

**Representing The Eternal Network:
Vancouver Artists' Publications, 1969-73**

by

**Tusa Shea
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Supervisor: Dr. Christopher Thomas

ABSTRACT

A number of artists' publications produced by the Vancouver-based collectives Image Bank, Ace Space Co., and Poem Company, which were circulated through Correspondence Art networks between 1969 and 1973 were crucial to the development of an "imagined community" known as the Eternal Network. This thesis uses the social, political, and art historical context specific to the development of artists' self-publishing in Vancouver as a case study. It examines how, at this particular time and place, these artists helped to build a parallel communications structure that functioned as an autonomous fictive space in which they could adhere to their anti-commodity, decentralized, and democratic ideals.

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INTRODUCTION

Historians of the alternative press have remarked on the preponderance of artists' publishing in Canada during the 1960s and 70s.¹ According to Fluxus artist Ken Friedman, "For some time in the early 70s, Canada served as a world centre for alternate press work by and for artists."² While two of the better known Canadian artists' publishing ventures, Coach House Press and General Idea's *FILE* magazine, were based in Toronto, Vancouver was also in the forefront of artists' publishing. A number of artists' publications produced in Vancouver and circulated through Correspondence Art networks were crucial to the development of an imagined community known as the "Eternal Network." This thesis explores how a specific group of Vancouver artists helped to develop the Eternal Network through spatially arranged publications.

¹ Chuck Welch, "Corresponding Worlds: Debate and Dialogue," in Chuck Welch ed., *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 188; Geza Perneczky, *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in Light of their Periodicals 1968-1988* (Köln, Germany: Edition Soft Geometry, 1993), 16, 20, 21, 63; Ken Friedman, "Notes on the History of the Alternative Press," unpublished version of an article originally published in *Contemporary Art Southeast* (vol. 1, no. 3, 1977), 5, "Glenn Lewis Artist File," Vancouver Art Gallery Library; John Held, *Mail Art an Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1991), xvii.

² Friedman, "Notes," 5.

Vancouver artists who were active in Correspondence Art during the late 60s enthusiastically embraced French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou's concept of a collaborative, global, utopian "Eternal Network" of artists, and promoted it through publications. In order to understand the role Vancouver artists played in the development of the Eternal Network, it is necessary to clarify the difference between Correspondence Art and Filliou's utopian concept. Correspondence Art encompasses a variety of ephemeral media, including postcards, pamphlets, posters, collage, packaged ephemera, rubber stamp art, artists' stamps, objects, and publications. In general, these media are cheaply produced and often text-based. Historians have looked for Correspondence Art precedents in the work of the Dadaists, Futurists, and Russian Constructivists; however, the birth of the movement can be most clearly linked to works produced in the early 1950s by European artists associated with the Nouveaux Réalistes, and New York artist Ray Johnson, who was affiliated with the international Fluxus group.³ Johnson, who had been mailing collages and art works to friends, fellow artists, strangers, and corporate offices since the late 50s, is regarded as the central figure in this early phase of

³ Ken Friedman, "The Early Days of Mail Art," 4.

Correspondence Art.⁴ His informal mailing group was christened “The New York Correspondence School” by fellow artist Ed Plunket, and was the first network of Correspondence Artists to gain public notoriety.⁵ As Fluxus artist Ken Friedman put it, “If the Nouveaux Réalistes created paradigms of correspondence art and mailed art as works, it was the ‘New York Correspondence School’ that took the notion from paradigm to practice.”⁶ In 1968, Johnson contacted Vancouver artist Michael Morris after seeing reproductions of his work in *Art Forum* magazine, and they began mailing ephemera to each other.⁷ The meeting of these two artists is commonly cited as the beginning of the Correspondence Art movement in Vancouver.⁸

If Correspondence Art is an activity, then the Eternal Network is the conceptual, or fictive, space in which that activity takes place. Whereas Correspondence Art often

⁴ Michael Crane and Mary Stofflet eds, *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984), 83.

