanding of the Mexican people and language. He was very Eurocentric. But then, he was that way about Canada, too." As an illustration of Lowry's linguistic ineptitude, RB cites the episode in *Under the Volcano* in which the mescal-fuddled protagonist, Geoffrey Firmin, crudely translates a public garden-sign's stern interrogatory directive -

(LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN?
(QUEESSUYO?
(EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN!

- as "You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!" And then reflects, "Perhaps the sign didn't mean quite that - for alcohol sometimes affected the ex-Consul's Spanish adversely (or perhaps the sign itself, inscribed by some Aztec, was wrong) - but it was near enough." In her film treatment of *Under the Volcano*, Lowry's second wife, Margerie Bonner Lowry, provided a more accurate translation: "You like this garden that is yours? See that your children [*hijos*] do not destroy it." The verb *evitar* means "avoid," not "evict": hence, alternatively, "prevent your children from destroying it." In other words, far from being warned against trespassing, the parent is encouraged to accept responsibility for the civic maintenance of a public amenity. The sign is not a hostile challenge but an invitation - which, however, carries with it, as Eden should have done, an admonition: *do not transgress!*

Some commentators have argued that the garden from which the Firmin is implicitly banned/banished is the paradis artificiel of drink, which, when consumed to excess, acts as the agent by which lovers are driven from the bower of bliss. However, the Dantean/Spenserian/Miltonic *topos* encloses a multitude of plantings besides the literally metaphoric and the psychologically allusive. For by confusing love of intoxication (self-escape) with the intoxication of love (discovery-of-other), the damned/doomed Adam of the epic parable that is *Under the Volcano* is also enacting the universal human tragedy on earth: by entering the garden, we perforce destroy it, and so ourselves, both individually and as a species. The neglected demesne is, by extension, Mexico, "the meeting place," in microcosm, Lowry explained in a 1946 letter to his publisher, "We can see it as the world itself, or the Garden of Eden, at once.... It is paradisaic; it is unquestionably infernal." (Lowry stated in a later letter that "The Consul has been a cabalist (this is where you get the Garden of Eden). Mystically speaking, the abuse of wine is connected with the abuse of mystical powers.... The implication is that an analogy is drawn between Man today on this planet and a black magician.... The Consul implies his war, as opposed to any Hugh [his half brother] might be involved in, is far more desperate, since it is against the very elements themselves. That is a war that is bound to be lost.")

How we interpret the message, RB concedes, is a matter of "intonation and semantics, and depends on the viewer's sense of collective or individual responsibility to society. " The

product of a colonialist, class-ridden culture on its uppers, Firmin (who scorns as futile and quixotic the revolutionary ideals of his younger sibling, Hugh, a former journalist and now a self-doubting member of the Iberian Anarchist Party) seems to be under the impression that the garden is a private one, like those with which he would have been familiar in England, accessible only to the privileged few who have keys. His phonetic (mis)reading of the sign becomes, in Benner's socialistic interpretation, "an issue concerning his [i.e., by inference, Lowry's] understanding of the possession of place. Lowry assumes possession rather than questions it. "

On the other hand, like everything else, the garden had allegorical implications for Lowry, representing not only the lost paradise of love and youth but life itself, which he could have saved but which he elected to forfeit, or from which he had banished himself through his own inebriated (in)actions. Do not transgress! became, in his own experience, a proscription, (fore?-)echoing its Canadian counterpart, the sign which, one late November morning, he and his wife were dismayed to confront, barring them from access to their forest spring at Dollarton, British Columbia (the fictive Eridanus): "PRIVATE PROPERTY KEEP OFF. " Fear of eviction, of expulsion, both symbolic and actual (the fiery sword, soul-drowning firewater, the manuscript-devouring shack-fire), was, after all, one of Lowry's governing obsessions. This "underground" meaning of the sign is made explicit in the last scene of Margerie Lowry's screenplay, after Firmin has been shot by the pun-addicted Chief of Rostrums as a spy (an "espider"), on the discovery of his possession of Hugh Firmin's Federacion Anarquista Iberica membership-card:

One of the policemen drags the Consul's dying body over to the barranca, and pitches him into the abyss. We see his body falling into the abyss. He screams. Somebody, half laughing, throws a dead pariah dog after him down the ravine. We see the sign in the little garden, beside the barranca:

LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN?
QUE ES SUYO?
EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN!

