Digital Materialisms:

Information Art In English Canada, 1910-1978

by

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Abstract

Information art has a long history in English Canada. The multidisciplinary production of Bertram Brooker (1888-1955) is paradigmatic of early-twentieth-century English-Canadian artists’ distinctive responses to, and interventions within, the channels of an emergent social formation characterized by an unprecedented circulation of “information.” Brooker’s counter-hegemonic renderings of information as a corporeal and qualitative alternative to the mathematical frameworks embraced by American peers cleared a path for a subsequent generation of information artists inspired by the percepts of Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), notably the Vancouver-based N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. (1966-1978). Like Brooker before them, NETCO’s co-presidents would attribute somatic and ontological meanings to information that trouble the cognitive, linguistic and structuralist frameworks conventionally mobilized by discussions of Conceptual art.

In tracing the sources of this discourse network to the Canadian-born British proto-media theorist Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), as well as its subterranean legacy in the Postminimalism of Robert Smithson (1938-1973), this study simultaneously troubles essentializing narratives of English-Canadian identity that problematically project
representations of Canadianicity onto the territorial borders, and terrain (or “landscape”), of the nation state. Inspired in equal measure by recent developments in media archaeology and a resurgent scholarly interest in McLuhan, detailed investigations of discrete information media and instrumentalities are woven into a trajectory of progressive “informationalization” coterminous with the rise of an information society.

Through original readings of archival materials and other primary sources, this dissertation argues for a revised understanding of information art produced in and beyond the borders of English Canada as articulating a critique of transcendence. Artists and thinkers implicated in the common “discourse network” delineated in these pages harnessed information concepts and information media to express shared visions of immanence. This dissertation historicizes and marterializes these non-technological visions of information by undertaking an archaeology of specific media and discourses.
Many thanks are due to my supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Legge, for her constant support and encouragement of this project through all stages of its development. I am grateful to my committee members, Dr. Jordan Bear and Professor Barbara Fischer, as well as my external readers, Dr. William Staw and Dr. SeungJung Kim, for their helpful insights and suggestions at all junctures. I would also like to thank the librarians and archivists of the Archives of American Art and the University of Manitoba’s Archives and Special Collections, for their assistance in accessing materials from the Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt papers and the Bertram Brooker papers respectively. I am grateful to Amy Marshall Furness of the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the Art Gallery of Ontario for her assistance with the Iain Baxter& fonds. My dissertation research would not have been possible without the generosity and insights of John Brooker and the Brooker Estate as well as IAIN BAXTER& and Louise Chance Baxter&. Finally, I want to thank my patient wife, Kate Dumoulin, and my parents, Ken and Tina Lauder.
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INTRODUCTION

[A]ll that mass of words is vain which men have devised and ranged against the senses.¹

Je n’ai pas de système … .²

Changing concepts of “information” are a persistent feature of art theory and practice in English Canada during both the modern and contemporary periods. Even prior to the recent informational turn in art criticism and historiography,³ the prophetic speculations of Marshall McLuhan ensured Canada’s place at the vanguard of information art and information society discourse. Preceding the American sociologist Daniel Bell’s influential analyses of expanded service-sector labour under post-industrial conditions by more than a decade,⁴ as early as the late 1950s McLuhan was describing the features of an “information society.”⁵ Long prior to the emergence of such art-and-technology projects as Experiments in art and Technology (E.A.T.), McLuhan was, moreover, busy

exploring the new media as “art forms,” and has himself been described as “an artist playing with percepts and affects.” Although his aesthetically- and theologically-motivated insights were looked upon with growing suspicion by academics following an initial period of celebrity and influence in the mid-1960s, particularly in the arts, recent years have witnessed renewed interest in McLuhan, accelerated by centennial celebrations of his birth held in 2011.8

Yet McLuhan’s pervasive influence on the arts in Canada, and, in particular, the impact of his meditations on the features of an emergent information society, remains understudied. If anything, his purloined relationship to the visual arts is hiding in plain sight in recent studies of Conceptual art in Canada.9 The research of Kenneth Allan stands out as illuminating McLuhan’s theorization of the defamiliarizing “counterenvironment” brought into visibility by the artist, in McLuhan’s account, as a persuasive prototype for much installation and environmental art of the 1960s and 1970s in both Canada and the United States.10 Yet the specifically “informatic” dimensions of McLuhan’s writings are downplayed by Allan, even in his insightful reading of the eminently McLuhanesque counterenvironment staged by curator Kynaston McShine for

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the era-defining MoMA exhibition, “INFORMATION” (1970). Where McLuhan’s speculations on information do appear in this literature, they tend to be invoked in relation to networked technologies of data transmission rather than in connection with the ontological and perceptual foci of the media analyst’s own writings. Only Richard Cavell and Donald Theall have discussed McLuhan’s critical dialogue with American information theory and cybernetics at length.

This dissertation sets out to address this gap by attending to the specificities of McLuhan’s influential information ontology, which served as a primary source for artists including Iain Baxter/N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Robert Smithson, and General Idea. For these and other artists of the conceptual generation working both within and outside the geographic boundaries of English Canada, but implicated, through their mutual reading of McLuhan and, albeit often indirectly, such interlocutors as Henri Bergson, George Berkeley and Wyndham Lewis, within a shared “discourse network,” media analysis operated as a proxy form of art theory. Other artists for whom the same claim could be made, though not explored in depth in these pages, include Les Levine, Intermedia and

14 “Discourse network” is German media theorist Friedrich Kittler’s term—adapted from Michel Foucault’s foundational studies of the disciplinary conditions of possibility for the emergence and reproduction of scientific discourses—for the materialist, and specifically mediatic, preconditions of both aesthetic and scientific formations. See Friedrich A. Kittler, Discourse Networks, 1800/1900 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); see also Michel Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge (1972; repr., London; New York: Routledge, 2002); Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (1970; repr., London; New York: Routledge, 2002).
Intersystems—thereby attesting to the general currency of media analysis as a substitute form of art theory in English Canada during the 1960s.

But this is not a study about McLuhan. Although Chapters 2 and 3, in particular, are dominated by original, close readings of texts by the media analyst, it is McLuhan’s claims about “information,” and what I describe as the neo-Stoic cosmology of information sketched by his sixties writings, which guide my investigation of the distinctive forms of information art that they spawned. Even more than McLuhan himself, the specifically informatic content of his thought has been consistently undertheorized. This is even more true in Canada, and within the perpetually anachronistic field of Canadian art history, which has—with the exception of occasional efforts, mostly authored by artists and curators—failed to register Canada’s rich vernacular traditions of critical information discourse and distinctive forms of information art.  

Although exemplary of the recurring concerns of information art in English Canada, McLuhan’s sensorial and social claims about information as a medium of translation between the organs of perception and the organism and its environment, do not in themselves exhaust the conditions of possibility for the emergence of an informatic paradigm in Canada. Following the example set by Cavell’s comprehensive study of McLuhan’s sources and network of influence in *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography*, this dissertation will also explore participants in what Paul Tiessen has

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termed the “pre-McLuhan body of Canadian media theory” of the interwar period. In particular, the far-reaching, if highly ambivalent, legacies of the Canadian-born British artist and author Wyndham Lewis will be studied in relation to a subterranean tradition of Canadian Bergsonism that Stephen Crocker has recently analyzed as foundational to McLuhan’s media metaphysics. In revisiting Lewis’s catalytic role in the emergence of the so-called Toronto School of Communication (a retrospective label for a loose grouping of communications thinkers centred at the University of Toronto, including Innis and McLuhan) and the innovative forms of information art that the School nourished during the sixties, this study will also trouble a growing literature devoted to what has been termed “Canadian Vorticism.” I will argue that the antihumanist Lewis, whose polemical writings on the effects of modernization on modalities of perception and social organization owe a disavowed debt to Bergson, were read by such figures as Innis, McLuhan and the multidisciplinary artist and proto-communications analyst

Bertram Brooker as a source of information about the very Bergsonian concepts that were Lewis’s putative objects of critique.

Brooker’s early exploration of census data and statistical techniques in his marketing writings beginning in at least 1921 establish a biopolitical context for interpreting the streamlined, “composite” bodies figured by his semi-abstract canvases of the mid-1920s—which were exhibited alongside subsequent non-objective paintings as part of his 1927 exhibition at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto, the first solo show of abstract art in Canada—as the products of a proto-informational vantage on subjectivity and the computational management of populations. Brooker’s proto-informatic understanding of data as a of “flux” compatible with Bergson’s theses on “virtuality” (as a real but un-actualized condition of perpetual becoming) is representative of the plastic condition attributed to “information” in the discourses upon which both the Vancouver-based “critical company” N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. and the American artist Robert Smithson were subsequently to draw.20 The proto-informatic dimensions of Brooker’s practice underline the longue durée of processes of “informationalization” later taken up, and significantly re-conceptualized to meet the requirements of altered circumstances, by NETCO, Smithson and General Idea.21 The entanglement of statistics and Bergsonian virtuality found in Brooker’s art and writings underlines the pre-digital origins of computational techniques and of conceptual methodologies in Canada. While explicitly not a study of conceptualism, this dissertation seizes upon the early interchangeability of the terms

21 This reading of the information society as the product of intensified processes of modernization, rather than of complete epistemic rupture, echoes the arguments of such information society scholars as Christopher May and Frank Webster. See Christopher May, The Information Society: A Sceptical View (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002); Frank Webster, Theories of the Information Society, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006).
“Conceptual art” and “Information art” to generate new readings of projects conventionally categorized as conceptual.\(^{22}\)

In contrast to international, and particularly American, contemporaries, participants in the discourse network that is the subject of investigation in these pages were not primarily concerned with information as the symptom of an “aesthetic of administration” attributed to managerial capitalism,\(^{23}\) nor computerization and the corresponding socio-economic figure of the “network,”\(^{24}\) nor occupational shifts and the transition from a manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy,\(^{25}\) nor as a form of knowledge representation—particularly as the later motif features in a literature generated by the so-called “archival turn.”\(^{26}\) Information figures in the work and thought of the artists and


theorists studied here, rather, as the manifestation of an imagined ontological
transformation, of which these other factors were seen to be signs. The informatic
episteme paradoxically substituted ways of being, for ways of knowing. Those ways of
being were frequently imagined in collective and relational terms that—as discussed in
Chapter 2—we would recognize today as specifically posthumanist. The prophesized
“translation” from and analogical to an electronic condition described by McLuhan’s
writings of the 1960s as promising nothing less than a restoration of the “harmony of all
being,”27 is representative of the kinds of claims made about information by the other
figures implicated in the English-Canadian discourse network studied in these pages.
Artists and thinkers participating in this network proposed contextual,28 embodied,29 and
qualitative alternatives to the dominant mathematical models of information championed
by American contemporaries—from the statistical techniques of behaviorism to the
engineering model of communication developed by Claude E. Shannon and Warren
Weaver. These concerns align English-Canadian artists’ and thinkers’ creative
transformations of hegemonic representations of information with the sociological
orientation of Lev Manovich’s productively expansive description of “info-aesthetics” as
“those contemporary cultural practices that can be best understood as responses to the
new priorities of information society: making sense of information, working with

6.
28 The contextual character of information as it figures in the work of Iain Baxter and of the N.E. Thing Co.
Ltd., in particular, invites comparisons with Richard Cavell’s discussion of McLuhan’s redescriptions of the
communication channel as “noise”: “what they call ‘NOISE,’ I call the medium,” Cavell cites the media
29 This aspect of the English-Canadian discourse on information strongly anticipates the critique of the
disembodied (and tacitly masculinist) frameworks of first-generation cyberneticians mounted by Hayles.
See N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and
information, producing knowledge from information.” For English-Canadian artists and thinkers, information was understood to be material, but non-mathematical. Yet a recurring theme of subsequent chapters will be how number re-surfaces in these same artists’ practices as a return of the repressed.

In some respects, the ontological perspective embraced by participants in this English-Canadian discourse network on information can be seen to constitute a variation on the antimodernism embraced by the Group of Seven. But whereas members of the Group converted their antimodernist sentiments into symbols of nationhood grounded in the physical territory to which they thereby laid claim, English-Canadian information artists and the theorists upon whom they drew mounted a counterintuitive appeal to media and technology in order to project their antimodern, but also resolutely cosmopolitan, agendas. As it is articulated in English Canada, the informatic thereby comes to resemble the archaic futures imagined earlier by Futurist and Vorticist artists as an uneasy compromise between competing pressures of modernization and tradition. The ontological status attributed to information by the protagonists of English-Canadian information art simultaneously suggests a resonance with the tradition of Canadian idealism from which the writings of Innis, in particular, drew early inspiration. Yet,

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31 “Based on a conflation of avant-gardism and arts-and-crafts aestheticism, [the Group of Seven’s polemic] was nothing less than an all-embracing critique of modern production, both artistic and industrial. … [T]he Group were antimodernists … .” Lynda Jessup, “Bushwhackers in the Gallery: Antimodernism and the Group of Seven,” in Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity, ed. Lynda Jessup, 130-52 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 131-32.
33 Innis credited his former McMaster instructor (and Baptist minister) James Ten Broeke for stimulating his lifelong concern with the question, “Why do we attend to the things to which we attend?” Harold A. Innis, The Bias of Communication, 2nd ed. (1951; repr., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), xliii;
information is described in materialist, and specifically embodied, terms that significantly trouble the mystic and transcendental values of idealism (as well as the “dematerialization” historically attributed to first-generation Conceptual art produced “in the mode of information”). To some extent, the sensorial status attributed to information by Canadian artists and thinkers resonates with the affective qualities explored by the informatically-motivated artists studied by Eve Meltzer, though the structuralist sources of Robert Morris and Mary Kelly implicate their work within a different genealogy, and a different set of concerns and strategies, than the Berkeleian / Bergsonian / Lewisian / McLuhanesque lineage within which the information art of English Canada, with its more ontological conception of information, is properly situated. More than a symptom of epochal change, in this English-Canadian discourse network information is specifically conceptualized as a form of immanence. This orientation reflects the empiricist genealogy of information aesthetics in English Canada.

A longstanding critique of historic constructions of Canadian “nationhood” necessitates reflection upon the use of the terms “English Canada” and “English-Canadian” at this juncture. Like Ian Angus, I understand and deploy the notion of English-Canadian identity as heterogeneous, historically contested and internally “divided” (by both histories of colonization and the multiple identifications embraced by Canada’s settler populations). My inclusion in this study of the American artist Robert

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Smithson, who visited Vancouver several times in late 1969 through early 1970, and, albeit to a lesser extent, the Canadian-born Lewis (who spent a lengthy period of self-imposed exile in Canada during World War 2, but was otherwise based for most of his life in Britain and Europe), complicates any easy identification of the discourse network centred in English Canada that is my subject with the arbitrary physical boundaries of the Canadian nation state, or any essentialized or monolithic notion of Canadianicity. NETCO’s frequent participation in international exhibitions and celebrated long-distance communications strategies similarly evince a non-nationalist but situated perspective closer to what Kristin Ross has recently dubbed “critical regionalism.”

This network is to be understood as the contingent product of competing historical and geographic forces that nonetheless solidify sufficiently to serve as a heuristic framework for comparative study. The non-nationalist resonance of information as it figures in the English-Canadian discourse network studied here parallels Esther Trépanier’s recent characterization of the nude in Canada as a genre “unhampered by the canons of … nationalism.”

A comparative matrix emerges from Brooker’s critique of the mechanistic conception of the self and society reinforced by the behaviorist techniques deployed by American counterparts, notably the influential vice-president of the J. Walter Thompson agency, John B. Watson. Brooker’s articles for Marketing magazine also explored differences in

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36 Kristin Ross, Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune (London; New York: Verso, 2015), 73. Given the neo-Stoic genealogy within which I am re-situating McLuhan’s thought here, it is possible to connect the shared cosmopolitanism of the protagonists of the discourse network which I am tracing to the ideal of “cosmic” statelessness espoused by the ancient Stoics. “According to Plutarch, Stoic cosmopolitanism – in which the wise conceive themselves as citizens distributed across an undivided Cosmos, indifferent to traditional States – was inspired by a reference in Zeno’s now lost Republic exhorting all humankind to live as if grazing on a common pasture (nomos). For the Stoics, territory should not be divided up among individuals; instead, individuals should scatter themselves across an undivided space.” John Sellars, “An Ethics of the Event: Deleuze’s Stoicism,” Angelaki 2, no. 3 (2006): 159, emphasis in the original.

buying habits between American and Canadian consumers reflective of cultural differences, with a particular sensitivity to the effects of language and religion in shaping the distinctive features of Québécois society. Like the internally differentiated and porous notion of English Canada that I deploy in these pages, Brooker’s representations of Canada were consistently attentive to regional differences and to the polyvocal character of a state comprising multiple ethnicities and language groups, while always situating Canada within a relational, global context. As discussed in Chapter 1, this multiplicitous conception of Canadian confederation was likely inflected by Brooker’s reading of Bergsonian theory, with its emphasis on the heterogeneity of the Real.

Distinctions between artists’ responses to information in Canada and the United States are less conspicuous in work produced during the 1960s and after, as reflected in the parallel concerns and strategies of the Vancouver-based NETCO and those of its American colleague Robert Smithson. The increasingly post-national outlook inscribed in the practices of these artists registers the growing continentalism of Canadian cultural and economic policy under the Pearson and Trudeau governments, as the defensive nationalism trumpeted by the Conservative administration of Diefenbaker—and affirmed by such intellectual apologists as the philosopher George Grant—was succeeded by a regime of “technological liberalism” congruent with the priorities of an increasingly hegemonic United States. But the sixties were a complex and contradictory period, in which Grant’s nationalist writings were, improbably, embraced by a young generation of New Leftists, as renewed nationalist sentiments fuelled by centennial celebrations

competed with intensified continentalist and newly globalizing pressures. As my analyses in Chapters 2-4 demonstrate, residual signifiers of cultural difference nonetheless persisted within the practices of artists implicated in a common discourse network. This vestigial binarism is legible in the divided reception of shared texts: NETCO’s socially engaged actions distinguishing its sympathetic reading of collective and specifically corporate themes in McLuhan’s writings, reflective of the Toronto School thinker’s encounter with Bergson, from the Lewisian satire of Smithson’s Berkeleian strategies of passivity and withdrawal (Berkeley having informed both Bergson and Lewis, while Lewis, in turn, served as a principal point of departure for McLuhan). As discussed in Chapter 4, the greater political charge unleashed by Smithson’s tactics must be read in the context of America’s concurrent involvement in the Vietnam War. These distinctions can be understood as symptomatizing the enduring distance separating the liberal ideology embedded in the American reception of structuralist and systems theory from the more collective and corporate character of sociality as brought into representation by Canadian artists.

This heuristic re-deployment of Angus’s critical construction (or rather deconstruction) of English Canada self-consciously departs from the narrative of Canadian nationhood as a product of “liberalism” articulated by the editors of a recent anthology that nonetheless makes significant strides in revising the historiographical assumptions conventionally informing the practice of Canadian art history. While the editors of Negotiations in a Vacant Lot advance convincing arguments for treating

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“Canada” as the product of ideological forces, their conflation of those pressures with the liberal values of individualism, liberty, and property does not agree with the findings of this dissertation, which, on the contrary, identifies the defining attributes of Canadian information art as those forms of sociality brought into representation by such collective—but also dissonantly “corporate”—entities as the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. and General Idea. Beginning earlier, with the work of Brooker, this antihumanist orientation assumed the form of an explicit critique of the “self.”42 Rather than the product of “liberal ordering” described by Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton and Kirsty Robertson, the social ontologies embodied by the informatic architectures of these corporate authors—in parallel with McLuhan’s prescient analyses of the business world as a theatre of transpersonal forces—can in fact be recognized as heralding subsequent transformations in the economy conventionally associated with neo-liberalism, including decentralization, networked subjectivity, and “sharing” as an economic model.

The critique of liberalism advanced by contributors to Negotiations in a Vacant Lot unintentionally preserves and, indeed, paradoxically renews a longstanding discourse on “landscape” as the privileged signifier and arena of English-Canadian nationalism. Even as it is the explicit aim of the editors to challenge this tradition—even including its deconstruction by John O’Brian and Peter White in Beyond Wilderness—Negotiations in a Vacant Lot’s conflation of “nation” with “arbitrary borders” unintentionally smuggles the notion of landscape back into its revisionist discussion of nationhood as an ongoing

42 In his notes for the unpublished novella Jevon, Brooker wrote that, “Too much emphasis always on the individual soul, on the Self, rather than on the raising of the level of the race. Those religions (the Eastern, particularly) that have got perhaps nearest the truth, and have learned that the Self must be destroyed, prompt men to destroy Self within the Self by Self’s power, rather than by forgetting Self and devoting one’s self to the regeneration and alleviation of the race, which is the Infinite, suffering.” Bertram Brooker, “Plot,” Jevon, August 18, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 2, my emphasis.
process of liberal and neo-liberal construction.\(^{43}\) The spectre of landscape similarly haunts the otherwise insightful scholarship of Charity Mewburn, Jayne Wark and William Wood on the “marginal” tactics practiced by NETCO as a displacement of Canada’s wilderness rhetoric—wherein arctic periphery and the “Terminal City” of Vancouver are claimed as new loci in a mythic topography,\(^{44}\) albeit one in which the global communications channels of an emergent information society have supplanted the transcontinental railways and waterways of an obsolete staples economy described earlier by Harold Innis.

In contrast to the enduring “landscape” character of information as it figures (whether as “map” or as the circuits of long-distance communication) in the critical writings of these authors, information is primarily rendered by the artists and thinkers studied in these pages as a medium for challenging the transcendental claims of classical Western aesthetics and metaphysics. Even the theologically-inflected writings of McLuhan reveal the influence of Stoic physics and of the immanent ontology of the medieval Catholic philosopher Duns Scotus, thereby lending his analyses an immanent orientation that significantly departs from the idealist legacy of Clement Greenberg’s neo-Kantian aesthetics in English Canada. Information is the sign, rather, of a materialist aesthetics and of a univocal conception of being. Although rarely discussed directly by McLuhan, Bergson’s critique of intelligence and language had a formative impact on the immanent status that he attributed to information. This is evident in a crucial passage in

\(^{43}\) See John O’Brian and Peter White, eds., *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* (Montréal; Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007).

"Understanding Media," in which McLuhan distinguishes between Bergson’s characterization, in *Creative Evolution*, of consciousness and language as effecting an artificial separation of the senses, from the integral and “preverbal” character computation:

Language extends and amplifies man but it also divides his faculties. … Bergson argues in *Creative Evolution* that even consciousness is an extension of man that dims the bliss of union in the collective unconsciousness. Speech acts to separate man from man, and man from the cosmic unconscious. … Our new electronic technology that extends our senses and nerves in a global embrace has large implications for the future of language. Electronic technology does not need words any more than the digital computer needs numbers. Electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalization whatever. … The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be, not to translate, but to by-pass languages in favour of a general cosmic consciousness which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by Bergson.⁴⁵

As in the writings of Bergson before him, McLuhan transforms the Kantian categories of space and time into the contingent and malleable products of the senses and society. Writing in reference to the Bergsonian conception of space advocated by the leading theorists of Puteaux Cubism, Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, Bergson scholar Mark McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 79-80.
Antliff states that, “Space is no longer an absolute category of experience, but a relative one—relative to our sensory faculties, and secondarily, to a given culture’s accepted conventions of artistic representation.” The elasticity and heterogeneity of Bergsonian duration marks a fundamental break with the “immutable form” of Kantian time as an a priori presentation. Bergson’s space-time discourse is equally symptomatic of the changing percepts of space and time brought into representation by the modernist artists and writers studied by Stephen Kern, and, in the Canadian context, by Jody Berland and Richard Cavell.

The non-dialectical dualism of Bergsonian space-time discourse was a significant motor for the emergence of “digital” (but not necessarily computational or technological) ontologies articulated by English-Canadian artists and theorists across the twentieth century, from the antinomies of space and time analyzed by Richard Cavell—memorably allegorized by Wyndham Lewis through the Zoroastrian figures of Ozman and Ahriman—to the binaries of sender and receiver, zero and one, found in the work of the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. and Robert Smithson. This trajectory parallels the transition “from

50 See Wyndham Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled (1926; repr., Haskell, 1972), 15. In his 1954 monograph on Lewis, McLuhan’s former student Hugh Kenner drew attention to a similarly dualistic representation by the British artist-author, on the cover of his anti-war pamphlet Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!, of “two figures, closely matched, … at each other’s throats, instead of a single monster … .” Hugh Kenner, Wyndham Lewis (London: Methuen, 1954), 60. The proto-digital binarism of this cosmological figure is also recognizable in Lewis’s subsequent depiction, in Book Two of The Human Age, of “the great Mazdean Principles of Light and Dark, of the Good and the Bad, locked in a fearful embrace … .” Wyndham Lewis, The Human Age, Book Two (London: Methuen, 1955), 118.
51 “[W]ith Smithson, the entropic flattening of the evolutionary, organic time—progress, again—so dear to Kepes was registered on the face of each crystal and in each frame of the film, within a cybernetically
energy to information,” traced by twentieth-century artists as they shifted from thermodynamic to informatic frames of reference, documented by Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson.52

The Bergsonian image of time as embodied, non-rational duration is rooted in traditions of empiricism that view temporal relations as a synthesis of habit.53 The priority accorded to custom by Gilles Deleuze in his influential, neo-Bergsonian reading of David Hume is reflective of empiricism’s pragmatic orientation: “knowledge,” cautions Deleuze, “is not the most important thing in empiricism, but only the means to some practical activity.”54 According to the post-structuralist philosopher, this utilitarian epistemology anticipates the practical bias attributed to the intellect by Bergson.55 Above all, empiricism is generative of an inventive subject. Indeed, “fiction becomes a principle of human nature” in Hume’s philosophy, according to Deleuze;56 the imagination, not the given (as is often assumed in discussions of empiricism), giving shape to the world.57

The constitutive role of custom and the mind’s inborn tendency to “delirium and madness” in empiricist frameworks troubles the false Kantianism haunting Canadian art historiography—not only in the guise of a lingering formalism, but also as a deceptively

54 Deleuze, Empiricism and Subjectivity, 107. “It is not necessary to force the texts in order to find in the habit-anticipation most of the characteristics of the Bergsonian durée or memory. Habit is the constitutive root of the subject, and the subject, at root, is the synthesis of time—the synthesis of the present and the past in light of the future.” Deleuze, Empiricism and Subjectivity, 92-93.
55 “What is denounced and criticized is the idea that the subject can be a knowing subject. Associationism exists for the sake of utilitarianism. Associationism does not define a knowing subject; on the contrary, it defines a set of possible means for a practical subject … .” Deleuze, Empiricism and Subjectivity, 120-21.
56 Deleuze, Empiricism and Subjectivity, 80, emphasis in the original.
57 “[E]mpiricism is a philosophy of the imagination and not a philosophy of the senses.” Deleuze, Empiricism and Subjectivity, 110.
idealizing picture of empiricism itself.\textsuperscript{58} The space-time and ontological visions of the artists and thinkers explored in these pages can be recognized as the products of precisely such states of collective hallucination as described by Deleuze.

“Information” as it figures in English-Canadian information art and theory discovers a precedent in the “collection of ideas” coextensive with the imagination in Hume’s philosophy.\textsuperscript{59} The imagination’s “flux of perceptions” resembles the sensorial condition,

\textsuperscript{58} Deleuze, \textit{Empiricism and Subjectivity}, 83. See, for instance, Mark A. Cheetham’s reading of the empiricist dynamics of William Hogarth’s aesthetics, in which Cheetham re-contains the radical potential of the eighteenth-century artist-theorist’s insistence on beauty’s basis in “habit” within a Kantian framework of legislative “judgment”: “Beauty is empirical; as the serpentine line, it can be captured and duplicated. Yet in these descriptions the line risks restriction to a rule … . … [Hogarth] strives to keep the eye of his readers cycling between the text and his illustrations, not with the intent to replace ancient sculpture or canonised art generally, but rather to reanimate it in line with valid contemporary judgement. Independent looking – looking ‘in English’ – is revisionary, \textit{not} radically iconoclastic. It is the counter authority provided by the liberated eye.” Mark A. Cheetham, \textit{Artwriting, Nation, and Cosmopolitanism in Britain: The ‘Englishness’ of English Art Theory since the Eighteenth Century} (Farnham, Eng.: Ashgate, 2012), 35-37, my emphasis. See also Mark A. Cheetham, \textit{Kant, Art, and Art History: Moments of Discipline} (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University press, 2001), Chapter 4. This passage draws attention to Cheetham’s yoking of Hogarth’s liberated gaze to the authority exercised by a faculty judgement. The repeated misrecognitions and visual ambiguities brought into representation by the Canadian-born novelist and British army officer John Richardson in \textit{Wacousta} powerfully instantiate the hallucinatory properties and social dynamics of the empirical imagination discussed by Deleuze. See, for instance, this passage: “De Haldimar looked again. ‘I do begin to fancy I see something,’ he replied; ‘but so confusedly and indistinctly, that I know not whether it be not merely an illusion of my imagination. Perhaps it is a stray Indian dog devouring the carcass of the wolf you shot yesterday.’” John Richardson, \textit{Wacousta; Or, The Prophecy}, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: A. Waldie, 1833), 26. In another passage underlining the uncertainties and univocity of empiricist vision, Richardson writes that, “Roused by the observation of his friend, De Haldimar quitted his position near the sentry box, and advanced to the outer edge of the rampart. To him, as to his companions, the outline of the old bomb-proof was now distinctly visible, but it was some time before they could discover, in the direction in which Valletort pointed, a dark speck upon the common; and this so indistinctly, they could scarcely distinguish it with the naked eye. … As the dawn increased, the dark shadow of a human form, stretched at its length upon the ground, became perceptible; and the officers, \textit{with one unanimous voice}, bore loud testimony to the skill and dexterity of him who had, under such extreme disadvantages, accomplished the death of their skulking enemy.” Richardson, \textit{Wacousta}, 49-50, my emphasis.

\textsuperscript{59} Deleuze, \textit{Empiricism and Subjectivity}, 22. The empirical imagination constituted by the collection of information forms aggregated by NETCO researchers, discussed in chapters 2 and 3, discovers an unlikely precedent in the nineteenth-century Québec painter Joseph Légaré’s lifelong reworking of motifs derived from the famed Desjardins collection of European paintings (themselves, in turn, being mostly copies). Although Légaré’s involvement in the Patriote uprisings of 1837 has ensured his enduring place in nationalist histories of Québecois art, his association with British military painters and surveyors, particularly Robert Sproule and Pattison Cockburn, simultaneously locates Légaré firmly with the dissemination of empiricist aesthetics in Canada. Légaré’s evolving adaptation of imagery drawn from his collection to meet the changing priorities of his social milieu powerfully illustrates the dynamics of Canadian empiricism and subjectivity. See Catherine Lambert, “Les copies européennes de peinture d’histoire de la collection de Joseph Légaré,” MA thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2005; Louise
and reproductive mechanisms of translation, attributed to information by McLuhan and his artist disciples.  

Deleuze underlines that, in itself, the Humean mind is not identical with subjectivity. The subject is, rather, the mind transfigured by the principles of human nature, which are in turn embedded in the social. In contrast to Kant’s legislative morality, Hume views the social as constituted by “profoundly creative, inventive, and positive” solutions to shared utilitarian problems. Whereas Kant’s moral law appears as “the pure form of universality,” Humean ethics is a creative product of the social. As a form of relation between the ideas of the imagination, Humean temporality is similarly subject to evolving social conventions. The impact of Berkeley’s and Hume’s empiricism on the art of Robert Smithson, and its traces in Bergson and Lewis, are discussed in Chapter 4. The long history of empiricist thought mined by English-Canadian information artists marks a significant departure from the more recent “legacy of modernism’s empirical positivism” (particularly as embodied by the logical positivism of Wittgenstein) active in American and European conceptualisms.

Bergson’s pivotal place in this lineage troubles the longstanding aversion to “French Theory” embedded in Central Canadian art historiography by highlighting the counterintuitive “Englishness” of some forms of continental philosophy. The longue durée of English-Canadian artists’ reception of French philosophy evinced by Brooker’s importation of Bergson and Émile Coué into English-Canadian criticism and cultural theory as early as the beginning of the 1920s simultaneously disturbs the claims advanced


Deleuze, Empiricism and Subjectivity, 23.

Deleuze, Empiricism and Subjectivity, 46.

Deleuze, Kant’s Critical Philosophy, x.

by English-Canadian proponents of critical theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s—
notably the Deleuze-and-Guattari-steeped Philip Monk—that, “there is no history [of art in Canada]” (where “history” is implicitly equated with “theory”).

Reflecting this empiricist heritage (as propagated by Bergson, McLuhan and other intermediaries discussed in subsequent chapters), time and space regularly appear in the English-Canadian discourse on information as barometers of changing social habits. Paradigmatically, Innis’s late communications writings thematize the shifting “bias” of successive social formations through time relative to the dominant medium of communication adopted by each society, a genealogy culminating in the post-World War 2 rise of what he prophetically termed the “information industries.” The Innisian antinomy of space and time is derived, in part, from the anti-Bergsonian criticism of Wyndham Lewis: both Bergson and Lewis having derived their theses on the variable, and socially constituted, condition of space and time from the same empiricist premises excavated by Deleuze. In Bergson’s rendering, the malleability of space and time is also subject to the evolutionary development of the organism’s perceptual capacities—instinctual access to concrete duration promising to supplant the more limited, spatial awareness of a geometricizing vision and intellect.

A late canvas by Brooker, Space and Time (1953) (Fig. 1), brings these themes of the empiricist synthesis of space and time, and of the ongoing transformation of space-time perception through Bergsonian processes of creative evolution, into striking visibility. The painting depicts interlocking organic forms resembling tree trunks, the lower half of a human torso, and even a whale, set against a pale geometric backdrop reminiscent of

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65 Innis, The Bias of Communication, 83.
abstract canvases produced by the artist during the late 1920s such as *Evolution* (1929). The embryonic fluidity of the interlocking central forms is suggestive of the “indetermination” that is synonymous with the freedom of the *élan vital* in Bergson’s account of creative evolution as the progressive, trans-species diversification of a primordial vital impulse.66

Brooker’s writings and controversial nude paintings memorably thematize the critique of transcendence and commercial media that are enduring motifs of subsequent Canadian information art. Brooker’s censored nude, *Figures in a Landscape* (1931) (Fig. 2)—which was removed by organizers from the 1931 annual exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA)—has been the focus of renewed attention in recent years, as a generation of emerging scholars has undertaken a reevaluation of the gendered and racialized politics embedded in Canada’s contested legacy of censored representations of the body. Anna Hudson paradigmatically locates Brooker’s offending canvas within a “transgressive” trajectory of the genre in Canada, even while insisting that the nude transforms “personal lust into the emancipatory realm of the spiritual.”67

Pandora Syperek draws attention to the frequently unacknowledged “gendered grounds” on which such modernist narratives of transgression and aesthetic sublimation rest.68 Though conforming to the accepted formula of Edwin Holgate’s nudes—which drew formal parallels between the female form and the Laurentian landscape imagery that served as its

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66 “The degree of independence of which a living being is master, or, as we shall say, the zone of indetermination which surrounds its activity, allows, then, of an a priori estimate of the number and the distance of the things with which it is in relation.” Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 32, my emphasis.


backdrop and support (a strategy that Brian Foss aptly terms the nude as “living landscape”)—Syperek argues that it was the summary cropping of Brooker’s bodies, which lack heads and legs, that rendered them unacceptable in the eyes of the Art Gallery of Toronto’s educational department head, Arthur Lismer, who allegedly worried that “the picture might be detrimental to children … .”69 Lacking context, Brooker’s nude torsos contravened the symbolic naturalization of female flesh that was deemed a necessary prerequisite for its public consumption as art. Where Syperek analyzes Brooker’s reply to his critics in the essay “Nudes and Prudes,” which champions the educational value of the nude as an opportunity for “acquainting children with the organs and functions of the body in an atmosphere of candour and beauty,”70 I want to turn to another text that stages a belated working out of the OSA scandal, and the of the tensions between immanent and transcendental values that it symptomatized.

It may initially strike those familiar with Brooker’s The Tangled Miracle as counterintuitive to claim the 1936 potboiler as an oblique commentary on unresolved questions raised by the OSA incident. Brooker scholar Gregory Betts astutely argues that, “The Tangled Miracle revolves around representation in the media and how it can affect and manipulate the opinions of the masses.”71 Notwithstanding his own, “mystical” interpretation of Brooker’s art and writings, Betts is attentive to the novel’s self-conscious debunking of occultist ideology. But the text’s foregrounding of the body—specifically, the nude female body—and its spectacular disappearance, are not discussed.

by Betts as narrating an allegorical commentary on the OSA’s censorship of *Nudes in a Landscape* and the media spectacle that it sparked. Yet the novel can be read as dramatizing a conflict between Brooker’s own, immanent conflation of aesthetic and sexual *interest* and the transcendental posture of disinterest adopted by his Group of Seven contemporaries, to which the OSA incident drew attention.

*The Tangled Miracle* follows the investigations of psychic detective Mortimer Hood into the disappearance of cult leader Agatha Weir. Weir is the spiritual figurehead of Assumptionism, the “latest and queerest of American cults.” While Weir’s disappearance from her bedroom sanctuary in the Assumotionist Temple is hailed by her followers as the long-awaited miracle that would effect her bodily “translation” to heaven, Hood is called upon to rule out the possibility of foul play. Weir’s hyper-publicized disappearance—while sleeping naked beneath a purpose-built chimney with a skylight designed to facilitate the cult leader’s ascension—notably recalls the circumstances of Brooker’s censored *Nudes in a Landscape*, and the sensational media coverage that it set in motion. Besides Weir’s own nakedness at the time of her vanishing, allusions to Brooker’s censored painting can be recognized in the doors to the cult leader’s boudoir, which feature a “strange modernistic design carved in the wood, representing scores of nude figures … .”

Hood looks upon the beliefs of the Assumptionists (whom he pointedly classes with “My enemies, the Spiritualists”) with unwavering skepticism, ultimately unveiling Weir’s disappearance as murder. Like Brooker himself, he nonetheless entertains the scientific plausibility of “translation”—albeit translation of a different sort:

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72 Brooker [Herne], *The Tangled Miracle*, 7.  
73 Brooker [Herne], *The Tangled Miracle*, 58.  
74 Brooker [Herne], *The Tangled Miracle*, 53.
‘To me it’s a scientific problem. There are a number of possible explanations. A physical body might conceivably pass from three dimensions into four—and consequently disappear. That’s one theory. Then, we must remember, that under certain conditions all solids can be turned into gases. It was thought for a long time that such a change took place only under certain conditions of terrific heat. I am beginning to wonder…’ he smiled, as though pleased with himself, ‘I’m wondering if the story of the chariot of fire—in Elijah’s case—may be an ancient way of describing what we call “spontaneous combustion.” A sudden burning up of the body.’\textsuperscript{75}

Hood’s reference to Elijah invites analogies between the competing themes of corporeality and transcendence staged by \textit{The Tangled Miracle} and an earlier, limited edition text illustrated by Brooker that narrates the life of the Old Testament prophet through Bible quotations, culminating in a spectacular image of Elijah’s ascension in a “whirlwind.”\textsuperscript{76} Strengthening this link, early in \textit{The Tangled Miracle} the reader is informed that, “The ‘translations’ of Enoch and Elijah are regarded [by Assumptionists] as a reward not beyond the expectations of any one who lives a pure life.”\textsuperscript{77} That Hood, a thinly veiled stand-in for Brooker (one in a long line of detective alter egos stretching

\textsuperscript{75} Brooker [Herne], \textit{The Tangled Miracle}, 87.

\textsuperscript{76} See Bertram Brooker, \textit{Elijah} (New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1930), n. pag. The looping trajectory of Brooker’s whirlwind recalls his contemporaneous, possibly Vorticist-inspired, drawing, \textit{Vortexing Upward and Outward Through Vaster Births and Deaths} (ca. 1922-23), which is held by the Robert McLaughlin Gallery and was exhibited as part of my 2009-11 touring exhibition, \textit{It’s Alive! Bertram Brooker and Vitalism}.

\textsuperscript{77} Brooker [Herne], \textit{The Tangled Miracle}, 6. Brooker also informs the reader that, prior to her disappearance, Weir had “become interested in Spiritualism, and it is believed that the date was recently fixed by a spirit voice, purporting to be none other than the prophet Elijah, communicated through a well-known medium.” Brooker [Herne], \textit{The Tangled Miracle}, 7.
back to the Holmes-like protagonist of the scenarios for silent films that he penned in 1912-13, discussed in Chapter 1) does not reject the plausibility of ascension, but merely the spiritualist interpretation of it propounded by the Assumptionists, underlines the critical intent of the narrative as an immanent rejoinder to the transcendental values espoused by those that removed his naked bodies from the OSA exhibition. The backdrop of media distortion and manipulation highlighted by Betts points to the information industries as the arena wherein these competing claims about the body, and ontology, played out.

But the allegory staged by *The Tangled Miracle* is not limited to an ideology critique of the media of communication. Rather, it reveals transcendence itself to be a “product” of the very mystic paradigm promoted by Bett’s reading of Brooker. As Betts acknowledges, Brooker’s non-fiction writings were critical of mystics, including John Middleton Murry. Yet Betts fails to reconcile Brooker’s insistence on a “rationalization” of the spiritual experiences reported by Murry and the Canadian radical psychiatrist R.M. Bucke with his own (Betts’s) mystical framework.

That Brooker’s critique of spiritualist claims in *The Tangled Miracle* was likely intended as a rebuke to the mystically inspired ideology embraced by the Group of Seven is strengthened by the novel’s parallels with an earlier, unpublished manuscript that narrates the actions of another would-be prophet, the eponymous Jevon. While the tenor

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78 “[A]s a gesture parallel to Eliot’s criticism of mystical literature, … Brooker’s novel can be recognized as part of an avant-garde response to both modern society and modern approaches to literature.” Betts, *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature*, 127.
of Brooker’s portrayal of Jevon and of his putative miracles is noticeably less skeptical than his subsequent rendering of Weir, his manuscript notes leave little room for doubt that the circle of mystics surrounding the Christ-like protagonist were intended to satirize the Theosophists Lawren Harris and F.B. Housser, with whom, ironically, Brooker has himself been grouped by some commentators.\textsuperscript{80} Brooker’s notes for \textit{Jevon} make explicit his modeling of the character Manchee on Harris:

Something like Harris, except in position and physical appearance. Under forty. … Supremely confident of his art and rather self-centred, rather wanting to be courtiered, especially in his own studio. Suspicious of newcomers, cryptically sarcastic, tricking them into confessions or statements that he will not like, so that he can quickly be done with them. … As a Canadian almost ferociously patriotic, with a great feeling for the country, which has been greatly bolstered by Whitman. Hesitating to go to Europe or even New York for fear of being seduced from his utterly native viewpoint. … As a mystic he also believes that things are going to happen in this country, indeed are happening.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} See, for instance, Ann Davis, \textit{The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920–1940} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Reid, \textit{Bertram Brooker}. Brooker’s manuscript explicitly pits the beliefs espoused by his alter ego, Jevon, against the Theosophical dogma of the Harris-like Manchee: “Among the characters there must be a man who combats Manchee’s theosophical ideas of reincarnations and seven bodies and all that, with a theory like mine, based on physics, that all is One.” Bertram Brooker, “Plot,” \textit{Jevon}, August 18, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 2.

\textsuperscript{81} Bertram Brooker, “Manchee,” \textit{Jevon}, August 26, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB. Confirming the extent to which Manchee reflected the artist-advertiser’s studious observation of Harris, Brooker notes, “I must observe Harris closely when he comes back. The angular motions of his hands, all to bring out of him what words fail to bring out. And I must get that smile of his when his hair lifts, and something that happens to his eyes.” Ibid.
In striking contrast to the transcendent beliefs espoused by Manchee and Dr. Eyles (the latter being Housser’s counterpart in Brooker’s allegory), Jevon’s illuminations are positively “unmystical.” Jevon’s immanent theology affirms that, “God is in everything.” Brooker distinguishes Jevon’s physicalist interpretation of divinity (as an “overflow of energy”), from “The Eyles-Manchee-Aubrey crowd [who] want to arrive at the infinite without passing through the finite, without love.” The specifically energetic interpretation of immanent divinity that Brooker puts forward in Jevon anticipates Mortimer Hood’s Bergson-inflected speculations on the fourth dimension as a flux of “light waves”:

If there is such a thing as eternity it must be a world where there is less matter and more time. I wonder if I can make that clear. Our ideas of matter have changed a great deal in recent years. To-day scientists are leaning to the view that there is no such thing as ‘dead’ matter—or what we used to call ‘substance.’ Instead of thinking that force acts on matter—moving it or changing it—it is now generally recognized that matter and force are the same thing. It is all force. The only thing in the universe that isn’t force, so to speak, is time. Motion in time is what produces—for us—the illusion of matter. … Force can be rarefied still further, until it becomes practically all motion—and one of our names for such a state—is light. One scientist declared not long ago that if he knew how to devise the tools

82 Bertram Brooker, “Plot,” Jevon, August 18, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 1.
83 Bertram Brooker, “Jevon,” Jevon, August 25, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 1.
84 Bertram Brooker, “Jevon,” Jevon, August 25, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 2; Bertram Brooker, “Plot,” Jevon, August 21, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 1.
he could break up all matter into light waves—there would be nothing but light—a universe of light. If such a state could be achieved, all motion would be at the same rate, and there would be no slower or faster movements to permit the measurement of time. Time would no longer be cut up. It would be all together in one endless moment—in short, eternity. … When a person is converted he is said to have seen the light. Perhaps, after all, it may be more than a metaphor. It may be that a person who thus turns away from matter—from the material world—with all his soul and with all his strength—learns the secret of motion through matter into a world of light—which exists under and above our world, just as this pencil exists under and above the sheet of paper. In other words, this world of light may be something like the sea—fluid and continuous—whereas our world is like a solid net that is dragged through it.85

As an allegory of transcendence, the Bergsonian oppositions mobilized by this astonishing passage from The Tangled Miracle (matter/temporality, measure/fluidity, simultaneity/motion) suggest analogies with the two-tiered structure of Marcel Duchamp’s summative statement on Bergsonian ontology and higher-dimensional geometry, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass) (1915-1923), exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926.86

85 Brooker [Herne], The Tangled Miracle, 196-98, emphasis in the original. That Brooker intended a specifically Bergsonian conception of “eternity” (as the infinite dilation of duration) in this passage is strengthened by his subsequent comments in the unpublished manuscript The Brave Voices: “when conceived as duration in the Bergsonian sense, is eternity—not a ticked-off infinity of years ahead of us, but one huge expanded moment in which all that happens is actually now.” Bertram Brooker, The Brave Voices, ca. 1953-55, box 5, folders 1-4, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, “Manhood,” n. pag., emphasis in the original.
The Large Glass is conventionally read as a commentary on sexual desire. Linda Henderson percutively interprets the glass panels, which divide the work into two distinct sections, as cultivating a “pseudo-Bergsonian contrast … between the upper and lower halves of the Large Glass.” Bergson’s dualistic rhetoric opposed—at least superficially—the geometric and mechanical characteristics of quantitative space and the continuous and fluid qualities of lived temporality (what Bergson termed durée, or “duration”). This schema may have inspired Duchamp’s partitioning of the mechanical bodies of the “Malic Molds,” representing the “Bachelors” of the three-dimensional lower space, and the gaseous “Bride” occupying the upper, fourth-dimensional field. Notwithstanding the Bergsonian sources underpinning the dualistic structure of Duchamp’s Large Glass, Henderson argues persuasively that the artist read the French thinker—whose ideas were embraced by the Puteaux circle of Cubists, with whom the young Duchamp had fraternized prior to their rejection of his now iconic Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2 (1912)—very much against the grain: perversely siding with the mechanical qualities that Bergson attributed to the comic in his influential essay Laughter, as opposed to the intuitive and qualitative values he reserved for art (and consequently vaunted by Duchamp’s Bergson-inspired Cubist rivals). It was Laughter, notes Henderson, that likely prompted Duchamp’s sardonic recuperation of Bergson’s

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88 “This description of the Bachelor’s realm points specifically to its anti-Bergsonian, mechanical quality, since Bergson had repeatedly decried the spatialization of duration by analytical, intellectual systems of thought. … Duchamp’s conception of the Bride’s ‘blossoming’ as ‘cinematic’ further emphasizes the oppositional quality between the upper and lower halves of the Glass: the fluid, continuous, organic motion of the ‘cinematic blossoming’ represents the closest approximation to the Bergsonian ideal of duration—though profaning it humorously as the sign of the Bride’s orgasm.” Henderson, Duchamp in Context, 167; see also Linda Dalrymple Henderson, The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art, Rev. ed. (1983; repr., Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2013), 250.
notion of the “ready-made,” which the artist radically reconfigured through his appropriation of pre-existing, and often mechanically produced, objects as art (in pointed contravention of the Bergsonian virtues of creativity and intuition valorized by his Puteaux counterparts). 89

Duchamp’s reading of Bergsonian oppositions against the grain sets a precedent for the anti-Bergsonian maneuvers of Wyndham Lewis and Robert Smithson explored in Chapter 4. Parallels with, and divergences from, the practices of the latter artists and the Bergsonian allegory of Brooker’s Tangled Miracle are, however, more ambiguous. Recalling the absurd physicalism embodied by Duchamp’s four-dimensional Bride, whose “elevator of gravity” Henderson interprets as a reference to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, 90 Brooker’s alter ego, the psychic gumshoe Hood, looks upon the Assumptionists’ claims with a combination of scientific skepticism and a lingering Bergsonian openness to the possibility of transcendence within immanence: ascension reconceived as a form of merger with the unbroken continuity of real duration. But Hood’s critical stance avoids the outright reversal of Bergsonian oppositions, and cynical embrace of the comic as a substitute form of aesthetics and ontology, which emerges from Henderson’s careful reading of Duchamp’s allegory of the age-old “conflict between the finite and the infinite.” 91 Brooker’s electro-magnetic rendering of Bergsonian flux as a medium of transcendence within matter sets the stage, rather, for the influential meditations of his compatriot, McLuhan, on electricity as a condition of

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89 “Through his interest in science Duchamp had declared his allegiance to quantity versus quality, to intellect over intuition, to the world of Descartes versus that of Bergson and the Puteaux Cubists. Indeed, Duchamp described himself as a Cartesian in later interviews … .” Henderson, Duchamp in Context, 77; see also Henderson, Duchamp in Context, 35, 200.
90 See Henderson, Duchamp in Context, 181.
91 Henderson, Duchamp in Context, 180.
possibility for attaining cosmic consciousness in the passage from *Understanding Media* quoted earlier. For both Brooker and McLuhan, the information industries represent the condition of possibility for the realization of immanence. Information assumes a comparably ambivalent status in the writings of both Canadians, as the sign of a threatening instrumentality as well as a potential medium of ontological restoration and psychic redemption.

Where Hudson and Syperek productively read Brooker’s censored *Nudes in a Landscape* as contravening gendered norms of decorum, the allegory of failed transcendence enacted by *The Tangled Miracle* suggests that it was a more profound violation of the transcendental ontology from which those norms drew their legitimacy that propelled Brooker’s missing bodies. The earlier manuscript *Jevon*, whose failed messiah anticipates the fate of Agnes Weir, reveals that Brooker’s break with the Theosophically-inspired mysticism of Harris and Housser occurred already prior to the artist-advertiser’s disillusionment with Harris and Lismer after they abandoned him following the mixed reception of his 1927 Art and Letters Club exhibition, which the latter pair had sponsored. As early as 1923-25, we find Brooker satirizing the narrow nationalism and mystical pretensions of Harris and Housser—themes to which he would  

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92 Brooker’s use of a scientific vocabulary to describe a monist ontology in *Jevon* likewise clears a path for NETCO’s quasi-scientific discourse of Sensitivity Information, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

93 Weir’s failed transcendence resonates with that of Tavistock, the protagonist of Brooker’s contemporaneous, Governor General’s Award-winning novel, *Think of the Earth*. See Bertram Brooker, *Think of the Earth* (1936; repr., Toronto: Brown Bear, 2000).

94 A diary entry from January 24, 1927 records Brooker’s disappointment with Harris and Lismer: “My pictures went up at the Arts and Letters Club on Saturday and there was a curious silence around the place, relieved only by the whispering of groups who could not come up and discuss with me openly. I came away and walked up Yonge Street with Fred [Housser] and Lawren [Harris] feeling hardened (in the best way) by the experience. They talked of everything else; apparently embarrassed by the remarks they had overheard, and not caring to tell me. … Today at the club was no better. Lismer asked Lawren to say something at 1.30, but after a while he and Lawren went over to the fireplace, talked together for a while and then left alone. … I could not help feeling let down and rather deserted by Lismer and Harris running away without any kind of announcement, or even any notice as to whose pictures they were or what they were intended to convey.” Bertram Brooker, “Diary,” January 24, 1927, Brooker Estate, Toronto, ON.
return in his 1936 potboiler. The missing nude body of Agnes Weir that acts as the fulcrum of _The Tangled Miracle_’s allegory of false transcendence redirects the earlier satire of _Jevon_ in light of the 1931 removal of Brooker’s _Nudes in a Landscape_ from the OSA. The sexualized body is now central to Brooker’s critique of Theosophical abstraction as the sensational object of a prurient press as well as a potential site of immanent merger with Bergson’s *durée.*

The themes of embodiment and immanence explored by _The Tangled Miracle_ set the stage for the case studies that follow. Through a close reading of archival documents and a combination of previously unexplored primary and secondary sources, they set out to historicize the distinct discourse network that developed in English Canada between the immediate pre-World War I period and the late 1970s as well as the changing claims about “information” advanced by artists and thinkers participating within that network. This approach is indebted to the discursive methodology formulated by Michel Foucault and adapted by the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler and, more recently and in the art historical context, by Caroline A. Jones. In many ways, this study extends Jones’s penetrating analysis of the “bureaucratic” discourse formation symptomatized by the late modernist criticism of Clement Greenberg. Yet, the present work can also be said to fill an important *lacuna* in Jones’s survey: bringing into visibility alogical and intermedial projects that sprouted at the margins of Greenbergian rationality. Though fuelled by anti-Kantian ontologies, these informatic projects nonetheless inhabited and redeployed administrative and rationalist forms and vocabulary. Information serves as a placeholder for the threatening promiscuity implied by anti-hierarchical and synaesthetic strategies.

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inspired by the holistic ontologies of Bergson and McLuhan as well as the funhouse mirror-image of Bergson’s metaphysics reflected by the polemical writings of Lewis.

This study is informed, on one hand, by developments in the emerging field of media archaeology,\textsuperscript{96} which guide the studies of specific technologies and instrumentalities found in these pages (Brooker: advertising, cinema and radio; NETCO: computation and telecommunication as well as the corporation and the university; Smithson: cybernetics and mapping). The disparate media examined through this lens discovers a precedent in Innis’s presciently expansive and multimodal theorization of the \textit{information industries}. Echoing Innis’s account of this epistemic formation, the university emerges as a central site of contest between competing visions of informationalization in Chapter 3. On the other hand, the current revival of interest in broader “narratives of media evolution” exemplified by the analyses of Kittler and McLuhan serves as the point of departure for historicizing the shifting claims of English-Canadian artists and thinkers within longer, and ongoing, trajectories of informationalization.\textsuperscript{97} Feminist and queer art histories and theory inform my framing of issues of identity and sexual difference, particularly in Chapter 3 and in the Conclusion. In contrast to European contemporaries, the figures studied here conceptualized gender as particularity—suchness, thisness, or uniqueness—rather than symbolic “difference.” Post-colonial theory shapes my reassessment of Robert Smithson’s earth maps and conceptual travelogues as articulating a vision of post-national space in Chapter 4. The focus on commercial structures and systems throughout this study answers, moreover, William Wood’s observation that, “Toronto’s longstanding role as the national centre for English-language communications, marketing and financial

\textsuperscript{97} Pressman, \textit{Digital Modernism}, 39.
and corporate administration has not been much explored in relation to artistic
practice.”\(^{98}\) This emphasis on business simultaneously complicates a longstanding
concentration on “public” arts initiatives in Canada (whether government-funded or
otherwise) exemplified by the scholarship of Maria Tippett,\(^{99}\) as well as the anti-capitalist
agenda frequently imputed to conceptual projects.

While performing visual analyses of individual works of art, this dissertation is as
much animated by a recognition that the discourses which are the objects of its study
were propelled by a Bergsonian conceptualization of thought as itself constituting a form
of visuality—an “image of thought.”\(^{100}\) The shared visual orientation of NETCO and
Smithson that emerges from this study, in particular, constitutes a significant departure
from established narratives of conceptualism’s “rigorous elimination of visuality.”\(^{101}\) At
the same time, NETCO’s McLuhan-inspired critique of language—another divergence
from “linguistic” orthodoxy—simultaneously challenges the media analyst’s alignment of
literacy with visuality; the Vancouver company performing an indirect recovery of the
Lewisian (“visual”) sources of McLuhan’s sensorial media discourse.

Chapter 1 performs original readings of Brooker’s earliest writings and works on
paper (ca. 1912-15) as responses to recent developments in the European avant-garde that
the Canadian encountered through his 1910-11 travels to New York and London and via
press coverage of the Chicago presentation of the 1913 Armory Show. Brooker’s
participation in an emergent film culture, both as a movie house operator and as the


author of scenarios for photoplays, is proposed as the wellspring of his multimedia modernism. Brooker’s subsequent career in advertising provides a context for reassessing his abstract and semi-abstract canvases of the 1920s as visualizing the Bergsonian themes that he was exploring concurrently in counter-hegemonic marketing texts for leading trade papers including Printers’ Ink. The physiological aesthetics of Vernon Lee are explored as a likely, but previously unexplored, source for the immanent mode of address exemplified by Brooker’s nudes. Despite the aesthetic and qualitative orientation of Brooker’s media program, the Canadian artist-advertiser simultaneously and paradoxically emerges from this reevaluation as an early exponent of the very behaviorist techniques of statistical analysis that he was so vocal in criticizing. Brooker’s multi-disciplinary art and personal philosophy come into focus through this reassessment as largely overlooked precedents for the competing corporeal and informatic concerns subsequently thematized by the Toronto School of Communication.

Chapter 2 undertakes a significant reassessment of McLuhan’s thought in light of the McLuhan-inspired art of “Sensitivity Information” developed by the Vancouver-based conceptual company, N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. (NETCO). Applying McLuhan’s own strategy of gleaning epistemological insights into the dynamics of technological change through close readings of artistic texts, this chapter revisits the Toronto School thinker’s surprisingly understudied ontology of information in light of NETCO’s satirical renderings of an emergent information society in Canada. In particular, the chapter explores conventionally underemphasized dialectic and neo-Stoic elements in McLuhan’s

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102 In Julian Murphet’s presentation, the term “multimedia modernism” refers to modernist writers’ borrowings from new media, preeminently cinema, to generate hybrid forms. I adapt Murphet’s usage here to describe visual artists’ coeval appropriations of cinema as a meta-medium for screening formal developments across platforms and genres. See Julian Murphet, Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-Garde (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
thought congruent with his former student Donald Theall’s portrait of a “virtual” McLuhan, whose digital cosmogony resembles, in often striking ways, the similarly neo-Scotist thought of his post-structuralist contemporary Gilles Deleuze.

Chapter 3 extends this focus on the N.E. Thing Co., carefully studying the sources and political implications of the Vancouver company’s innovative model of corporate authorship. Through a series of vignettes, NETCO’s evolving organizational apparatus is plotted in relation to its original contexts of emergence at Simon Fraser University’s (SFU) experimental Centre for Communication and the Arts—where faculty including Co-president Iain Baxter and the composer R. Murray Schafer attempted to adapt McLuhan’s theses on the multisensory character of information as a holistic approach to arts pedagogy—through the company’s subsequent secession from this McLuhanesque milieu. Following an early period of crisis at SFU, NETCO’s representations of information assume an increasingly satirical inflection, dramatizing the co-presidents’ increasing skepticism of the Toronto School thinker and consequent turn back to an earlier interest in Western popularizations of the Zen notion of the “void.” Unresolved questions regarding Ingrid Baxter’s contested role within the company as a troubling of gendered ontologies of corporate “personhood” receive extended consideration in light of feminist art historiographies, and as a challenge to recent attempts at recuperating the NETCO Co-president’s administrative legacy as a form of “housework.”¹⁰³

Chapter 4 revisits the Vancouver sojourn of the American multidisciplinary artist Robert Smithson, from late 1969 through early 1970, which coincided with his participation in the Lucy Lippard-curated survey exhibition of Conceptual art, 955,000,

and preparations for the notoriously unrealized earthwork, *Island of Broken Glass*. This brief but influential episode in Smithson’s career has been foundational to histories of Vancouver photo-conceptualism, which have tended to position the American’s visits (along with the photo-essays of his compatriot, Dan Graham) at the head of newly analytical and semiotic currents subsequently pursued by artists in the West Coast city—notably Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace. Following the lead of Halina Tomaszewska’s revisionist account of literary influences on contemporary Vancouver art that predate Smithson’s visits (and Graham’s publications), but shifting the focus onto visual continuities between the “scanning” methodologies developed independently by NETCO and Smithson, this reevaluation will argue that the American artist’s interventions are best understood as developing out of his participation in the same discourse network that nourished NETCO. Through his reading of McLuhan and his mentor, the Canadian-born Wyndham Lewis, as well as their shared sources in Bergson and the eighteenth-century transcendental empiricism of George Berkeley, Smithson can be recognized as having emerged out of the same network of conceptual coordinates navigated by NETCO. But the greater impact on Smithson of Berkeley’s “passive” theorization of vision in tandem with Lewis’s “non-moral” satire simultaneously distinguishes the American’s depotentialized and withdrawn approach to the image from the socially embedded orientation of his Canadian counterpart. While Smithson’s inclusion in this study troubles essentialized notions of Canadianicity, this gap also registers differing conceptions of the social, and of the social role of art, embedded within the respective American and Canadian contexts inhabited by the antihumanist Smithson and the more McLuhanesque Vancouver critical company.
The Conclusion summarizes the findings of preceding chapters, evaluating
continuities and transformations in representations of information and information media
articulated by the art and writings of participants in this English-Canadian discourse
network. Additional readings of works by Brooker, NETCO and Smithson serve to
highlight both parallels and divergences in their respective figurations of the informatic.
Finally, a brief study of the Toronto-based collective General Idea demonstrates the
potential generalizability of this study, and sketches possible directions for future
research.
CHAPTER I

BERTRAM BROOKER’S MULTIMEDIA MODERNISM

Introduction

To be great one must reform the cosmos … .

Truth is not above us—it is all about us … .

The multidisciplinary artist and advertising professional Bertram Brooker inaugurates a persistent, and remarkably stable, discourse on “information” and informational media in English Canada as both symptoms of crises in modernity and potential agents of socio-cultural regeneration. “There has grown up a school of advertising men,” wrote Brooker in 1928, “which seeks to classify scientifically the elements of human character. By means of psychological investigations these men hope to chart the vagaries of instinctive reactions. They expect to ‘measure’ the strength of instincts and emotions as the reason-why fellows measure materials and ingredients.”

Echoes of Brooker’s prescient critique of quantitative instruments deployed by the associationist and behaviorist psychologists who dominated early marketing theory can be heard in the subsequent warnings of
Harold Innis regarding the emergence of monopolistic “information industries” in the aftermath of World War 2.⁵ It is likely that Brooker’s earlier comments on the uses and abuses of statistics and other informational techniques in the pages of Canada’s premier business magazine, *Marketing and Business Management*, which he owned and edited from 1924 to 1927,⁶ were indirectly influential on the better known writings of Innis and his self-proclaimed heir, McLuhan. Anticipating McLuhan’s observations on the growing ubiquity of the market researcher’s “chart-image” in *The Mechanical Bride*, Brooker noted in a 1925 article for *Marketing*’s American competitor, the trade paper *Printers’ Ink*, that, “Even coffee has its chart.”⁷

Like the writings of these and other figures associated with the so-called Toronto School of communication, Brooker’s critique of a nascent information society is inextricable from a broader project of corporeal and social reconstruction. Clearing a path for what scholar Judith Stamps has termed the “sound-based paradigm” championed by Innis and McLuhan as an antidote to the spatial “bias” that they associated with the social science of psychology …. The prominence of psychologists among the early contributors to marketing thought indicated also the awareness of those social scientists of marketing problems of the day.” Robert Bartels, *The Development of Marketing Thought* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1962), 48. Russell Johnston similarly notes that, “Although [John B.] Watson himself did not publish on advertising in the 1910s, a number of other behavioral psychologists did. The most prominent was Harry L. Hollingworth, a professor at Columbia University in New York. … His work … was supplemented by the behaviorists Edward K. Strong, Henry Foster Adams, and Daniel Starch, all of whom published extensively throughout the 1910s.” Russell Johnston, *Selling Themselves: The Emergence of Canadian Advertising* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 162. Typifying Brooker’s qualitative critique of informational substitutes for interpersonal communication are these comments from a 1929 article for *Marketing*: “Proof can be adduced without a salesman, by means of a description, charts, pictures, documents, affidavits, government certificates, and the like. But salesmanship is an imaginative and emotional quality within the salesman which enables him to visualize the amount of use or enjoyment the prospect will get from the product if he buys it.” Bertram Brooker [Philip E. Spane], “Is Selling Intellectual or Emotional,” *Marketing* 31, no. 6 (1929): 142.

⁵ Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 83.
hegemony of print-based information media and statistical approaches to social science at mid-century, Brooker’s writings and visual art explored auditory and time-based alternatives to the “opticality” of the dominant formalist paradigm of the inter- and post-war period.

Brooker’s rejoinders to hegemonic advertising are exemplary of the “animistic countertendencies” that Jackson Lears identifies as persistent alternatives to the managerial ethos of efficiency that increasingly dominated advertising discourse and, indeed, everyday life through the course of the twentieth century. To wit, Lears quotes Brooker, writing in the pages of Printers’ Ink in 1925 under the pseudonym Richard Surrey, as defending “the magical power of words to move human feelings.” But Lears does not explore the Bergsonian ontology that Brooker formulated in his advertising textbooks, Layout Technique in Advertising (1929) and Copy Technique in Advertising (1930), which stands out from the survivals of pre-modern carnivalesque iconography that dominate his own descriptions of a “vitalist countercurrent.”

Although Mary Ann Gilies and Thomas Quirk have documented the widespread currency of Bergsonian philosophy in the United States during the first quarter of the twentieth century, Brooker’s creative adaptation of Bergsonian concepts in his advertising writings, graphic designs and visual art constitutes a departure from the carnivalesque pattern charted by

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12 Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 140.
Lears’s penetrating study of commercial culture in this period. The Futurist designs executed by the Italian artist Fortunato Depero for periodicals including *Movie Makers*, *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* during his New York sojourn from 1928 to 1930 may constitute the only rival examples of Bergson-inflected commercial imagery produced in either Canada or the United States during the period studied by Lears.\(^\text{14}\) The Bergsonian turn in Brooker’s output of the 1920s reflects the artist-Canadian author’s “discrepant” situation at the crossroads of European avant-garde movements fuelled by the organic temporality of Bergson and the ascendant culture industry of the United States.\(^\text{15}\) Brooker’s paradoxical harnessing of Bergson’s critique of the instrumentalizing effects of the intellect, and corrective ontology of “continuous creation,”\(^\text{16}\) to sell commodities draws attention to unreconciled antimonies within the Canadian condition.

Notwithstanding the critical orientation of Brooker’s engagements with information, his early application of statistical instruments and census data to marketing problems symptomatizes an emergent biopolitics, in which the disciplinary management of populations gives way to a new concern with what Michel Foucault would subsequently term “biopower,” which he defined as “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life.”\(^\text{17}\) This biopolitical outlook is imaged by the generic bodies populating Brooker’s semi-abstract canvases of the mid-1920s, whose “composite” features and streamlined silhouettes give shape to the statistical concerns of his coeval


marketing texts. The biopolitical contours of Brooker’s statistically-inflected bodies suggest analogies with Michael Cowan’s revisionist reading of the contemporaneous “commissioned films” of the Weimar avant-garde filmmaker Walter Ruttmann. Like Ruttmann’s intertwined modernist and industrial activities, Brooker’s multivalent career necessitates a reassessment of the “Great Divide” that has continued to haunt Canadian art historiography long after the influential critique of high modernism’s rhetoric of “autonomy” mounted by Andreas Huyssen.18

Rethinking the Time of Media

Early Life and Cinema

Brooker was born in 1888 in Surrey, a suburb of London, England. In 1905, he emigrated with his family to Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.19 After working as a timekeeper for the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway,20 he opened a movie house in partnership with his brother, Cecil. The multi-use Neepawa Opera House—which staged plays, some of them authored

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18 “What I am calling the Great Divide is the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture. … The discourse of the Great Divide has been dominant primarily in two periods, first in the last decades of the 19th century and the first few years of the 20th, and then again the in the two decades or so following World War I.” Huyssen, After the Great Divide, viii. See also Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, High & Low: Modern Art & Popular Culture (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Harry N.E Abrams, 1990). This multidisciplinary approach troubles Dennis Reid’s assessment that, “Brooker was most successful when he was able to separate his art from his business,” but builds on the earlier insights of Richard Cavell, Mavor Moore and Maria Tippett. Reid, Bertram Brooker, 21; see also Cavell, McLuhan in Space, 14-16; “Mavor Moore in Conversation with Maria Tippett,” Provincial Essays 7 (1989): 89-90; Maria Tippett, “‘Shape’ as an Attention Compeller,” Provincial Essays 7 (1989): 86-88.


and performed by Brooker, in addition to screening films—was the ideal venue for honing the multimedia modernism that would shape his subsequent explorations of information’s growing prominence within, and intermedial implications for, the media ecology of modernity.21

Brooker’s multimodal program was fuelled, in part, by his exposure to the holistic aesthetic promoted by the theatre reformer Edward Gordon Craig. His return trip to England to visit family during the 1910-11 holiday season would have provided the ideal occasion for strengthening his familiarity with Craig,22 though an autobiographical sketch titled “Years” dates his first acquaintance with the theatre innovator to 1908.23 An unpublished manuscript likely dating from 1912, “The Measure of Gordon Craig,” nominates Craig as “the greatest man alive in the world today,” and identifies the pioneering British theatre practitioner as one of three “Ultimatists”: Brooker’s neologism for the post-Christian aesthetic and spiritual movement that he envisioned himself as spearheading in partnership with Craig and the South African novelist Olive Schreiner.24

Enlisting Craig in a mutual “Revolt against Realism,” Brooker revises the maxim of

21 Anton Wagner writes that, “Brooker’s early activities preceded the Canadian ‘art’ and Little Theatre movement which attempted to elevate public taste and amateur theatre production through the staging of classics and contemporary plays of literary merit. Brooker’s acting and directing for local religious and community dramatic societies between 1911 and 1914 in fact exemplify the kind of repertoire the Little Theatre movement sought to elevate.” Anton Wagner, “‘God Crucified Upside Down’: The Search for Dramatic Form and Meaning,” Provincial Essays 7 (1989): 38-39.
22 “In 1910 Brooker returned to England via New York. That he attended the theatre in both places is certain, but what he saw or why he made this trip is not yet known.” Grace, “‘The Living Soul of Man,’” 5. In his notes for “The Measure of Gordon Craig,” Brooker compares Craig to “one of those children we saw in Maeterlinck’s at the Haymarket a few years ago,” presumably referring his 1910-11 London trip. Brooker [Bartholdy], “The Measure of Gordon Craig,” 12.
23 See Bertram Brooker, “Years,” n.d., box 1, folder 16, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 1
24 Brooker [Bartholdy], “The Measure of Gordon Craig,” 1. “Ultimatism,” writes Brooker, “rejects Christianity because it ignores miracles and forgets its spiritism [sic.]” Ibid., 15. “There are in the world at present, as far as I have been able to discover, three Ultimatists—namely—Gordon Craig, Olive Schreiner, and myself.” Ibid., 13.
aestheticism to sketch a worldly “Art for Joy’s sake.” The Canadian artist would continue to espouse an aesthetic of sensuous immanence throughout his career. Craig’s dual identity as “a violent propagandist” and “riotous revolutionist” (of art) was equally formative for Brooker’s avant-garde path, one that soon fused contributions to the mass media of advertising, film and journalism with modernist efforts in fiction, poetry, theatre and visual art.

It was while operating the Neepawa Opera House that Brooker began contributing journalism and graphic designs to various prairie newspapers. Some of the artist’s earliest surviving drawings, preserved today in the archives of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Ontario, consist of imaginative exercises in layout, typography and trademark design. More than mere sketches, in their sophisticated interweaving of commercial motifs appropriated from popular culture into complex formal designs, some of these works on paper suggest parallels with the “aesthetics of packaging” subsequently explored by the American cubist Stuart Davis. The dense patterns of logotypes found in Reznor and The Romance of Trademarks (both ca. 1912-1915) (Figs. 3-4) exemplify Brooker’s growing mastery of composition and line during his Neepawa years, and may also reflect the artist’s awareness of Cubist precedents gleaned from his exposure to the Chicago presentation of the Armory Show in 1913. The assured draftsmanship and knowledge of European modernist precedents revealed by these works challenge the

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26 For instance, in the late, unpublished manuscript The Brave Voices, Brooker wrote that, “[This] book, in its totality, will be seen to coincide with some of the views of Shaftesbury, who wanted to banish the supernatural so that we could regard the universe as a living whole with reverence and affection. … Nature is enough!” Brooker, The Brave Voices, n. pag.
28 See Betts, “‘The Destroyer,’” 229.
29 Lears, Fables of Abundance, 304.
artist’s own later claim that, “I plunged into painting in 1927 without any knowledge of drawing or pigments.” Other drawings, such as What’s On at the Theatres Next Week (ca. 1912-15), which may have been intended to serve as a headline for the Neepawa Opera House’s film schedule, reveal the impact of cinema on Brooker’s visual repertoire.

Brooker’s exposure to film culture was not limited to screening movies. In parallel with his co-proprietorship of the Neepawa Opera House, he authored scenarios that were adapted by the Brooklyn-based Vitagraph Company of America, the largest US film production company at the time. The resulting series of photoplays starred Maurice Costello, one of the leading stars of the day, in the eponymous role of Lambert Chase, detective. At least three of these shorts have survived, one of which was transferred to digital format and screened as part of a touring exhibition of Brooker’s multidisciplinary production that I curated in 2009. The plot of The Adventure of the Thumb Print (1912) (Fig. 5) is modeled on the detective fiction of Arthur Conan Doyle.

Although *The Adventure of the Thumb Print* adheres to the narrative and realist conventions of a then still emergent classical Hollywood cinema,\(^{34}\) Brooker’s scenario created opportunities for director Van Dyke Brooke to incorporate innovative (for the time) close up cinematography in representing the forensic detail of the thumb print of the title—which appears at one point under magnification.\(^{35}\) Hugo Münsterberg—a Harvard professor of experimental psychology and early film theorist who visited Vitagraph’s Brooklyn studios while researching his 1916 study *The Photoplay*—attributed the development of close up cinematography to “Vitagraph artists.”\(^{36}\)

Brooker’s surviving correspondence with Vitagraph—preserved today in the Warner Brothers archives, which purchased the Brooklyn production company in 1925—suggests that filming of *The Adventure of the Thumb Print* took place under the personal supervision of J. Stuart Blackton, Vitagraph’s co-founder.\(^{37}\) Blackton was directly

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\(^{34}\) “[T]he subject matter of Brooker’s photoplay scripts was non-literary, popular and melodramatic.” Wagner, “‘God Crucified Upside Down,’” 40. “Between 1908 and 1916, the film industry broadly defined the emergent structure of ‘the cinema’ as a set of spectatorial practices and conditions leading to the classical spectator’s absorption before the screen.” Jennifer Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 1900-1923* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 142.