⁵ John Held Jr, “Networking: The Origin of Terminology,” 17.

⁶ Friedman, “Notes,” 5.

⁷ Joan Lowndes, “Multi-happening of Michael Morris,” *The Province*, Vancouver, 27 September 1968, 11. See also Scott Watson, “Hand of the Spirit: Documents of the Seventies from the Morris/Trasov Archive” in UBC Fine Arts Gallery, *Hand of the Spirit: Documents of the Seventies from the Morris/Trasov Archive* (Vancouver, 1994), 7.

⁸ Although it wasn’t until Ray Johnson contacted Michael Morris that Correspondence Art flourished in Vancouver, Gary Lee Nova had been exchanging art and ephemera with San Francisco artist Bruce Conner since 1965. See, Anna Banana, “Mail Art Canada” in Crane and Stofflet eds, *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984), 245-248.

involves a circle or community of artists exchanging art and ephemera, the Eternal Network is a global utopian concept that validates the collaboration and exchange being performed. Conceived by Filliou in the mid-1960s, the Eternal Network developed as an alternative to the avant-garde—as a spatially arranged communications system that would run parallel to, but outside, the official art world. The concept struck a powerful chord with Vancouver artists and by 1973 was being used as an umbrella term for the contemporary practice of Correspondence Art.⁹

While a number of international artists used the postal system as a means of disseminating art and information at this time, Vancouver artists have been singled out for their role in the consolidation of independent Correspondence Art projects into the Eternal Network.¹⁰ As Geza Perneckzy observes, “Ray Johnson’s ‘correspondence school’ became a network proper upon the birth of its West Coast variant or, more precisely, at the time when it established contact with the Vancouver and Calgary-based

⁹ Kate Craig et al., *Art and Correspondence from the Western Front* (Vancouver, 1979), 3. The concept of the Eternal Network has been credited by members of the Western Front Society with providing artists with the incentive to develop their own alternative spaces.

¹⁰ John Held states that *File* magazine was the first major publication linking the emerging network; however, Imagebank supplied the Image Request Lists printed by *File*, and also published its own *Image Request List* in 1972. Held, *Mail Art an Annotated Bibliography*, xxv. See also, Michael Crane “The Speed of Correspondence Art,” in Crane and Stofflet eds, *Correspondence Art* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984), 147; Friedman, “Notes,” 5; and Chuck Welch, “Corresponding Worlds: Debate and

Canadian artists.”¹¹ According to West Coast Correspondence Artist Anna Banana (a.k.a. Anna Long), “out of this simmering brew of artistic talents and collaborations came several publications that flash-fired the whole activity, illuminating the overall picture, and at the same time burning out many of the originators and transforming mail art into something else.”¹² In Vancouver between 1969 and 1973, publications produced by Image Bank (Michael Morris, Vincent Trasov, and, until c. 1973, Garry Lee-Nova), Ace Space Co. (Dana Atchley), and Poem Company (Ed Varney) played a significant part in the early development and promotion of the Eternal Network.

This thesis attempts to fill a gap in the scholarship: even though numerous historians of the Correspondence Art movement have pointed to the crucial role played by Vancouver artists in the creation of the Eternal Network through publishing ventures, no one has explored the reasons this was so. I have been guided by three related questions: Why were Vancouver artists so receptive to the concept of a fictional utopian communications system? How did they use publications to develop it? Why was artists’ publishing so prevalent in Vancouver at this time? Several social currents and conditions

Dialogue” in Chuck Welch ed., *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 188.

¹¹ Geza Perneczky, *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in Light of Their Periodicals, 1968 – 1988* (Budapest, Hungary: Hettorony Edition, 1991), 20.

specific to Vancouver emerged during the course of this study, which help to explain why Vancouver artists were especially responsive to the global, utopian concept of the Eternal Network.