And now a reverse of the opening shot: from the barranca we ascend: we see the volcanoes, their peaks pure and clear in the evening light above the storm, the great mountain chain, and then a tremendous panorama of sky, with clouds piled five miles high.

The first line of the sign gave RB the title of his *You Like This Garden?*, undertaken in the spring Of 1976 after he had come to an impasse with his semi-abstract paintings, which he felt "weren't working. " In an attempt to find out why, he decided to explore the aleatory possibilities of found photographic images. Having enlarged a close-up photograph of a dense fir forest - public domain, but licensed to private lumber companies - he covered this bush garden with spruce resin; re-photographed the result; coated that blowup; re-photographed it again; and so on, to "completion." As reproduced in the catalogue of the exhibition Ron Benner-Tom Benner, mounted by the Sir George Williams Art Gallery of Concordia University in December 1976 (fig. 73 a-b), each of the five panels bears a section of the above, quoted sign, first in Spanish, then in French, then in RB's English translation, in which the last sentence reads "see that/your children/don't

destroy it!" (Ironically, this important early work, which foreshadows his later eco-political installations and billboard pieces, was destroyed in a studio-flood.)

RB next applied this new approach to *You Like This Garden?*'s counterpart, "*As dark as the grave wherein my friend is laid*," the genesis of which is explained in his own artist's statement concerning the work:

The image in *As dark as the grave wherein my friend is laid* is from a news photograph [by Sam McLeod, of the London Free Press, taken in June 1975] Of a train derailment near Simcoe, Ontario. The train was the Norfolk & Western (Wabash) DN90 bound for Buffalo, New York, from Windsor, Ontario. I worked for the Norfolk & Western from 1971 until 1979 as brakeman/conductor. Two of my fellow workers, Edward Wadley, the engineer, and Ray Merritt, the head-end brakeman, died in this accident. The title of the work refers to Malcolm Lowry's book, *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*.

Having obtained a copy of the original news photo, RB cropped it square and had it blown up to near-billboard Proportions. In keeping with the industrial imagery, he slathered the photomurals not with a quasi-natural substance but with teardrop-shaped goops of plastic roofing cement. Despite this change in materials from the organic to the artificial, "The two works, process-wise, are exactly the same," the artist remarks. This similarity of treatment is also carried forward in the folding, square format Sir George Williams Art Gallery exhibition catalogue, in which the five *As dark as the grave* panels are printed on the verso of those of *You like this garden?*, the title again being divided among the reproduced images, which they underscore like inscriptions. Asked why he had assigned a (slightly but significantly altered) Lowry title to this piece, Benner offers an indirect explanation: "Twenty years after I made that work, I can say that I don't really like Lowry any more, but at that time I was still reading him. in fact, he so intrigued me that in 1973 I travelled to Vancouver to check out where he'd lived. On the beach near where he'd built his shack I bumped into an old man who had known Lowry. "

The title, he says, "*was provided* for me. I found it when I needed it," several years after having read the book. As to why he prefixed the phrase with the word "As," he struggles to recall his thinking and state of mind back in 1976, following the death of his two friends:

Well, the work is about fellow employees, mismanagement, distant ownership. To do that work created a lot of tension. My co-workers kept asking me, "Ron, why are you doing this?" The way I looked at it, it was a way of getting at the company and of working out my anger at the railway owners for using outdated equipment that should have been junked years earlier, and my anger at the newspaper for using an image that didn't represent those men's lives. Thirdly, it was something very personal. I was responding to the way the news media trivialize tragic events and the way a lot of the art of the 1970s was doing the same thing. Artists kept telling me I was "doing a Warhol" - you know, all those Disaster Paintinas, That was the exact *opposite* of what I was trying to do.