\(^{35}\) “[L]ook here,” exclaims Chace [sic.] while examining the contents of a curiosity shop believed to be connected with the mysterious disappearance of actress Olga Mauve; “Dirty finger marks on the wall over the desk here. They cant [sic.] be the hunchback’s, he wouldn’t [sic.] be tall enough – eh? Looks as if someone had been standing beside him, leaning one hand on the wall.’ And Chace went close up to the wall and examined the marks minutely. ‘See here,’ Hurst,’ he exclaimed. ‘See those tiny imprints of scars – little cuts like you make when you peel potatoes – perhaps he’s a cook at some cheap restaurant – no – you see they’re on the second finger as well – just the thumb and the second finger. What causes that – eh? What does a man do that scars his thumb and second finger?’” Bertram Brooker, “Lambert Chace, Detective,” 1912, box 8, folder 2, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 6. In an ingenious allegory of medium specificity that simultaneously alludes to Brooker’s own position at the time as a motion-picture operator, the perpetrator is discovered to be a projectionist, the cuts identified by Chase being a byproduct of mending films when they become damaged during screening. See Brooker, “Lambert Chace, Detective,” 7.


\(^{37}\) See Anthony Slide with Alan Gevinson, *The Big V: A History of the Vitagraph Company* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987), 2; Richard Abel, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 75. In a 1913 article for *The Photoplay Author*, Brooker stated that, “I have been informed that these pictures were produced by the most competent director employed by the company in
responsible for some of the earliest experiments with close up cinematography in the form of animated shorts, including *The Enchanted Drawing* (1900) and *The Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906), which exploited the potential for filming at close range to generate a form of animation from blackboard drawings that pre-dated cel techniques. While *The Adventure of the Thumbprint* cannot be said to belong to the tradition of avant-garde cinema in which the unrealized, contemporaneous proposal by cubist Léopold Survage of using “film to create an autonomous art of forms in movement” is rightly located, nor even to have pioneered close up cinematography, it is nonetheless significant that this Vitagraph short insinuates Brooker’s filmic activities within a locus of formal and technical innovation. Indeed, it is likely that films based on Brooker’s forensic scenarios would have been among the earliest examples of close up cinematography to reach European audiences.

Of greater consequence than any particular formal innovation (or lack thereof) to be found in the films based on Brooker’s scenarios, is the resulting implication of his visual art within a paracinema that, as Jennifer Wild argues in another context, “challenged the hierarchies of cultural, representational, and epistemological order.”

Poster-like early drawings by Brooker, such as *What’s On at the Theatres Next Week*, bring into visibility what Wild terms a “cinematic horizontality” of immanence and intermediality that

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transgressed the transcendental rhetoric of formalist art,\textsuperscript{41} while establishing a continuum with low-cultural forms and their corporeal and ephemeral modes of address and spaces of reception. The filmic content of some of Brooker’s early works on paper thereby instantiate the rapid diffusion of cinematic conventions across national borders and a broad range of media during the “transitional era” of 1908-1917.\textsuperscript{42}

The survival of two of Brooker’s three extant shorts in European archives is likely explained by Vitagraph’s pioneering distribution of American films to the British and French markets in this period.\textsuperscript{43} Significantly, Wild identifies the gestural imagery characteristic of American film serials as articulating “a field of avant-garde possibility” that was quickly appropriated by Dada artists, including Tristan Tzara, to define an alternative to the theatrical pretensions characteristic of mainstream French film, which had displaced the visceral spectacle characteristic of an earlier “cinema of attractions” beginning around 1908.\textsuperscript{44} The eponymous thumb print of Brooker’s sole surviving Vitagraph scenario—whose translation into the tactical proximity of close up cinematography punctuates the narrative of Van Dyke Brooke’s filmic adaptation—anticipates the ubiquitous manicule, or pointing hand, of Dadaist publications. Significantly, Wild associates the latter with the gestural iconography of “posters for crime serials,”\textsuperscript{45} of which Brooke’s Chase serials could be counted as examples.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Wild, \textit{The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{42} See Wild, \textit{The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema}, 63.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Wild dates the opening of the American film export market to 1909, though Vitagraph had opened distribution offices in London and Paris two years earlier. See Wild, \textit{The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema}, 202; Musser, \textit{The Emergence of Cinema}, 473.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Wild, \textit{The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema}, 236.
\end{itemize}
Wild locates the Dadaists’ *détournement* of the film poster’s manicule within a broader appropriation of commercial tactics “at the service of [the avant-garde’s] own publicity goals.” The Dadaists’ strategic inhabitation of commercial imagery seized upon the disruptive tactility of advertising conventions to interrupt the protocols of contemplative spectatorship inscribed in formalist art and mainstream cinema in a fashion that Wild likens to “the radical time of the instant” theorized by proto-phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard in explicit opposition to the organic continuity of Bergsonian temporality. By contrast, the haptic referent of Brooker’s scenarios would have spurred the artist-advertiser’s deepening commitments to Bergsonian time philosophy through the 1920s and after. Bergson’s non-rational representations of temporality as “duration,” an embodied awareness of that which endures, would have held very different connotations in Brooker’s Canadian context than for the Parisian avant-garde, who rejected Bergson following the popular diffusion of his ideas immediately prior to the outbreak of World War I (following which, Bergsonism was viewed with increasing suspicion as overly compatible with a bourgeois mentality). While emphasizing continuity over Dadaist instantaneity, it is important to recognize that Brooker’s deployment of Bergson in the context of North American communications systems shared with European avant-garde contemporaries an ambition to redirect the temporality of the moving image against prevailing cultural norms (in the American-inflected context of Canada, that of the “spatial” newsprint culture subsequently described by Innis).

The forensic aura of Brooker’s thumbprint also parallels the “criminal index” of the Dada manicule as an embodiment of anti-censorship sentiment.49 Wild observes that the transgressive Dadaist Louis Aragon embraced American serials as a “school of crime” at a time when Swiss authorities were taxing posters for crime films as abuses of public space.50 In a similar spirit of transvaluation, Brooker boasted in a 1913 feature for The Photoplay Author that, “my characters have broken practically every conceivable law of the criminal code, they have murdered each other in hot blood, and in cold blood; they have stolen from each other, swindled each other, robbed, kidnapped, poisoned, counterfeited, all in the most ingenious manner that my perverse brain has been able to contrive.”51 The anti-censorship ethos motivating Brooker’s participation in the then contested genre of the crime serial would subsequently resurface in his rebuttal to the controversial removal of his painting Nudes in a Landscape from the OSA’s annual exhibition following allegations of obscenity. Brooker’s 1931 essay “Nudes and Prudes” reprises the anti-censorship rationale of his earlier defense of crime serials, but re-directs those arguments to the no-less controversial (in Canadian society, at least) question of nudity in art.

If Brooker’s Vitagraph scenarios shared with the interventions of Dada contemporaries a commitment to anti-censorship, the Symbolist ends to which his detective protagonist directed the haptic cues interwoven into their narrative fabric comes closer to McLuhan’s subsequent reworking of the crime fiction of Conan Doyle and Chesterton into a New Critical methodology of close reading. Less explosive in intent than subsequent Dada appropriations of American crime serials, Brooker’s Lambert

51 Brooker [Bartholdy], “The Censorship of Photoplays, 1.
Chase series anticipated the neo-Symbolist logic of McLuhan’s media meditations as allegories of the creative process itself and its transformative re-inscription by the spectator or reader. In The Mechanical Bride, McLuhan wrote that, “The sleuth embodies an attitude, a personal strategy for meeting an opaque and bewildering situation.” As he subsequently elaborated, that strategy involved “working backwards from effect to cause”—a methodology literalized by Edgar Allan Poe’s habit of composing his plots in reverse narrative sequence. Brooker had earlier proposed a sleuth-like technique of backwards motion—derived from similar literary sources, including Chesterton, as well as his own Lambert Chase scenarios—in his 1930 textbook, Copy Technique in Advertising:

> It is necessary to work backward, as it were, in much the same way that a writer of detective stories concocts his plots. … We all know that these writers construct their plots backward, working their complicated network of clues into a growing and ordered sequence that finally brings together a unified and simple situation which gives rise to a murder. In the same way, when you see an advertisement for Palmolive Soap which says, ‘Keep that Schoolgirl Complexion,’ you realize that the idea back of it didn’t drop out of a clear sky.

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52 McLuhan, The Mechanical Bride, 108.
54 Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], Copy Technique in Advertising, Including a System of Copy Synthesis, a Classification of Copy Sources, and a Section on Copy Construction (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1930). See also Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “One Thousand Sources of Copy Ideas—Copy as Dead as a Fencepost or Alive as a Tree,” Marketing 24, no. 6 (1926): 156.
As Brooker’s filmic alter ego, Lambert Chase implicates the multidisciplinary production of the Canadian artist-advertiser within the same cinematic imaginary navigated by the star struck Dada associates Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia. Wild proposes a compelling revision to the “model of polymorphous connectivity” ascribed to Dada’s “diagrams” by David Joselit, underlining their embeddedness in an economy of desire specific to the emergent celebrity culture of commercial cinema. Like the “intersections between media” brought into visibility by Picabia’s machine drawings of the 1910s, which chart the film star’s circulation across paracinematic space, Brooker’s intermedial representations of his gumshoe alter ego in drawings and narrative fiction rehearses an imagined claim to star status that suggests analogies with the “star construct” of Duchamp’s cinematic double, Rrose Sélavy.

Whereas Joselit interprets the polysemous vectors charted by the abstract diagrams of Duchamp and Picabia as mounting an “assault on commodity fetishes,” Wild cannily proposes that the iconicity of Duchamp’s subsequent interventions within the “close up” conventions of advertising and cinematography facilitated, on the contrary, Rrose Sélavy’s “disappear[ance] within the vernacular of advertising imagery, and in a circuit of commodity fetishism … .” Brooker’s graphic translation of his alter ego into a typeface reminiscent of his contemporaneous pastiche of commercial logotypes ca.1912-

56 Wild, The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 72, 81.
58 Wild, The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 85, 98.
15 in a 1912 drawing held by the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, *Lambert Chase: Detective*, underlines the Canadian artist’s distance, on one hand, from the abstracted and anti-commodity vocabulary of Picabia’s diagrams, and proximity, on the other hand, to the parasitic inhabitation of commercial conventions enacted by Duchamp through his paracinematic persona as Rrose Sélavy. Brooker’s play with celebrity personae thereby anticipates the subsequent tactics of media parasitism practiced by Canadian artists such as General Idea; his inhabitation of a commercial logotype clearing a path for the corporate manoeuvres of NETCO.

The lasting imprint of the star system on Brooker’s libidinal economy is legible in such later works as the 1930 drawing *Face and Breasts* (Fig. 6), whose superimposition of planes redolent of the “multiple overlapping images” characteristic of Futurist and Cubist paintings inspired by the proto-cinematic motion studies of Étienne-Jules Marey.59 Wild revisits Standish Lawder’s classic study of cubist cinema as projecting a “kinetic dynamism” inspired by contemporary film culture,60 to argue that, more radically, the faceted planes of Picasso’s non-perspectival surfaces “collapsed the distinction between representation and the lived, spectatorial space.”61 Wild compares the “interspace” defined by cubistic fragmentation to the “multifaceted attraction” characteristic of pre-World War I film screenings.62 With its mixed program of commercial film screenings and live, experimental theatre, the Neepawa Opera House resembled the “multi-purpose exhibition venues” that fuelled the contemporaneous experiments in collage performed

by Braque and Picasso in Wild’s account. The leveling, “horizontal” logic embedded in this intermedial exhibition context may have also contributed to the desegregation of commercial and fine art genres thematized by Brooker’s early compositions of trade marks, introduced above, which recall the transgressive recirculation of signs appropriated from commercial culture found in Cubist papier collé.

*Face and Breasts*’ fetishistic repetition of isolated body parts—the breasts of the title—simultaneously suggests analogies with the discontinuous “moments of sensory affect” privileged by Dada artists under the spell of cinema. While the somatic merchandise trafficked by European Dada artists in their commerce with American cinema frequently limned a criminal index, Wild also draws attention to the eroticism invested in the figure of Musidora: the actress celebrated for her portrayal of the criminal anti-heroine Irma Vep in the cult French crime serial, *Les Vampires* (1915-16). Like Musidora before her, Greta Garbo would subsequently come to incarnate modernity itself through her body’s transformation into a metonym for an aesthetic signifying the allure, and threat, of the liberated “New Woman.” In contrast to the paradoxical absence and invisibility of the ubiquitous, female star bodies diagrammed by Picabia’s abstract desiring machines, Brooker’s homage to Garbo—whose iconic face is fragmented and repeated in *Face and Breasts*—more closely approximates the *épanouissement*, or orgasmic “blossoming,” brought into visibility by Duchamp’s representations of spectatorial desire, such as the 1916 study *Fania (profile).*

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The trademark asceticism of Garbo’s performance style in European productions such as *Joyless Street* (1924) justifiably earned the admiration of artists including H.D. and Nabokov as the epitome of modernist “impersonality.” However, Anthony Paraskeva notes that the commodity logic of the American film industry resulted in an increasingly formulaic output following Garbo’s move to Hollywood in 1925. It is “the coarsened Garbo” of American genre vehicles that is conjured by Brooker’s eroticized representation.67 Less the thrilling embodiment of a potentially threatening female sexuality than a reified component of an Art Deco ensemble, Brooker’s Garbo instantiates Lucy Fischer’s claim that the actress’s Hollywood films “establish[ ] congruity between décor and heroine,” thereby reducing her to an instantiation of “ornamental sculpture.”68 If the moderne re-containment of Garbo’s face and body effected by Brooker’s cubistic rendering of the star stands in stark contrast to the “uncontrollable bodies” conjured by contemporary Dadaists,69 his nude nonetheless stands out—particularly within the Canadian context—for its marked continuity with the conventions of commercial and popular culture, notably cinema. It was precisely this “interested” aesthetic that landed Brooker in trouble over his censored *Nudes in a Landscape*, removed from the 1931 annual exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists at the then Art Gallery of Toronto (today’s Art Gallery of Ontario).70

Like the coeval Dadaist appropriations of advertising and film studied by Wild, Brooker’s *Face and Breasts* harnesses a sensorial and, indeed, sensationalist mode of

68 Fischer, “Greta Garbo and Silent Cinema,” 102, 89.
70 Richard Lofthouse writes that, “[Vitalist artists] objected to the subordination of art to the formal elements of its creation, or what is commonly referred to as formalism and broadly associated with abstraction.” Richard Lofthouse, *Vitalism in Modern Art* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2005), 29.
address to implicate the beholder in a circuit of somatic receptivity and desire redolent of
the early cinema of attractions and subsequent crime serials (to which he had directly
contributed in an earlier stage of his career though his Vitagraph scenarios). But, working
at the margins of avant-garde culture as he was, Brooker’s corporeal interpellation of the
viewer is mediated by the spectre of a Garbo adulterated by Hollywood and an Art Deco
tempering of cubistic fragmentation that the more revolutionary Dadaists would have
surely rejected.

**Theatre**

A more radical representation of the body is found in certain of Brooker’s semi-abstract
canvases of the mid-1920s, first exhibited in 1927 at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto
under the sponsorship of Lawren Harris and Arthur Lismer: the premier solo show of
abstract art in Canada.71 The abstracted stick figures populating such early Brooker
paintings as *Endless Dawn* (ca. 1927), *The Dawn of Man* (ca. 1927) (Figs. 7-8) and the
figurative study for *The Finite Wrestling with the Infinite* (ca. 1925) (Fig. 9) may
constitute Brooker’s attempt to represent the “Über-marionette” that Edward Gordon
Craig envisioned as superseding the traditional actor.72 Interpreters of Craig continue to
debate the precise meaning of his neologism, some viewing the Über-marionette as an
oversized string puppet, others seeing it as a “masked” actor. What is clear, is that the
theatre innovator was attempting to define a non-mimetic alternative to the realist

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Sherrill Grace observed of Brooker’s symbolist play *Within*, which was mounted by Herman Voaden at Toronto Central Highschool of Commerce in 1935, that, “[t]he entire play, including the set, employ[ed] Craig’s concepts of abstraction, motion, and puppetlike acting in order to express warring inner forces … .” *Within* staged a conflict between instinct, reason and the senses within a symbolic representation of the mind.

Joyce Zemans subsequently drew attention to parallels between Brooker’s 1912 drawing *The Next Beyond*—held today by the archives of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery—and Craig’s innovative stage designs, published in *On the Art of the Theatre*. Although Zemans argues that, “[b]y 1927, such illustrative devices have been left far behind,” I want to suggest that the stick figures and geometric “backdrops” of Brooker’s semi-abstract canvases from roughly 1924 through 1927 extend this dialogue with Craig’s abstract theatre. Brooker’s schematic bodies invite analogies with the abstracted

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74 Grace, “‘The Living Soul of Man,’” 13; see also Wagner, “‘God Crucified Upside Down,’” 40.

75 See Bertram Brooker, “Within,” 1935, manuscript 16, box 2, folder 6, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB. Sherrill Grace records that, “In an early fragment of the play dated 7 November 1927, Brooker call[s] for dancers, revolving discs in bright red light, and ‘brain-figures’ on cords. Instinct and Reason are enthroned at the top of the dome (or brain); everything is in darkness at the beginning while the Author and Angel speak.” Grace, “‘The Living Soul of Man,’” 13. This scheme suggests analogies with the roughly contemporaneous canvas *Head* (ca. 1930), reproduced by Reid. See Reid, *Bertram Brooker*, 49. Although Brooker’s plays have been categorized as “expressionist,” the staging of mental phenomena in *Within* suggests analogies, rather, with Hannah’s discussion of symbolist set design inspired by Mallarmé’s “theatre of the mind.” Grace, “‘The Living Soul of Man,’” 11; “Hannah, “Event-Space,” 171. Wagner questions the European pedigree attributed to *Within* and *The Dragon* by Grace, arguing instead that, “The shape of these two plays was not primarily determined by such contemporary European influences but by Brooker’s own religious / philosophic quest and search to express his subjective feelings through meaningful symbolism in a dramatically viable form.” Wagner, “‘God Crucified Upside Down,’” 47.

76 See Zemans, “First Fruits,” 37n61.

physiognomy of the Über-marionette, which, according to Craig, “will not compete with life—rather it will go beyond it.”

Even more than the streamlined figures portrayed in *Endless Dawn* and *The Dawn of Man*, the cubo-futurist decomposition of the body, and integration of figure and ground, sketched by *Evolution* (1929) and *Striving* (1930) (Figs. 10-11) suggests analogies with the minimalist geometry of Craig’s flexible set designs for *Scene* (1908) (Fig. 12), whose cube-like elements “could be lowered and raised to varying levels,” as well as the merger of actor and stage which it called for. The duality of biomorphic and crystalline elements staged by the “scenic space” of Brooker’s *Resolution* (1929/1930) and the final version of *The Finite Wrestling with the Infinite* (ca. 1927) (Fig. 13) echoes the “tension between the infinite space of the cosmic void and the finite reality of the mutable stage” observed by Dorita Hannah in her astute description of Craig’s Symbolist set designs.

The work by Brooker that comes closest to a direct appropriation of Craig’s geometric scenography for *Scene* is the 1929 pen and ink on paper, *All the World’s A Stage*, with its stepped backdrop (Fig. 14). A 1928 ad for Reliance Engravers (Fig. 15) further demonstrates Brooker’s adaptation of Craig’s set designs to commercial ends. The persistent influence of Craig’s anti-naturalist theatre on Brooker’s approach to visual problems during the period of his abstract and semi-abstract paintings is corroborated by his discussion of Craig in an article for *Marketing* on the origins of modernist poster design:

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78 Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre*, 40.
While not too familiar with the earliest origins of modernistic design in Europe, I am inclined to the view that the movement we now definitely recognize began in Germany, and its first expression, so far as I can discover, came through the theatre. The new movement in the theatre throughout Europe was largely brought about by the influence of an expatriated Englishman—Gordon Craig—whose designs for Macbeth, many of them made 15 or 20 years ago, were embodied in a production which recently toured this continent with great success, long after America had applauded all sorts of pale imitations and adaptations of his work. It was in Germany and Russia that Craig was most welcomed, and in these countries his revolutionary ideas took root. The character of his ideas may be summed up in two words—simplicity and austerity—the two principal characteristics of the whole modernistic tendency.\(^{81}\)

Paraskeva proposes Craig’s Über-marionette as a probable prototype for the depersonalized performance style enacted by protagonists of the modernist fiction of Wyndham Lewis, the Canadian-born British author and visual artist. Paraskeva draws parallels between the machinic actor substitute envisioned by Craig and the character of Arghol featured in the early, notoriously unperformable Lewis play “Enemy of the Stars.”\(^{82}\) Arghol’s angular affect personified the anti-mimetic program of the English avant-garde movement spearheaded by Lewis and Ezra Pound for readers of the Vorticist little magazine \textit{Blast}, in which “Enemy of the Stars” was first published.\(^{83}\) Paraskeva further interprets the actions of Hanp—Arghol’s subaltern double, who murders him

\(^{81}\) Brooker [Surrey], “Posters Are Going Modern Too,” 33.
\(^{83}\) See Paraskeva, \textit{The Speech-Gesture Complex}, 93.
before committing suicide—as rehearsing an allegory of Craig’s failure to realize his radical program of theatrical reform in practice. It is equally conceivable that Craig’s Über-marionette and geometric set designs for Scene inspired “the schematic stick-figure” and cubistic lattice of such contemporaneous Vorticist canvases as Lewis’s The Crowd (Revolution) (1915), a possibility that Paraskeva does not entertain.

Craig’s mutual influence on the modernist projects of Brooker and Lewis partially elucidates the homologies between their multidisciplinary productions noted by Gregory Betts, Carole Luff, and myself. Lewis’s Vorticist canvases of the mid-1910s reveal striking formal parallels with Brooker’s foregrounding of simplified figures against a geometric scenography in his semi-abstract paintings of the mid-1920s. Betts’s nomination of Brooker for membership within a group of artists and writers that he categorizes as exponents of a “Canadian Vorticism,” is, however, problematic. While Betts is correct in noting that Brooker was “The first to explore and test the implications of Vorticism in the Canadian context,” his comparison of the Canadian avant-gardist to Lewis is misguided. Brooker’s unpublished notes for a 1927 lecture on William Blake

84 Richard Humphreys, Wyndham Lewis (London: Tate, 2004), 33.
86 Betts, Avant-Garde Canadian Literature, 215.
delivered at the University of Toronto’s Hart House attest to the Canadian artist’s knowledge of Lewis’s monumental work of epistemic critique, *Time and Western Man*, in the year of its publication. But Brooker’s comments strongly suggest that he read Lewis against the grain. Brooker’s critical transformation of Lewis’s notorious anti-Bergsonian polemic in his “Blake” talk is superseded by outright repudiation in a 1931 article published in journal *The Adelphi*, edited by the one-time Bergsonist John Middleton Murry. Brooker writes of Lewis and other “‘new’ Humanists” that, “They cling to the hard outline and the comfortable concreteness of their world. They are cloistered and unadventurous, despite all their criticism of other philosophies as an ‘evasion of life.’” In opposition to Lewis, Brooker champions the “‘organic’ philosophy of creative newness” that he associates with Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead.

Contra Betts’s “Canadian Vorticist” label, Brooker’s mature aesthetic project is more accurately situated within the neo-vitalism of Bergson and the process philosophy of Whitehead. Additionally, Brooker’s early enthusiasm for Craig’s anti-mimetic theatre reforms remained a sustaining interest until at least 1930. Significantly, Hannah notes that, “By 1900 Henri Bergson saw the symbolist’s external figuration of internal life on stage as an expression of élan vital where art and drama could contact that ‘vital impulse’ by offering glimpses into the hidden part of man and nature’s dark and turbulent passions.” The continuities between Bergson’s temporalization of metaphysics and Craig’s Symbolist redefinition of theatrical space as, in Hannah’s words, an “event-

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87 Bertram Brooker, “Blake,” 1927, box 10, file 13, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 6-7.
89 Brooker, “Prophets Wanted,” 192.
space” of dynamic flows, suggests a bridge between Brooker’s Bergsonian sympathies of the 1920s and his ongoing commitment of Craig and other figures that shaped the Canadian artist’s early formulation of Ultimatism.

Paradoxically, the Bergsonian overtones of Craig’s Symbolist aesthetics are fully compatible with Lewis’s indictment of the “time-school” in Time and Western Man, which, as SueEllen Campbell observes, is structured by “patterns of hidden oppositions” that implicate the criticisms of the British artist-author in a vicious circle of anxiety and influence. Like T.E. Hulme and other members of the Vorticist circle, Lewis was an early admirer of Bergson, having attended his public lectures in Paris during the early years of the century. Lewis’s subsequent repudiation of Bergson—in parallel with the disavowals of T.S. Eliot, Hulme and Middleton Murry, among other Anglo-American modernists—coincided with the rapid popularization of his philosophy following the English translation of his hugely influential Creative Evolution in 1911. Lewis’s anti-Bergsonian turn may also have responded to the shifting reception of his thought by Leftist and Rightist audiences. “Bergson provoked a variety of distinct and sometimes incompatible responses,” Sanford Schwartz observes. The anti-positivist orientation of the earlier text, Matter and Memory, was initially embraced by Rightist audiences keen to assert the self-determination of the ego, including Pierre Lassere, Charles Maurras and Léon Daudet. However, Creative Evolution revealed Bergson to belong to what Schwartz

93 See Campbell, The Enemy Opposite, 98.
94 Tom Villis argues that, “the increased popularity of Bergson among the liberal bourgeoisie was part of the reason for rejecting his ideas in 1911.” Villis, Reaction and the Avant-Garde, 24.
terms a “vitalism of the Left” that embraced the philosopher’s vision of a coming “society of creators” as a platform for social reform. This revelation—widely broadcast by the Rightist Action Française—is not likely to have been welcomed by the authoritarian Lewis.

Nonetheless, Bergson’s writings remained an enduring touchstone for the former Vorticist, even after embarking upon the project of full-scale anti-Bergsonian polemic culminating in Time and Western Man, which, Campbell argues, paradoxically adopted Creative Evolution as a “hidden model.” “Their difference,” posits Campbell, “…is simply that Lewis embraces what Bergson has rejected.” It was this covert persistence of the Bergsonian paradigm in the Vorticism of Lewis that appealed to Brooker, who read the British artist-author against the grain as a source of information about the very time concepts that are the explicit object of Lewis’s condemnation.

Canadian Vorticism

Brooker’s fraught relationship to Lewis is properly situated within the ambivalent coordinates of a pervasive fin de siècle debate that Schwartz terms “the vitalist controversy.” Originating amongst nineteenth-century biologists, the quarrel was defined by competing mechanistic and organismic theories of life. In the years immediately prior to the outbreak of World War I, this quarrel was taken up and transformed by a wide range of thinkers, artists and, at its peak, by members of the public.

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97 Deleuze, Bergsonism, 111.
98 Campbell, The Enemy Opposite, 98.
at large, who adopted vitalism’s ideology of “creativity” in support of social agendas spanning the political spectrum. “Bergson,” states Schwartz, “offered vitalism as a coherent via media between [the vitalism of the Right and vitalism of the Left],”101 an ideological plasticity that fuelled his massive appeal (and subsequent eclipse). If Lewis and his future Vorticist peers initially welcomed the anti-positivism of the early Bergson as the harbinger of a vitalism of the Right, Bergson would ironically continue to define the terms of their subsequent anti-vitalist turn. Brooker’s Bergsonian “Becoming-as-Ethics” situates him squarely within the opposing pole of the vitalist controversy in which Lewis’s anti-Bergsonian polemics of the 1920s intervened.102 In contrast to Betts’s claim that, “Brooker was more like Lewis … than any other Canadian,”103 any resemblance to the British Vorticist was likely due to their mutual reading of Craig’s symbolist writings and Brooker’s vitalist counter-reading of Time and Western Man.

A more accurate label for Brooker’s organicist oeuvre would be Canadian “vitalist modernism,” a term that I proposed in 2010 to describe the shared organicist concerns (both avowed and disavowed) of Brooker and peers including LeMoine FitzGerald, Arthur Lismer, and the later Lewis of the “Creation Myth” series produced during his Toronto sojourn in World War 2.104 Betts’s 2005 dissertation on Brooker makes only

102 Brooker quoted in Grace, “‘The Living Soul of Man,’” 8.
103 Betts, Avant-Garde Canadian Literature, 215.
104 Lauder, “It’s Alive!, 95. My 2006 Master’s thesis on Brooker and vitalism had earlier observed that, “Vorticism remains a largely unexplored influence on the development of abstraction in Canada and, in particular, on the evolution of Brooker’s practice.” Lauder, “Marketing Subjects,” 89. In an unpublished 2004 paper, cited by Betts’s dissertation, I suggested that, “future study will elucidate the full extent of Brooker’s knowledge of Rhythm, and the artists later associated with Vorticism in particular, thereby shedding new light on the ‘futurist’ aesthetic of Brooker’s abstractions, first noted by Reid in his Concise History of Canadian Painting.” Lauder, “Brooker and Bergsonism,” 32; see also Betts, “‘The Destroyer,’” 343.
passing references to Lewis and Vorticism, proposing instead a “mystical” interpretation derived from the scholarship of Ann Davis and Dennis Reid. But the diligent archival analyses of Joyce Zemans had convincingly refuted Brooker’s alleged Theosophical or mystical sympathies: “Brooker’s approach to modernism, to the interrelatedness of the arts, to nationalism in art, and to Theosophy, differed radically from those of his colleagues,” noted Zemans; “… Brooker felt no need for Theosophy or any other formal movement.” Following Zemans’s lead, Luff convincingly concluded that, “Brooker did not espouse Theosophy as a belief system.”

Luff productively scrutinized Brooker’s annotations to _Creative Evolution_ (a text that subsequently went missing from the Bertram Brooker Papers held by the University of Manitoba), and hypothesized a Vorticist source for Brooker’s abstractions. However, she ultimately rejected this possibility as implausible, given that the Vorticist movement did not coalesce until after Brooker’s 1910-11 voyage to England. However, my 2006 Master’s thesis noted that, “ _Blast_ included a Toronto imprint, and was therefore available to readers in this country … .” Moreover, my findings explored the possibility that Brooker may have been familiar with the proto-Vorticist work of “Rhythmist” artists grouped around the British Bergsonist painter J.D. Fergusson, and the Bergsonian little

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106 See Davis, _The Logic of Ecstasy_.


108 Bell & Cockburn, listed in the colophon of _Blast_, acted as the Toronto agent of the British publisher John Lane. See Lauder, “Marketing Subjects,” 94; see also Lauder, “It’s Alive!,” 85, 102n35; George Parker “Distributors, Agents and Publishers: Part II, the Toronto Publishing Scene During World War I,” _Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada_ 44, no. 1 (2006): 7–68. Strengthening the probability that Brooker was familiar with _Blast_ is his reference in his 1927 “Blake” talk to “the inevitable splitting up of artistic tendencies into schools and groups, each with their blasts and manifestoes … .” Brooker, “Blake,” 1; see also Luff, “Progress Passing through the Spirit,” 157n55.
magazines edited by John Middleton Murry *Rhythm* and *The Blue Review*.\(^{109}\) Betts has repeatedly emphasized Murry’s importance to Brooker, while ignoring Murry’s debt to Bergson.\(^{110}\) Contributors to *Rhythm* including the future Vorticist Jessica Dismorr, who went on to contribute to *Blast*.\(^{111}\) Whereas Betts argued in 2013 that, “The influence McLuhan took from Lewis in particular, and Pound in general, has been widely acknowledged by scholars and biographers, but this influence has never before been situated within the context of a general Canadian current of interest in Lewis, Pound, and the Vorticist group,”\(^{112}\) in 2010 I argued that, “The vitalist modernism of Brooker, Lismer and Lewis resists conventional representations of the mid-twentieth century Toronto art scene as a cloistered community of mystics. Toronto emerges, rather, as the global marketplace of ideas that incubated the utopian communications theories of Marshall McLuhan.”\(^{113}\) Moreover, Betts’s contention that, “Brooker was not directly influenced by Henri Bergson,”\(^{114}\) overlooks repeated discussions of Bergson in his published texts as well as the unpublished manuscript, *The Brave Voices*.\(^{115}\) But the biological

\(^{109}\) Lauder, “Marketing Subjects,” 84-86; Lauder, “It’s Alive!,” 92.  
\(^{110}\) See Betts, “‘The Destroyer,’” 3, 5, 6, 37, 49-50, 52, 86-93, 105, 114, 125, 172, 209; Betts, “Introduction,” xliii, xlviii; Betts, *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature*, 126-8, 130, 216.  
\(^{112}\) Lauder, “Marketing Subjects,” 84-86; Lauder, “It’s Alive!,” 92.  
\(^{113}\) Betts, *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature*, 192.  
\(^{114}\) Lauder, “It’s Alive!,” 95.  
\(^{115}\) Betts, “Introduction,” xliii.  
\(^{116}\) Brooker [Spane], “Make Advertising Believable,” 75-76, 96; Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Making Orders Flow Downhill,” *Printers’ Ink* 126, no. 8 (1924): 3-8; Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Are statistics More Convincing Than Words or Pictures?,” *Printers’ Ink* 134, no. 1 (1926): 115-125; Brooker [Surrey], *Copy Technique in Advertising*, 217. In addition to these direct references to the French thinker, Brooker’s advertising
metaphilosophy of Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* was but the most influential in a sequence of evolutionary and neo-vitalist paradigms explored by Brooker, including the *lebensphilosophie* of Hermann Keyserling and Oswald Spengler,\textsuperscript{116} the utilitarianism of Herbert Spencer,\textsuperscript{117} the vitalism of Ernst Haeckel and Friedrich Nietzsche,\textsuperscript{118} and Edward Carpenter’s speculations on human sexuality.\textsuperscript{119}

A presentation copy of Lewis’s *Paleface* dedicated to Brooker (Fig. 16), discovered during the writing of this dissertation, confirms a long-hypothesized, but previously undocumented, meeting between the two artists (which, it turns out, took place in September, 1939).\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, Brooker’s annotations suggest that Lewis’s *Paleface* may have served as the inspiration for his late canvas, *Machine World* (1950). Yet the skepticism evinced by Brooker’s other marginalia reinforces the gulf separating his Bergsonian commitments from the British artist-author’s late-Vorticist concerns. Indeed, it is not improbable that Brooker, in turn, served as the prototype for Lewis’s satirical portrait of Charles Brooks, the “Proust-drunken parlour-treader” who guides the novelist’s alter ego through the human “marvels” of Momaco, Lewis’s thinly disguised

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\textsuperscript{116} Bertram Brooker, “The 7 Arts,” August 24, 1929, Brooker Estate, Toronto, ON.
\textsuperscript{117} See Zemans, “First Fruits,” 19, 34n34.
\textsuperscript{118} See Bertram Brooker, “Books that have Influenced Me,” n.d., box 10, folder 9, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB; Grace, “‘The Living Soul of Man,’” 5; Wagner, “‘God Crucified Upside Down,’” 46; Zemans, “First Fruits,” 19.
\textsuperscript{119} See Grace, “‘The Living Soul of Man,’” 9; Zemans, “First Fruits,” 33n5.
stand-in for the wartime Toronto of his Canadian sojourn portrayed by *Self Condemned*.121

**Creative Evolution**

The 1912 playscript “Cassandra” documents Brooker’s early engagement with biological themes that would resurface in his Bergson-inspired writings and visual art of the 1920s. Anton Wagner was the first to analyze this manuscript, which subsequently entered the Bertram Brooker Papers held by the University of Manitoba’s Archives & Special Collections. According to Wagner, “The conflict of the play is between intellect and passion,”122 a tension personified by the eponymous Cassandra, amanuensis to the late Professor Graffspiel (author of the manuscript “Universal Evolution,” which Cassandra is in the process of preparing for publication),123 and the painter and seducer Rutherby Quintze. Cassandra and Quintze are immediately recognizable as Brooker’s alter egos, each embodying an opposing tendency of his personality and thought. Whereas Quintze extols an immanent perspective that sets the stage for Brooker’s Bergsonian commitments of the 1920s,124 Cassandra seeks transcendence through evolutionary biology. In popular articles with titles appropriated from Brooker’s own unpublished

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121 Wyndham Lewis, *Self Condemned* (1954; repr., Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 221. The appellation “Charles Brooks” may be an allusion to Brooker’s authorship of the 1923 *Subconscious Selling*, which drew heavily on the writings of C. Harry Brooks, a disciple of the French self-help expert Émile Coué (as discussed below, Lewis heavily criticized Coué’s method of auto-suggestion in *Time and Western Man*).
122 See Wagner, “‘God Crucified Upside Down,’” 46.
124 Quintze admonishes the idealistic Cassandra for having “envisaged Reality as a Mountain – as something above experience,” insisting on an immanent alternative: “Reality, dearest, is all about us – every day.” Brooker, “Cassandra,” Act 1, 14.

For Cassandra, Nietzsche’s superman personifies the New Woman, whom she conceives of as a “soul, unsexed, isolated, exiled from the flesh – a unit of existence.” This asexuality may be symptomatic of a pervasive “reluctance [among] nineteenth-century feminists,” noted by Sally Ledger, “to construct themselves as sexual objects” in a context that frequently pathologized the quest for emancipation as a sign of deviance.

Tellingly, Cassandra’s feminism derives from her reading of Olive Schreiner—one of three fellow “Ultimativists” nominated by Brooker in “The Measure of Gordon Craig.” Schreiner’s *Dreams* offers Cassandra (and, by implication, Brooker himself) a vision of “carv[ing] stairs in the mountains of Stern Reality”—an idealism symbolized by the Great White Bird featured in Schreiner’s story, “The Hunter.” The sexual theorist and advocate of sexual freedoms Edward Carpenter may have provided another source for the

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125 The title of one of Cassandra’s articles, written under the pen name Oscar Rosencrantz, is “The Cause of Gravitation.” Brooker, “Cassandra,” Act 3, 6. Anton Wagner notes that in his 1937 “Self-Portrait,” Brooker discusses a “theory of the cause of gravitation, which he submitted to the Royal Society,” aged just nineteen. Wagner, “God Crucified Upside Down,” 45. Brooker’s personal physics, like the subsequent informational *physisc* of McLuhan and the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., discussed in the next chapter, would appear to describe a form of monism. In his notes for *Jevon*, Brooker declares that his physics is based on the principle that, “all is One.” Brooker, “Plot,” *Jevon*, August 18, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 2. Booker would allude to his youthful speculations on physics in at least one article for *Printers’ Ink*, which proposes an improbably cosmological interpretation of the principles of layout: “Subconsciously you know that he is tugging every particle of matter toward the core of the universe. In comparison with gravitation the other forces with which men battle are local and puny. Science harnessed the lightening in the form of electric light and power before it conquered gravitation in the aerial equilibrium of the plane. It may not have occurred to you that gravitation governs the normal layout of an advertisement. Gravitation, indeed, governs the form of everything in the universe.” Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Life vs. Lingo,” *Printers’ Ink* 136, no. 11 (1926): 4-6.


130 Brooker, “Cassandra,” Act 3, 10; see also Wagner, “God Crucified Upside Down,” 46.
themes explored by “Cassandra.” Sherrill Grace notes that, “Brooker owned a copy of Carpenter’s Love’s Coming of Age,” speculating that, “Carpenter may well be one of the links between Schreiner and himself, as well as a source for Brooker’s ideas about love and the inner life.”

Although an early advocate of same-sex rights, Carpenter’s descriptions of feminists have been interpreted as reinforcing the correlation between sexual liberation and a pathologized lesbianism posited by fellow sex theorist Havelock Ellis (whose writings Brooker also knew and owned). Despite Brooker’s feminism and gender-bending identification with Cassandra, the drama’s resolution problematically hinges on Quintze’s success in convincing her that she has misinterpreted Schreiner’s allegory of the human evolutionary drama: the play closing with Brooker’s heroine embracing “motherhood.”

Amongst a remarkable suite of early works on paper first reported by Zemans in 1989, are a series of drawings that visualize characters and ideas from “Cassandra” (a link that Zemans, however, does not posit, noting instead the probable source for some of the drawings and watercolours in the Chicago installation of the Armory Show). Described by Zemans as “a rather odd extra-terrestrial creature,” the figure depicted in Brooker’s ca. 1912 drawing Ultrahomo the Prophet (Fig. 17) likely represents the “unsexed” being imagined by Cassandra as the future outcome of the evolutionary process: “I

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131 Grace, “‘The Living Soul of Man,’” 9.
133 Brooker, “Cassandra,” Act 1, 16. In language typical of Brooker’s ambivalent feminism, Quintze declares that, “Women are God’s deputies.” Ibid.
manufactured a sort of prophet,” Cassandra tells Quintze, “like Nietzsche’s ‘Zarathustra.’” The figure’s blastoderm-like eyes draw attention to the perpetually embryonic status of the evolutionary subject. Executed in the self-described “Beardsley-like” style of Brooker’s earliest experiments, Ultrahomo the Prophet fuses Art Nouveau line, pointillism and poster-like typography into a sophisticated personal brand of modernism. Significantly, “Ultrahomo” is also the name of the play being mounted in Brooker’s contemporaneous drama, “The Measure of Gordon Craig,” suggesting that Craig’s inhuman Über-marionette may also have served as a model for the alien being portrayed in Ultrahomo the Prophet.

The title of another semi-abstract drawing in this series, The Next Beyond (ca. 1912-15), is similarly drawn from “Cassandra”—being identical to the heroine’s prospective book on evolution. The Web of Destiny (ca. 1912-15)—whose title may refer to an article penned by Cassandra under the nom de plume Oscar Rosencrantz, “Destiny of Mind”—deploys an abstract vocabulary of arcs, points and stars to bring into representation the atomistic cosmos described by the theory of gravitation that Brooker has devised as a youth. According to Wagner, Brooker hypothesized that, “the universe was ‘made up originally of an enormous—but finite—number of sparks—electrons—all of equal power or vitality.’” The final component of this series, The Last End (ca. 1912-15), depicts a cellular (or perhaps atomic) structure with radiating lines consistent with

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135 Brooker, “Cassandra,” Act 2, 15. Brooker’s autobiographical sketch “Years” retrospectively dates this drawing to 1908, connecting it with the artist’s concurrent reading of Nietzsche’s Thus Spake Zarathustra. “My prophet was Ultrahomo,” states Brooker, characterizing the drawing of Ultrahomo as “influenced by Beardsley’s Salome.” Brooker, “Years,” 2.
139 Brooker, “Cassandra,” Act 4, 12.
140 Brooker quoted in Wagner, “‘God Crucified Upside Down,’” 45.
the biological (or alternately gravitational) concerns staged by the play, even if—unlike the other drawings in the suite—it does not appear in the surviving manuscript of “Cassandra.”

After relocating to Toronto in 1921 to become Vice-President and Business Manager of Marketing magazine as well as a regular contributor to that publication, Brooker would revisit the evolutionary themes explored by “Cassandra” and associated drawings in advertising texts, graphic designs and visual art. A 1925 cartoon (Fig. 18) published by Marketing during Brooker’s tenure as editor (he purchased the publication from W.A. Lydiatt in 1924), depicts a bug-eyed man whose exaggerated physiognomy is strongly reminiscent of Ultrahomo the Prophet. Printed in conjunction with an article by Charles W. Stokes, “Selling Via All Five Senses,” the captions reads: “Our tame cartoonist predicts what the race will look like a few generations hence if eye-mindedness is carried much further.” The comically hypertrophied eyes of Brooker’s businessman or consumer draw attention to the effects of visual stress suggested by Stokes’s analysis of the untapped potential of the other senses as advertising channels—a theme that would later be reprised by the critiques of media “bias” elaborated by Innis and McLuhan. It is probable that Brooker’s cartoon drew inspiration from Bergson’s celebrated discussion of “the eye” in Creative Evolution, as embodying an evolutionary problematic that—in contrast to the random mechanism of selection in Darwinian theory—adapts “positively, it solves a problem.” In Bergson’s formulation, the optic sense serves as a metonym for

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141 “Becomes Publisher,” 12.
142 See W.A. Lydiatt and Bertram Brooker, “Agreement,” Nov. 1, 1924, Brooker Estate, Toronto, ON.
144 Bergson, Creative Evolution, 60, 70.
the organism’s capacity to adapt creatively and holistically to the pragmatic problems
posed by environmental stressors (e.g., “light”).

Brooker’s cartoon registers a key shift in the terms of reference navigated by his
evolutionary rhetoric—from the social Darwinism of Nietzsche, Shaw and Spencer
mined during his years in Neepawa, to the “creative evolution” of Bergson which
-dominated his thinking during the 1920s. Although the lost copy of Creative Evolution
recorded in a posthumous inventory of Brooker’s personal library, and whose annotations
are extensively quoted by Luff, was an edition dating from 1944, the artist-advertiser’s
familiarity with this key work in the Bergsonian corpus during the mid-1920s (if not
earlier) is verified by his arguments in a 1926 Marketing article, “Are Statistics More
Convincing than Words or Pictures?” In that text, Brooker adapts Bergson’s evolutionary
theses to reimagine advertising itself as undergoing a perpetual process of evolutionary
adaptation: “Advertising is alive! And being alive its development is in accord with those
principles of ‘creative evolution’ that Bergson has postulated of all living things. It is in
flux, it is in a constant state of becoming” Creative Evolution’s exploration of the
coadaptation of bodies and media represents an overlooked source for the Toronto School
of Communication’s discourse on the bias of communication and its effects on the
dynamics of intra-sensory adjustment, for which Brooker’s Bergsonian articles for
Marketing may have served as a bridge. Bergson introduces the notion of “bias” in
relation to his thesis that, “Sensory organs and motor organs are in fact coordinated with
each other”; the pragmatic orientation of our actions thereby giving rise to a privileging

145 Bergson, Creative Evolution, 70.
146 “Personal Library of Bertram Brooker,” 36.
147 Brooker [Surrey], “Are statistics More Convincing Than Words or Pictures?,” 115.
of kinesthetic and visual percepts.\textsuperscript{148} An unresolved tension animating Brooker’s cartoon, and marketing discourse as a whole, is his rendering of the pragmatic subject critiqued by Bergson as the product of a biased intelligence, whose redemption via multisensory stimulation he ironically seizes upon as an exploitative strategy for selling advertising space.

If Brooker’s cartoon offers a striking illustration of the optical bias reinforced by visual media—including traditional print-based advertising—the sensory plasticity embodied by his imagined future reader simultaneously illustrates Bergson’s reworking of Darwinian mechanisms of adaptation into an imperative of continuous creation. Brooker’s figure demonstrates that, “the body is changing form at every moment” in Bergson’s creative paradigm.\textsuperscript{149} The malleable condition of Brooker’s consumer/businessman echoes the enduring embryonic status of Bergson’s larval subject.

Moreover, Brooker’s and Stokes’s call for alternatives to the visual bias of dominant print culture suggests analogies with Bergson’s attempt to counter the spatialization and stasis characteristic of classical Western metaphysics and post-Newtonian physics by “thinking in time”—to quote Germaine Guerlac—and, in particular, through an appeal to non-visual media and perception.

\textbf{Radio}

As Bergson’s favoured metaphor for the non-rational phenomenology of \textit{duration}—whose embodied temporality he opposed to the abstract, mensurated time of physics and

\textsuperscript{148} Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, 300.

\textsuperscript{149} Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, 302.
Platonic ontology—“melody” represents a probable stimulus for Brooker’s experiments in synaesthetic advertising strategies and exploration of “musical ‘shape’” in his coeval production of abstract paintings. Writing in 1929 under the tongue-in-cheek pseudonym of Mark E. Ting, Brooker reviewed his experiments in synaesthesia aimed at revitalizing print advertising under new competition from radio: “I was much interested,” he wrote, “[in] the problem of translating appeals to senses other than the visual (taste, touch, smell, hearing) into the visual limitations of a printed advertisement.” Brooker’s experiments with “using ink and paper to stimulate the palate or to cause the mind to ‘auditionize’ unheard sounds in the same way that it ‘visualizes’ unseen sights,” recall the earlier comments of Stokes on the advertising potential of non-visual stimuli in his 1925 Marketing article printed in conjunction with Brooker’s comic representation of the consumer or businessman as the larval subject of Bergson, discussed above. Anticipating McLuhan’s discourse on the visual “stress” generated by the printing press and the corrective potential of the “five sense sensorium,” the assistant advertising manager of the Canadian Pacific Railway speculated that,

![Image alt text](image-url)

> [E]ach sense—*each sense*—can be as powerful to the imagination as the others.

As a matter of fact, sight alone is the poorest selling accomplice of the five—

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perhaps because Sight is more over-worked than the other four, and becomes a little palled.¹⁵⁴

Brooker’s experiments in synaesthetic advertising were, from the start, bound up with the growth of radio advertising. A 1926 article for *Marketing*—“Consumers Have Fives Senses: What Sense Have You?”—made this connection explicit: “radio advertising has shown to what lengths the artist can go in suggesting sounds,” Brooker wrote.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, a 1928 *Marketing* text analyzed the synaesthetic overtones of an advertisement for National Carbon Company radio batteries:

[T]here were five different models of the product illustrated in the immediate foreground, standing out against white space. Behind the topmost battery in the group was a picture of three people listening to a radio set. This was a littler greyer than the batteries and was vignetted into the white space at the bottom. At the top it broke into an oblong background which took up more than half the space, filled with figures of choir boys walking in a processional through the lofty aisles of a church or cathedral. This large background illustration was so grey as to be almost misty, which added to its interest and impede that it was being *heard* rather than seen.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Help the Prospect to Visualize What the Product Does,” *Marketing* 29, no. 5 (1928): 132, emphasis in the original.
A subsequent text explored the auditory associations of distorted images of musicians accompanying an advertisement for Philco radio batteries (Fig. 19):

The distortion idea, as pictured in these twisted photographs, ingeniously duplicates the feeling a radio listener has when he hears a voice that is familiar to him—a singer he has heard on the concert stage, for example—distorted by bad reception. instruments stretched into thin and monstrously warped shapes, with curious unnatural [sic.] bulges where they shouldn’t be, do somehow correspond to the effect produced on one’s hearing when the radio starts to ‘act up.’ These thematic illustrations are perhaps as close as it is possible to go, pictorially, in representing an auditory experience. In other words, as a friend of mine remarked recently—not intending a pun—they constitute a ‘sound idea.’

Brooker and *Marketing* were early in recognizing and promoting the advertising potential of the radio medium. As early as 1922—the year of Canada’s first radio broadcasts—*Marketing* was touting that, “Radio advertising promises to bring new grist to the publisher’s mill in the near future.” While this insight may have coincided with the “radio craze” that swept Canada beginning the same year, advertising historian Roland Marchand notes that, “In 1922 and 1923 *Printers’ Ink* editorialized against radio as an

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‘objectionable advertising medium.”

It was only following the emergence of a national network of radio stations that American advertisers embraced the auditory medium. Prior to 1928, radio advertising in the United States was mostly limited to a “sponsorship only” system of financing content deemed to embody “the ‘great genteel hope’ of cultural redemption for the millions.” Classical music broadcasts were central to this early conception of commercial radio as a public service. Sponsors’ reluctance to apply more direct approaches is attributable to two principle factors: the potentially intrusive nature of the medium, which penetrated the intimacy of consumers’ homes, and, newspapers’ resistance to the competitive threat posed by radio.

The aura of cultural uplift associated with early radio sponsorship of classical music programming in the mid-1920s coincided with Brooker’s early exploration of “musical” themes in his contemporaneous abstract paintings. The auditory-visual correspondences, and classical references, of such canvases such as Abstraction-Music (ca. 1927), “Chorale” (Bach) (ca. 1927), and Toccata (ca. 1927) (Figs. 20-22) suggest analogies with the regime of elitist radio sponsorship analyzed by Marchand as well as the synaesthetistic techniques explored contemporaneously by Brooker himself in the pages of Marketing.

161 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 92.
162 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 90, 108.
163 “Few media have enjoyed an aura of cultural uplift comparable to that of radio in the mid-1920s,” writes Marchand; “Technology seemed to be fulfilling its destiny as a civilizing force.” Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 90. Commenting in the pages of the same volume containing Brooker’s “Nudes and Prudes,” Merrill Denison similarly stated that, “There can be no question that both [musical taste and appreciation] are improving, and that thousands of people today can enjoy classical music they would neither have tolerated nor understood three years ago. The credit for this miracle is usually accorded broadcasting with an assist to its distaff aunt, the photograph . . . .” Merrill Denison, “Thoughts on Radio,” in Open House, eds. William Arthur Deacon and Wilfred Reeves, 107-20 (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers, 1931), 115.
164 See Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 92-93. Marchand notes that, “Publishers feared the loss of advertising revenues.” Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 92.
Brooker’s dialogue with music has been a running theme of commentary on his early abstractions from the start. In a 1956 obituary for *Canadian Art* magazine, the critic Thomas R. Lee reported that when Brooker’s canvases were unveiled at his 1927 solo show at Toronto’s Arts and Letters Club (where they were exhibited without attribution), the composer G.D. Atkinson reputedly exclaimed, “Oh, I know who did that … Brooker! Look, it’s all music!” Atkinson was only one of several musician acquaintances of Brooker’s—who also included the noted violinist Harry Adaskin and the composer Sir Ernest MacMillan, Lee further described how, “With ruler and compass [Brooker] sought to compose on canvas the colour, the volume and rhythm he experienced while listening to music.” The artist’s widow, Rill, similarly related that,

Music inspired more than three-quarters of his work. … I called him the frustrated musician. Because he had no outlet for that, his striving burst out in all other directions, writing, painting, advertising and philosophy. … Much of his work came fresh and quick from the inspiration of a concert heard perhaps only that evening.

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167 Lee, “Bertram Brooker,” 288. Williams states that, “Though Brooker’s musicianship skills were limited, he was certainly able to read music. He had sung in several choirs, including the St Mary’s Anglican choir in Portage la Prairie and the prestigious Mendelssohn choir which he joined in 1921.” Williams, “Translating Music into Visual Form,” 114.
Dennis Reid would return to, and amplify, this musical interpretation of Brooker’s abstractions in his 1973 monograph, aptly describing the early canvases as “literal translations of musical ‘shape.’” But Reid’s assertion that Brooker’s synaesthetic experiments were fuelled by his knowledge of Kandinsky’s theories of auditory-visual correspondence calls for scrutiny. Reid himself qualifies that, “Neither [Abstraction—Music nor Toccata] seem to have been drawn from direct experience of Kandinsky’s paintings.” Rather, Reid contends that, “It was surely Lawren Harris who, probably after the publication of his own first extended statement concerning the place of spiritualism in art in 1926, turned Brooker to Kandinsky.” Writing in the same year as Reid, Zemans noted in an early article for artscanada that, “Music and musical forms are integral parts of the artist’s views on painting and many abstract paintings of this period are given musical titles like Toccata.” While similarly suggesting parallels with Kandinsky, and noting that fellow artist Carl Schaefer later recalled conversations between Brooker and Harris on the problems of interpreting Bach’s music visually, Zemans is more cautious than Reid in assigning linear relationships of “influence.” In her subsequent, archival study of Brooker, published in 1989, Zemans questions Reid’s narrative, noting that,

[T]he texts that Reid believed to be so influential in the development of Brooker’s

168 Reid, Bertram Brooker, 12.
169 Reid, Bertram Brooker, 12.
170 Reid, Bertram Brooker, 12.
172 Zemans reports that, “The Brooker family recounts that while he was working on the railway in the early part of this century, Brooker was nicknamed ‘little Kandinsky.’” Zemans, “The Art and Weltanschauung of Bertram Brooker,” 65, 68n4; see also J. Rusell Harper, Painting in Canada: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 352.
abstract painting, Harris’ ‘A Revelation of Art in Canada’ and Housser’s *A Canadian Art Movement*, were both published in 1926—less than a year before Brooker exhibited a full collection of mature abstract and non-objective paintings, almost all of which had originated in earlier tempera and oil sketches. On the basis of time alone, this assumption seemed problematic.\textsuperscript{173}

Zemans suggests, rather, that, “a date of circa 1924 for the earliest experiments seems appropriate.”\textsuperscript{174} This revised chronology would be in keeping with Brooker’s own reports of being inspired to produce art “worked out mathematically and rhythmically” on the model of Dürer, following a spiritual “conversion” that he experienced in July 1923 at Dwight on Lake of Bays in Northern Ontario.\textsuperscript{175}

Zemans proposed the Clavilux, or “colour organ,” devised by the Danish-American inventor Thomas Wilfred, as an alternative source for Brooker’s abstractions; one that troubles the rigid correspondences between “certain colours and certain tones” promoted by Kandinsky’s writings, which the Canadian artist-advertiser explicitly rejected.\textsuperscript{176} Glenn Williams would similarly conclude that, “Brooker’s synaesthetic sensibility was determined more by feeling and intuition than by scientific analysis.”\textsuperscript{177} Brooker twice reported on Wilfred’s experiments in his syndicated “Seven Arts” column for the Southam newspaper chain, and knew the inventor personally.\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{173} Zemans, “First Fruits,” 17.
\textsuperscript{174} Zemans, “First Fruits,” 37.
\textsuperscript{175} See Zemans, “First Fruits,” 20, 33n5, 34n19.
\textsuperscript{176} Kandinsky quoted in Zemans, “First Fruits,” 24; see also Bertram Brooker, “The 7 Arts,” October 19, 1929, box 8, folder 6, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB; Williams, “Translating Music into Visual Form,” 122n74.
\textsuperscript{177} Williams, “Translating Music into Visual Form,” 120.
\textsuperscript{178} See Zemans, “First Fruits,” 35n37.
A contemporaneous unpublished manuscript by Brooker entitled “The New Game of Music-Colour” repurposes Wilfred’s experiments as a “parlor game.”179 “Overawe your guests,” Brooker advises readers, “by elevating both brows simultaneously, and at the same time audibly inject[ing] the idea into the assembled company that there is a relationship between color and music.”180 Describing himself in the third person as a “highbrow from Canada,” who has “painted musical interpretations in vast numbers,” Brooker situates his game within a technological milieu comprising “radios, gramophones and player pianos.”181 Although locating his own attempts at “giving plastic expression to my responses to music” securely within a high-cultural genealogy that includes the Cubist paintings of Georges Braque, Brooker suggests that,

If these names mean nothing to your particular crowd it is easy to substitute a reference to the weird pictures painted by Rockwell Kent and others for the advertising of Steinway Pianos—pictures representing these artists’ reactions to such compositions as Stavinsky’s ‘Fire Bird’ and Gershwin’s ‘American in Paris.’182

Brooker’s parlor game connects Wilfred’s colour organ with contemporaneous developments in advertising illustration and classical music radio programming. The Canadian artist-advertiser’s comments thereby confirm Judith Zilczer’s contention that, “During the 1920s, the advent of commercial radio broadcasting provided modern

painters with [a] readily accessible source of musical inspiration.” Elsewhere Zilczer notes that, “The idea of colo[u]r music was symptomatic of a fundamental shift in aesthetic theory,” which she traces to the Symbolists—whose influence on Brooker is legible through his dialogue with Craig.

Wilfred’s colour music experiments were financed by the Rochester-based architect, colour-music pioneer and higher-dimensional theorist Claude Bragdon. Bragdon would have been familiar to Brooker through his 1922 translation of P.D. Ouspensky’s treatise on fourth-dimensional consciousness, *Tertium Organum*—a title included on Brooker’s list, “Books that have Influenced Me.” Zemans draws attention to Bragdon’s direct influence on Brooker in works such as the 1929 drawing “4 Dimensional Cube” and Brooker’s 1930 article for *The Canadian Forum* on the poetry of e.e. cummings (which Brooker praised for its “queer fourth-dimensional quality”). Bragdon also served as the prototype for the “Toronto architect” represented in Brooker’s manuscript, *Jevon*. Although Zemans was the first to interpret Brooker’s early abstractions as

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188 “Central to [Jevon’s] development is a Toronto architect who has come north to write a book on the fourth dimension (Bragdon).” Brooker quoted in Zemans, “First Fruits,” 36n47.
visualizations of “Bergsonian flow,” her account does not address Bergson’s formative role in shaping Bragdon’s transformation of Ouspensky’s discourse on spirituality and higher dimensions into a vitalist theory of “involution” (echoing Bergson’s “creative evolution”). In the words of Jonathan Massey, involution “suggested that humanity was evolving toward mastery of higher spatial dimensions and that as it gained the power to perceive the fourth dimension it would achieve universal brotherhood and a cosmic unification of consciousness.” Helen Palmer has parsed the Bergsonian sources of Russian Futurism, noting that, “At times Ouspensky sounds positively Bergsonian.”

In contrast to Betts’s “occultist” reading of Ouspensky, the Bergsonian threads connecting the higher-dimensional and synaesthetic concerns of Bragdon and Ouspensky illuminate Brooker’s experiments in colour music via radio advertisements and paintings as complementing his interest in the French thinker’s image of “indivisible melody” as an alternative to the “homogeneous time” enshrined in classical Western metaphysics and modern science. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson contrasts the image of “sixty points on a fixed line” suggested by the oscillations of a pendulum when viewed through the lens of mathematics, with the “continuous or qualitative multiplicity with no resemblance to number” conveyed by the embodied experience of hearing those same oscillations

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192 Betts, “‘The Destroyer,’” 277.
“melting into one another.” Bergson’s melodic rhetoric emerges as a central influence on the “spatialization of the sonic” enacted by Brooker’s abstract canvas *Sounds Assembling* (1928), which Richard Cavell identifies as an important antecedent to McLuhan’s discussions of “acoustic space.”

This genealogy significantly complicates the advertising histories of Lears and Marchand. Brooker’s repurposing of the neo-vitalist, but aural ontology of Bergson to sell radios troubles the visual bias of Lears’s narrative of persistent animist currents in mainstream advertising under managerial capitalism, which he describes in iconographic terms as “a carnival of exotic imagery” left over from an earlier era of fairground publicity. At the same time, Brooker’s participation within, and harnessing of, vitalist counter-currents complicates Marchand’s account of the values of “uplift” invested in classical programming by early radio sponsors. Brooker’s paintings and marketing texts fused high and low, classicism and vitalism, into a singular aesthetic and media ontology.

**Dance**

An alternate metaphor for the processual qualities of *duration* that Bergson attempts to impart through his descriptions of melody, is the figure of “the dancer,” whose graceful movements are paradigmatic of the “pure inner joy” generated by aesthetic experience. Key to the production of this joyous affect is the “physical sympathy” experienced by audience members as they observe the dancer’s rhythmic motion: “the rhythm and the

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194 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 104, 105, 128, emphasis in the original.
beat lead us to believe that we are the masters of these movements.” An allusion to Bergson’s dancer, and to the interactive dynamics of Bergsonian “sympathy,” are legible in the fluid outlines of Brooker’s drawing *Fugue* (ca. 1929) (Fig. 23)—reproduced in his 1929 *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada*. The work’s superimposed silhouettes recall the chronophotographs of É.-J. Marey, whose multiple exposures generated a dynamic record of corporeal motion. The multiplicity of curves delineating the abstracted central figure in Brooker’s drawing recall the sinuous contours of Bergson’s dancer, turned one hundred and eighty degrees to emphasize the transpersonal quality of the motion forms traced by her undulating body. Set against a geometric background, the streamlined figure in this work on paper suggest analogies with the machinic chorus line of women’s legs found in the slightly earlier oil on board, *Green Movement* (ca. 1927) (Fig. 24). Both works can, in turn, be related to Duchamp’s attempt at capturing motion in his Futurist-inspired *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*—which Brooker may have been familiar with as early as 1912, through exposure to the Armory Show via news accounts.

Brooker’s writings explore techniques of sympathetic communication reminiscent of the interactive dynamics of Bergsonian aesthetics that further illuminate the representations of “biorhythmic energy and flow” in his paintings noted by Zemans. For instance, in *Copy Technique in Advertising* Brooker analyzes a passage from Walter de la Mare’s *Memoires of a Midget* as a model for what he elsewhere describes as “set[ting] the consumer in motion [through] e-motion [sic.], inner motion”.

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200 See Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, 21, 117.
203 Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Seven Uses for ‘Costume’ in Advertising Art,” *Marketing* 21, no.
In one of the early chapters the midget discovers a dead mole. She speaks of stooping ‘with lips drawn back over my teeth,’ while she surveyed ‘the white heaving nest of maggots in its belly.’ When I read that passage I consciously and deliberately drew my own lips back over my teeth, to see what it meant. Try it yourself, and your nose will immediately wrinkle, and you will feel yourself actually confronted with some distasteful spectacle.204

Bergson’s aesthetics of sympathy served as a model for the literary texts analyzed by Brooker’s marketing writings, which attempted to substitute a participatory model of communication for the unidirectional forms of address championed by associationist and behaviorist peers.205 Walter de la Mare belonged to a network of British writers, including Ford Maddox Ford, Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry, that had contributed to Murry’s Bergson-inflected, Rhythmist journals, Rhythm and the Blue Review, prior to World War I. One-time members of this Rhythmist circle are among the writers most frequently cited by Brooker in Copy Technique in Advertising; moreover, Brooker published an important article in Murry’s The Adelphi in 1931.206

13 (1924): 344. Brooker explicitly connects the empathic dynamics of this inner motion with “the new craze for radio.” Brooker [Surrey], “Seven Uses for ‘Costume’ in Advertising Art,” 344.
204 Brooker [Surrey], Copy Technique in Advertising, 133.
205 See Antliff, Inventing Bergson, Chapter 3.
Physiological Aesthetics

Another source for the model of empathetic spectatorship elaborated by Brooker was Vernon Lee. In a 1929 article for *Marketing*, Brooker wrote that,

Vernon Lee, a less known but not less acute critic of writing than the others I have quoted, has a passage which brings this question of rhythm closer to the contact between writer and reader which is so much more important in advertising than in any other form of writing. She says:

There are words which, owing to their extreme precision, make the reader think and feel, in a way make him *live*, slowly; and there are other words which make the reader think, feel and live quickly, and quickly and smoothly, or quickly and jerkily as the case may be. Above all, there are arrangements of words, combinations of action and reaction of word upon word, which, by opening up vistas or closing them, make the reader’s mind dawdle, hurry or bustle busily along. … It is from no idle affectation, no mere conventional desire to make things match, that we resent the lengthy telling of a brief moment, the jerky description of a solemn fact. We dislike it because two contrary kinds of action are being set up in our mind; because the fact related is forcing us to one sort of pace, indeed to what is even more important, one sort of rhythm, while the words relating that fact are forcing us to another pace, to another rhythm.

Miss Lee makes clear here what Middleton Murry meant by the differentiation of
rhythmic effects; that rhythms differ—or should differ—in accord with the nature of the subject (whether it is solemn, humorous, business-like, and so on), and also with the essential ‘pace’ of the subject (whether it is a matter that can be decided quickly or one that requires deliberation).)

Brooker’s invocation of Lee and Murry in the foregoing discussion of “rhythm” as a characteristic of effective copy rehearses Bergson’s aesthetics of sympathy—in which rhythm is synonymous with the “qualitative multiplicity” of melody—propagated by Murry in the pages of Rhythm. In the summer 1911 issue, Murry enjoined modern artists to employ intuition to return “to the moment of pure perception to see the essential forms, the essential harmonies of line and colour, the essential music of the world.” Brooker would later deploy remarkably similar language in an article for Printers’ Ink to argue that, “A flow implies a rhythm, a rhythm implies a beat, a beat implies music, and music, according to the scientists, is the deep-rooted, aboriginal language to which the first ears in the universe were attuned.”

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207 Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Rhythmical headings? No!,” Marketing 30, no. 2 (1929), 40, emphasis in the original. The enduring importance of Lee’s empathic aesthetics to Brooker is evident from his notes for the late, unpublished manuscript The Brave Voices. In his notes for a draft section titled “Truth,” Brooker writes that, “I still haven’t found the passage about being the thing, which I thought came from Lafcadio Hearn. Or did I find it later in Vernon Lee. Yes, Vernon Lee, The Handling of Words, page 23. First she writes of imitating people, without conscious analysis, gestures, facial expressions, etc … ‘we see that they move, look, sound like that … Why they should do so, or why we should feel that they do so, we have no notion whatever. Apparently because for that moment and to that extent we are those people; they have impressed us so forcibly, at some time or other, they or those like them, that a piece of them, a pattern of them, a word (one might think) of this particular vital spell, the spell which sums up their mode of being, has remained sticking in us, and is there become operative.’ She has been talking about the creation of characters in novels, and how sometimes the imaginary creature seems to ‘invade’ the writer. At the back of the book I wrote ‘TO CREATE ONE MUST BE THE THING CREATED.’ It looks as though the use of the word BE is my own, after all.” Brooker, The Brave Voices, “Truth,” 7, my emphasis.


Though sometimes deploying an analogous vocabulary of “rhythm” and “sympathy” to describe an interactive model of beholding, Lee dispensed with Bergson’s metaphysics of “intuition” in favour of a physiological account of empathetic responsiveness that would, in turn, contribute to Brooker’s somatic outlook. Building on a series of small-scale experiments conducted with her collaborator, research subject and probable object of unconsummated desire, the Scottish artist Clementina (“Kit”) Anstruther-Thomson, Lee and her co-author reported in 1897 on the psychophysical responses experienced by Anstruther-Thomson as she beheld a combination of nude models and paintings in art galleries. Drawing on recent theorizations of Einfühlung (or “feeling-into,” translated as “empathy” in 1909 by Edward Titchener) by such German psychologists as Theodor Lipps, Lee redefined the process of aesthetic response as, in the words of Carolyn Burdett, a participatory circuit in which,

The attentive process of realizing a beautiful object—of looking at its lines and planes and the relations of its constituent elements—invoke modes of activity of our own; our own motor activities rehearse the tensions, pressures, thrusts, resistances and volitions—the life, as Lee calls it, with its accompanying emotions—which we project back into the form and attribute to it.

Lee’s deployment of rhythmic metaphors to convey this empathetic circuit likely contributed to Brooker’s interest in the collaborative possibilities of radiophonic communication conceived as a rhythmic medium. For instance, a 1930 article for *Marketing* praised “a word-making contest” sponsored by the Borden company and featuring the trade character “Captain Jimmie,” whom Brooker lauded as “a flesh and blood creation, even though it is only his voice that is heard.”

The physiological aesthetics theorized by the Canadian-born popularizer of Darwin, Grant Allen, and other proponents of evolutionary theory, were equally formative influences on Lee’s relational aesthetics. Shafquat Towheed writes that, “Lee transposed the paradigms current in evolutionary science onto her investigation of the development of specific artistic forms and the development of aesthetics ….” Like Darwin before him, Allen proposed a purely physiological basis for aesthetic feeling. Darwin’s 1871 publication *The Descent of Man* had controversially posited sexual selection as the basis of aesthetic pleasure in animals:

> When we behold male birds elaborately displaying their plumes and splendid colours before the females, whilst other birds not thus decorated make no such display, it is impossible to doubt that the females admire the beauty of their male partners.

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214 See Burdett, “‘The Subject Inside Us can Turn into the Objective Outside.’”
Jhoanna Infante traces the sources of Darwin’s biological account of aesthetics to pre-Kantian theories of taste that emphasized the sensual interests of the beholder. Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* is exemplary of eighteenth-century articulations of “sensibility” that, in the British context, arose out of vernacular traditions of empiricism and Romanticism. Like Darwin, Burke described aesthetic experience as an immanent “delight” of the body, rather than a cognitive exercise of judgment. It is within these evolutionary and physiological discourses that Lee’s aesthetics “from below” are properly located. But, as Shafquat Towheed underlines, Lee’s engagements with biology and psychology were always creatively motivated and transformative, and, as Carolyn Burdett argues, increasingly psychological in orientation following her break with Anstruther-Thomson.

If Lee’s aesthetics of empathy are legible in Brooker’s discussions of rhythmic innervation as the unfolding of a sympathetic chain between image and beholder, her descriptions of the physiological mechanisms of aesthetic response likely influenced the artist-advertiser’s eroticized representations of the nude female figure as well as his frank defense of human sexuality in “Nudes and Prudes,” following the removal of his canvas *Nudes in a Landscape* from the 1931 OSA exhibition. “[S]ex, which is to be found in all organisms, and is perhaps the principle on which all forms of life are founded—in short, the principle of issuance—may very well be the primary division of Being, the first

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mysterious step taken by the primal unity towards multiplicity.”

Brooker’s (eminently Bergsonian) endorsement of “physical attraction” as an aesthetic, and, indeed, ontological framework in this text, supports Anna Hudson’s contention that, “During the 1920s, the modern nude rose from its nineteenth-century academic roots to manifest … the liberalization of sexual expression in an expanding bawdy culture … .”

Brooker articulates an even more explicitly sexualized and evolutionary version of his physiological aesthetics in the late, unpublished manuscript *The Brave Voices*. Reprising the arguments of Allen and Darwin, in a draft chapter titled “Love,” Brooker writes that,

> The alluring loveliness of a nude woman is a notable instance of the creativeness of nature exceeding the needs of existence. No creature is more beautiful, and none more defenceless. On the basis of this fact we are perhaps warranted in assuming that the birth of human love had much to do with the exquisite fashioning of the female body, if [unintelligible]. We can readily imagine that the delicacy of the human form, compared with the coarse hides, the fangs and claws, of the beasts, may have brought about a refinement in the mating [unintelligible] habits of men and women. The soft contours and delicate skin of a [unintelligible] youthful woman can scarcely have been thought of as appealing to a male of brutal instincts. The male must have grown gentle also and become susceptible to subtleties of attractiveness previously unknown. When we think of the swaying and posturing of native dancers, and even the stately antics of some [unintelligible] birds, it is not hard to imagine that violent love-making was

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222 Brooker, “Nudes and Prudes,” 105-06.
223 Hudson, “Disarming Conventions of Nudity in Canadian Art,” 102, 90.
gradually replaced by a longer, tenderer more rhythmic process of enticement.\textsuperscript{224} 

In a different version of this same draft text, Brooker likens the dynamic understanding of nature as \textit{phusis}, which he derived from reading the ancient Greeks, to sexual intercourse:

But here let us relate the idea of Phusis—upward striving—with sex impulse lately discussed.

Itself an upward striving, an ascent—not only physically, but an ascent in the scale of sensation to a height or peak—highest [unintelligible] ecstasy, what we would expect is we believe with Blake that ‘energy is eternal delight.’

If it were not such a familiar act, we might see in it a clue, or almost a symbol, a parable, a prototype (literally, first type or model)—in short, it is the in miniature the ascending urge and creative function of all nature.\textsuperscript{225} 

In another draft of this section of \textit{The Brave Voices}, Brooker relates the physiological release of orgasm to “the untranslatable flow of music,” which he describes in terms that strongly recall Bergson’s discussion of “melody,” and the oscillations of the pendulum, in \textit{Time and Free Will}:

\textsuperscript{224} Brooker, \textit{The Brave Voices}, “XVI (Love),” 27, emphasis in the original. Notwithstanding the sexism of this passage, it is preceded by the following meditations on women’s historically occludes creative production: “I find it remarable,” writes Brooker, “that after several ‘ages of enlightenment’ there still seems to be reluctance on the part of men—even among supposedly detached male scientists—to recognize the [unintelligible] role women have played in the evolution of our race. For example, whoever heard of a ‘cave woman’? The magnificent primitive paintings in the caves of Dordogne and elsewhere are invariably credited to cave men, although no evidence exists that these were not ‘doodled’ on the walls by women while their mates were out hunting.” Brooker, \textit{The Brave Voices}, “XVI (Love),” 26.

\textsuperscript{225} Bertram Brooker, \textit{The Brave Voices}, “LOVE Re High and High Places,” 1.
The notes and staves, the sharps and flats, on a musical score are like an architect’s drawing, accurate, exact, the intervals measureable, the harmonies calculable. The vibrations of each note can be measured and related to the whole science of sound and its waves. But none of these calculations or these marks on paper could give a person born deaf any conception of what music is like to the ear. …

It has been remarked more than once that music of a certain type, arousing our feelings by a sense of urgency, suspense, acceleration and final culmination, almost duplicates our sensations during the sex experience. In the sex this experience we come closest to a direct apprehension of the onwardness [sic.] of life’s energy.226

Brooker’s exploration of musical metaphors and participatory, somatic modes of address in his late, speculative writings sheds new light on his earlier efforts to “Visualize Events—Not Things in Advertising Copy”:227 a renovation and dynamization of traditional print formats prompted, in part, by new competition for advertising dollars arising from the aural and time-based medium of radio. This project unfolded in parallel with Brooker’s investigation of auditory and synaesthetic themes in his abstract and semi-abstract canvases of the mid-1920s. In both cases, his embodied and temporal outlook took Bergson’s theorization of “memory” as its model while simultaneously integrating seemingly incompatible elements drawn from Lee’s physiological aesthetics. (The persistence of Brooker’s Bergsonian referent is evident from an alternative title for The

226 Bertram Brooker, The Brave Voices, “A Short Section from Chapter on love,” 1.
**Brave Voices**, “Intuition and Reality: Essays Towards a Philosophy of Feeling,” as well as a draft chapter titled “Bergson”).