The utopian spirit that characterized the late 60s was compounded in Vancouver by a sense of isolation and regional identification with the “far West” as a new frontier. This “frontier mentality” led many Vancouver artists to seek association with a West Coast arts community with international aspirations that straddled the coastal cities of Vancouver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Vancouver poets and artists were encouraged by San Francisco and Los Angeles poets and artists associated with the Black Mountain School and the Beat movement to experiment with performance and concrete poetry, and to produce alternative publications. A cheap and accessible medium, printing was and still is associated with democratic ideals and radicalism, making it an especially popular medium with the counter-cultural movement.

Vancouver artists were also directly influenced by Marshall McLuhan’s communications theories, which promoted spatial perception and paved the way for “network thinking.” Many Vancouver artists found encouragement and inspiration to

¹² Anna Banana, “Mail Art Canada” in Crane and Stofflet eds, *Correspondence Art*, 245.

experiment with alternative forms of communication in McLuhan's popular theories, which posited artists as extra-perceptive ambassadors of new media to the rest of society. McLuhan's mantra "the medium is the message" was celebrated in Vancouver throughout the late 60s by a number of artists who engaged in Correspondence Art activities. Indeed, in this thesis I argue that Vancouver had a predominately communications-centred arts milieu. McLuhan's emphasis on alternative forms of communication encouraged Vancouver artists to embrace and promote Filliou's Eternal Network.

Another theme that emerged during the course of this study was the prevalence of "fictive thinking" in the Vancouver arts milieu at this time. Fictive thinking is evident in the utopian mindset shared by artists' collectives such as Intermedia, Image Bank, and The Western Front; in the shared regional West Coast identity; in the alter-egos created by a number of artists involved in Correspondence Art; and in the imagined community of the Eternal Network. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson explains how nations, as essentially fictional collective identities, have been successfully sustained through representations of "communion" in the form of publications, such as the daily

press.¹³ These representations are consumed simultaneously by a broad audience, fostering what Anderson calls “a deep horizontal comradeship.”¹⁴ This element of collective imagining, or fictive thinking, was crucial to the perpetuation of the Eternal Network, which, without geographic territory to ground it, relied heavily on publications to substantiate its existence.¹⁵ As Anderson observed, “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”¹⁶ In this thesis, I explore *how* Vancouver artists represented the imagined community of the Eternal Network through spatially arranged publications that emphasized the decentralized, democratic, anti-commodifying, and experiential goals of its participants.

One problem I initially encountered in exploring the development of artists’ publications was the wide variety of movements and forms from which they emerged and borrowed. The alternative press, the little magazine, concrete poetry, Dada, Neo-Dada,

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 30.

¹⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

¹⁵ Although the Eternal Network continues to materialize through publications, the internet has also become a useful venue for Eternal Network participants. Throughout this thesis I occasionally refer to the Eternal Network in the past tense, and at other times I refer to it in the present tense. When I refer to it in the past tense, I am making a statement that is particularly true for the beginning phase of the Eternal Network – such a statement may no longer be true for the Network of today. When I refer to the Network in the present tense, I am doing so in order to emphasize that it is a phenomenon that continues.

and Conceptual Art can all be strongly related to —or seen as precedents for— the various forms of publications artists produce. The history of the alternative press shares a common origin with that of the little magazine. Both are “characterized by opposition to the dominant character in our society – to the popular press, the advertising economy, and all those pressures which would reduce the individual to stark uniformity as producer-consumer of a mechanized super-state...”¹⁷ By making available information previously censored by the mainstream press, the alternative press called attention to the biased construction of knowledge.¹⁸

With their interest in the collection and preservation of periodicals, librarians have been in the forefront of research on the history of the alternative press, which can encompass a wide variety of radical, revolutionary, and “underground” serial publications, including those produced by artists. *The Alternative Press in Canada* compiled by Anne Woodsworth provides a bibliography and a general introduction to alternative publications produced in Canada from the mid-1960s to the early 70s. While

¹⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15.