RB was also, in his own words, "trying to get rid of this fetish of the machine." Hence his fear that, because AHM has so prominently featured his - RB's - likeness - in the exhibition, he, too, will appear to resemble a "fetish." AHM counters that he deliberately chose *not* to "give faces" or otherwise make direct reference to RB's dead workmates, out of respect for their memories, and because to do otherwise would be to intrude upon an

observed grief. His object was to invite himself into another artist's imaginative arena (according - unconsciously, perhaps - to the doctrine of Bahktinian "dialogue"), not to invade a private space. And, despite RB's protestations to the contrary, the "source-erer" derives from *As dark as the grave* a strong elegiac feeling - a feeling that is no more RB's province to control than it is in AHM's power to influence, after the fact, the ways in which his own reflections on another's work will be interpreted. For his part, however, RB emphatically insists that *As dark as the grave* should be seen "not as a memorial but as an attempt to denounce the representation of two people's lives by a machine. I don't want the machine to represent a person's life and death." His "statement" in the 1976 catalogue gives voice to the deceased railwaymen:

WABASH And someone asked why'd he wanna move up & down the same road all the time - boring! - and Jack Q) replied that hell - it wasn't - how you are allowed seconds to see & the brokenness of a second it's finished & no matter how much time you've got - it's so much dross and the next time the same image's seen & the same few seconds to view - only this time it's different - not the split seconds but the images imprinted and as this occurs & re-occurs and is seen and re-seen - a build-up - only additions ... an unending whine. And when the mile posts are indistinguishable from a picket fence an' he's whistling the sound of an overspeed valve - killing time no less M - an' this job's gotten your blood - f 'un -'Cause we're out here by ourselves anyways & they don't give a damn.

If the viewer interprets the work as being commemorative or elegiac in character - well, artists can't control the ways in which an image or construction will be construed after it leaves the studio. At any rate, RB feels that the sincerity of his intentions was confirmed six years after the piece's completion, when the widow of one of the accident victims paid him a visit in order to thank him for making the work. He takes justifiable pride from the fact that, in his words, "*As dark as the grave* made a lot of artists think about something other than stupid, frivolous tart." Somehow, the addition of the conjunction "As" to Lowry's title metaphorically distances the artist Ron Benner from the catastrophe he commemorates, removing himself from the picture in order that the viewer can concentrate on the image he transforms from a once-timely news photograph into a timeless meditative device. But if the Lowry novel is thus doubly removed from the work that bears a variant of its title, R,B affirms the importance of the literary referent and its critical connection with his own development as an artist. (Like former fellow-Londoner Robert Fones, he started out as a poet before turning to art.)

Lowry's posthumously published *Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid* is a thinly fictionalized account of the author's 1945 bus trip from Vancouver to Cuernavaca, Mexico, where, in 1936, the expatriate English writer had lived with his first wife, Jan Gabriel, and where he had begun his sole masterpiece, *Under the Volcano*, the expressionist story/ fable/allegory/ myth whose lightning-struck flame he vainly hoped to rekindle in the form of an "Under" *Under the Volcano*. This fitfully dazzling book is a vision of a still-worse abyss than the pit into which the suicidally dipsomaniac Geoffrey Firmin is dumped on the last page of the 1947 epic, but offers a final, fleeting glimpse of a tender blue rift in the pall of sulphurous black cloud that hangs over both novels. For, while the past-seeking quest of the unlikely-named protagonist, Sigbjorn Wilderness, ends with the discovery that the Mexican friend he longs to visit, after nearly a decade of unanswered

correspondence, was six years in his alcoholic's grave, the pilgrimage is seen neither as a failed mission nor as a one-way journey. Not, in other words, from Ca(nada) to the Hotel (Cor)nada, whose truncated sign is naturally interpreted as an omen, but from Hell to Eternity. (In *Under the Volcano*, the inn's name is the Hotel Canada. A name, as Lowry must have known, that is sometimes interpreted as deriving from the Portuguese explorers' notation, Aca nada - "nothing there.")