In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson famously diagrams his ontology of memory as a “cone” contracted by the appeal of present perception, indicated by its intersection with the “plane” of matter (Fig. 25). In one version of this figure, Bergson represents the multiplicity of accumulated recollections as a virtual coexistence of conic “sections.”

A truly cosmological figure, Bergson’s cone represents the dynamics of individual memory as “a section of universal becoming,” the “hyphen” constituted by subjectivity being but a “place of passage” between pure matter and an infinitely dilated universal memory, or *durée réelle*.

It is possible that Bergson’s cone also suggested a model for Brooker’s early speculations on “gravitation.” In *The Brave Voices*, Brooker revisited his youthful theorization of physics in terms that markedly resemble Bergson’s conic figure:

> As a youth of nineteen the cause of gravitation excited my curiosity and became so urgent a problem that it kept me awake at nights. Finally I developed a theory, after much reading of popular works on astronomy, which at the time seemed like a reasonable explanation.

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229 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 152.
232 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 151, emphasis in the original.
233 “As a youth of nineteen the cause of gravitation excited my curiosity and became so urgent a problem that it kept me awake at nights. Finally I developed a theory, after much reading of popular works on astronomy, which at the time seemed like a reasonable explanation. I conceived a universe consisting of an enormous infinite mass of energy-units congregated at one end of space. Their energy consisted simple and solely of a desire to reach a goal at the other end—a mere pin-point. Their motion could be charted by lines drawn from the left to right, converging on the goal-point; the total shape of the mass movement resembling a cone.” Bertram Brooker, *The Brave Voices*, “Foreword,” 17½, emphasis in the original.
I conceived a universe consisting of an enormous infinite mass of energy-units congregated at one end of space. Their energy consisted simply and solely of a desire [unintelligible] to reach a goal at the other end—a mere pin-point. [unintelligible] Their motion could be charted by lines drawn from the left to right; converging on the goal-point; the total shape of the mass movement resembling a cone.\textsuperscript{234}

In a later passage of the same draft manuscript, Brooker likens his own conic representation of gravitational force to Ouspensky’s (likely also Bergson-inspired) diagram “in the shape of a cone, with lines ascending from a broad base and converging on the apex, which was a pinpoint. The lines represented human beings approaching God through the emotion of love … .”\textsuperscript{235} Although Brooker does not cite Bergson directly, his discussion of the Greek notion of phusis as a “desire for unity” repeats almost verbatim notes in another draft section of \textit{The Brave Voices}, titled “Bergson,” in which he describes “Feeling” as “the force that makes the world cohere in a perpetual coming together” (significantly, the word “Gravitation” is scribbled in the margins).\textsuperscript{236}

If Brooker’s notes for \textit{The Brave Voices} connect his youthful interest in physics with the durational ontology of Bergson, his advertising writings demonstrate a counter-

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\textsuperscript{234} Bertram Brooker, \textit{The Brave Voices}, “Foreword,” 18, emphasis in the original.
\textsuperscript{235} Bertram Brooker, \textit{The Brave Voices}, “Foreword,” 18.
\textsuperscript{236} Brooker, \textit{The Brave Voices}, “Foreword,” 18, emphasis in the original; Brooker, \textit{The Brave Voices}, “Bergson,” 13. On the next page of his notes on Bergson for \textit{The Brave Voices}, Brooker goes on to discuss phusis as “the always striving force of Nature.” Brooker, \textit{The Brave Voices}, “Bergson,” 14. Brooker had earlier sketched a gendered version of this conic, or vortical, ontology in the manuscript for \textit{Jevon}: “This jibes with my First Desire theory; at least it can be connected with it. Woman is formed from the Limit of Contraction, that Himself in process of time be born, Man to redeem. Doesn’t this mean that Generation is the limit of contraction, resulting in an expansion again again into another unit of life – physical birth. When two vortexes reach development as man and woman – when they contract into materiality that far their limit is reached, they come together, and a fresh influx of the spiritual – a baby – comes through into materiality to soften it.” Bertram Brooker, “Notes,” Jevon, August 29, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 1.
intuitive and, indeed, somewhat perverse readiness to redeploy the philosopher’s redemptive vision of universal memory as a device for selling. For instance, a 1926 article for *Marketing* proposes a Bergsonian critique of the spatializing effects of language redolent of the French thinker’s arguments in *Creative Evolution*. Describing conventional copy as “a string of words turned out by an underpaid copy-drudge who has been ordered to fill a certain number of square inches of space,” Brooker proposes an alternative approach that he represents in the form of a conic diagram, wherein “vertical lines suggest the final unification in the finished copy of numerous ideas derived from each stratum of knowledge” (Fig. 26).\(^{237}\) The conic shape and “strata” of Brooker’s figure point to Bergson’s cone of memory, and its constituent “sections,” as a likely prototype; while its “vertical lines” striving for unification suggest Ouspensky’s cone, or Brooker’s own youthful model of “gravitation,” as possible templates (both of the latter, in turn, being of probable Bergsonian derivation as well). Brooker’s *Marketing* diagram reveals the artist-advertiser’s paradoxical operationalization of Bergson’s critical ontology as an instrument of commerce. Brooker’s advertising texts seized upon the potential for Bergsonian “rhythm” to act as a “memory-moulder” as part of a critical intervention within a hegemonic discourse on “attention” as a spatial faculty that nevertheless yoked the French thinker’s time-based alternative to instrumental reason in the service of a practical agenda.\(^{238}\)

Brooker’s experiments in music visualization and participatory advertising anticipate McLuhan’s early prescriptions for a corrective “orchestration” of industrial society in *The Mechanical Bride* as well as Innis’s coeval appeals to a putatively redemptive “oral

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\(^{237}\) Brooker [Surrey], “Copy as Dead as a Fencepost or Alive as a Tree,” 155, 157.

tradition” in his late communications writings. But where McLuhan’s invocations of the auditory were intended to compensate for, and indeed to redress, the perceived threat posed by (in particular, American) commercial culture, Brooker’s simultaneous exploration of musical themes across “high” and “low” cultural forms exposes a more ambivalent program, in which Bergson’s sound-based ontology was at times redeployed as an instrument for persuading consumers. Notwithstanding the critical motivation of Brooker’s harnessing of Bergsonian time concepts to advertising, he comes to resemble Innis’s deploring portrait of Canadian artists as “reduced to the status of sandwich men.” At the same time, Innis’s relentless critique of the threat posed by the “Printers’ ink” of imperialistic American publishers belies his likely, if unacknowledged, debt to Brooker’s insights on subjects ranging from the latent dialogism of radio to the potential orality of traditional print media. Similarly, if Brooker’s commercial applications of Bergson’s redemptive rhetoric of “melody” would appear to clash with the anti-commercialism of The Mechanical Bride, McLuhan’s later writings would discard the “moralistic approach” of that early text in favour of an “operational” approach to media welcoming collaborations with industry.

241 Innis, Changing Concepts of Time, 1.
The Bergsonian ontology promoted by Brooker through his advertising writings and visual art of the 1920s significantly troubles Gregory Betts’s portrait of the artist-advertiser as a Canadian Vorticist; the mature cultural criticism of that group’s leader, Wyndham Lewis, having squarely taken aim at the dual targets of mass advertising and Bergsonian ontology. Prior to adopting the fully-fledged Bergsonian perspective articulated by his marketing texts of the years spanning 1924 through 1930, Brooker explored the insights of another French theorist, the pharmacist and pop psychologist Émile Coué, as an alternative to then dominant, associationist and behaviorist approaches to advertising. Coué is best remembered today as the originator of the popular mantra, “Day by day, in every way, I’m getting better and better.” This simple phrase offers a succinct reduction of his method, which claimed to ameliorate psychosomatic disorders through techniques of induced auto-suggestion.

Brooker’s first monograph, published as a stand-alone volume by Marketing in 1923, appropriated the French therapist’s arsenal of subliminal techniques in support of a reformation of salesmanship. Subconscious Selling—the only known copy of which I located at the British Library in 2010—develops Coué’s insights into a pragmatic program for self-improvement and mass persuasion. Adopting the French therapist’s pre-Freudian conceptualization of the unconscious as a fluid medium susceptible to rational direction and control, Brooker speculated that, “The Subconscious is controllable

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… “Brooker’s exploration of the potentially lucrative applications of Coué’s method again situates the Canadian artist-advertiser at the opposite pole of the discursive formation traced by the polemical writings of Lewis, who held Coué responsible for supplying the psychological foundations of modern advertising:

In the world of the Advertisement, Coué-fashion, everything that happens today (or everything that is being advertised here and now) is better, bigger, brighter, more astonishing than anything that has ever existed before. (Dr. Coué actually was embarked upon his teaching, so he said, by noticing, and responding to, an advertisement.)

Brooker’s dialogue with Couëism in *Subconscious Selling* is also significant for showing clear signs of Bergsonian influence already a year prior to the artist-advertiser’s first known citation of the French philosopher. Echoing Bergson’s representation of memory as a corporeally situated “attention to life,” in *Subconscious Selling* Brooker states that, “A thought, a sensation, is a living thing. It has a life of its own. It endures. It becomes a part of us.” Moreover, Brooker’s division of conscious and subconscious operations into “two strata of mental activity” reprises Bergson’s “cone” of memory, whose multiple “sections” correspond to divergent, but mutually enduring, episodes in the psychic life of the subject. Brooker would revisit the hydraulic metaphors for

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247 See Brooker [Surrey], “Making Orders Flow Downhill,” 3.
248 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 173, emphasis in the original.
249 Brooker [Surrey], *Subconscious Selling*, 11, my emphasis.
250 Brooker [Surrey], *Subconscious Selling*, 6.
consciousness deployed by *Subconscious Selling* in his first known published text on Bergson, an analysis of the essay *Laughter* for the American journal *Printers’ Ink*, which likened consciousness to the “down-hill flowing tendency” of Bergsonian matter.²⁵¹ (Coué makes subsequent appearances—both direct and indirect—in Brooker’s early writings for *Marketing.*)²⁵² Couéism thus constitutes something of a previously overlooked bridge between Brooker’s pre-World War I philosophy of Ultimatism and his deepening commitment of Bergsonian thought following his 1923 “conversion” at Dwight. Brooker’s Couéism simultaneously underlines the consistent internationalism of his outlook, from the early continental sources of Ultimatism, through the French influence of Coué and Bergson.

Captivated by Number

**Behaviorism**

If Brooker’s Bergsonian and Couéist sympathies, and cross-disciplinary traffic between advertising and modernist abstraction, place him in tension with the postwar polemics of Lewis, their mutual critique of (and simultaneous borrowings from) the then fashionable doctrine of behaviorism locates a point of convergence between their projects that Betts’s Canadian Vorticist label glosses over. John B. Watson—the American founder of

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²⁵¹ Brooker [Surrey], “Making Orders Flow Downhill,” 3. Discussing Coué’s psychology in *Subconscious Selling*, Brooker had earlier written that, “[The consumer’s] fluid subconsciousness has a tendency to flow down hill, to flow in certain channels.” Brooker [Surrey], *Subconscious Selling*, 123.
behaviorism—was already the object of Lewis’s venom in *Time and Western Man*. For Lewis, Watson’s paradoxical psychology of “thought without consciousness” represented the end point in a centuries-long dissolution of the European rationalist tradition within which Lewis situated his ideology critique and, somewhat improbably, his modernist aesthetic project. “Behaviorism,” as Lewis states with commendable concision, “… substitutes the body for the ‘mind.’”

In a move anticipating the clinical concerns of Jonathan Crary and Michel Foucault, Lewis portrayed Watson as embodying the American phenomenon of the “Tester”: whose subjects were the products of “laboratory” conditions of efficiency and observation. Sounding very much like Crary over sixty years later, Lewis wrote that, in Watson’s science, “Everything about a human being is directly and peripherally observable: and all the facts about the human machine can be stated ‘in terms of stimulus and response,’ or of ‘habit-formation.’” For Lewis, Watson and behaviorism were inseparable from forces of rationalization then in the process of reshaping American society: “Professor Watson is a fanatical product of modern American civilization, an

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253 Paul Scott Stanfield notes that, “the passage on Watson in *Time and Western Man* repeats, sometimes verbatim, the discussion of him published the year before in *The Art of Being Ruled,*” a circumstance which Stanfield attributes to the two texts’ shared paternity in the Ur-manuscript, *The Man of the World*. Paul Scott Stanfield, “Behaviorism in Wyndham Lewis’s *Snooty Baronet,*” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 47, no. 2 (2001): 244.


255 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 324. “All [Watson] has to say is what I have already told you, namely, that the human body is a machine: that it has no ‘mind’: that it possesses two things—(1) instinct, that is inherited muscular habit, and (2) habits (speech and others) that is acquires …: and that the working of what is called the ‘mind’ can be observed from outside by watching what it does. Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 326, emphasis in the original.


257 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 320.

258 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 324.
impassioned mechanistic theorist, and a believer in the possibility and desirability of mechanizing men much further and more thoroughly than has been done even at present.”

The subsequent novel *Snooty Baronet* mounts Lewis’s most sustained, if highly tenuous, critique of behaviorism. Michael Kell-Imrie, its behaviorist protagonist, personifies Lewis’s satire of Watson’s dehumanizing psychology; yet, as Paul Scott Stanfield persuasively argues, simultaneously bears a striking and paradoxical likeness to Lewis’s own literary persona. Moreover, the modernist pyrotechnics of the novel’s prose noticeably echo the stylistic strategies of Lewis’s cultural criticism. Even as Lewis is beset by fears that the sovereignty of the rationalist (white, male) ego at the centre of his personal aesthetic and philosophical project is endangered by Watson’s machinic approach to psychology and social engineering, at the same time the British artist-author’s own method of “non-moral” satire “ran closely parallel in some ways.”

A proto-postmodern satire of genre fiction that constantly alludes to its own inhabitation of potboiler conventions, *Snooty Baronet* recounts the misadventures of the chronically unmindful Kell-Imrie as his literary agent, Humphrey Cooper-Carter (“Humph”), plots to boost sales of his next book by arranging for the author to be abducted by bandits in Persia while putatively conducting research on a modern-day

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259 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 327.
262 See, for instance, Kell-Imrie’s self-reflexive aside, “I ’motioned him to a seat’ (as I remarked that the novelist always says on such occasions when I was reading up a novel or two, prior to composing the present unorthodox treatise) ….” Wyndham Lewis, *Snooty Baronet*, ed. Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), 219. The novel concludes with the publication of Kell-Imrie’s adventures by *The Book of the Month Club*, and a competing version of events authored by his former companion, Valerie Ritter. See Lewis, *Snooty Baronet*, 251.
vestige of the ancient cult of Mithras. Deploying his behaviorist’s toolkit, Kell-Imrie sets about his machinelike “field-work” *en route* through the south of France and Persia with his mantis-like companion Val in tow. But even as Lewis lingers on the “repertoire of acts” performed by Snooty’s “human specimens” in punctilious emulation of Watson’s methodology, the text ends up foregrounding the manic discontents of its protagonist’s mental life (which, according to behaviorist tenets, does not, however, exist).

Kell-Imrie’s prosthetic physiology is the comical embodiment of these contradictions—the behaviorist appropriately sporting a wooden leg and metal plate in his head that endow his animalistic couplings with Val with an aura of laboratory experimentation (perhaps also intended an oblique reference to the sexual misconduct scandal that abruptly terminated Watson’s academic career). In a pivotal scene, Snooty experiences a vertiginous loss of ego as he contemplates a hatter’s dummy in a window display:

> Was not perhaps this fellow who had come up beside me a puppet too? I could not swear that he was not! I turned my eyes away from him, back to the smiling phantom in the window, with intense uneasiness. For I thought to myself as I caught sight of him in the glass, smiling away in response to our mechanical friend, *certainly he is a puppet too!* Of course he was, but dogging that was the brother-thought, *but equally so am I*.

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264 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 328; Lewis, *Snooty Baronet*, 16.
265 It is not fortuitous that the portrait of Watson painted by Lears is similarly afflicted by paradox: “The man who believed that a malleable self could be harnessed to a regime of unceasing productivity was himself an emotional wreck.” Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 191.
266 Lewis, *Snooty Baronet*, 135-36, emphasis in the original.
Snooty’s auto-roboticization in this passage rehearses the equivocal dynamics of informationalization subsequently analyzed by McLuhan in *Understanding Media*, explored in the next chapter. The novel’s dénouement dramatizes an analogous confounding of identities precipitating Humph’s (ostensibly accidental) shooting death in Persia at Kell-Imrie’s hands. Anxious that his literary proxy may be plotting to appropriate his literary celebrity, Snooty preemptively attacks his agent, all the while—true to his behaviorist principles—disavowing the very possibility that his actions could have an intentional basis. Prior to the ill-fated rendezvous with their bandit accomplices, Snooty complains that, “In short, he had become Snooty. He had usurped my snootiness”; finally exclaiming in exasperation to Humph, “‘Listen! It is I who am Snooty, not you! You keep to your role, and leave mine to me!’”\(^\text{267}\)

Arguably it is at the level of the “language machinery” of Lewis’s satirical prose—its “rattletrap” assault on the reader—that *Snooty Baronet* comes closest to ventriloquizing the very tenets that it ostensibly sets out to critique, a seeming contradiction first noted by Hugh Kenner.\(^\text{268}\) The machine-like staccato and impersonal jargon of Lewis’s “mindless modernism” is legible as both a strategic inhabitation and travesty of behaviorism’s efficient and mechanical conception of human action and speech as well as Watson’s laboratory methodology.\(^\text{269}\)

Brooker’s marketing texts negotiate a similarly ambivalent relationship to Watson, advertising historian Russell Johnston observing that, “The foremost Canadian writer on

\(^{267}\) Lewis, *Snooty Baronet*, 205, emphasis in the original.

\(^{268}\) Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 329; Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis*, 113. “This fiction started by being satire, employing the strategy of appearing to know no more about the characters than a set of behaviorist’s Tests would reveal. Lewis gradually came to doubt if there were in fact any more to know.” Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis*, 107.

the subject …, Bertram Brooker took great pleasure in lampooning Watson’s adventures in advertising.”

Brooker’s short story “Mrs. Legion’s Affection” recounts the collapse of a New York advertising agency when its bid to locate the living embodiment of “the perfect average of American womanhood” comically misfires. Similarly, his 1931 Adelphi article, “Prophets Wanted,” decried the “behavioristic rationalization of experience” under modernity. But even as Brooker’s appeals to an aesthetic approach to advertising problems, which he dubbed “humanics,” took aim at the quantitative techniques associated with Watson, a number of his own writings and graphic designs participated in the same proto-informatic, statistical project. Indeed, I want to argue that the streamlined bodies of Brooker’s semi-abstract canvases of the mid-1920s can also be read, in part, as responding to Watson’s drive to bring into representation demographically “average” subjects. As his biographer Kerry W. Buckley notes, Watson’s behaviorist reforms were, from the start, bound up with commercial ambitions. Beginning around 1916, Watson worked as a consultant to industry, developing various performance and personnel tests for corporate clients—and eventually also for military applications, following the United States’ entry into World War I in 1917. Following a

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270 Johnston, Selling Themselves, 173.
271 Brooker quoted in Johnston, Selling Themselves, 174, emphasis in the original. An unpublished dialogue, “A Trade Survey of Mars in 1997,” transposes the travesty of Watsonian methodology rehearsed by “Mrs. Legion’s Affection” into the conventions of science fiction: “Well, Mr. Mergem, after 14 years close study of the field I have returned with a report that I’m afraid you will find disappointing. It will be delivered to you in a few days. There are 512 volumes, 22 miles of charts, 115,000 feet of film, and 63 acres of maps.” Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “A Trade Survey of Mars in 1997,” n.d., box 1, folder 18, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 2.
272 Brooker, “Prophets Wanted,” 185.
273 Brooker [Surrey], “Roll Your Own Vocabulary,” 102; Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “One Thousand Sources of Copy Ideas VII – Factors in Selection of Mediums That Affect Copy,” Marketing 24, no. 12 (1926): 401; Brooker [Surrey], Copy Technique in Advertising, 78. Brooker’s advertising writings consistently argue that, “Markets are people!” Bertram Brooker [Anonymous], “‘Darn the Luck—It’s Solid!’” Marketing 21, no. 12 (1924): 323; see also Bertram Brooker, “Markets are People!,” Marketing 22, no. 1 (1925): 6–7, 22.
274 See Buckley, Mechanical Man, 94-98, 99-111.
sexual misconduct scandal that resulted in his departure from Johns Hopkins University. Watson joined the New York advertising firm of J. Walter Thompson in December 1920 (he would be promoted to vice-president in 1924).

Buckley notes that, “Watson joined the advertising community at a pivotal juncture in its history.” The behaviorist’s studies of conditioned reflexes in animals and infants, based on the prior work of Pavlov and Bechterev, would prove invaluable to J. Walter Thompson’s efforts at transforming an emergent national market into a “society of consumers” by reinforcing the non-rational impulses of buyers. In Buckley’s words, “[M]arketing of goods depended,” in Watson’s view, “not upon an appeal to reason but upon the stimulation of desire.” As his biographer also stresses, Watson’s tenure at J. Walter Thompson was equally defined by an intensified application of demographic techniques pioneered by such figures as Paul Cherrington, an early proponent of market research. Jackson Lears observes that, “As the advertising business became more professional, its efforts to mold the daily lives of millions was increasingly based on statistics. By the end of the 1920s, market research was being hailed as a major achievement of the national advertising agencies.” Market surveys and quantitative studies of consumption patterns fed Watson’s behaviorist project of conditioning consumer reflexes through stimuli calculated to elicit predictable responses. Watson simultaneously promoted tests originally developed in a laboratory context for assessing

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275 See Buckley, Mechanical Man, 112-33.
276 Buckley, Mechanical Man, 146.
277 Buckley, Mechanical Man, 137.
278 See Buckley, Mechanical Man, 87.
279 Buckley, Mechanical Man, 137.
280 Buckley, Mechanical Man, 141.
281 See Buckley, Mechanical Man, 135, 141.
282 Lears, Fables of Abundance, 225. Similarly, Roland Marchand writes that, “A knowledge of consumer desires was becoming increasingly crucial to decisions not only about how much to produce but also about the details of what to produce.” Marchand, Advertising the America Dream, 29, emphasis in the original.
personnel and performance as part of neo-Taylorist program of organizational reforms aimed at maximizing efficiency.  

Though skeptical of behaviorist psychology, Brooker nevertheless experimented with quantitative techniques of linguistic analysis that recall the laboratory experiments carried out by Watson and associationist peers and predecessors. In a 1926 article for the American trade paper *Printers’ Ink*, Brooker proposed a system for rating the “use-frequency” of words developed by the Columbia University Professor of Educational Psychology Edward L. Thorndike in *The Teacher’s Word Book*. A far cry from “the magical power of words to move human feelings” championed by Brooker in reaction to a rising tide of managerial rhetoric, and quoted by Lears (like a number of other advertising historians, without thereby recognizing the Canadian artist-advertiser as the authorial source of the pseudonymous pronouncement), Thorndike’s book comprises an alphabetical listing of the 10,000 most frequently occurring words in the English language: the result of an analysis of over 4.5 million sampled words. Recalling the personnel tests devised by Watson, Brooker proposes Thondike’s tabulation as “a language test for advertising purposes.” He proceeds to perform a comparative analysis of Thorndike’s data against his own custom list of “100 thin words,” first published in an earlier feature for *Printers’ Ink*: a catalogue of marketing superlatives and jargon. In contrast to such “advertisingese,” as Brooker calls it, the he advocates “the use of words,

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283 See Buckley, *Mechanical Man*, 144-45.
286 Brooker [Surrey], “A Rating System for Words in Advertising Copy,” 106.
287 Brooker [Surrey], “A Rating System for Words in Advertising Copy,” 106; see also Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Take a Tip from Tchekhoff,” *Printers’ Ink*, 127, no. 9 (1924): 77-84.
common in themselves, but arranged in unfamiliar combinations, so that their novelty possesses an edge which penetrates the mind.”

In a counterintuitive leap, Brooker seizes upon the quantitative rationale of Thorndike’s list as an endorsement of his own prior advocacy of the literary “masters of language,” including Shakespeare and Tchekhov, as model copywriters. Brooker then proceeds to undertake an analysis of three texts drawn from his own shelves, using Thorndike’s rating as a cross reference: Katherine Mansfield’s story “The Daughters of the Late Colonel,” Dorothy Wordsworth’s “Journals,” and a poem by John Donne. From these texts, Brooker excerpts paragraph-long passages, which he proceeds to decompose through double-spacing and by assigning numeric values drawn from Thorndike’s book. This tabular presentation encourages a form of close reading that anticipates the techniques of New Criticism.

Joshua Gang has linked the emergence of techniques of close reading to Watson’s critique of structuralist psychology, noting that, “By the 1920s, behaviorism’s objections to structuralist introspection were circulating globally and appearing in a number of different literary circles.” In addition to the writings of Samuel Beckett and other modernist authors, Gang identifies the New Criticism developed by the Cambridge professor I.A. Richards as a product of Watson’s psychological reforms. Significantly, Gang identifies Thorndike as an “ally” of Watson’s in the critique of introspective psychology. Brooker reinforces the effect of suspended attention generated by his own application of Thorndike’s principles by calling for multiple readings of his excerpts so

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288 Brooker [Surrey], “A Rating System for Words in Advertising Copy,” 107, emphasis in the original.
that readers might appreciate the “content” of the texts, and in order to call attention to the fact that “the sharpness of effect is not due to uncommon words, but to common words in uncommon sequence.”

The contradictory dynamics of Brooker’s informationalization of language is particularly striking in the case of the Bergsonian Mansfield (an oft-quoted voice in his subsequent McGraw-Hill textbooks) (Fig. 27), and “the sharp appeal … to the mind through the senses” elaborated by her quoted text. Brooker’s informatic rendering of the one-time Rhythmist’s prose as a succession of quantitative values corresponding to Thorndike’s scale of statistical frequency underlines the ambivalent stakes of the artist-advertiser’s concurrent participation in multiple discourses—on the dangers of rationalization as well as the redemptive possibilities of Bergsonian alternatives.

If Thorndike’s behaviorist methodology served as the immediate model and reference for the computational poetics sketched by Brooker for the readership of Printers’ Ink, Vernon Lee was another unlikely early innovator in “reading-by-numbers” whose “quantification of language” in such studies as “The Syntax of De Quincy,” “The Rhetoric of Landor,” and “Carlyle and the Present Tense” Benjamin Morgan proposes as an alternate (if disavowed) prototype for Richards’s program of close reading that simultaneously contextualizes Brooker’s fusion of quantitative and vitalist perspectives within a counter-tradition of physiological formalism. Morgan argues that Lee’s

293 Brooker [Surrey], “A Rating System for Words in Advertising Copy,” 108.
295 Morgan, “Vernon Lee’s Aesthetics and the Origins of Close Reading,” 45, 49. Brooker’s Lee-inspired fusion of algorithmic and physiological approaches to textual analysis constitutes an overlooked vernacular
“characterization of words as ‘data’” was not in conflict with her better-known explorations of the physiological aesthetics of empathy.  

Lee’s informationalization of the text was, rather, grounded in a recognition that “the body [is] a site of linguistic meaning” that complicates the mind-body dualism reinforced by the cognitive and formalist bias of Richards and other New Critics.

**Psychophysics**

Lee’s “data-based” aesthetics must also be traced to the quantification of physiological response performed by nineteenth-century psychophysicists. Inaugurated by the experimental psychologist Gustav Fechner, psychophysics built upon the earlier attempts of Ernst Heinrich Weber to quantify “the smallest discernible distinction” between two stimuli. Positing a parallelism between mental and physical events, Fechner’s psychophysics proposed a logarithmic progression of ratios between physical stimuli and somatic reactions that implied a non-causal relationship with psychological states of intensity. The resulting Fechner-Weber law offered a mathematical description of perception that seemed to promise a fully quantitative, but non-deterministic, precedent for McLuhan’s somatic and informatic reworking of New Critical methodologies conventionally traced exclusively to his Cambride training with Leavis and Richards.

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300 “Fechner set about rationalizing sensation through the measurement of external stimulus. … His achievement was the establishment of what is variously called Fechner’s Law or Weber’s Law, in which he proposed a mathematical equation that expressed a functional relationship between sensation and stimulus.” Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 145.
psychology. In effect, psychophysics transformed the “mind” described by introspective psychology into what Kittler termed a “psychic information system,” in which the interpretation of psychic events is reduced to the recording of asymbolic data.

Fechner’s establishment of “measurable units of sensation” based on the thresholds of perception determined by Weber would support the emergence of attention as a central problematic of scientific discourse and everyday experience under capitalist modernity. Jonathan Crary argues that,

It is possible to see one crucial aspect of modernity as an ongoing crisis of attentiveness, in which the changing configurations of capitalism continually push attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with an endless sequence of new products, sources of stimulation, and streams of information, and then respond with new methods of managing and regulating perception.

Indeed, Crary postulates that attention constituted “the fundamental condition of … knowledge” itself under the psychophysical regime initiated by Fechner. The scientific discourses of attention analyzed by Crary were equally central to the earliest academic literature on marketing, which conceived of advertising’s goal as, in the influential words...

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301 “Higher mental activity, therefore no less than sensory activity, the activity of the mind as a whole no less than in detail, is subject to quantitative determination. … Indeed, we will demonstrate that in principle our psychic measurement will amount to the same as physical measurement, the summation of so- and-so many multiples of an equal unit. Gustav Theodor Fechner, Elements of Psychophysics, trans. Helmut E. Adler; ed. Davis H. Howes and Edwin G. Boring (1860; trans., New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 46-47.
302 Kittler, Discourse Networks, 292.
303 See Kittler, Discourse Networks, 229-30.
304 Crary, Suspensions of Perception, 13.
305 Crary, Suspensions of Perception, 25.
of the psychologist and marketing theorist Walter Dill Scott, “to attract attention.”

Echoing the Second Law of Thermodynamics, Scott qualified attention as a finite and easily depleted resource: “Simple objects can not hold our attention for more than 3 or 4 seconds,” he claimed. Attention was also characterized as having a “focus and [a] margin.” Drawing upon the evidence of psychophysical laboratory experiments, Scott emphasized the potential suggestibility of objects appearing in the margins as much as the attention-getting properties of those appearing in the centre.

It is within this psychophysical construction of an “attentive subject,” and of correspondingly attentive consumers, that Brooker’s neo-vitalist advertising writings self-consciously intervened. “Advertising is growing less and less mysterious,” the Canadian artist-advertiser wrote in the pages of Marketing in 1923; “… there is a steadily increasing recognition of advertising as a force subject to demonstrable laws. Through years of experiment certain broad fundamentals of advertising practice have been established.” As this passage documents, Brooker not only acknowledged, but actively embraced the “eye-trapping” and “attention-compelling” devices advocated by associationist peers—at least within limited contexts, such as “small-space copy.” As Brooker’s comments in another advertising text clarify, his aesthetically-motivated approach to marketing accepted the imperative of “arrest[ing] attention” for media that operate through a “metaphorical” substitution of one thing for another, but set out to

308 Scott, The Psychology of Advertising, 42.
309 Crary, Suspensions of Perception, 10.
310 Bertram Brooker [Philip E. Spane], “‘Shape’ as an Attention Compeller,” Marketing 19, no. 5 (1923): 140.
311 Brooker [Spane], “‘Shape’ as an Attention Compeller,” 140, 142.
complement this spatial logic with a Bergsonian emphasis on the auditory, as what he
dubbed “a memory-moulder.”\textsuperscript{312}

In reality, the relationship between the “spatial” logic underwriting psychophysical
constructions of attention and Brooker’s own Bergsonian conception of memory was less
oppositional than his \textit{Marketing} texts sometimes presuppose. Although Bergson’s \textit{Time
and Free Will} attacks the psychophysical quantification of interior states, with special
emphasis on the work of Fechner,\textsuperscript{313} Alexandra Hui underlines that, “Psychophysics as
framed by Fechner was an aesthetic project from its very origin.”\textsuperscript{314} Issuing from a
monistic cosmology that he termed “panpsychism,”\textsuperscript{315} Fechner’s psychophysics was in
fact a far cry from the “encroachment of scientific thought into the recesses of the soul”
that the early Bergson of \textit{Time and Free Will} perceived it to be.\textsuperscript{316} His project is more
accurately characterized as a form of “nonreductive materialism” that attempted to fuse
the idealism of \textit{Naturphilosophie} with logical empiricism.\textsuperscript{317} Embracing a nondual model
of mind and body anticipating Bergson’s own meditation on the mutual implication of
matter and memory, Fechner’s research encompassed a range of aesthetic applications
culminating in his 1876 book, \textit{Vorschule der Aesthetik} (Introduction to Aesthetics). The
latter text outlined an “experimental aesthetics ‘from below’” whose clinical approach to
aesthetic problems cleared a path for the computational studies of Lee and other

\textsuperscript{312} Brooker [Spane], “Rhythmical Headings?,” 40, 39.
\textsuperscript{313} See John Mullarkey, \textit{Bergson and Philosophy} (Notre Dame, ND: University of Notre Dame Press,
1999), 22.
\textsuperscript{314} Alexandra Hui, \textit{The Psychophysical Ear: Musical Experiments, Experimental Sounds, 1840-1910}
\textsuperscript{315} Heidelberger, \textit{Nature from Within}, 7.
\textsuperscript{316} Guerlac, \textit{Thinking in Time}, 42.
\textsuperscript{317} Heidelberger, \textit{Nature from Within}, 106.
exponents of physiological aesthetics subsequently embraced by the Bergsonian Brooker.318

Hui’s investigation of continuities between nineteenth-century laboratory studies of hearing and contemporary developments in musical composition, criticism and theory undermines any easy distinction between the psychophysical quantification of sensation and attention that is the object of Bergson’s early critique and his own “melodic” (but equally attentive) alternative. Similarly, Friedrich Kittler argues that the paradigm shift effected by psychophysics is legible in what he terms the “discourse network of 1900” brought into visibility by literary forms of automatic writing inspired, as in the case of Gertrude Stein, through exposure to the laboratory experiments of psychophysicists such as Hugo Münsterberg (with whom Stein studied at Harvard), even as these same artists drew inspiration from Bergson’s writings.319 Kittler’s description of these literary forms as articulating an “aesthetics of applied physiology” suggests analogies with the musical artefacts studied by Hui as well as the criticism and theory of Vernon Lee.

Given the mixed genealogies of Lee’s quantitative aesthetics and Bergson’s auditory paradigm—both of which served as primary sources for Brooker’s critical advertising practice—it is unsurprising to discover the Canadian artist-advertiser navigating the ambivalent terrain explored by “A Rating System for Words in Advertising Copy” (in which he presents Thorndike’s linguistic rating system). Brooker’s experimentation with quantitative methods redolent of Fechner’s psychophysics should not be mistaken for a contradiction of his Bergsonian critique of hegemonic (associationist and behaviorist) advertising. Rather, it points to the equivocal dynamics of contemporary debates on

318 Hui, The Psychophysical Ear, 17.
quantitative and vitalist epistemologies, whose stakes, as articulated in the writings of the seemingly rival Fechner and Bergson, are ultimately deeply intertwined. It is unsurprising, then, to find Brooker citing experimental psychologists including the psychophysicist Münsterberg and the associationist Harry L. Hollingworth.\footnote{320} Hollingworth’s visual ranking of the “relative attention value of 50 geometrical forms” in his 1920 advertising textbook \textit{Advertising and Selling}—values that would have been determined in a laboratory context utilizing a tachistoscope—is thus ultimately not far removed from the epistemological assumptions informing Brooker’s quantitative analysis of Mansfield’s prose, even as the overall objective of the latter’s marketing writings was framed as a Bergsonian corrective to the prevailing, psychophysically-inspired behaviorist paradigm.\footnote{321}

Brooker would revisit the numeric aesthetic of his experiment in statistical analysis for \textit{Printers’ Ink} in a series of graphic designs for newspaper advertisements published in \textit{Marketing} in 1928 through 1930. Designs for \textit{The Family Herald and Weekly Star}, \textit{The Halifax Herald}, \textit{The Saskatoon Star Phoenix} visualize circulation gains as “pictorial statistics”—Michael Cowan’s term for a modernist precursor to contemporary infographics—addressed to potential advertisers.\footnote{322} A more sophisticated rendition of this numeric theme is found in a 1928 advertisement for Reliance Engravers with the punning headline “Figure Drawing” (Fig. 28), featuring a backdrop of abstracted numerals. The

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{320} See Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “One Thousand Sources of Copy Ideas—X: ‘Expression’ of the Copy Writer or ‘Impression’ on the Reader?,” \textit{Marketing} 25, no. 3 (1926): 82; Brooker [Surrey], \textit{Layout Technique in Advertising}, 155.
\end{itemize}
copy wryly draws parallels between art and finance: “Many commercial artists make drawings of the figure; but many more are forced to make drawings to a figure.” Such designs give shape to Brooker’s early experiments in what we would now recognize as a form of “info-aesthetics.”

The chart-like contours of the multicolour “tubular forms” which dominate Brooker’s early masterpiece Sounds Assembling (Fig. 29) likewise suggest the info-graphics mobilized by market researchers and early advertising psychologists. The charts developed by Brooker to map the interrelation of characters and plot in his unfinished novel, Jevon (Fig. 30), may constitute a previously overlooked prototype for the diagrammatic quality of Sounds Assembling. At the same time, Bergson’s description of the virtual “motor diagram” sketched by the motile subject in preparation for action may have inspired its zigzagging lines. In its merger of the market researcher’s graph with Bergson’s kinaesthetic descriptions of virtual space, Sounds Assembling anticipates

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323 “Figure Drawing,” Marketing 28, no. 13 (1928): 461, emphasis in the original.

324 Lev Manovich, “Introduction to Info-Aesthetics,” 2008, http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/060-introduction-to-info-aesthetics/57-article-2008.pdf (accessed January 15, 2016). The tensions between Bergsonian intuition and quantitative analysis structuring Brooker’s advertising writings of the 1920s—and idealized representations of the body in his coeval visual art—emerge with clarity through a comparison of his comments in two contemporaneous articles. The first, published by Printers’ Ink, argues in favour of quantification: “Say what you like about selling the intangibles—most of us prefer brass tacks. We like to say, ‘First—Second—Third.’ We like to spread out our fingers and announce five or ten reasons why anyone should buy what we have to sell. And if we can list these reasons, or, better still chart them, in sales manuals, in business paper copy, or in consumer advertising, we feel that we have scored a victory.” The second text, published by Marketing, mobilizes Bergson’s “Laughter” as a critique of quantitative techniques: “Life is not subject to mathematics. Neither is life governed by facts.” Brooker [Surrey], “Hammering Brass Tacks into Flaccid Copy,” 61; Brooker [Spane], “Make Advertising Believable,” 75.

325 Dennis Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 183.

326 “There will have to be something almost in the nature of a chart of the contents before I begin,” Brooker notes in the manuscript for Jevon. Bertram Brooker, “Plot,” Jevon, August 18, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 1, emphasis in the original. “More than ever I feel the need of charts to get balance of plot and character interest, and also what will be practically stage settings of the principal characters.” Bertram Brooker, “Notes,” Jevon, August 29, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 1. Brooker’s Jevon charts constitute a previously overlooked paradigm for the diagrammatic zigzags and star forms of Sounds Assembling, suggesting the intriguing possibility that the canvas may encode a narrative content.

327 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 111, emphasis in the original.
McLuhan’s likening in *The Mechanical Bride* of the “chart-image” of listener habits generated by the Nielsen Audimeter to “cubist painting.” 328 At the same time, the restricted vocabulary of “geometric shapes” deployed by Brooker in *Sounds Assembling* suggests analogies with Hollingworth’s previously mentioned inventory of attention-compelling figures (“‘star,’ ‘crescent,’ ‘crown,’ etc.”) (Fig. 31). 329 Brooker had explored the “attention-compelling effect” of “‘wrong’ shapes” (“a circle, a star, a zig-zag”) in a 1923 *Marketing* article redolent of Hollingworth’s psychophysical methodology, thereby situating the Canadian’s early abstractions within the same psychotechnical configuration as the laboratory investigations conducted by the American advertising psychologist. 330

While Brooker’s marketing writings responded to, and rejected, the mechanistic model of consumer psychology associated with Watson’s behaviorism, the Canadian artist-advertiser was simultaneously an unlikely early champion of demographic and statistical approaches. Despite his skeptical attitude toward current psychological theories, “Brooker,” writes Johnston, “believed that market research provided the data that were sought: the demographic details necessary to visualize the ideal consumer.” 331

Brooker’s preference for basic market research over still crude psychological instruments would actually have been in keeping with the priorities of many peers:

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330 Brooker [Spane], “‘Shape’ as an Attention Compeller,” 140. Although it is likely that Brooker is in dialogue with Hollingworth in this text, the artist-advertiser characteristically proposes a literary precedent: “One of Gilbert Chesterton’s detective stories, called ‘The Wrong Shape,’ deals with the unraveling of a crime mystery by means of a few pieces of clipped paper whose odd shape attract attention and eventually lead to a series of clues that result in the detection of a murderer.” Ibid. Brooker discusses Hollingworth’s approach to “attracting the reader’s attention.” Brooker [Surrey], “One Thousand Sources of Copy Ideas—X,” 82. Brooker’s allusions to Chesterton in his marketing texts suggest analogies with McLuhan’s adaptation of the Catholic modernist’s technique as a New Critical methodology, beginning with his first published text, “G.K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic.” See Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 23-24; Marshall McLuhan, “G.K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic,” *Dalhousie Review* 15, no. 4 (1934): 455-64.
The bulk of what passed for advertising research throughout the 1920s did not explore the subjective qualities of the masses. Most agency research was market research. It compiled indexes of buying power in various areas, catalogued media coverage, and tabulated brand preferences at representative retail stores. Researchers categorized selected audiences by occupation and class but did little else that would give copywriters a feeling for the ‘mass mind.’”

The Census

In virtual lock step with Watson’s innovations at J. Walter Thompson in New York (innovations soon adopted by the company’s Toronto office), beginning in 1921 Brooker explored the question of “how the census can help us sell” in the pages of *Marketing*. Brooker even claimed credit for a significant revision to a statistical series produced by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, which he proposed to the Dominion Statistician and Controller of Census R.H. Coats during a 1921 interview published by *Marketing*. Brooker was intrigued by the possibility that statistics could deliver “a

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332 Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 75.
334 Bertram Brooker [Anonymous], “How the Census can Help Us Sell,” *Marketing* 15, no. 22 (1921): 781. In an earlier issue of *Marketing* from the same year, an anonymous text (almost certainly authored by Brooker) argued that, “Market analysis has come to play an important role in the development of Canadian business. The executive who acts from intuition rather than from reason is beginning to find himself profoundly distrusted. The analyst and the statistician is coming into his own. … The 1921 Census will be the most elaborate ever undertaken in this country.” Bertram brooker [Anonymous], “What the Census Will Tell Us,” *Marketing* 15, no. 10 (1921): 346.
335 See Brooker [Anonymous], “How the Census can Help Us Sell,” 781-85; Johnston, *Selling Themselves*, 206. “Back in the fall of 1921, shortly after coming to MARKETING, I visited Ottawa and had a long session with R. H. Coats, the Dominion Statistician. I was full up on the subject of ‘Selling Statistics.’ … At that time and also in the course of two later interviews with the Dominion Statistician I tried to outline the kind of information that would be valuable, and we discussed way and means of accumulating it.” Bertram Brooker, “Census of Merchandising in Canada Approaches Reality,” *Marketing* 22, no. 5 (1925): 117.
composite character, and average consumer.\textsuperscript{336} At the same time, his writings disclose an atypical preoccupation with questions of contingency: “Certainly people are eccentric, but even their idiosyncrasies are discoverable and measurable,” he wrote in 1925.\textsuperscript{337} Brooker’s most extended discussion of statistical methodologies is found in the 1924 article, “A Statistical Picture of the Average Canadian Consumer.” While advocating the use of census data in particular, Brooker is attentive to the difficulties involved in “isolating and pinning down for investigation the normal person.”\textsuperscript{338} For instance, Brooker pointedly queries, “How is it possible to average the two sexes?”\textsuperscript{339} Brooker’s writings on statistical approaches to marketing problems, innovative in the Canadian context, thus attempted to articulate a via media between the extremes of Watsonian behaviorism and his own advocacy of “the methods of the novelist” (mostly expounded under the pseudonym Richard Surrey).\textsuperscript{340} The advantages of this two-pronged approach are evident in the late Marketing text, “Here Lies John Mass, Average Man,” in which Brooker elaborates an astonishingly early version of niche marketing.\textsuperscript{341}

Rejecting the crude audience profiles all too often generated by market researchers,\textsuperscript{342} Brooker’s proposal that, “Mass appeal is splitting up because the mass itself is splitting

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{336} Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Three Copy Points of View,” Marketing 18, no. 8 (1923): 264, emphasis in the original.
\item \textsuperscript{337} Brooker, “Markets are People!,” 22.
\item \textsuperscript{338} Bertram Brooker, “A Statistical Picture of the Average Canadian Consumer,” Marketing 20, no. 11 (1924): 394.
\item \textsuperscript{339} Brooker, “A Statistical Picture of the Average Canadian Consumer,” 394.
\item \textsuperscript{340} Brooker [Surrey], “Making the Package the Hero of Your Sales Story,” 256.
\item \textsuperscript{341} Brooker employs the term “niche” in a 1926 article for Marketing: “The problem,” he writes, “is to fill the vacuum of desire in the prospect’s mind, to fill the niches in market environment, to fill the five channels of the senses. In short, the message must be fluid enough to pour through every possible channel.” Brooker [Surrey], “Copy as Dead as a Fencepost or Alive as a Tree,” 337, my emphasis.
\item \textsuperscript{342} As Lears notes, “Despite market research, nobody really knew what the people wanted.” Lears, Fables of Abundance, 333. Marchand similarly observes that, “copywriters and artists … formed images of general audiences for a large variety of products. These revolved around the conception of two broad categories: class and mass.” Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 63. Writing in the pages of the same volume containing Brooker’s “Nudes and Prudes,” Merrill Denison observed of contemporary market research,
“up,” reveals an acute awareness of “the multitude of overlapping audiences for different goods and services” that, according to Marchand, eluded so many contemporaries. Brooker’s nuanced approach to statistics hinges on a creative misreading of contemporary representations of “class” advertising. Reprising the Bergsonian evolutionary rhetoric of the 1926 article “Are statistics More Convincing Than Words or Pictures?,” Brooker proposes that, “Advertising, like everything else, is subject to the laws of evolution . . .” Recalling his earlier reworking of Bergson’s cone of memory—with its conic sections corresponding to discrete planes of recollection—to represent factors that contribute to an effective appeal, Brooker now views the product of advertising’s ongoing evolution to be the increasingly stratified “sections into which the mass can be divided”: “The desires and demands of the differentiated public grows yearly more diverse and idiosyncratic. . . . Classes cut across classes. Buying habits within any one class are less and less dependable.”

The techniques of data mining explored by Brooker’s advertising writings are revealing symptoms of a then emergent regime of “governmentality” aimed at bringing a newly statistical image of population into representation and under management. A distinctly modernist development within the arsenal of “biopolitical” instruments

with respect to radio in particular, that, “one may reach knowingly for the salt cellar when he reads forthright statements purporting to tell what the radio audience likes and dislikes. No one knows and no one can know for there is no means of finding out. Denison, “Thoughts on Radio,” 113.


calculated, in the words of Michel Foucault, “to ensure, sustain, and multiply life … ,”\textsuperscript{348} Ian Hacking has argued that statistics constitute an intricate “part of the technology of power in a modern state.”\textsuperscript{349} In their specific marriage of advertising, statistical instruments and collective bodies, Brooker’s marketing writings suggest parallels with the roughly contemporaneous “commissioned films” by the German avant-garde filmmaker Walter Ruttmann.\textsuperscript{350} Michael Cowan posits that the techniques of montage deployed by Ruttmann’s advertising films of the Weimar period, “emulate[] what statisticians had long termed the ‘law of large numbers,’ the idea that ‘social facts’ can only be visualized by comparing numerous individual instances.”\textsuperscript{351} Recalling the earlier composite images of sample populations generated by statisticians including Francis Galton and Adolphe Quetelet,\textsuperscript{352} the “statistical gaze” mobilized by Ruttmann’s commercial films accentuates regularity and sameness over difference and potential conflict.\textsuperscript{353}

A similar algorithmic logic is legible in the streamlined contours of the figures populating Brooker’s semi-abstract canvases of the mid-1920s, including \textit{Endless Dawn}, \textit{Green Movement}, and \textit{The Dawn of Man} (all ca. 1927). Brooker’s idealized bodies “enact” a comparable “statistical epistemology” to that dramatized by Ruttmann’s commissioned films; one traceable, in Brooker’s case, to his meditations on techniques

\textsuperscript{350} Cowan, \textit{Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity}, 9.
\textsuperscript{351} Cowan, \textit{Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity}, 78.
\textsuperscript{352} See Cowan, \textit{Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity}, 79, 94-95, 114.
\textsuperscript{353} Cowan, \textit{Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity}, 80.
for representing the “average Canadian consumer.” Recalling Ruttmann’s “cross-sectional” use of montage “to superimpose the phenomena of the world in such a way that their contingent aspects cancel each other out,” Brooker’s “composite” subjects draw attention to statistical instruments as biopolitical techniques for “the administration of collective bodies.” The counter-hegemonic elements of Bergsonian philosophy that fuelled Brooker’s sophisticated intervention within the statistical forms of governmentality pioneered by J. Walter Thompson situate his writings and visual art within a genealogy of “informational culture” that comprehends the “statistical patterns” of a digital economy as fully compatible with the emergent dynamics of Bergsonian (and, later, Deleuzian) virtuality. The labile contours of Bergson’s “virtual” supersede the “grid” of Cartesian space in the statistical optic screened by the collective physiognomy of Brooker’s early semi-abstract canvases.

**Nationhood**

The biopolitical dimensions of Brooker’s proto-informatic discourse on advertising, Bergsonian ontology, and statistics also intersect with Ruttmann’s “public hygiene” films dating from the final years of the Weimar period, which “conceive of the ‘population’ in

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national terms.”

Unlike the films produced under the National Socialist regime which followed, Ruttmann’s Weimar hygiene films “still addresse[d] its viewers as individuals.”

A similar tension between individual and collective subjectivity animates Brooker’s explicitly nationalist framing of his ideal consumer as “the Average Canadian Consumer.”

Brooker’s advocacy of census data as a valuable source of information on this elusive entity inflected his articles addressed to American peers on “selling conditions” in Canada—a theme echoed by other Marketing contributors in a string of texts on “Selling Canada” that appeared in the pages of the magazine during the 1920s.

Taken together, these articles present an image of nationhood whose claims to being “distinctively Canadian” are rooted in the statistical toolbox advocated by Brooker. But unlike the increasingly monolithic image of German identity found in Ruttmann’s films, Brooker’s statistical tactics picture a national identity in-formed by Bergsonian multiplicity. Contrary to Sherrill Grace’s claim that Brooker’s “ideal of Unity” obscured “the essential diversity of Canadian culture,” his writings in fact championed a combined internationalism and regionalism, and, in particular, paid careful attention to

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358 Cowan, Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity, 100.
360 Brooker, “A Statistical Picture of the Average Canadian Consumer,” 394, my emphasis.
363 “[T]here can hardly be a Canadian art – a homogeneous thing. And nobody wants it. They simply want people living in various parts of Canada to react to their own environment. This would produce art native to certain sections of the country – and would be Canadian in the sense that it could not have been done anywhere else – but not Canadian in any uniform sense.” Brooker quoted in Joyce Zemans, “The Art and Weltanschauung of Bertram Brooker,” 65. In a 1924 article for Printers’ Ink, Brooker quoted the general sales manager of Palmolive Co. of Canada, A.D. Rettinger, on the pluralistic character of the Canadian market with an American readership in mind: “geography seems to have more to do with … differences [in merchandising conditions] than nationality. … Quebec, with its large proportion of French, does present a
the special status of Québec and of its linguistic difference. Writing for an American audience in 1923, Brooker observed that,

French as it is spoken in Quebec is by no mean [sic.] identical with the language spoken in France. … A single word sometimes betrays one’s ignorance, and the term ‘Toronto French’ is often applied with a knowing smile to the advertisements designed to interest the people of Quebec.  

This attentiveness to the pluralistic character of Canadian identity as it emerges from informatic sources including census data, would be amplified in the annual special features devoted to the Québec market published by Marketing during Brooker’s tenure as editor. The latter incorporated innovative visualizations of demographic data, including maps, graphs and tables.

If Ruttmann’s hygiene films were socially-motivated and reformist in aim, a more nakedly capitalistic logic emerges from Brooker’s statistical representation of consumers in a prototypical example of “class” advertising that he designed for The Globe newspaper (Fig. 32). Under the punning headline, “Citizens of no mean city,” the copy for this 1928 ad mobilizes demographic data to draw a “clear dividing line between above-the-average and below-the-average families” in the province of Ontario.  Consistent with widespread claims by media in this period to be patronizing “a ‘quality’

problem that is unique on the continent.” Bertram Brooker, “Marketing Conditions in Canada Affecting American Advertisers,” Printers’ Ink 128, no.7 (1924): 129.  


audience,”367 The Globe’s representation of its ideal readership as comprising “Ontario’s first 100,000 families” adheres to the “bifurcation of the nation’s consumers” into class and mass audiences noted by Marchand in his study of contemporaneous American advertising.368 “Publications aspiring to a class image,” writes Marchand, “constantly sought new ways to dramatize their superior selectivity.”369 But Brooker’s copy for The Globe ad stands out from the techniques of class appeal enumerated by Marchand, which frequently centred on the magnetic pull of a particular city, in its deployment of demographic rhetoric to trouble the premise that a single urban centre could coincide with the paper’s ideal market. “Globe readers do not live in a single city,” the ad insists; “If they did, you would have a city that has been the dream of economists, a city of prosperous, contented people.”370 Brooker here seizes upon the potential for statistics to bring into visibility a utopian (and specifically Bergsonian) population not reducible to conventional spatial thinking, thereby conjuring an imagined and, indeed, virtual metropole; one dispersed across the province of Ontario,371 and only accessible via the marketer’s statistical toolkit.

The biopolitical reduction of a target population to a statistical pattern performed by this ad looks forward to Marshall McLuhan’s subsequent, cybernetic representations of the “behavior patterns” of consumer society in early writings that prepared a path for the publication of his first monograph, The Mechanical Bride, in 1951.372 The latter text

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367 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 63.
368 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 63.
369 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 65.
370 “Citizens of No Mean City,” 19.
371 “Such a city—if all these people were neighbors—is the Globe audience.” “Citizens of No Mean City,” 19.
echoes Brooker’s statistical vocabulary in the 1928 *Globe* ad in its analysis of how market researchers convert consumer populations into “a number.”

The angular geometry of the abstract patterns flanking Brooker’s copy for *The Globe* ad—drawn in the artist-advertiser’s distinctive hand—offer a striking visualization of the statistical logic informing his textual appeal, which simultaneously invokes the emergent properties of Bergsonian virtuality as well as the higher symmetry of fourth dimensional spatial models. Ironically, these emblems of biopolitical rationality would have represented many Canadian readers’ first exposure to non-objective art—the earliest substantial exhibitions of abstraction in Canada having been mounted but the year previously (the Art Gallery of Toronto’s presentation of the Société Anonyme, and Brooker’s own solo showing at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto).374

**Secondary Orality and Hybrid Media**

The equivocal dynamics of Brooker’s Bergsonian project are equally defining of the multidisciplinary Canadian’s final advertising textbook and “artistic credo,” Copy Technique in Advertising. Where Cavell notes that the earlier and pendant volume, *Layout Technique in Advertising*, mobilizes Brooker’s “sensitivity to spacing” to propose novel approaches to the “division of space” in commercial design, Gregory Betts observes that *Copy Technique in Advertising* “organized its argument around conceptions

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of time.”

Reprising the auditory orientation of his earlier articles on the synaesthetic potential of print-based radio advertising for *Marketing*, *Copy Technique in Advertising* investigates the latent dialogical properties of text.

Through close readings of former Rhythmists (Ford Maddox Ford, Katherine Mansfield, Walter de la Mare, and John Middleton Murry) and other writers, including Joseph Conrad, whose prose Brooker views as a practical demonstration that, “the power of sound [is] greater than the power of sense,” he elaborates an “oral” interpretation of language under the impact of auditory media including gramophone and radio that sets the stage for the subsequent theses of McLuhan’s student Walter J. Ong on the “secondary orality” generated by an electronic media ecology.

*Copy Technique in Advertising* rehearses Brooker’s prescriptions, published in the pages of *Marketing* and *Printers’ Ink*, for casting copy “in the form of a dialogue.”

Anticipating the “oral” techniques that McLuhan gleaned from his dissertation research on the sixteenth-century rhetorician Thomas Nashe, Brooker exhorts readers to study the Elizabethan poets for their invention of “new word-forms” drawn from everyday

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377 Betts, “‘The Destroyer,’” 247.
378 Brooker would revisit this strategy in the dialogical methodology deployed by his late manuscript, *The Brave Voices*: “When I was writing fiction I could never create a sense of reality in the characters if I tried to invent dialogue for them, I had to be in a mood of suspension—switching my own voice off, as it were, and simply listening to what the characters would say. With this book the process is the same. As I write I am listening to a thousand voices, ancient and modern, whose words have come to me from distant ages and lands through fifty years of reading. […] In rewriting for the last time I have done my best to ignore heaps of notes—filed away, to keep my desk clear—and I sit in a sort of suspended state, making myself a receptacle, breathing in what comes uppermost in my ear from the voices of the past.” Brooker, *The Brave Voices*, n. pag.
379 Brook [Surrey], *Copy Technique in Advertising*, 192.
381 Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Socratic or Didactic Copy?,” *Printers’ Ink* 136, no. 2 (1926): 73.
speech, which he opposes to the “imitation antiques” of such modern-day advertising jargon as halitosis: “the advertising man of the present is doing just what the sixteenth century poet did,” claims Brooker; “He is forcing speech into new channels of expression.”

Brooker’s turn to historic forms of speech in search of “the living spirit of the word” is motivated by his conviction that “folk words” are more expressive than “book words”—an intermedial dialectic that clears a path for the space-time discourse of Innis. In addition to original close readings of historic texts—which fuelled his controversial championing of Shakespeare as a “consummate copy writer”—Brooker undertakes etymological studies of Anglo-Saxon, Old Danish, Old Norse, and

383 Brooker [Surrey], “Roll Your Own Vocabulary,” 101; see also Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 18-20.
385 Bertram Brooker [Anonymous], “Makes Advantage of Adversity,” Marketing 17, no. 13 (1922): 528. Attempting to distinguish his own advocacy of a “literary” approach to advertising copy from the agenda promoted by the leading American aesthete of the period, Ernest Elmo Calkins, Brooker claimed that his interest in Shakespeare lay in the playwright’s “dragging onto the polite stage the gutter-words of Elizabethan London and building with them a new idiom”—rather than a nostalgic art for art’s sake. Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “O Oikonomikos, Mr. Calkins!,” Printers’ Ink 155, no. 10 (1928): 97.
386 See Bertram Brooker [Anonymous], “Does Hand-Lettering Sell More Smokes,” Marketing 18, no. 1 (1923): 11. Brooker describes his etymological method in physical terms that recall his youthful theory of gravitation and subsequent gloss on Bergson’s discourse on “the ‘fluidity’ of thought” in Laughter: “[The advertiser] may even wish to go further and pay some attention to the history of words—the record of their slow thinning and thickening of significance in the mill of speech. There he will learn that the specific meaning of words rises and falls through the generations, like the specific gravity of fluids.” Brooker [Surrey], “Making Orders Flow Downhill,” 3; Brooker [Surrey], “Take a Tip from Tchekhoff,” 80. Brooker’s physical approach to linguistics in this passage anticipates McLuhan’s representations of the logos as a Stoic physis, discussed in the next chapter.
Complementing the oral bias of Brooker’s linguistic research, Williams notes that he “could be considered an amateur ethnomusicologist” as a result of his interest in the folk music of Iceland and India. These musical interests directly inform the aural orientation of *Copy Technique in Advertising*, a fact underlined by the following passage:

The other evening I said to Surrey, Jr., aged nine: ‘We haven’t had those Ukrainian Choir records on lately, son. How would you like to put one on?’

He went to the cabinet and took out the album. The records have a title in English on one side and on the other the title is Ukrainian.

Apparently Surrey, Jr., hadn’t noticed these queer characters previously, for he came quickly across the room, holding out the record, and exclaiming: ‘Daddy, look at the funny reading!”

That word ‘reading’ crystalized a lot of thoughts about advertising.

The test of advertising copy should not be ‘Is it good writing?’

The test should be ‘Is it good reading?’

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387 “And seeing that ‘connotation’ is itself a book word, let us have clearly in our minds, at the outset, just what it conveys. Primarily, it means ‘to note with,’ or, as the dictionary has it, ‘to imply along with an object its inherent attributes. … Originally it was a simple label-word, denoting a fetter. Centuries ago, in Denmark, for that is where we got the word, somebody saw the ‘inherent attribute’ of the fetter—namely that it made something fast or firm or fixed.” Brooker [Surrey], “Folk Words vs. Book Words in Advertising,” 109.

388 “I am not sure about Dickens. I am afraid he used a great many adjectives. But I am sure about the Old Norse writers. And since adjectives are probably the commonest mufflers of meaning in use amongst us, I should like to quote from the ancient Icelandic saga of Njal. It is what many would call a ‘poignant’ passage, I suppose; and yet it contains but one adjective. As an object-lesson in unencumbered writing it can scarcely be surpassed.” Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Swaddled Meaning in Copy,” *Printers’ Ink* 125, no. 7 (1923): 62.


391 Brooker [Surrey], *Copy Technique in Advertising*, 260, emphasis in the original.
Copy Technique in Advertising’s exploration of musical and oral forms was grounded in Brooker’s practical experiments in conveying “tone of voice” through print by means of “the vividness of colloquial phraseology.”³⁹² But his deeper, ultimately Bergsonian aim was “to reach the inner ear of the average prospect,” thereby “mak[ing] time tangible.”³⁹³ Brooker’s improbable ambition of returning advertising copy to the “living” condition theorized by Bergson as the ideal state of language in Laughter³⁹⁴—a text to which Brooker refers at least twice in his advertising writings³⁹⁵—is consistent with Jackson Lears’s observation of advertising coloured by vitalist sentiments in this period, that, “‘aliveness’ [was] an end in itself.”³⁹⁶ Brooker’s writings exemplify this animistic tendency in their assertion that vivid metaphors “make the thing ‘come alive.’”³⁹⁷ But the Bergsonian pedigree of Brooker’s protests against the “ready-made” element in advertising copy—what he appropriately dubbed “chopped-up language”—distinguishes

³⁹² Bertram Brooker [Philip E. Spane], “Can You Cast Your Copy in Story Form?,” Marketing 19, no. 11 (1923): 326. Elsewhere, Brooker advises copy writers to “Use the colloquial style when practicable, remembering that the dialogue passages in a novel are rarely skipped.” Brooker [Surrey], “Injecting Speed into Copy,” 93.
³⁹⁵ See Brooker [Spane], “Make Advertising Believable,” 75; Brooker [Surrey], “Making Orders Flow Downhill,” 3.
³⁹⁶ Lears, Fables of Abundance, 179.
³⁹⁷ Brooker [Surrey], “Rhythical Headings,” 39. In another text, Brooker reprises Bergson’s critique of positivism in arguing that the scientist can not make [a tree] come alive. Only the artist, the poet, the visualizer of life can do that.” Brooker [Spane], “Is Selling Intellectual or Emotional,” 141. Brooker’s lengthiest discussion of this theme is found in an early article for Printers’ Ink, in which he attributes his interest in “the principle of getting life instead of lingo into advertising copy” to his encounter with a cartoon image of a cowboy riding an automobile resembling a bucking bronco. “This automobile was alive!” Surrey [Brooker], “Life vs. Lingo,” 3, emphasis in the original. It is highly likely that Brooker is referring to an image drawn by himself that appeared on the cover of a 1920 market survey published by the Winnipeg Free Press and in the header for his recurring humour and traffic column for the paper, “Gasograms by Honk.” See Bertram Brooker [Honk], “Gasograms by ‘Honk,’” Winnipeg Free Press, Dec. 4, 1920, 44; Winnipeg Free Press, A Survey of Western Canada’s Motor Market: Compiled January, 1920 by The Winnipeg Free Press (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Free Press, 1920), cover.
his philosophically-informed approach from the untheorized “carnivalesque heritage” mobilized by peers. 398

Classification

The classificatory form of Copy Technique in Advertising stands in unresolved tension with the vitalistic claims of its prose content. Subdivided by a decimal scheme with six main categories in apparent emulation of library reformer Melvil Dewey’s hierarchical representation of knowledge, the artist-advertiser’s “Classification of Sources of Copy Ideas” would seem to embody the very rigidity of technical vocabulary identified by Bergson as a prime trope of the comic. 399 Ironically, Brooker’s own gloss on Laughter reveals an acute awareness of the potential for “ridicule” to be incurred through the application of any “firm and rigid platform” in representing human problems. 400 Notwithstanding this recognition, the Bergsonian rhetoric of Copy Technique in Advertising is regularly interrupted by interminable “tables” (Fig. 33), with decimal subdivisions, enumerating “the known sources of copy ideas under each head.” 401 In apparent contravention of the Bergsonian imperative animating his prose, Brooker gives the following informational rationale for the classification system that regularly disrupts its flow:

398 Bergson, Laughter, 119; Surrey [Brooker], “Copy as Dead as a Fencepost or Alive as a Tree,” 155; Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “One Thousand Sources of Copy Ideas—IV: Copy that Goes ‘Up-Country’ from the Coast of Demand,” Marketing 30, no. 10 (1926): 336; Lears, Fables of Abundance, 192.
400 Brooker [Spane], “Make Advertising Believable,” 75.
401 Brooker [Surrey], Copy Technique in Advertising, 8.
The object of the following Classification of Copy-Idea Sources is to help reveal possible gaps in information by placing the factors under each head in logical order and also to point to sources of information by means of which the gaps can be filled.\footnote{Brooker [Surrey], \textit{Copy Technique in Advertising}, 10.}

The resulting classification scheme recalls the tabular presentation of census data that accompanied Brooker’s innovative texts on market research beginning in at least 1921. The statistical logic underpinning these tables, which equally structures the sequence of chapters as a whole, would seem to fly in the face of the intuitional methodology advocated by those same chapters’ prose content (consisting, in turn, of revised versions of previously-published texts collated from the pages of \textit{Advertising and Selling}, \textit{Marketing} and \textit{Printers’ Ink}—a fact that further undermines Brooker’s claim that the “\textit{order}” pursued by the text “\textit{is itself the principle of life},” rather than any “pre-conceived plan”).\footnote{Brooker [Surrey], \textit{Copy Technique in Advertising}, 3, emphasis in the original.}

These tensions anticipate the polarities navigated by the late communications writings of Harold A. Innis, whose unconventional course Brooker may have indirectly shaped. Echoing Brooker’s earlier critique of the quantitative methods deployed by American advertisers, Innis warned of the dangers associated with the rise of neo-colonial “information industries” in the wake of America’s victory in World War 2.\footnote{Innis, \textit{The Bias of Communication}, 83.} In contradistinction to the linearity and stasis that he associated with what he termed the \textit{monopoly of knowledge} supported by American newspaper publishers and social
scientists, Innis asserted that his own “bias [lay] with the oral tradition.” This avowal, coupled with the University of Toronto political economist’s detailed studies of the dialogical institutions of ancient Athens and medieval Britain, closely aligns his communications writings with Brooker’s earlier advocacy of “folk words” and etymological studies of Old English in the pages of *Marketing* and *Printers’ Ink*. A 1931 article by Brooker published in *The Sewanee* (a journal that would subsequently publish several early McLuhan texts) strikingly foreshadows Innis’s late meditations on the civilizational impact of the spatially oriented media of papyrus, parchment and paper. In “Idolaters of Brevity,” Brooker posited that, “with the popularity of the daily press the idolatry of brevity began in earnest. We became known as a nation of journalists and short-story writers.” Brooker’s arguments closely match Innis’s subsequent gloss on the impact of portable writing technologies on the spatial ambitions, and territorial stability, of the Roman and modern-day American empires.

Staking a claim against the neo-imperial ambitions and “presentism” embodied by paper, Innis identified—like the Bergsonian Brooker before him—with the *longue durée* and cultural continuity associated with oral forms conceived as carriers of transpersonal memory. It is somewhat perplexing, then, to simultaneously recognize in Innis the embodiment of the consummate archivist, whose sprawling “Idea File” brings

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405 Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 190.
into visibility an obsessive ordering of paper documents. Initially consisting of approximately eighteen inches of card files (subsequently lost), including an index, the contents of the File were subsequently transferred to paper and typed, with entries ordered from 1 to 339.409

But if Innis’s Idea File—which, in a final irony, was posthumously published in edited, monographic form by the scholarly University of Toronto Press—gives shape to a paper-based logistics consistently disavowed by its author, McLuhan would recognize in Innis’s idiosyncratic process of composing his texts through sometimes incongruous juxtapositions of content drawn from these cards an aesthetic methodology harkening to the experiments of the Cubists and Symbolists: “Without having studied modern art and poetry, he yet discovered how to arrange his insights in patterns that nearly resemble the art forms of our time.”410 In recognizing this “poetological procedure” implicit in the Idea File’s discontinuous structure, McLuhan was anticipating the more recent scholarship of Markus Krajewski on the evolution of the card catalogue as a creative and scholarly prosthetic device—what Krajewski terms “a text generator.”411 In stark contrast to the linear and static qualities that Innis controversially attributed to paper media, Krajewski traces the genealogy of the “paper slip economy” instantiated by card catalogues to the gradual transition from a “book-keeping” paradigm, in which data were stored in bound volumes (generally, the contents of a given library), to the universal discrete machine of Alan Turing, as one of ever-increasing mobility and nonlinearity.412 Traceable to the

411 Krajewski, Paper Machines, 56, 52, emphasis in the original.
412 Krajewski, Paper Machines, 133, 5.
sixteenth-century Swiss polymath Konrad Gessner (if not earlier), the paper slip technique involved the registration of individual references, classically monographic titles (sometimes including short excerpts), on scraps of paper that could be rearranged alphabetically or thematically, as required.\textsuperscript{413} The great insight of McLuhan’s introduction to the second edition of Innis’s \textit{The Bias of Communication} lies in its recognition that the Idea File embodies a flexible and recombinatory “production aesthetic,” which, in retrospect, is highly anticipatory of Krajewski’s observation that, “The reformulation of excerpts into new texts transforms the copyist into an artist.”\textsuperscript{414}

Krajewski’s contextualization of libraries’ early adoption of the paper slip technique within the growth of a banknote economy during the first decades of the nineteenth century suggests another reading of Innis’s Idea File.\textsuperscript{415} Namely, that the Idea File, and the paper slip economy which informed it, symptomatized the very accelerated mobility of knowledge characteristic of an emergent regime of information industries—which, in Innis’s prescient analysis, included public universities—even as the Toronto School thinker was putatively writing against these same developments in his communications texts. McLuhan recognized this paradox when he observed that Innis’s mosaic-like method “saves time,”\textsuperscript{416} a characterization that provocatively conflates the redemptive potentiality of Bergsonian \textit{durée} with the more equivocal effects of modern time-saving technologies.


\textsuperscript{416}McLuhan, “Introduction,” ix.
A second look at Brooker’s Copy Technique in Advertising discloses a similarly conflicted dynamic between the terms of the author’s critique and the ostensible object of that critique. Even as he risks turning his Bergson-inspired criticism of conventional advertising into an illustration of “the immobility of a formula” that the French thinker views as the essence of comedy, he appropriates Bergsonian metaphors of volition to dynamize his classification scheme. Recalling Bergson’s declaration in Creative Evolution that, “Life in general is mobility itself,” Brooker explains to readers that his system of classification expresses a motile logic:

All through my experience as an advertising man I have felt this insistence on relating advertising to life—to the life of the consumer, if possible, but, at any rate, to living things. … I found, after a while, that the best way for me to get my thoughts into any sort of order was to think of the whole advertising process in terms of motion. Ideas in advertising, I said to myself, should move. They should go somewhere. They should have direction.

Adopting Bergson’s terminology of “direction,” which he employs in Creative Evolution to describe the continuity of memory and constancy of the élan vital through successive evolutionary variations, Brooker characterizes the subdivisions of his classification

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417 Bergson, Laughter, 46.
419 Bergson, Creative Evolution, 128.
420 Brooker [Surrey], Copy Technique in Advertising, 7.
421 Recalling Bergson’s description of the evolutionary process as “the continuity of direction of successive variations,” Brooker writes in Layout Technique in Advertising that, “An advertising campaign is a
system as “six different ‘angles’ of direction.” Even as he adopts a bibliographic system for “the arrangement of information” as the basis for his Bergsonian project of Copy Synthesis, Brooker thereby transforms the static hierarchy of Dewey’s decimal system of knowledge representation into a flexible array modeled on the “divergent directions” pursued by Bergson’s vital impulse. There is also a (likely unintended) resemblance between Brooker’s text and the “flexible form” of a working card catalogue. In particular, the product of Brooker’s processual reimagining of Dewey’s hierarchical representation of discrete fields of knowledge recalls the “hybrid card catalog in book form” that predated the invention of card index cabinets. Anticipating McLuhan’s description of “hybrid media” in Understanding Media, Brooker’s Copy Technique in Advertising exhibits a “hybrid form” whose simultaneously fluid and linear structure presages the subsequent development of the card index after 1930 toward a computational model that would supersede, but also transpose, the logic of the paper slip economy analyzed by Krajewski. Brooker’s Bergsonian-inflected writings anticipate the fluid features of the post-industrial, electronic milieu subsequently explored by McLuhan in their profound awareness of the transformative character of radiophonic space as well as their reconceptualization of the Fordist organization along organismic lines redolent of Bergson’s speculations on creative evolution:

If advertising is to be anything more than […] a lot of chopped-up language stuck

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422 Brooker [Surrey], Copy Technique in Advertising, 8.
423 Bergson, Creative Evolution, 99.
424 Krajewski, Paper Machines, 16.
426 McLuhan, Understanding Media, 55; see also Krajewski, Paper Machines, 142.
into a hole in layout it must correspond with something that is growing within the entire organization. It must be the surface blossoming, as it were, of the inner growth. It should have the same rhythm as your whole selling and distributive plan.  

Brooker transposes the structural features of the mobile card catalogue, in tandem with an anticipatory vision of information movement derived from his familiarity with Bergsonian virtuality and the “acoustic space” generated by radio, into book form. The resulting hybridity of *Copy Technique in Advertising* clears a path for the paradoxical “non-book” formats explored by McLuhan with collaborators Jerome Agel, Quentin Fiore, Harley Parker and Wilfred Watson (for which the media analyst was frequently rebuked for the seeming contradiction entailed in such an enterprise).  

The Bergsonian conception of temporality as qualitative multiplicity invoked by Brooker’s description of his classification scheme as embodying “direction” and “motion” suggests additional analogies with “the irrational underside of modernism’s archival connection” brought into visibility by the avant-garde projects studied by Sven Spieker, which similarly undermined the linear time of nineteenth-century historicism embodied by the protocols of classical archivalism. But where the modernist interventions analyzed by Spieker critiqued and disrupted an earlier confidence in the ability of archives “to register what eludes symbolic representation” through anti-

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archival strategies of montage, Brooker’s Bergsonian project attempted to access the Real of embodied temporality. “How to depict the phenomenon of Time in terms of spatial dimensions,” he wrote in Printers’ Ink, “is thus one of advertising’s most difficult problems.” It is, rather, Brooker’s multiplicitous conception of la durée réelle that departs from the rational protocols of nineteenth-century archival practice. (To some extent, then, Brooker’s posture can be interpreted as a complexification, rather than an avant-garde rejection, of the “archival vitalism” endorsed by nineteenth-century archivists.)