¹⁷ Since the birth of the printing press, when it became possible to reproduce texts without the intervention of either church or state, revolutionary and avant-garde movements have used broadsides, pamphlets, and periodicals to disseminate information. See, Louis Dudek, *Literature and the Press* (Toronto: Ryerson/Contact, 1960), 140.

¹⁸ Friedman, “Notes,” 1.

Woodsworth's compilation supplies contemporary information on the burgeoning "journal revolution" in Canada, Ken Norris's more recent book *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925-80* provides a detailed historical examination of the development of alternative publishing in Canada.¹⁹ His investigation of the influence of Black Mountain Poetics on the formation of *Tish* magazine in Vancouver is especially enlightening; however, his interest is primarily in "literary" movements.

Artists' publishing activity in general is not a widely researched topic in the discipline of art history. A ground-breaking 1976 exhibition accompanied by an essay anthology entitled *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, edited by Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot, examines the ways in which art periodicals affected the development of Western art from the early nineteenth century to the present. Especially important is John A. Walker's essay "Periodicals Since 1945," which examines the difference between periodicals about art and those which are presented as art, Walker argues that art periodicals act as "feedback mechanisms" by providing "snapshots of art

¹⁹ Ken Norris "The Black Mountain Influence: Tish and Beyond" in *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925 – 80: Its Role in the Development of Modernism and Post-Modernism in Canadian Poetry* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1984), 97-131.

at particular moments.”²⁰ This concept coincides well with Benedict Anderson’s observation that publications imbed representations, or “snapshots,” of a shared fraternity into the minds of readers.

Artists’ publications have also been discussed in conjunction with political and avant-garde movements. In the 1978 exhibition catalogue *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, Dawn Ades examines publications produced by Dada and Surrealist artists in Europe and North America. During the 1910s and 20s the Dadaists, with their goal of transforming society, used publishing as a means to disseminate their anti-establishment attitudes and avant-garde ideas. Drawing from the Futurist concept of “words in freedom” they developed the technique of “psychotype” in which the typographical character of the printed words participated in the expression of thought.²¹ In this way, they constructed nonsensical, irrational, and ironic word plays, poems, and manifestoes which were published in a flood of European magazines such as *Dada*, *Cabaret Voltaire*,

²⁰ John A. Walker, “Periodicals Since 1945” in Tevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot eds. *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines, Essays Published for the Art Libraries Society on the Occasion of the International Conference on Art Periodicals and the Exhibition ‘The Art Press’ at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: The Art Book Co., 1976), 45.

²¹ Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 34.

Littérature, Les Soirées de Paris, and in New York, 291, *New York Dada*, *Rongwrong*, and others.²²

A number of anti-art movements that surfaced in Europe after World War Two also used publications and printed matter to subvert the dominant culture. Stuart Home's *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (1988) calls attention to the utopian tradition in postwar anti-art movements including COBRA, the Lettriste Movement, the Situationist International and its various factions, Fluxus, Mail Art, and several others. Home follows the "utopian current" pulsing through these movements by analyzing the ways in which each aims at the integration of art and life, international status, and the use of alternative publishing in order to remain, at least partially, autonomous of dominant cultural institutions.²³

In the mid-sixties, Conceptual artists like Dan Graham and Joseph Kosuth used the space of the magazine subversively as a way to circumvent the commercial and authoritative space of the art gallery, and to avoid producing commodity art.²⁴

Conceptual artists additionally used the pages of the magazine as an exhibition space for

²² For a thorough discussion of these and other Dada and Surrealist magazines see *Ibid.*

²³ Stuart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (London: Aporia Press and Unpopular Books, 1988), 71.

their language and photography-based “idea art.” According to the New York art critic

Lucy Lippard:

One of the things we [conceptual artists and critics] often speculated about in the late sixties was the role of the art magazine. In an era of proposed projects, photo-text works, and artist’s books, the periodical could be the ideal vehicle for art itself rather than merely for reproduction, commentary, and promotion.²⁵

Conceptual artists, along with adherents to the anti-art movements mentioned above, worked upon—and often within—the official art world to subvert it. In contrast, the Eternal Network was conceived of as a separate, parallel utopian space. Within the Eternal Network, publications play a very specific role. The Network’s only cohesive goal is communication; its products are often text-based, non-aesthetic, and cheaply produced; the artists are collective and sometimes anonymous; and participation in the Network is often referred to by “networkers” as a mystical experience.