Just as *Dark As the Grave* concludes on a rising note of optimism following a precipitous descent into confusion, disappointment and loss, so RB's *As dark as the grave* likewise can be "read" not only from left to right but from darkness to light: that is, from death back to life. Can the Fall be reversed? The descent into Dis turned into an ascent? The film shown backward? Even if life says, unequivocally, No, art says, emphatically, Yes.

Questioned about this, RB agrees: '*As dark as the grave* isn't an act of necrophilia. Memory doesn't only work one way. Visual art is never one-way. Allan Harding Mackay, being a visual artist, understands that.' He recalls that the first critic to comment on the piece "completely misinterpreted it. He described it as reading as a one-way narrative, pointing only to death." When Benner first showed *You Like This Garden?* and *As dark as the grave* in Montreal, he concluded the label text for the latter with the sentence, "It could go on forever." The same can be said of the quartet of memorial pieces he produced in 1984, a decade after the demise of his coworker friends, to mark the deaths that year of four of his political and literary heroes, Ruth Furst, Michel Foucault, Manuel Scorza and Livia Rokach. In the words of RB's companion, the London artist Jamelie Hassan, through such testaments he is "Making [his] grief valid."

AHM's respectful, muted but fundamentally sanguine variations on Benner's despairing lament for absent friends (not, as Terrence Heath reminds us, our own, or AHM's) consists of an assemblage of discrete but related elements that bounce echoes off one another as well as off the work to which they allude. They are arranged in no specified order or sequence, so, as a convenient means of discussing them, the descriptive inventory that follows observes a counter-clockwise "browse" of the 360 degree pan of the installation, as videotaped by *S/D III*'s curator Vincent Varga. This publication's equivalent of these continuous frames is a sequence of scanned and digitized slides taken by AHM to document the show, beginning with RB's six-part piece (viewed, of necessity, from right to left), then moving to the wall with the exhibition's signage and explanatory text panel, which acts as a dividing line between the Source and the Derivations.

This order of observance may in fact be how most gallery visitors take in an exhibition, first standing back to scope the whole and then zooming in on individual works in an effort to identify their contents, then to comprehend their interrelationships, and finally to figure out the drift of the installation as a single, unified entity. The origin of the title of RB's testimonial/ testament is revealed - in typically covert fashion - toward the "end" of AHM's series of multi-media meditations on *As dark as the grave*. We will return to that undersource and its significance, for RB and AHM, after naming and describing the parts of the show in the historical present. This task was made easier by a typically tongue-in-cheek diagram d faxed by the artist after numerous phone-calls from a confused and

bemused commentator.

Presiding over the entire "dialogue" is a large, shelf-work's supported, square-format portrait of RB. This work's media are oil, pastel and wax; the source was a projected colour slide of the artist's head, shot by AHM. Tacked to the chrome-yellow wall immediately below its lower-right corner is a photocopy on acetate of a detail of the portrait: the top of the artist's head, the focus being on his right eye. If we follow the trajectory of this sombre, inward-looking gaze (that loaded noun/verb), we find ourselves staring directly into the two black eyelike windshields of the crashed engine across the room. Suddenly the locomotive, with its nasal headlamp and grimacing grille, becomes anthropomorphized. Was this startling linkage between the witnessing survivor and the disaster he commemorates deliberate or accidental?

Yes or no, the effect is electrifying.

We are in the presence here not of the subjective and subjecting male "gaze," as anatomized by Sartre, Foucault, Lacan and Barthes, but of something more numinous, more haunting and haunted, as a consultation of the *Tao T'e Ching* on the topic of ghosts suggests:

Because the eye gazes but can catch no glimpse of it, It is called elusive. Because the ear listens but cannot hear it, It is called the rarefied.

Because the hand feels for it but cannot find it,
it is called the infinitesimal.