Of the anti-archival works discussed by Spieker, it is Duchamp’s interpolation of “contingency into the rigidity of the decimal system” that comes closest to Brooker’s intervention within conventional information systems in Copy Technique in Advertising. But though similarly elaborated in dialogue with Bergson, Duchamp’s 3 Standard Stoppages (1913-1914) and related readymades violently punctuate symbolic representations of the passage of time. In the case of 3 Standard Stoppages, this is effected through a gendered travesty of that ultimate symbol of objectivity, and French pride, the standard metre: beguiling feminine curves distorting the masculine rigidity of the mètre des archives—a prototype maintained, in the form of a platinum-iridium bar, by the French State Archives. By contrast, Brooker seizes upon “the threat posed by blur” exposed by Bergson’s critique of positivism to simultaneously dismantle established systems of knowledge representation and to elaborate durational alternatives.

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434 Spieker, The Big Archive, 59.
435 Spieker, The Big Archive, 66.
The Conclusion revisits the equivocal dynamics navigated by Brooker’s engagement with Bergsonian critique and information systems in *Copy Technique in Advertising* through an original reading of the artist-advertiser’s fraught efforts to bring Bergson’s processual understanding of space into representation in the pendant volume, *Layout Technique in Advertising*. The intervening chapters explore subsequent artists’ projects that unintentionally reprise Brooker’s informatic and space-time concerns as they recur in altered form during the postwar period. In particular, Brooker’s seizing upon temporality itself as an intermedial platform for his multimedia modernism anticipates the N.E. Thing Co.’s “post-medium,”436 and specifically *univocal*, renderings of what it termed “Sensitivity Information,” explored in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER II
N.E. THING CO. LTD. I: McLuhan’s Age of Information

Introduction

Binary computers are post-number … 1

The world is basically one very big ball of information.2

The Vancouver-based conceptual enterprise N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. (NETCO) experimented with collective ways of being to cope with the novel stresses of an information society.3

The posthuman ontology of its corporate frame looked beyond the structuralist horizon explored by American peers, anticipating the digital materialism characteristic of more recent projects. The creative dissonance generated by the company’s resistant practice of everyday life articulated a micropolitics animated by a recognition of the potentia—to employ the neo-Spinozist argot of European contemporaries5—immanent in the power

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3 Sharla Sava was the first to situate NETCO’s art of Sensitivity Information within the emergence of an information society. See Sharla Sava, “‘Art is All Over,’” West Coast Line 39, no. 3 (2006): 80.
5 Michel Foucault revisited the Spinozist tension between potestas and potentia in his multi-volume study, The History of Sexuality; more recently, it has been elaborated by Antonio Negri and Rosi Braidotti, among others. See Rosi Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University, 2011), 37; Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol., 135; Antonio Negri, Spinoza for Our Time: Politics and Postmodernity, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 25-36. NETCO’s embrace of potentia is conveyed by the
relations of a technological society, rather than the obsession with forms of domination (or potestas) displayed by contemporaneous, and, to-date better-known, practitioners of ideology critique. But the troubled reception of the “critical company” speaks to unresolved tensions within its utopian ambitions that demand renewed scrutiny in light of contemporary debates about gender, embodiment and difference under techno-capitalism. NETCO’s liberationist, but non-revolutionary business plan continues to test assumptions about 1960s art and politics as primarily, if not exclusively, engaging representational debates and strategies. The company’s failures as much as its achievements teach enduring lessons about the still unresolved legacies of that storied decade of disruptive change.

Created by Iain Baxter in 1966, as an “umbrella” for the production of diverse bodies of work, the N.E. Baxter Thing Co. was re-branded in 1967 as the registered name N.E. Thing Co., and later incorporated under the British Columbia Companies Act in January 1969, with the artist’s then wife, Ingrid Baxter (known as Elaine prior to the spring of


6 Yann Toma and Rose Marie Barrientos, eds., Les entreprises critiques = Critical Companies (Saint-Etienne, Fr.: Cité du design, 2008).


1971), acting initially as Vice-president and, after July 1970, as Co-president. With legal incorporation, the company’s corporate internal decision (CID) structure formally superseded the metaphysical “faculties” of the neo-Kantian subject interpellated by formalist criticism. The resulting “delegation” of responsibilities formerly vested in the personhood of the individual creator, authorized the constitution of the company’s complex architecture of specialized “Departments” (ACT, ART, COP, etc.) and “subsidiaries” (ICOME, Sensinfodyn and SYDCO). In some respects, this

10 Fleming, Baxter 2, 9.

11 Iain Baxter is listed as one of two founding shareholders in the Company’s January 16, 1969 articles of incorporation; NETCO’s Secretary and counsel, Sholto Hebenton, holding the other share. The minutes of a meeting on January 18, 1969, document Ingrid Baxter’s election as co-director and appointment to the office of Vice-President. The same minutes record Ingrid Baxter’s purchase of 2,000 Company shares (valued at 1¢ per share) and an allotment of an additional 1,998 shares to Iain Baxter as well as the transfer of Sholto Hebenton’s one common share to him. The minutes of a subsequent meeting of the Directors held July 17, 1970 document Ingrid’s appointment to the office of Co-president, a change noted retroactively in the minutes of the January 18, 1969 meeting. Under British Columbia law, there was only ever one “Chairman” of the corporation: Iain Baxter. See N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., “Photocopy of Memorandum of Association (certified copy),” January 16, 1969, box 9, file 18, Iain Baxter& Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Toronto, ON; N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., “Minutes of the first meeting of directors of N.E. Thing Co. Ltd,” January 18, 1969, box 9, file 18, Iain Baxter& Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Toronto, ON; Vancouver Art Gallery, 17 Canadian Artists: A Protean view (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1976), n. pag. See also the company’s notice of incorporation in The British Columbia Gazette: N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., “Companies Act No. 84030,” The British Columbia Gazette, January 30, 1969, 291. Surviving documentation suggests that the company name began as a nom de plume for Iain Baxter, but was gradually consolidated as a corporate structure: “N. E. Thing Company is a pseudonym for my name (Iain Baxter).” Iain Baxter to C. Appleby, March 25, 1970, box 10, file 11, Iain Baxter& Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Toronto, ON. Similarly, in 1966 Baxter wrote to Albert White Galleries regarding his forthcoming solo exhibition there, and request for anonymous attribution: “My work continues to progress and to expand and I find it necessary to be identified not as Iain Baxter but as ‘IT,’ which consists of more than one mind.” Iain Baxter to Deborah, April 22, 1966, box 6, file 6, Iain Baxter& Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Toronto, ON.

12 In his influential 1979 description of corporate ontology, Peter A. French argues that, “a Corporation’s Internal Decision Structure (its CID Structure) is the requisite redescription device that licenses the predication of corporate intentionality.” French, “The Corporation as a Moral Person,” 211. In his study of Kant, Deleuze writes that, “the doctrine of the faculties forms the real network which constitutes the transcendental method.” See Deleuze, Kant’s Critical Philosophy, 10. For an overview of the enduring legacy of Kant’s aesthetics of judgment, see Cheetham, Kant, Art, and Art History.


organizational reconfiguration of the author function paralleled the contemporaneous
“death of the author” pronounced by European structuralist and post-structuralist
thinkers, but registers the entry of the “artificial person” of the corporation within the
established channels of art as a new set of responsibility relationships. Peter A. French’s
influential description of corporate ontology suggests analogies with the networked
agency explored more recently by Bruno Latour:

When operative and properly activated, the CID Structure accomplishes a
subordination and synthesis of the intentions and acts of various biological
persons into a corporate decision. When viewed in another way, as already
suggested, the CID Structure licenses the descriptive transformation of events,
seen under another aspect as the acts of biological persons (those who occupy
various stations on the organizational chart), to corporate acts by exposing the
corporate character of those events. … The organization chart of a corporation
distinguishes ‘players’ and clarifies their rank and the interwoven lines of
responsibility within the corporation.

1970 (Vancouver: N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., 1970), n. pag. “We have a number of people [involved in the
corporation]. We have a person involved with the whole photography division. And another man is
handling an area that we have, a subsidiary called ICOME, which is International Consultants on Media;
and it’s a whole dealing with actual consulting to industry about problems of media … .” Baxter in
15 See Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath,
142–48 (1968; trans., New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in *The
Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and
NETCO’s corporate maneuvers suggest parallels with those of E.A.T. Orit Halpern notes that, “The
organization of E.A.T. mimed that of a corporation, with boards of directors, and a vision not of
sustainability or institutionalization, but of applicability.” Orit Halpern, *Beautiful Data: A History of Vision
17 French, “The Corporation as a Moral Person,” 212, 213.
In addition to the executive positions filled by Iain and Ingrid Baxter, NETCO’s corporate hierarchy included “Director of Information” Brian Dyson, and “Director of Special Projects” Paul Woodrow. Other participants in the company, though not recognized with formal titles, included the early collaborator of Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace, Duane Lunden. Notwithstanding the significant (albeit still largely misunderstood) administrative gains achieved by Ingrid Baxter through the company’s progressive restructuring, her contested role in the corporation points to persistent asymmetries in power which dogged NETCO’s prescient exercise in relational subjectivity.

Despite adopting an informatic vocabulary to describe its multifarious activities and “products,” the company’s tactics were paradoxically pitted “against the digital” in ways that frequently anticipate more recent projects of resistance targeting the contemporary “empire of number.” NETCO’s “probings of the why and how of visual things and their combinations,” as one early document read, were “efforts to discover [their] distinct properties or effects and the means of putting them into operation.” The company’s non-technological, and indeed perplexingly analogue conceptualization of...

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21 Alexander R. Galloway, Laruelle: Against the Digital (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Alain Badiou, Number and Numbers (Cambridge, Eng.: Polity, 2008), 1.
23 Downplaying the hardware component of the company’s pioneering telecopier and Telex transmissions, Iain Baxter observed of NETCO’s telematic contributions to MoMA’s 1970 INFORMATION show that, “It’s simply a way of just using the actual materials of information itself to provide a visualization of.
“information” cleared a path for, and acquires renewed relevance in light of, the contemporary ontological turn.24 Its innovative corporate ontology was, in part, an attempt to materialize McLuhan’s vision of “the harmony of all being” orchestrated by what Jacques Rancière would subsequently term the new “distribution of the sensible” effected by contemporary social transformations—in this instance, the transition to an information society in the decades following World War 2.25 The corporation emerges as a privileged site in McLuhan’s ontological account of these transformations, its decentralizing maneuvers under post-Fordism being viewed by the media thinker as analogous to the decentering experienced by the subject as its nervous system is externalized and artificially “extended” by information media.26 In retrospect, McLuhan’s corporate redefinition of the subject can be recognized as a parallel manifestation of the transition noted by Orit Halpern, “from organizing data to producing organizations” brought into visibility by the designers Charles and Ray Eames’s through their collaboration with IBM on the multi-screen “Information Machine” debuted at the 1964 New York World’s Fair.27

In this first of two chapters devoted to NETCO, the Company’s art of Sensitivity Information will serve as a lens through which McLuhan’s speculations on the

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27 Halpern, Beautiful Data, 133.
ontological effects of information will be revisited through the media analyst’s own methodology of reading aesthetic texts for insights into broader technological and epistemic transformations;\textsuperscript{28} NETCO’s alternately celebratory and satirical renderings of McLuhan’s percepts suggest a number of new approaches to the Toronto School thinker’s still largely misunderstood (particularly in the art historical context) methodology and percepts.\textsuperscript{29}

**McLuhan’s Digital Materialism**

Perverse and absurd idea—a visual book, made of words.\textsuperscript{30}

McLuhan’s writings seized upon the convergent potential of emerging information technologies to imagine a computational reconstruction of the “sensorium” theorized by the medieval Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas as a multi-sensorial faculty of cognition, or sensus communis.\textsuperscript{31} The capacity for digital media to support the formation of what the German media thinker Friedrich Kittler would subsequently term a “complete

\textsuperscript{28} Elena Lamberti argues that, “McLuhan anticipated future trends of modernist studies. … McLuhan points out the close links existing between the modernist experiments and the new technological and cultural environment of the time. … He points out how the modernists bore witness not only to the making of a new age, but also to the long-term effects of that process on the collective and individual psyche. … My point is that McLuhan employed a modernist strategy from the very beginning.” Lamberti, *Marshall McLuhan’s Mosaic*, 95, 97-98.

\textsuperscript{29} Jayne Wark draws attention to the ‘N.E. Thing Co.’s strategy [of] adopt[ing] a utopian version of McLuhanism that enabled it to use technology to connect the periphery to the centre while simultaneously inhabiting and parodying the merger McLuhan advocated between art and business.” Wark, “Conceptual Art in Canada,” 345.

\textsuperscript{30} Lucy R. Lippard, *I See/You Mean* (Los Angeles: Chrysalis, 1979), 44.

media system” held distinctly ontological meanings for the Toronto School thinker.32 “By surpassing writing,” he wrote in the 1954 self-published pamphlet Counterblast, “we have regained our WHOLENESS.”33 McLuhan’s convergent understanding of information recalls the earlier synaesthetic media manoeuvres of the monist Brooker, analyzed in the previous chapter. By dispersing diverse sensory data onto a shared surface, or, perhaps more accurately, by compressing them into a common channel, McLuhan’s descriptions of information simultaneously confirm the subterranean affinities with the “univocal” ontology of Aquinas’s near contemporary and rival, Duns Scotus, noted by McLuhan’s one-time student Donald Theall: “Early on in his work he appears to have abandoned what he once considered to be the Thomistic balance of Aquinas, although apparently he never overtly recognized that he did so, for by following the modernists, particularly Joyce, he moved towards the monism of Scotus while believing, or at least asserting, that he was dedicated to the authorized neo-scholasticism of Aquinas.”34 This mixed pedigree highlights conflicting trajectories within McLuhan’s discourse on information, which articulates an unlikely “post-digital” vision of information,35 while retaining traces of a disavowed dialectic.36 Ironically, this dialectic can be traced to the very “duncical” tendencies satirized by McLuhan in his critique of

conventional approaches to literacy and pedagogy. Alexander Pope’s Augustan satire of the unintended consequences of dialectical methods and print technologies on learning and the arts—whose title directly references Scotus and the much-maligned techniques promoted by his followers—is a central reference for McLuhan’s critique, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, of the “translation or reduction of diverse modes into a single mode of homogenized things” brought about by the printing press.

Yet the media thinker’s parallel commentary on the combinatory effects of information media is noticeably more ambivalent than Pope’s parody. Indeed, the deliberately paradoxical pronouncements of McLuhan—his puzzling aphorisms, or “probes”—can be recognized as articulating a form of strategic dualism reminiscent of Stoic and Scotist epistemologies.

The constitutive bi-polarity of Scotism is reflective of unresolvable tensions obtaining between commonality and particularity in a univocal ontology, and of the respective ways of knowing implied by those contraries for creatures and God alike (whereas, in the epistemology of Aquinas, divinity can not be accessed directly, but only known through analogy). In *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze illuminates the mechanics of Stoic dialectics as expressive of a similarly dualist cosmology:

The Stoics are amateurs and inventors of paradoxes. […] [The] Stoics used the

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37 See especially Theall, *The Medium is the Rear View Mirror.*
40 “‘Writing in aphorisms’ was part of the Stoic technique of dialectics and rhetoric … .” McLuhan, *The Classical Trivium*, 114-15.
paradox in a completely new manner—both as an instrument for the analysis of language and as a means of synthesizing events. *Dialectics* is precisely this science of incorporeal events as they are expressed in propositions, and of the connections between events as they are expressed in relations between propositions.  

In his perceptive study of his former teacher, Theall proposed that McLuhan’s writings develop precisely such a Stoic dialectics of paradoxical “humour”.  

What McLuhan seems to require is some kind of paradoxical logic akin to that implicit in the way in which Hugh Kenner (one of McLuhan’s literary disciples) has suggested the Stoic Comedians (Flaubert, Joyce, Beckett) are supposed to have created their literary structures.  

The art of “dynamic contrast” practiced by Stoic dialecticians suggests an alternative, but complementary, genealogy to the Bergsonian influence on the Toronto School thinker’s dualist apparatus, and NETCO’s comic reworking thereof, recently traced by Kenneth Allan, building on the Bergsonian media studies of Stephen Crocker. McLuhan’s “binomial” renderings of an information environment re-purposed this dialectic inheritance to imagine a neo-Stoic *physis* that Theall aptly termed “neo-

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44 Theall, *The Medium is the Rear View Mirror*, 7.
Pythagorean digitalism.” A similarly ecological (as well as informatic and “dialectic”) framework emerges from Iain Baxter’s comments in an August, 1970 radio interview with KPFA-FM host Charles Amirkhanian:

And some of our ideas are that you really got to look at information as a natural resource like coal or oil or water or anything else. And it’s not just an affectation, it’s an actual really fantastic resource. And what happens then, and we’ve talked about this a number of times now, is there has to be an ecology of information. So you’re going to have, we’re proposing an organization developing called Information Ecology. So the same approaches are being approached through environment has to be done through information. So we’re into that whole area of advising people on these kinds of concerns and so forth. So we’re really a think tank … .

1967 correspondence between Theall and Baxter regarding an unrealized book project on McLuhan, documents one conduit through which Baxter may have refined his univocal perspective on the information ecology of the Toronto School thinker.

A binomial substrate of zeros and ones supplants the “continuous variation” of analogue materialisms in McLuhan’s prescient renderings of the information age. This is particularly true of his sixties texts. Poised between the early interest in rhetoric

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displayed by his dissertation on Thomas Nashe and the neo-Baconian grammar of the posthumous _The Laws of Media_ (co-authored with his son, Eric McLuhan), the media thinker’s writings of the 1960s, beginning with his _Report_ to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, reveal a dialectic thread consistent with the “digital” (Scotist and Stoic) elements later identified by Theall. This digitalism often assumes the form of (strategic) dualisms or polarities reminiscent of the perpetually divided argumentation of Wyndham Lewis—a another point of departure for the Toronto School thinker’s computational cosmology.51 “McLuhan has a technique,” wrote Theall, “by which he continually compares and contrasts opposites—a quasi-philosophical polarization of reality.”52 But as McLuhan himself wrote in his NEAB Report, such dualisms were always provisional: “Chiasmus is indispensable to understanding media since all information flow is feed-back—that is by its _effects_—operates simultaneously in opposite modes.”53 The N.E. Thing Co.’s renderings of “information” frequently seized upon, and drew attention to, this neglected antagonism between dialectic and rhetoric within the media thinker’s renderings of information.

In keeping with McLuhan’s corporeal inscription of information, NETCO’s representations of Sensitivity Information were always grounded in the noisy channels of

52 Theall, _The Medium is the Rear View Mirror_, 5. “This dialectical movement, inherited from the schoolmen—the earlier moderni—provides a way of moving from point to point as Bacon seems to have considered the mind did. … The entire universe of McLuhan is always dualistic—visual vs. audio-tactile; continuous vs. discontinuous; script vs. print; phonetic vs. non-phonetic alphabets; hot vs. cool; ancient vs. modern; war vs. peace. … This dualistic bias is a major feature of the McLuhan style and of the McLuhan method of analysis.” Theall, _The Medium is the Rear View Mirror_, 20.
the senses. But lest the company be categorized alongside McLuhan as representative of a conservative “Catholic modernism,” its appropriation of pornographic imagery in the 1976 artist’s book and exhibition catalogue _Celebration of the Body_ underlines that its allusions to the Toronto School thinker’s neo-Thomist renderings of “innervation” as illumination—paradigmatically brought into visibility by collaborator Quentin Fiore’s image, in _The Medium is the Massage_, of fishnet-clad women’s legs accompanied by the caption “When information is brushed against information”—were always proffered as much in a spirit of satire as of homage.

The tacit monism of McLuhan’s eschatological representations of an emergent “information society” as a return to a Stoic cosmos fusing matter and sense identifies his media explorations as parallel, but independent, manifestations of materialist currents in contemporaneous continental thought, preeminently the neo-Stoicism (and, to a lesser extent, Epicureanism) of the early Deleuze. Similarly, the affective and somatic values

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54 See Kittler, _Discourse Networks_, 187.
56 N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., _Celebration of the Body_ (Kingston, ON: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1976), n. pag.
attributed to the “things of all kinds” aggregated by NETCO “researchers” and archived utilizing the company’s uniform informatic nomenclature, resonate strongly with the “logic of sensation” formulated by the French post-structuralist to describe the art of Francis Bacon—as what Paul Crowther terms the “body’s striving to escape from itself.” Although developed independently, I will invoke the better known ontological writings of Deleuze to illuminate these misunderstood, neo-Stoic and Scotist dimensions of McLuhan’s thought, and NETCO’s creative reworking thereof, to which both bear a striking resemblance.

NETCO’s dialectic cosmology emerges with comic clarity from such projects as *VSI Formula #5* (1968), the company’s contribution to the index card catalogue of the Lucy Lippard-curated exhibition *955,000* (titled after the population of Seattle, where it was held). The work records a ludicrous exercise in McLuhanesque “translation,” in which an analogue intervention in the Seymour River (appropriately pronounced “See More”), sited adjacent to the company’s suburban “headquarters” in North Vancouver, is transcribed into a cryptic “formula” resembling the machine-readable code, and rational order of operations, of information science:

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63 Theall was early in noting affinities between Deleuze and McLuhan. Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan*, 74.


65 The Baxters humorously christened their residence accordingly, the “Seymour Plant.” Wood, “Capital and Subsidiary,” 15.
Contrary to what one might expect of the consummately McLuhanesque company, NETCO’s “analogical mirrors” here reflect neither the grammatical structure of the Logos, nor the metaphorical operations of the Thomist sensorium. “The world” reflected by NETCO’s mirrored surfaces is, truly, “one very big ball of information.” But this immanent and informatic cosmos frustrates the ecstasy of communication promised by McLuhan in “The Media as Translators” chapter of Understanding Media. Rather than unconstrained translation across media (water, mirror, photograph, formula), NETCO’s mirrors satirically reflect the “dulness” that, Theall tells us, was the “blurring of the senses resulting from an over-strong emphasis on the scholastic” in medieval

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68 Iain Baxter quoted in Fleming, Baxter², 36.
educational theory. As such, NETCO’s *Hydro Projects* dramatize the univocal media unconscious of SFU Chancellor Gordon Shrum’s hydro/electric vision for education in BC, and its narcotizing and “noisy” discontents, discussed in detail in the next chapter. Explicitly rejecting the “narrow view” imposed by the analytic frameworks deployed by New York-based peers, NETCO insisted that, “It is better to have confusion then anything will fit [sic.].”

Suggesting analogies with Theall’s likening of McLuhan to the “town fool of Vancouver,” Kim Foikus, NETCO’s clowning served a serious purpose: to underline the potential erasure of the “prickly uniqueness” revealed by direct perception in a technological milieu. The company’s informatic renderings of a “dialectic nature” are thus revealed to be partly strategic in orientation: a “praise of folly” designed to draw attention to the disavowed scholasticism, and potential for dialectical narcosis, implicit in McLuhan’s own critique of the “scholastic-Puritan roots of the modern technologist.”

NETCO embraced the immanence of McLuhan’s neo-Stoic discourse on information to challenge the transcendental framework of Greenbergian formalism, whose peak influence was felt in the years immediately preceding the company’s emergence on the North American scene (coinciding with Iain Baxter’s MFA studies in painting at Washington State University). The punning propositions of NETCO’s celebrated button works—paradigmatically “Art is all over”—seized upon the dialectical insight generated

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69 Theall, *The Medium is the Rear View Mirror*, 72.
71 Theall, *The Medium is the Rear View Mirror*, 31.
74 Theall, *The Medium is the Rear View Mirror*, 96.
75 See Jones, *Eyesight Alone*. 
by McLuhan’s aphorisms to advance a critique of neo-Kantian rationality. Its ACTs and ARTs are thus incorrectly framed as the witty exercise of neo-Kantian “judgment” proposed by Thierry de Duve. In Unleashing the nonsensical energies latent within McLuhan’s idiosyncratically Zennist brand of dialectic, NETCO’s ACTs and ARTs—certified judgments “claiming” or “rejecting” everyday aesthetic phenomena and pop-cultural artefacts (everything from the Great Pyramid of Giza [ACT no. 31, 1968] to a local statuary shop in North Vancouver [ACT no. 110, 1968])—resonate, rather, with the Futurist “transreason” animating the Stoic wordplay of Deleuze in Helen Palmer’s perspicuous analysis. In the Canadian context, Wyndham Lewis served as a primary conduit for the dissemination of Futurist strategies for transvaluing binaries. The Zen-inspired “nondualism” of the Vancouver company’s approach to McLuhan’s strategic digitalism echoed the historical avant-garde’s (and, indirectly, Lewis’s) deployment of paradox to undo culturally ingrained binaries. These experiments in transreason also suggest analogies with the “non-sense” attributed by Eve Meltzer to the infantile marks documented by Mary Kelly’s Post-Partum Document as a form of “‘abstraction’ that ‘precedes’ the child’s subjection.” However, Sensitivity Information must be rigorously

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76 Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 296-300. NETCO’s only direct citation of Duchamp suggests a much more ambivalent valuation of the readymade than de Duve’s reading authorizes: ACT#19/ART#19, the company’s 1968 appropriation of a photograph of Duchamp, constituting the sole instance in its ACTs and ARTs series in which the same object is simultaneously claimed and rejected by NETCO. Significantly, the company explicitly rejects Duchamp’s “total ready-made production.” N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., *N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Vol. 1* (Vancouver: N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., 1978), n. pag. Originating as they did in the earlier “copies” of NETCO’s forerunner, IT, the ACTs and ARTs recall George Kubler’s “conception of the copy [as] now include[ing] both acts and things.” George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1962), 74.

77 Palmer, *Deleuze and Futurism*, xxii.


79 Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved*, 182.
distinguished from the “practices of social inscription” explored by antihumanists peers captivated by structuralism and systems theory, also studied by Meltzer, including Robert Morris.

The physiological aesthetics of McLuhan in which NETCO’s sensory conceptualism is properly located, place its information art at a considerable remove from the Romantic Conceptualism practiced by such nonconforming European peers as Bas Jan Ader. In their astute assessments of the Dutch artist, both Jörg Heiser and Jan Verwoert discuss the currents of German Romanticism out of which Ader’s practice developed. Unlike Ader’s poetics of fragmentation, located as it was in the idealist philosophy of Schelling and Schlegel, the debased Romanticism of NETCO self-consciously courted the very commoditized representations of “kitsch of love and desire” from which Heiser and Verwoert are evidently at pains to distance their neo-Romantic projects. Even where NETCO comes closest to the utopian iconography of Ader—the company’s appropriation, in Celebration of the Body (Fig. 34), of Yves Klein’s iconic performance Le Saut dans le vide (1960)—the effect is precisely one of travesty: a parody of the Romantic “melancholy yearning” conveyed by Ader’s own leap into the void in his series of Klein-inspired Fall films. Iain Baxter’s inclusive embrace of “non-art, and even anti-

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80 Meltzer, Systems We Have Loved, 102.
84 Verwoert, “Impulse Concept Concept Impulse,” 139.
art, was capable of generating the beguiling mosaic of “yoga, streakers, belly dancers, keep fit experts, [and] body painting” constituted by the unbound leaves of the company’s McLuhanesque “non-book” Celebration of the Body. Writing in 1969, Lippard underlined this tendency of NETCO’s “to repel purists in any area.”

The Vancouver company’s pedagogical orientation, discussed at greater length in the next section, does, however, suggest some parallels with Boris Groys’s qualification of Moscow Conceptualism as lacking the explicitly utopian and emancipatory impulse of the historical Russian avant-garde. Groys views the activities of Moscow conceptualists, rather, as “looking on Soviet life as a spectacle.” Much as NETCO produced a McLuhan- and Zen-inspired, informatic “void” within which to explore the ordinarily invisible contours of everyday life as an “anti-environment,” Groys argues that, “visual and linguistic gaps, paradoxes and poetic nonsense played the … role of creating the ruptures and empty spaces in the fabric of Soviet life.”

The literary bias of previous commentators on McLuhan (with the notable exception of Theall) has obscured the dialectical undercurrents of his media analyses. Although

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86 N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Celebration of the Body, n. pag.
90 Groys, History Becomes Form, 3.
explicitly argued “from a grammatical point of view,”91 McLuhan’s doctoral
dissertation—putatively a study of the sixteenth-century pamphleteer Thomas Nashe, but
in fact a sweeping history of humanistic traditions of learning (and technologies of
“information” dissemination)—is in fact propelled by a recognition of the fundamental
“complementarity of rhetoric, dialectic, and grammar, the three components of the
trivium since classical antiquity.”92 His analyses trace the cyclical disequilibrium of the
constituent arts of the trivium under successive pedagogical regimes,93 culminating in the
Renaissance dispute between the so-called ancients and moderns, in which Nashe was
implicated as the eloquent partisan of grammar amidst an ascendant dialectic associated
with the champions of book learning represented by his rival, Richard Harvey. While the
trivium could be viewed as embodying the mystic properties attributed to the number
three by the Catholic McLuhan,94 his dissertation posits an eminently dialectic
antagonism between the proponents of dialectic and rhetoric as the animus of pedagogical
debates from the time of the Sophists and the Stoics to his own day.95 (In a further
complication of conventional portraits of the Toronto School thinker, he explicitly traces
the origins of rhetoric itself to the development of dialects.)96 McLuhan thereby
establishes dialectic at the heart of the Trinitarian logic of the classical curriculum.

Though an undoubted proponent of the “encyclopedic ideal of the unified arts”
associated with grammar and its oratorical methods,97 McLuhan nevertheless recognized

91 McLuhan, The Classical Trivium, 43.
92 McLuhan, The Classical Trivium, x, my emphasis.
93 “[T]he history of the trivium is largely a history of the rivalry among [its constituent arts] for
ascendancy.” McLuhan, The Classical Trivium, 42.
Books, 1997), 75.
95 McLuhan, The Classical Trivium, 42.
the merits of dialectic when pursued as “a way of testing evidence rather than of organizing facts.” It was the latter tendency, epitomized by the stock “themes or ‘places’ of argumentation” mobilized by the Sophists, and reified by the tabular oppositions of Petrus Ramus and fellow Protestant reformers of the Renaissance, that McLuhan’s grammatarian agenda militated against. For the Stoics, by contrast, dialectics was inseparable from the cosmological operation of the Logos. The intimate fusion of grammar and physics (the latter being inseparable from dialectics) in Stoic cosmology admitted “no clear line […] between what we call syntax and logic respectively.” This proposition recalls Deleuze’s celebrated formulation of the “blank word” in *The Logic of Sense* as that which “says its own sense.”

NETCO’s language works embody an allied performative logic. For instance, the 1969 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts site-specific installation “Talk,” in which a series of small tags directed visitors to approach the museum’s guards in order to access the work, who had been directed in turn to say simply, “talk.” In this tautological imperative, a Stoic “saying of sense” cannibalizes the analytic language games of conceptual peers such as Art & Language and its attendant aestheticization of the structuralist matrix. Something similar is legible in the company’s *Color/Language* studies, originally published in *Vancouver* magazine in 1975 (Fig. 35), and subsequently featured, in altered

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102 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 79.
104 See, for instance, Philip Pilkington and David Rushton, “Models and Indexes: Fringe Benefits,” *Art-Language* 2, no. 3 (1973): 12-17. The parallels between Deleuze’s neo-Stoic adage, *the saying of sense*, and McLuhan’s aphorism, *the medium is the message*, has gone previously unremarked.
form, in the *Art Journal* in 1982. In these participatory language studies resembling concrete poetry, viewers are invited to activate the *potentia* latent in everyday language by physically “colouring in” the bolded text. These works recall the “physical language” of the Stoics analyzed by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*; they bring into visibility an immanent semiotics in which the “The sign imparts meaning immediately. … It says what it is.”

NETCO’s language games staged something akin to the “communication beyond meaning” characteristic of informatic forms according to Tiziana Terranova. This recognition (also inscribed in McLuhan’s ubiquitous adage *the medium is the message*) seizes upon the a-signifying character of “information” in classical Information Theory. “Two messages, one of which is heavily loaded with meaning and the other of which is pure nonsense, can be exactly equivalent … as regards information,” wrote Warren Weaver, the theory’s chief popularizer, in 1949. Claude Shannon’s statistical definition of information, which asserted that “semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant,” suggests analogies with McLuhan’s interest in the formal properties of

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106 On the dialogue between concrete poetry and the visual arts in 1960s Vancouver, see Tomaszewska, “Borderlines of Poetry and Art.”


communication as well as the “absurdity of significations and […] nonsense of denotations” revealed by the pedagogies of the Stoic sage and Zen master alike, according to Deleuze.\footnote{Deleuze, \textit{The Logic of Sense}, 155.} As discussed at greater length below, the riddles, or \textit{kōans}, of Zen were a decisive influence on Iain Baxter’s non-verbal approach to teaching and, subsequently, on NETCO’s informatic turn.\footnote{See Durham, “Iain Baxter\& and N.E. THING CO.,” 102-03, 224. For a brief introduction to the impact of \textit{kōans} on Conceptual art generally, see Robert C. Morgan, “Art Koans: Zen and the Tao in Conceptual Art,” \textit{The Brooklyn Rail}, February 4, 2009, http://www.brooklynrail.org/2009/02/artseen/art-koans-zen-and-the-tao-in-conceptual-art (acessed July 14, 2015).} Eastern philosophy was also influential on McLuhan, as several commentators have noted.\footnote{See especially Lamberti, \textit{Marshall McLuhan’s Mosaic}, 49-68; 84-90; Peter Zhang, “McLuhan and I Ching: An Interological Inquiry,” \textit{Canadian Journal of Communication} 39, no. 3 (2014): 213-27.} His probes similarly suggest analogies with the “aphorism-anecdote” that Deleuze viewed as the shared product of Stoicism and Zen.\footnote{Deleuze, \textit{The Logic of Sense}, 162. In \textit{Understanding Media}, McLuhan likens the “redundant” form of electronic media of communication to an “Eastern mode of thought.” McLuhan, \textit{Understanding Media}, 26.} The neo-Stoic interpretation of McLuhan’s media ecology encouraged by NETCO’s illuminating engagements with the Toronto School analyst does not negate the dominant portrait of him as a “grammician,”\footnote{Deleuze, \textit{The Logic of Sense}, 162.} nor his analyses of the “grammatical physics” of an incarnate Logos.\footnote{Theall, \textit{The Virtual Marshall McLuhan}, 109.} Rather, as Theall emphasizes, these perspectives co-exist in McLuhan’s work: “Just as Bacon joins the grammatical and the dialectical, the humanist and the scholastic, so McLuhan can appear to marry the scholastic-technological with the humanist tradition.”\footnote{Theall, \textit{The Medium is the Rear View Mirror}, 101. “It is possible to see a way in which McLuhan might conceive of himself as a counter-Bacon (using Bacon as a counter-environment), taking traditional humanism and synthesizing it with the scholasticism of contemporary technology … .” Ibid., 98.} Much as Theall and others have tended to view the dialectical
element in McLuhan’s thought as an incorrigible excess,\textsuperscript{119} NETCO seized upon the latent satirical potential of the media analyst’s efforts to systematize his insights via such dialectical devices as the “square diagrams” of the NEAB Report (precursors of the tetrads of \textit{The Laws of Media}).\textsuperscript{120} The company’s ludicrously cryptic VSI “formulas” are only the most extreme \textit{exempla} of its dialectical comedy.

Ironically, it is precisely when “beclown[ing]” McLuhan that the co-presidents came closest to embodying the tradition of “learned satire” that,\textsuperscript{121} for Theall, came to define the Toronto School thinker’s own comic method. As a young graduate student of McLuhan’s at the University of Toronto in the early 1950s, Theall had researched the then obscure genre of Varronian satire, in which such works as the \textit{Dunciad} of Pope were cast. In his dissertation, McLuhan had earlier drawn attention to the \textit{ethos} embodied by the protagonists of Classical comedy as imparting a Stoic ethics of virtue (whereas, somewhat paradoxically, the more “serious” genre of tragedy teaches the \textit{pathos} of a fate that can only be suffered).\textsuperscript{122} Like the comedic exploits recounted by the Roman playwright Terence, the \textit{ACTs} performed by NETCO’s co-presidents stage an informatic ethics of “choice” between binary alternatives.\textsuperscript{123}

Much as Shannon defined “information” as the \textit{degree of choice} between multiple potential messages sent or received, the company’s active engagement with the post-industrial environment celebrated the virtues of an expanded notion of the aesthetic (and of a diversified corporate portfolio). This investment in freedom of choice is comparable

\textsuperscript{119}“...The potential weakness appears when his rhetoric-poetic project becomes fact or formula rather than insight and intuition.” Theall, \textit{The Virtual Marshall McLuhan}, 100.
\textsuperscript{120}Theall, \textit{The Virtual Marshall McLuhan}, 72.
\textsuperscript{121}Theall, \textit{The Virtual Marshall McLuhan}, 220; Theall, \textit{The Virtual Marshall McLuhan}, 41.
\textsuperscript{122}See McLuhan, \textit{The Classical Trivium}, 112.
\textsuperscript{123}See also Halpern, \textit{Beautiful Data}, 102-03.
to the epistemology of information overload developed slightly earlier by the influential designers Charles and Ray Eames, who, in the Halpern’s words, “were interested in the most choices that could be produced.”\footnote{Halpern, Beautiful Data, 103.} NETCO’s corporate implementation of this topos of choice also suggests analogies with the contemporaneous management theories of the British cybernetician Stafford Beer, whose “viable system model” (VSM) incorporated feedback mechanisms between different levels in the organizational hierarchy, which Andrew Pickering has described as constituting “a model for a democratic subpolitics.”\footnote{Andrew Pickering, The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 268.} Beer’s proposal for “algedonic meters” would have empowered subaltern voices to respond to government (or management) through a qualitative scale of affect (essentially “yea” or “nay”).\footnote{Pickering, The Cybernetic Brain, 271.} The “alternating positive and negative responses” recorded by this device parallel the binarism of NETCO’s ACTs and ARTs as a micropolitical exercise of organizational “choice.”\footnote{Pickering, The Cybernetic Brain, 271.}

Whereas Richard Cavell and Janine Marchessault emphasize the dynamic properties of space-time as the defining concern of McLuhan’s post-Explorations writings—as an increasingly elastic conception of space superseded the static perspective of the theorist’s earlier, Lewis-inspired critique of consumerist ideology—I want to propose that it is rather “information” which constitutes the key term in McLuhan’s writings of the 1960s.\footnote{See Cavell, McLuhan in Space; Marchessault, Marshall McLuhan.} The McLuhan-inspired information art of NETCO assists us in recognizing this new priority of information in the media thinker’s speculative landscape.
In some ways, McLuhan’s capacious descriptions of information suggest analogies with the notion of “univocity” proposed by Scotus (and later taken up by Deleuze), to describe the condition of common being shared by disparate entities otherwise defined by their irreducible “thisness,” or *haecceity*, as well as the shared being of creatures and God. McLuhan’s comments on the homogenizing effects of information media in his post-NEAB *Report*, and subsequently *Understanding Media*, suggest a similarly univocal alternative to the analogical ontology of Aquinas championed by the Toronto School thinker’s earlier texts. But in contrast to the affirmative presentation of Scotus in Deleuze’s writings, the univocal overtones of informatization are at times an acute source of anxiety for McLuhan, as his oft-quoted comments in a March 1969 interview with *Playboy* attest:

> If you insist on pinning me down about my own subjective reactions as I observe the reprimitivization of our culture, I would have to say that I view such upheavals with total personal dislike and dissatisfaction. I do see the prospect of a rich and creative retribalized society—free of the fragmentation and alienation of the mechanical age—emerging from this traumatic period of culture clash; but I have nothing but distaste for the *process* of change. … No one could be less enthusiastic about these radical changes than myself. I am not, by temperament or

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conviction, a revolutionary; I would prefer a stable, changeless environment of modest services and human scale.\textsuperscript{131}

The “narcosis” afflicting McLuhan’s cybernetic Narcissus in \textit{Understanding Media} perpetually threatens to overwhelm the univocal subject of the “Age of Information.”\textsuperscript{132} The subterranean Scotist genealogy unearthed by Theall in many ways constituting the shadowy reverse of the “pure immanence” affirmed by Deleuze.\textsuperscript{133} The sophisticated satire enacted by NETCO seizes upon the darkly comic potential of this negative univocity to deflate the hyperbolic claims of “McLuhanism” in such works as \textit{Dummy Self-Portrait Sculpture} (1971) (Fig. 36):\textsuperscript{134} a staging of the co-presidents as corporate “dummies” caught in the narcissistic trance of techno-utopianism.\textsuperscript{135} Nevertheless, some corporate artefacts, such as the ubiquitous “information form” designed by Bryan Dyson in 1969 to document and archive company projects, disclose a less “negative” (albeit still satirical) univocal vision (Fig. 37).\textsuperscript{136} The non-categorical “grid” of Dyson’s form levels the hierarchies of traditional classification schemes in favour of the singular (univocal) category of “information”; at once embracing the operational potential of this non-categorical strategy, and at the same time redeploying it to travesty archival and bureaucratic protocols.

\textsuperscript{131} Marshall McLuhan, “Playboy Interview,” 267.
\textsuperscript{132} McLuhan, \textit{Understanding Media}, 36.
\textsuperscript{134} See Theall, \textit{The Virtual Marshall McLuhan}, 27.
\textsuperscript{135} This tableaux recalls Lewis’s rendering of Kell-Imrie’s confrontation with a hatter’s dummy in \textit{Snooty Baronet}, discussed in Chapter 4. See Lewis, \textit{Snooty Baronet}, 132-39.
Although the affective surplus generated by NETCO’s corporate choreography suggests parallels with the “paradiscursive space of affect” generated by the contemporaneous antihumanist practices of the American and British artists studied by Eve Meltzer, the ontological foundations and artful humour of NETCO’s tactics must be rigorously distinguished from the structuralist matrix mined by peers. The company’s radical independence from the linguistic and semiotic concerns of Analytical philosophy and “French Theory” as initially popularized in North America would consequently prove problematic for the subsequent reception of the N.E. Thing Co. by the Theory-driven Vancouver School of photo-conceptualism, whose members (preeminently Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace) have tended to dismiss the company’s informatic gestures as neo-Dada frivolity, or the products of a naïve McLuhanism. But as an attempt to render the materiality of sense, rather than the arbitrariness of “signs,” NETCO’s art of Sensitivity Information acquires renewed relevance amidst a range of contemporary projects engaged in a reassessment of the “linguistic turn.”

Far from disengaged exercises in armchair philosophizing, the company’s ontological experiments defined an operational framework within which NETCO’s co-presidents, Iain and Ingrid Baxter, navigated, and immanently intervened within, their socio-technical milieu. A quasi-ethnographic attentiveness to what Tiziana Terranova has more recently termed the “daily deployment of informational tactics” anticipated the anthropological turn of subsequent conceptualism, while proposing informatic (in

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137 Meltzer, Systems We have Loved, 89.

As a platform for enhancing the agency of the artist in a technocratic society, NETCO’s corporate frame simultaneously enacted “a refusal to succumb to bureaucracy”
that invites comparisons with the contemporaneous discourse of New Leftist youth.\textsuperscript{146} NETCO’s ludic corporatism resonated, moreover, with the “play-tactics” of the Situationists,\textsuperscript{147} and the Fourierist economics of Robert Filliou (who made frequent trips to Vancouver),\textsuperscript{148} as well as the more aspirational and phantasmatic dimensions of mainstream conceptualism explored by Chris Gilbert.\textsuperscript{149} NETCO’s ludic corporatism thus stands apart from the functionalist logic of Benjamin Buchloh’s influential articulation of a rationalized “aesthetic of administration,”\textsuperscript{150} as well as the contemporaneous experiments in bureaucracy undertaken by members of government-funded initiatives and socialist organizations such as CARFAC and Opportunities for Youth.\textsuperscript{151} As Vincent Bonin and Ken Lum have both demonstrated, these bodies were in equal measure experiments in new forms of collectivity as well as instantiations of the new forms of cybernetic governmentality and self-regulation discussed in the next section.


“The Concept of the Corporation”\textsuperscript{152} as Psychophysical Ontology

Though frequently cited by critics and followers alike as the “patron saint” of the digital age,\textsuperscript{153} McLuhan’s discourse on “information” remains surprisingly under-examined to the present day. The N.E. Thing Co. was thus remarkably prescient in seizing upon this dimension of the media thinker’s writings to re-conceptualize the role of the artist in a post-studio milieu as that of a “sensory informer,”\textsuperscript{154} as well as the post-medium status of art in an emergent information society as varieties of “Sensitivity Information,” or SI for short.\textsuperscript{155} Conceiving of information as the univocal medium of a knowledge economy, the company understood the artist’s role to consist in the sensitive processing of that information. This non-linguistic perspective emerges forcefully from a 1967 interview between Iain Baxter and curator Dorothy Cameron:

A fork, a car, a door, and handle or a rock—all these things are information:

and if you get beyond the label-attitude, you are able to see and experience all they contain. The label is what gets in the way of experience. Because an object is labeled a ‘glass’, people see simply g-l-a-s-s. They do not see all the intrinsic potentials of ‘glass-ness’: how the glass is a bubble; how it’s a container that captures space; how it’s a clear window and some other little world. […]

\textsuperscript{152} Peter F. Drucker, \textit{The Concept of the Corporation} (1946; repr., New York: Mentor, 1972).
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Wired} magazine’s masthead claimed McLuhan as its “patron saint.” Theall, \textit{The Virtual McLuhan}, 162.
\textsuperscript{154} Baxter quoted in Dorothy Cameron, \textit{Sculpture ’67} (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1968), 84.
\textsuperscript{155} NETCO’s reconceptualization of art-as-information suggests analogies with Rosalind Krauss’s reading of Marcel Broodthaers’s “Museum of Modern Art, Eagles Department” as announcing “the termination of the individual arts as medium-specific.” Krauss, “\textit{A Voyage on the North Sea},” 12. NETCO’s 1966 “Glossary” similarly proclaimed that, “The idea of comprehending ‘all arts as information handled sensitively’ breaks the historical chains that keep them apart from each other and grossly misunderstood.” N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., “Glossary,” 1966, box 5, file 11, Iain Baxter& Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Toronto, ON, n. pag.
People don’t go off into these various realms of magic and empathy, pure form and surrealism, because labeling has become what their appreciation of life is. They have lost their innocent way of looking and feeling.\(^{156}\)

In place of the discrete media categories policed by a waning Greenbergian formalism,\(^{157}\) NETCO substituted the multiple modalities of the all-purpose medium Sensitivity Information, as delineated in a 1966 company “Glossary”: Sound Sensitivity Information, or SSI (“music, poetry [read], singing, oratory, etc.”), Moving Sensitivity Information, or MSI (“movies, dance, mountain climbing, track, etc.”), Experiential Sensitivity Information, or ESI (“theatre, etc.”), and Visual Sensitivity Information, or VSI (“a term developed and used by the N.E. Thing Co. to denote more appropriately the meaning of the traditional words ‘art’ and ‘fine art’ or ‘visual art’”).\(^{158}\) This inclusive nomenclature implies a simultaneously carnal and informatic epistemology comparable to that described by the economist and cyberneticist Herbet Simon, for whom, in Halpern’s words, “rationality [is] guided by the data gathered through embodied sensory perception.”\(^{159}\) Like Bergson’s earlier efforts “to restore the specificity and novelty that has been stripped away by the psychophysicists’ quantification,”\(^{160}\) NETCO’s aspiration

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\(^{156}\) Baxter quoted in Cameron, *Sculpture ’67*, 84.


\(^{158}\) N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., “Glossary,” n. pag.

\(^{159}\) Halpern, *Beautiful Data*, 177.

to wrest a qualitative kernel from computation would be complicated through the course of its deepening engagement with concepts of information.

The varieties of SI enumerated by this “Glossary” (Fig. 38) simultaneously define an immanent *physis* in which the company’s proprietary actions and “things” circulated within an informatic void recalling the Epicurean physics recently recognized as a formative influence on Deleuze.¹⁶¹ Moreover, the company’s univocal ontology of information reinforces analogies with the monadic subject of the French post-structuralist.¹⁶² Yet, the source of NETCO’s monad lies, improbably, in the writings of McLuhan; improbable because McLuhan’s Catholicism might discourage a Leibnizian reading.¹⁶³ Yet, as Richard Cavell has extensively documented, McLuhan drew heavily upon Central European traditions of philosophy and science. The proto-cybernetic physiology elaborated by the Hungarian-born Canadian stress researcher Hans Selye,¹⁶⁴ which McLuhan explicitly adapted in formulating his informatic sensorium and Cold-

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¹⁶³ In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan wrote favourably of Leibniz that, “long before literate technology, the binary factors of hands and feet sufficed to launch man on the path of counting. Indeed, the mathematical Leibniz saw in the mystic elegance of the binary system of zero and 1 the image of Creation. The unity of the Supreme Being operating in the void by binary function would, he felt, suffice to make all beings from the void.” McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 114.

War ideology of technological “coping,”\textsuperscript{165} authorizes such a monadological interpretation of NETCO’s informatic physics.\textsuperscript{166}

N. Katherine Hayles underscores the ambivalent stakes of early cybernetic visions of embodiment, which simultaneously eroded the boundary between subjects and their environment by envisioning informational “pathways” bridging carbon- and silicon-based components,\textsuperscript{167} but also defensively disavowed this newly porous condition via militaristic (and masculinist) fantasies of bodily re-containment and homeostatic “closure.”\textsuperscript{168} Selye’s rendering of the body’s \textit{milieu intérieur} as a non-material network of cybernetic feedback loops, or what he termed “reactons,”\textsuperscript{169} in a diagram published in McLuhan and Edmund Carpenter’s interdisciplinary journal \textit{Explorations} (Fig. 39), is a striking illustration of this paradigm. Consistent with the emphasis on “form” in McLuhan’s critical communications paradigm, Selye stated that, “Stress has its own characteristic \textit{form} and \textit{composition}, but no particular cause.”\textsuperscript{170} The aesthetic investments of Selye’s schematization of physiology in this diagram recall his earlier collaboration with the Montréal artist Marian Dale Scott on a mural for a projected conference and reading room in McGill University’s Department of Histology, where the stress researcher was then employed as an assistant professor.\textsuperscript{171} The cubist lattice of Scott’s \textit{Endocrinology} visualizes the interaction of cellular processes as an “allover”

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{165} See Cavell, \textit{McLuhan in Space}, 86-87. \\
\textsuperscript{166} Orit Halpern emphasizes the extent to which Norbert Wiener’s formulation of cybernetics was dependent on the ontology of Bergson. See Halpern, \textit{Beautiful Data}, 51-53. This genealogy suggests a bridge between American cybernetics and the Bergsonian “ancestry” of McLuhan’s dualistic environmental discourse traced by Kenneth Allan. Allan, “Marshall McLuhan and the Counterenvironment,” 23. \\
\textsuperscript{167} Hayles, \textit{How We Became Posthuman}, 2. \\
\textsuperscript{168} McLuhan, \textit{Understanding Media}, 44. \\
\textsuperscript{169} Hans Selye, “Stress,” \textit{Explorations}, no. 1 (December 1953): 70, my emphasis. \\
\textsuperscript{170} Selye, \textit{The Stress of Life}, 54, my emphasis. \\
\textsuperscript{171} See Esther Trépanier, \textit{Marian Dale Scott: Pioneer of Modern Art} (Québec: Musée du Québec, 2000), 159-64.\end{flushleft}
composition that anticipates the cybernetic design of Selye’s subsequent diagram of reactons.  

If in some respects Selye’s Explorations image anticipates the governing metaphor of more recent network aesthetics, McLuhan’s reworking of cybernetic physiology in Understanding Media aligns the stress researcher’s phobic discourse of homeostasis, rather, with the polarities structuring the proto-informatic colour theory of Wilhelm Ostwald, in which chromatic values are distributed according to the logarithmic progression of Fechner’s Law.  

Without citing Ostwald or his “colour solid” (Fig. 40) directly, McLuhan relates Selye’s notion of “autoamputation”—which the media thinker likens to the search for sensory “closure” that occurs when one or more of the senses are technologically extended—to the Baltic German chemist’s psychophysical distribution of colour values. “It is with the senses as it is with color. Sensation is always 100 per cent, and a color is always 100 per cent color. But the ratio among the components in the sensation or the color can differ infinitely.”  

Ostwald’s discussion of the “constant ratio” between the chromatic intervals of his colour solid mobilized rhetoric complementary to McLuhan’s neo-Thomist descriptions of the sensorium as a faculty of computation. The media analyst’s associate Harley Parker, who served as Head of Design and Installations at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto from 1957 to

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173 See, for instance, Larsen, Networks; Wigley, “Network Fever,” 82-122.  
175 Theall accuses McLuhan of a “naïve psychology” resulting from a “collage” of incompatible sources and methodologies. Theall, The Medium is the Rear View Mirror, 85, 84.  
176 McLuhan, Understanding Media, 44.  
177 Ostwald, Colour Science, 96.
1967, elucidated Ostwald’s relevance to McLuhan’s sensorial media analyses in comments recorded in a transcript of a 1967 museum seminar held at the Museum of the City of New York, in which McLuhan also participated:

I came to an analogy for [the changing sensory modalities of today] through long study of colour. Ostwald was a German physicist, a colour scientist of the late 19th Century, and he said at one point that all sensation is one hundred percent. He could have said all perception is one hundred percent.

He said, in color it’s as if you had a full test tube of colour and you can only change that colour or add something to it at the expense of the initial ingredients. I find that this is a good illustration for sensory life. Because as you put more, for instance, of the visual into perception, the other factors, of necessity, must go down, if all experience is one hundred percent. If you raise the tactile, the oral will go down. It’s always in a constant flux of orchestration.

Parker’s observation, in another context, that “Data are not exactly contained in structure. They are the structure, and all the data in a structure are in a constant state of

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interplay,” suggests one possible source for NETCO’s non-hierarchal, quasi-psychophysical renderings of “Sensitivity Information.”

Drawing attention to Ostwald as the source of this holistic model and sensorial terminology acquires relevance in the context of Thierry de Duve’s influential reading of Duchamp’s “pictorial nominalism,” and subsequent arrogation of NETCO’s ACTs and ARTs to that framework. Taking Duchamp’s early painting practice as his unlikely point of departure, de Duve argues that the “semiotic” structure of Chevreul’s colour theory—its foundation in a binary structure of simultaneous colour contrast—informed the linguistic turn enacted by Duchamp’s subsequent readymades. “In the same way that Saussure saw differences, and even opposition, as the principle for the construction of any sign, Chevreul similarly viewed contrast as the basis of all perceptions of colour.” De Duve contrasts the “linguistic’ treatment of colour” inherited by Duchamp from Chevreul via practitioners of Divisionism and Simultaneism, notably František Kupka, to the fantasy of an essentialist language of colour espoused by Kandinsky. Unlike the ontological project pursued by Kandinsky, the unmotivated character of art’s linguistic condition developed by Duchamp, according to de Duve, unveils a Symbolic “where that which it names is nothing other than its naming function.”

Yet de Duve’s analysis inadvertently suggests an alternative to this linguistic framework that is helpful in re-situating the a-signifying language games of NETCO. De Duve likens Chevreul’s colour theory to the “psychological” studies of Fechner, “in that

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180 See de Duve, Kant after Duchamp, 296-300.  
182 De Duve, Pictorial Nominalism, 149.  
183 See de Duve, Pictorial Nominalism, 124-25.  
184 De Duve, Pictorial Nominalism, 61.
it treats sensations in their relations to stimuli and organizes these relations in a differential fashion around a basic law, that of simultaneous contrasts."  

The invocation of Fechner’s psychophysics of “just noticeable differences” places Chevreul’s colour theory within a nineteenth-century scientific tradition that conceived of “force” as non-linguistic polarity. This monist paradigm was particularly strong in central Europe; its influence legible in the work of such German-speaking theorists as Hermann von Helmholtz, Adolf von Hildebrand and Heinrich Wölfflin—whose impact on McLuhan has been traced by Cavell.

The logarithmic divisions of Ostwald’s geometric solid delimit and quantify the perceptual capacities of the subject in a fashion reminiscent of fellow German Baltic scientist Jakob von Uexküll’s roughly contemporaneous likening of the environment, or umwelt, constituted by the affective thresholds of the organism, to a “soap-bubble.”

Brett Buchanan has explored the influence of Uexküll’s theoretical biology on a range of twentieth-century thinkers. Uexküll’s soap-bubble ontology—in particular, his description of the “world with only three affects” inhabited by the tick—were an important reference for Deleuze in his discourse on the univocity of being. The autopoietic ontologies of Uexküll and Deleuze suggest analogies, in turn, with

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185 De Duve, Pictorial Nominalism, 146.
188 See Cavell, McLuhan in Space, 71-73.
191 See Buchanan, Onto-Ethologies, 154; see also Deleuze, Spinoza, 124.
McLuhan’s interest in “automorphic” space: “a space in which each person, each thing, makes it[s] own world.” Cavell discusses the salience of this notion to McLuhan’s speculations on the disruptive effects of electric media on spatial perception.

McLuhan’s invocation of “sensory thresholds” in approaching alterations to the technological environment is suggestive of Ostwald’s (and Parker’s) influence. It is not improbable that Selye’s aesthetic approach to biology—a product of his doctoral studies in 1920s Prague—served as a conduit for the monist polarities and psychophysical rhetoric that are recurring features of McLuhan’s writings of the later 1950s and 1960s. Selye’s definition of stress as the “nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it” is, moreover, strongly suggestive of the univocal “body without organs” described by Deleuze with Félix Guattari—a figure derived, in part, from Uexküll.

Whether or not McLuhan possessed firsthand knowledge of these holistic models, the structural homologies between Central European ontologies and the Toronto School thinker’s own univocal conception of being speak to his participation in a shared discourse network.

McLuhan’s speculations on automorphic space are brought into satirical representation by Iain Baxter’s 1968 collection of “inflatable wearables”: inflated vinyl fashions resembling ludicrous literalizations of the soap-bubble worlds of Uexküll (perhaps in oblique reference to Baxter’s earlier studies in zoology).

Recalling

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McLuhan’s speculations on clothing as a social extension of body,199 Baxter’s fashions “bagged” the hermetically sealed subjectivity of a plastic society permanently on high alert.200 

Cold War paranoia fuelled the political appropriation of Selye’s discourse on homeostasis as a conservative social ideal that promised to maintain equilibrium amidst unprecedented technological transformation and ideological conflict: “Stress was pictured as a weapon, to be used in the waging of psychological warfare against the enemy, and stress research as a shield or vaccination against the contagious germ of fear.”201 Russell Viner situates the homeostatic rhetoric of Selye’s popular writings on stress squarely within the charged atmosphere of this ideological force field. As an “expert consultant” to the US Army and Surgeon General from 1947 to 1957, Viner notes that Selye extolated the virtues of permanent self-defense in a fashion strongly resonant with American foreign policy objectives of the day. Selye’s aestheticized recasting of homeostasis as self-preservation also recalls Wyndham Lewis’s proto-Freudian rhetoric of “armouring” the ego against the shocks of modernity.202 Hal Foster productively likens this artistic correlate of the “protective shield” cultivated by the Freudian subject to McLuhan’s
discourse on prosthesis. McLuhan’s influential theorization of the media of communication as “extensions” of the human sensorium seeking cybernetic equilibrium under the impact of environmental stressors, was a direct outgrowth of Selye’s writings on stress. “All extensions of ourselves, in sickness or in health, are attempts to maintain equilibrium.” McLuhan extended Selye’s speculative biology to describe the homeostatic functioning of information networks in an emergent “global village.”

If political and commercial institutions take on a biological character by means of electric communications, it is also common now for biologists like Hans Selye to think of the physical organism as a communication network: ‘Hormone is a specific chemical message-substance, made by an endocrine gland and secreted into the blood, to regulate and coordinate the functions of distant organs.’

McLuhan’s rhetoric of “coping” with the stresses of the technological environment owe an important debt to Selye that has been obscured by repetition of the Toronto School thinker’s beloved anecdote of Edgar Allen Poe’s mariner, who saved himself from catastrophe by engaging in a cybernetic “feedback loop” with the hostile action of their

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203 Foster, Prosthetic Gods, 122.
204 Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, 34.
205 McLuhan, Understanding Media, 42.
207 McLuhan, Understanding Media, 247. In Understanding Media, McLuhan applies Selye’s biology as a framework for cultural studies: “As Selye deals with the total environmental situation in his ‘stress’ theory of disease, so the latest approach to media study considers not only the ‘content’ but the medium and the cultural matrix within which a particular medium operates.” McLuhan, Understanding Media, 11. See also Willmott, McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse, 127.
environment. This posture of collusion with the forces of environmental change is recognizable in the coping strategies adopted by NETCO’s personnel: “We celebrate the ordinary.”

McLuhan did not construe coping as an exclusively individual enterprise. As an informal advisor to Prime Minister Trudeau, the media analyst elaborated a doctrine of “cybernation,” in which “autonomy and decentralism” would be achieved by a “new environment consisting of a network of information and feedback loops” between semi-autonomous organizations. McLuhan’s choice of imagery recalls the network logic of Selye’s Explorations diagram. But if in his role as a military advisor, Selye projected an image of the socius as a militantly hermetic monad, McLuhan’s reworking of the stress researcher’s cybernetic rendering of the sensorium in his comments on “cybernation” imagined an extended and porous social structure. Nevertheless, traces of a more defensive attitude, likely derived from Selye, are legible in McLuhan’s 1960 report to the United States Office of Education, the precursor to Understanding Media: “We may be forced,” he wrote: “in the interests of human equilibrium, to suppress various media as radio or movies for long periods of time, or until the social organism is in a state to

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210 See Palmer, Canada’s 1960s, 14142, 156-57, 176; see also Theall’s likening of McLuhan’s role as advisor to Trudeau to that of a “court jester.” Theall, The Medium is the Rear View Mirror, 32.
sustain such violent lopsided stimulus.” The Cold War foundations of this strategy were not lost on McLuhan, whose 1960 NAEB Report cast education as a matter of national security,

Today, civil defense would seem to consist in protection against media fallout. In the past, war has consisted in the movement of commodities back and forth across frontiers. Today, when the largest commodity of all is information itself, war means no longer the movement of hardware, but of information. What had previously been ‘a peace time’ activity within our own boundaries now becomes the major “cold-war” activity across frontiers.213

The next Chapter traces the consequences of McLuhan’s program for educational reform on NETCO self-constitution as a cybernetic organization as it was transmitted via co-president Iain Baxter’s teaching appointments at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University.

CHAPTER III

N.E. THING CO. LTD. II: THE LOGIC OF SENSITIVITY

The Univocal University

Simon Fraser University (SFU), the “instant university” that served as the institutional backdrop to NETCO’s emergence and early ontological experiments,\(^1\) was a product of Cold War tensions between defensive “implosion” and decentralizing “explosion” analogous to those sketched by McLuhan’s Gestalt-inspired media analyses.\(^2\) Published during the period of SFU’s accelerated construction and founding, *Understanding Media* postulated a relationship between the terms of this polarity and the alternating currents of organizational transformation associated with electricity: “The stepping-up of speed from the mechanical to the instant electric form reverses explosion into implosion.”\(^3\) Building on his doctoral research into the changing patterns of humanistic learning, McLuhan was particularly attuned to what he characterized as the educational “crisis” engendered by the tensions unleashed by electric media:\(^4\)

> Our new concern with education follows upon the changeover to an interrelation in knowledge, where before the separate subjects of the curriculum had stood apart from each other. Departmental sovereignties have melted away as rapidly as

\(^3\)  McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 35.
\(^4\)  McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 35.
national sovereignties under conditions of electric speed. Obsession with the older patterns of mechanical, one way expansion from centres to margins is no longer relevant to our electric world.\(^5\)

McLuhan’s assessment would prove prophetic for the troubled early history of Simon Fraser. Initially conceived as a node in a projected multi-campus network, or “multiversity” on the University of California model,\(^6\) Simon Fraser was intended to ease intensifying enrollment pressure on the established University of British Columbia as the baby boom cohort began to move through the post-secondary system.\(^7\) Historian Hugh Johnston notes that, “decentralization had become essential” to University of British Columbia (UBC) President John Barfoot Macdonald’s 1962 Report on the future of higher education in British Columbia.\(^8\) Macdonald’s recommendations called for the creation of a tiered system, with the creation of a second campus in the Vancouver area. A new Burnaby campus would provide undergraduate courses to more working-class students from East Vancouver,\(^9\) while UBC would maintain its privileged status through competitive admissions policies and by offering graduate degrees.\(^10\)

Premier W.A.C. Bennett’s appointment of then B.C. Hydro co-chair, Gordon Shrum, as Chancellor of the future SFU, inadvertently set in motion conditions ripe for testing McLuhan’s hypothesis that, “the instant electric form reverses explosion into

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\(^6\) Hugh Johnston, *Radical Campus: Making Simon Fraser University* (Vancouver; Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 52.
\(^7\) See Johnston, *Radical Campus*, 20-22.
\(^8\) Johnston, *Radical Campus*, 21.
\(^9\) See Cleveland, “‘Berkeley North,’” 196.
“Implosion.” Cutting ties with UBC, Shrum established the new campus on Burnaby Mountain as an autonomous university with graduate programs in an astonishingly compressed period of only 30 months, between the spring of 1963 and September, 1965. Yet this sudden shift in orientation would mark but the beginning in a series of “endless reversals or break boundaries passed in the interplay of the structures of bureaucracy and enterprise” that would define SFU’s early years. In some ways, the successive “rival conceptions of a university” identified by Johnston in his perceptive study of SFU’s early development serve to illustrate McLuhan’s principle of the “reversal of the overheated medium”: the autonomous university that opened in September 1965 under Shrum’s univocal administration appearing as the opposite of Macdonald’s original plan for a stratified multiversity. In her study of Iain Baxter’s short-lived but impactful tenure at the Centre for Communication and the Arts, Sharla Sava notes that,

Sponsored by then Premier W.A.C. Bennett, SFU represents one of the more ambitious projects of the Social Credit government. The spectacular location chosen for the building of the new university, isolated on the top of a mountain, as well as the imposing and rigorous monumentality of its modernist architectural design, convey the grandiose line of the Social Credit vision.

The political vision of Bennett’s conservative-centrist Social Credit government was initially trained on infrastructure: “His public hydroelectric power projects (with Shrum

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15 Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts,” 83.
as a partner),” notes Johnston, “were massive.” McLuhan’s eminently Innisian gloss on “roads” as media of communication in chapter 10 of *Understanding Media* suggests something of an unintended meta-commentary on the Socreds’ turn from physical infrastructure, such as highways and dams, to social programs, including education and universities, during the course of the 1960s. As if sketching a blueprint for this transition, McLuhan had traced “the idea of transportation as communication … [to] the transition of the idea from transport to information by means of electricity.”

If the choice of Burnaby Mountain as the site of SFU necessitated negotiations with then minister of highways, Phil Gaglardi, to construct an access route from the Trans-Canada Highway, Shrum would turn his attention to architecture as the principal conduit for realizing’s his vision of an instant university. “Architecture,” he noted, “determines the nature, the inner philosophy of a university.” There is a striking resonance between Shrum’s determinist view of architecture and McLuhan’s belief that, “the architect can orchestrate different spaces, with their differing sensuous involvements, with the same freedom as the composer and the conductor.” The winning entry in the 1963 architectural design competition overseen by Shrum—the iconic Erickson-Massey “megastructure”—“proposed a more efficient layout to encourage interdisciplinary co-

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16 Johnston, *Radical Campus*, 18. Similarly, Tomaszewska notes that, “One of Bennett’s top mandates was to harness BC’s hydro power through extensive damming and, in partnership with the United States, develop a power system that would ensure the province’s long-term prosperity.” Tomaszewska, “Borderlines of Poetry and Art,” 64.
18 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 89.
19 Johnston, *Radical Campus*, 43.
operation and to break down departmental barriers.”

Johnston speculates that Shrum’s preference for a mix of large lecture halls and smaller seminar rooms was the decisive factor in Erickson-Massey’s victory. In its radical fusion of multiple functions, the resulting “single structure” suggests analogies with McLuhan’s description of “electric light” as “pure information” and “a medium without a message”: a compression of formerly discrete media into a single space, or channel. Like McLuhan’s renderings of electric light, the Erickson-Massey megastructure constituted a monadic “centre without a margin” expressive of the (purportedly) post-lineal, “electric” values of an information society.

Despite the utopian hopes invested in the rapidly constructed SFU, the campus would soon earn a reputation for turmoil in addition to the dubious moniker “Berkeley North.” John Cleveland has studied the student power movement at SFU as a (relatively successful) exercise in participatory democracy that hinged on an alliance between students and junior faculty leading up to a June 1968 victory for faculty rights following the threat of CAUT censure. But if student protestors’ imitation of Berkeley professors’ appropriation of the IBM punch card to symbolize the growing industrialization of education can be seen to resonate with the inflated computer punch card that NETCO installed in its booth at the 1970 Data Processing Manager’s Association (DPMA) meeting.

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21 Johnston, Radical Campus, 48.
22 “About teaching, Gordon Shrum had one conviction that would influence the design: he thought teaching was best done with a combination of large lecture halls and small classes.” Johnston, Radical Campus, 47-48.
23 Johnston, Radical Campus, 53; McLuhan, Understanding Media, 8.
24 McLuhan, Understanding Media, 91.
25 Johnston, Radical Campus, 129.
27 See Johnston, Radical Campus, 127. The computer as symbol of institutional contestation also marked the 1969 Sir George Williams Computer Riot in Montréal. See Marcel Martel, “‘Riot’ at Sir George Williams: Giving Meaning to Student Dissent,” in Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties, eds. Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément and George S. Kealey, 97-114 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).
conference in Seattle as part of a satirical intervention within the burgeoning computer industry, Baxter’s adoption of a corporate frame is more accurately seen as bringing into visibility tensions within the university’s transition to a “capitalist corporation” than the actions of student radicals.\textsuperscript{28} But while their corporate habitus may have set the NETCO co-presidents apart from the counter-cultural currents that gripped the student body in the wake of the 1967 Summer of Love,\textsuperscript{29} there can be little doubt that the backdrop of institutional crisis and, in particular, the thwarted utopian ambitions of faculty at the Centre for Communication and the Arts, were decisive in shaping the concerns and strategies of NETCO.

The interdisciplinary implications of Shrum’s pedagogical vision for the fledgling university, imbricated in the univocal infrastructure of the Erickson-Massey megastructure (its physical and metaphorical leveling of departmental hierarchies within a common and uniform matrix), would be constitutive of the aims and approaches adopted by the experimental Centre, where Iain Baxter accepted a position as “University Resident” in mid-1966. Sava writes that, “art and media were not differentiated” in the organization and curriculum of the Centre; and that, “the initial directive of the facility appears to have been geared to production.”\textsuperscript{30} This description matches artist Victor Doray’s observation in a 1968 \textit{arts\_canada} feature on the future of arts education that, “Some art schools thankfully are realizing the futility of formal training in each media,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Cleveland, “‘Berkeley North,’” 194.
\item[29] Cleveland, “‘Berkeley North,’” 205. “In the 1960s, it was asserted that this city led the nation in experimentation and the embrace of new ideas in the arts.... One celebrated factor was Vancouver’s “west coastiness” in a world that was taking the pulse of California’s hippie cultural rebellion. The counter-culture of consciousness-raising, Tibetan Buddhism, faux agrarianism, wilderness worship, LSD, and sexual exploration found its biggest colony in Vancouver.” Scott Watson, “Urban Renewal: Ghost Traps, Collage, Condos, and Squats—Vancouver Art in the Sixties,” in \textit{Intertidal: Vancouver and Art Artists}, ed. Dieter Roelstraete and Scott Watson, 31–48 (Antwerpen: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst; Vancouver: The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2005), 32.
\end{footnotes}
and instead are giving free rein to explore among them by self experimentation, by audio visual referral, and by personal assistance whenever and wherever requested.”\(^{31}\) The fusion of art and technology at the Centre for Communication and the Arts was symptomatic of broader processes integrating “arts training into the engineering curriculum” described by Halpern.\(^{32}\) In keeping with McLuhan’s reworking of the medieval Catholic philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, the ultimate goal of the multidisciplinary, sensorial pedagogy developed by faculty at SFU’s Centre for Communication and the Arts was nothing less than to achieve “the harmony of all being.”\(^{33}\) This ontological agenda is echoed by an unrealized proposal for a parallel institute to be modeled after the Centre and the Vancouver-based Intermedia collective (founded in 1967), penned by Baxter with fellow artists Victor Doray and Jack Shadbolt. The authors envisioned their projected Centre for Intermedia Research and Communication Analysis (CIRCA) as a “subtly changing product of many individual human beings, through their extensions of being,” adding that “CIRCA really does sum it up, metaphysically perhaps.”\(^{34}\) The distinctly ontological function of “information” within this McLuhanesque context differed radically from the alienated affects attributed to “information-subjects” by Eve Meltzer’s structuralist analysis.\(^{35}\)

In a 1968 article, Schafer stated that, “From the very beginning of the Simon Fraser


\(^{33}\) McLuhan, Understanding Media, 5-6.

\(^{34}\) Shadbolt, Doray and Baxter, “Intermedia,” n. pag.

experience we have been intent on developing technique and content for a new teaching which does not break the creative primal unity of the senses.” In keeping with McLuhan’s vision of a dawning era of “secondary orality” as his student Walter Ong would dub it—Schafer and peers attempted to develop a “panaesthetic grammar joining vision to hearing” in hopes of realizing the reconstructed sensorium imagined by McLuhan. “Information” was imagined as the medium of translation between the various media as well as an alternative to traditional (printed) notation schemes:

“...[S]tudents will perhaps be trained to describe music in terms of exact frequencies or frequency bands rather than in the limited nomenclature of the tonal system.... The psychology and physiology of aural pattern perception will supersede many former musical studies in which musical soundings were rendered mute by paper exercises.”

The multi-modal pedagogy envisioned by Schafer and peers at SFU’s Centre represents an artefact of the “persistent and recurring dream of synaesthesia, corrupted boundaries, and genre miscegenation” that Caroline A. Jones places in dialectic tension with the dominant—rationalist and formalist—Greenbergian paradigm of late modernist criticism. It simultaneously brings into visibility the contemporary university’s (re-)formation of a “complete media system” under computational conditions studied by

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37 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 3.
Friedrich Kittler.  

In early sketches jotted by Baxter in the margins of university memos, the Centre itself comes into visibility as an organizational equivalent of the sensus communis envisioned by McLuhan. In Baxter’s imaginative diagrams (Figs. 41-42), the Centre’s constituent arts programs—represented in a point-form notation scheme that anticipates the cybernetic code subsequently deployed by NETCO’s researchers to designate the company’s “departments” (COP, ACT, ART) and their informatic “products” (SI, MSI, VSI)—interact in Gestalt patterns suggestive of the systole-diastole action of organic tissue. The biological associations conjured by these diagrams echo the ecological foundations of the artist’s earlier hard-edge paintings and parallel the artist’s 1966 design for the Centre’s logotype as a series of concentric rings—part of a broader re-branding of SFU’s visual identity conceived by Baxter under the auspices of McTaggart-Cowan.

Lurking within the ontological rhetoric mobilized by Centre faculty to justify their informatic pedagogy was the spectre of “convergence” as both organizational ideal and potential mechanism of social control which. As Halpern has documented, the latter concern also haunted the informational gambits of contemporaries such as Charles and Ray Eames as a master signifier: “The data-filled worlds of the IBM pavilion [designed by the Eames brothers] refracted this changing nature of knowledge and commerce.

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44 Halpern, Beautiful Data, 78.
Inside the pavilion, human perception was also treated as a channel and capacity to be extended, increased and circulated. This ‘expanded’ media … not only reformulated perception but linked this form of seeing to forms of thinking.”