The Eternal Network has largely been discussed by participants as a collective history of the Correspondence Art movement. Several internationally focused publications have attempted to document and define Correspondence Art practice while

²⁴ Anne Rorimer, “Siting the Page: Exhibiting Works in Publications” in Michael Newman and Jon Bird eds., *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London, 1999), 15 – 19.

supporting the Eternal Network's collective and experiential ideals by allowing correspondence artists to tell their own histories through personal descriptions of practice and recollections of events. These include the 1971 landmark publication *Mail Art Communication, A Distance Concept*, compiled and written by Jean-Marc Poinot; *Correspondence Art: Sourcebook for the Network of International Postal Activity* (1984), edited by Michael Crane and Mary Stofflet; John Held's *Mail Art: an Annotated Bibliography* (1991); and *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology* (1995), edited by Chuck Welch.

An exception is Chuck Welch's earlier study of 1986, *Networking Currents: Contemporary Mail Art Subjects and Issues*. Here, Welch reveals the inherent biases in the Eternal Network's claim to be a global, democratic, and collective art practice. Though the Network claims to be accessible to everyone, through its reliance on the postal system it excludes the homeless, the geographically remote, and those living under government regimes where mail is suppressed.²⁶ Although Correspondence Art claims to dematerialize and decommmodify the art object, the artworks being exchanged are always subject to censorship by the recipient, often based on personal aesthetic sensibilities;

²⁵ Lucy Lippard, "Escape Attempts" in Anna Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975* (Los Angeles, 1995), 32-33.

many works will not be circulated because of poor aesthetic quality. Though it claims to be a collective art practice, many artists use Correspondence Art in the interest of self-promotion and are keenly protective of their authorship. Seen through the lens of the official art world, the Eternal Network becomes a series of self-contradictions.

In part, this is due to the ideal of the Network as a global, collective, decentralized process that functions within its own set of utopian values, outside the “official” context of the art world. To contextualize this process according to the tenets of the official art world brings the “fiction” of the Eternal Network into conflict with the existential world, in which it cannot but fail to function utopically. Most broad histories of the Eternal Network have attempted to avoid addressing its inconsistencies by presenting it as a series of intersecting personal perspectives, with each participant representing their own experiences. In contrast, this thesis attempts to avoid becoming embroiled in an unproductive critique of the ways in which the Eternal Network fails to operate utopically, by treating it as a “fiction” that encouraged artists to act “as if” the official art world could be circumvented.²⁷

²⁶ Welch, 1986, 6.

²⁷ I elaborate on this in Chapter Two, in which I use Hans Vaihinger’s “As If” philosophy to explain the Eternal Network.

Although they supply a foundation for the history of the Correspondence Art movement, the studies mentioned above do not specifically discuss the role of artists' publishing in the creation of the Eternal Network. Geza Pernesczky's international publication *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in the Light of Their Periodicals, 1968-1988* (1993), attempts to fill this gap through a discussion of artists' self-published works as a form of "alternative publicity" within the Eternal Network. While Pernesczky's treatment of the Eternal Network as a marginal art practice that chooses to remain outside the official art system supplies a crucial foundation for further theorizing, his discussion of artists' self-publishing is based on his own experiences as a participating "networker." His personal anecdotes and reminiscences weave a tale that is sometimes highly detailed and, at others, glaringly inaccurate. Although he notes that "the threads of the story all lead us back to the Image Bank on the West Coast of Canada," Pernesczky's discussion does not do justice to the important role played by Vancouver artists in the growth and development of the Eternal Network through artists' self-publishing ventures.