These three, because they cannot be further scrutinized,
Blend into one. its rising brings no light;
its sinking, no darkness.

Endless, the series of things without name
On the way back to where there is nothing.

Wrecked engine as skull.

Gazing up at RB's sad face, I find myself asking: where have I met this image before? Back in his Toronto studio, while viewing his own videotaped record of the installation, AHM rewinds and freezes on the face. "Hodler!" he hoots. Subsequent research in the library shows that the portrait recalls the heads of the procession of downcast, white-robed old men - the bald central figure especially - in *Hodler's Eurythmie*, which AHM had studied at the Kunstmuseum in Bern, Switzerland, over the course of many visits. And from which, it turns out, he produced not only *Requiem for Hodler*) but *Interpretation Hodler # 1*, in which, as with *Northern River*, he "flipped" and "symmetrized" the (eu) rhythmically composed file of monk-like ancients - very Dead White Males, to a man - to create an even more cadenced pattern. He brought the artist into the picture by introducing a profile of Hodler in the lowerleft foreground of *Requiem*.

AHM was responding, in this Swiss derivation, not only to the formal qualities of the

source but to its atmosphere, the mood of fatal inevitability conveyed by the "movement" of the statue-like figures, whom we first might take to be mourners but who, in fact, are those who are about to be mourned. For, as the critic Louis Duchosal observed in 1895, "C'est la destinée qui les conduit et la mort doit fermer le corffte. Ils diffèrent les uns des autres par la physiognomie, mais un même état d'âme fait se mouvoir les cinqs corps d'un mouvement régulier de marche lente et mélancholique."63

Hodler, in turn, openly borrowed his composition from works such as William Blake's oil and tempera painting, *The Procession from Calvary* (Tate Gallery, London), dating from 1799-1800. Not only in the massing of his figures but in his choice of quotations, "Hodler was demonstrating his epigraphically excited theory of Parallelism (which, along with a lecture given in 197 upon the invitation of the University of Freiburg, constitutes his entire theoretical oeuvre - a refreshing if rare instance of artistic reticence at the dawn of the modern era). As he explained,

If an object is pleasant, repetition will increase its charm; if it expresses sorrow or pain, then repetition will intensify its melancholy. On the contrary, any subject that is peculiar or unpleasant will be made unbearable by repetition. So repetition always acts to increase intensity... Since the time that this principle of harmony was employed by the primitives, it has been visually lost, and so forgotten. One strove for the charm of variety, and so achieved the destruction of unity ...

In recruiting Hodler, who recruited Blake, who recruited Michelangelo, who recruited Masaccio, who recruited Giotto (the ex-shepherd who taught himself to draw perfect circles in the dirt with a stick), AHM is aligning himself with a practical philosophy of composition as well as inserting himself into the Swiss master's concept of art history not as "progress" from past to present to future but as a simultaneous procession across space, eternally present in the Great Wheel of creation (which sometimes revolves backwards). Whatever the direction of their flight, Hodler reminds us that "Proverbially... Birds of a feather flock together.,,

If RB resists AHM's attempts to conscript him into the line of succession, that is his right; he cannot prevent his image from being repeated in parallel to renovate Hodler's "principle of harmony" at the end of the most dissonant and chaotic century in recorded history. Another Hodler work in the Kunstmuseum that AHM had filed away in his mental slide-library and subconsciously projected onto the head of RB is *Die enttäuschten Seelen* (*Disappointed Souls*), of 1891-92, again involving five grieving figures (fig- 78), of which a contemporary Swiss critic noted, "Tout en restant très moderne par l'inspiration, M. Hodler a pour but le caractère et le style - comme les primitifs, ou Durer, ou Mantegna, qu'il a étudiés beaucoup, mais qu'il n'imites pas - et il a comme eux le sens décoratif et architectural." Qualities which AHM, recognized in Hodler, and which he strove to update and adapt for employment in his own ironic, late-twentieth-century meditations on the twin vanities of heroic self-portraiture and sublime mountainscapes.