For McLuhan, the multi-screen environment of Expo ’67—for which his associate Harley Parker acted as a design consultant—augured similar developments: “When the inner spaces of our lives go outward,” wrote McLuhan, “the result is a structure like Habitat at Expo ’67. This is a mosaic form of composite spaces which in effect presents an X ray of our entire culture.”

Significantly, Halpern links the dispersed visual field of the Eames’ multi-screen “Information Machine” to both the appearance of “new institutional spaces for art practice,” notably Kepes’s Center for Advanced Visual Culture (CAVS) at MIT, and the simultaneous reconfiguration of corporations into decentralized bureaucracies studied by Reinhold Martin.

SFU’s informatic pedagogy was symptomatic of similar “architectural” pressures immanent in the univocal contours of the Erickson-Massey megastructure; notably, the incipient corporatization of the university.

In McLuhan’s discourse, convergence is synonymous with the media analyst’s neo-Thomist notion of the continuous process of “translation” among the senses effected by the sensus communis and its technological “extensions,” the media of communication. His apocalyptic rhetoric of an impending informatic translation promised a reconstructed

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45 Halpern, *Beautiful Data*, 129.
46 “Harley Parker,” Libraries and Archives, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, ON.
48 Halpern, *Beautiful Data*, 95; see Martin, *The Organizational Complex*.
sensorium. In what is recognizable today as an early version of an Information Society thesis, as early as his NEAB Report, McLuhan wrote that,

[I]n any high-level information society, one subject-matter can be substituted for any other as an educational base. The creative process itself becomes the means and the object of education in the dialogue of high level communication. The faster information moves, the more forms of knowledge, process, and experience become accessible to observation. The medium becomes the message.\(^{51}\)

McLuhan’s vision of education as a process of “pattern recognition” exploiting conditions of accelerated information movement resonates with the slightly earlier pedagogical experiments of Charles Eames and György Kepes,\(^ {52}\) which, Halpern argues, embraced “data overload as a pedagogical principle.”\(^ {53}\) The McLuhan-inspired Vancouver artist and associate of Iain Baxter’s, Victor Doray, employed similar rhetoric in his artscanada feature on the future of arts education: “The flood of information is beginning to cause cracks in our concrete curriculum,” he wrote.\(^ {54}\) Similarly, “Eames,” notes Halpern, “spoke of distraction and overstimulation as an education. Rather than worrying about information overload, Eames thought more data offered more ‘choice,’ giving the spectator a freedom to ‘choose’ from and produce his (or her) own patterns and combinations.”\(^ {55}\) For McLuhan, pedagogy was likewise a matter of translating


\(^{52}\) McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, vii.


\(^{55}\) Halpern, *Beautiful Data*, 102.
between meaningful forms. Eames’s conception of the image as “a process and pattern that embodies ‘ideas’”56 establishes further parallels with McLuhan’s declaration that, “All that remains to study are the media themselves, as forms.”57

SFU faculty, notably Baxter and Schafer, adopted McLuhan’s radical pedagogy in experimenting with the interdisciplinary potential of information as a medium of translation between the various arts programs offered by the non-credit Centre for Communication and the Arts. This informatic infrastructure facilitated the constitution of an analogical interplay of departments resembling the organizational equivocity of the decentralized corporation subsequently described by McLuhan and his collaborator, Barrington Nevitt.58 The convergent pressures productive of this analogical curriculum also recall the “ideal of reintegrating the classical trivium” explored by McLuhan’s dissertation and, albeit indirectly, by his subsequent writings.59 Ironically, the Centre’s celebrated interdisciplinarity can also be recognized in retrospect as having been coterminous with the emergent pressures of technological convergence and control diagnosed by Halpern, which increasingly involved “producing perception as a channel”;60 that is, the body’s metaphorical reconceptualization as a conduit for the transmission and processing of sensory data. NETCO’s early reconfiguration of perception as “data transmission” is legible in a 1966 note penned by Iain Baxter headed “INFORMATION DYNAMICS OF EDUCATION ACTION,”61 or IDEA, that explores

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56 Halpern, Beautiful Data, 105.
60 Halpern, Beautiful Data, 136.
the practical consequences of the McLuhanesque translation paradigm enshrined in the curriculum of SFU’s Centre for the moniker of his fledgling company as a potential datum for both sensory (analogue) and technological transmission:

N.E. THING (VISUAL) — TV
— looking
— reading

ANYTHING (ORAL) — speech
— phone
— Radio

VISUAL, N.E. THING—ANYTHING, ORAL

This note records but one of the many thought experiments sketched on Centre letterhead and memos, preserved today in the Iain Baxter& fonds at the Art Gallery of Ontario, which link Baxter’s earliest plans for an independent organization to the administrative and curricular concerns of Centre faculty. Documentation of a 1966 meeting of the Communications Centre Resource Policy Committee, chaired by Baxter during the 1966–67 academic year, contains marginalia detailing plans for a utopian information centre that the artist christened Centre for “Universal Information Potential” (UINPO). Baxter’s plans for UINPO closely resemble the organizational framework of NETCO, created the

same year. A related sheet of notes directly ties UINPO to McLuhan’s Centre for Communication and Technology at the University of Toronto, suggesting that the Toronto School thinker’s applied experiments in organizational reform may also have served as a template for NETCO’s corporate frame.

Baxter’s sketches for UINPO may include the earliest extant reference to the artist’s concept of “sensitivity information”—in the form of a proposed “Sensitivity Information Sub-Centre,” to be established for the purpose of “self-sensitization.” As Tai van Toorn has studied, “sensitization” was a key word in the early pedagogy practiced by faculty at SFU’s Centre for Communication and the Arts. In a 1968 feature for artscanada magazine, R. Murray Schafer wrote that, “In the first year there was the Sensitivity course. We would simply gather in the Theatre, both students and faculty, for a series of experiences, talks and discussion …” However, as I argue at greater length in the next section, van Toorn’s yoking of NETCO’s Sensitivity Information to the field of environmental perception studies and the sensitivity training exercises developed by the San Francisco-based duo of Ann and Lawrence Halprin ignores the sensorial ontology

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65 Prior to the Centre for Communication and Technology, there was McLuhan’s brief-lived venture with William Hagon, Idea Consultants. See Philip Marchand, Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger (Toronto: Vintage, 1990), 100. McLuhan’s subsequent association with the San Francisco-based advertising agency headed by Howard Gossage and Dr. Gerald Feigen suggests further parallels with NETCO’s business platform. See Theall, The Virtual McLuhan, 84-87.
68 Schafer, “Cleaning the Lenses of Perception,” 12. In a 1969 proposal for an unrealized “Visual or Sensory Art Instruction” study, Iain Baxter hypothesized that, “Visual or Sensory Art Instruction will result in more creativity in art production than would a system of verbal instruction. … Visual Art Instruction would enable the students to engage in Art directly, visually, with heightened empathy and aesthetic sensitivity.” Iain Baxter, “Purpose of Study,” 1969, box 10, file 2, Iain Baxter Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Toronto, ON, n. pag.
of McLuhan as the primary influence on both the Centre and NETCO.

Baxter’s organizational thought experiments suggest that a shared vocabulary of “sensitivity” functioned as a bridge between the public, pedagogical aims of the Centre, and the private interests of the artist’s corporate platform. Indeed, these sketches suggest that NETCO was conceived as an organizational sensorium patterned after the Centre’s curricular ratio of the senses. The company thereby emerges as a symptom of the growing business presence at SFU, where, according to John Cleveland, “the domination of the university by a group of mainly corporate lawyers and representatives of big business on the Board was highly visible.”

Symptomatically, Baxter’s notes for UNPO weave effortlessly between pedagogical rhetoric (“INFORMATION KNOWHOW – EDUCATION”) and for-profit language (“INFORMATION KNOWHOW – WEALTH”). This fusion of educational and commercial prerogatives echoed McLuhan’s contention that, “Education follows behind commerce in leadership.”

NETCO’s proprietary ambitions significantly trouble the anti-capitalist aims imputed to the company by Sava and Shaw as well as the “intrinsic social value” vested in the notion

69 Cleveland, “‘Berkeley North,’” 195.
70 Baxter, “The ‘Fine Arts,’” n. pag. Baxter’s deployment of the term “potential” references the vocabulary of the cultish Esalen Institute, founded by Michael Murphy and Dick Price in Big Sur, California in 1962. Early brochures for the institute employed such terminology as “nonverbal humanities” and “human potentialities.” This rhetoric would later transform into the “human potential movement” spearheaded by the journalist and alternative educational theorist George Leonard. See Jeffrey J. Kripal, Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 86-87, 202-212. The somatics movement developed by Esalen participants Don Hanlon Johnson and Ida Rolf suggests a more plausible point of departure for NETCO’s satire of therapeutic practices and alternative educational centres than the area of environmental perception research proposed by van Toorn, for which no concrete evidence is provided. See Kripal, Esalen, 222-46. Under the leadership of Esalen instructor Fritz Perls, the Lake Cowichan, British Columbia-based Gestalt Institute of Canada, founded in the summer of 1969, would, in Kripal’s words, “create a kind of Canadian Esalen.” Kripal, Esalen, 165. NETCO’s satirical therapeutics of everyday life presents something of a fun-house mirror-image of Bertram Brooker’s earlier propagation of Couéism.
of “information” by Conceptual artists generally, according to Vincent Bonin. For NETCO, as for McLuhan, in the age of information, “culture is our business.”

As a parasitic satellite of the Centre, NETCO resembles Doray’s proposal, in a 1968 feature for artscanada, for a “mobile information van” equipped for ad hoc multimedia self-instruction, intended to facilitate “the fusion of unrelated institutions” as part of a coming “Life-knowledgeopolis.” The bubble-like media space of Doray’s mobile learning environment in turn suggests analogies with the proposal put forward by McLuhan’s associate Harley Parker, at the above-mentioned 1967 seminar held at The Museum of the City of New York, for a “newseum”—which he envisioned as mounting temporary exhibitions of topical interest, to be located beyond the confines of the museum proper:

I want to build what I call a ‘newseum,’ which consists of a building outside the museum proper, but which draws on the artifacts and materials of the museum for its shows. The idea of a newseum is that it is concerned with news, any news in the world which is of great moment, whether it occurs in science or archaeological discovery or what have you, or whether it occurs on the political scene.

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74 For McLuhan, the satellite—for which that symbol of Cold War aggression, Sputnik, served as a metonym—was constitutive of the new informational environment. See Marshall McLuhan, “At the Moment of Sputnik the Planet became a Global Theater in which there are no Spectators but only Actors,” Journal of Communication 24, no. 1 (1974): 48-58.
76 Parker quoted in Marshall McLuhan et al., Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values, 33.
As satellites of the Centre for Communication and the Arts, UINPO and NETCO are but two in a string of satirical “shadow campuses” sketched by Iain Baxter during his tenure at SFU culminating in his undated proposals for “EUNUCHVERSITY.” In at least one variation on this latter “anti-academic” enterprise, the EUNUCHVERSITY is represented as a book proposal. Proclaiming that, “The ivory tower has lost its balls!,” Baxter described the projected monograph thus,

It is our premise that the university as it now exists has serious faults. It has lost its balls, become castrated, and is totally ineffective. It could well cease to exist.

It is a EUNUCHVERSITY.

This book is aimed at the fingering of the faults from several points of view.

An unlikely list of potential contributors drafted by Baxter included Roy Ascott (then the controversial President of Toronto’s OCA), Lucy Lippard, David Suzuki, and Donald Theall. The tone of “discouraged optimism” that Baxter hoped to project through the unrealized book reflected the artist’s growing sense of pessimism and disappointment with the Centre for Communication and the Arts following the departure of SFU’s first

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president, Patrick McTaggart-Cowan, in May 1968.\textsuperscript{80}

Early in his tenure at the Centre, Baxter had developed an—as it turned out, ill
timed—alliance with the President, who was terminated by faculty vote following the
CAUT crisis that shook the fledgling university in May 1968.\textsuperscript{81} The classical associations
of Baxter’s highly-visible re-branding of the university—an initiative backed by
McTaggart-Cowan—which included a new institutional logotype evocative of a Greek
meander pattern, spoke to a humanistic vision of education recalling the Classical ideals
promoted by the Values Group at the University of Toronto, to which both Innis and
McLuhan belonged for a time.\textsuperscript{82} Johnston notes that, “although he had no great
familiarity with the arts,” McTaggart-Cowan “was a strong supporter of the centre. Yet
he gave it only three years to prove itself; after he was gone, no one in the administration
had any commitment to it.”\textsuperscript{83} The tragic irony of McTaggart-Cowan’s firing is that he
was never more than a “subordinate” to Shrum, who remained in power long after the
crisis.\textsuperscript{84} The university’s senate initiated a debate about the future of the Centre in 1969
that resulted in its formal dissolution in 1971, and its subsequent reconstitution as a new
department within the faculty of interdisciplinary studies.\textsuperscript{85} Correspondence dated August
27, 1969 from Acting University President L. Srivastava documents Baxter’s failure to

\textsuperscript{80} Johnston notes the “disappointed expectations” of Baxter and Schafer, who “complained that the centre
was loosely run and loosely structured, or that it lacked a clear statement of goals or had no definite
\textsuperscript{81} See Johnston, \textit{Radical Campus}, 266-69.
\textsuperscript{82} See Marchessault, \textit{Marshall McLuhan}, 104-105. The “humanist bias toward communication” advocated
by fellow Centre faculty member Tom Mallinson, who was on the committee that hired Iain Baxter and
served on the Communications Centre Resource Policy Committee chaired by Baxter in 1966–67, is
another point of reference. Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU,” 84.
\textsuperscript{83} Johnston, \textit{Radical Campus}, 245.
\textsuperscript{84} Cleveland, “‘Berkeley North,’” 194.
\textsuperscript{85} See Johnston, \textit{Radical Campus}, 246.
achieve tenure under the policy adopted in the summer of 1968, modeled on a 1967 CAUT statement with a strong emphasis on peer review by elected tenure and promotion committees. Baxter found himself among those faculty who did not survive the “publish-or-perish” culture that was an unintended consequence of this corrective to Shrum’s earlier, arbitrary exercise of administrative power. (His affiliation with McTaggart-Cowan, and association with the corporate image of the university, may have been contributing factors in his non-renewal.)

Baxter’s EUNUCHVERSITY is a working through of the “schizoid state” that McLuhan theorized as the outcome when outmoded frameworks are applied to the processing of new environments. The dismembered phallus of Baxter’s satirical “ivory tower,” brings into representation the figurative and literal fragmentation of the Centre for Communication and the Arts’ interdisciplinary sensorium under the stresses of intensified written “bias” spelled by the new promotion and tenure regime. A 1969 memorandum penned by Department Chair Patrick Lyndon proposed segregating arts and communication. Baxter echoed Lyndon’s vision of disciplinary segregation in a list of counter-demands responding to his non-renewal. Baxter called for a “newly formed Arts Centre to be independently functioning from the Communication Centre and to have its own budget.” These calls for disciplinary segregation thematize the dissolution of the

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87 See Johnston, Radical Campus, 215-16.
88 Johnston, Radical Campus, 215.
91 Iain Baxter to Patrick Lyndon, August 27, 1969, box 9, file 9, Iain Baxter& Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Toronto, ON, n. pag.
Centre’s McLuhanesque ontology of “analogy and equivocity”;\(^92\) that is, the fragmentation of its curricular sensorium under conditions of intensified “visual” bias inaugurated by the reinstatement of writing and print as the privileged forms of an academic media ecology.

In the wake of this period of institutional crisis at Simon Fraser, the N.E. Thing Co. would develop an increasingly sophisticated ontology of Sensitivity Information that looked upon McLuhan’s paradigm of media “translation” with increasing skepticism. In place of the analogical and equivocal representations of informatic transmission as “translation” found in its pre-1968 production, NETCO’s later representations of Sensitivity Information register a deepening attentiveness to what Deleuze, following Scotus, termed *haecceity*: the noisy particularity of things.\(^93\) The following section will trace the sources of this sensitivity to the claims of singularity to Baxter’s Zen-inspired pedagogy through the subsequent promotions of Ingrid Baxter in 1969 and 1970.

**Teaching as Epistemology and the “Insufficiently Generic”\(^94\)**

[\(T]\)he ancients spoke little of consciousness and a great deal of sensing.\(^95\)

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\(^{95}\) Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch*, 21.
As Argus’ eyes by Hermes’ wand oppressed,
Closed one by one to everlasting rest;
Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
Art after art goes out, and all is Night.⁹⁶

NETCO’s epistemology emerges through its teaching. From the start, pedagogy was central to the company’s information tactics. Indeed, its reconceptualization of the artist, from a traditional producer of objects, into a transdisciplinary “sensory informer,”⁹⁷ was every bit a recognition of the artist’s growing imbrication within the educational-industrial complex as a seizing upon the expanded possibilities implicit in an informatic frame for artists navigating the post-studio environment of a nascent information society. Partly under the sway of McLuhan’s radical pedagogy,⁹⁸ NETCO’s co-presidents represented themselves as “educators of the senses.”⁹⁹

Baxter’s early conceit of “information” as a neutral medium for the transmission of perceptual data, recorded in the transcript of his 1967 interview with curator Dorothy Cameron quoted in an earlier section, was one that would be incorrectly attributed to McLuhan, for whom sensory knowledge—it often goes unacknowledged—was always already a socio-technical artefact: “‘perceptions are not disclosures,’” McLuhan quoted Adelbert Ames as saying in his NAEB Report; “We see and feel via the patterns of

⁹⁶ Pope, The Dunciad, 552.
⁹⁷ Baxter quoted in Cameron, Sculpture ’67, 84.
⁹⁹ Fleming, Baxter², 37. This description suggests analogies with the “pedagogy of sense” earlier developed by the Eames brothers. Halpern, Beautiful Data, 81.
familiarity imposed by our various media.” With time, NETCO’s informatic discourse would evolve into a more sophisticated understanding of McLuhan’s deeply cultural understanding of the effects of media environments—eventually even harnessing tensions within the media thinker’s speculations to resist the sometimes reductive applications of his “probes” by followers. Yet Iain Baxter’s comments in the Cameron interview point to a parallel and competing tendency within NETCO’s pedagogical paradigm that both pre-dated McLuhan’s influence and, somewhat improbably, pointed a way out: namely, the embodied pedagogy of Zen, as popularized for Western audiences by Alan Watts.

Baxter encountered Watts via his influential Radio Pacifica broadcasts during a transitional period in his early development, which saw the young Canadian—then studying abroad at the University of Idaho, and later at Washington State University—shift from works of zoological illustration to watercolour studies influenced by the wildlife imagery of the West Coast mystic painter Morris Graves. A growing fascination with Eastern mysticism fuelled the artist’s exploration of traditional Japanese formats and techniques in byōbu screen paintings inflected by Western action painting, executed during a year-long residency in Japan supported by a Japanese government scholarship. In keeping with the syncretic fusion of East and West articulated by Watts,

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100 McLuhan, *Understanding Media: A Report to the United States Office of Education*, 12. Indeed, McLuhan’s *Report* to the NAEB was one long meditation on “the power of the media themselves to impose their own assumptions upon our modes of perception [… and] forms of human association.” Ibid., 1.

the Japanese art historian Teruo Ueno praised Baxter for “showing us the possibilities within our world that we hadn’t imagined.”

Zen pedagogy, in particular, would leave lasting traces on the epistemology and ontology of Iain Baxter and of the N.E. Thing Co. According to Watts, “whatever the Zen master says or does is a direct and spontaneous utterance of ‘suchness,’ … no symbol but the very thing.” Zen epistemology is thus founded on a critique of representation: “Not founded on words and letters,” it consists, rather, in “Direct pointing (chih-chih) … by nonsymbolic actions or words.” The impermanent, nondual “thing-events” revealed by these acts of pointing designate a world characterized by an “unclassified ‘suchness.’” Exposure to this non-categorical perspective was formative, according to Ingrid Baxter, to the constitution of the company’s multifarious “Departments.” In stark contrast to the “documentary and functional qualities” projected by contemporaneous exercises in “counterorganization” such as the Art & Language group, NETCO’s administration mounted an immanent critique of the very concept of organization.

103 Watts, The Way of Zen, 88. “Suchness” was similarly central to the praxis of Allan Kaprow. See Foster et al., Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism, 491.
105 Watts, The Way of Zen, 76.
106 “Some of the early experience that Iain and I had was [sic.] to go to Japan. And one of the things that I learned there was the openness of the Japanese ways of thinking and the closedness of the North Americans, of our Western mind. And we’re very, very categorical. And so I think this then leads, if you can follow the thread on that one, to the things that we did with the N.E. Thing Co. Iain Creating a very categorical company, and doing our various works—be that the art, or whatever they were called. But Sensitivity Information, information to make people more sensitive about various things, and the N.E. Thing Company then became an umbrella to state that we knew that we were doing things in many different categories and ways, and that they were all, you know, united noncategorical [sic.]” Ingrid Baxter, “Interview,” http://vancouverartintesthesixties.com/interviews/ingrid-baxter (accessed May 20, 2015).
Marcus Boon has analyzed the relational ontology of Zen as unfolding a proto-deconstructive “critique of essences.” In contrast to the resemblance to a stable “original” enshrined in the representational tradition of Platonism, the “reverse mimesis” enacted by Buddhist semiotics signifies a condition of essenceless. Rather than the nihilism that is often imputed to it by Western observers, the emptiness asserted by the Buddhist sign draws attention to the contingency and relativity of all “act[s] of designation or labeling.” In place of the conceptual identity enshrined in classical Western metaphysics, Buddhist phenomenology thereby enacts a “nonconceptual” sameness, what Watts termed suchness.

The astonishingly early appropriationist œuvre of IT—the handle adopted by Baxter in 1965 to facilitate anonymous co-production with the American artist John Friel (1938-1971) and Ingrid Baxter, whose copied products were subsequently folded into the aptly christened COP Department of NETCO—drew upon this Buddhist critique of representation to intervene within the modernist cult of originality. Tomaszewska writes that, “In Pneumatic Judd, Iain Baxter’s plastic replica of a metal Judd sculpture pokes fun at the notions of value and autonomy in modernist art.” In contrast to the Saussurean logic of nomination enacted by Duchamp’s readymades in de Duve’s influential account (which he later applied to a reading of NETCO’s ACTs and ARTs), IT’s appropriations constitute non-linguistic acts of designation derived from “Buddhist ecologies of the

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109 Boon, In Praise of Copying, 32.
112 See Fleming, Baxter, 24.
113 Tomaszewska, “Borderlines of Poetry and Art,” 52.
114 See de Duve, Kant after Duchamp, 296-300.
sign.”\textsuperscript{115} The phenomenal \textit{similarity} designated in this fashion is an invitation to the
viewer to look beyond Platonic narratives of originality and repetition to explore the
nonconceptual suchness disclosed by perception: the “innocent way of looking and
feeling” invoked by Iain Baxter in his 1967 interview with Dorothy Cameron.\textsuperscript{116}

If Baxter’s early rhetoric of the artist’s “innocent” vision is symptomatic of the “anti-
modern” currents which Sava detects in NETCO’s communications-based practice,\textsuperscript{117} the
appropriationist projects of its COP Department equally impart an Innisian recognition of
news media as the instruments of neo-imperialistic “information industries” and
McLuhan’s understanding of the simulacral character of experience in a technological
society:\textsuperscript{118} the “originals” to which its copied “products” refer being reproductions in
American magazines such as \textit{Artforum} and \textit{Art in America}, rather than any unmediated perceptual act.

Iain Baxter has linked his exposure to the Zen tradition of \textit{kōans}—riddles intended to
guide the student to enlightenment, or \textit{satori}, which frequently assume a performative
presentation\textsuperscript{119}—to his subsequent development of non-verbal teaching techniques with
fellow educator Joel Smith, curing Baxter’s MFA studies at Washington State University
circa 1963-64. According to Watts,

\begin{quote}
[T]he \textit{koan} system involves ‘passing’ a series of tests based on the \textit{mondo} or
anecdotes of the old masters. … The student is expected to show that he has
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{115} Boon, \textit{In Praise of Copying}, 28.  \\
\textsuperscript{116} Baxter quoted in Cameron, \textit{Sculpture ‘67}, 84.  \\
\textsuperscript{117} Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU,” 86.  \\
\textsuperscript{118} Innis, \textit{The Bias of Communication}, 83.  \\
\textsuperscript{119} The significance of these concepts to Baxter is evident in the naming of his son, Tor (from \textit{sa-tor-i}),
born during the Baxters’s Japanese sojourn.
\end{flushright}
experienced the meaning of the *koan* by a specific and usually nonverbal
demonstration which he has to discover intuitively.\textsuperscript{120}

Baxter, who legally changed his name to IAIN BAXTER& in 2005, recounted a
particularly memorable anecdote of non-verbal teaching in a 2011 interview:

The king of Japan, or head of some prefecture, or shogun—this is going back to
the 1200s or something—he invited this very special Zen monk to come and
explain about Zen, right, and so the guy—I've always liked this, and I think it
influenced some of my performances and stuff—came to the place, and the
audience is there. He goes up on stage—wherever he is, standing in front—and he
stands very quietly for a while, and everybody's waiting for him to expound and
talk. So you know how they have those big kimonos? He just reaches in—they
have these amazing pockets, you can carry everything in there—and he just brings
out this little reed. This little reed flute. And he just holds it up there and he just
blows, like, one note. And then he just takes it and puts it back in and he leaves,
right? And that's it. And I really—that's really profound, right? Because it makes
you think, yeah, that's it, or, I hate it, it's stupid or something. All that non-verbal
teaching—when you start thinking about that—it's kind of like that, too.\textsuperscript{121}

Recalling the performative logic of *kōans*, BAXTER& states that non-verbal teaching

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{120} Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 105.
\textsuperscript{121} Lauder, “‘An Educational Stance,’” n. pag.
\end{footnotesize}
involved, “trying to just hold up things in the class and do something with them.” This unscripted pedagogical theatre was intended as a critique of the “deadening effects” of conventional (rational and scripted) classroom procedure, and, by implication, of the epistemology of “conformity” which such pedagogy increasingly represented to students in the 1960s. The comic overtones of such teaching performances as “Swimming on Dry Land” (ca. 1964-65) (Fig. 43), in which Baxter simulated swimming by writhing under a clear plastic sheet, simultaneously invokes the tradition of learned satire practiced by McLuhan.

Non-verbal teaching is a recognizable expression of the “culture of spontaneity” that, according to Daniel Belgrad, gave rise to the imagined “Pacific Nation” of which the N.E. Thing Co. was a defining product according to Tomaszewska. Like the subsequent dematerialized inventory of NETCO, the driving paradox of non-verbal teaching was its substitution of sensation for the cognitive signified conventionally attributed to Conceptual art. The anticipatory affective turn spelled by Baxter’s silent teach-ins paralleled the methodological experiments of fellow pedagogue György Kepes, in which, to quote Halpern, “[p]erception itself became a form of thought.”

Growing in equal part out of an exposure to the writings of the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall on the “silent language” of non-verbal communication,
particularly forms of cross-cultural communication, non-verbal teaching constitutes the earliest (if highly improbable) chapter in the narrative of Vancouver artists’ acculturation to “theory” recounted by Ian Wallace, a former student of Baxter’s at the University of British Columbia.

Tai van Toorn argues that Baxter’s experiments in pedagogy illuminate NETCO’s misunderstood methodology of “Sensitivity Information.” In his dissertation, Van Toorn associates the sensorial aims of NETCO with contemporaneous studies in the field of environmental perception, which “strove to empower users of public space” through group sensitivity training exercises. Van Toorn’s research adds valuable new insights into the pre-McLuhan sources of the culture of multi-sensory “documentation and witnessing” that Scott Watson posits (but implicitly dismisses) as the non-conceptual precursor to the Vancouver School. As a non-semantic intervention within the symbolic discourse of the university, non-verbal teaching also drew from historically denigrated genres and media such as the non-hierarchical patterning practiced by tramp artists—whose marriage of rhizomatic design and everyday objects is suggestive of NETCO’s democratic fusion of art and leisure as varieties of non-categorical Sensitivity Information.

As a pedagogical variation on the countercultural Be-In, non-verbal teaching pitted the “silent” purity of Zen ontology against the “noisy” speech of conventional (and, in the eyes of a growing number of youth, highly compromised) epistemology: to be, non-

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131 Watson, “Urban Renewal,” 34.
132 See Baxter and Lauder, “‘An Educational Stance,’” n. pag.
verbal pedagogy seemed to suggest, was preferable than to mean. (“Being” here designating, of course, the non-essentialist, relational ontology described by Watts.) Such rhetoric situates the concerns of non-verbal teaching decisively prior to the advent of French Theory in the pedagogies and conceptual practices of later Vancouver artists such as Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace.

Somewhat paradoxically, non-verbal teaching could in fact be abrasively dissonant. In their 1966 account of the unconventional methodology in artscanada, Matthew Baigell and Joel Smith reported that Baxter’s pedagogical performances were sometimes accompanied by recordings of John Cage (himself a follower of McLuhan, as Donald Theall was early in recognizing),

\[133\] “played throughout at loud volume.”

\[134\] The ambivalent stakes of this discourse on silence and noise are even more stark in the contemporaneous writings of Schafer, Baxter’s Centre colleague, culminating in the apocalyptic tenor of his comments on noise pollution in Vancouver, and on the SFU campus in particular, which remained in a state of perpetual construction following its accelerated launch in 1965.

\[135\] In Schafer’s account, “noise” serves as a foil for the political tensions at Simon Fraser discussed in the previous section: “A certain university in Western Canada has been in existence for five years. During that time it has been undergoing constant further construction. The profile of this construction noise … has infected the entire campus for this period. Sometimes offices and classrooms have to be evacuated; usually faculty and students ignore (at least consciously) the jack hammers and bull-dozers, though the bulls rarely doze. Among Canadian universities none has been so troubled by strife, strife affecting not only students but faculty and administration as well, leading to firings, suspensions and court cases. It will not be irrelevant to suggest an understudied correlation between the general chaos and noise level of this campus and its social disorders.” Schafer, The Book of Noise, 23. Schafer would leave SFU in 1975. To some extent, the trajectory traced by Iain Baxter’s involvement in SFU’s troubled Centre—from his early embrace of the ideology of sensory reintegration championed by fellow faculty, to his immersion in the stochastic realities of campus strife reported by Schafer—can be seen to mirror Bertram Brooker’s earlier oscillation between a Bergsonian ontology of Oneness, and his professional participation in the psychophysical decomposition of subjectivity through his advocacy of behaviorist techniques in his advertising writings.
Van Toorn is right to complicate the received portrait of Iain Baxter as the naïve McLuhanite of early reports; in the words of Lucy Lippard, “probably the prototype of the new artist, a product of the McLubricated era.” Van Toorn points to compelling points of friction with McLuhan’s program vis-à-vis the company’s humorous riposte to a lackluster rendezvous with the media thinker, orchestrated by then Canada Council officer David Silcox, in the form of a button work (Fig. 44), in which the acronym “V.I.P.” (pointedly standing for “Visually Illiterate Person”) is printed black-on-black to deliberately frustrate access to the sensorial “content” of the work. Yet, there can be little doubt that McLuhan quickly came to dominate Baxter’s approach to non-verbal teaching as he developed his performative repertoire during his stint as an assistant professor at UBC from 1964 to 1966: an early hotbed of McLuhan-inspired sensory exploration, as reflected in the 1964 and 1965 McLuhan-themed Festival of the Contemporary Arts—the latter of which included a sprawling multi-media event titled *The Medium is the Message*, for which Baxter devised the visual arts component.

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non-verbal methodology explicitly links their teaching experiments to McLuhan
(although Smith is skeptical of Baxter’s enthusiasm for the Toronto School thinker,
writing that, “He sounds more like a very effective propagandist than a prophet”).
Van Toorn proposes parallels between the sensorial pedagogy developed by faculty at the
experimental Centre for Communication and the Arts, and the sensitivity training
exercises developed by the San Francisco-based duo of Ann and Lawrence Halprin. Yet
the comments of Schafer on the sensorial aims of the Centre’s experiments in
pedagogical reform leave little room for doubt as to their indebtedness to McLuhan:
“Why was the sensorium shattered?,” he queried in a 1968 feature for artscanada
magazine redolent of McLuhan’s rhetoric of the sensory conflict instigated by the
printing press; “Why do we not have simply one multitudinous art form in which the
details of perception corroborate or counterpoint one another in fields of simultaneous
interaction?,” he asked. As Richard Cavell has written, “the singular advantage of
[NETCO’s Sensitivity Information] nomenclature was its lack of subservience to
traditional artistic hierarchies”—stressing McLuhan’s influence on this approach.

Preceding Schafer’s better-known World Soundscape Project by three years, the
analogical, interdisciplinary ideal pursued by Centre faculty was actualized by a visionary
experiment in “microteaching” executed by Iain Baxter, in which twelve weeks of

and Archives, Toronto, ON. The transcript of a 1963 “Silent Seminar,” presumably held at Washington
State University, in which Iain Baxter and the painter Gaylen Hansen were participants, documents
Baxter’s development of ideas that would coalesce in his nonverbal teaching experiments with Joel Smith:
“Visual insight gets a chance to ‘see’ so to speak without verbal glaucoma. … In art, is silence golden.”
Archives, Toronto, ON, 2.
140 Schafer, “Cleaning the Lenses of Perception,” 10. See also R. Murray Schafer, “McLuhan and Acoustic
141 Cavell, McLuhan in Space, 185.
courses were spontaneously compressed into “a compact 24-hour experimental unit.”\textsuperscript{142}

Commandeering two cars and a panoply of audio-visual equipment, Baxter and his students set out to explore and document a variety of “visual experiences” across the city of Vancouver, including a meal at a Chinese restaurant, a screening of the movie Blow-Up (1966) and a paper dress design show.\textsuperscript{143} This rapid-fire sequence of ad-hoc, immersive learning situations exemplifies the “epistemology of informational surfeit” that Halpern reads into the contemporaneous pedagogical experiments of the Eames Brothers, Kepes and others.\textsuperscript{144} The process of documenting the urban environment utilizing a variety of portable media represents an early exercise in the “scanning”\textsuperscript{145} technique that would subsequently coalesce in the N.E. Thing Co.’s \textit{A Portfolio of Piles} (1968) (Fig. 45), an important precedent for the documentation generated by Dennis Wheeler as part of Robert Smithson’s 1970 Vancouver project, \textit{Glue Pour} (to be discussed in the next chapter). Baxter’s transformation of the automobile into a multimedia lab also anticipates Doray’s 1968 proposal for a mobile information van. Baxter’s seizing upon the urban environment at large as a McLuhanesque classroom without walls paralleled the emergence of what Orit Halpern terms the “sensorial city” brought into representation by the learning environments of Kepes and other media pedagogues.\textsuperscript{146}


\textsuperscript{144}Halpern, \textit{Beautiful Data}, 83.


\textsuperscript{146}Halpern, \textit{Beautiful Data}, 98.
If Baxter’s 24-hour Class captures the initial optimism with which faculty at SFU’s Centre for Communication and the Arts adopted McLuhan’s discourse on “the media as translators” as a framework for their interdisciplinary ontology, later examples of Baxter’s media pedagogy reflect the growing mood of skepticism that followed in the wake of the crises of 1968. Sava notes that, “There is a formidable aspect of Baxter’s production which, while embracing the so-called information society, also remained resolutely suspicious of it.” In fact, while Baxter’s art always approached the mediated environment in a spirit of satire, his media skepticism can be historicized to mid-1968, as the N.E. Thing Co.’s initial vision of “the new galleries of the future” as “Television Stations, and Radio Stations and Communications Companies” yielded to a reconceptualization of “vision [as] the site of resistance inside the circuit,” discussed by Halpern in another context. To some extent, this transition to a notion of what Iain Baxter dubbed “antiinformation” (sic.) registered the growing sophistication of his reading of McLuhan’s critique of American information theory. Richard Cavell has explored McLuhan’s substitution of a “transformation model” for the “transportation model” enshrined in the classical information theory of Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, which conceptualized the communications process—and information movement—as a linear channel, or “conduit.”

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147 Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU,” 85.
148 For instance, Richard Cavell sees in the early Baxter installation Bagged Place a representation of “the environment as mediated.” Cavell, McLuhan in Space, 183.
of fragmentation, and of classification,” wrote McLuhan; “The new multisensuous world is one of making.”\(^{152}\)

The telecopier and Telex transmissions that constituted NETCO’s remote participation in David Askevold’s 1969 Projects class at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), certainly incorporated opportunities for “interactivity and participation” consistent with McLuhan’s critical information theory of “making.”\(^{153}\) A number of transmissions consist of instructions for simple actions to be carried out by students. Photo-documentation of the ensuing performances effectively completed the communicational circuit. For instance, one communiqué read: “PAINT THE TOP OF A TREE BROWN AND THE TRUNK GREEN.”\(^{154}\) A subsequent sequence of Polaroids recorded the students’ ensuing misadventures, including an “Accident on location site while painting trees.”\(^{155}\)

However, a number of other transmissions in this exchange frustrate any possibility of communicational transparency or telepresence. “SEND LIE AND RECEIVE TRUTH,” consists of an otherwise blank page featuring a single black dot, absurdly labeled “TWO SPOTS.” The “Comments” section of the legend below states that,

WHEN YOU LOOK AT YOUR PAPER YOU

HOLD THE TRUTH, I ALSO HOLD THE TRUTH TOO

BUT I SENT THE LIE\(^{156}\)

\(^{152}\) McLuhan, “Environment as Programmed Happening,” 118.
\(^{153}\) Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU,” 86.
\(^{155}\) N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Trans VSI Connection NSCAD-NETCO, n. pag.
\(^{156}\) N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Trans VSI Connection NSCAD-NETCO, n. pag.
The inaccessible contents of this transmission enact a form of “non-communication” consistent with Eugene Thacker’s recent theorization of “dark media.”\textsuperscript{157} Embodying an apophatic mysticism that proceeds through negation and what Thacker terms “discommunication,”\textsuperscript{158} dark media refuse the correspondence between messages sent and received inscribed in the transmission model of classical information theory. But in contrast to the alternative of transformation embraced by McLuhan, which authorizes the receiver to creatively repurpose the signal’s form, dark media cancel any possibility of communication, proffering instead direct encounters with the alien.\textsuperscript{159} Thacker’s dark media resemble the “Buddhist ecologies of the sign” analyzed by Boon, which similarly designate nonconceptual emptiness. Sava points to the comedic potential latent in such gestures, noting that “the humour” of NETCO’s Trans VSI instructions “resides in the impossibility of … communication.”\textsuperscript{160}

The comic nonduality of TWO SPOTS invokes the infinite regress of the “non-Platonic” copy of Buddhist epistemology as a (tele)copy without an original,\textsuperscript{161} since the statement requires optical duplication to answer its truth content (and, even then, the receiver must take the second “spot” promised by the label on faith, since it remains,

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{158}] Thacker, “Dark Media,” 89.
  \item[\textsuperscript{159}] Although NETCO’s later experiments in antiinformation suggest comparisons with the “anti-message” that Galloway, Thacker and Wark oppose to the transparency and presence which they impute to McLuhan’s “orthodox” media theory; in fact the Toronto School thinker himself explored numbness and narcosis as effects of failed communication in “The Gadget Lover” chapter of \textit{Understanding Media}. Galloway, Thacker and Wark, “Execrable Media,” 16; see McLuhan, \textit{Understanding Media}, 41-47. In contrast to the immanence of electric light, which Galloway, Thacker and Wark incorrectly apply to McLuhan’s reading of all media, the Toronto School thinker wrote that, “Self-amputation forbids self-recognition,” an insight that likely reinforced the Vancouver-based conceptual company’s later turn to the nonmodern epistemology of Zen.
  \item[\textsuperscript{160}] Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU,” 83.
  \item[\textsuperscript{161}] Boon, \textit{In Praise of Copying}, 35.
\end{itemize}
invisibly, retained by the sender). Moreover, the spot itself resembles a Zen “void” carved out within the linear channels of the teleprinter network. This and related kōan-like works in NETCO’s NSCAD interchange suggest something akin to second-wave cybernetician Gregory Bateson’s recognition that, “translations are never complete and … make evident the impossibility of directly converting or communicating between one temporal state and another.”

What is sometimes viewed as the “naiveté” of NETCO’s utopian communications experiments, had, by the time of its 1970 intervention at the Data Processing Managers Association (DPMA) convention in Seattle, given way to a prescient critique of the social consequences of information technologies. In the surviving notes for his speech, “Human Element in the Information Processing Community,” Baxter calls upon participating computer companies (including 3M, IBM and Xerox) to “solve the problems of the deleterious byproducts of the ‘American Dream.’” Baxter warned that failure to address the social effects of computing could result in nothing less than “immediate government takeover—which could lead to ominous times ahead.” Baxter developed these themes further in a 1970 radio interview with Charles Amirkhanian:

> I’ve been very interested in what happens with the whole industry of computers

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164 Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU,” 88.


166 Baxter, “Synopsis of Speech,” 1. Somewhat improbably, panel chair and Assistant Vice President of Management Information Systems, William J. Horne, praised Baxter’s speech, noting that, “the panel in total was accepted as ‘excellent’ the highest rating available to the audience in its rating scheme. William J. Horne to Iain Baxter, July 9, 1970, IAIN BAXTER& personal papers, Windsor, ON.
and information. Because in a sense what will happen if it’s not handled carefully is it will be taken over by governments, and then, of course, all the obvious ominous aspects are going to happen. If the computing industry itself can’t control the privacy problems and so on, you’re immediately going to see it being taken over. And so there’s a great concern in the whole computing industry for them to rally together and with integrity to try to develop a code of ethics about keeping personal information about people and so on.¹⁶⁷

Where Sava reads Iain Baxter’s disappearance from the Vancouver scene following the restructuring of the Centre for Communication and the Arts as symptomatic of the “exhausted potential” of interdisciplinary practice,¹⁶⁸ I want to argue that the “counter-protocols” enacted by NETCO’s later telex and Telex transmissions,¹⁶⁹ and parallel growing political engagement, responded to, and brought into representation, rather, the reassertion of disciplinary boundaries following the crises of 1968, and their challenge to the preceding paradigm of analogical translation.¹⁷⁰ The reassertion of paper and writing under the bureaucratic regime of the ensuing publish-or-perish culture, and Theory-based curriculum, brought with it a new clash of media bias that favoured disciplinary specialization and a constitutive “disconnectivity” among media and the senses.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU,” 85.
¹⁶⁹ Galloway, Protocol, xvi, xvii.
¹⁷⁰ Sava notes that “disciplinary boundaries [at SFU] were reinstated.” Sava, “The Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU,” 88. Similarly, Johnston notes that with the secession of anthropology in 1971, faculty in the troubled interdisciplinary PSA (Politics, Sociology and Anthropology) department, “reverted to their original disciplines.” Johnston, Radical Campus, 223.
¹⁷¹ Galloway, Protocol, xvi. See also Innis’s discussion of bureaucracy and writing technologies in Empire and Communications. Innis, Empire and Communications, 114, 122-26.
As the backdrop to the non-verbal experiments of Baxter and Smith at the Centre for Communication and the Arts, McLuhan’s exploration of multi-sensory techniques for countering the sensory—and, in his understanding, ontological—fragmentation effected by the traditional dominance of print media, suggests that non-verbal pedagogy attempted to wrest a resistant ontological kernel from what was increasingly viewed by the Generation of ’68 as the compromised epistemology underwriting the War in Vietnam and a problematic culture of conformity more generally. Parallels with contemporary efforts to counter the linguistic turn of post-structuralist theory with a renewed attention to affect and ontology are striking. The correspondences between Baxter’s coupling of the “integral” qualities that McLuhan attributed to oral media—where the term oral can, counter-intuitively, designate media that are in fact silent—with the non-binary ontology of Zen, and Alexander Galloway’s more recent gloss on the project of “non-philosophy” articulated by the French thinker François Laruelle as an attempt to develop an “analogue” alternative to the divisive frameworks of conventional philosophy, and its “digital” techniques, are striking.

Galloway’s analysis of the ethical dimensions of Laruelle’s resistance to the digital, and, in particular, his insistence on its incompatibility with political projects, suggests a point of entry onto a consideration of the limitations of NETCO’s non-verbal teaching as epistemology. If, in Galloway’s Laruellian argot, the analogue designates the “generic,” or “dis-individuate[d]” status of ethical being,\(^{172}\) strategic digitality must be the precondition of politics and its competing identitarian claims. While recognizing the timeliness of Laruelle’s ethical call for a “return to the one” in an era of impending

\(^{172}\) Galloway, *Laruelle*, 205.
ecological catastrophe, Galloway insists that, “the ethical does not trump the political.”

Challenging the monism of an analogue “One,” politics demands recognition of the multiple as well as strategic deployments of the digital. Galloway points to what he calls the “odious universalism” that results when ethical categories are “insufficiently generic”: the classic example of this insufficiency being the (white, male and affluent) democratic subject of the American founding fathers. Galloway concludes by arguing for the possibility of “substitute[ing] the political [which, for him, means the ‘multiple’] for division and the ethical for fusion.”

An anecdote from Baxter’s later teaching career clarifies how Galloway’s reflections on the limitations of ontological frameworks that elide the constitutive multiplicity of politics illuminate the McLuhanesque vectors of non-verbal teaching as well as the limitations implicit in their universalizing ambitions. In addition to performing for students, non-verbal teaching sometimes involved inviting pupils to orchestrate performances by way of acculturating them to conceptual methodologies. During his tenure at the future Emily Carr University in the early 1980s, Baxter’s students included a young Stan Douglas. In an interview, BAXTER rehearsed a particular performance at Emily Carr in which he invited students to arrive at class dressed in black as an entry point for exploring the conceptual possibilities of this overdetermined shade. Yet Douglas, he recalls, showed up to class wearing white. When questioned, Douglas, who is a person of colour, tersely explained that, “I am black.” Photo-documentation of the resulting student performance (Fig. 46) shows Douglas in witty defiance of what

174 Galloway, Laruelle, 206.
175 See Baxter and Lauder, “‘An Educational Stance,’” n. pag., emphasis in the original.
Galloway would term the “failed sufficiency” of Baxter’s generic (McLuhan- and Zen-derived) ontology.

Douglas’s drawing attention to blackness as a racialized category and signifier—in opposition to Baxter’s deployment of it as a generic representation of the “void”—constitutes a powerful statement on the troubling silences that can proliferate within non-linguistic methodologies.¹⁷⁶ Tomaszewska’s study rightly underlines the Orientalizing undercurrents of Baxter’s, and West Coast peers’, appropriations of Asian culture.¹⁷⁷ What is also at risk in non-verbal teaching, and in the McLuhanesque ontology upon which it drew—not to mention the many affective and ontological projects of the contemporary moment—is their potential to silence the multiplicity of claims and identities that constitute the condition of possibility for political discourse through an insufficient articulation of the generic of ethical solidarity. The insufficiency revealed by Douglas’s intervention recalls Jennifer L. Roberts’s discussion of the “indifference to historical difference” disclosed by Robert Smithson’s Yucatán travels,¹⁷⁸ discussed in the next chapter. And yet, Douglas’s intervention within the non-verbal framework—his willingness to play along with, while also against, Baxter’s ontological theatre—simultaneously suggests latent possibilities for epistemological complexity within the current ontological turn: what more striking image of the “ethical” that Galloway opposes to the fusion of insufficiently generic ontologies than Douglas’s gesture? To the extent that this student performance begins to register the representational concerns that would come to define the epistemological and political project of the Vancouver School (and

¹⁷⁶ Douglas’s gesture recalls Adrian Piper’s exploration of her body as “a gendered and ethnically stereotyped art commodity.” Piper quoted in Rorimer, New Art in the 60s and 70s, 162.
¹⁷⁷ Tomaszewska, “Borderlines of Poetry and Art,” 74n111.
Douglas’s own mature output), I want to suggest that the complex interaction between epistemology and ontology which it stages presents a compelling model for thinking, and rendering visible, the ethical today.

Ingrid Baxter: Corporate Personhood and “Gender Insubordination”

Stan Douglas’s intervention within Iain Baxter’s conceptual pedagogy suggests new possibilities for approaching the chronically misunderstood labour of Ingrid Baxter.¹⁷⁹ Ingrid Baxter’s corporate role has been hotly contested as a symptom of women’s occlusion from accounts of Conceptual art prior to the full impact of second-wave feminism on the North American art scene, beginning in the fall of 1970.¹⁸⁰ To some extent, accounting for Ingrid Baxter’s agency within the N.E. Thing Co. suggests parallels with Siona Wilson’s recent study of feminist projects carried out within the “mix-gendered collective[s]” of Berwick Street Film Collective and COUM Transmissions, particularly given “the struggle for women’s equality in the workplace” brought into visibility by such projects as Nightcleaners (1972-75), a film documenting a campaign to unionize precarious female maintenance workers.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ “Some reassessment of the collaborative process between Iain and Ingrid Baxter is necessary to achieve a greater understanding of what Ingrid’s role might have been, since it is not well understood outside the perfunctory label of Co-President. Questions about her function and how we should measure her contribution remain unanswered.” Derek Knight, N.E. Thing Co.: The Ubiquitous Concept (Oakville, ON: Oakville Galleries, 1995), 6.
The Vancouver art community within which the Baxters operated was a microcosm of the heterosexist and patriarchal milieu of the larger art world. Beginning with the scholarship of Nancy Shaw, this recognition has inspired a string of historians to advance a feminist recovery of Ingrid Baxter, whose “minor” status relative to the art-historical laurels lavished on her former husband, has been interpreted as the byproduct of structural inequities generated by this context. But while Ingrid Baxter’s achievements undoubtedly remain poorly understood to this day, I want to argue that the rigid frameworks marshaled by Shaw and others in their recuperation of the former Co-president unintentionally set in motion a secondary occlusion of Ingrid Baxter’s innovative practice that has only intensified misunderstandings with the passage of time.

Shaw drew on the lessons of second-wave feminism to explore the ways in which Ingrid Baxter’s domestic roles of housewife and mother both shaped the photo-conceptual output of the company in unacknowledged ways, while contributing to the Co-president’s erasure by a misogynist art world beholden to ideals of heroic masculinity that could be attributed to an athletic and charismatic Iain Baxter. This reading re-cast the pioneering “products” of the conceptual enterprise as “mementos of family outings” documenting typical activities of hetero-normative suburban leisure, with which the Baxters, and their company, were thereafter closely identified. Shaw’s narrative was instrumental, moreover, in transforming the groundbreaking features of the company’s

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posthuman authorship, and its ever-shifting personnel, into a recognizable “duo,” or “pair”—“Iain and Ingrid Baxter”—amenable to the default liberal humanist framework of many second-wave feminist recuperation narratives. Significantly, this framework does not recognize works that operate within relational idioms of the type described preeminently by Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto”—a text that, I want to argue, offers a more productive point of entry for understanding the proto-feminist currents active within NETCO’s assemblage of human and non-human actors.\(^{185}\) It is a testament to the influential legacy of Shaw’s revisionist history of the company that museums and historians quickly and, indeed, almost universally, substituted the individual authors “Iain Baxter” and “Ingrid Baxter” for the attribution “N.E. Thing Co. Ltd.,” the latter having been employed by mutual consent of the co-presidents, and in accordance with the terms of their 1983 divorce agreement, until the 1993 Belkin Gallery exhibition, “You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape,” for which Shaw contributed a catalogue text.

It is characteristic of the perpetual lag in reception that afflicts Canadian art historiography,\(^{186}\) that a reading foregrounding Ingrid Baxter’s domestic identity enjoyed such popularity in Canada at the very moment that third-wave feminism was undergoing a process of institutionalization within the American academy under the rubric of Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Butler influentially recast all gender roles as


forms of “drag” that effectively imitate an ideal ego without an original. While recent reassessments of the shift in perspective associated with the rise of performance theory warn against reading second-wave feminism’s construction of gender as naively “essentialist” and theory-based notions as more “advanced,” I want to take this opportunity to revisit Butler’s notion of “gender insubordination” as a potentially illuminating framework for understanding the corporate role play of Ingrid Baxter as a deliberate, and, in retrospect, anticipatory travesty of gendered understandings of corporate ontology. In light of the continued prevalence of second-wave feminist recuperation narratives in Canadian art histories—a tendency that is currently receiving renewed vitality with the rise of a fourth-wave formation which is returning to and reexamining the merits of feminist critiques of the 1960s and 1970s—the interpretive possibilities suggested by Butler’s work remain highly compelling, and notably underdeveloped, in Canadian art historiography—particularly in feminist art histories. In an essay originally published in an anthology devoted to the question of queer identity, Butler’s articulation of “gender insubordination” interrogated the very premise of such an identitarian framework. Controversially, Butler’s text argued for a recognition of elements of mimicry within the performance of gay and lesbian identities. But crucially for Butler, these features of mimicry do not correspond with derogatory views.

189 Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination.”
of LGBTQ subjectivities as somehow derivative of, or secondary to, an originary heterosexual norm, since, for the theorist, this imitation of gender ideals is common to all subject positions on the gender continuum: heterosexual performance being just as dependent upon the other terms in this mutually reinforcing field of difference as any other. Instead, what Butler identified as characteristic of—though not unique to—a queer positionality is precisely its effect of revealing the norm to consist in just such antifoundationalist forms of masquerade.

How this deconstruction of the gendered ontology presupposed by both the dominant culture of misogyny and by some earlier feminist critiques of that culture is relevant to an adequate understanding of Ingrid Baxter’s corporate performance emerges from reflection upon the self-conscious role play implied by NETCO’s corporate theatre, which explicitly substituted the public personae of the corporation and its employees for the private roles of husband and wife, father and mother. NETCO’s organization chart, and Ingrid Baxter’s carefully crafted role therein, invited viewers to evaluate the actions of its executive members within a non-essentialist framework suggestive of what Benjamin Buchloh subsequently termed an “aesthetic of administration” (albeit the co-

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192 Cavell notes that, “[The Baxters’] use of an acronym to sign their art conveyed that they were not expressing subjectivities but rather entering into a pre-existing discourse.” Cavell, McLuhan in Space, 182. “What remains engaging about Iain and Ingrid Baxter is that in their roles as company Presidents they were frequently the subject of the camera’s scrutiny. Perhaps it is because they were able to define their roles symbolically that they could eschew the conventional image of company President, preferring instead to live both within, and—depending on circumstances—outside the myth.” Knight, N.E. Thing Co., 8.

There is a decidedly non-domestic and even science fictional quality to representations of the Baxter children in artworks such as And They had Issue, presented at the Art Gallery of York University in 1973, in which Tor and Erian Baxter were presented on plinths as living sculptures. See N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Vol. 1, n. pag.
presidents’ inhabitation of that frame was eminently parodic and fuelled by the non-rational percepts of McLuhan).193 As far as I have been able to ascertain, the NETCO corpus does not include a single representation of Ingrid Baxter in the domestic role in which she was retrospectively re-cast by Shaw, and, latterly, by Vincent Bonin in his efforts to recuperate her corporate labour as a variation on Julia Bryan-Wilson’s reading of Lippard’s leadership within the New York-based Art Worker’s Coalition (AWC) as a form of “housework”:194 a bringing into the public sphere of (typically unpaid and gendered) forms of labour usually confined to domestic space, or the unseen spaces and hours of public institutions (preeminently, Mirele Laderman Ukeles performance of after-hours “maintenance” functions).

What is so striking about Ingrid Baxter’s corporate labour is, rather, the way in which it brings into visibility the public work of women professionals occupying roles formerly reserved for men. Her generally androgynous or gender-neutral “look” in company documentation defies both the potentially essentializing rhetoric and imagery mobilized by some second-wave feminist artists and critics, while equally complicating the non-binary reinterpretation of that vocabulary by Helen Molesworth,195 who nonetheless continues to prioritize representations of the domestic and private over the public sphere

193 See Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962-1969,” 105-43. 194 See Bryan-Wilson, Art Workers, 131. Lippard’s work of autobiographical fiction I See/You Mean, while certainly attentive to the author-curator’s struggles to maintain a career as a single mother, and recognizing childbirth as “work,” seems, contra Bryan-Wilson’s reading, to in fact reinforce distinctions between the two forms of labour: “Oh hell, sweet, what is it?,” states Lippard’s literary alter ego to her infant son; “I’m working. You’re not supposed to come in here. … I’m your mother. Now get out of here and let me work. … If you won’t let me work when I want you to you can’t expect …” Lippard, I See/You Mean, 112, 122. 164. While in some respects Ingrid Baxter’s corporate persona could be likened to the “refusal to image the mother” inscribed in Mary Kelly’s Post-Partum Document (1973-77), the co-president’s performance did not displace maternity into a linguistic register, nor enact a prohibition on sexualized representations of her body. Molesworth, “House Work and Art Work,” 86. 195 Molesworth, “Cleaning Up the 1970s,” 107-22. To some extent, Ingrid Baxter’s androgyne could be likened to the “sexually undifferentiated athleticism” associated with the “protofeminist” Judson Dance Theater, whose task-based choreographies were nonetheless haunted by gender disparities. Wark, Radical Gestures, 38; Foster et al., Art Since 1900, 609.
as historically-determined arenas for the performance of women’s agency. Ingrid Baxter’s travesty of gender norms—the conventions of “transnational business masculinity” traditionally vested in corporate *habitus*, and sometimes conflated with the ontology of the corporation itself—has proven equally troubling to the expectations of second- and third-wave feminist art historians who have generally emphasized the ways that art by women brings into representation private or invisible forms of labour or ideals of feminine beauty resistant to heterosexist and patriarchal norms.

In some sense, Ingrid Baxter’s groundbreaking corporate performance revised the terms of the familiar second-wave slogan, “the personal is the political”; suggesting an alternate imperative along the lines of “personalize the public.” Rather than engaging in the representational work of exposing “hidden” scenes of labour as the unrecognized condition of possibility for the constitution and maintenance of a public sphere, Ingrid Baxter’s promotion to co-president enacted an immanent re-structuring of social

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197 NETCO’s early recognition of the gendered attributes of the corporate legal person anticipated the later writings of feminist organizational scholars such as R.W. Connell on “gendered institutions.” Connell, “Masculinities and Globalization,” 11. Alvesson and Billing employ the term “gendering organizations” to refer to the process of “paying attention to how organizational structures and processes are dominated by culturally defined masculine meanings.” Mats Alvesson and Yvonne Due Billing, *Understanding Gender and Organizations*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2009), 72. Such “paying attention to” is exactly the type of critical activity in which I propose that NETCO engaged. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt (building on the insights of political theorist Antonio Gramsci) describe structural processes of gender domination as productively defined as “hegemonic”; they employ the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” to refer to “the pattern of practice […] that allowed men’s dominance over women.” R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 832. Connell has argued that hegemonic masculinity, as exercised in organizations, and particularly business organizations, has, in recent decades, assumed a new alignment with processes of globalization and the gender-neutral rhetoric of neoliberalism (with its implicitly masculinist symbolic attributes of “self-assertion, separation, independence, control, competition, focused perception, rationality, analysis, etc.”). Mats Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture* (Sage: London, 2002), 133; see also Connell, “Masculinities and Globalization.”
198 Without citing an examples in the NETCO oeuvre to support her reading, Nancy Shaw contents that, “The Baxters’ structure extended beyond the limits of the business and art world to involve family relations. Domestic duties as well as business and art productions were always included in the list of company doings.” Shaw, “Expanded Consciousness and Company Types,” 100.
relations. While succeeding in attaining a remarkable degree of visibility within a misogynist art system—and a strikingly non-sexist one at that—and despite inscribing this change of status into the very legal fabric of the company prior to critiques of transnational masculinity as an ideal and legal reality in the business world undertaken by feminist organizational scholars beginning only in the later 1970s, Ingrid Baxter’s masquerade of gender norms evidently was, and continues to be, unsettling to many viewers. Her champions—who ironically continued to force her back into a domestic space that, while inhabiting her corporate persona, she had succeeded in escaping—shared this anxiety. Uncomfortable perhaps with the unabashedly capitalistic goals of NETCO and its co-presidents, would-be advocates of Ingrid Baxter have read the company as a “co-optation of collaborative production for commercial purposes”: misattributing works created prior to the company’s foundation, such as Iain Baxter’s solo work, *Bagged Place* (1966), in the process.201 Viewed within the lens of the second-wave recuperation narratives institutionalized in Canadian art historiography, it has been seen as necessary to decry inequities in NETCO’s partnership that continued to favour Iain Baxter’s visibility even after 1970 as the products of a presumed power imbalance at home (rather than the stratified product of a capitalist structure), at the expense of acknowledging and exploring the highly innovative features of Ingrid Baxter’s controversial corporate maneuvers, which anticipated Butler in suggesting that gender is a construct which is publicly performed and perpetually open to renegotiation—one that sets a compelling and non-sexist example of corporate leadership for the growing number of female administrators today.

The legal framework and capitalistic values underpinning NETCO’s corporate authorship equally transgress the ethical claims sustaining a considerable share of more recent collaborative projects informed by the relational aesthetics popularized by Nicolas Bourriaud. Far from the “equal artist-partners[hip]” projected by some commentators, inattentive to the historical gap separating the period of the company’s activity from the present moment of its memorialization, the N.E. Thing Co. was, rather, a non-human actor that facilitated forms of distributed authorship specific to a corporate agency. When cooperative, these activities rarely unfolded on the even footing assumed by many analysts, as the preponderance of attention devoted to Iain Baxter from the outset clearly attests. In part, this uneven representation must surely reflect the gender disequilibrium that structured the art world. Yet it is notable that the company operated in a city (Vancouver) with a significant number of outspoken female art critics, all of whom were early champions of NETCO, even as they uniformly singled out for praise the contributions of Iain Baxter. This pattern was not limited to Vancouver, with

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other early promoters including Lippard and the Toronto-based Dorothy Cameron.\textsuperscript{207} While the fact that these and other critics were women does not in itself absolve the company’s commentators of a misogynist bias commensurate with their era,\textsuperscript{208} it does paint a somewhat different picture than the “boys club” which promoted and sheltered male Abstract Expressionists and their colour field heirs studied by Marcia Brennan, among others.\textsuperscript{209} More consequential than the possibility of a systemic diminution of Ingrid Baxter’s contributions in these accounts, I want to argue, is the fact that they fail to grasp the momentous implications of Ingrid Baxter’s enactment of a corporate persona because of its multivalent heterodoxy. The \textit{haecceity} exposed by Ingrid Baxter’s executive performance—the gendered “thisness” of her co-presidency—proffers another example of the latent political potential of that which fails to “translate” under an analogical paradigm.

In interviews, Ingrid Baxter has consistently downplayed the influence of McLuhan’s writings on the evolution of her thought.\textsuperscript{210} It is nonetheless likely that his early critiques of hegemonic gender roles indirectly shaped her deconstruction of corporate habitus through, in her words, “osmosis.”\textsuperscript{211} Janine Marchessault has convincingly argued that,

\textsuperscript{210} Ingrid Baxter has stated that, “This Marshall McLuhan bit is much overrated […] I skimmed his book, but I don’t think Iain read, from cover to cover, any of McLuhan’s philosophy. It’s much exaggerated.” Sarah Scott, “Mr. Concept,” \textit{Canadian Art} 29, no. 1 (2012), 97.
\textsuperscript{211} In a 2009 online interview, Grant Arnold asks Ingrid Baxter, “Was that interest in the idea of the kind of sender and receiver coming out of any kind of specific influences, like Marshall McLuhan […] and, was that something that you kind of read a lot of, Marshall McLuhan?” Baxter replies: “No. I think it’s
“While McLuhan was not a feminist, his work is significant for early feminist thought.”212 *The Mechanical Bride*, in particular, mounted an astonishingly early analysis of gender in post-war American society as the product of consumption patterns.213 Marchessault focuses her reading of *The Mechanical Bride* on its satirical appropriation of popular representations of women’s bodies as “mechanical dolls [that] speak to a desire to expand the sexual domain and to ‘posses machines.’”214 However, *The Mechanical Bride* is equally notable for its critical representations of masculinity, and its focus on gender as performance, or “role,” the term McLuhan would have preferred. I want to argue that it was precisely as a critique of hegemonic masculinity that McLuhan’s exploration of gender was influential on NETCO’s corporate maneuvers. Iain Baxter’s McLuhan-inspired presidential persona and parallel interventions within the symbolic economy of hegemonic masculinity emerge as key precedents for Ingrid Baxter’s subsequent, but no less consequential, critical practice.

From his earliest forays into the corporate arena—operating with John Friel under the futuristic moniker IT215—Iain Baxter engaged in a travesty of dominant representations of the (implicitly masculine) artist as independent, competitive and rational. Works such as *Pneumatic Judd* (1965) suggest that the “boy’s toys” techno-aesthetic of Minimalism osmosis—intuitively, yeah. I don’t think I really read... I would read snippets of Marshall McLuhan, but not really, you know, studied up all that.” Baxter in Arnold, “Interview;” http://vancouverartinthesixties.com/interviews/ingrid-baxter (accessed July 14, 2015).


was just as easily deflated as filled with the proverbial hot air of Madison Avenue.\textsuperscript{216} Such early “extension” pieces—punning prostheses of the “big” names in contemporary art—subjected conventional constructions of artistic persona, and male bravura, to a parodic detumescence recalling McLuhan’s satirical analyses of popular representations of manhood in \textit{The Mechanical Bride}. The media analyst’s explorations of symbolic “cluster image[s]” of masculinity (from businessman to superman) are focused, in that work,\textsuperscript{217} on the “big, dynamic extrovert” exemplary of the “big firm which buys up or crushes its competitors.”\textsuperscript{218} Nevertheless, some of McLuhan’s observations point to the emergence of a new, “cybernetic” masculinity which sets the stage for his own later reflections on the effects of electronic media on management as well as NETCO’s subsequent gender critique of post-industrial institutions.\textsuperscript{219} In a section titled “I’m Tough,” McLuhan observes, “The real toughness today has shifted from the personal Darwinian melodrama to the abstractions of logistics, Cybernetics, and consumer research.”\textsuperscript{220} It is within these gendered socio-cultural “abstractions” that NETCO’s exploration of the moral personhood of the electronic corporation is properly located.

A critical interface with the “touch-football” masculinity of the cybernetic age diagnosed by McLuhan is legible in a Telex work transmitted by NETCO to various

\textsuperscript{217} McLuhan, \textit{The Mechanical Bride}, 122.
\textsuperscript{218} McLuhan, \textit{The Mechanical Bride}, 115.
\textsuperscript{219} See McLuhan, \textit{Culture is Our Business}; McLuhan and Nevitt, \textit{Take Today}.
\textsuperscript{220} McLuhan, \textit{The Mechanical Bride}, 131. In a section titled, “The Law of the Jungle,” McLuhan further elaborates this historical shift: “The century of spectacular prize fighting which lies behind us coincides with the era of the maulers and bruisers of industry. A more subtle age of bureaucratic and monopolistic business enterprise calls for the more complex sport of ’push-button football.’ Modern football would have bored to death the tycoons of yesteryear, because they would have found in it none of the dramatization of their own lives’” McLuhan, \textit{The Mechanical Bride}, 123. McLuhan’s text is peppered with references to Norbert Weiner’s “mechanical brain,” though he does not yet systematize the consequences of cybernetics for society as a whole in this early work. McLuhan, \textit{The Mechanical Bride}, 31.
corporations, in which the responding President was cabled the following instructions rehearsing a scene of symbolic corporate castration:

TO THE PRESIDENT

...

DON'T LOOK AT THIS UNLESS YOU ARE READY FOR ANYTHING

OK SIT DOWN AND WITH A PAIR OF SISSORS CUT 4 INCHES OFF YOUR TIE

AND PLEASE MAIL IT IMMEDIATELY TO IAIN BAXTER PRES N E THING CO

...

NOW YOU ARE READY FOR ANYTHING

This work—appropriately addressed to McLuhan himself in a December, 1969 communiqué—interpellated the networked knowledge worker forecast by such contemporary spokespersons of the radically decentralized “ad-hocracy” of the Information Age as Alvin Toffler, the corresponding President of NETCO is, correlatively, implicated in the role of “stay at home commuter” envisioned by McLuhan

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221 McLuhan, The Mechanical Bride, 123.
as the “drop-out” of the distributed corporation. The response cabled by one company president underscores the implicit gendering effected by the gender-neutral language of futurist management literature (satirically recycled here by NETCO): “I don’t have a tie, I’m a woman,” she responded. This exchange underscores the extent to which, in the words of Orit Halpern, “cybernetics … aspired to the elimination of difference.”

NETCO’s early adoption of networked communications technologies to critically probe the gendered organization of the Information Age described by McLuhan is indicative of the company’s positioning as a visionary multi-divisional enterprise (in this view, the company’s “Departments” are improperly understood as functional or bureaucratic units, let alone the “entrepreneurial family unit” portrayed by Shaw; rather, NETCO’s repeated exercises in establishing branch plants—SIDCO and ICOME—speaks to a newly distributed, transnational outlook).

Viewed through this lens of the networked corporation, NETCO’s restructuring (the promotion of Ingrid Baxter to Co-President in 1970) emerges as a critical intervention within the hegemonic CID Structure: an exercise in re-gendering the horizontal organization. Together, IAIN BAXTER& and Ingrid Baxter probed the representational conventions of nascent transnational business masculinity and the gender-neutral figure of the “generic manager,” simultaneously subverting and structurally reconfiguring the implicit gendering of those institutions and symbols.

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225 IAIN BAXTER&, conversation with the author, 20 Nov. 2010.
Another theorist who reworked the classical information theory of Shannon and Weaver to incorporate embodied aspects of information transmission and reception omitted by the latter’s engineering model of communication, which further contextualizes Ingrid Baxter’s interventions within the company’s informatic architecture, was the French psychologist Abraham Moles. Moles viewed the “work of art as a creator of sensations.” Rather than passively receiving data, he conceived the human “receptor” as actively engaging in “scanning” its environment, from which it “selects” data that it subsequently “assembles” into new configurations. This formulation resembles McLuhan’s metaphor of the “mosaic,” which Durham sees as the key figure in NETCO’s oeuvre.

Consistent with the ecological information theories of MacKay and McLuhan, Moles distinguished between linear “scanning pure and simple” and a contingent “human mode of perception.” Moles thereby introduced into information theory a recognition of the embodied subjectivity of the receptor, and of the body’s power to shape and constrain message content, that is absent from the “conduit” model of Shannon-Weaver, and that clears a path for the subsequent feminist critiques of Hayles and others: “each [receptor] has his [sic.] repertoire,” he wrote, “and each finds his own redundancy and originality.”

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232 See Durham, “IAIN BAXTER & and N.E. Thing Co.,” 74.


transmission explicitly builds upon the relational information theory of Donald M. MacKay.235

The distinction between “esthetic information” and “semantic information” at the heart of Moles’s influential 1958 text, *Théorie de l’information et perception esthétique* (widely available in English translation in 1966 as *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception*) undoubtedly influenced NETCO’s categorization of experience as “sensitive” and “practical” information. Moles argued that the aesthetic value of a given message diminishes in direct proportion to its redundancy: “[i]f the receptor has complete knowledge of the message to be transmitted to him [sic.],” he stated, “that is, if he ‘knows’ this message a priori, the information is null, the redundancy is 100 per cent, the message is uninteresting and banal as, for example, the pictures on postage stamps.”236 Correlatively, “aesthetic information,” was defined by the French psychologist as high in information or “originality.”237 This Shannon-inflected valorization of “unforeseeable” or *improbable* aesthetic values did not find a receptive audience in Baxter—as discussed in the previous chapter—who evidently read the French theorist’s celebrated descriptions of *kitsch* against the grain.238 Nonetheless, Moles’s critical reconsideration of embodiment as a factor in processes of information transmission and reception was influential on NETCO’s formulation of Sensitivity Information.

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235 See Moles, *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception*, 19. “From a physical point of view, the two-way interaction of people in dialogue (as distinct from purely manipulative monologue) introduces a coupling between the physical states of their cognitive mechanisms. They thus become effectively one system for purposes of mechanistic analysis, so that to this joint cognitive system, no matter how many people are involved, the foregoing argument applies. No party to a dialogue can logically regard any of the others as a fully determinate system.” Donald M. MacKay, *Freedom of Action in a Mechanistic Universe* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 13–14.


The 1973 NETCO series, *Sexual Clichés* (Fig. 47)—labeled pornographic when first exhibited at the Art Gallery of York University—consists of a photographic catalogue or index of humorous interpretations of “language phrases used every day by all people.” While attentive to issues of embodiment, desire and sexual difference, this series is, however, notably lacking in the activist focus characteristic of subsequent works of feminist art, such as Martha Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975).

In contrast to classical information theory, Moles distinguished between what he termed the “natural” channels of sensory perception and the “artificial” or technological channels, the latter being the exclusive concern of Shannon and followers. “[T]he receptor’s structure and particularly his [sic.] difference thresholds determine the elements of the sensory message.” This recognition coincides with Friedrich Kittler’s subsequent description of the “logic of channels” in *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900.* The German media theorist argued that the emergence of what he termed the *psychophysical paradigm* inaugurated by modern information media ca. 1900 coincided with a new awareness that “the very channels through which information must pass emit noise.” Moles’s critical information theory similarly emphasized the role of context and the physiology of the receiver in processes of in-forming message content—its influence on NETCO thus yielding important new information about the conditions of possibility.

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243 Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, 293.
244 Kittler, *Discourse Networks*, 183.
for subsequent, socially engaged forms of conceptualism and information art that emerged in the wake of the new social movements of the 1970s.\textsuperscript{245}

As the 1970s unfolded, Ingrid’s growing visibility within the company was registered by critics, notably Lippard, who invited NETCO (as a company) to participate in the otherwise all-female exhibition of Conceptual art, \textit{c. 7,500}, held at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1973.\textsuperscript{246} The company’s contribution to that show (Fig. 48)—documentation of a swimming performance executed by Ingrid Baxter in the SFU pool where she had formerly worked as an instructor—constitutes a rare and valuable instance of a NETCO work unequivocally credited to the Co-president.\textsuperscript{247} But while some works document Ingrid Baxter’s role as a performer in NETCO’s mock fashion spectacles and athletic exhibitions,\textsuperscript{248} it is in her capacity as the androgynous conceptual administrator

\textsuperscript{245} NETCO’s socially engaged, but ultimately pre-political stance was not atypical prior to the mid-1970s. “I didn’t call myself a ‘socialist feminist’ until the late 1970s. Very few of the North American Conceptual artists I was involved with in New York made ‘political, or even ‘socially concerned’ art.” Lucy R. Lippard, “Lucy R. Lippard in Correspondence with Antony Hudek,” in \textit{From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard’s Numbers Shows 1969-74}, ed. Cornelia Butler, 70-77 (London: Central Saint Martins, 2012), 71.


\textsuperscript{247} To the best of my knowledge, the only other NETCO work explicitly credited to Ingrid Baxter is \textit{Older Than Younger Than}, described in 1974 as a “series started in 1969. Ingrid Baxter, Co-president has been involved in this series. A book will be coming out soon about this concept.” N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. quoted in \textit{The Owens Art Gallery, Investigations: Ian Carr-Harris, John Greer, N.E. Thing Co. Ltd.: An Exhibition-Symposium at the Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B., Jan. 7-Jan. 14 1974} (Sackville, NB: Owens Art Gallery, 1974), n. pag. The information form representing this series in the Owens Art Gallery exhibition catalogue includes a quote from Lucy Lippard in noticeably different handwriting than that employed in all other information forms which I have studied, suggesting that it was Iain—not Ingrid—who acted in a “secretarial” role in maintaining the company archive.

portrayed by the 1969 series *Inactive Verbs* (Fig. 49), depicting the Co-president engaged in the familiar routines of cognitive labour (e.g., “Pondering,” “Thinking,” “Wondering”), that she most powerfully inserts herself within, and utterly transforms, the conventions of mainstream conceptualism. We might well ask to what extent the Co-president’s anti-sexist interventions in conceptual administration informed Lippard’s own subsequent adoption of a similar leadership role in the AWC and, subsequently, within a variety of feminist organizations. Such a lineage would trouble the image of Lippard’s AWC advocacy as located within an exclusively anti-capitalist genealogy promoted by Julia Bryan-Wilson and Vincent Bonin, yet would add further complexity to the picture of mixed (commercial and critical) motives informing the work of Lippard’s partner at the time, Seth Siegelaub.