While chroniclers of the Correspondence Art movement tend to note the significant role Vancouver Correspondence artists played in the promotion of the Eternal

Network, there have been few attempts to provide a specific context for the development of artists' publishing in Vancouver. A survey of the relevant literature demonstrates that, although Vancouver artists were integral to the development of the Eternal Network, the publications they produced have not been the topic of an art historical inquiry. Several studies and anthologies that have attempted to document and provide context for the development of art in Vancouver mention the Eternal Network and its primary vehicle of communication, *Correspondence Art*, but do not mention artists' publications. The 1983 anthology *Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada*, edited by Robert Bringhurst, and the 1983 Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition catalogue *Vancouver Art and Artists, 1931-1983* both contain essays that point to the importance of Correspondence Art to conceptually-oriented artists in Vancouver during the 1960s and early 70s. Similarly, the 1993 publication *Whispered Art History: Twenty Years at the Western Front*, edited by Keith Wallace, mentions the central role played by the Eternal Network in the daily workings of the collective-run centre. While Correspondence Art and the Eternal Network are touched upon in several essays contained in these publications, they remain largely a footnote to other studies of conceptually-based art practices in Vancouver.

Eternal Network participant Anna Banana has written two essays on her personal experiences and involvement in West Coast-based Correspondence Art activities and publishing ventures, "Mail Art Canada" published in Crane and Stofflet's 1984 anthology, and "Vile History," an updated version of the introduction to her *Book About Vile* (1983), published in Welch's anthology of 1995. These essays provide richly detailed recollections of Vancouver-based Eternal Network activities involving a number of local artists, but, each is limited by its singular point of view. Because the existing literature on artists' self-publishing in Vancouver often reflects one artist's or art group's experiences without consideration of the larger social, political, and art historical contexts, that literature remains fragmented.

Further attempts to broaden the understanding of Vancouver's avant-garde position in the Canadian art scene during the late 60s and early 70s have occurred as a result of the UBC Fine Arts Gallery's acquisition of the Image Bank collection in 1991. Over twenty-five years, Image Bank cofounders Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov amassed a collection of over 10,000 items, many of which are self-published and small-press artists' books and serials.²⁸ According to Morris, one of Image Bank's main

²⁸ UBC Fine Arts Gallery, "Morris Trasov Archive" n.p.; "Michael Morris Vertical File," Vancouver Art Gallery Library.

interests was “with publications that reflect current trends, personalities and formats emerging from the international network.”²⁹ The UBC Fine Arts Gallery’s publication *Hand of the Spirit: Documents of the Seventies from the Morris/Trasov Archive* (1994), summarizes the contents of the archive and provides social and historical context for Image Bank activities and projects in essays written by Scott Watson and Keith Wallace. Although this initial research conducted on Image Bank provides a context for the activities of Morris and Trasov, their collections of local artists’ serials and books remain largely unexamined.

In light of these considerations, this thesis argues that an examination of the role played by Vancouver artists’ self-publishing projects in the development of the Eternal Network needs to be broad enough to consider more than just one artist’s perspective. At the same time, to support a discussion of the Eternal Network as a fictive concept that had “real” repercussions on the development of the Vancouver arts milieu, it needs to be narrow enough to meaningfully include a specific social, political and art historical context. Most important, this study of Vancouver artists self-publishing attempts to respect the utopian ideals of the Eternal Network. It builds on theories advanced by Geza

²⁹ Michael Morris “The Artist as curator of the Imagination,” *Artscanada* (April/May, 1978) vol 35, 42.

Pernescky by treating the Eternal Network as a parallel utopian conceptual realm within which artist's self-publishing ventures functioned to publicize and perpetuate the system.