Also (subconsciously?) influencing the manner in which he posed and photographed &B in preparation for making this larger-than-life likeness were dimly remembered Hodler images

of bearded philosophers and peasants hanging their weary heads in attitudes of resignation and reflection - like, if you will, the figure whom the ex-Consul in *Under the Volcano* hallucinates "apparently in some kind of mourning.... standing, head bowed in deepest anguish, near the centre of the public garden" By introducing (intruding, so far as the reserved RB is concerned) the "source" artist's countenance into the derivation, AHM is opening up new channels of connection and divergence: he reaches towards and moves away from the maker otherwise invisible within his own creation; the other makers before him; the time-markers who drive the trains; the mourners who bear the biers.
Ad infinitum ("H could go on forever.")

Running along the wall at about waist-level are several wooden shelves on which AHM has positioned a number of framed and unframed works. Of these, the first to the grave is greet the eye scanning left is a long, shadowbox-like frame containing seven treated photocopies of the six pages in the *Ron Benner: Other Lives* catalogue in which *As dark as the grave* is discussed by Matthew Teitelbaum (fig. 82). The first panel is a layering of acetate photocopies of the opening page of Teitelbaum's entry. Each subsequent panel is masked with a sheet of Damar-waxed tracing paper, from which AHM has cut and scrolled up a window blind-like flap, to reveal in sequence, left-to-right, the six black-and-white catalogue reproductions of the individual RB panels.

To the left is a second framed work, this time consisting of six laser-generated copies made from installation slides of the individual panels of the KB source-work, provided by the Art Gallery of Windsor. Over these AHM applied imperfectly aligned acetate photocopies of the under-image, their edges sealed with wax. The last panel has an additional overlay that turns it into a three-ply triple-exposure: an acetate photocopy derived from a photograph of a second AHM portrait of RB, Which we have yet to encounter, but soon will.

Viewed together, these two horizontal stretches of vertical "windows" resemble the sides of trains, planes or buses, the faces and forms behind the simultaneously refractive and lucid glass only partially visible from any position. "The window", writes Sherrill Grace of Malcolm Lowry's recurrent use of t double-exposure device in *Under the Volcano*, "serves as a mirror to frame and reflect a series of temporal and spatial dimensions; it is a miniature serial universe. " As Elizabeth Brown wrote of AHM's Hodler variations, "like an ever-repeating object in a mirror, mirroring itself, the role of artist as master and student revolves into infinity."⁶⁸ But with mirrors, the role of the viewer comes to the fore, if only as a third or fourth overlay, dimly floating in mercury (or, here acetate and plexiglass).

Further still to the left on the long wooden shelf is another group of works which parlay a transition between the "portrait" of the wrecked locomotive and that of the artist who submitted himself to its scarifying hypnosis. Dominating the group is a square, charcoal-and-wax drawing on paper-covered plywood of the first RB panel, loosely propped against which is a small colour photograph of the eye-section of the portrait with which we began. The rest of the shelf is occupied by four framed pieces - window-like, again - which resist an easy reading. Eventually the media and matter disclose themselves: photocopy prints on the clear acetate of a photograph of RB placed over laser prints and photocopies of the first

panel of *As dark as the grave*. Artist and artwork thus become a unit, a *gesamt* (a gestalt, even?), the human face looming hologram-like over the "face" of the slain train. This illusionistic leap into three-dimensionality, which AHM refers to as "popping," was another unexpected result of the montaging of materials and images with which he experimented in the studio while working out the components and arrangements of S/D III. (Another heuristic discovery, not, in the end, represented in the present exhibition, was the macabre, moiré-patterned forms that resulted from the overlaying of reverse and obverse photocopy on-acetate blowups of AHM's snapshots of RB's dome-browed head - a tactic reminiscent of the computer- "morphing" of two mugshots to generate a third-party composite of the individual faces. The coincidental creation of which Julio Cortázar, in a very different context, anticipates in this sentence about the "dark game" of memory: "The archive of supposed photocopies actually offers up strange creatures..,.)