In particular, Ingrid Baxter set a prescient example in proto-feminist a/counting through her struggle for equitable representation in NETCO’s executive that may have guided Lippard’s subsequent transition from the “utopian … openness” of the “mapping...
[and …] measurements” carried out as part of the early “numbered” exhibitions, Number 7 (1969), 557,087 (1969) and 955,000 (1970), as well as the playful demographics brought into representation by her novel I See/You Mean (published in 1979, but written ca. 1970), to the activist demography she subsequently deployed as part of her involvement in the AWC and the Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee.\(^{251}\)

Another explanation for the relatively greater emphasis on Iain Baxter found in primary documentation of the company’s activities is his formal art training (he earned an MFA in painting at Washington State University in 1964), and his prior and award-winning independent art practice as well as his subsequent experience as an innovative and highly-visible arts pedagogue during years when Ingrid Baxter struggled to find a place within the corporate hierarchy of NETCO and a performative vocabulary with which to translate her training and work in physical education into the industrial choreography authorized by the company’s organizational apparatus.\(^{252}\) This is a narrative of gradual coming into representation, and then of a radical restructuring of that representation, over the course of the more than ten years that NETCO operated. It has remained obscure largely due to the uncomfortable implications of both its corporate resonance and its troubling of stable gender categories and roles.\(^{253}\)


\(^{253}\) See, for instance, the anxieties of commercial contamination found in the work of Vincent Bonin, who argues that, “Making ‘alternative spaces’ viable within a liberal economical model would sound the death knell for the project of emancipation, which has been a drive of artistic practice since the late 1960s.” Bonin, “Here, Bad News Always Arrives Too Late,” 93. In a 1976 interview with Ann Rosenberg for The Capilano Review, Ingrid Baxter states that, “the business has to be a financially rewarding thing for everyone involved. It has to turn bucks, so to speak. … We're sold in.” Ingrid Baxter in Ann Rosenberg, “Interview / N.E. Thing Co.,” The Capilano Review, no. 8/9 (1975/1976), 171, emphasis in the original. In
The commercial theatre of NETCO’s dispersed authorship presents an enduring challenge to the anti-capitalist claims of contemporaneous collective projects such as Art & Language and the Art Workers’ Coalition, with their Marxist-inspired critical frameworks. The “play tactics” of NETCO more closely approximated the ludic ambitions attributed by Chris Gilbert to such post-War collectives as the Situationist International, as a Marcusean dream of labour transformed into collective leisure. But whereas such utopian desires have been critiqued for occluding the role of women and other markers of “difference” — and, indeed, this line of reasoning might suggest a rationale for Ingrid Baxter’s lesser visibility within the gender-neutral framework of the company’s “informatic” production—I have demonstrated the important extent to which Ingrid Baxter seized upon NETCO’s McLuhanesque information concepts as a platform for enacting a “deep-seated play” of traditional gender roles that anticipated the subsequent performative insights of Butler. In retrospect, Ingrid Baxter’s corporate performance could be categorized with those early works of feminist art recently revisited by Abigail Solomon-Godeau—such as the photographs of Suzy Lake—which, when viewed from today’s vantage, reveal feminine ideals and roles to be riven by “the ambiguities of gender itself,” rather than the disclosures of natural or stable selfhood once attributed to them.

a 2011 interview with Alexander Alberro, Ingrid Baxter herself reveals some anxiety about her role, stating that, “I’ve never worn the label artist very well. I have never worn any labels very well, such as housewife, entrepreneur, and the like.” Baxter quoted in Alberro, “Interview with Ingrid Baxter,” 41.

254 See Bryan-Wilson, Art Workers.
257 Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” 311.
CHAPTER IV
ROBERT SMITHSON: VANCOUVER VORTEX

Introduction

There is nothing so impressive as the number TWO.

You must be a duet in everything.¹

Everything is two things that converge.²

The American Postminimalist Robert Smithson is foundational to standard histories of
Vancouver photo-conceptualism. His visits in 1969 through early 1970 in preparation for
the unrealized earthwork Island of Broken Glass—which would have dumped over 100
tons of pulverized industrial glass on Miami Islet, a rocky outcropping located in the
Strait of Georgia—are viewed as important catalysts for subsequent developments in the
previously marginal Canadian city. In their introduction to the influential 2005 exhibition
catalogue Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists, Bart De Baere and Dieter Roelstraete
attribute the emergence, in the late 1960s, of a Vancouver avant-garde to a combined
“Dan Graham/Robert Smithson effect,”³ thereby bracketing Smithson with the author of

³ Bart De Baere and Dieter Roelstraete, “Introducing Intertidal,” in Intertidal: Vancouver and Art Artists,
ed. Dieter Roelstraete and Scott Watson, 7-14 (Antwerpen: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst; Vancouver:
The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2005), 11.
the epochal photo-essay, “Homes for America” (1966-67).\(^4\) Earlier, Scott Watson situated such seminal proto-photo-conceptual projects as Jeff Wall’s *Landscape Manual* (1969) and the collaboratively produced *Free Media Bulletin* squarely within the American artists’ sphere of influence.\(^5\) More recently, Halina Tomaszewska has challenged this precedence, drawing attention to a pre-existing network of cross-border artistic exchange fuelled by a specifically West Coast “culture of spontaneity” exemplified by the concrete poetry of Charles Olson and the aleatory music of composer John Cage. The annual Festival of the Contemporary Arts hosted by UBC provided opportunities in this period for staging a veritable *Gesamtkunstwerk* of anti-formalist tendencies crossing borders, media and disciplines.

Tomaszewska’s reassessment succeeds in shifting the epicenter of the early Vancouver School’s intellectual geography from New York to an imagined Pacific Nation. But, in emphasizing the genealogical primacy of concrete poetry, Tomaszewska’s study simultaneously extends the privilege accorded textual media and linguistic strategies under the so-called cultural turn enshrined in the Smithson- and Graham-centred narratives of Watson, De Baere and Roelstraete. Moreover, Tomaszewska downplays the decisive influence of McLuhan’s thought and other vernacular currents (which one might expect to be foregrounded, given Tomaszewska’s emphasis on the thoroughly McLuhanesque experiments of Cage), effectively relegating visual art

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produced by the N.E. Thing Company and peers including Gary Lee-Nova and Michael Morris to the status of neo-Dada extensions of a nebulous “L.A. Look.”

In this chapter, I will draw from these competing genealogies to reassess Smithson’s Vancouver sojourn, and what it can teach us about the contested sources of Conceptual art in Canada, and the disputed origins of photo-conceptualism in particular, in light of ongoing reexaminations of the linguistic turn. In particular, I want to pursue the seemingly improbable thesis that elements of Smithson’s practice activated by his preparations for the unexecuted Miami Islet earthwork participated in the same English-Canadian discourse network that I have been tracing in previous sections, while simultaneously drawing attention to the porous and open-ended topology of that network instantiated by Smithson’s presence in it. While bringing into focus the same border-crossing developments traced by De Baere/Roelstraete/Watson and Tomaszewska, I want to explore how Smithson’s Vancouver activities simultaneously, and unexpectedly, highlight the constitutive role of a recognizably English-Canadian discourse on bodies, media and space-time perception in the emergence of conceptual practices engaging information technologies and informatic formats—both in Canada and beyond its borders. “Information” will be central to this reconsideration, given both the primary status of documentation in Smithson’s corpus as well as the information-theoretic associations of his organizing metaphor of “entropy.” The proto-postmodernism of Wyndham Lewis’s travelogues will emerge as an important antecedent for Smithson’s

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experiments in a modality of fiction that Peta Mitchell terms “self-conscious ‘cartographic’ writing.”

Previous Smithson commentators have nominated the Canadian-born Lewis as a primary source for the anti-modernist imaginary inhabited by the American artist’s earthworks. Fellow Postminimalist Dan Graham recalls Smithson citing Lewis as his “favorite writer” in 1965. Lewis belonged to a cadre of Anglo-American modernists—including T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound—that Smithson explored in tandem with Catholic imagery and texts in the early 1960s. With characteristic ambivalence, the multidisciplinary artist would later dub these “Men of 1914,” to whom he had a direct connection through his childhood pediatrician, William Carlos Williams, an “antidemocratic intelligentsia.” The contents of Smithson’s personal library, held by the Archives of American Art, attest to Lewis’s central place in this intellectual cartography. The library includes two Lewis titles as well as Geoffrey Wagner’s 1957 monographic study, *Wyndham Lewis: A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy*. Smithson scholar Jennifer L. Roberts quotes the artist’s avowal that, prior to his self-proclaimed

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10 “Although he is not a practicing Catholic, the choice of these themes grows directly out of Smithson’s fascination with the rituals and iconography of Catholicism, which peaked between 1959 and 1961.” Eugenie Tsai, “Smithson, 1957-73,” in *Robert Smithson Unearthed: Drawings, Collages, Writings*, ed. Eugenie Tsai, 1-45 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 14.
“breakthrough,” and putative break with, his earlier religious concerns in 1965, \(^{15}\) he had been endeavouring “to reestablish traditional art work in terms of the Eliot-Pound-Wyndham Lewis situation.” \(^{16}\) Gary Shapiro observes parallels between the “antimodernist modernism” of Lewis and Smithson’s postmodernism. \(^{17}\) He writes that, “Smithson adopts some of the rhetorical and antiacademic tone of Lewis’s polemic” in the latter’s monumental critique of the modernist episteme, *Time and Western Man* (1927), \(^{18}\) but adds that Smithson actually “goes farther than Lewis” in his own excavation of pre-modern alternatives to hegemonic formalism. \(^{19}\) More recently, Nico Israel has drawn attention to formal resonances between Lewis and Pound’s crystalline figure of the “vortex” and such early Smithson sculptures as *Four-Sided Vortex* (1965). \(^{20}\) Besides offering Smithson a working model of the artist-author, \(^{21}\) and a rich repertoire of crystalline metaphors, what did Lewis’s example suggest to the American artist?

*Island of Broken Glass* was conceived as an ambitious extension of a series of interventions representing “hypothetical continents,” executed by Smithson at Uxmal in


\(^{18}\) Lewis, *Time and Western Man*.

\(^{19}\) Shapiro, *Earthwards*, 29.


the Yucatán and at Loveladies Island in the artist’s home state of New Jersey.\textsuperscript{22} These “earth maps”\textsuperscript{23} forcefully materialize the imaginative geographies charted by the artist in such contemporaneous photo-essays as the 1969 \textit{Artforum} text, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan” (Fig. 50).\textsuperscript{24} The unstable relation between diagram and territory manifested by the continents attenuates the earlier tension between site and documentation articulated by the “non-sites”—museum documentation and physical samples referring to remote locations—which, in the artist’s words, functioned as “three dimensional map[s] of the site.”\textsuperscript{25} In a 1970 \textit{Domus} interview, Smithson retraced the intellectual trajectory, and transnational itinerary, that had led him to the proposed \textit{Island of Broken Glass}:

I’m very interested right now only in land for the work to be on, in other words the work of art needs actual land. When I go back to the United States, I have planned to cover a whole island with broken glass. I … made a small version of that in the Yucatan, because the Yucatan, in a sense, is a very allusive place, a


\textsuperscript{23} “There are three kinds of work that I do: the nonsites, the mirror displacements, and earth maps or material maps.” Smithson, “Fragments of an Interview with P.A. [Patsy] Norvell,” 193.


I want to propose that Lewis’s writings offer an interpretive key to both the earth maps and the so-called “scanning records” reproduced in the photo essays—a thesis with significant revisionist implications for our understanding of Smithson’s informatic concerns as well as his time in Vancouver and its lingering influence on that city’s art scene. The British modernist’s vexed dramatizations of the space-time polarity that fuelled his criticism and fiction of the 1920s and early 1930s suggest a previously overlooked paradigm for the generative “antinomies” of Smithson’s early paintings and later Sites/Nonsites observed by Robert Hobbs. In particular, Lewis’s speculative travelogue, *Filibusters in Barbary* (1932)—an incisive satire of colonialism and the travel genre itself—suggests a previously unexplored model for Smithson’s conceptual essays, notably “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan” (1969).

Roberts has undertaken the most detailed study of the latter text in relation to fellow New Jersey-born travel writer John Lloyd Stephens’s 1843 account of his tour of Central America, to which the title of Smithson’s photo-essay alludes. Roberts, an Americanist, reads “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan” as staging a “critical inversion” of

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Stephens’s imperialist narrative of discovery, while simultaneously uncovering lingering colonialist attitudes in Smithson’s text. Roberts argues that Stephens’s Yucatán peregrinations propagated a framework of domination at the level of vision through the efforts of the travel writer’s companion, British architect and illustrator Frederick Catherwood, to survey and illustrate a recalcitrant territory by imposing a picturesque optics. “Stephens’s descriptions of the obstacles faced early on in Copán,” writes Roberts, “include the most basic challenges of visual and historical differentiation, dramatizing the landscape’s resistance to the travellers’ every attempt at scrutiny.” For the nineteenth-century travel writer, an elevated incidence of the ocular disorder strabismus, colloquially known as “lazy eye,” among the Yucatán’s indigenous population, symptomatized a “general lack of industriousness” that resulted in the Mayan peoples’ failure to “see,” and thus to recognize, the cultural achievements of their ancestors. By contrast, Stephens’s and Catherwood’s modern-day struggles to map the ruins of Copán and Palenque instantiate a Western capacity to extract order from apparent chaos through active practices of seeing.

Roberts interprets the nine Mirror Displacements documented in Smithson’s Artforum text—grid-like configurations of partially buried, twelve-inch-square mirrors temporarily installed at sites on the artist’s Yucatán itinerary—as staging a “systematic attempt to oppose Stephens’s visual imperialism.” In Roberts’s reading, Smithson generates a rupture in Stephens’s colonial gaze through the Mirrors’ potentially blinding opacity and strategic deflection of unitary, perspectival vision. In place of the archaeological

monuments conjured by the multidisciplinary artist’s textual narrative, and so diligently rendered by Catherwood’s illustrations, Smithson’s mirrors picture only the blank space of blue sky, or the dazzling illumination of reflected sunlight.

The deliberately fragmented, empty field of vision screened by the Mirror Displacements literalizes the “dedifferentiated” mode of scattered seeing, or scanning, theorized by the art educator and perceptual psychologist Anton Ehrenzweig in *The Hidden Order of Art*—a key source for Smithson’s anti-formalist tactics.33 Where Robert Linsley interprets this dedifferentiated gaze as deconstructing the “optical” Gestalt propagated by the criticism of Michael Fried,34 Roberts views Smithson’s intervention as enacting a “recognition of the recalcitrance of the colonized Other” that symbolically resurrects a defiant indigenous “strabismus.”35

Despite acknowledging these decolonizing undercurrents, Roberts simultaneously critiques Smithson’s figurations of dedifferentiated vision for reinforcing Stephens’s de-historicized view of the indigenous peoples of the Yucatán as inhabiting a mythic, “primitive” temporality. On one hand, Roberts argues that this condition of perpetual synchrony rehearses Stephens’s representations of the Mayan people as lacking in historical consciousness, while simultaneously reinforcing pejorative views of contemporary governments in the region as, in Smithson’s overdetermined vocabulary, “entropic.”36 In the final analysis, Roberts comprehends the “passivism” implicated in the

Mirror Displacements’ empty gaze as both a reflection of the artist’s own political 
apathy, and a projection of that condition onto his mythical Central American subjects.  

A non-perspectival reconceptualization of vision was equally central to the critical 
project mounted by Wyndham Lewis more than four decades earlier, suggesting a key 
site of convergence with the anti-Gestalt maneuvers of Smithson’s Mirror Displacements. 
Lewis articulated his contentious “philosophy of the eye” in counterpoint to the 
processual metaphysics of Bergson and Whitehead, which he cannily identified as a 
paradigm for the “stream of consciousness” techniques deployed by modernist peers, 
including James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf. Shapiro writes that, Lewis’s 
“attack [in Time and Western Man] on the ‘time-mind’ is meant to clear the way for a 
renewed emphasis on spatiality and vision.” The reconstructed spatial frame embraced 
by Lewis in his texts of the 1920s and early 1930s as an antidote to the “flux” celebrated 
by Bergsonian modernists marks both a point of continuity with, and a hypertrophied 
refrain of, the earlier “stasis” vaunted by Vorticist aesthetics. Reed Way Dasenbrock 
persuasively demonstrates that vision served as the paradigm for the multi-media, and 
particularly literary, experiments of Vorticist artists—for which painting, and Lewis’s 
semi-abstract canvases in particular, served as both instantiation and model.

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38 Lewis, Time and Western Man, 392.
39 Shapiro, Earthwards, 29.
40 Tyrus Miller describes the formal structure of Lewis’s fiction from this period as articulating a “spiral.” Tyrus Miller, Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars (Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1999), 99. Dasenbrock had earlier posited that, “The circularity of Lewis’s novels is the circularity of the vortex itself.” Reed Way Dasenbrock, The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound & Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 168.
41 “Vorticism from the beginning was conceived of as a movement across the arts and though it developed a rudimentary theory of linking the arts, the center of Vorticist activity was painting. This centrality of painting did not exclude Vorticist literature, however, but instead allowed it to come into being.” Dasenbrock, The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound & Wyndham Lewis, 25-26.
Operating decades prior to the emergence of cultural studies as an accepted academic discipline as what Andrew Gaedtke dubs a “proto-media critic,” Lewis simultaneously traced a broad range of developments in popular culture to what he perceived as the “ontological crisis” wrought by a Bergson-mad modernity.\(^{42}\) Everything from advertisers’ manipulation of consumer sentiment, and commonsense conceptions of space and time, to the silent slapstick of Charlie Chaplin were evidence, in Lewis’s perspicacious eyes, of a perilous rejection of Western metaphysical values that threatened to plunge European civilization into a state of cultural barbarism and a renewal of hostilities suspended by the Treaty of Versailles. (For Lewis, who had served as a bombardier and official war artist for both the British and Canadian militaries during World War I, the latter prospect was a source of acute anxiety that fuelled his deepening commitment to pacifism throughout the interwar period, notwithstanding his seemingly contradictory flirtation with fascism in the early 1930s.\(^{43}\))

While it would be tempting to read the reconstructed vision valorized by Lewis’s criticism as a manifestation of reactionary classicism \textit{tout court}, the artist-author’s visual and spatial paradigm was, in fact, formulated in an antagonistic relationship with the neoclassicism of Parisian contemporaries.\(^{44}\) In Paul Edwards’s carefully-argued, revisionist account of Lewis’s career, the cultural and metaphysical polemic of \textit{Time and Western Man} marks the culmination of a half-decade-long project of epistemic reexamination argued across multiple published volumes, including \textit{The Art of Being Ruled} (1926) and


\(^{44}\) See Edwards, \textit{Wyndham Lewis}, 262-70.
The Lion and the Fox (1927). These texts were reconstituted and substantially revised excerpts from an unwieldy Ur-manuscript initiated in 1923, originally exceeding 500,000 words and prospectively titled “The Man of the World.” Edwards argues that this period of concentrated critical activity must be read as following on the heels of a misunderstood postwar interlude of lingering avant-garde optimism, during which Lewis attempted to recuperate the constructivist energies of Vorticism—the brief-lived, English avant-garde movement he had spearheaded with Ezra Pound, which effectively came to a close with the muted reception of the second issue of its little magazine, Blast, in 1915, and the wartime casualties of key affiliates T.E. Hulme and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. The subsequent interlude ended abruptly with the disappointing reception of Lewis’s 1919 neo-Vorticist manifesto The Caliph’s Design and the Lewis-orchestrated Group X exhibition held at the Mansard Gallery in 1920, followed by the artist’s inability to afford studio space after October, 1923.

Those forays, in parallel with a series of comedic paintings collectively known as the Tyros, constitute Lewis’s ill-conceived attempt at articulating a viable, populist alternative to continental modernisms. As early as his 1919 manifesto, Lewis had begun to accuse the latter of betraying the revolutionary ambitions of the pre-war avant-garde in return for a dubious purchase on the fashion system of commodity culture. Lewis’s turn to English traditions of satire to ground his riposte to the Parisian avant-garde cleared a path for his subsequent exploration of the non-perspectival optics of Bishop Berkeley and

46 Edwards, Wyndham Lewis, 286.
other British empiricists,\(^{49}\) whose theories—as I will examine at greater length below—bear a remarkable resemblance to the scanning model of vision explored subsequently by Smithson.

In *Time and Western Man*, Lewis reprised his earlier critiques of Picasso and Stein, now arguing that their fashionable experimentation with temporal forms (and, in Picasso’s case, regular rotation through disparate styles) was symptomatic of a pervasive condition of “permanent novelty” rooted in the ontologies of Bergson,\(^{50}\) Whitehead and other process philosophers. This assault on late modernism as the product of capitalist economies of aesthetic co-optation and planned obsolescence culminated in Lewis’s 1930 satirical masterwork, *The Apes of God*.\(^{51}\)

Revisiting the bourgeois bohemia documented by his earlier novel *Tarr* (1918), *The Apes of God* Lewis anatomizes the denizens of Bloomsbury with a zoologist’s eye.\(^{52}\) Inhabiting the panoptic centre of this vortex of artistic counterfeiture and social pretension is Pierpoint (or, the punningly perspectival “peer-point,” as Tyrus Miller notes),\(^{53}\) a presumed alter ego who,\(^{54}\) like Beckett’s Godot, never appears in person, but whose God-like presence propels the action (or in-action, such as it is). Pierpoint’s self-appointed evangelist, Horace Zagreus leads a newly discovered “genius,” Dan Boleyn,


\(^{50}\) Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 123.


\(^{52}\) Perhaps from familiarity with Lewis’s satires, Bertram Brooker would write in a 1929 article for *Marketing* that, “Advertising has become an interesting and established ‘profession,’ allied to the arts, and entered by artists and writers who have brought into it some of the ‘tone’ of Bohemia.” Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Is the Clean-Cut Illustration Becoming Popular?,” *Marketing* 30, no. 10 (1929): 317.

\(^{53}\) Miller, *Late Modernism*, 117.

\(^{54}\) “‘You have not heard of Pierpoint? No one ever sees him now—he has shut himself up for some reason. Pierpoint is a painter turned philosopher. He says he wants a studio, but as he never paints I can’t see what he wants one for. He models himself upon Whistler.’” Lewis, *Apes of God*, 138.
through the Dantesian circles of Bloomsbury society; the characters they encounter declaiming various points of theory attributed (or more accurately misattributed) to Pierpoint along the way. These “broadcasts,” as the presciently media-critical Lewis calls them, articulate an ontology of transmission that glosses the late modernist economy of the commoditized copy, or avant-garde knock-off, critiqued by *Time and Western Man*. As each “ape” successively rehearses the insights of Pierpoint (whose novelty the artist-author implicitly arrogates to his own pre-war innovations as a painter and prose stylist), the novel progressively incarnates the argumentation of Lewis’s foregoing volumes of cultural criticism.

The ontology of replication travestied by *The Apes of God* suggests an overlooked precedent for Smithson’s interventions within modernist notions of originality and vision. The novel’s satirical staging of modernist anxieties of influence, suggests a prototype for Smithson’s exploration of recursive modes of “transhistorical consciousness,” usually traced to the Mesoamericanist George Kubler. In Pamela M. Lee’s influential analysis, Kubler’s typological approach to art historiography—as the study of objects considered as sequential solutions to enduring formal problems—appealed to Smithson as an antihumanist alternative to the “biological metaphor” informing dominant, formalist approaches. “However useful it is for pedagogical purposes,” Kubler’s popular 1962 monograph *The Shape of Time* admonished readers that, “the biological metaphor of style as a sequence of life stages was historically misleading, for it bestowed upon the flux of

57 See Lee, *Chronophobia*.  

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events the behavior and shape of organisms.” Kubler’s words reverberate in Smithson’s conceptual essay, “Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space.” “The biological metaphor is at the bottom of all ‘formalist’ criticism,” Smithson states with characteristic hyperbole. In place of organicist conceptions of history, Kubler substituted analogies drawn from the physical sciences—a strategy with predictable appeal for the geologically minded Smithson.

Lee attributes Kubler’s and Smithson’s mutual critique of historiographic approaches grounded in artists’ biographies to the emergence of a non-anthropocentric concept of time derived from the science of cybernetics. For Lee, Norbert Wiener’s 1948 introduction to the new discipline, Cybernetics: Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine, reframed problems of “communication over time” in a fashion promising to render the unforeseeable flow of future events amenable to calculation and control. Derived from self-correcting antiaircraft technologies known as servomechanisms, the predictive temporality of “feedback” was analogized to nonhuman forms of machinic time. Notwithstanding its self-regulating ideal, feedback was notoriously subject to interference that progressively eroded the system’s capacity to adapt to new conditions. Extrapolating from the information theory of Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, Wiener labeled this phenomenon of irreversible decay, “entropy”—a key term in Smithson’s lexicon as well.

58 Kubler, The Shape of Time, 8.
61 Lee, Chronophobia, 235.
Lee notes that the opening chapter of *Cybernetics* paradoxically situates the automated
time scales navigated by the servo-mechanism, not, as might be expected, within the
mechanistic temporality of post-Newtonian science, but, rather, within “the same sort of
Bergsonian time as the living organism.” On a first reading, Wiener’s invocation of
Bergson and of the “time-structure of vitalism” in the context of cybernetic machines’
inexorable drift toward disorganization is bound to strike a contradictory note.
Bergson’s neo-vitalist revision of Darwinian theory in *Creative Evolution* championed a
conception of life as “endlessly continued creation”—a far cry from the terminal state of
sameness forecast by Wiener. But in echoing Bergson’s own definition of biological
temporality as “irreversible,” Wiener’s text yields an unlikely homology between the
time of vitalist ontogenesis and the thermodynamic stasis of cybernetic systems. Manfred
Clynes and Nathan Kline would subsequently christen the conflation of animal and
machine systems and temporalities theorized by Wiener the “cyborg”—a conflation of
cybernetic and organism. In retrospect, it is possible to recognize Wiener’s cybernetic
redescription of information-theoretic entropy as a form of neo-Bergsonian virtuality.

Smithson’s engagement with entropy is properly located within a related tension
between mechanistic and vitalist conceptions of temporal process. Humpty Dumpty, one
of the artist’s favoured metaphors for entropy, forcefully personifies the unidirectional

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63 Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 44.
64 Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 44.
65 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 178.
momentum common to Bergsonian evolution and cybernetic recursion. In turn, Smithson’s ponderous art materializes this sedimentary action of history.

This conception of time’s arrow is deemphasized in Lee’s triangulation of cybernetic motifs figured by Kubler, Smithson and Wiener. Lee foregrounds the “Niagara of increasing entropy” that all three foresaw as the inevitable product of temporal passage. For Kubler, art as a process of finite formal innovation and potentially unlimited “replication” compelled an awareness of the imminent exhaustion of formal possibilities. “Radical artistic innovations may perhaps not continue to appear with the frequency we have come to expect in the past century,” he hypothesized in the conclusion to *The Shape of Time*; “It is possible that the potentialities of form and meaning in human society have all been sketched out at one time and place or another, in more or less complete projections.” Lee draws attention to Smithson’s representations of futurity as a “horizon of sameness” echoing this entropic “perspective of approaching completion” sketched by Kubler. As noted by Lee, such Smithson texts as “Quasi-Infinities” evoke the waning of space itself as an irrevocable effect of time’s paradoxical regression. “[A]rt and its history,” Lee concludes, “for Kubler, Wiener, and Smithson alike, seems a set of diminishing returns. Nothing new under the sun.”

What this interpretation ignores, or significantly downplays, however, are the Bergsonian and vitalist strands in cybernetic theory foregrounded by Wiener’s foundational writings. Bergson also directly influenced Kubler’s cybernetic revision of

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70 Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 123.
72 Lee, *Chronophobia*, 256.
73 Lee in fact cites Wiener’s references to Bergson as evidence of “the importance of temporality for considerations of the new communication science.” Lee, *Chronophobia*, 236.
art historiography via his mentor, Yale medievalist Henri Focillon. Jae Emerling argues for a Bergsonian interpretation of Focillon’s work. Similarly, Adi Efal traces the French thinker’s influence on both art historians: “Henri Focillon’s encompassing dynamic world of forms and George Kubler’s *Shape of Time* also exhibit qualities that are concordant with Bergsonian principles,” writes Efal. The impact of Bergson’s thought is not limited to Kubler’s privileging of morphological and durational questions over iconological interpretation.

Kubler’s conception of the artefacts of art history as objectifying a sequence of linked solutions to enduring formal “problems” is a tacit reformulation of Bergson’s problematic of creative evolution. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson countered the Darwinian postulate of adaptation as a process of random and piecemeal mutation with a notion of evolution as embodying holistic solutions to functional “problems.” Bergson’s influential illustration of this problematic is the eye, whose structure—from the simplest mollusks to complex vertebrae—constitutes a working demonstration that evolution does not proceed by accidental variation, but, rather, “reacts positively, it solves a problem.” Kubler’s description of the artefacts of human manufacture as answering “problems” notably reprises Bergson’s language: “every man-made thing,” writes Kubler, “arises from a

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77 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 70, my emphasis.
problem as a purposeful solution." (We similarly recognize unmistakable echoes of Bergson’s problematic in Wiener’s dismissal of conventional oppositions of mechanism and vitalism as a “badly posed question.”) 

These Bergsonian elements in Kubler’s text point to a more ambivalent discourse on time and biology than Lee acknowledges. Despite its apparent spatial bias, Kubler’s topological mapping of the structures of duration in fact flirts with organicist metaphors at almost every turn. In the very same breath that he criticizes “the biological metaphor of style,” Kubler invokes Bergson’s rhetoric to describe that which inevitably gets distorted in such a framework as the “flux of events.” Indeed, duration—the keyword in Bergsonian discourse—permeates the “morphological problems of duration” tackled by Kubler. As Reinhold Martin has cogently argued, Smithson’s entropic idiom is similarly haunted by the spectre of its organicist Other. This organicist excess of Smithson’s cybernetic discourse belongs to the same Bergsonian genealogy as the art historiographies of Focillon and Kubler, as well as to Wiener’s fraught representations of time. For Smithson, Lewis’s writings served as a bridge between Bergson and Kubler.

Previous Smithson commentators have proposed temporal readings of his antimodernist tactics amenable to a Bergsonian discourse on matter and memory. In Robert Linsley’s concise reduction of the Smithson’s rejection of the stasis vaunted by

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78 Kubler, The Shape of Time, 8. Kubler’s reworking of Bergson’s notion of the diagram of virtual actions sketched by the subject in advance of bodily motion, and, specifically, the art historian’s likening of the “total diagram” constituted by a historical sequence of formal solutions to “the models called color-solids,” situates his thought squarely within the same discourse network in which McLuhan and his associate Harley Parker were located in Chapter 3. Kubler, The Shape of Time, 125.

79 Wiener, Cybernetics, 44. Gilles Deleuze identifies “the stating and creating of problems” as one of three determining “acts” of Bergsonian method: “For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated.” Deleuze, Bergsonism, 14-15.

80 Kubler, The Shape of Time, 8.

81 Kubler, The Shape of Time, 8; see also Craig Lundy, “Bergson, History and Ontology,” in Bergson and the Art of Immanence: Painting, Photography, Film, eds. John Mullarkey and Charlotte de Mille, 17-31 (Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh Press, 2013), 24-27.

82 See Martin, “Organicism’s Other,” 34-51.
high modernist aesthetics, “[in Smithson’s universe] the victory will always belong to
time.” Roberts similarly links the passive historicity brought into representation by
Smithson’s Mirror Displacements to his’s invocations of a “fundamental memory” in
“Quasi-Infinities.” Indeed, for Roberts, the Mirror Displacements function as working
models of the involuntary memory described by Marcel Proust and Samuel Beckett under
the mutual influence of Bergsonian mnemotechnics.

Andrew Uroskie undertakes the most extended analysis of Smithson’s figurations of
temporality. Uroskie applies Gilles Deleuze’s neo-Bergsonian theorization of a “time-
image” characteristic of post-World War 2 cinema to reassess Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*
film as “less concerned with delineating spatial location than with the elaboration of what
could be called a ‘stratigraphic’ conception of time.” The travel writings of Wyndham
Lewis suggest an overlooked antecedent for the paradoxical dynamics of “unmapping”
invoked by Uroskie to elucidate Smithson’s temporalization of spatial forms.

Like the tacit Bergsonism of Kubler’s cybernetic historiography, Lewis’s anti-
Bergsonian polemic harbors a disavowed debt to the French thinker that further
illuminates the conflicted dialectics of space and time propelling Smithson’s practice. In
her foundational study of the enabling dualisms of Lewis’s critique of process

83 Robert Linsley, “Painting Outside Itself: Robert Smithson and Art After Pollock,” in *Robert Smithson in
Vancouver: A Fragment of a Greater Fragmentation*, ed. Grant Arnold, 59-74, (Vancouver: Vancouver Art
Gallery, 2004), 67.
85 See, for instance, David Addyman, “Speak of Time, without Flinching… Treat Truth of Space ith the
Same Easy Grace”: Beckett, Bergson and the Philosophy of Space,” in *Beckett/Philosophy*, eds. Matthew
Feldman and Karin Mamdani, 103- 126 (Stuttgart: *ibidem* Press, 2015); Pete A.Y. Gunter, “Bergson and
Proust: A Question of Influence,” in *Bergson and the Art of Immanence: Painting, Photography, Film*, eds.
87 Uroskie, “La Jetée en Spirale,” 70.
philosophy, SueEllen Campbell argues that Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* served as “a hidden model—a model Lewis mirrors, inverts, and conceals throughout the philosophical argumentations of *Time and Western Man*.” Campbell aptly describes Lewis’s fraught relationship to Bergsonian theory as that of “equal opposites.”

Lewis belonged to a generation of Anglo-American modernists who collectively disavowed Bergson following a formative period of interest in his work. Mary Ann Gillies notes that, “During his continental wanderings of 1902–1908, [Lewis’s] base was Paris, and while in Paris he attended Bergson’s lectures at the Collège de France.” In his nuanced reassessment of the frequently self-contradictory twistings and turnings of Lewis’s career and thought, Paul Edwards similarly argues that, “Lewis becomes in 1913 a more Bergsonian artist, though of a peculiarly perverse and rebellious kind.” In a jiu-jitsu-like move, Lewis’s Vorticist and post-Vorticist production inverted the familiar binaries of Bergsonian philosophy, championing the intellectual and material pole

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88 Campbell attributes a “dualistic habit of mind” to Lewis, whose criticism reveals a “tendency to organize concepts of pairs in polar opposites.” Campbell, *The Enemy Opposite*, xiii. Similarly, Edwards argues that “Lewis’s Vorticist aesthetic was essentially dualistic, involving empathetic immersion in life followed by an aesthetic abstraction from that experience ….” Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 201. This organizing system of polarities is reminiscent of the series of dualisms that Gilles Deleuze observed in Bergson: “matter and memory, perception and recollection, objective and subjective.” Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 53.

89 Campbell, *The Enemy Opposite*, 98-99. Similarly, Mary Ann Gillies argues that, “Lewis’s attitude to Bergsonian philosophy [in *Time and Western Man*] is symptomatic, then, of his failure to recognize the sources of his own inspirations.” Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*, 50. Similarly, Dasenbrock argues that, “The critiques of Vorticism, it must be confessed, are often most intense when they seek to conceal an indebtedness.” Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound & Wyndham Lewis*, 29.


denigrated by Bergson. Nonetheless, as Richard Lofthouse rightly observes, “There was of course much vitalism in Vorticism as well.”

Bergson’s enduring stamp is particularly legible in Lewis’s putative corrective to the alleged excesses time-philosophy: namely, his “philosophy of the eye,” and the Vorticist aesthetics of “imagism” that preceded it. In particular, Bergson’s ontology of the “image” in Matter and Memory suggests a prototype for Lewis’s discourse on vision that, in turn, offers a new line of approach to the anti-optical manoeuvres of Smithson, which are usually traced to the anti-Gestalt writings of Ehrenzweig.

The conflicted investments of Lewis’s space-time discourse are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in his travel writings. Filibusters in Barbary appeared on the heels of the artist-author’s parody of a time-minded bourgeois bohemia in The Apes of God and his subsequent, disastrous endorsement of Hitler as a “Man of Peace” in a 1931 report from Berlin. David Farley argues that Filibusters in Barbary attempted “to find some political or social structure that would prevent a recurrence of events that led to the First World War.” Ironically, the redemptive futurity postulated by that text was located in a mythical past. The divided argumentation of Lewis’s space-time discourse suggests a compelling prototype for Smithson’s unresolved dialectic of entropy and remembrance.

Smithson’s proposal for Island of Broken Glass forcefully embodies this Lewisian interface with Bergsonian mnemotechnics. Drawing on Lewis’s travelogue as inter-text, I

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94 Likewise, Campbell argues that, “Everywhere, Lewis’s philosophical position is a sort of mirror image of Bergson’s. . . . Noisily, Lewis reverses Bergson’s values. Silently, he appropriates Bergson’s categories, constructing his central dichotomy of time and space to agree in almost every respect with that of his former teacher.” Campbell, “Equal Opposites,” 366.
95 Lofthouse, Vitalism in Modern Art, 250.
96 Dasenbrock, The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound & Wyndham Lewis, chapter 3.
97 Wyndham Lewis, Hitler (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), 32.
98 David Farley, Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 114.
want to revisit Smithson’s “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” and the hypothetical continents which grew out of the expeditionary project which it documents, as mining a repressed Bergsonian ontology of matter and memory. Cybernetic and thermodynamic notions of entropy—variously interpreted as structural equilibrium or thermodynamic heat death—have conventionally been mobilized to elucidate Smithson’s representations of temporality. Lewis’s critical dialogue with Bergson suggests another approach to Smithson’s figurations of what Reinhold Martin has aptly dubbed “organicism’s other.”

Much as Lewis scholars have pointed to traces of Bergsonian ontology in Lewis’s anti-Bergsonian polemics of the 1920s, so too have revisionist studies of Smithson’s critique of the “biological metaphor” identified an excess of what Caroline A. Jones variously terms “libidinal flows” and “flux and change.” How does this temporal excess of Smithson’s crystalline practice inform his transformation of documentary formats into what Reynolds dubs “the undifferentiated flow of information” communicated by the photo-essays?

Risking the prospect of, in Nico Israel’s admonitory words, “merely … add[ing] another example of Smithsonian ‘influence,’ anxious or sanguine, onto the heap of others recently or long ago unearthed,” this chapter will map affinities between the rhetorical frameworks mobilized by Lewis and Smithson with the goal of adding additional complexity to existing narratives of the American artist’s enabling role in histories of Vancouver art and economies. (To the best of my knowledge, Lewis does not appear in

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100 Jones, Machine in the Studio, 277, 310.
101 Reynolds, Robert Smithson, 83.
previous accounts of Smithson’s time in Vancouver.\textsuperscript{103} Less an investigation of a previously underexplored reference in Smithson’s multivalent system of intertextuality; this case study will argue that Lewisian tropes latent in the American artist’s work necessitate a reconsideration of previous genealogies of Vancouver conceptualism to foreground continuities with the “pre-McLuhan body of Canadian media theory” analyzed by Paul Tiessen.\textsuperscript{104} If the coeval production of the N.E. Thing Co. brings into visibility the decisive impact of McLuhan’s critical information theory on Canadian conceptualism, Smithson’s Postminimalism instantiates something like a late or “neo-” Vorticism; one parallel to the “Canadian Vorticism” practiced contemporaneously, according to Gregory Betts, by McLuhan’s associates Sheila and Wilfred Watson as well as McLuhan himself.\textsuperscript{105}

If at first glance Smithson’s failed intervention on Miami Islet, and the ephemeral \textit{Glue Pour} (1970) that he and a team of assistants executed near the UBC campus as part of the Lucy Lippard-curated exhibition 955,000,\textsuperscript{106} would appear to have left little in the way of an enduring footprint in Vancouver, some historians have identified the American’s Canadian interlude as the springboard for his signature \textit{Spiral Jetty} (Fig. 51).\textsuperscript{107} The present reconsideration of the most ambitious, if unrealized, of Smithson’s earth maps will thus have important consequences for our understanding of \textit{Spiral Jetty}, to which I return in the Conclusion, as well as Smithson’s \textit{oeuvre} as a whole.

\textsuperscript{103} I have previously argued that, through McLuhan’s engagements with Lewis, the latter’s discourse on bodies and technology acted as “an unlikely influence on the sensorial culture of 1960s Canada,” notably on the embodied and satirical information art of the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. Lauder, “‘Sensitivity Information,’” 5. See also Lauder, “Circumvention Anxieties,” 285.
\textsuperscript{104} Tiessen, “From Literary Modernism to the Tantramar Marshes.”
\textsuperscript{105} See Betts, \textit{Avant-Garde Canadian Literature}, 191-244.
\textsuperscript{106} See Lucy R. Lippard, ed., \textit{955,000: An Exhibition} (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1970).
Scanners

Or to take the vedic figure of the two birds, the one watching and passive, the other enjoying its activity, we similarly have to postulate two creatures, one that never enters into life, but that travels about in a vessel to whose destiny it is momentarily attached.¹⁰⁸

Smithson’s presence in Vancouver is a standard anchor in accounts of the emergence of photo-conceptualism. Scott Watson’s narrative is paradigmatic in its drawing attention to Smithson’s photo-essays (and those of fellow American artist Dan Graham) as a primary source for the “urban semiotic” subsequently mined by Jeff Wall and Ian Wallace in such foundational photo-text projects as Wall’s 1969 Landscape Manual.¹⁰⁹ While acknowledging Graham and Smithson’s departure from the hermetic self-reflexivity of New York Minimalism (as, in Watson’s words, “saturated with ideology and reflected social reality”) in the artists’ turn away from the idealized space of the gallery to the hybrid zones of the metropolitan fringe, the art historian nevertheless privileges a genealogy of photographic and textual representation at the expense of the perceptual and material dimensions of the artists’ respective practices. The unresolved position of the

¹⁰⁹ Watson, “Discovering the Defeatured Landscape,” 265. Ian Wallace echoed Watson in placing NETCO’s A Portfolio of Piles within a Graham-Smithson genealogy: “[Graham and Smithson’s] documentary, photographic approach, which typified the critical conceptual photography of the late 1960s, inspired the Vancouver artists to take a closer look at the conflicted spaces of the region. Some of the first representations of the spaces of these lower zones appeared in bookworks such as A Portfolio of Piles (1968) by N.E. Thing Company, whose work was political in effect if not in intent.” Wallace, “The Frontier of the Avant-Garde,” 56.
N.E. Thing Co.’s photographic production in this lineage symptomatizes broader tensions in established histories of photo-conceptualism.

Watson credits the Vancouver company with defining a semiotic “strategy” whose theorization, however, he tacitly arrogates to Wall and Wallace.110 NETCO’s chronological position in this narrative is similarly ambivalent: Watson asserts that, “[t]he earliest locally produced image of what I have been calling the defeatured landscape was made, I believe, by Iain and Ingrid Baxter.”111 The work in question, Ruins (1968)—a Cibachrome transparency depicting a generic suburban landscape, whose title introduces a dissonant, if not “dialectical,” note—is alleged to “[show] a clear debt to Smithson.”112 Though recognizing the company’s early innovations in Cibachrome photography (pre-dating the better known work of Wall by a decade),113 Watson thereby situates NETCO’s production squarely within a narrative of one-way (American) influence.

Smithson had in fact cited Iain Baxter, and the 1968 N.E. Thing Co. artist’s book A Portfolio of Piles, in his seminal earthworks essay “A Sedimentation of the Mind,” published in Artforum the same year Ruins was shot.114 “Recently, in Vancouver,” wrote Smithson, “Iain Baxter put on an exhibition of Piles that were located at different points in the city; he also helped in the presentation of a Portfolio of Piles.”115 Rather than relegate NETCO to the derivative rank of Smithson acolyte to which Watson consigns the company, Smithson had himself promoted the Vancouver company to the vanguard

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111 Watson, “Discovering the Defeatured Landscape,” 263.
112 Watson, “Discovering the Defeatured Landscape,” 263.
114 The work was not actually assembled until 1990. See Knight, N.E. Thing Co., 21.
of an emergent earthworks movement. Fellow Vancouver artist Christos Dikeakos reinforces this precedence, noting that, “It’s important to mention the Baxters. Their use of Duchamp’s ready-made nomination in the catalogue A Portfolio of Piles (1968) was a seminal work for photoconceptual practice here.” Dikeakos’s reminiscence foregrounds the formative importance of NETCO’s photography practice to subsequent photo-conceptual projects as well as its parallels, and synchronicity, with Smithson’s scanning methodology.

Smithson’s papers at the Archive of American Art include correspondence with Iain Baxter from 1968 accompanied by photo-documentation of various NETCO “Earth” projects (including an “Eroding Fountain”) and other works, likely sent in response to enquiries related to the American artist’s “A Sedimentation of the Mind” essay, published later the same year. As introduced above, the term scanning denotes a peripheral or scattered mode of seeing originally theorized by the arts educator Anton Ehrenzweig, and adapted, according to Robert Linsley and Ann Reynolds among others, by Smithson into a “de-differentiated” alternative to the Gestalt “opticality” vaunted by Greenberg and fellow formalist critics. As transformed by Smithson, scanning also became associated with mapping techniques that translated the documentation process into a non-linear network.

116 Adam Lauder, “Glue Pour, 1970: Robert Smithson’s Vancouver Sojourn,” Canadian Art 32, no. 2 (2015): 92. Baxter’s acknowledgements, framed as a message from the President, suggest that the project was his initiative. “I would like to thank … Elaine Baxter, my wife, for her encouragement of the Portfolio and for accepting all the piles around.” See N.E. Thing Co., A Portfolio of Piles, n. pag.
117 “Dear Robert Smithson: here are the photos of 2 of the projects in earth the N.E. THING Co. would like to do. ERODING FOUNTAIN would be easy to setup [sic.] in model form if you wished to do so. It could be on a base of 3 x 3 plywood with 10 to 12” small chrome pipe mounted in centre. Pour water to to [sic.] show erosion and let dry … .” Iain Baxter to Robert Smithson, June 28, 1968, Papers of Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., reel 3834. Another NETCO piece anticipatory of Smithson’s projects, but antecedent the execution of the American’s work is the Territorial Claim - Urination (pissing on snow) performed by Iain Baxter during the company’s visit to Inuvik, sponsored by the Edmonton Art Gallery, in September 1969—prior to Smithson’s Vancouver Glue Pour of January 1970. See Lippard, “Art within the Arctic Circle,” 665.
of spatialized “views.” A crucial artefact of this methodology is a “scanning record” (Fig. 52) of the *Glue Pour* executed by the American artist near the UBC campus with assistance from Dikeakos, Lucy Lippard, and then UBC students Ilya Pagonis and Dennis Wheeler. Grant Arnold echoes Linsley’s interpretation of the earlier Mirror Displacements (which similarly mobilized the potentialities of a de-differentiated gaze) as a critique of formalist optics:

> Had the scanning record been completed, it would have undercut the foundation of the Cartesian model of vision to a degree beyond that of any of his earlier photographic works. The deployment of multiple perspectives and technically diverse types of photographs would have also challenged a phenomenological apprehension, based on the idea of a single body moving physically around the work.\(^{118}\)

Arnold rightly draws attention to the innovative dimensions of the *Glue Pour* scanning record, which incorporated a previously unseen degree of complexity and a newfound break with embodied modes of seeing. It is likely that the “pathways radiat[ing] in all directions” schematized by Ehrenzweig’s diagram (Fig. 53) of “The maze (serial structure) of a creative search” suggested a (until now overlooked) model for the “gridded forking arrangements” of Smithson’s *Glue Pour* documentation.\(^{119}\)

\(^{118}\) “While Smithson had employed scanning as a structure in earlier photographic documentation, none of the earlier works incorporated the range of viewpoints and formats he proposed for the presentation record of the *Glue Pour*. In contrast to the gridded forking arrangements of the photographs for Nonsite ‘Line of Wreckage,’ Bayonne, New Jersey, the proposed forking arrangement of *Glue Pour* images would have presented an equivalent to the material action within the pour, in which a mass begins at a central nodal point and then fans out. Arnold, “Robert Smithson in Vancouver,” 22.

Ehrenzweig’s figure brings into representation the “fruitful alteration between differentiated and undifferentiated modes of functioning,” which he identified as the key to a healthy creative ego, and which Smithson, in turn, was frequently wont to invoke in interviews and statements.\textsuperscript{120}

The term scanning had likewise early entered NETCO’s lexicon, albeit through a different route. As discussed in Chapter 3, the informational aesthetics of the French psychologist Abraham Moles had suggested new approaches to the company’s primarily McLuhan-derived conceptualization of “information,” possibly beginning as early as 1966 (the year that Moles’s \textit{Information Theory and Esthetic Perception} was published in English translation). In Moles’s theorization, the aesthetic subject is described as a “receptor” that “scans” its environment in search of symbolic “forms” which it subsequently “assembles” into original compositions. \textit{A Portfolio of Piles} operationalizes the computational procedures of \textit{scanning} and \textit{selection} described by Moles: the resulting documentation of readymade “piles” enacting a punningly scatological travesty of the French theorist’s methodology of symbolic assemblage. As observed by Smithson in his \textit{Artforum} essay, NETCO’s procedures suggested a more “anthropomorphic” approach to

the problem of non-linear seeing (presumably in contrast to his own antihumanist methodology).\footnote{See Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind,” 102; see also Meltzer, \textit{Systems We Have Loved}, Chapter 3.}

Highlighting the shared centrality of scanning methodologies within the practices of NETCO and Smithson not only disturbs the linear narrative of influence rehearsed by Watson (suggesting something more akin to mutual participation in a shared discourse network), it simultaneously foregrounds perceptual and material dimensions of photo-conceptualism occluded by earlier histories of Vancouver art and economies written in the wake of the linguistic turn.\footnote{Paradigmatically, Jeff Wall’s discussion of the painterly \textit{tableaux}, or what he terms the “Western Picture,” as the persistent, if submerged, model for photographic practice. See Jeff Wall, “‘Marks of Indifference’: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art,” in \textit{The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982}, by Douglas Fogle, 32-44 (1995; repr., Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2003), 33. In constrast to the (alternately avowed and disavowed) compositional logic of Wall’s neopictorialist framework, the scanning techniques adopted by NETCO and Smithson more closely approximate the perceptual ideal of Smithson’s postulated “set of glances” as a valid artistic methodology. Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind,” 112.} Scanning techniques point to the underemphasized role of “vision” in a photo-conceptual tradition that is conventionally viewed as primarily motivated by language-based theoretical investments.\footnote{See, for instance, Melanie O’Brian, ed., \textit{Vancouver Art & Economies} (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press; Artspeak, 2007). Scott Watson writes that, “[I]n Wall’s discussion of the painterly \textit{tableaux}, or what he terms the “Western Picture,” as the persistent, if submerged, model for photographic practice. See Jeff Wall, “‘Marks of Indifference’: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art,” in \textit{The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982}, by Douglas Fogle, 32-44 (1995; repr., Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2003), 33. In constrast to the (alternately avowed and disavowed) compositional logic of Wall’s neopictorialist framework, the scanning techniques adopted by NETCO and Smithson more closely approximate the perceptual ideal of Smithson’s postulated “set of glances” as a valid artistic methodology. Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind,” 112.} While Ehrenzweig and Moles undoubtedly acted as the primary stimuli for the scanning procedures activated respectively by Smithson and NETCO, I want to explore Wyndham Lewis’s discourse on vision in \textit{Time and Western Man}—a text owned by Smithson,\footnote{See Reynolds, \textit{Robert Smithson}, 329.} which also served as a principle point of departure for McLuhan (NETCO’s primary source)—as a parallel point of origin for the American artist’s, and the Vancouver company’s, perceptual maneuvers. While Linsley, Reynolds and others have
convincingly argued that the de-differentiated visuality theorized by Ehrenzweig served as a model for Smithson’s anti-Gestalt explorations, Lewis’s polemical “philosophy of the eye” suggests a longer trajectory that implicates the scanning techniques of the 1960s within empiricist ontologies of the image.

*Time and Western Man* marks the culmination of Lewis’s critique of a postwar modernism turned fashion system: an institutionalized recycling of avant-garde experiments (including Lewis’s own), propelled by economic imperatives and the pervasive influence of Bergsonism and other process philosophies. (Echoes of Lewis’s diatribe are easy to identify in Smithson’s running commentary on formalist painting.) Though it has become commonplace to dismiss Lewis’s arguments as the paranoid delusions of a proto-fascist,¹²⁵ in some respects the artist-author’s ideology critique anticipated Peter Bürger’s influential *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Bürger distinguishes between a socially motivated, but failed, historical avant-garde, “whose aim it [was] to reintegrate art into the praxis of life,”¹²⁶ and a fatally compromised, post-World War II “neo-avant-garde,” which negated the radical intentions of antecedents by restoring their disruptive tactics to a bourgeois sphere of “autonomy.”¹²⁷ Lewis was remarkably prescient, if inopportuneely premature, in assessing the products of the post-World War I *rappel à l’ordre* as evidence of a taming of avant-garde ambitions to transform society through art—a project that, as Edwards has demonstrated, the artist-author was himself still optimistically pursuing as late as the 1919 pamphlet *The Caliph’s Design*.

¹²⁶ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22. “The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. … The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society … [as an] attempt to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art.” Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 49.
Yet the analogy to Bürger’s text must be qualified by the recognition that Lewis’s polemic of failed avant-gardism hinges, in part, on the very rapprochement of art and life that he paradoxically condemns in the case of such Bloomsbury contemporaries as the Sitwell family of artist-patrons (the not-so-veiled targets of Lewis’s Rabelaisian satire in *The Apes of God*). However, the contradiction is merely apparent: it is necessary to distinguish Lewis’s theory of art from what he viewed as the illegitimate aesthetics of Bergsonian modernism, and its celebration of sympathetic merger with, and durational dissolution of, the object. As introduced above, Lewis’s cultural criticism of the 1920s expanded the earlier, “painterly” aesthetics of Vorticism into an oppositional “philosophy of the eye” answering what could be called—to quote the Canadian poet bpNichol—the “ear rational” paradigm embraced by such modernist peers inspired by the auditory and time-based philosophy of Bergson as Eliot, Joyce, Stein and Woolf. I want to turn now to Lewis’s discourse on vision and, in particular, its relationship to Bishop Berkeley’s transcendental empiricism, to lay the groundwork for a closer reading of the British artist-author’s influence on Smithson’s scanning methodology.

Impolitic portraits of Lewis’s “enemies” and even friends notoriously dominate the bulk of *Time and Western Man*; everyone from Chaplin to Einstein being subjected to the lashings of Lewis’s merciless critique. Predictably, this adversarial approach left Lewis

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128 “[W]hen I speak of an absolute movement, I am attributing to the moving object an interior and, so to speak, states of mind; I also imply that I am in sympathy with those states, and that I insert myself in them by an effort of imagination. Then, according as the object is moving or stationary, according as it adopts one movement or another, what I experience will vary. And what I experience will depend neither on the point of view I may take up in regard to the object, since I am inside the object itself, nor on the symbols by which I may translate the motion, since I have rejected all translations in order to possess the original. In short, I shall no longer grasp the movement from without, remaining where I am, but from where it is, from within, as it is in itself. I shall possess an absolute.” Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T.E. Hulme; ed. John Mullarkey and Michael Kolkman (1913; repr., New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2-3, emphasis in the original. See also Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), Chapter 2.

open to charges of having failed to provide a persuasive alternative to his *idée fixe* of an all-pervasive “time-mind.” It was this challenge that Lewis set out to answer in the second volume of *Time and Western Man*. When pressed to elaborate his own perspective of “the eye” as anything more than a painter’s “occupational” bias, however, the conservative Lewis had, as Edwards underlines, little more than a restatement of Catholic doctrine to offer his readers. Vision as the fulcrum of a neo-Aristotelian “common sense” was the “bridge to the transcendent” that Lewis counterposed to the auditory and time-based forms privileged by his contemporaries.

**Lewis’s Crypto-Bergsonism**

Not only does Lewis’s philosophy of the eye succeed in impressing the reader as a distinctly underwhelming alternative to Bergson’s innovative critique of the Western metaphysical tradition, it simultaneously engages in a covert traffic with his ideas. But, where SueEllen Campbell advances Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* as affording a hidden model for *Time and Western Man*, I want to propose that Lewis’s discourse on space and vision suggests a different text in the Bergsonian *corpus* as its submerged prototype; namely, *Matter and Memory*, which sketches a radical approach to consciousness and mind harnessing new developments in neuroscience. In Bergson’s proto-phenomenological account, the world is composed of “images,” the body itself being just

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130 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, xiv.
131 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 133; see also Jameson, *Fables of Aggression*, 129.
134 See Guerlac, *Thinking in Time*, 106, 123
another image, to which others are referred through its actions and perceptions. In this schema, the brain does not contain the mind, but is merely a locus for the coordination of action upon these ambient images. Notwithstanding its endurance in time, Bergson’s “ontology of the image” thus bears a surprising resemblance to the visual metaphysics of Lewis. Like Bergson, Lewis’s construction of visuality is distinctly non-perspectival, yet realist. In the words of Bergson scholar Suzanne Guerlac, “Images are matter and at the same time they are perceptions.” Similarly, the writings of Bergson and Lewis disclose an unexpected, and previously overlooked, concordance on the contested subject of space.

David Addyman advances the counterintuitive but fruitful argument that, “Space not only plays a key role in Matter and Memory, but that work, and Bergson’s work more generally, makes a major contribution … to twentieth-century thought on space.”

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135 “My body is, then, in the aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement, with, perhaps, this difference only, that my body appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives.” Bergson, Matter and Memory, 19. Underscoring the Epicurean roots of Bergson’s ontology of the image, this key passage bears a remarkable resemblance to Lucretius’s account of perception in De Rerum Natura: “there are what we call the ‘images’ of things, and these, like membranes torn off from the surface of things, flit this way, that way, through the air … . … I say, then: shapes of things, and delicate casts are freed by things from the surfaces of things; we might denote these ‘membranes,’ ‘husks,’ or ‘rinds,’ because they are ‘likenesses,’ with the shape and form of the bodies from which, sloughed off, they wander free … [T]hey create perception … . … [I]mages must flow countless in countless ways in all directions.” Lucretius, The Nature of Things, 84, 85, 87. Not coincidentally, one of Bergson’s first publications was a translation of selected texts by Lucretius. See Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 9.

136 “My body, an object destined to move other objects, is, then, a centre of action … .” Bergson, Matter and Memory, 20, emphasis in the original.


138 As discussed below, Lewis’s construction of vision, particularly in Time and Western Man, is deeply indebted to Bishop Berkeley’s critique of perspectival optics—which likewise serves as a touchstone to Bergson in Matter and Memory.

139 Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 112.

Challenging the standard view, epitomized by the comments of Michel Foucault, of Bergson’s critique of the abstract “spatialization” effected by classical Western metaphysics and modern science, Addyman draws attention to the consequences of Bergson’s reconceptualization of perception (or “image”) as being “in matter” as implying that, “The world of matter—concrete extension—is structured in a similar way to consciousness.” The mutual exclusivity of space and time, matter and memory imputed to Bergson by his critics is exploded by Addyman’s recognition that Matter and Memory in fact argues that, “memory is actualized by concrete extension.” In other words, the space of concrete extension is inseparable from the operations of memory due to the materiality of perception, which is both its content and carrier.

Although Addyman situates Lewis’s critique of the Bergsonian “time-cult” in Time and Western Man at the head of the very tradition which has consistently misconstrued the French philosopher’s innovative discourse on space as a one-sided denigration of the spatial, it is also possible to recognize in Addyman’s perceptive counter-reading of Bergson yet another dimension of Lewis’s disavowed indebtedness to his former teacher: the perceptual, and specifically optical, space described by Matter and Memory coming remarkably close to the visual and spatial alternative advanced by Lewis in Time and Western Man.

Lewis’s vexed engagements with Bergsonian space-time concepts in Time and Western Man shed new light on Smithson’s similarly uneasy discourse on “time and its

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144 See also Guerlac’s discussion of the “rapprochement between the metaphysical oppositions” articulated by the fourth chapter of Matter and Memory. Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 157, emphasis in the original.
measure,” to quote Pamela M. Lee on the “chronophobic” turn in 1960s art and art criticism, of which she views the American Postminimalist’s writings to be paradigmatic.\footnote{Lee, Chronophobia, xii.} Even as art historians frequently invoke Smithson’s favoured metaphor to draw attention to the temporal aspects of his practice, “entropy” is simultaneously suggestive of a terminal state of sameness consistent with the static paradigm vaunted by Lewis.\footnote{Elena Lamberti writes that, “Lewis’s vortex is not conceived as a flux, but as a dynamic, progressive, moving image related to time but also containing a stable point, the spatial element from which its energy spirals originate.” Lamberti, Marshall McLuhan’s Mosaic, 219-20, emphasis in the original.} The “repetition,” “absolute inertia” and “backwards” progress conjured by such Smithson texts as “Ultramoderne” echoes the hyperbolic rhetoric of hypostatization deployed by Lewis.\footnote{Smithson, “Ultramoderne,” 63, 64, 65.} Where Andrew V. Uroskie and others have read Smithson’s Spiral Jetty film through the lens of Deleuze’s influential study of postwar cinema as bringing into representation a crystalline “time-image,”\footnote{Uroskie, “La Jetée en Spirale,” 56; see also Deleuze, Cinema 2. Uroskie notes in passing that “Bergson and Peirce form the philosophical ground from which Deleuze’s project begins.” Uroskie, “La Jetée en Spirale,” 56. Without citing Bergson directly, George Baker’s analysis of cinematic tropes in Smithson’s oeuvre similarly invokes Deleuze, but cites the latter’s (equally Bergsonian) notion of the “diagram.” See George Baker, “The Cinema Model,” 92. While exploring the “crystalline structure of time” brought into visibility by Smithson’s art and writings, Jennifer L. Roberts discusses neither Bergson nor Deleuze. Roberts, Mirror-Travels, 44.} Felicity Colman fruitfully counters that Bergson’s “mattering of the image” suggests insights into Smithson’s exploration of “modes of cognitive perception” in such moving image works as his collaborative film with Nancy Holt, Swamp (1970-71).\footnote{Colman, “The Matter of the Image,” 119, 117.}

Colman’s investigation of the ways in which the processual methodology mobilized by Smithson and Holt effects a creative deformation of the “diagram” that the Bergsonian subject marks out on matter in preparation for action, hinges on Smithson’s only direct reference to Bergson.\footnote{Colman, “The Matter of the Image,” 120.} The early Smithson text, “Entropy and the New Monuments,”
quotes the following passage from *Creative Evolution* as part of an ironic *détournement* of Bergsonian philosophy: “The history of philosophy is there, however, and shows us the eternal conflict of systems, the impossibility of satisfactorily getting the real into the ready-made garments of our ready-made concepts, the necessity of making to measure.”\(^{151}\) Colman interprets Smithson’s ironic gloss on Bergson as a reminder that, “pre-figured systems miss the point of artworks that are, as he says, ‘puns on the Bergsonian idea of ‘creative evolution.’”\(^{152}\) Colman initially suggests that, in harnessing Bergson’s theory of the increasing diversity of biological forms to his entropic reading of recent trends in sculpture elsewhere in the same essay, Smithson performs a creative misreading of the French thinker, thereby correcting what she terms “The error of the diagram”: a paradoxal hypostatization of the mobility valorized by Bergson effected by the very act of its diagrammatization.\(^{153}\) But, upon closer scrutiny, Smithson’s claim that Minimalism deliberately frustrates modernist expectations of formal innovation would appear to be entirely faithful to Bergson’s meditations on the “impossibility of satisfactorily getting the real into the ready-made.” Indeed, Smithson’s nuanced recognition of the perpetual tension obtaining between biological differentiation and rationalist stereotyping in Bergsonian ontology—the friction between creative evolution and readymade “systems”—suggests an alternative, or more likely parallel, inspiration for the anti-vital overtones of the artist’s discourse on entropic temporality to the

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Kublerian critique of the “biological metaphor” usually attributed to it. Smithson’s perverse dialogue with the notion of creative evolution suggests, in Colman’s words, that, “Art is like comedy”;154 his references to “solid-state hilarity” likely having been refined through a reading of Bergson’s theorization of the comic in *Laughter.*155

Colman’s exploration of Bergson’s “image-matter” as a source for Smithson’s perceptual experiments complements Eve Meltzer’s interpretation of the “crystalline materiality” deployed by the American artist’s as instantiating “a compelling alternative to the structuralist … turn” pursued by his (British and New York City-based) peers.156 I want to complicate this materialist view of Smithson’s practice, while simultaneously building on Colman’s reading of the Bergsonian bases of his practice. Foregrounding Lewis’s polemical but highly ambivalent presentation of Bergson as a filter for Smithson’s perceptual rhetoric and scanning methodology, I will explore Lewis’s synthesis of a Bergsonian ontology of the image with the critical optics of the eighteenth-century philosopher George Berkeley as a previously overlooked point of departure for the American artist’s discourse on perception and development of scanning techniques. As Campbell states, “in Berkeley’s *Principles of Human Knowledge* [Lewis] finds several of his own central terms and one of his own characteristic structures of thought, a complex set of oppositions joined by paradox.”157 It is in no way my intention to refute standard interpretations of Smithson’s scanning methodology as a transformation of Ehrenzweig’s anti-Gestalt writings, for which the artist’s published writings alone provide ample support. My goal is more modest: namely, to demonstrate that Lewis’s

presentation of Berkeley—as Campbell notes, “one of the few thinkers whose influence Lewis ever directly embraces” —likely coloured Smithson’s method in ways that contribute additional nuance and texture to our understanding of these dimensions of his practice.

**Berkeley’s Transcendental Empiricism**

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Lewis introduces Berkeley in the preface to Book Two of *Time and Western Man*. The Anglo-Irish philosophr first appears in the context of Lewis’s response to critics of Book One, which attempts to lay the foundations for a positive alternative to the “time-cult” that remains the enduring object of his critique. Lewis nominates Berkeley as a model for the contemporary exercise of non-specialist critique, or the “independent critical mind,” as Lewis describes his own position (and, by implication, that of his ideal reader). Lewis insinuates parallels between Berkeley’s non-mathematical “criticism of the Newtonian system” and his own generalist’s assault on Bergsonian metaphysics and Relativity physics. More than a simple precursor, Lewis summons Berkeley for his distinctive synthesis of idealism and empiricism. In a crucial passage, Lewis invokes what Branka Arsić has more recently termed the “transcendental empiricism” of Berkeley

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160 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 115.
161 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 137.
162 Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 137.
by way of elucidating his own, seemingly contradictory, merger of a disembodied “eye” and the obdurate surfaces of an “external world” that are the object of that vision.

So, under whatever form it takes, the position we are attacking is the abstract one, as against the concrete of say, such an ‘idealism’ as that of Berkeley, Bradley or Bosanquet. I am afraid that stated in that way this will be without very much meaning to the general reader. If he attends to it at all, he will perhaps think that it is a strange thing that ‘absolute idealism’ should stand for the concrete, the non-abstract, whereas contemporary thought, which is highly ‘realistic’ and positivist, should stand for the abstract or the non-concrete.

Following Berkeley’s example, Lewis views his own project as buttressing the classical and everyday world of “common-sense” against the pernicious incursion of abstractions, which threaten a “breaking up of the composite space of the assembled senses into an independent space of touch, a space of sight, a visceral space, and so forth: the conversion of ‘the thing’ into a series of discrete apparitions.” Berkeley’s strategic significance to Lewis’s project emerges with clarity from the Conclusion to Book Two of

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164 Lewis, Time and Western Man, 163. “[W]hatever I, for my part, say, can be traced back to an organ; but in my case it is the eye. It is in the service of the things of vision that my ideas are mobilized.” Lewis, Time and Western Man, 134, emphasis in the original.

165 “If I added, as is indeed the case, that such an extreme idealist doctrine as that of Berkeley, far more even than the skeptical idealism of Bradley, stood even fanatically for the concrete, as against the abstract, the reader who had not given much attention to philosophy would be completely mystified, no doubt, as indeed Berkeley foresaw would be the case when he first launched his doctrine.” Lewis, Time and Western Man, 161, emphasis in the original.

166 Lewis, Time and Western Man, 399, my emphasis.
*Time and Western Man.* Lewis invokes the Anglo-Irish philosopher’s claim that, “a man need only open his eyes to see” as endorsing the “vivid realism” advocated by Lewis himself as an alternative to the blur of Bergsonian flux.\(^{167}\) In Campbell’s words, “[Berkeley] is an idealist. Yet he insists that such idealism implies a vivid, concrete, and particularized world—the world we are directly given by our senses.”\(^{168}\) Notwithstanding the legitimizing function of this self-constructed pedigree, Lewis is not blind to the weakened grip on his vaunted “thing” implicated in his appeal to Berkeley.

Even as he turns to Berkeley as the paradigm of a “solid” world of “dead” things with which to counter the disintegrating effects of scientific realism and the flux of process philosophy, Lewis openly confesses the central, and seemingly incorrigible, paradox of Berkeleian idealism;\(^{169}\) namely, that, “the material world must, from [Berkeley’s] standpoint, be imaginary. … And the more solid it is the more unearthly, in that sense.”\(^{170}\) Campbell echoes this tension, observing that, despite its concrete appearance, “for both [Berkeley and Lewis], matter … is unreal.”\(^{171}\) Similarly, Arsić states that, “Matter does not exist” for Berkeley’s subject.\(^{172}\) Only mind is real; matter concrete to the extent that it is perceived by mind. It is a ghostly unreality perceived by the Berkeleian subject, despite the ostensively “solid objects” with which its world appears to

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\(^{167}\) Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 445, emphasis in the original.

\(^{168}\) Campbell, *The Enemy Opposite*, 88.

\(^{169}\) In *Paleface*, Lewis observes with even greater concision the (for him) paradoxical fact of Berkeley’s appropriation by the proponents of scientific realism: “Extreme concreteness and extreme definition is for me a necessity. … Against the mysticism of the mathematician I find myself with Bishop Berkeley (though, of course, he is claimed by the enemies of the concrete, strangely enough): I am on the side of commonsense, as against abstraction, as was Berkeley.” Wyndham Lewis, *Paleface* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929), 253.

\(^{170}\) Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, 448-49, emphasis in the original.

\(^{171}\) Campbell, *The Enemy Opposite*, 89.

\(^{172}\) Arsić, *The Passive Eye*, 104.
be populated.\textsuperscript{173} In a characteristically dualist move, Lewis seizes upon the unlikely creative potential of this condition of unreality, or “immaterialism,” to celebrate the self-fashioning Imagination of a subject capable of endowing the given with an ideal clarity that it lacks materially. The artist thereby emerges as the archetype of an auto-telic perception. “Like an artist,” Campbell observes, “each of us creates our own world.”\textsuperscript{174}

By the same token, there is more than enough of the phantasmatic haunting the Berkeleian Imagination to match the “discrete apparitions” conjured by Lewis’s time-school adversaries.\textsuperscript{175} In particular, the ambivalent character of Berkeley’s objects of vision (being concrete but imaginary), and the creative imperative which the philosopher attributes to his subject, ironically bear an unmistakable resemblance to the image-matter of Bergson’s ontology and evolutionary vision of a coming “society of creators.”\textsuperscript{176}

Surprisingly, given the pattern of disavowed affinities mapped by Campbell, Lewis does not hide this correspondence between the “object” of Berkeleian vision and that of the supposedly rival ontologies of Bergson and followers:

\textsuperscript{173} See Mao, \textit{Solid Objects}. The unresolved tensions of Lewis’s reading of Berkeley derive in large part from a crucial misunderstanding of the total disjuncture of the faculties of touch and vision articulated by the Anglo-Irish philosopher, which Lewis misconstrues as the “common sense” of Aristotle. “[I]t must be acknowledged,” writes Berkeley, “that we never see and feel one and the same object. That which is seen is one thing, and that which is felt is another.” George Berkeley, “An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision,” in \textit{Philosophical Writings}, ed. Desmond M. Clarke, 1-66 (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 23. Contra Lewis’s visual construction of space, Berkeley argues, in Arsić’s words, that, “Spatial extension … and everything that defines the spatial situation of an object is the proper object of touch.” Arsić, \textit{The Passive Eye}, 167. Ironically, where Lewis appeals to Berkeley’s philosophy in \textit{Paleface} and \textit{Time and Western Man} as embodying a classical common-sense, Arsić argues that in the Berkeleian world, “Every sense goes its own way, to its own objects. … A nightmare world appears in which only surprises and astonishments are continuous: a world of horror, a world of schizophrenia.” Arsić, \textit{The Passive Eye}, 174. Berkeley’s comments recall Friedrich Kittler’s discussion of the “untranslatability” of sensory channels. Kittler, \textit{Discourse Networks}, 268.

\textsuperscript{174} Campbell, \textit{The Enemy Opposite}, 91.

\textsuperscript{175} Lewis, \textit{Time and Western Man}, 399.

\textsuperscript{176} Deleuze, \textit{Bergsonism}, 111.
The scientific object, the simplest aspect of any given object, ‘exists’ in the same sense and on the same level of reality as the image. In a world of hypothesis: it is what should be there if the empirical systems of fact could lead us to some absolute. … It is in that sense the material of such a sign-world as that of Berkeley, who said of the external world of objects, that they were not actual, but that is what they would be like and how they would behave if they were real … . … Berkeley is a popular hero of many relativists today … .