Having covered these - what? collages? works on paper? - with a translucent film of white wax, AHM inscribed, and then filled in with black oil pigment, a word running across the base of each: "Sorrow," "Testimony," "Anger," "Interrogation." As transcribed here, the sequence is that of reading: left to right.

To the left hangs a push-pinned photostat of a second mixed media portrait of RB, the original of which is nailed to the wall beside it. Similarly affixed to the stat's right edge is an acetate-photocopy of a portion of this brooding portrait, generated from a laser copy of a slide, and, on the left, a yellow-washed laser copy of the original slide used in the generation of the RB likeness.

To the right-of-centre of the stat, standing upright on its own small shelf, is a wax-encased copy of the Penguin paperback edition (covers removed) of Lowry's *Dark As the Grave*, the title of which alone has been left legible (fig. 91). In the space below the title, AHM has "written," in raised wax letters, the word "AS," by which the connection is drawn between the novel and RB's *As dark as the grave*.

The last component of the wall is the charcoal, pastel, oil and wax-on-wood "source" portrait, over which is pinned, at a slightly skewed angle, a size-as photostat on acetate, which was made from the original transparency that AHM projected on the panel to aid in the drawing of the portrait. The cumulative effect, again, is of illusory or virtual depth, such as we associate with a hologram, but also of confusion, for the viewer is confronted with the quandary of what constitutes the "original" and what the "copy?"

By overlaying a derivation from a reference photo upon art produced from it, rather than (as is usual) withholding it from view lest the image-juggler be accused of "cheating," AHM presents us with the evidence and asks us to judge. In ways the autographic drawing is different from/better than/ more "aura" -charged than the photomechanical reproduction.

The entire complex whisks us back to the well springs of conceptualism and its notion of the idea being the thing the raw components themselves merely the catalysts of the thought-processes that must take place in the viewer/reader's mind for the work to "work." This is

the opposite of deliberately posing a puzzle without a solution, and likewise of hitting us over the head with foregone conclusions (one reason why conceptualism underwent several near-death experiences in the 1980s). If artists perform all the work, there is nothing left for the viewer/reader to do. So too if they do none of it. Art that is completely transparent is as invisible as art that is completely opaque. The key is not to keep us guessing but to keep us looking.

As Hodler tersely put it, "*Let us sum up.*" On the fourth wall of the long, rectangular room, separated from what has already been described by an entrance/exit-way looking out into two other galleries (which, during the installation of *S/D III* housed retrospective exhibitions by Eric Cameron and Patrick Thibert),

AHM made a large charcoal drawing based, once again, on the first panel of *As dark as the grave*. Below it, he stationed an antique, double-drawer wooden table, which he found in an AGW storage vault. In the half-opened left-hand drawer he placed in mimicry of rolled-up dinner napkins, scrolled Photo copies of pages from RB's railway log-books (on which appears the signature of one of the victims of the train-wreck), acetate photocopies of the first RB panel, and images from the *Other Lives* catalogue. On the top of the table stands a wax-sealed copy of this publication, opened at the spreads devoted to *As dark as the grave*, with the phrases "to realize a personal memorial," and the words "testimony" and "interrogation" revealed. Over the images of the RB panels can be detected what AHM describes as "a flowing of tear-like streams of wax, whose interval creates the 'zones of sorrow.'" Tears of clear wax, not opaque, tar-like roofing cement. But serving something of the same additive/ subtractive function.

Randomly arranged around this post-literary object is a leaf-like scattering of loose, unframed tracing-paper drawings and colour photo-prints (including ones depicting works-in-progress in AHM's studio). Leaning on the wall is a photocopy-on-glass of the fourth panel of *As dark as the grave*. *Still life: nature morte*. And projecting into the room, like an accusatory finger, the drawer points back to where it all began, the six monitory/co-memorial panels of *As dark as the grave*.