As Lewis traces a lineage through the Catholic ontologies of Aquinas and Berkeley, he seems oblivious to Bergson’s place in this same tradition. Praising the Berkeleian cosmos in the concluding paragraphs of Time and Western Man as “one of the best of all possible philosophic worlds,” it is indeed a world of glaring “paradox” that emerges from Lewis’s fraught discourse on Berkeleian ontology and vision as counters to contemporary Bergsonisms. As sketched by Lewis, Berkeley’s “gimcrack world of

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177 Lewis, Time and Western Man, 443, emphasis in the original.
178 Stephen Crocker traces a genealogy of “two branches of Bergsonism,” one of which he characterizes as a “Catholic Bergsonism” and identifies with the thought of Etienne Gilson and Marshall McLuhan, which included a strong admixture of Aristotle and Aquinas. Crocker, Bergson and the Metaphysics of Media, 17, 30. Nonetheless, Bergson’s celebration of instinct was at odds with Catholic orthodoxy, his major works being placed on the Index in 1914. See Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 29. Schwartz observes of this trajectory of early influence and subsequent disavowal that, “Bergson became the victim of the Roman Catholic revival he had helped to inspire. Bergson himself was a Jew, but in the first half-decade of the new century he exerted a remarkable influence on some of the future luminaries of modern French Catholicism.” Schwartz, “Bergson and the Politics of Vitalism,” 289. The impact of Berkeley on McLuhan is evident from the Toronto School thinker’s discussion of his New Theory of Vision in the opening pages of The Gutenberg Galaxy as “denouncing the absurdity of Newtonian visual space as a mere abstract illusion severed from the sense of touch,” a reaction which McLuhan situates, in turn, within the dissemination of Gutenberg technology. McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy, 17.
179 Lewis, Time and Western Man, 450.
180 Lewis, Time and Western Man, 445.
façades” certainly constitutes an improbable commonsense alternative to the
“chronological mentalism” imputed to his opponents, to be sure.181

The post-structuralist account of Berkeley’s visual ontology presented by Arsić is
fertile ground for reassessing the “bipolar rhythm between mind and matter” traced by
Smithson’s destabilizing documentary and perceptual manoeuvres.182 As in the artist’s
report of the “‘anti-vision’ or negative seeing” activated by his Yucatán Mirror
Displacements, maps and diagrams appear in Berkeley’s critique of Cartesian optics, in
Arsić’s words, as “the effect[s] of the mathematical imaginary [that] are fantasies we
have no reason to follow.”183 Appealing to the evidence of experience to counter the
geometrical abstractions mobilized by rationalist frameworks, Berkeley states that, “those
lines and angles, by means whereof some men pretend to explain the perception of
distance, are themselves not at all perceived, nor are they in truth ever thought of by those
unskilful optics.”184 In place of the ordered visual field presumed by linear perspective,
Berkeley posits that, “What we see are not solids, nor yet planes variously coloured; they
are only diversity of colours.”185 The “mad, pure optical tactility” perceived by the
Berkeleian subject is consequently characterized by a “perpetual mutability and
fleetingness” that, “render[s its objects] incapable of being managed after the manner of
geometrical figures.”186

Sounding very much like Berkeley in the passages quoted above, Smithson writes
that, “The mirror displacement cannot be expressed in rational dimensions. The distances
between the twelve mirrors are shadowed disconnections, where measure is dropped and incomputable. Such mirror surfaces cannot be understood by reason.”\textsuperscript{187} Rather, the “broken geometry” reflected by the Mirror Displacements thrives on what he terms “surds”: \textsuperscript{188} a neologism signifying the absurd alogos of a non-rational space.\textsuperscript{189} Like the “wilderness of unassimilated seeing” reported by Smithson in his “Mirror-Travel” photo-essay,\textsuperscript{190} Arsić describes “the Berkeleian person” as “situated in a jungle of visual lawlessness because the visual is here not geometrical.”\textsuperscript{191}

But where Berkeley stresses the immateriality of the world perceived by the senses, on a first reading Smithson’s “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan” would, on the contrary, appear to emphasize the materiality of vision:

Particles of colour infected the molten reflections on the twelve mirrors, and in so doing, engendered mixtures of darkness and light. Colour as an agent of matter filled the reflected illuminations with shadowy tones, pressing the light into dusty material opacity.\textsuperscript{192}

Eve Meltzer draws attention to Smithson’s skepticism of the structuralist frameworks adopted by peers—a distrust that extended to the contemporaneous enthusiasm for “systems” associated with the work of artist-curator Jack Burnham. Smithson commented

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\textsuperscript{188} Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 127; Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 124.
\textsuperscript{190} Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 129.
\textsuperscript{191} Arsić, The Passive Eye, 50.
\textsuperscript{192} Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 124-25.
\end{flushleft}
acerbically in a 1969 interview with P.A. Norvell that, “the system is bound to evade itself, so I see no point in pinning any hopes on systems … .”¹⁹³ In addition to the crystalline metaphors excavated by Meltzer, the artist’s writings abound in references to the corrupt physicalism of matter. He characteristically stated that, “My work is impure; it is clogged with matter. I’m for a weighty, ponderous art.”¹⁹⁴ Yet the “material reason” that Meltzer imputes to Smithson overlooks the “interaction between mind and matter” as the motor for the “endless doubling” staged by his art and writings.¹⁹⁵ In the very same breath that he declares that, “there is no escape from matter,” Smithson adds, “nor is there any escape from the mind. The two are in a constant collision course.”¹⁹⁶ To wit, Smithson’s art and writings negotiate a “back and forth rhythm” between ideation and concretion, which reprises the paradoxical dualisms of Lewis’s remediation of Berkeley’s optics.¹⁹⁷

A second look at Smithson’s conflictual comments on colour in the “Yucatan” essay elucidates the driving Berkeleian dualism of his discourse: “[I]t is the very lack of ‘existence’ [of colour] that is so deep, profound, and terrible,” writes Smithson; “There is no chromatic scale down there because all colours are present, spawning agglutinations out of agglutinations. It is the incoherent mass that breeds colour and kills light.”¹⁹⁸ While acknowledging that colour may be “an agent of matter,” for Smithson, that matter

¹⁹³ Smithson, “Fragments of an Interview with P.A. [Patsy] Norvell,” 194. This skepticism of systems is also evident in Smithson’s description of Rozel Point, the site of Spiral Jetty, as giving “evidence of a succession of man-made systems mired in abandoned hopes.” Smithson, “The Spiral Jetty,” 146.
¹⁹⁵ Meltzer, Systems We Have Loved, 145; Smithson, “Fragments of an Interview with P.A. [Patsy] Norvell,” 193, my emphasis.
¹⁹⁸ Linsley, “Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 125.
paradoxically lacks “existence.” Pursuing a similarly dualistic line of argumentation, Smithson writes in the earlier essay “A Sedimentation of the Mind”—probably his strongest statement on the material dimensions of his practice—that, “no materials are solid, they all contain caverns and fissures. Solids are particles built up around flux, they are objective illusions supporting grit … .”\(^{199}\) This view of solidity as illusion reprises Berkeley’s critique of the abstractions projected by geometry and matter, which Smithson likely absorbed indirectly through Lewis:

> [W]hat we immediately and properly see are only lights and colours in sundry situations and shades and degrees of faintness and clearness, confusion and distinctness. All of which visible objects are only in the mind, nor do they suggest aught external, whether distance or magnitude, other than by habitual connexion as words do things.\(^{200}\)

Here we encounter a Smithson sounding very much like the immaterialist Berkeley, questioning the solidity of appearances and ontological moorings of rationalist systems of representation: “When the conscious artist perceives ‘nature’ everywhere,” writes Smithson in “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan; “he starts detecting falsity in the apparent thickets, in the appearance of the real, and in the end he is skeptical about all notions of existence, objects, reality, etc.”\(^{201}\)

Robert Linsley productively implicates Smithson’s meditations on sight—culminating in the American artist’s seemingly absurd proposition that, “A great artist can make art


\(^{201}\) Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 131-32.
by simply casting a glance—202—as part of a strategic “theatricalization of vision” directed at then prevailing notions of “opticality” associated with the criticism of Clement Greenberg and, especially, his young disciple Michael Fried.203 Yet the ultimate purpose of Linsley’s analysis of Smithson’s dialogue with Fried and Pollock in the Yucatán essay as seeking to furnish confirmation of the “persistence of painting as the paradigm of critical experience” misses, I think, the American artist’s real target.204 Smithson’s visual manoeuvres are, rather, part of a larger critique of rationalism in general and of optics in particular, in which documentary forms—especially mapping and photography—are mobilized as potential sites of “information feedback.”205 It is in the medial space of documentary formats that Smithson locates the informatic: “The refuse between mind and matter is a mine of information,”206 the artist states in “A Sedimentation of the Mind.”

Photography, and in particular the photo-documentary techniques mobilized by Smithson’s scanning methodology, are properly situated as pivots between the “act of viewing” that the artist associates with the process of art making and the abstract systems for “locating” the resulting work for exhibition and publication purposes.207 The punning title of Anthony Robbin’s 1969 *Art News* interview with Smithson elucidates this

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202 Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind,” 112. Smithson further speculates that, “a set of glances could be as solid as any thing or place.” Ibid.

203 Linsley, “Mirror Travel in the Yucatan,” 15. Writing in reference to the specific objects of Minimalism, Fried commented derisively that, “the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art.” Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 822-34 (1967; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 825. Rejecting the immersive “endlessness” of Minimalist theatricality, Fried upheld the “instantaneousness” of modernist painting’s optical address to the beholder: “the latter has no duration … at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest.” Ibid., 828, 832, emphasis in the original.

204 Linsley, “Mirror Travel in the Yucatan,” 30.


207 Smithson, “Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson,” 246; Smithson, “…The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master,” 254.
Berkeleian dialectic between the “sights” activated by his sites and the abstraction, or non-site (literally non-sight), paradoxically brought into representation by his maps and other exhibition techniques.

Smithson’s continuous traffic between a rational optics and an undisciplined vision both mobilizes and ultimately confounds the Berkeleian dualisms informing Lewis’s parallel critique of scientific realism in *Time and Western Man*. Smithson’s informed interest in “on-the-spot experience” calls into question Reinhold Martin’s contention that the residual organicism disclosed by the artist’s practice either went unrecognized by its author, or else points to an inattentive reading of Norbert Wiener’s Bergson-inflected writings on cybernetics and entropy. Smithson’s Berkeleian reports of the non-geometric discontents of organic vision function, rather, as knowing interventions within the positivist discourses of crystallography and other sciences. Much more than the biological excess of Kubler’s borrowings from “physical science,” Smithson’s allusions to the organic, and to embodied modes of seeing in particular, function as highly calculated interventions within rationalist systems that reprise the earlier dualistic maneuvers of both Lewis and Berkeley.

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210 “[Smithson’s] exchanges with Kepes underscore Smithson’s aversion to the system organicism of this technological city—in favour, it would seem, of the entropics of the ‘new’ crystalline one. But what he does not recognize, possibly because he is not reading Norbert Wiener closely enough, are the hidden affinities between his first two models as indexed by the third—in other words, the organicism of the crystalline city … .” Martin, “Organicism’s Other,” 48, emphasis in the original. Martin’s analysis overlooks Smithson’s explicit interest in recovering the experiential (embodied and organic) dimensions of art: “Art has tended to be viewed in terms of isolation, neutralization, separation, and this is encouraged. Art is supposed to be on some eternal plane, free from the experiences of the world, and I’m more interested in those experiences, not as a refutation of art, but as part of that experience, or interwoven, in other words, all these factors come into it.” Robert Smithson, “Conversation with Robert Smithson,” in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, 262-69 (1975; repr., Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 262.

The conflicting contours of Smithson’s critical project are thrown into relief when his Mirror Displacements, and the photo-documentation that accompanied the resulting *Artforum* text, are recognized as rejoinders to the positivist documentary techniques deployed by the multidisciplinary artist’s nineteenth-century interlocutor and foil, John Lloyd Stephens. Jennifer L. Roberts astutely reads Smithson’s Yucatán project as “an inversion or undoing of Stephens’s operations.”212 The primary operations to which Roberts refers are the difficulties encountered by Stephens and fellow traveller Frederick Catherwood in generating an “objective” visual record of the ruins at Copán and other archaeological sites. As we have already seen, their efforts were impeded by the unfamiliar and unwieldy vegetation of the area—a physical resistance that, in Roberts’s assessment, the Western travelers in turn projected onto their indigenous hosts and guides, thereby conflating cultural difference with the condition of *strabismus*, or “lazy eye,” from which an unusually high percentage of them suffered. But where Roberts’s analysis hinges on a reading of Catherwood’s illustrations as effecting a colonizing transformation of the Mayan jungle into “a Western space,” one that she views moreover as specifically *picturesque* (internally divided into “figure and ground, fore and aft”),213 the majority of Catherwood’s engravings do not support this interpretation, being planar representations of single objects (particularly altars and stelae), strategically isolated from the surrounding landscape and rendered without aerial perspective. The resulting images more closely approximate examples of scientific illustration than picturesque landscape

212 Roberts, “Landscapes of Indifference,” 552.
painting.\textsuperscript{214} In Stephens’s own words, “from the beginning, our great effort was to procure true copies of the originals, adding nothing for effect as pictures.”\textsuperscript{215}

Roberts’s analysis overlooks a key element in Stephens’s narrative: namely, Stephens’s report that Catherwood employed a \textit{camera lucida} to render his illustrations. The \textit{camera lucida}, a portable device patented in 1807 by William Hyde Wollaston, superimposes a reflected image over the drawing surface in a half-silvered mirror through which the artist looks down while working.\textsuperscript{216} A prism reverses the right-left inverted image initially reflected by the mirror. The dim, unstable and split field of vision generated by this technology significantly troubles the “spatial and temporal continuum” characteristic of the picturesque mode attributed to Catherwood’s illustrations by Roberts.\textsuperscript{217} To be sure, Stephens’s two-volume publication includes some views matching Roberts’s description, but most of these represent colonial spaces dominated by European architecture (e.g., “Great Square of Antigua Guatemala,” “Plaza at Quezaltenango”), with only a handful showing Mayan ruins (e.g., “Palace at Palenque,” “Nunnery and House of the Dwarf at Uxmal”). In any event, Stephens’s narrative leaves little room for doubt that it was not in fact “the ruins” that “proved challenging to discern,”\textsuperscript{218} so much as the single artefacts, and, especially, undeciphered hieroglyphs, that dominate the resulting list of figures, and which were granted less artistic license by Catherwood:\textsuperscript{219}

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\begin{enumerate}
\item For a definitive survey of nineteenth-century norms of scientific representation, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Gallison, \textit{Objectivity} (New York: Zone Books, 2007).
\item Stephens, \textit{Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, & Yucatan}, Vol. 1, 137.
\item Roberts, “Landscapes of Indifference,” 549.
\item Roberts, “Landscapes of Indifference,” 545.
\item Stephens describes quite different challenges than those associated with generating a picturesque view in his account of preparing artefacts for Catherwood’s pencil: “As at Copán, it was my business to prepare the different objects for Mr. Catherwood to draw. Many of the stones had to be scrubbed and cleaned; and, as it was our object to have the utmost possible accuracy in the drawings, in many places scaffolds had to be
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
As we feared, the designs were so intricate and complicated, the subjects so entirely new and unintelligible that [Catherwood] was having great difficulty in drawing. He had made several attempts both with the camera lucida and without, but failed to satisfy himself or even me, who was less severe in criticism. The idol seemed to defy his art …

Roberts problematically interprets Smithson’s Mirror Displacements, in their “present[ation of] two pictures simultaneously” (earth and sky), as mobilizing the self-cancelling mirror images generated by his earlier *Enantiomorphic Chambers* (1964) to restage the divided visual field of the indigenous *strabismus*-sufferer. For Roberts, Smithson’s interventions thereby amount to a defiant “recognition of the recalcitrance of the colonized Other” that literally undoes the picturesque suture allegedly effected by Catherwood and Stephens (as well as their surgeon co-traveller, Dr. Samuel Cabot).

Roberts misses the more immediate target of Smithson’s critique: Cartesian optics. His use of mirrors and photography incisively repurposes the constituent technologies harnessed by Catherwood’s engravings (the half-silvered mirror of the camera lucida and technologies of mechanical reproduction) to visualize a Berkeleian alternative to the latter’s rationalist optics.

Smithson’s comments reveal an acute awareness of the dialectic of enfleshed experience and disembodied abstraction navigated by his Sites and Nonsites, as well as

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221 Roberts, “Landscapes of Indifference,” 556.

the medial position occupied by his photography and photo-essays. “For the mirror pieces,” he states in a 1970 interview with Paul Toner, “there is no audience, yet if the work is strong enough, and photographed properly, it is fed back into a mass distribution situation. There is a generative aspect to that. It defeats the idea of exhibition entirely.”

Photography here bridges the circuit between the artist’s on-site activity and audience reception of the work. Earlier in the same interview, Smithson traces the emergence of this eminently cybernetic approach to dissemination to his unrealized proposal for a closed-circuit television system that would have relayed images of earthworks to be sited at the periphery of the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport to a central terminal as a form of “information feedback.” In the feedback loop sketched by this proposal, photography functions as a highly ambivalent relay. Smithson’s photo-essays similarly withhold unmediated access to his Mirror Displacements, as he well understood. “If you take a photograph of it, you arrest the process,” he clarified in the Toner interview; “The process is not continuous, it is discontinuous, at least in terms of the record of the process.”

To understand just what it is that the photograph disrupts, let us return now to the Mirror Displacements themselves.

Rather than the “double seeing” of strabismus that Roberts reads into the Mirror Displacements, the “broken geometry” of their grid-like arrays—which, according to the artist, “followed the irregular contours of the ground”—is properly conceived of as intervening within the rational grid of Cartesian optics. The Mirrors embody a

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227 Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 121.
Bergsonian aspiration to “escape the grip of a spatial logic” paradoxically derived, in part, from a reading of the anti-Bergsonian Lewis. That is the meaning of Smithson’s incantatory invocations of the non-rational, “surd-” character of the Mirror Displacements: the blue sky reflected by his mirrored configurations indirectly reprising the irrational vision of pure “light and colours” described by Berkeley—a constant point of reference for Lewis’s _Time and Western Man_. The Mirror Displacements’ Berkeleian referent also suggests an important revision to Robert Linsley’s interpretation of this series. Where Linsley reads the horizontal format and material excess of Smithson’s partially-buried mirrors as enacting a parodic, para-painterly dialogue with the drip and stain canvases of Morris Louis and Jackson Pollock vaunted by Fried’s “optical” criticism, Berkeley’s theory of vision directly counters the Cartesian notion that, “external objects are *painted* on the retina or fund of the eye” by optical rays. What Berkeley substitutes for this painterly paradigm is a simulacral conception of the optical sign, which, in turn, we can also recognize in the photo-mechanical products of Smithson’s optical investigations.

In Berkeley’s model, images in the eye are understood to be “pictures or copies, whereof the archetypes are not things existing without,” but, rather, “… the originals or true things themselves.” Arsić clarifies that the objects of Berkeley’s simulacral vision “are not projections at all—pictures are not copies. … They do not have a model outside themselves.” The copies without models of Berkeleian sight are simulacra instantiating

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228 Guerlac, _Thinking in Time_, 5.
232 Arsić, _The Passive Eye_, 54.
a mode of “presentation without representation” characteristic of empiricist ontologies. Similarly, the “visible blindness” invoked by Smithson’s enantiomorphic meditations on sight in the “Yucatan” essay conjure a Berkeleian (and Lewisian) “Sight turned away from its own looking … .” Like Berkeley’s anti-Cartesian vision, Smithson’s simulacral mirrors take aim at rational systems of representation and the informational status attributed to documentation by positivist epistemologies. In contrast to the reversing lenses of the camera lucida deployed by Catherwood, Smithson’s mirrors do not “correct” the image that they reflect, since, like the unmediated Berkeleian “picture” of pure colour, they do not operate according to the rational geometry of Cartesian optics or its representational logic.

What then to make of Smithson’s claim that, “the camera is a mechanism—a Cartesian eye”? To what ends does he deploy this device that “squares everything” in the service of a critique directed at the very rationalist systems which photography is conventionally seen to be the technical embodiment? “Always caught between [the] two worlds” of his dialectic, Smithson incorporates photo-documentation into his Yucatán installations in order to infect the representational apparatus of rationalism from within. The resulting photo-essay is a travesty of Catherwood’s positivist documents that recalls the “mirror-world” of scientific realism invoked by Lewis in the concluding

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236 Smithson, “…The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master,” 255. Compare Smithson’s description with the governing metaphor of Lippard’s “photographic” novel, *I See/You Mean*: “A book’s like a camera. You load, focus, take, develop. The original camera obscura was a dark room, a good metaphor for the mind … .” Lippard, *I See/You Mean*, 52.
237 Smithson, “Fragments of a Conversation,” 188.
paragraphs of *Time and Western Man*, a text likewise structured by a series of conscious oppositions, and unconscious conflations, of the image-matter of Bergson and the simulacral “pictures” of Berkeley. As Smithson subsequently clarified his dualist strategy in a posthumously published interview with Dennis Wheeler, “it’s a matter of wrestling with those material properties and at the same time with the mental experiences … a matter of setting up correspondences, where you see something that’s very material but at the same time it somehow is absorbed into abstraction. So that at first you see it then you don’t. It’s a kind of camera obscura.” Perception and photography are central to Smithson’s reactivation and reworking of Lewis’s bi-polar apparatus, which, as Campbell underlines, is itself “a sort of mirror image of Bergson’s [philosophical position].” Berkeley’s transcendental empiricism emerges from this reassessment as a mirror within the Lewisian mirror-world refracted by Smithson’s Yucatán scanning record.

Mirroring Lewis’s subterranean reworking of *Matter and Memory*, Smithson’s photo-documentation effects a strategic “de-organicization” of the Bergsonian image-matter reflected by his Mirror Displacements. This operation can be traced to the “passivity” attributed to sensation in Berkeleian ontology, which generates an “exhausted world” of simulacral percepts. The irony of Lewis’s strategy, and of Smithson’s critique of systems organismism mounted in its wake, is that, as Dorothea Olkowski has shown,
Bergson’s image-matter likewise derived from a reading of Berkeley.244 Olkowski notes that Bergson recognized in Berkeley “an image of God expressing himself (sic) through matter.”245 But Bergson transformed the Anglo-Irish philosopher’s passive percept and “exhausted subjectivity” into the support for a practical intelligence directed toward action.246 In a reversal of Bergson’s gesture, it is this very activity that Lewis drains from Bergsonian image-matter, restoring a Berkeleian passivity in its place.

Lewis originally sketched the critique of fashion and the Bergsonian metaphysics of “creativity” enacted by the protagonists of The Apes of God in a manuscript entitled “Joint” (ca. 1921-22), in which the eponymous character appears only through the descriptions of his mentor, Bully.247 The multiple hierarchies, or “husks,” of the enduring Hindu self inspired this decentred identity, which Edwards likens to a “‘Chinese box’ effect.”248 “The ‘god’ of this particular universe,” writes Edwards, “is therefore Lewis himself, and the characters would be the embodiments of all those psychic and physical identities provided by natural and cultural evolution which he, ideally indeterminate

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244 See Dorothea Orlowski, Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation (Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1999), 91-92. See also Bergson, Matter and Memory, 10-11, 214-15.
245 Orlowski, Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation, 92. There is a striking resemblance between the image-matter of Bergsonian memory and Berkeley’s picture of a “mind that is not different from sensations.” Arsić, The Passive Eye, 121.
246 Arsić, The Passive Eye, xi; see also Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 7.
248 Edwards, Wyndham Lewis, 320. The Chinese box effect of “Joint” remains a recurring motif in Lewis’s writings long after The Apes of God. The following description of the room at the Hotel Blundell occupied by the protagonist of Self Condemned during his self-imposed exile in the Canadian city of Momaco (a barely concealed, fictionalized description of the Lewises lodgings in World War 2 Toronto) being one of the more memorable examples: “The Hotel in which they lived was surrounded by the District, which was surrounded by the rest of the City, which was surrounded by the Province, which was surrounded by the Nation, which was a part of the Continent. The North American continent, like the Chinese toy of box within box within box. And these boxes were all of a piece, all cut out of the same stuff. They were part of the same organism. Their cells would have the same response to a given stimulus. And of these diminishing compartments the ROOM was the ultimate one, which they inhabited.” Lewis, Self Condemned, 189, emphasis in the original. Smithson appears to ventriloquize Lewis in a 1969 interview with P.A. Norvel, in which he likens his nonsites to “rooms within rooms.” Smithson, “Fragments of an Interview with P.A. [Patsy] Norvell,” 193.
himself, can imagine as possible for himself.” But when placed within this genealogy of transcendental empiricism, the clichés embodied by Lewis’s *dramatis personae* of “walking ideas” are seen to inhabit the same simulacral world as the “archetypes” of Berkeleian passive perception, or, for that matter, the image-matter of Bergsonian ontology. Where they—and the Lewisian practices of simulacral seeing redeployed by Smithson—depart from the ontology of Bergson is in their deliberate divestiture of the potency invested by Bergsonian ontology in action, creation, and novelty.

A brief comparison of the scanning record generated by Smithson’s *Glue Pour* and the N.E. Thing Co.’s *A Portfolio of Piles* (which Smithson referenced in his “A Sedimentation of the Mind” essay) will elucidate this distinction between the passive percept of Berkeley-Lewis and the active image of Bergson (and, by implication, McLuhan’s “effective” media). The scanning record for *Glue Pour* preserved today with Smithson’s papers at the Smithsonian depicts a branching sequence of boxes matching the artist’s statement that, “Photography squares everything.” By contrast, *A Portfolio of Piles*, as Smithson himself wrote, brings into representation an “anthropomorphic” view of matter (as the product of human agency) implicitly derived from McLuhan’s (neo-Bergsonian) “extensions” thesis.

Where the Molesian or neo-Thomist “forms” scanned by NETCO correspond to McLuhan’s Bergson-derived notion of media as inextricably entangled in the pragmatic

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251 Smithson, “Fragments of a Conversation,” 188.
252 Smithson, “A Sedimentation of the Mind,” 102. Despite the derogatory imputation of Smithson’s allusion to McLuhan in reference to NETCO, the artist’s writing frequently paraphrase the Toronto School thinker: “Perhaps ever since the invention of the photograph,” states Smithson in his interview with Patsy Norvell, “we have seen the world through photographs and not the other way around.” Smithson, “Fragments of an Interview with P.A. [Patsy] Norvell,” 193.
“problems” generated by the evolutionary imperative,\textsuperscript{253} the grid-like arrangement of
“squares” in Smithson’s diagram parodies the map-like abstraction, and de-
organiztion, imposed by photography’s documentation of sight: “a photograph acts as
a kind of map,” as Smithson stated in his 1971 interview with Gregoire Müller.\textsuperscript{254} In
addition to “locating” the work as a site/sight,\textsuperscript{255} the map-like function of photography
introduces an element of Lewisian abstraction, and Berkeleian passivity, at the same time
that the simulacral percept infects and distorts the resulting image.

Nevertheless, the unprecedented complexity of the \textit{Glue Pour} scanning record noted
by Arnold, and, in particular, its implied mapping of the activities of a human agent, or
more likely multiple agents, may register the indirect influence of NETCO’s McLuhan-
but also Moles-derived photoconceptual practice, via Smithson’s intensive conversations
with Wheeler, a former student of the Molesian Baxter and the reputed draughtsman of
the scanning record (Moles’s reconceptualization of the artist as a “receptor” suggests a
possible point of continuity between the posthumanist threads in NETCO’s and
Smithson’s photographic methodologies, notwithstanding the latter’s dismissive
characterization of the former as “anthropocentric”).\textsuperscript{256} For both NETCO and Smithson,
photography functions as a form of non-linguistic “designation.”\textsuperscript{257} But distinguishing his
simulacral practice from that of NETCO, Smithson stated that, “I don’t simply pile things
up. The shape imposed is a three-dimensional map. The non-sites incorporate not just the

\textsuperscript{253} Moles, \textit{Information Theory and Esthetic Perception}, 65. For McLuhan’s relationship to Bergson, see
\textsuperscript{254} Smithson, “…The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master,” 254.
\textsuperscript{255} Smithson, “…The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master,” 254.
\textsuperscript{256} See Lauder, “\textit{Glue Pour}, 1970,” 92.
\textsuperscript{257} Smithson, “Fragments of a Conversation,” 189. In NETCO’s case, the notion of designation can be
traced to the writings of Alan Watts, whereas for Smithson, “The photograph is a way of focusing on the
abstract aspects, but the raw material aspects."\textsuperscript{258} Unlike NETCO’s \textit{ACT-ive} Portfolio, Smithson’s instrumental scanning record effects a Berkeleian devitalization and a Lewisian abstraction of the artist’s on-site perceptual actions. In the next section, I want to explore how Smithson’s “piles” operate materially and spatially in his similarly Lewisian earth maps.

**Imagined Geographies and Mad Maps**

What is brewing here is a dust-storm you understand or an event of no more importance—this is a very arid place, I try to make it a little juicy as you have often observed with displeasure, it is the Plain of Death and is full of an empty whirling underneath—its movements signify nothing: these myrmidons will whirl about and my particles there will agitate and collide, vortex within vortex, mine within thine, with a buzzing of meum and tuum, a fine angry senseless music, it will be an unintelligible beating of the air if we go on just as it will be if we do not.\textsuperscript{259}

[T]he best and the worst actions run together and surround one in the inertia of a whirlpool.\textsuperscript{260}

\textsuperscript{258} Smithson, “Interview with Robert Smithson,” 234.
\textsuperscript{259} Wyndham Lewis, \textit{The Childermass} (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928), 291.
Re-reading Smithson’s photo-documentation of the Mirror Displacements and scanning record for *Glue Pour* through the neo-Berkeleian and crypto-Bergsonian lens of Lewis yields a more complex and multivalent network of correspondences with the proto-photocritical practice of the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. than authorized by the narratives of De Baere/Roelstraete/Watson. The Lewisian dualisms rehearsed by the system of “information feedback” instituted by Smithson between a concrete, but immaterial vision and abstracting documentary protocols suggest further parallels with the McLuhan-derived polarities structuring NETCO’s practices of designation, notably its differentiation between ACTs and ARTs. These correspondences are explained by Lewis’s impact on McLuhan as well as their mutual participation in a tradition of transcendental empiricism with Epicurean and Stoic foundations.262

A lesser-known Lewis text, *Filibusters in Barbary*—an account of the British artist-author’s 1931 fieldwork in Morocco in preparation for his Persian-set novel, *Snooty Baronet*—provides an unlikely key to Smithson’s Vancouver sojourn as a whole, and to the pivotal status of his unrealized *Island of Broken Glass* in particular. Besides *Time and Western Man*, Smithson’s library contained a second volume of Lewis’s writings: a 1966 anthology published by Signet that includes two extracts from his Moroccan travelogue.263 Written in the immediate aftermath of Lewis’s disastrous commentary on recent developments in Nazi Berlin, David Farley describes *Filibusters in Barbary* as “navigat[ing] a complicated course between cultural critique, polemic, and parody” that

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simultaneously mounts an improbable search for “the outlines of a revivified West” in the heterogeneous composition of Moroccan colonial society. In contrast to Hitler’s nostalgic appeal to a mythical Roman and Teutonic past, Lewis believed he recognized in Morocco a spatial alternative to the time-obsessed culture of contemporary Europe matching his own earlier prescriptions in *Time and Western Man*.

Deploying the same “satiric” techniques as *The Apes of God*, Lewis’s eccentric travelogue is structured by a familiar series of “stark dichotomies.” Farley seizes upon SueEllen Campbell’s nuanced reading of the fraught dynamics of Lewis’s dualisms to interpret the satire of *Filibusters in Barbary* as articulating “a momentary failure of satire itself” that opens onto the possibility of an “almost utopian internationalism.” I want to propose that Smithson retraces Lewis’s transit between satirical travelogue and utopia in the earth maps: physical materializations of hypothetical continents, of which Smithson’s *Island of Broken Glass* was to be the most ambitious instantiation.

The proto-postmodern irony of *Filibusters in Barbary* suggests a previously overlooked model for Smithson’s own self-conscious travelogue, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan.” Like Lewis’s text, Smithson’s photo-essay satirizes the travel genre from within: exploding the imperialism and positivism of its host text, John Lloyd Stephen’s *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, & Yucatan*, through a calculated travesty of the visual norms of the picturesque as well as scientific systems of representation. But it is Lewis’s tenuous, and ultimately failed, dialectic of space and

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267 See Lauder, “Glue Pour, 1970,”
268 Farley notes that, “Lewis’s satire, couched in the innocuous form of a travel book, is directed as much against … Romantic portrayals of the East and the packaging of exotic experience as it is against the crooked operation of French colonial government.” Farley, *Modernist Travel Writing*, 103.
time that furnishes Smithson with the structuring polarities of the “Yucatan” essay as well as the earth maps that it brought into representation for the first time.

For Lewis, the Western fascination with alterity symptomatizes a time-obsessed, historical imaginary. Elaborating an ideology critique anticipating Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Lewis argued that the “exotic” Other is set apart by European observers more through the imposition of a mythical *time* than through any geographic distance. In addition to satirizing the romantic conventions of travel literature, Lewis’s facetious report of “first-class ‘Islamic sensation[s]’” exuded by the historic Moroccan settlement of Tlemcen is a recognizable product of Lewis’s critique of the “triumph of history over the eyes.”

Much as Roberts interprets Smithson’s “Yucatan” essay as participating in a “broader cultural project of de-historicizing the ancient Maya,” even as its Mirror Displacements staged a resistance of the colonized gaze, Farley observes that Lewis’s text enacts a similarly ambivalent dynamic. Satirically inverting the travel genre’s conventional emphasis on history, Lewis’s spatial enterprise is perpetually in danger of merging with its historiographic Other.

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269 See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr., New York: Vintage, 2003). Lewis strikingly anticipates Said’s post-colonial deconstruction of race and orientalist tropes in such passages of *Filibusters in Barbary* as the following: “When Mr. Cunningham Graham tells you, in the manner more or less that just now I have employed above, how mere Berbers, Caïds, ‘native’ Agents, Jews or Turks tended to put obstacles in his way—why, you believe him at once! Why not! Was not he in a wild land? In dealing with ‘natives’ one must expect both ferocious obtrusiveness and contemptible deceit! Well, I tell you that Britons are just as bad as Berbers, and their personnel of mulatto Americans and ‘Serbians’ hidden behind smoked glasses (quite according to Film canons)—why they are as bad as scheming Oriental Caïds and Congo ‘Chamberlains.’ After all, why not? Why should not the poor Briton have his schemings? Is not the European capable of plots? But there is a law, an unwritten law, perhaps, and it is this. Nothing proper to Chicago can happen in London: all ‘Orientals’ (it is in their nature) are mysteriously obstructive and untruthful! Britons never! To tell about your adventures among Europeans in the same tone you would use for adventures among ‘Orientals’—that is absurd—I have offended.” Wyndham Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, ed. C.J. Fox (1932; repr., Santa Barbara, CA: Black Sparrow, 1983), 128, emphasis in the original.


Lewis’s self-deprecating self-portrait as the proverbial “well-informed traveler” situates the artist-author in the same precarious position as the historically minded tourist who “see[s] too much, and much that is not there at all.”\footnote{Lewis, \textit{A Soldier of Humor and Selected Writings}, 427, 430.} Exaggerating this threat of touristic learning for comedic effect, Lewis states facetiously that, “the name of the first king [of the Abdenwedite dynasty], Yarmorasen, I knew as well as I knew my own.”\footnote{Lewis, \textit{A Soldier of Humor and Selected Writings}, 428.} Notwithstanding the characteristically supercilious tone of this passage, “Lewis,” argues Farley, “finds himself struggling to contain the very notion of history that has been let loose in the modern world.”\footnote{Farley, \textit{Modernist Travel Writing}, 128.} We find Lewis alternately affirming and disavowing the virtues of history as he weaves a satiric circuit between earnest reportage and irony, as in the following passage from the Tlemcen section of \textit{Filibusters in Barbary}: 

\begin{quote}
[Y]ou must have a good smattering of the history of Morocco, or more properly of Maghreb, to be able to breathe its balmy citron-scented air intelligently—in addition to staring at its storks’ nests at the top of all its minarets, and remaining open-mouthed in front of its fondouks and synagogues.

Often in the past I have stared stupidly at vast systems of machinery—in factories and powerhouses—for many minutes, until I got too hot or I was moved on, without having the least idea what these monstrous concatenations of steel might be for. A city and its history are the same as that. Wherever you get people you get this: it is all meaningless and really rather silly unless you know what it’s all about.

There is an opposite difficulty of course: namely, when people know what a
thing signifies historically … 275

Smithson’s “Yucatan” text is similarly structured by unresolved tensions between the delirium of present perception and the artist-narrator’s surfeit of historical information, much of it of comparably dubious derivation. Drawing on an ingeniously eclectic bibliography of tourist guides, popular histories of the Maya, geology manuals, and Plato’s *Timaeus*, Smithson elaborates an anti-academic discourse that troubles the truth claims of conventional reference works (chief among them, the travel book as first-person, historical non-fiction). More than a challenge to the epistemological integrity of information media, Smithson’s mongrel text follows Lewis’s example in collapsing the linear trajectory of historicism into a spatial mosaic of simultaneous times. In Lewis’s account, modern factories, in which the sound of child labourers manufacturing rugs resembles the scratching of a “gramophone,” stand side by side the “delightful deformities and structural freaks” of Tlemcen’s ancient bazaar. 276 In thus juxtaposing the “stark geometry of the Machine Age” with the “vast, non-human lines of nature” evoked by the non-rational spaces of Moroccan architecture, 277 Lewis thereby conjures what Bergson would term a “spatialized time” in which past and present coexist in a paradoxical state of archaic futurity. 278

Lewis’s conflation of historic architecture, geology and history in his Moroccan travelogue discovers a precedent in his earlier painting *Bagdad* (1927-28) (Fig. 54), whose intercalation of architectural and geological elements anticipates Smithson’s earth

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maps in its allusion to, and satirical concretion of, the virtual strata of Bergson’s influential cone of memory.  

Farley highlights the incongruities generated by this anachronistic montage: “Lewis’s contradictory pronouncements on history in this section, and his ambiguous call for the need of a ‘smattering’ of it, reveal the fissures in Filibusters that emerge from the conjoining of modernist style and politically engaged travel book.” In a section of Filibusters in Barbary that immediately follows the excerpt in the Signet anthology owned by Smithson, Lewis brings this impossible temporality into lucid representation, by drawing an analogy between the Moroccan Kasbah, or citadel, and “the appeal of the swarming skyscraper.” Lewis’s polemical conflation of ancient and modern architecture in Filibusters in Barbary suggests a precedent for the knowing anachronism of Smithson’s essay on 1930s Mayan Deco, “Ultramoderne,” as well as the time-travelling analogies subsequently mobilized by “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan.” Where Lewis’s time-defying gaze spies skyscrapers in the Atlas mountains, Smithson and travel companions are addressed by, and play at being, Mayan (and, anachronistically, Aztec) gods: “In the rear-view mirror appeared Tezcatlipoca—demiurge of the ‘smoking-mirror.’ ‘All those guide books are of no use,’ said Tezcatlipoca. ‘You must travel at random, like the first Mayans; you risk getting lost in the thickets, but that is the only way to make art.’” Sounding more like Lewis’s Canadian disciple Marshall McLuhan than a Mayan god, the Tezcatlipoca that addresses

279 See Bergson, Matter and Memory, 152.
280 Farley, Modernist Travel Writing, 131.
281 Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 57. Lewis’s manuscript for a posthumously published companion volume to Filibusters in Barbary, Kasbahs and Souks, elaborates this “parallel to these contradictory sensations [produced by the Kasbah] … to be found in … New York skyscraper-architecture.” Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 214. “[A]s I have already said, the Atlas architecture reminded me more of New York City than of anything else.” Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 222.
282 Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 120.
Smithson in the metaphorical “rear-view mirror” echoes the signature prolepses and skepticism of reference works voiced by Lewis’s Moroccan travelogue.\(^\text{283}\)

Lewis’s dualistic juxtaposition of discrete spatialized times in *Filibusters in Barbary* pivots on a central dichotomy between urban and desert spaces: the labyrinthine *souk* and monumental Atlas *Kasbah* (a polarity he would develop further in “Kasbahs and Souks”).\(^\text{284}\) From this binary, Lewis attempts to distill a “nomadic” ideal from Morocco’s indigenous population,\(^\text{285}\) that he equates with the “political remedy for [a] troubled West”; according to Farley, was the true object of his travels in the North African colony.\(^\text{286}\) The nomadic virtues that Lewis projects onto the North African Berbers (which he contrasts to the “sedentary” vices he attributes to the denizens of the Moroccan *souk*),\(^\text{287}\) strikingly anticipates the idealized discourse on nomadism as an alternative to Western capitalism subsequently elaborated by the neo-Bergsonian Deleuze in collaboration with Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.\(^\text{288}\) Lewis’s dialectic of “Tent-versus-Oasis” also suggests parallels with the tensions between Site and Nonsite structuring Smithson’s Yucatán travelogue.\(^\text{289}\)

Lewis attempts to wrest from the nomads he observes in Morocco the exemplar of a post-national, “new West” capable of withstanding the threat of renewed hostilities then

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\(^{287}\) Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 208.

\(^{288}\) See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

menacing Europe. In fact, McLuhan’s metaphor of the *global village* and its vision of post-digital *retribalization*, which is usually traced to Lewis’s post-World War 2 text *America and Cosmic Man*, already finds a prototype in the cultural analyses of *Filibusters in Barbary*: “our civilization,” writes Lewis, “with the impetus given it by machines, is turning from the settled to the restless ideal—from ‘civilization’ to ‘savagery.’” In Lewis’s critical accounting, it is the European colonialist who has turned “barbarian”: the “filibusters” of his bantering title are the “empire-builder[s]” of the West, *not* the Berber “brigand of the Desert” of orientalist fantasy. “What is all white colonization however but brigandage?” queries Lewis with typical hyperbole.

More than simply a component part of Lewis’s surprising (because written by the recent author of *Hitler*) critique of race as an “abstraction,” his inversion of the conventional colonizer/colonized relation in *Filibusters in Barbary* sketches nothing less than a coming post-colonial order of global nomadism that sets the stage for the utopian geopolitics of McLuhan and, subsequently, of Deleuze and Guattari.

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290 Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, 382. “For ‘European civilization’ is no longer Roman, the Machine has no nationality, nor is it a matter of hemispheres … .” Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 74. Lewis speculates optimistically that, the “world … has out-grown war … .” Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 75.


293 “We are, of course, *nous autres Européens*, complete barbarians.” Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 213, emphasis in the original.


296 Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 143.
But, just as Roberts accuses Smithson of de-historicizing the Maya in the very act of deflecting the colonial “gaze” through the eccentric optics of his Mirror Displacements, Lewis imputes a lack of “history” to the North African nomads in whom he believes he has discovered the model for a post-historical West: “It seems the Berber of the Atlas has little idea of time,” he writes.\(^{297}\) Ironically, Lewis reprises the very Bergsonian vocabulary that he had hoped to displace in de-historicizing his Berber exemplars: “More than half of the Berber world is still in a state of nomadic flux,” he writes approvingly.\(^{298}\)

More consequential than his entanglement in these unresolved temporal conflicts, Lewis fails to identify a real space onto which he can map his nomadic subjects. More accurately, he misrecognizes his prized cartography in what Farley terms the “unreal space” traversed by pilots of the Aéropostale airmail service over the disputed desert territory of the Rio de Oro region.\(^{299}\) Farley underlines the apparent paradox of Lewis’s symbolic elevation of the celebrated French author and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, whose *Vol de nuit* recounts the exploits of Aéropostale air men,\(^{300}\) to the status of a Western “nomad,” given Lewis’s overall project of debunking the Romantic paraphernalia of the travel genre. Lewis writes:

> But now, higher even than the mountains, we have to take into our conspectus that new, very solitary, not by any means numerous, people, who for all practical purposes live in those superior altitudes. So, when we are speaking of the nomads of the Rio de Oro, the fact that there are other nomads higher up cannot be

\(^{297}\) Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 155.
\(^{298}\) Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 223, my emphasis.
\(^{299}\) Farley, *Modernist Travel Writing*, 141.
ignored.\textsuperscript{301}

It is, then, in the mirage-inducing regions of the Saharan atmosphere that Lewis improbably locates his vaunted spatial alternative to a time-obsessed interwar Europe:

On occasion \textit{the desert itself} levitates. It rises bodily into the air for thousands of feet—what is its maximum I do not know—and provides an almost solid surface, far above the inferior plane, as though to afford an absurdly physical basis for this merely metaphor of mine. It is the \textit{Sand-Wind}—that is what this agency is called.\textsuperscript{302}

Farley identifies Lewis’s description of the Sand-Wind with the spatial “agency” that is the purported object of his travels; the Saharan altitudes conveniently furnishing “a space that has no history.”\textsuperscript{303} In his conflation of the nomadic structures of spatiality practiced by the Berbers with a physical space, Lewis anticipates the “recent revalorization of non-Western mapping practices” in contemporary literature and literary theory analyzed by Peta Mitchell—from Borges to Deleuze and Guattari.\textsuperscript{304} Mitchell argues that this trend responds to a “nomadic imperative” which,\textsuperscript{305} in the words of Félix Guattari, generates “fluctuating maps” critical of the Cartesian optics and discourses of informational objectivity underwriting Western cartography.\textsuperscript{306} Anticipating the speculations of

\textsuperscript{301} Lewis, \textit{Journey into Barbary}, 170, emphasis in the original.
\textsuperscript{302} Lewis, \textit{Journey into Barbary}, 173, emphasis in the original.
\textsuperscript{303} Farley, \textit{Modernist Travel Writing}, 141.
\textsuperscript{304} Mitchell, \textit{Cartographic Strategies of Postmodernity}, 77.
\textsuperscript{305} Mitchell, \textit{Cartographic Strategies of Postmodernity}, 78.
Guattari and collaborator Deleuze on “nomadology”—their term for the non-rational spatiality pursued by the post-Cartesian subject—Lewis’s project of imaginative geography in *Filibusters in Barbary* can be seen to clear a path for Smithson’s earth maps in their appropriation and reworking of indigenous mapping practices that merge the mythic and the real.

Farley overlooks another dimension of Lewis’s text that, in turn, yields additional clues to the sources and meanings of Smithson’s earth maps; namely, Lewis’s identification of the illusory space of the Saharan Sand-Wind with the lost territory of Atlantis:

This artificial plain of torrid sand in-flight invariably moved *ocean-ward*. Often it would stretch out from the coast of the Rio de Oro over the Atlantic as far as the Canaries—re-establishing, in its semi-solid form, the land-bridge of the Lost Atlantis.307

In thus conflating the mirage-like space generated by the Sand-Wind with the mythic territory of Atlantis, Lewis attempts to impart an elusive materiality to his nomadic spatial ideal that is absent from Farley’s reading of it. In fact, Lewis’s references to Atlantis challenge the mythic status conventionally conferred on the island: “that there was once a land-bridge of some kind across the ocean to the shores of America is not disputed,” he contends in the unpublished *Kasbahs and Souks*.308 This claim echoes the

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307 Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 174-75, my emphasis. “It is a moving block of desert: and it is always moving out from the coasts of the Sahara over the Atlantic Ocean, which … not unlike itself, a fluid block, is superimposed upon the twilit depths of the submerged Atlantis.” Lewis, *Journey into Barbary*, 176.

theories of Ignatius Donnelly and other “historians” of Atlantis that pointed to the so-called “Dolphin’s Ridge” discovered by the nineteenth-century British deep-sea expedition Challenger as material proof of the submerged continent’s one-time existence.\(^{309}\) The British artist-author’s appeal to an Atlantean genealogy to endow his nomadic space with a concrete, if conveniently inaccessible, referent must also be situated within his problematic critique of colonialism and race. This Atlantean turn in Lewis’s nomadic discourse suggests a model for Smithson’s earth maps, which likewise allude to the mythical island as well as the parallel lost continent of the Pacific, Mu.\(^{310}\)

Crucially, Atlantis provides Lewis with an alternate genealogy for his idealized Berber nomads, whom he speculates to be descendants of the same “race” of “black Celts” as the modern-day inhabitants of Cornwall, Wales and Scotland, a hypothesis he derives from the writings of journalist Budgett Meakin:\(^{311}\) “there is a great deal of the ‘Celtic Twilight’ in [the Berbers’] most everyday habits,” writes Lewis in a fragment of Kasbahs and Souks; “ …indeed all that matchless air of infinite wandering indolence that reminds one of the cadences of Mr. Yates’s Wanderings of Oisin more than anything else: all that great unworldly air—it is characteristic of these people as it is of the more familiar ‘Celts’ … .”\(^{312}\) Whereas Lewis’s post-colonial critique takes aim elsewhere in Filibusters in Barbary at race as an ideological construct, in the passage above Lewis


\(^{310}\) See Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 131.

\(^{311}\) See Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 191. See also Budgett Meakin, The Moors (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902). Lewis also cites the nineteenth-century French nationalist historian Henri Martin (1810-1883) in support of a claimed common (“Celtic”) origin for the megaliths of North-Western Africa and the menhirs of Brittany as well as Stonehenge. See Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 197. Lewis’s Atlantean speculations suggest parallels with the subsequent imaginative archaeology practiced by the British surrealist Ithell Colquhoun (1906-88). See Mark S. Morrison, “Ithell Colquhoun and Occult Surrealism in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland,” Modernism/modernity 21, no. 3 (2014): 600-01.

\(^{312}\) Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 192. Lewis’s fascination with the “Celtic fringe” recalls the Celtic nationalism embraced earlier by Bergson-inspired Cubists such as Albert Gleizes. Edwards, Wyndham Lewis, 314; see also Antliff, Inventing Bergson, Chapter 4.
problematically seeks a genetic basis for undoing racial typologies. In part, this project focuses Lewis’s anxieties that his idealized Berber nomads could be confused with their Arab-Moroccan neighbours (with the “Semitic” origins of Arab people being his ultimate source of disquiet).313 “The Berber nature,” Lewis attempts to reassure his reader in Kasbahs and Souks, “is like the European nature.”314 In turning to Plato’s lost continent to explicate this shared “nature,” Lewis echoes the spurious racial theories endorsed by previous Atlantean theorists such as Churchward,315 while problematically laying the foundations of a projected post-nationalist future on the same troubling basis.

Although Smithson could not have been familiar with Lewis’s discussion of the “great submerged bridge across the Atlantic Ocean” as the explanation for dubious cultural correspondences between Mexico and Morocco (what Lewis termed “the Mexican illusion” in the until recently unpublished Kasbahs and Souks),316 Filibusters in Barbary, from which excerpts were reprinted in the Signet anthology included in the American artist’s personal library, already alluded to this “land-bridge,”317 thereby situating the “spatial” metaphors pursued by both authors squarely within the same Atlantean discourse network. (Although Smithson’s library does not include a copy of Filibusters in Barbary, that fact alone does not discount the possibility that he was familiar with this text by his favourite author in its entirety.) Smithson’s references to such “historians” of Atlantis and Mu as Ignatius Donnelly and Diego de Landa in the “Yucatan” essay echo

313 Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 191.
314 Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 211.
315 “Through Yucatan and the inland parts of Central America a white race predominated. They were called Mayas, and the white races of Europe, Asia Minor and northern Africa are easily traced from them.” James Churchward, The Lost Continent of Mu (1931; repr., New York: Paperback Library, 1968), 204.
316 Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 193, emphasis in the original.
317 Lewis, Journey into Barbary, 175.
Lewis’s mobilization of the lost continent to imagine a nomadic, post-nationalist world order.  

Lewis’s utopian discourse on Atlantis contextualizes Smithson’s earth maps as parallel attempts to visualize post-national space. A white limestone earth-map installed in a suburb of the Yucatán city of Uxmal, and discussed in “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” brings into representation the same themes as Lewis’s Moroccan travelogue. A ludicrous reconstruction of the Great Ice Cap of Gondwanaland—the southerly portion of the Pangea supercontinent that covered approximately one-fifth of earth’s surface between 300 and 180 million years ago—Smithson’s earth-map recalls Lewis’s Atlantean representations of global space in Filibusters in Barbary as well as Churchward’s discussion of Mu.

The location of Smithson’s Yucatán earth-map is not fortuitous. The Mayan Temple of Sacred Mysteries at Uxmal appears several times in Churchward’s The Lost Continent of Mu, to which Smithson refers in his “Yucatan” essay. Churchward claims that inscriptions on the walls of the Temple constitute “the most important records” of the lost continent (along with physical remains in the South Sea Islands). “[W]hatever we find there,” writes Churchward, “we know originated in Mu.” Churchward alleges that symbols carved at Uxmal “are duplicates of the symbols first used in the religious teachings of man,” and he improbably dates the Temple of Sacred Mysteries to before

319 See Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 121.
321 Churchward, The Lost Continent of Mu, 48.
322 Churchward, The Lost Continent of Mu, 66, emphasis in the original.
Smithson’s decision to site his earth-map of the prehistoric Gondwanaland at Uxmal suggests an informed intervention within Churchward’s speculative history of the lost Pacific supercontinent of Mu and its purported links with the Mayan ruins at Uxmal.

Smithson’s Uxmal installation is key to unraveling his utopian intentions for the unrealized Island of Broken Glass as a Lewisian exercise in imaginative geography paralleling McLuhan’s analogously Lewis-inspired vision of a global village. In an endnote to the “Yucatan” essay, Smithson writes that, “On a site in Loveladies, Long Beach Island, New Jersey a map of tons of clear broken glass will follow Mr. Scott-Elliott’s map of Atlantis. Other Maps of Broken Glass (Atlantis) will follow.” The Uxmal Gondwanaland installation stands at the head of this Atlantean series of projected earth maps, of which the unexecuted Miami Islet project would have been the most ambitious instantiation. Counter-intuitively, the projected site of the Canadian earth-map would have situated Island of Broken Glass squarely within the same mythic terrain mined by the Uxmal earth map. In fact, Churchward’s narrative of Mu makes several references to the indigenous peoples of British Columbia, and to Vancouver Island in particular.

In one extended passage, Churchward problematically interprets a Nootka tableau as symbolizing “Mu and her destruction.” In a troubling conflation of culturally- and historically-specific signifiers anticipating Smithson’s interpolation of Aztec gods into

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323 Churchward, The Lost Continent of Mu, 111, 225.
324 Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan,” 133n1.
325 See Churchward, The Lost Continent of Mu, 53-60, 96.
326 Churchward, The Lost Continent of Mu, 53.
his Mayan travelogue, Churchward reads a winged serpent depicted in the Nootka work as a representation of Quetzalcoatl, whose “double aspect” Smithson likewise invokes in his “Yucatan” essay as personifying the twined perception figured by his Mirror Displacements and dualist conceptual apparatus. The proposed locale of *Island of Broken Glass* would have held strong associations for Smithson with Churchward’s descriptions of Mu: the Pacific mirror-image of the lost Atlantic continent described by Plato.

Smithson’s interface with Churchward’s Mu via his unrealized proposal for Miami Islet underlines the critical orientation of his earth maps, which, like the postmodern cartographic fictions studied by Mitchell, set out to destabilize the Cartesian optics and discourse of objectivity mobilized by the “classical map.” “A map,” wrote Smithson, “is a mental system made out of grids, latitudes, and longitudes,” implicitly likening the abstraction of conventional maps to the ideal optics of formalist painting. If the Berkeleian mirage conjured by Lewis’s Atlantean Sand-Wind in *Filibusters in Barbary* suggests a prototype for the irrational optics brought into visibility by the unmanageable scale and unwieldy materials of Smithson’s earth maps, Churchward’s anti-academic methodology points to a model for the critique of scientific objectivity that they simultaneously articulate. Ann Reynolds notes that:

[Churchward] dispenses with all scholarly apparatus or local evidence to portray every ancient civilization, including the Maya of the Yucatan, as colonies of a master civilization . . . . with footnoted references to ‘various records,’ photographs derived exclusively from the popular press, and all other documentary images rendered by the author himself, Churchward makes assertions that are simultaneously as outrageous as they are irrefutable because of the general level on which they are made.  

Smithson’s appeal to Churchward’s dubious historiography via his earth maps (and to the equally questionable scholarship of Ignatius Donnelly, the author of a popular nineteenth-century study of Atlantis, which the he likewise cites in his “Yucatan” essay), enacts a calculated travesty of scholarly norms and of the linear temporality of historicism in particular, that recalls the anti-temporal stratagems of Lewis’s *Filibusters in Barbary*. As Reynolds proposes, Smithson’s dialogue with Churchward and Donnelly is properly situated within his exploration of what he termed, in true McLuhanite fashion, the “pre- and post-historic mind.”

The glass shards of Smithson’s *Loveladies Island of Broken Glass (Atlantis)* and proposed *Island of Broken Glass* on Miami Islet recall Churchward’s description of the “mass of records” upon which he claims to have based his conjectures. Churchward’s text opens with a description of the “fragments of a vast collection” of “ancient tablets in

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the secret archives” of an Indian temple that purportedly sparked his researches. These apocryphal archives strongly suggest metaphorical and physical analogies with the American artist’s broken glass earth maps. In particular, the shattered glass strata of Smithson’s Atlantean earth maps resemble lantern slides—a technology central to art historical pedagogies and historiography. This allusion intercalates an additional layer of reflexivity into the artist’s critique of informational media and discourses of objectivity.

Roberts’s post-colonial critique of Smithson’s Yucatán travelogue propagates a fundamental misreading of the artist’s interface with the Mayan ruins. Contrary to Roberts’s contention, Stephens did not claim that ancestors of the indigenous population that he and Catherwood encountered had constructed the ruins. Rather, as Ann Reynolds correctly summarizes the matter, Stephens departed from the Atlantean genealogies proposed by the likes of Churchward and Donnelly, arguing instead that, “the Mayan ruins then buried in the jungles of the Yucatan peninsula were evidence of a unique culture.” Smithson’s interface with Mayan architecture is properly located, then, not in narratives of indigenous degeneration—which Stephens’s text does not in fact perpetuate—but, rather, in his entropic representations of an unknown, and thus necessarily de-historicized, people:

There was no necessity for assigning to the ruined city an immense extent, or an

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336 Churchward, The Lost Continent of Mu, 10.
339 Reynolds, Robert Smithson, 176, my emphasis.
antiquity coeval with that of the Egyptians or any other ancient and known people. What we had before our eyes was grand, curious, and remarkable enough. Here were the remains of a cultivated, polished, and peculiar people, who had passed through all the stages incident to the rise and fall of nations; reached their golden age, and perished, entirely unknown. The links which connected them with the human family were severed and lost, and these were the only memorials of their footsteps upon earth. … In the midst of desolation and ruin we looked back to the past, cleared away the gloomy forest, and fancied every building perfect, with its terraces and pyramids, its sculptured and painted ornaments, grand, lofty, and imposing, and overlooking an immense inhabited plain. … In the romance of the world’s history nothing ever impressed me more forcibly than the spectacle of this once great and lovely city, overturned, desolate, and lost; discovered by accident, overgrown with trees for miles around, and without even a name to distinguish it. Apart from everything else, it was a mourning witness to the world’s mutations.

\[\textit{Nations melt}\]

\begin{quote}
\textit{From Power’s high pinnacle, when they have felt}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{The sunshine for a while, and downward go.}\footnote{Stephens,\textit{ Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, & Yucatan,} Vol. 2, 356-57, emphasis in the original.} \end{quote}

A 1972 slide lecture delivered by Smithson at the University of Utah describing, in a mock archaeological vocabulary, the contemporary architecture of the low-budget Hotel
Palenque where Smithson and his companions stayed during their Yucatán travels, reprised the de-historicized, entropic speculations of Stephens in this and similar passages from *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, & Yucatan*.341 The slide format adopted by Smithson’s intervention simultaneously alluded to the cartographies of broken glass staged by the earlier earth maps. In so doing, his talk staged a reverse and pointedly anti-academic “informationalization” of the earth maps.

More than a Lewisian critique of “history” and historicist method *tout court*, Smithson’s allusions to the imaginative geographies and critical geologies of Churchward and Donnelly echo Lewis’s evocations of Atlantis in *Filibusters in Barbary* as the paragon of a coming post-national society.342 Where Roberts interprets the Yucatán project as a “rebuttal to the political activism” of the artist’s peers in the AWC,343 Smithson’s earth maps, beginning with the Uxmal installation, can alternately be read as interveing within the politics of the Vietnam era to give shape to a Lewisian vision of post-national space. Nico Israel provocatively reads the figure of the helicopter brought into representation by the aerial gaze of Smithson’s subsequent *Spiral Jetty* film—which documents the construction of the earthwork that directly issued from the failed *Island of Broken Glass*—as an allusion to one of the ubiquitous technologies, and symbols, of the Vietnam War.344 Yet Smithson’s cinematic documentation of his most recognizable hypothetical continent projects, rather, a vision of lost, and perhaps future, global

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342 Churchward was highly critical of what he labeled “the myths of geology.” Churchward, *The Lost Continent of Mu*, 108. Sounding very much like the skeptical Smithson of later interviews, Churchward pronounced categorically that, “geology, as usual, is wrong.” Ibid. When asked in a 1970 interview whether he viewed scientific theories as “fiction,” Smithson similarly replied, “Yes. … I wrote an article recently entitled ‘Strata’ covering the Pre-cambrian to the Cretaceous periods. I dealt with that as a fiction.” Smithson, “Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson,” 248-49.
harmony redolent of the global village popularized by Lewis’s Canadian disciple, McLuhan. This is not the political apathy imputed by Roberts and Lippard before her, but rather a geo-aesthetics for the global village.

Smithson’s direct and indirect references to McLuhan remain an understudied dimension of his writings. His comments on the “obsolescence” of nature in a technological society, in particular, suggest the media analyst’s influence. For instance, in a symposium on art and politics, Smithson paraphrases McLuhan in stating that, “the media revealed the planet Earth to be a limited or closed system.” This allusion to McLuhan’s meditations on the artefactual condition of nature in the wake of new media—satellite technology in particular—suggests additional interpretive possibilities for Smithson’s earth maps.

The 1968 Art International essay, “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art”—a text that constitutes Smithson’s most extended discussion of mapping systems—proposes the following, presciently simulacral reading of nature: “Cinematic ‘appearance’ took over completely sometime in the late 50s. ‘Nature’ falls into an infinite series of movie ‘stills’—we get what Marshall McLuhan calls ‘The Reel World.’” Preceding a survey of recent artists’ projects incorporating cartographic techniques—from Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt to Jo Baer—this reference to McLuhan’s cinematic renderings of

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345 “Smithson was too much of a pragmatist to join in the orgies of rage and desperation in which some of us were passionately involved. He watched the AWC as a detached observer, too aware of our powerlessness to join in, and amused by the spectacle of all of us ‘idealists’ scrapping with each other.” Lippard, “Breaking Circles,” 36.

346 See, for instance, Smithson, Robert Smithson, 12, 18, 91, 101.


348 See McLuhan, “At the Moment of Sputnik the Planet became a Global Theater in which there are no Spectators but only Actors,” 48-58.

technological nature reinforces a Bergsonian reading of Smithson’s earth maps as satirizing “creative evolution.”

*Creative Evolution*—Bergson’s most popular text, and one that, as I have already shown, was key to Smithson’s thinking—famously compares the practical orientation of human knowledge to the mechanism of a “cinematograph,” which substitutes a discontinuous series of immobile “snapshots” for the fluid unfolding of *duration.* Duration is Bergson’s term for the non-rational temporality of embodied “becoming,” which he opposes to the falsely “spatialized time” mobilized by utilitarian *habit* and scientific method alike. While Bergson’s text explicitly critiques this mechanical conception of temporality endorsed by a pragmatic consciousness primarily concerned with *action*, Felicity Colman draws attention to Smithson’s comic inversion of the French thinker’s vitalistic remedy. Smithson’s hypostatization of Bergson’s ontology of flux is a highly calculated manoeuvre that intervenes within and revises Bergson’s theorization of the comic in his essay *Laughter.*

For Colman, Smithson’s tongue-in-cheek characterization of Minimalist sculpture as “solid-state hilarity” turns Bergson on his head as a satirical valorization of the very mechanical and material pole of human consciousness and activity denigrated by *Laughter.* This gesture in turn echoes Lewis’s earlier formulation of his own “external method” of Modernist representation as what he termed “non-moral” satire. “The root of the Comic,” Lewis speculates in an explicatory essay on his early fiction, “is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a

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351 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 363.
person.”  

As Ella Zohar Ophir writes, “[Lewis’s] *The Wild Body* is sometimes read as an ‘inverted’ or ‘black’ version of Bergsonian Cartesinanism—as a vision of humanity as essentially vegetable matter, with comedy erupting from its fitful and awkward leaps toward mind.” From this upending of Bergson’s formulation of the comic, Lewis derives a specifically antihumanist approach to abstraction and satire as, in the words of Emmett Stinson, “inhuman art.” In stark contrast to Jan Walsh Hokenson’s reading of Bergson’s theory of the comic as promoting a gentle corrective to mechanical aspects of behavior incompatible with social life, Lewis anti-vital aesthetics turns this conception inside out; in Stinson’s words, “Laughter steps outside the ego-body interaction to reveal the inherently absurd and comedic element of human existence. Laughter leaves us, momentarily, in the void at the centre of the vortex.” Echoes of Lewis can be heard in the punning paradoxes of McLuhan; the obsolescence of the globe itself being perhaps the most grandiose figure of his own distinctive brand of non-moral satire.

Smithson’s earth maps reprise McLuhan’s geoaesthetic transposition of the Bergsonian discourse of cinematic perception, staging a satirical variation on creative evolution closer in spirit to the antihumanist black comedy of Lewis. The second excerpt from Lewis’s *Filibusters in Barbary* reprinted in the Signet anthology owned by Smithson, which travesties Bergson’s cinematic gloss on evolution, may have provided a

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prototype for the parodic “cinematic atopia” staged by the earth maps.\textsuperscript{359} “Film Filibusters” chronicles Lewis’s interactions with the cast and crew of Rex Ingram’s 1931 film \textit{Love in Morocco} during his North African sojourn. Farley perceptively interprets Lewis’s depiction of “sham sheiks” as part of his broader critique of “Romantic portrayals of the East.”\textsuperscript{360} But Lewis’s satirical representation of the filmic apparatus itself as a “photographic sausage machine” suggests the possibility of an overlooked Bergsonian reading.\textsuperscript{361} Anatomizing the behaviours of his unwitting cinematic subjects with a mock-anthropological detachment worthy of his “Snooty” alter ego (whom he was in the process of crafting during his Moroccan travels), Lewis pointedly describes the comings and goings of the film company as following “an evolutionary pattern.”\textsuperscript{362} This characterization sets the stage for the ensuing allegory of creative evolution in reverse: a process of “\textit{degeneration}” yielding what Lewis labels,\textsuperscript{363} in a comic reversal of the Nietzschean “superman” forecast by Bergson as the eventual product of his ontology of perpetual creation,\textsuperscript{364} “the Untermensch.”\textsuperscript{365} For Lewis, the membership of the film company constitutes nothing less than “another species,”\textsuperscript{366} whose subaltern condition mocks the implicit progressivism of Bergson’s evolutionary paradigm.

Lewis’s satirical upending of Bergson’s rhetoric suggests a prototype for what Colman terms the “cinematographic devolution” staged by Smithson’s film projects.\textsuperscript{367} An allusion to Bergson’s filmic discourse is discernible in the artist’s Atlantean earth maps,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[360] Lewis, \textit{A Solider of Humour and Selected Writings}, 434; Farley, \textit{Modernist Travel Writing}, 103.
\item[361] Lewis, \textit{A Solider of Humour and Selected Writings}, 434.
\item[362] Lewis, \textit{A Solider of Humour and Selected Writings}, 438-39.
\item[363] Lewis, \textit{A Solider of Humour and Selected Writings}, 440, emphasis in the original.
\item[364] Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, 266.
\item[365] Lewis, \textit{A Solider of Humour and Selected Writings}, 440.
\item[366] Lewis, \textit{A Solider of Humour and Selected Writings}, 439.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
whose sheets of broken glass recall the French thinker’s description of the cinematographic space projected by the pragmatic intellect as “an arrangement like that of the pieces of glass that compose a kaleidoscopic picture.”368 Yet Smithson’s jagged piles of glass constitute a ludicrous “ha-ha-crystal” of practical reason indebted to the non-moral satire of Lewis’s cinematographic undoing of Bergsonian creative evolution in “Film Filibusters.”369 Rather than the “diagrammatic” character attributed to Smithson’s earthworks (and Spiral Jetty film) by George Baker, whose filmic yoking of Deleuze and Guattari is thoroughly neo-Bergsonian,370 the earth maps are more productively conceived of as staging a Lewisian devolution toward the “material unconscious” theorized by Bergson as an inhuman merger of perception with matter itself.371

The earth maps gesture facetiously toward the “universal memory” that Donnelly envisioned as the true legacy of Atlantis,372 in the process of constituting a parodic literalization of Bergsonian “Pure Memory”: an impossible-to-actualize condition of total recall divorced from the practical concerns of human perception (which, as Guerlac elucidates, filters sensory input to isolate objects of individual interest).373 Smithson’s ambition to generate “a vast reservoir of pure perception” through the cinematic atopia of

368 Bergson, Creative Evolution, 306.
371 Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 110.
372 Donnelly, Atlantis, 2.
373 Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 139.
Spiral Jetty extends the Lewisian satire of the earth maps. Its shattered glass strata can be read as literally cancelling—through material fragmentation—the informational content of map components included in earlier Nonsites and such sculptures as Glass Stratum (1967) and Mirror Stratum (1966) (Fig. 55). Ann Reynolds interprets the latter’s stacking forms as alluding to the glass plates deployed in military applications of aerial photography, which Smithson encountered while conducting research for the unrealized Dallas-Fort Worth airport project, introduced above.

Recalling Bergson’s analogy in Matter and Memory between “the work of adjustment” performed by memory in response to the appeal of present perception and “the focusing of a camera,” Smithson stated that, “Photographs are the most extreme contraction … ” Like the contraction of memory in the present brought into representation by Bergson’s celebrated figure of the “cone,” Smithson noted that “[photographs] reduce everything to a rectangle and shrink everything down.” As agglutinations, or “piles,” of such photographic materializations of perception, Smithson’s earth-maps discover an improbable precedent in the proto-earthwork, in the shape of the Great Lakes, that the chronophotographer Eadweard Muybridge was

374 Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia,” 141.
375 “Smithson made a few of these works by stacking pieces of mirrored glass of equivalent sizes and shapes, but he produced most of them by stacking or overlapping glass plates of incrementally smaller dimensions. The result visually evokes a cross-section of the strata of a contoured landscape at the same time that it suggests the stacking of glass negatives.” Reynolds, Robert Smithson, 141.
376 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 134.
378 See Bergson, Matter and Memory, 152.
purportedly digging in the backyard of his home at Kingston-upon-Thames at the time of his death.  

Like the passive perception theorized by Berkeley, Smithson’s earth amass “worn-out, ossified views” in the form of broken glass “strata” invoking, and pointedly voiding, the “informational” plates of aerial photography or the lantern slides of the art historian. Similarly recalling the simulacral “pictures” of Berkeley’s critical optics, Smithson’s shattered views are born in a state of “ruin.” As a result, “personal identity is destroyed,” as it is in Berkeley’s ghostly world, and replaced by a antihumanist perception that is in things. In this precise sense, Smithson’s Lewisian earth maps are “ruins in reverse.” This is not, in the first instance, due to the effects of any physical process of entropy, as is often assumed; but, rather, due to their satirical staging of an impossible immaterialism. Smithson ludicrously literalizes Bergson’s pure memory, inverting the corrective function of the philosopher’s theorization of the comic by massing a pure perception redolent of the passivity of Berkeleian vision.

The “contradictory view of things” staged by Smithson’s earth maps closely resembles the “concrete interaction” of matter and memory conceived by Bergson as the reconciliation of facile dualism in Matter and Memory. In the concluding chapter of that work, Bergson abandons the oppositions mobilized by his preceding arguments—

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382 Arsić, The Passive Eye, 104.
which the reader now recognizes as being of purely strategic value—to posit that matter and memory are not incompatible. The resulting concrete perception is the synthesis, or rapprochement, of these principles obtaining in the Real. Redeploying the universal memory invoked by Donnelly’s Atlantean speculations, Smithson’s earth maps give shape to the “universal becoming” envisioned by Bergson as the dynamic interaction of mind and matter. Through an irreverent détournement of the French thinker’s theory of the comic indebted to Lewis, Smithson redeployed brute materiality to effect an improbably dream-like disengagement from the practical interests of action.

Alluding to this non-rational state of “interplay,” and ventriloquizing Bergson’s Laughter, Smithson writes that, “we must not think of Laughter as a laughing matter, but rather as the ‘matter-of-laughs.’” The “back and forth rhythm” between matter and myth/memory enacted by Smithson’s earth maps thus mirrors the rhythms of Bergson’s “interactive dualism” as an auto-deconstruction of idealist and realist systems. The “concrete humour” of the earth maps thus lies in their deliberately ponderous actualization, and irreverent conflation, of the virtual functions of pure memory and pure perception—the (purely hypothetical) extreme poles of Bergsonian dualism.

This reassessment of Smithson’s earth maps in light of the satiric interface with Bergson staged by Lewis’s travel writings suggests new possibilities for comparative readings of his unrealized Island of Broken Glass with the features of Vancouver photo-conceptualism that the American artist’s presence on the West Coast reputedly

386 Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 150.
387 Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 172.
389 Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 166.
390 Smithson, “What is a Museum?,” 50.
stimulated. Mutual references to McLuhan suggest that the N.E. Thing Co. and Smithson participated in a common discourse network. The formative character of Smithson’s tenure as a “consultant” during his involvement in the Dallas-Fort Worth project suggests further parallels with the Vancouver company’s commercial frame.\textsuperscript{392} Ann Reynolds’s gloss on Smithson’s earth maps encourages comparisons with NETCO’s \textit{A Portfolio of Piles}, in particular, as parallel exercises in “designation”:

As photographed images—and that is the only way most individuals will ever perceive them since they were usually abandoned or destroyed after completion—these earth maps all look practically interchangeable as forms and certainly not much different from any other pile of shells, rocks, or glass found on any beach, near any ancient ruin or quarry, or in any junkyard. By designating his piles as three-dimensional maps of hypothetical continents, Smithson makes possible a similar designation for any pile of stuff, thus creating a syntactical chain or form-class through repetition.\textsuperscript{393}

As noted above, NETCO’s \textit{A Portfolio of Piles} preceded the cartographic “piles” of Smithson’s earth maps—a fact underlined by the American’s direct citation of the Vancouver company’s artist’s book in his seminal 1968 essay, “A Sedimentation of the Mind.” This sequence of events troubles the standard narrative of one-way influence imputed by De Baere/Roelstraete/Watson to Smithson (and Graham). More profoundly, it necessitates a renewed exploration of the divergent sources and meanings of the two


\textsuperscript{393} Reynolds, \textit{Robert Smithson}, 165.
artists’ practices of scanning, and of the earthworks executed in dialogue with discourses of perception and photography that they mobilized.

Whereas *A Portfolio of Piles* documents actions that the company would tautologically label *ACTs* (Aesthetically Claimed Things), Smithson’s piles give shape to the detached image-matter of Bergsonian ontology (as satirized by Lewis), or to the passive, ruined perception of Berkeley. In his textual contribution to *A Portfolio of Piles*, curator Kurt von Meier stressed the active orientation of NETCO’s designation practice: “There is no problem about a pile being a work of art—not since Marcel Duchamp. At least half the creative act is in the eye/mind of the perceiver/creator; art is not a *thing*—it is an event … .”  

The state of “inaction, or powerlessness” conjured by Smithson’s piles, by contrast, is commensurate with Bergson’s formulation of the *unconscious* as a dream-like state of disengagement from practical affairs, which the philosopher associated with the creative method of the artist. Yet in Smithson’s comically antihumanist rendition, this inactive or virtual state of the Bergsonian psyche returns as a highly calculated critique of the very organicism which Reinhold Martin alleges to be the repressed content of the artist’s crystalline rhetoric.

A primary target of Smithson’s critique is ecology, whose reversible conception of historical process he viewed as “imposing an abstraction” comparable to the Cartesian optics of classical cartography. By contrast, Iain Baxter, who had studied ecology as a zoology major at the University of Idaho, labeled NETCO’s more modest earthworks—

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for which the exhibits of *A Portfolio of Piles* could be seen as a form of field work—
“‘ecological’ projects.”

Lucy Lippard perceptively distinguished Iain Baxter’s action-based approach to
earthworks from Smithson’s passive outlook as reflecting competing views of ecology.
Her illuminating comparison of the two artists in a 1969 *artscanada* feature is worth
quoting at length:

Baxter’s optimistic embracing of the dynamics of rapid change is directly
opposed to Robert Smithson’s entropy or energy drain approach to earth, history
and time; in between the two are infinite differences of degree and sensibility.

(Smithson is from industrial New Jersey; Baxter from the rural West. There are
two schools or approaches to ecology, the first, associated with Europe, is called
‘static,’ and is attributed to Europe’s restricted areas of study, the long-
accomplished destruction or modification of natural communities; the second,
associated with America, is called ‘dynamic’ and is attributed to our remaining
vast areas where natural variation can be observed on a large scale and under a
variety of circumstances. A basic difference between Smithson and Baxter is
found in their reactions to space. Smithson contemplates finity; Baxter welcomes
infinity; Smithson’s ‘primordial ooze’ is deathlike but time defying; it traps but
preserves; Baxter’s art is fertile but ephemeral.)

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398 Lippard, “Art within the Arctic Circle,” 669; see also Fleming, *Baxter*, 90.
In Lippard’s illuminating reading, Baxter and Smithson harnessed ecology to radically different ends. In the wake of his Vancouver sojourn, and of the success of ecological activists in opposing his Island of Broken glass proposal, Smithson would increasingly identify ecology itself with the abstract, spatialized time critiqued by Bergson. In his 1972 report on the Spiral Jetty project—which, as Grant Arnold notes, grew directly out of his thwarted hopes for Island of Broken Glass—Smithson wrote that, “These fragments of a timeless geology laugh without mirth at the time-filled hopes of ecology.” Smithson laughs at the linear, spatialized time of ecology in the same spirit of non-moral satire that animates Lewis’s earlier, anti-Bergsonian, yet strangely Bergsonian, travelogue, Filibusters in Barbary. By contrast, NETCO’s ACT-ive earthworks and “piles” inhabit the world of Bergson’s intellect: the pragmatic world of the body and society. “NETCO’s work,” observed Marie Fleming, “is generally smaller-scaled in a vaster space, more humanized, without the mythic overtones or entropy associated with Smithson’s, existing rather in the temporal/spatial continuum of life.”

To some extent, the pragmatic orientation of NETCO’s scanning record in A Portfolio of Piles—conceived as a trigger for active perception—can be seen to correspond with the perceptual pole of Bergson’s strategic dualism—a perspective further coloured, in NETCO’s reception, by McLuhan’s “operative” approach to media derived, in turn, from

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400 Smithson’s comments in a 1970 interview with Paul Toner are characteristic of the artist’s conflation of ecology and millenarian anxieties with the “spiritual dread of space” that Wilhelm Worringer associated with the psychological urge to abstraction: “We are back to that state of fear again—we are frightened of what is out there—ecology is a withdrawal—people want to stop eating. They are afraid that the lettuce they are eating has feelings.” Smithson, “Interview with Robert Smithson,” 238; see also Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style, trans. Michael Bullock (1907; repr., Cleveland; New York: Meridian, 1967), 15.
403 Fleming, Baxter, 76.
modernists such as Lewis and Pound.\textsuperscript{404} By contrast, Smithson’s earth maps would seem to embody the disengaged dream state of Bergson’s pure memory, or material unconscious, albeit a comically hypostatized representation thereof inflected by the anti-Bergsonian tactics of Lewis. In fact, both artists can be seen to negotiate shared coordinates within a common discourse network defined by strategic dualisms of perception and memory. Although occupying opposite poles in this network, NETCO and Smithson can be recognized as defining two options within the Vancouver milieu circa 1969-70 that would reverberate in the subsequent development of photo-conceptualism: on one hand, an action-based practice aimed at augmenting the artist’s power to navigate the social (NETCO), and, on the other hand, an inactive, or passive form of aesthetic “memory” addressing a real duration putatively located beyond socially-sanctioned conventions of symbolization.

\textsuperscript{404} Lamberti, \textit{Marshall McLuhan’s Mosaic}, 137. Lamberti writes that, “[McLuhan’s] definition of the artist, in fact, stems from a solid conviction that the artist is a person who grasps the consequences of his observations and actions … .” Lamberti, \textit{Marshall McLuhan’s Mosaic}, 36.
“Information” emerges from this reassessment as a central feature of modernist and contemporary art practices implicated in a common English-Canadian discourse network organized around the co-shaping of bodies and computational media and techniques; a network extending beyond Canada’s territorial borders. The advertising writings of Canada’s first abstract artist, Bertram Brooker, explored census data and other statistical instruments as technologies of biopolitical administration and aesthetic expression. These investigations, in turn, likely informed the de-individuated bodies portrayed by his coeval semi-abstract canvases as well as the numeric motifs, and demographic rhetoric, deployed by his commercial designs. Brooker initiates the highly ambivalent discourse on information that characterized English-Canadian artists’ prescient engagements with the features of an emergent information society. Brooker seized upon the statistician’s toolbox as a resource in his efforts to articulate a qualitative “Humanics” as an alternative to dominant, mechanistic approaches to consumer psychology, even as the associationist and behaviorist frameworks that constituted the object of his critique drew upon the very same technologies of informationalization.

To some degree, these tensions point to a seeming contradiction in Brooker’s project: his artworks and writings effect a hypostatization of the subject through reduction to an informational pattern; a fact that would initially appear to compromise his qualitative and ontological claims. Yet, his adaptation of Bergsonian concepts to pragmatic problems in advertising, and in his innovative (in the Canadian context) abstractions, suggests a resolution of these competing investments. As John Mullarkey argues, Bergson’s
polarities are properly conceived of as defining a perpetual “process of dualization,” as opposed to any absolute or static opposition. Bergson’s critique of psychophysical techniques of quantification that reduce consciousness to a progression of discrete magnitudes in *Time and Free Will* represents the most extreme statement of what would evolve into a relational model of matter and memory in his subsequent writings.

In Chapter 1, I examined *Copy Technique in Advertising* as a paradigmatic expression of these tensions structuring Brooker’s approach to informatic media and techniques (in the case of *Copy Technique in Advertising*, decimal classification). On one hand, Brooker’s decision to organize his qualitative arguments through recourse to a quantitative strategy resembling Dewey’s decimal approach to knowledge representation would appear to betray his stated ambition of carrying out an oral and rhythmic renovation of conventional print advertising—a project of reform inspired by Bergsonian artists and authors. On the other hand, this very ambivalence can be recognized as “enacting” the dualisms of Bergsonian ontology through a hybridization of competing media that clears a path for Innis’s subsequent quest for a corrective “balance” of conflicting biases (oral/written).

A similar dynamic is legible in the earlier of Brooker’s pendant McGraw-Hill textbooks, *Layout Technique in Advertising*. If *Copy Technique in Advertising* is primarily concerned with the latent sonic properties of text, the earlier work is devoted to spatial problems involved in commercial design. *Layout Technique in Advertising*’s striking juxtaposition of advertisements and textual commentary suggests an alternative prototype for the “exhibits” of McLuhan’ *The Mechanical Bride* than the usually-cited

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2 Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 62, 64.
Culture and Environment, coauthored by the Toronto School analyst’s former Cambridge teacher F.R. Leavis with Denys Thompson, and Lewis’s Doom of Youth. Like its sequel, Layout Technique in Advertising discloses a Bergsonian attentiveness to the processual and time-based dimensions of printed communication. In one particularly instructive passage, Brooker praises the looping electric cord in an ad for Hoover vacuum cleaners (Fig. 56) for its capacity to evoke “‘events’ rather than ‘forms.’” For the artist-advertiser, the Hoover design epitomizes the potential for a static image to convey the dynamic qualities of “becoming” and “flux that Bergson counterposes to the “container” space of Classical Western metaphysics. But a paradox emerges (although Brooker does not address it) via the numbered bullet points, which are distributed to follow the curving line of the vacuum cord so as to evoke a clock face. In unresolved tension with Brooker’s Bergsonian reading of the vortical action set in motion by the electric cord, the ad’s copy conjures the linear clock time that the French thinker viewed as the very antithesis of the qualitative multiplicity of duration. This antagonism between non-rational process and informatic representation runs through the entirety of Layout Technique in Advertising—and, indeed, is a turbulent undercurrent of Brooker’s writings as a whole.

Brooker’s prescriptions for “dynamic design” adapt his own principles of “Dynamic Equilibrium,” a fusion of his youthful theory of gravitation with the Bergsonian design methodology advocated by the Mexican artist and educator Adolfo Best-Maugard in his

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3 Pressman, Digital Modernism, 40. See also Cavell, McLuhan in Space, 95-96; Lamberti, Marshall McLuhan’s Mosaic, 218; F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933); Wyndham Lewis, Doom of Youth (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932); Marchand, Marshall McLuhan, 39-40; Marchessault, Marshall McLuhan, 52-53; Willmott, McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse, 19.

4 Brooker [Surrey], Layout Technique in Advertising, 176.

5 Brooker [Surrey], Layout Technique in Advertising, vii, 38. “Dynamism, if we may coin such a word, in advertising layout technique, has been a favorite study of mine for several years, and has been in the back of my mind, as you will have suspected, through the opening chapters of this book.” Brooker [Surrey], Layout Technique in Advertising, 37.
1926 primer, *A Method for Creative Design*. An associate of Diego Rivera, Best-Maugard participated in the Parisian vogue for Bergson prior to World War I. In contrast to the classically-inspired system of proportions advocated by the contemporary, and today better-known, theory of “dynamic symmetry” propounded by the Canadian-born Jay Hambidge, Brooker took “living things as examples of temporary balance”:

A temporary balance in defiance of gravitational laws or whatever laws operate to bring an object or organism into a naturally balanced state of rest, always involves a struggle, an effort, an expenditure of energy above the ordinary.

Unnatural balance is dramatic. … Gravitation, indeed, governs the form of everything in the universe. Nothing that is permanently lopsided can continue to exist in living form in this universe … . … We pattern our creations in our own image.

If his own youthful speculations on physics provided a partial framework for this cosmological perspective on problems of dynamic equilibrium, the “simple rhythms or motifs” that Brooker presents as the formal embodiment of those principles were modeled on the “seven simple motifs and signs” upon which Best-Maugard based his

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7 Hambidge’s *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* was published in the same year as Best-Maugard’s textbook. Brooker’s theory of Dynamic Equilibrium is tacitly framed as a retort to Hambidge. See Jay Hambidge, *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry* (New York: Brentano’s, 1926).
8 Brooker [Surrey], *Layout Technique in Advertising*, 42, emphasis in the original. “If layout men, instead of attempting novelties and oddities purely for the sake of ‘being different,’ would select simple, life-like forms which have some subconscious associational value through their resemblance to natural objects, to say nothing of being more beautiful.” Brooker [Surrey], *Layout Technique in Advertising*, 42.
system of design: the Spiral, the Circle, the Half-circle, Two Half-circles, the Wavy line, a broken Zigzag line and the simple Straight line.\textsuperscript{10} Brooker argues that Best-Maugard’s “active and moving” motifs possess the “allure of the rugged, struggling, actively living and \textit{balancing} thing, as contrasted with the thing at rest, that make layouts more arresting and more akin to the strenuous, dynamic rhythm of life on this young continent.”\textsuperscript{11}

Based in part on an original study of the popular arts of Mexico,\textsuperscript{12} Best-Maugard’s textbook simultaneously delineates a sophisticated Bergsonian cosmogony. Its concluding chapter, “The Whirling Spiral,” posits an origin for the seven motifs explored in earlier sections as the products of nature and “collective popular expression,” in the “occult potentialities” immanent in matter itself (Fig. 57)—a proposition redolent of Brooker’s own monist physics (as well as Bergson’s vortical reworking of Lucretian atomism).\textsuperscript{13}

[W]e may consider the vortex or whirling-spiral motion of lines of force as the synthesis of such lines, through which are produced basically all forms of matter and diverse modes of motion from the simplest to the most complex. … The whirling vortex in all its dimensions is for us with our present limitations of thought an undefinable form. What we wish to express by the name is a

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\item[12] Best-Maugard’s historical framing of his pedagogical project recalls Bergson’s neo-Lamarckian paradigm in \textit{Creative Evolution}: “It is the intention of this method of teaching graphic art to return to the sources, to being with basic symbols, and little by little to establish in the mind of the student his own sense of, and his kinship with, these laws: he is the natural heir of all the stored wisdom accumulated in Time ….” Best-Maugard, \textit{A Method for Creative Design}, 106-07.
\item[13] Best-Maugard, \textit{A Method for Creative Design}, 109, 154. A similar monism emerges from Brooker’s account of his gravitational physics in the manuscript for \textit{Jevon}; namely, his declaration that, “all is One.” Bertram Brooker, “Plot,” \textit{Jevon}, August 18, 1925, box 3, folder 1, Bertram Brooker Papers, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, MB, 2.
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noumenon, a one thing, which, however, is indescribable since it is an infinite form, a cause, whereas we are able to describe only finite manifestations of phenomena within the limited sphere of our knowledge.14

Best-Maugard’s seven “motion-form[s]” represent retrospective crystallizations of this cosmic spiral's incessant emergence.15 His choice of vortical metaphor to describe this “undefinable” universal form recalls Bergson’s description of the ultimate, “imponderable” unit of matter in Creative Evolution as “a mere vortex.”16 Brooker’s portrayal of the “event” that he advised fellow commercial designers and copy writers to substitute for the “lifeless object” of conventional advertising copy as “a vortex or equilibrium” is likely traceable to this source via the Bergsonian pedagogy of Best-Maugard.17 If the graphic elements comprising Best-Maugard’s (and, by extension, Brooker’s) system of design bear a superficial resemblance to the features of a widespread “Zig Zag Moderne,” described by Roland Marchand as communicating “the vibrating rhythms of the machine in a style that combined simplicity and dynamism,”18 the Bergsonian cosmologies elaborated by the Mexican pedagogue and his Canadian disciple suggest a more far-reaching and, indeed, metaphysical purpose. Brooker’s advertising writings and graphic designs seized upon the Bergsonian physis informing

15 “[W]e will take very simple phenomena of the whirling spiral, so as to be able better to understand and study them, and see their relations to the phenomena of art. We will take one portion of it, a single point in motion in the whirling spiral, i.e., as if we were considering a particle of dust in a whirlwind. Following its passage, or orbit in space, we will find that it describes a whirling form of motion. If this motion-form could be crystallized so as to make it a form without motion, and its passage fixed, such a track would be a form similar to that of a curl-shaped spring. This curl will represent in space the solidification of the run of one point in the whirling spiral, the motion being thus, as it were, frozen.” Best-Maugard, A Method for Creative Design, 156, emphasis in the original.
16 Bergson, Creative Evolution, 8.
17 Brooker [Spane], “Visualize Events,” 161.
18 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 143.
Best-Maugard’s system in order to further his avowed ambition of “talking in cosmic terms.”

In following Best-Maugard’s example in deploying a diagrammatic vocabulary to represent “the entire universe as a flux of energy,” Brooker’s advertising writings become entangled in the central paradox of Bergson’s own hypostatization of duration through his figure of the “cone.” Paul Harris argues that Bergson’s influential diagram problematically “transpose[s] a virtual concept into an actualized symbolic entity.” We find Brooker falling into this same trap of unintended symbolization and consequent immobility through his reuse of a diagram developed by Otto Kleppner (Fig. 58), Advertising Manager at Prentice-Hall, to represent public perception of advertising as an “evolutionary process” consisting of cyclical phases. Kleppner portrays these evolutionary stages—which he labels “pioneering,” “competitive,” and “retentive”—as sections of an open spiral resembling the geometric “shape” of time brought into representation by Bergson’s cone and Best-Maugard’s “whirling spiral” alike. All three figures inadvertently reduce the processual ontologies extolled by their authors to documentary stasis. In Brooker’s own words, such graphic representations of temporality “reduce Time to the dimension of Space, … make it a pictorial and hence an instantaneous factor.” As Brooker would have recognized, Kleppner’s “Advertising ‘Spiral’” and similar diagrams commit the arch Bergsonian error of “think[ing] of the

20 Brooker [Spane], “Visualize Events,” 161.
coming year as so much space.” This unintended informationalization of durational “flux” recalls the contradictory mensuration of temporality effected by the clock-like copy of the Hoover ad analyzed by Brooker in Layout Technique in Advertising—whose dynamic imagery he praised, by contrast, for its evental qualities. These unresolved antagonisms resonate, in turn, with the earlier struggles of Cubist, Futurist and Rhythmist artists to naturalize symbolic representations of the Real through an appeal to Bergsonian ontology analyzed by Antliff.

Layout Technique in Advertising is replete with “diagrams” similarly caught between the dynamism of Bergsonian durée and the stasis of commoditized space. Chapter 2, “Division of Space,” reprises strategies elaborated in the pages of Marketing and Printers’ Ink for generating “vital and interesting” layout by suggesting a “struggle for equilibrium.” Brooker pursues his “dramatic” ideal—no doubt also inspired by Craig’s event-space—through a performative “Division of Space” redolent of Bergson’s virtual “motor diagram,” in which “ways are traced out for [the subject] in advance, along which [its] activity is to travel.” Layout Technique in Advertising adapts the kinaesthetic sketch modeled by Bergson’s subject in advance of motor activity to enliven representations of commercial trade characters: “The projected lines of its activity or movement,” Brooker speculates, “can often be made the basis of interesting space

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24 Brooker [Surrey], “Making ‘Time’ and Instantaneous Factor in Advertising,” 84.
25 See Antliff, Inventing Bergson.
26 Brooker [Surrey], Layout Technique in Advertising, 14.
28 Brooker [Surrey], Layout Technique in Advertising, 14, emphasis in the original.
29 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 111, emphasis in the original; see also Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “One Thousand Sources of Copy Ideas—V: Invite the Prospect to ‘Act’ In an Advertising Drama,” Marketing 24, no. 11 (1926): 368-70.
30 Brooker [Surrey], Layout Technique in Advertising, 11, emphasis in the original; Bergson, Laughter, 137.
divisions.”\textsuperscript{31} But even as the virtual “sketch” projected by the Bergsonian subject serves as Brooker’s unstated prototype,\textsuperscript{32} the Canadian artist-advertiser paradoxically applies the French thinker’s non-reductive “method of division” to monetize space itself: \textsuperscript{33} “Layout, in my view, should start from a single, unified idea, and should proceed by breaking down or dividing the idea into its components … .”\textsuperscript{34} In effect, Brooker appropriates Bergsonian intuition for the purpose of selling space to potential advertisers.

Brooker would repeatedly revisit the clock, or “pendulum,” motif found in the Hoover ad,\textsuperscript{35} in both graphic designs and works of visual art. A series of advertisements for \textit{The Globe} from 1928-1929 is particularly illustrative of the fraught relationship between durational sovereignty and informatic captivation that animates the arguments of \textit{Layout Technique in Advertising}. Brooker’s representations of stylized clock faces in this series embody his efforts to temporalize print advertising under the joint influence of Bergson’s critique of “spatialized time” and his own early advocacy of radio as an advertising medium.\textsuperscript{36} But his choice of a clock to give shape to Brooker’s time-based paradigm would seem ill chosen. Although one image in the series (Fig. 59),\textsuperscript{37} which portrays a dizzying assemblage of clocks displaying a multiplicity of numbering systems (both Arabic and Roman), is certainly evocative of the heterogeneity of Bergsonian duration, other images reinforce the linear and quantitative properties attributed to temporality by Newtonian mechanism, Platonic metaphysics and informational media alike.

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\item \textsuperscript{31} Brooker [Surrey], \textit{Layout Technique in Advertising}, 224.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Brooker [Surrey], \textit{Layout Technique in Advertising}, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{33} “Intuition as method is a method of division.” Deleuze, \textit{Bergsonism}, 22.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], “Layout and Copy—Being Twins—Should Be Born Together,” \textit{Marketing} 32, no. 10 (1930): 280.
\item \textsuperscript{35} See Brooker [Surrey], \textit{Layout Technique in Advertising}, 52-59.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, 363.
\item \textsuperscript{37} See The Globe [Bertram Brooker, designer], “Globe readers are leaders,” \textit{Marketing} 31, no. 5 (1929): 119.
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Subsequent citations of the clock motif in such late paintings by Brooker as *Shepherd’s Purse* (1950) and, especially, *Swing of Time* (1954) (Fig. 60) are more resolved in their evocations of the qualitative multiplicity of Bergsonian temporality. In their sheer diversity, the manifold instruments employed to measure the passage of time, which compete for the beholder’s attention in *Swing of Time* (bell, hourglass, clock, sundial), challenge the linearity and uniformity imputed to temporality by positivist systems of mensuration. Moreover, the animating device of the “pendulum” recalls Bergson’s analysis in *Time and Free Will* of the competing images of temporality conveyed by the “sixty oscillations” beat by a pendulum: that of “sixty points on a fixed line” (perception without succession), and that of “each permeating the other and organizing themselves like the notes of a tune” (“continuous multiplicity with no resemblance to number”).

Lacking the explicit commercial aim of the Hoover ad, with which its clock-like composition bears a striking resemblance, *Swing of Time* presents a considerably less conflicted image of Bergsonian duration. The corporeal connotations of the picture’s amorphous, flesh-toned ground as well as the manner in which the superimposed timepieces occupying the foreground appear to dissolve into that ground, reinforce an interpretation of the work as bringing into visibility the “inner multiplicity” that is Bergson’s principle image of duration in *Time and Free Will*—a book that Brooker annotated extensively.

Yet, as with Brooker’s earlier representation of multiple clock faces in his 1929 ad for *The Globe*, his deployment of timepieces to evoke qualitative multiplicity in *Swing of Time* remains fraught. Ultimately, Brooker’s assemblage endorses both images of

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39 Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 73.
temporality suggested by Bergson’s metaphor of the pendulum: the “pure heterogeneity” of embodied duration and the stasis of instrumental time.\(^{40}\) When situated within the arc of Brooker’s multidisciplinary career, however, the latter image is considerably strengthened through recognition of formal parallels between Swing of Time and the artist-advertiser’s earlier commercial designs (particularly for The Globe) as well as the anonymous advertisements that he carefully analyzed in his marketing writings.

The circular composition of Shepherd’s Purse and other late paintings roughly contemporaneous with Brooker’s execution of Swing of Time and concurrent preparation of the unpublished Bergsonian manuscript The Brave Voices, similarly drew upon his earlier efforts to visualize the qualitative multiplicity of duration in commercial designs. Only the “qualitative time” communicated by those earlier images is now rendered in literalist terms, as a wreath-like assemblage of floral motifs that, through the artist’s strategies of modernist reduction, ironically resembles a corporate logotype—an “informational” sign, degree zero.\(^{41}\) These diagrammatic compositions discover a precedent in the modernist geometry of Bergson’s cone of memory and vortex of Lewis and Pound (which Bergson’s diagram likely inspired), the latter being based, as well, on the eminently “informatic” form of a storm cone.\(^{42}\)

Brooker’s direct citations of Bergson’s Laughter in two advertising texts of the 1920s illuminate the persistent tensions between durational dynamism and informational rigidity that structure his output as a whole. In the earlier of the two pieces, written for Printers’ Ink, Brooker paradoxically adapts Bergson’s critical notion of the “‘fluidity’ of

\(^{40}\) Bergson, Time and Free Will, 104.

\(^{41}\) See Harootunian, “Remembering the Historical Present,” 479-80.

thought” to instrumental ends: namely, “Getting the prospect’s thoughts to flow downhill instead of trying to force them uphill against deeply-rooted inclinations … .”43 Yet, Brooker’s avowed Bergsonism stands in unresolved tension with the “mold”-like character of his commercial applications of the French thinker’s ideas. A central contradiction emerges from Brooker’s reading of Bergson for images of “flow” with which he attempts to reinforce consumer habit, even as Bergson’s larger purpose is precisely “to brush aside the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself.”44 It is of course true that Bergson famously reads the comic itself as a utilitarian “corrective” aimed at adapting unsociable behaviours.45 But laughter’s “social function” lies precisely in the ridicule which unleashes against the rigidities of habit.46 While Bergson and Brooker both explore the “useful function” of the comic, it is necessary to distinguish between their respective ends.47 Where Bergson pursues a vision of society that is adaptive and elastic, Brooker arrogates that vision to an exploitative capitalism that reinforces the very “mechanization of life” critiqued by the philosopher.48

Brooker’s misinterpretation, or, more likely, creative misreading, of Bergson’s social project is further exaggerated in the second of the artist’s articles invoking Laughter.

Brooker writes that,

43 Brooker [Surrey], “Making Orders Flow Downhill,” 3; see also Brooker [Spane], “Make Advertising Believable.”
44 Bergson, Laughter, 141. Thus, Brooker’s formula for effective selling, “Talk[ing] about dead things—inanimate products—as though they were living!,” inverts Bergson’s definition of the comic in Laughter as “Something mechanical encrusted on the living… .” Brooker [Surrey], “Life vs. Lingo,” 3, emphasis in the original; Bergson, Laughter, 39, emphasis in the original.
46 Bergson, Laughter, 120.
47 Bergson, Laughter, 176.
48 Bergson, Laughter, 94, emphasis in the original.
The application of a rigid average, or indeed almost any arithmetical
generalization, to human beings in the mass, gives rise to a chuckle of incredulity
or cynicism, because people know that life is something that can’t be run through
an adding machine or confined to a test tube. Life is not subject to mathematics.
Neither is life governed by facts. The ruling principle of life is significance—the
view imposed on facts by the individual observer according to his particular
position or relation with and to the facts observed.49

This passage echoes Bergson’s comments on the comic potential of “professional jargon”
and “technical vocabulary.”50 Yet Brooker’s gloss on Laughter overlooks the ambivalent
status of mathematics in Bergson’s writings (the philosopher himself having been trained
as a mathematician).51 Notwithstanding the anti-positivist bias of Time and Free Will,
Bergson was not entirely averse to quantitative and even statistical and psychophysical
metaphors. Indeed, in Laughter he wrote that the comic,

must appear to us as an average effect, as expressing an average of mankind. And,
like all averages, this one is obtained by bringing together scattered data, by
comparing analogous cases and extracting their essence, in short by a process of
abstraction and generalization similar to that which the physicist brings to bear
upon facts with the object of grouping them under laws.52

49 Brooker [Spane], “Make Advertising Beleivable,” 75, emphasis in the original.
50 Bergson, Laughter, 117.
51 See Guerlac, Thinking in Time, 30, 42.
52 Bergson, Laughter, 151-52.
Although Brooker invokes Bergson by way of advising fellow copy writers to abandon statistical methods in favour of the interpretive procedures of “the artist or the novelist,” a close reading of Bergson’s texts discloses a much more conflicted stance. These unresolved tensions between information as stasis and flow revealed by Brooker’s appropriation and application of Bergsonian concepts illuminate the dualistic uses of “information” subsequently made by the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. and Robert Smithson. I want to conclude by briefly revisiting those artists’ fraught engagements with information through the lens of Bergson’s theorization of the comic as a social function aimed at correcting the “formulaic” element in human behaviour.

Allan has recently, and fruitfully, endorsed a Bergsonian reading of the McLuhan-inspired conceptualism of the N.E. Thing Co. He identifies the Vancouver-based company’s defamiliarizing ACT and ART certificates with the Toronto School thinker’s influential notion of the “counterenvironment” brought into visibility by artists. Such counterenvironments, in Allan’s words, “prompt a revelatory awareness of previously disregarded phenomena.” In turn, Allan situates McLuhan’s discourse within an “ancestry that goes back much further to sources that include Henri Bergson and Wyndham Lewis … .” Taking his cue from Stephen Crocker’s revisionist, Bergsonian genealogy of McLuhan’s media metaphysics, Allan posits Laughter as a probable source for the strategies of inversion activated by the artist’s counterenvironment. To be sure,

53 Brooker [Spane], “Make Advertising Believable,” 75.
certain passages of *Laughter* are anticipatory of McLuhan’s notion. For instance, Bergson proposes that,

> To take a series of events and repeat them in another key or *another environment*, or to invert them whilst still leaving them a certain meaning, or mix them up so that their respective meanings jostle one another, is invariably comic … .\(^{56}\)

Crucially, Allan’s Bergsonian reading of NETCO’s McLuhan-inspired installations and photo-documentation suggests that these works serve “a socially corrective role.”\(^{57}\) But rather than enforcing any social norm, let alone a specific political platform, the laughter provoked by the counterenvironment awakens, in the perceptive words of Jan Walsh Hokenson, “self-consciousness as a social being.”\(^{58}\) NETCO’s counterenvironments similarly tested McLuhan’s observation that, “Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible.”\(^{59}\)

Allan’s gloss on NETCO emphasizes the illuminating powers of perception in a fashion congruent with Marie Fleming’s earlier portrait of the co-presidents as “educators of the senses.”\(^{60}\) The company’s McLuhan-inspired rebranding of the contemporary artist as a “sensory informer” matches Allan’s interpretation of the “revelatory awareness” of the socially active capacity of milieux communicated by the counterenvironments.

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\(^{56}\) Bergson, *Laughter*, 109, my emphasis. Bergson’s counter-environmental reading of the comic in this passage reverses the usual process of socialization, in which “Each member … must model himself on his environment.” Bergson, *Laughter*, 122. Reversing this procedure shocks the ill-adapted product of this process into self-awareness and, potentially, a condition of renewed plasticity.


\(^{58}\) Hokenson, “Comedies of Errors,” 25.

\(^{59}\) McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*, 68.

\(^{60}\) Fleming, *Baxter*, 37.
constituted by artists. Yet I want to argue that this perceptual focus is more Lewisian than Bergsonian—and, in turn, bears witness to the influence of Berkeley’s visual ontology on Bergson’s thought. However, Allan confines his discussion of McLuhan’s acquisition of Bergsonian notions of the comic via Lewis’s fraught engagements with the French thinker to a footnote. As Allan’s marginal analysis rightly insinuates, Lewis constitutes the more immediate derivation of McLuhan’s understanding of the man-made environment as a perceptual tool; but Allan does not develop the implications of this Lewisian detour in this genealogy further.

In Chapter 4, I introduced Lewis’s reworking of Bergson’s theorization of laughter as what he termed “non-moral satire”: an inversion of the philosopher’s socially motivated understanding of the comic that locates humour, rather, in the pretension of thing-like subjects acting as if they were human. As in Bergson’s earlier commentary, Lewis viewed the mechanized body as a key locus of the comic. But whereas the French thinker identified a utilitarian purpose in laughter—namely as a corrective “intended to humiliate” unsociable behaviour—Lewis, by contrast, took aim at Bergson’s anthropomorphic illusion. Rather than shoring up the humanist delusions of liberal democracy, Lewis’s comedic bodies reveal the subject’s inherence in posthuman patterns

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61 Baxter quoted in Cameron, Sculpture ’67, 84; Allan, “Marshall McLuhan and the Counterenvironment,” 31.
62 See Bergson, Matter and Memory, 10-11, 214-15.
64 Allan quotes a 1967 audio recording of McLuhan published as a flexidisc insert in a special issue of artscanada magazine devoted to Lewis, as stating that, “It was Lewis who put me onto all of this, study of the environment as an educational, as a teaching machine. … Lewis was the person who showed me that the man-made environment was a teaching machine, a programmed teaching machine.” McLuhan quoted in Allan, “Marshall McLuhan and the Counterenvironment,” 23-24n3.
65 Lewis’s notion of “the wild body” inverts Bergson’s formula in Laughter (“Something mechanical encrusted on the living …”): “The movement or intelligent behaviour of matter,” writes Lewis, “any autonomous movement of matter, is essentially comic. … The man is ridiculous fundamentally, he is ridiculous because he is a man, instead of a thing.” Bergson, Laughter, 39, emphasis in the original; Lewis, “The Meaning of the Wild Body,” 159, emphasis in the original.
66 Bergson, Laughter, 176.
of mechanization that we would now recognize as specifically proto-informatic. The cynical overtones of Lewis’s transformation of Bergson’s theorization of the comic reveals his indebtedness to traditions of Menippean satire: an ancient Greek genre that cast a long shadow on the subsequent development of European literature, which was likewise an enduring inspiration to McLuhan.67

McLuhan’s engagement with this until recently marginal genre of satire developed independently of the better known work of the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, which was not available in English translation until 1973.68 The Toronto School thinker’s former graduate student Donald Theall traced McLuhan’s study of Menippean satire to 1951-52, though his exposure to the eminently Menippean Lewis suggests an earlier, if indirect, encounter during his teaching appointments at St. Louis University and Assumption College.69 Theall attributes the media analyst’s “deliberately cryptic” style to the “complex, ambivalent, and transgressive” qualities characteristic of Menippea.70 Theall’s 2001 monograph on McLuhan develops the Menippean foundations of his earlier, 1971 portrait of the media analyst as a “learned clown.”71 Theall proposes a fruitfully inclusive definition of Menippea as encompassing the work of Varro, Pope, Swift, Sterne, Joyce and Lewis—among others.72

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71 Theall, *The Medium is the Rear View Mirror*, 111.

In a recent text, McLuhan’s son, Eric McLuhan, a serious scholar in his own right, explores the bases of Menippean satire in the ancient philosophy of Cynicism.\(^{73}\) Theall earlier noted that McLuhan père encouraged his son to write his doctoral dissertation on Joyce as a Menippean satirist, and suggested that the term “cynic satire” may have been McLuhan senior’s.\(^{74}\) Paralleling Allan’s reading of Bergson’s theory of the comic, Eric McLuhan proposes that Menippea “provide the audience with a means of seeing itself and its own culture afresh … .”\(^{75}\) But departing from the environmental framework of Laughter, McLuhan argues that the Menippean genre reactivates the Cynic philosopher’s aim of “renew[ing] readers’ percepts and sensibilities.”\(^{76}\) The Cynics set out to combat the conceptual pretensions of idealisms through perceptual techniques, frequently involving violations of decorum, intended to draw attention to the repressed material support of putatively transcendental referents.\(^{77}\)

Cynic satire emerges from Eric McLuhan’s account as a genre “based on imitation.”\(^{78}\) Cynic mimesis enacts a travesty of the satirical text from within through strategies of digression, mock erudition, and a seriocomic leveling of generic hierarchies. This “perverse decorum” of Menippea stages a practical demonstration of the “futility of

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\(^{73}\) Cynic Satire develops arguments found in the earlier publication, based on Eric McLuhan’s 1982 dissertation, The Role of Thunder in Finnegans Wake. See Eric McLuhan, The Role of Thunder in Finnegans Wake (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1997).

\(^{74}\) See Theall, The Virtual McLuhan, 45.

\(^{75}\) McLuhan, Cynic Satire, 69. Consistent with Marshall McLuhan’s notion of the counterenvironment, this approach frequently involved “Casting the familiar in unfamiliar terms and vice versa … .” Ibid., 70.

\(^{76}\) McLuhan, Cynic Satire, 44. In another passage, McLuhan describes this perceptual imperative of Menippean satire as “readjust[ing] the audience’s ability to see itself and its world clearly.” Ibid., 86.

\(^{77}\) See McLuhan, Cynic Satire, xvii. McLuhan argues that the hybrid features of Menippean satire work “to awaken and inform not the concepts but the perceptions.” Ibid., 89.

\(^{78}\) McLuhan, Cynic Satire, 45. Elsewhere, McLuhan stipulates that, “the Menippean tradition is a mimetic, rather than an ideal, one.” Ibid., 26.
philosophy.” In addition to mimicking literary and scholarly norms, McLuhan observes a tendency for “Menippists [to] imitate and [to] plagiarize one another endlessly.”

McLuhan cites the “non-moral” art of Wyndham Lewis as “satiriz[ing] the whole of society” through a distinctly modern transformation of Menippean conventions, while retaining the Cynics’ focus on perceptual adjustment. Eric McLuhan’s Menippean portrait of Lewis agrees with Theall’s analysis of the satiric features of the British artist-author’s fictional world, and of its influence on McLuhan, Sr. “McLuhan, like Lewis,” writes Theall, “developed a contemporary transformation of the cynical tradition of Menippean satire in order to expose the follies of a world that was abandoning the solidity of space for the abstractness of space-time.” Theall underlines the indebtedness of Lewis’s *The Apes of God* to Pope’s *Dunciad*—two texts that were, in turn, tremendously influential on the modes of learned satire practiced by McLuhan.

I want to propose that NETCO’s art of Sensitivity Information traces a passage from a Bergsonian engagement with “information” as an agent of social re-enchantment, to a more Lewisian modality of Cynical mimesis. It is necessary to underline here that neither Bergson nor Lewis served as primary sources for the company’s co-presidents; NETCO’s shifting orientation—from an early “comic” and operative outlook, to the Menippean satire of its post-1968 production—likely reflects, rather, Iain Baxter’s evolving reading of McLuhan’s writings, whose learned satire had been shaped, in turn, by both thinkers.

Iain Baxter’s earliest remarks on Sensitivity Information, as recorded in his 1967 interview with Dorothy Cameron, disclose the eminently Bergsonian (and to some extent

79 McLuhan, *Cynic Satire*, 57.
80 McLuhan, *Cynic Satire*, xvii.
81 McLuhan, *Cynic Satire*, 176.
82 Theall, *The Virtual McLuhan*, 197.
Cynic) ambition of capitalizing on “information” as a lens to “get beyond the label-attitude … that gets in the way of experience.” Baxter’s McLuhan-inspired critique of the classificatory mind-set that veils the variegated haecceity of things echoes Bergson’s reflection in Laughter that, “we do not see the actual things themselves; in most cases we confine ourselves to reading the labels affixed to them.” The enduring importance of haecceity—what the Western Zennist Alan Watts would term “suchness”—to the company’s operations was constitutional to Ingrid Baxter’s election as Co-president in 1970, and consequent troubling of the default homosocial ontology of corporate personhood.

The neo-Bergsonian perspective on information that emerges from early documents of the creative company’s activities is also legible in Iain Baxter’s 1966 proposal to found a “Sensitivity Information Sub-Centre,” to be established for the purpose of “self-sensitiz[ation].” Such pronouncements reflect the impact of McLuhan’s socially engaged media analyses on the early development of the Centre for Communication and the Arts at SFU, where Iain Baxter played a formative role as director of the visual arts division. Recalling the neo-Bergsonian dynamics of McLuhan’s theorization of the counterenvironment, NETCO’s early actions and projects incorporate the company’s ambition to re-adapt the alienated members of an emergent information society through a “comic” recuperation of the very instruments responsible for processes of informationalization. This program of social reform through counter-informationalization actualizes the “operative” paradigm promoted by McLuhan’s media analyses, and, in

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83 Baxter quoted in Cameron, Sculpture ’67, 84.
84 Bergson, Laughter, 138.
86 Lamberti, Marshall McLuhan’s Mosaic, 137.
particular, the Toronto School thinker’s adage in *Understanding Media*—frequently recited in later interviews and publications—that, “the artist tends now to move from the ivory tower to the control tower of society.”\(^8^7\) The N.E. Thing Co.’s evolution would seem to recapitulate the transition from public sphere to private sector implicit in McLuhan’s foregoing percept, as the company grew out of Iain Baxter’s early involvement in SFU’s Centre for Communication and the Arts into a para-academic satellite with for-profit ambitions (if few fiscal successes to speak of).\(^8^8\)

NETCO’s corporate satellite space would prove to be the ultimate counterenvironment, as the company’s co-presidents’ satirical interface with the academy increasingly came to resemble McLuhan’s Cynical mimesis following the May 1968 termination of SFU’s first President, Patrick McTaggart-Cowan: a key supporter of the Centre and a close ally of Iain Baxter’s. In place of the utopian overtones of the company’s early pronouncements on Sensitivity Information as a medium promising direct access to the Real, NETCO’s post-1968 “formula” pieces present a perverse inscrutability that satirizes the ambitions of Centre faculty to actualize McLuhan’s vision of an artificially reconstructed “sensorium” through the coordinated interaction of its arts programs and associated curricula. Indeed, the deliberately cryptic form assumed by the company’s later representations of SI enacts a “beclown[ing]” of the Toronto School thinker that may also reflect Iain Baxter’s coeval discussions with Donald Theall regarding an unrealized book project that would have satirized McLuhan.\(^8^9\) As in Theall’s

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\(^{87}\) McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 65.

\(^{88}\) “We need a breakthrough in the retailing field,” Iain Baxter stated in a 1969 report; “… 1968 was not a good business year for NETCO ….” In 1970, journalist Susan Paynter similarly reported that, “last year’s expenses outweighed fees and prize money by some $4,500.” Iain Baxter quoted in Grescoe, “Steady, Now. Is this Art?,” 15; Susan Paynter, “N.E. Thing Can Happen When You Meet Iain Baxter,” 7.

1971 monograph on the media analyst, McLuhan emerges from NETCO’s satirical transformations of his thought in such later pieces as the button work *VIP* in an almost unrecognizably antihumanist light that reveals often overlooked dialectical and instrumental undercurrents in his discourse on “information.” Rather than “the immobility of a formula,” which Bergson viewed as a perennial wellspring of the comic, the consciously formulaic character of NETCO’s later figurations of information more closely approximates the Menippean satire of Lewis’s “non-moral” transformation of Bergson’s theorization of laughter in tandem with the traditions of Cynic mimesis. NETCO would have acquired this Lewisian orientation through Iain Baxter’s close reading of McLuhan, whose writings navigate a polarity—albeit not explicitly stated as such—between Bergson’s and Lewis’s competing conceptions of the comic and the satiric. In NETCO’s Cynical rendering of its later information “products,” SI emerges as the cryptic afterimage of its earlier, redemptive vision of media (and of the Centre’s reconstructed organizational sensorium).

In its later, more emphatically antihumanist and satirical renderings, the company’s representations of Sensitivity Information come to resemble the psychophysical inscription of sensory intensities limned by Brooker’s scalar representations of the relative attention value of various words and layout schemes under the influence of Vernon Lee’s physiological aesthetics and the experimental psychology of Münsterberg and other laboratory investigators. In particular, NETCO’s sensory formulae recall the psychophysical ontology sketched by the nineteenth-century physicist Ernst Mach, who

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proposed that, “nothing exists beyond discrete sensations.”

Spieker fruitfully speculates that Mach’s radical decentering of subjectivity licensed the possibility of “an archive without objects in which the only principle of organization is accumulation over time, one sensation after another.” Inspired by the corporeal logic and repressed psychophysical foundations of McLuhan’s “non-book” collaborations with Fiore and Watson, NETCO’s *Celebration of the Body* (1976) comprises just such a Machian compendium of sensorial data. Its only suggestion of linear ordering lies in the temporal indications recorded in its constituent “information forms,” whose gridded layout recalls, moreover, the calibrated spaces of psychophysical registration. In turn, the psychophysical resonance of NETCO’s experiments in Sensitivity Information belies the anthropomorphic fallacy of McLuhan’s “extension” thesis; thereby underlining sometimes disavowed continuities between the Toronto School thinker’s media analyses and prior developments in the sciences of physiology and physics (connections revisited, more recently, by Richard Cavell). NETCO’s satirical figurations of McLuhan’s sensorial informatics contribute to the still-relevant task of contextualizing and historicizing the media thinker’s notoriously transhistorical rhetoric.

If a Lewisian undercurrent of black humour runs through the company’s later inscriptions of “information,” its corporate carnivalesque staged a version of the Menippean tradition in some ways closer to Bakhtin’s rendering of it in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Despite the unalloyed cynicism disclosed by a work such as *VIP*,

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93 See Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*. 

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the overall tenor of even later projects remains a “joyful relativity” that,\textsuperscript{94} while increasingly skeptical of institutional and metaphysical claims for “information,” remains notably less pessimistic than Lewis’s paranoid renderings of the media of communication. NETCO’s “communal performance” was always sufficiently joyful that it succeeded in interpelling participants within its corporate theatre. Commensurate with Bakhtin’s description of the “mixing of high and low” characteristic of Menippea, NETCO’s informatic hybridity “reject[ed] … stylistic unity” in a fashion that, in the words of one of the company’s most perceptive critics, Lucy Lippard, resulted in a “tendency to repel purists in any area.”\textsuperscript{95} In place of the formal homogeneity typical of the Minimalist-derived projects of American peers analyzed by Meltzer, “information” imposed an “organic unity” on the company’s heteroglossia.\textsuperscript{96}

Bakhtin’s analysis of Menippean satire simultaneously articulates a framework for comprehending the participatory dynamics, and corporeal texture, of carnivalesque pageantry as a temporary suspension of social norms and taboos that adds further complexity to the Bergsonian reading of NETCO’s equivocal corporate theatre proposed by Allan.\textsuperscript{97} The improbably perceptual character of NETCO’s Sensitivity Information emerges from a comparative reading of Bakhtin’s descriptions of the carnivalesque as a contemporary manifestation of the “concretely sensuous ritual-pageant ‘thoughts’” typical of Menippea.\textsuperscript{98} Finally, the company’s formal election of executive members suggests analogies with the ritual “crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival

\textsuperscript{94} Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 107, emphasis in the original.


\textsuperscript{96} Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, 119.

\textsuperscript{97} See Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, 122.

\textsuperscript{98} Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, 123. NETCO’s ACT and ART certificates resemble “the concretely sensuous form of carnivalescic acts and images” that embody the “naked posturing of ultimate questions” in Bakhtin’s discussion of Menippea. Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, 134.
“king” enacted by historic carnival forms: the co-presidents’ appearance in the 1971 work *Dummy Self-Portrait Sculpture* constituting a symbolic elevation (and thus implied immanent degradation) of the businessman-cum-“fool.” But just as Bakhtin stresses that Dostoevsky was cut off from ancient traditions of Menippean satire and medieval carnival, and so must have acquired their flavour through generic sources that absorbed and transformed them during the intervening centuries, so too it must be underlined that NETCO did not possess a first-hand knowledge of ancient Menippean satire, but rather encountered its features indirectly via McLuhan’s alternately Bergsonian and Lewisian transformations of the genre’s conventions. While not itself a source for NETCO’s corporate pageantry, Bakhtin’s more ludic analysis of the carnivalesque nonetheless emphasizes the social dimensions of Menippean satire in a fashion that enriches our understanding of the participatory dynamics of NETCO’s “social sculpture,” thereby extending its continuities with Bergson’s speculations on the comic.

The perceptual locus of Allan’s perspicuous reading of the Bergsonian dynamics of McLuhan’s counterenvironment, as “the revelation of underperceived environments,” likewise suggests a convivial framework for resituating the *scanning* methodology refined by Robert Smithson during his Vancouver peregrinations within the same English-Canadian discourse network in which I have located the informatic practices of Brooker and NETCO. But if the coeval information art of NETCO embodies an “operative” and socially engaged posture, Smithson’s scanning record for *Glue Pour*, like

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100 As Bakhtin remarks, “Crowning already contains the idea of immanent decrowning: it is ambivalent from the very start. And he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester; this act, as it were, opens and sacrifices the inside-out world of carnival.” Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 124.  
his earlier photo-documentation of the Yucatán Mirror Displacements, enacts a parodic abstraction of embodied seeing. The condition of ruination endemic to the photographic subterfuge practiced by the multidisciplinary American reflects the Berkeleian and Lewisian sources of his anti-Cartesian stratagem.

Smithson’s Nonsites constitute an early, and characteristically ludicrous, literalization of the condition of blindness which he attributed to rationalist systems of visual representation. The incorporation of maps and mirrors into some of the early Nonsites set the stage for the perceptual maneuvers of the subsequent earth maps and photo essays. If the Mirror Displacements and Glue Pour scanning record pointedly substitute a neo-Berkeleian formlessness for the rational phenomenological spaces of late Greenbergian formalism, the earth maps stage a radical withdrawal from the social modeled on Bergson’s postulation of an inhuman, pure perception that, in its condition of absolute passivity, merges with matter itself. In stark contrast to the sociological orientation of NETCO’s ACTs, Smithson’s earth maps instantiate a modality of Bergsonian perception overlooked by Allan’s gloss on the French thinker’s meditations on the comic: namely, a de-potentialized vision that has been subtracted from the social world of the generic human agent.

Yet, it is difficult to mistake the satirical overtones of Smithson’s materializations of Bergsonian perception. The artist’s studiously ponderous interventions within the Cartesian coordinates of conventional cartographic representation reactivate the non-moral satire of Lewis—Smithson’s favourite author—to read Bergson’s hypothesized pure perception against the grain. In Matter and Memory, Bergson proposed pure perception as confounding the strict dualisms (inner life/extensity) that had propelled his
earlier dissertation. In *Creative Evolution*, the philosopher revisited the proto-deconstructionist arguments of *Matter and Memory*, positing that the Western rationalist tradition “is, pre-eminently, the logic of solids.”103 That is, “our concepts have been formed on the model of solids” (as opposed to the fluidity that Bergson attributed to unmediated consciousness and perception).104 Smithson’s writings satirically invert the terms of Bergson’s critique—and, following Lewis’s lead, overturn the socially motivated rationale of the philosopher’s formulation of the comic—to champion a “Solid-state hilarity” as the preposterous justification for the “‘ha-ha crystal’ concept” informing his earth maps.105 The principle of “Generalized Laughter” sketched by the early Smithson text “Entropy and the New Monuments” thus embodies a non-moral transvaluation of both Bergson’s critique of the geometric, and implicitly geological, basis of rationalism as well as the philosopher’s socially engaged theorization of the comic that would guide the American artist’s subsequent, satirically static and geometric interventions within dominant, organicist constructions of vision (as a Gestalt “opticality”).

But, as I demonstrated in Chapter 4, Smithson’s earth maps simultaneously disclose a vestigial social content vis-à-vis their allusion to the utopian geography of Lewis’s imagined post-nationalist space in *Journey into Barbary*. When re-situated within the Vietnam War-era context in which such scholars as Nico Israel have recently restored Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, this residual social dimension of Smithson’s satirical earth maps articulates a poignant politics of hope that defies the putatively objective boundaries charted by official cartographies. Nevertheless, the Atlantean geography of *Spiral Jetty*—

103 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, ix.
104 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, ix.
whose vortical form recalls the concentric rings of Plato’s description of the mythical island reprise by Ignatius Donnelly\textsuperscript{106}—remains withdrawn from the politics of everyday life navigated by NETCO’s co-presidents, frozen in a state of perpetual latency.\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Spiral Jetty}’s condition of suspended animation satirically alludes to Bergson’s counterintuitive reading of motion pictures in \textit{Creative Evolution} as embodying the “logic of solids” that the philosopher imputes to rationalist systems. In Smithson’s “cinematic atopia,”\textsuperscript{108} the movement-image of Bergsonian thought is ludicrously decelerated to the point of merging with the molecular motion of solid matter. Less the Deleuzian \textit{diagram} of “abstract transitivity” posited by George Baker’s filmic reading of \textit{Spiral Jetty},\textsuperscript{109} than a properly Bergsonian cinema conceived as a “kaleidoscopic picture” consisting of static “pieces of glass,”\textsuperscript{110} Smithson’s crowning earth map constitutes a strategic intervention within the organicist ontology of cybernetics.

But whereas Bergson’s discourse on the cinematographical method advances a \textit{critique} of the “illusion of mobility” and hyostatizing consequences of practical knowledge and \textit{techne},\textsuperscript{111} Smithson’s most ambitious earth map (for such \textit{Spiral Jetty} should be recognized as being through its multiple allusions to Atlantean geography) enacts a travesty of Bergsonian flux via the sheer inertia of its rocky presence. The crystalline composition of Smithson’s \textit{Spiral Jetty} effects a comic concretion of

\textsuperscript{106} “In the great ditch surrounding the whole land like a circle, and into which streams flowed down from the mountains, we probably see the original four rivers of Paradise, and the emblem of the cross surrounded by a circle, which, as we will show hereafter, was, from the earliest pre-Christian ages, adopted as the emblem of the Garden of Eden.” Donnelly, \textit{Atlantis}, 24.

\textsuperscript{107} Smithson’s politics of withdrawal recalls the inaccessibility of Lewis’s Pierpoint in \textit{The Apes of God}.

\textsuperscript{108} Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia,” 140.


\textsuperscript{110} Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, 306.

\textsuperscript{111} Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, 308.
Bergson’s hypothetical film reel that refracts the French thinker’s critique of Western metaphysics through the lens of Lewis’s anti-Bergsonian satire. The Jetty thereby gives shape to the mocking “ha-ha crystal” earlier theorized by Smithson as a Lewisian riposte to recent developments in sculpture, which limned Bergson’s theses on the comic to perversely anti-social and, indeed, non-moral ends.

The satirical stasis of Smithson’s cinematic Spiral Jetty brings into visibility the ubiquitous experience of “simultaneity” that, according to Stephen Kern, was the paradoxical accompaniment of the accelerated rhythms of modernity.112 Yet the work’s tacit interface with the cinematic discourse of Bergson via the non-moral satire of Lewis, as well as its allusions to pre-Columbian mythologies and the longue durée of geological change, unleash temporal countercurrents that implicate the iconic earthwork within the same tensions between motion and stasis negotiated, but left unresolved, by the influential diagrams of Bergson. The Futurist motion-forms upon which Brooker based his Bergsonian efforts to dynamize the conventions of commercial design in Layout Technique in Advertising rehearse this same conflict.

The contemporaneous NETCO project, North American Time Zone Photo-V.S.I. Simultaneity (1970) (Fig. 61), traces a similarly fraught circuit between cartographic instantaneity and lived duration. The work documents synchronized actions performed by invited participants (Jack Chambers, Gerald Fergusson, Kenneth Lochhead, Chris Pratt and Harry Savage) at locations across Canada corresponding to the constituent “zones” of that ultimate symbol of modern simultaneity—the system of standard time devised by

112 Kern, The Culture of Time and Space, 68.
Canadian engineer Stanford Fleming.\textsuperscript{113} Like the mythic geography delineated by the rings of *Spiral Jetty*, the maps incorporated into the resulting artist’s book of the same title freeze the actions executed as part of this transcontinental performance within a static cartography. The geography mapped by NETCO is further abstracted through the overcoding of Canada’s physical territory effected by the geometrical contours of Fleming’s global system of synchronized time.

Notwithstanding these resonances, a gulf separates the respective engagements of NETCO and Smithson with the “informatic” technologies of cartography and time keeping that registers the greater impact of McLuhan’s Bergsonian—social and operative—approach to media on NETCO’s information art, relative to the Lewisian satire of Smithson’s disengaged, yet still utopic, earth maps.\textsuperscript{114} The everyday gestures enacted by NETCO’s dispersed network of participants remains irrevocably embedded within social contexts that, in the last instance, resist the abstracting, “informationalizing” forces of cartographic representation and photo-documentation. By contrast, the “ruined” percepts metaphorically sedimented in Smithson’s saline monument testify to his Berkeleian withdrawal from the social (but not the political). Though implicated within the same discourse network—one principally defined by the influential commentaries of Bergson, Lewis and McLuhan on the ambivalent dynamics of information and media—the opposing values imputed to the social in these works by NETCO and Smithson


\textsuperscript{114} Notwithstanding the company’s affinities with the operative and social dimensions of the French thinker’s writings, it should be underlined that the standardized time brought into visibility by NETCO differs markedly from the multiple temporalities figured by the Bergsonian Brooker in an earlier series of advertisements for *The Globe*, discussed in the Conclusion.
underlines a significant point of rupture that simultaneously defines the poles of a shared discursive space.

Another NETCO project that draws attention to the company’s mobilization of standard time to coordinate its actions as well as its divergence from the entropic, but still politicized, temporality harnessed by Smithson, is its 1969 calendar submission to the 10th Bienal de São Paulo (Fig. 62), which juxtaposes selected ACTs and ARTs against a generic calendrical grid. While the ACTs documenting everyday activities and objects collated by the São Paulo calendar attest to the socially engaged orientation of the Vancouver company, NETCO’s decision to participate in the Bienal amidst a widespread boycott in protest of Brazil’s authoritarian government speaks to its more ambivalent politics. By contrast, Smithson’s withdrawal from the Bienal confirms the politicized nature of his work, notwithstanding his critiques of the AWC and ecology as well as the socially disengaged aesthetic propagated by his earthworks.\textsuperscript{115}

Information emerges from this comparative analysis of NETCO and Smithson as the signifier of a common immanental aesthetic that takes aim at the transcendental pretensions of late modernism as well as rationalist systems of “objectivity.” Drawing on a shared discursive tradition in which avatars of the informatic (appearing in the protean guises of advertising, census or psychophysical data, diagram, map, market survey or photo-documentation) figure as symptoms of contested processes of modernization, NETCO and Smithson alternately seize upon the operative potentiality of information and its systems of circulation and reception under postindustrial conditions, and satirize the positivist claims made in its name. Yet the socially embedded actions performed and

documented by NETCO personnel testify to the critical company’s more Bergsonian and Menippean orientation, which registers its debt to McLuhan. This socially engaged stance notably diverges from the more withdrawn and cynical maneuvers of Smithson, which, while assuming a similarly operative and, indeed, specifically corporate frame, projected a Lewisian and McLuhanesque figuration of post-national space onto a “ruined” perceptual field satirically coextensive with matter itself. If NETCO’s socially immanent practice retrieves the historical avant-garde’s vision of “an art of life,” Smithson’s deactivation of the social (but not political) capacity of information concepts and media reflects his fidelity to Lewis’s proto-postmodern critique of the “failure” of the objectivist aspirations embedded in the same.

Although this dissertation has focused on just three case studies, its conclusions regarding artists’ engagements with information concepts and media in English Canada (and beyond) are generalizable: the commonalities and fissures discernible in the practices of Brooker, NETCO and even the American Smithson being also evident, albeit to varying degrees, in the work of peers including General Idea, Intermedia, and Les Levine. Lack of space dictates that a consideration of possible directions for future research be restricted to just one of these: General Idea. The Toronto collective’s evolving figurations of “information” can be recognized in retrospect as reprising and, indeed, in almost Bergsonian fashion, recapitulating the prior informatic representations of Brooker, NETCO and Smithson.

For a country located at the margins of empire and its established art world centres, and one lacking, moreover, a robust system of patronage for the arts as well as a pre-existing public for contemporary art consumption, it is doubly remarkable that Canada

produced not one, but two innovative corporate entities during the conceptual “moment.” The second of these, the Toronto-based General Idea, presents no less of a challenge to conventional accounts of collaborative practice than NETCO. The group’s transgression of pre-conceived notions of cooperative activity similarly revolved around themes of corporatism and gender.

Phillip Monk’s recent homage to General Idea’s intricate structures of self-mythologization, productively re-focuses attention on to the neglected early years of the group’s formation out of the pre-existing framework of the correspondence network constituted by mail artists such as Vancouver’s Image Bank (Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov). Appropriating the collaborative mechanisms of this “alternative information network,” General Idea—initially consisting of a loose association of friends centred on the protagonists AA Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal—orchestrated its earliest collective performances, its “Miss General Idea Pageants” and related events, by soliciting the participation of network participants; the first, and nominally last, Miss General Idea being none other than Image Bank’s Trasov. In drawing attention to the evolution of General Idea’s subsequent corporate architecture—metaphorically imbricated in the projected “1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion” and related series of Showcard “blueprints” for its construction—out of this public infrastructure, Monk recovers the troubling dynamics of this transition from a public to a private network methodology: an appropriation of the Eternal Network under the sign of a fictive rebranding exercise that reprised NETCO’s earlier transition from a “satellite” of the vanguard Centre for Communication and the Arts at SFU into an autonomous corporate organism with a purchase on the proprietary circuits of information exchange.

117 Lippard, Six Years, 9; Six Years Monk, Glamour is Theft, 30.
It was only in 1975, Monk reminds us, that General Idea became the famous “trio” of its later, corporate *oeuvre*: “To start with, General Idea were not always, well, General Idea. In the beginning they operated without a name—or with individual projects under their own name.”118 In some ways, this transition suggests analogies with the process of formalization inscribed in NETCO’s incorporation in 1969. But whereas the N.E. Thing Co.’s transition to full corporate “personhood” generated a viable legal structure within which Ingrid Baxter was able to renegotiate her visibility within the enterprise, Monk is conspicuously silent about the identities of the original membership made redundant by GI’s process of consolidation. Clues exist, of course, not only in the form of photo-documentation of early Pageant performances and other collective actions, but also in early corporate paraphernalia, such as a business card for Art Metropole—the artist-run centre founded by General Idea in 1974 on Toronto’s Yonge Street—that gives equal weight to Granada Gazelle in a list of organizational contacts whose other names are restricted to the famous “three.” Only Fern Bayer, in her meticulously researched history of General Idea’s early years, singles out for attention the contributions (and subsequent occlusion) of early female collaborators of the future trio, including Mimi Paige, Granada Gazelle (a.k.a. Sharon Venne) and Honey Novick.119 But if General Idea’s corporate narrative was characterized by these incorporations and disappearing acts, it must also be emphasized that—again recalling Ingrid Baxter’s executive role, albeit in a different sense—its collective frame simultaneously carved out a space for the performance of

118 Monk, *Glamour is Theft*, 158.
alternative identities at a moment when heterosexist patriarchy was dominant in the Canadian art world and, indeed, a ubiquitous reality for Canadian society at large.

The writer who has arguably approached this problem with the most sophistication is Elizabeth Lebovici, in her punningly titled essay, “Gender ‘Trouple.’” Her text underlines the extent to which the trio’s corporate, but socially engaged production was notably indifferent toward “gay art” during the 1970s. “We did not find it interesting at all,” Lebovici paraphrases GI as stating, “no more and no less interesting than defining yourself as a Canadian artist, ‘which was worse than being gay.’”120 Like Monk, she underlines the resonance between GI’s performance of a queer sociality and Susan Sontag’s essay on “camp”—an important precursor to the performance theory of Butler in its emphasis on artificiality and a purposeful warping of causal and temporal relations to trouble the foundational claims of hetero-normative subject positions.122

But if Sontag’s discourse on camp provided a source for GI’s elaborate travesties of beauty pageants and other “retro” artefacts of an obsolete consumer culture whose re-enactment revealed that society to be jarringly without foundation, the group’s allusions to the New York critic and, indeed, direct references to queer sexuality, were few—GI having preferred coded terminology such as “alternate lifestyle.”123 As Lebovici reminds us, “After the emergence of the AIDS epidemic, gay discourse became a necessity.”124 In approaching the baroque enactment of identities staged by GI’s corporate theatre, it is

122 General Idea’s campy détournement of calendrical temporality suggests analogies with Elizabeth Freeman’s more recent theorization of “queer time” as characterized by a “privileging of delay, detour, and deferral.” Elizabeth Freeman, Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2010), xi, xvi.
imperative not to project contemporary sexualities backwards onto a group project forged out of the communal ideals of the sixties correspondence scene in Canada and an antihumanist corporate frame.\footnote{For a historicization of shifting sexual identifications, see Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer, \textit{Queer Art \& Culture} (London; New York: Phaidon, 2013).}

Much as Butler’s notion of “gender insubordination” destabilizes essentializing claims on identity—both straight and queer—General Idea’s project is more accurately characterized as, in the fitting words of Gregg Bordowitz, “reveal[ing] the hypocrisy of dominant heterosexual norms,”\footnote{Bordowitz, \textit{Imagevirus}, 64.} than as articulating a “gay” aesthetic.\footnote{Echoing the fraught reception of Ingrid Baxter’s executive labour, the ways in which General Idea negotiated its performance of identity has proven controversial, not least among queer scholars. The acute anxiety and unease that can be provoked by GI’s corporate tactics are perhaps most legible in the poignantly self-reflexive account of the group’s signature \textit{Imagevirus} series—a flexible appropriation and redeployment of Robert Indiana’s well-known “LOVE” logo—authored by the longtime AIDS activist and survivor, artist Gregg Bordowitz. In his nuanced reflections on General Idea, the one-time member of ACT UP admits that,

\begin{quote}
[W]hen I first saw the AIDS logo in 1987, I strongly objected to General Idea’s \textit{Imagevirus} campaign. […] To me and a lot of other activist artists who devoted their energy to fighting government inaction on AIDS, \textit{Imagevirus} lacked imagination. […] [A]ll our poster campaigns, videos and activist art evolved out of our commitment to direct political action. General Idea weren’t really part of the activist scene, although their lives were very much affected by AIDS. […] [T]he \textit{Imagevirus} project seemed so cool and aloof, distant from militant activism.
\end{quote}

Bordowitz, \textit{Imagevirus}, 73-74.}

Bordowitz’s account of the origins of General Idea’s best-known campaign in the particularities of a sixties’ Canadian counterculture of communal living, is propelled by a self-searching re-examination of his own assumptions about the nature of activism and the implications of living with AIDS. In many ways, this stock-taking of GI’s corporate tactics boils down to a probing reassessment of collaborative practices and their intersection with the historically-specific identities of individuals and groups.

The key point of divergence between the strategies of GI and ACT UP is their respective approaches to collective agency and authorship. Much like the second-wave feminist frameworks that preceded 1980s AIDS activism, discussed above, ACT UP largely operated within a liberal humanist conception of subjectivity and civil politics. Bordowitz’s narrative is deeply coloured by his own experience of living with the disease: “It is difficult for me to remain measured and objective,” he admits, “because I am not calm.” Bordowitz, \textit{Imagevirus}, 4. The consciousness of living with the virus motivated Bordowitz, in tandem with other young artists affected by the epidemic in New York at the time, to shoot guerilla documentaries about the fraught experiences of individuals. These works, and Bordowitz’s account of them, are profoundly personal and humanistic.

By contrast, GI’s \textit{Imagevirus} was “a cold piece of antihumanism, vacant in its refusal to mean anything, unclear who it was meant to address.” Bordowitz, \textit{Imagevirus}, 108. The dissonant affect and impersonal address of GI’s intervention, as Bordowitz rightly observes, were outgrowths of the Canadian group’s corporate apparatus and of the lingering modernism informing its peculiar queering of dominant culture. Bordowitz writes that, “General Idea had one mind.” Bordowitz, \textit{Imagevirus}, 70. This was not the humanist
drawing attention to GI’s organizing motifs of triangle and threesome as effecting “an instant rupture with the geometry of patriarchal representations” is another eloquent reminder of the modernist virus active at the heart of General Idea’s Burroughs- and Stein-inspired enterprise. As an anti-patriarchal stratagem, General Idea’s geometric method echoes the nondual arithmetic of “not-two” mobilized by NETCO’s gender-defying governance structure. Likewise recalling NETCO’s theatricalization of a McLuhanesque ideal of information and leisure, General Idea’s glamorous corporate performances more closely approximated the utopian aspirations catalogued by Chris Gilbert than the activist ambitions of contemporaries associated with Art & Language. An early artefact of those aspirations is the 1970 Orgasm Energy Chart (Fig. 6.3): a questionnaire circulated within the collective’s network that enjoined respondents to generate a graphical representation of their sexual activity over a one-month period. The completed charts unintentionally recall the psychophysical and statistical decomposition of subjectivity effected by the innovative market research of Bertram Brooker, and brought into visibility by the “composite” bodies figured by his quasi-

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subject imperiled by AIDS documented by, and informing the thought of, Bordowitz and fellow members of DIVA—the documentary wing of ACT UP. This was, rather, an alien subjectivity ripped from the science fiction-inspired pages of Burroughs’s queer modernist prose. Inhabiting the readymade “shells” of the corporate actor in imitation of the “virus” that, according to Burroughs, is language itself General Idea’s trio penetrated and repurposed the contents of the culture at large in a fashion anticipating Judith Butler’s later theorization of gender performativity as “drag,” discussed above. This was a para-modernist methodology without pity, devoid of the humanistic empathy that was second nature to Bordowitz in his activist years. He summarizes the characteristic estrangement effected by the Canadian trio’s quasi-modernism thus: “The goal behind all of General Idea’s work was a-tending-away-from-the-familiar into something-that-simply-and-self-evidently-is-itself. Being and not knowing.” Bordowitz, Imagevirus, 85, emphasis in the original. Paradoxically, it was this very estrangement that facilitated the extraordinary visibility achieved by General Idea’s Imagevirus, as it quickly swept beyond the borders of the United States—where the group was then located—to Europe, and beyond. It was by seizing upon the latent modernist logic of the virus itself as a sign of alienation and non-sense, that GI was able to penetrate the channels of popular culture so effectively with a symbol—or, more accurately, an anti-symbol—of historical rupture and trauma. Bordowitz, Imagevirus, 109.

129 Watts, The Way of Zen, 64.
130 See Lebovici, “Gender ‘Trouple,’” 100.
abstract canvases of the 1920s. As such, they shine a light on the increasingly invasive character of the biopolitical techniques pioneered by an earlier generation of market researchers and government statisticians—thereby revealing, in true Foucauldian fashion, “the ‘putting into discourse of sex’ and, in particular, of those acts categorized as perversions, as modern techniques of power (or, properly speaking, as the exercise of ‘biopower’).” A likely source for General Idea’s *Orgasm Energy Chart* is the generic “chart-image” of McLuhan’s Menippean rendering of market researchers’ informatic toolbox in *The Mechanical Bride*. The Toronto collective’s pageants orchestrated a powerful Menippean satire of the contemporary “society of the spectacle” in its own right. The Cynic drama of the culminating chapter of Lewis’s *The Apes of God* can be recognized in retrospect as an indirect influence on these performances via the collective’s intensive reading of the British artist-author’s Canadian disciple (McLuhan). General Idea’s subsequent “rehearsals” for its projected 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant—including *Blocking* (1974), *Going Thru the Motions* (1975) and *Towards an Audience Vocabulary* (1977)—which coached audiences in the protocols of pageant etiquette, similarly recall the mass stereotyping of affect and bodies alternately described, critiqued and operationalized by the statistically-motivated writings and artistic explorations of Brooker and McLuhan. It is not implausible that these performances were also an oblique reference to, and satirical commentary on, the highly publicized, but ultimately foiled, efforts of McLuhan’s associate and ROM Head of

Design and Installations, Harley Parker, to engage youthful audiences (in particular, the Hippie denizens of nearby Yorkville) by engineering responsive, “informatic” environments.\textsuperscript{136}

Adding to these parallels between the corporate authorship of General Idea and NETCO, are correspondences between the organizational architectures, and untimely ruination, of the two entities’ prototypical edifices: the Centre for Communication and the Arts and \textit{The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion}. The fragmentation of the Centre’s McLuhan-inspired, interdisciplinary “sensorium” of arts programs under the stresses of SFU’s turbulent early growth anticipated the ritual unmaking of General Idea’s notional \textit{Pavillion} in 1977.\textsuperscript{137} Philip Monk observes that, “Architecture serves a purpose and follows a program; it is a corporate activity, indeed, a corporate creativity; lone vision is insufficient in a world of business.”\textsuperscript{138} In serving as a container for the informatically circumscribed bodies and desires coordinated by the pageants, the \textit{Pavillion} also suggests analogies with the “despatialized” architecture of Eames’s earlier “Information Machine,” or the “sensorial city” envisioned by Kepes.\textsuperscript{139}

A more proximal referent may have been Toronto’s CN Tower—in the memorable words of Arthur Kroker, that “perfect phallocentric symbol of the union of power and technology in the making of the Canadian discourse”—whose spectacular construction, from 1973 to 1976, coincided with the metaphorical erection, and subsequent detumescence, of the \textit{Pavillion}—a project first announced in the pages of the collective’s

\textsuperscript{137} See Monk, \textit{Glamour is Theft}, 111. The ceremonial destruction of the Pavillion also recalls Smithson’s influential figurations of entropy.
\textsuperscript{138} Monk, \textit{Glamour is Theft}, 82.
\textsuperscript{139} Halpern, \textit{Beautiful Data}, 135, 98.
parasitic house organ, FILE magazine, in 1973. Indeed, the 1977 “burning” of the Pavillion is legible as a ritual demolition of the manipulative conjunction of information technologies and sensorial environments imbricated in the Tower through the consultative role in its design played by McLuhan’s one-time collaborator, University of Toronto professor of psychiatry Daniel Cappon. Capton had assisted McLuhan in developing the 1965 IBM Sensory Profile Study for quantifying the sensory preferences of different audiences. Prior to cutting ties with Cappon, McLuhan had hoped to apply this instrument toward the Parker-like ambition of engineering new environments capable of modifying the sensory “ratios” of their occupants in response to shifting social priorities. Given Cappon’s dual identity as a controversial and outspoken critic of homosexuality, it is tempting to read General Idea’s Pavillion as, at least in part, a deliberate travesty and dissolution of the authoritarian contours of the psychiatrist’s normative info-architecture.

Monk’s ingenious “simulacrum” of General Idea’s conceptual system rightly emphasizes the structural role played by Burroughs’s “cut-up” method in the Pavillion’s “Collage or Perish” edifice.” Following the example of Burroughs’s collage ethos, the divisive architectonics of the Pavillion—like the collective’s larger mythical apparatus—

140 Arthur Kroker, Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant (Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1984), 9; see also Bayer, “Uncovering the Roots of General Idea,” 94; Monk, Glamour is Theft, 63, 193.
142 See Marchand, Marshall McLuhan, 174-75.
144 Monk, Glamour is Theft, 126, 63.
constituted a “system of signs in motion.”  

In this structure, there was “no room for enclosures, but only divisions.”  

Yet Monk’s emphasis on the semiotic flux of Burroughs’s garbled prose notably overlooks the informatic flow of Stein’s psychophysically-inspired experiments in the generative possibilities of repetition, given greater prominence in Bordowitz’s account of General Idea.  

Indeed, the inaugural iteration of the collective’s Miss General Idea Pageant was staged as an impromptu finale to a theatrical performance held in 1970 at the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts in Toronto. The 10-day event loosely reinterpreted Stein’s 1913 play What Happened utilizing audio, video, photography, and other documentary formats to aggregate data generated by performers and audiences alike—both inside and outside the theatre space—which was then incorporated into subsequent acts on the fly.  

The autoexperimental logic of Stein’s stuttering language games suggests an alternate frame for interpreting the informatic discontents of the collective’s unrealized Pavillion such as the layout-like grid of the Showcards, which “served the same archival function as FILE, but now totally devoted to the Pavillion.”  

Rather than the structuralist imaginary of Barthes, Debord and Lévi-Strauss that propels Monk’s linguistically motivated chronicle of General Idea’s processes of auto-mythologization (however dynamic in his retelling), it is, rather, the psychophysical flux conjured by the informatic

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145 Monk, Glamour is Theft, 180.  
146 AA Bronson quoted in Monk, Glamour is Theft, 166.  
147 See Bordowitz, General Idea, 19-22.  
149 It was as if the process of putting together the magazine now became the practical means of constructing the Pavillion. … The Showcards’ scenario plotted word lines and sightlines converging on the Pavillion’s elevations.” Monk, Glamour is Theft, 195. Re-situating General Idea within the reception of Stein’s work also indirectly ties the Toronto collective to the same Bergsonian lineage as Brooker and McLuhan. See, for instance, Joseph Riddell, “Stein and Bergson,” in The Turning Word: American Literary Modernism and Continental Theory, ed. Mark Bauerlein, 84-123 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).
aesthetic of McLuhan and Stein that animated the collective’s “system.” It is just such an informatic dissolution of categories that General Idea’s *Pavilion* directed at the insufficiently generic architecture of the Cappon-inflected CN Tower.\(^{150}\) The collective’s satirical “architecture” of ruination was also inspired by the informatic materialism of Smithson’s entropic allegories, the latter’s “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan” having been cited by Bronson as sowing “the seeds of [General Idea’s] elaborate and invented universe.”\(^{151}\) Smithson’s resistant reworking of the informatic media of cartography, journalism, and photo-documentation set an influential prototype for the Toronto collective’s similarly agonistic and ludic interventions within information media.

This brief survey of previously underemphasized informatic dimensions of General Idea’s corporate theatre has corroborated the claims of earlier chapters while continuing to sketch future directions for the study of information art in English Canada. General Idea’s projects disclose striking consistencies with the earlier work of Brooker, NETCO and Smithson—the collective’s evolving relationship with the information industries of American consumer culture to some extent even playing out as a quasi-Bergsonian recapitulation of the preceding history of information art in English Canada: from the psychophysical decomposition of the body and subjectivity carried out by Brooker to a Smithson-like Menippean politics of entropy and refusal. Yet, the Toronto-based group simultaneously enacted a queering of earlier informatic forms and strategies that endows

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\(^{150}\) “To dissolve categories was to keep them fluid,” writes Monk; “Sometimes it took an aggressive act. That was what collage was all about.” Monk, *Glamour is Theft*, 190.

\(^{151}\) Monk, *Glamour is Theft*, 147, emphasis in the original; Bronson quoted in Monk, *Glamour is Theft*, 161. Bonson also states that the issue of *Artforum* containing Smithson’s photo-essay constituted the first addition to the collection that would eventually become the artist-run centre Art Metropole. See Bronson quoted in Monk, *Glamour is Theft*, 161. In particular, the process of “de-architecturization” staged by Smithson’s *Partially Buried Woodshe*ed, installed at Cornell University in 1969, suggests an antecedent for the entropic unmaking of GI’s 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion. See Foster et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, 552.
its information ecology with a distinct libidinal economy. In some respects, General Idea’s queering of McLuhanesque notions of information as embodiment and social ontology introduces an element of “difference” that resonates with the *haecceity* inscribed in Ingrid Baxter’s critical, but also fraught, inhabitation and transformation of a corporate executive role. Like the other Canadian projects examined in this dissertation, General Idea’s engagements with information reveal an attentiveness to the sensorial and socially situated potential of information, while also exposing the influence of Smithson’s more politically-inflected Menippean satire of the Bergsonian and McLuhanesque tropes that fuelled NETCO’s operative manipulation of the corporate channels of an information society.


5. Van Dyke Brooke, *The Adventure of the Thumb Print* (still), 1912. Reproduced with the permission of the Archive Film Agency Ltd.


16. Presentation copy of Wyndham Lewis’s *Enemy*, no. 2, signed September 14, 1939.


22. Bertram Brooker, Toccata, ca. 1927.


27. Bertram Brooker [layout], Katherine Mansfield’s story “The Daughters of the Late Colonel,” 1926.

28. Reliance Engravers [Bertram Brooker, designer], “Figure Drawing,” 1928.

30. Bertram Brooker, “Chart” for *Jevon*, 1925. Reproduced with the permission of the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections.

33. Bertram Brooker [Richard Surrey], Copy Technique in Advertising, 1930.

34. N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Celebration of the Body (detail), 1976. Reproduced with the permission of IAIN BAXTER&.


44. N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., “V.I.P.,” ca. 1968-70. Reproduced with the permission of IAIN BAXTER&.
45. N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., *A Portfolio of Piles*, 1968. Reproduced with the permission of IAIN BAXTER&.

46. Iain Baxter (photograph), Class Project at Emily Carr, ca. 1981-83. Reproduced with the permission of IAIN BAXTER&.
47. N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., *Sexual Clichés*, 1973. Reproduced with the permission of IAIN BAXTER&.


![Diagram](image)


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