It takes Pernescky's treatment of the Eternal Network as a marginal art practice a step further by discussing it as an imagined community, or shared fiction. By treating the Eternal Network as a fictive realm this thesis draws an imaginary line between the official art system and the utopian Eternal Network, thereby honoring the Network's self-declared autonomy.

The parameters of this study bear some explanation. Because many artists who work, or at one time worked, within the Eternal Network have recited their own various histories in anthologies, retelling their stories here would not be particularly useful. A thorough analysis of all Vancouver-based artists' publications is beyond the scope of this thesis, which considers publications produced between 1969 and 1973, when the Eternal Network was in its formative stage. Not all Vancouver-based artists' publications produced during this time will be accounted for in this thesis because a large number remain unknown. Their ephemerality, the irregularity with which they appeared, and the fact that they were not often collected by libraries or individuals, makes a comprehensive study impractical. For this reason, this study has relied heavily on the Morris/Trasov

Archive which, while not complete, offers the largest collection of correspondence art material in Canada.³⁰ Other archival collections consulted include the Vancouver Art Gallery Library Vertical Files, the University of Victoria Special Collections Library, and the Peter Day Fonds at the Belkin Gallery, UBC. In particular, this study focuses on publications produced by Image Bank (a.k.a. Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov); Poem Company (a.k.a. Ed Varney and Henry Rappaport); and Ace Space Co (a.k.a. Dana Atchley).

By building on work done by scholars who have in some instances documented the activities of artists participating in the Eternal Network, and in others outlined and discussed the historical development of an arts milieu in Vancouver, this thesis constructs a localized, context-based history that can support a theoretical and philosophical examination of the global, decentralized ideals of the Eternal Network. It uses the social, political, and art historical context specific to the development of artists' self-publishing in Vancouver as a case study. Starting from this context and using artists' publications as evidence, it analyses the reasons why and how, at this particular time and place, it

³⁰ To emphasize that, the title of a publication or piece of ephemera collected by Image Bank—now housed in the Morris/Trasov Archive—is highlighted with an asterisk at first mention in the text and footnotes.

became possible, and even advantageous, for artists to build a parallel communications structure that could function separately from the official art world.

The Eternal Network's focus on communication and experience has shaped my approach to this topic. In investigating the purpose and development of the Eternal Network, as it took shape in Vancouver, I have followed a path with branches leading in many directions. While it is possible to define the Eternal Network as a postmodern development, rooted in a relativistic view of all realities as fictions, I have been struck repeatedly by participating artists' emphasis on the transformative power of the "experiential event." The primacy of experiential knowledge also winds its way through a number of influential movements that helped to shape artists' publishing in Vancouver, including Black Mountain Poetics, Concretism, Fluxus, and Marshall McLuhan's theories about communications and space. Terms such as intersubjectivity, holism, gestalt, field, mosaic, and mind-body experience are used by artists to describe the Eternal Network; they are also terms that emerged out of or are related to the development of process philosophy during the early twentieth century. In opposition to objective rationalism, process philosophy offers a theory of reality that merges objective truths with subjective

perceptions.³¹ At the core of the “process perspective” is a revolutionary spirit of social change that opposes objectivity’s separation of the mind and body, and instead focuses on their interaction and relation.³²

In this study, I have chosen to investigate and emphasize the consistent focus on experiential communication. In this respect I have found the following studies particularly helpful. Daniel Belgrad’s book *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America*, provides a rich, interdisciplinary, historical overview of the development of artistic interpretations of process philosophy, such as Black Mountain School poetics and Beat Poetry, in post-war American art. In addition, Richard Cavell’s recent look at Marshall McLuhan’s spatial theories, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography*, has two chapters, “Artiste de livres” and “Visible Speech,” which trace the intellectual history of McLuhan’s use of publications to express spatial theory.³³ These chapters support my contention that McLuhan’s publications embody the tactic of experiential communication through the use of eccentric or “concrete” typography and experimental formats. Cavell’s fresh and exhaustive research also enabled me to make

³¹ For more see Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). See especially Chapter Five, “Subjectivity in the Energy Field: The Influence of Alfred North Whitehead,” 120-141.

³² Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*, 3-4.

connections between McLuhan and members of the international Fluxus group. Finally, Hannah Higgins's study of the relationship between the historical avant-garde and the Fluxus group, entitled *Fluxus Experience*, provided me with further encouragement to explore the experiential aspect of the Eternal Network.³⁴

Chapter One establishes a context for the development of artists' publishing in Vancouver during the 60s. It discusses the role played by Marshall McLuhan's theories in the creation of a communications-centred arts milieu, and introduces a unique current of utopianism in the West Coast regional place-identity. Setting the Vancouver context in which the Correspondence Art movement and Filliou's concept of an Eternal Network were combined reveals that the Eternal Network which emerged in 1973 was significantly shaped by Vancouver artists' concerns with communications. In Chapter Two, I introduce Robert Filliou's principle of "Permanent Creation" and explore its affinity with the experiential aims of the Fluxus group and Marshall McLuhan. This chapter serves as a bridge to a discussion in Chapter Three of Vancouver artists' use of publications to provide Eternal Network participants with what Benedict Anderson calls

³³ Richard Cavell, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

³⁴ Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

“an image of their communion.”³⁵ This third, and final, chapter discusses the spatial communication engendered by publications produced by Image Bank, Ace Space Co. and Poem Company, and discusses how these three collectives used assemblage, lists and edited compilations to represent and promote the emerging Network.

³⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15.

CHAPTER ONE

A Communications-centred Arts Milieu:

Vancouver During the 1960s

While the Vancouver artists who engaged in Correspondence Art activities were motivated by their own diverse artistic and social concerns and experiences, it is possible to identify in their work an overarching preoccupation with new modes and structures of communication, fostered within the context of the 60s counter-cultural revolution.

Michael Morris, Vincent Trasov, Gary Lee Nova, Dana Atchley, Glenn Lewis, Ed Varney, and Anna Banana were instrumental, to varying degrees, in the transformation of the Correspondence Art movement into a global Network. That Network, in turn, encouraged artists' self-publishing by providing a venue with a decentralized global distribution system and utopian parameters that appealed to their anti-establishment sensibilities.

In this chapter, I examine the social and political counter-cultural currents that encouraged Vancouver artists to experiment with alternative modes of communication through self-publishing, prior to the formation of the Eternal Network. Marshall

McLuhan's pervasive communications theories; interaction between Vancouver and Black Mountain School poets and artists; the rise of the alternative press; and the increasing dominance of Conceptual Art and its questioning of the ways in which artists communicate with their audiences, merged in Vancouver during the 60s, creating a fertile environment for self-publishing experiments.

Self-publishing was made easier in Canada after the Massey Commission of 1953 recommended the formation of a government body that would promote the study and production of the arts.³⁶ The resulting Canada Council, which began in 1957, provided a new financial resource for publishing projects through a grant system. In addition, the development of offset printing in the early 60s, which followed the development of the mimeograph machine, provided a faster and cheaper method than letterpress. A number of publishing projects undertaken by modernist poets experimenting with concrete and performance poetry in Vancouver provided a precedent for artists' publishing and created an avant-garde milieu in which self-publishing became an accessible means of disseminating new work and ideas directly and widely.

³⁶ Ken Norris, *The Little Magazine in Canada: 1925-80* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1984), 77.

The term “communications” is commonly used today to describe information exchange systems like satellite and internet technologies. There are also well-defined communications theories specific to the disciplines of engineering, sociology, and geography that have their own nuances and applications. In this study, the use of the term “communications” is circumscribed by the context in which it was used by artists during the 1960s. In his book *The Culture of Spontaneity*, Daniel Belgrad highlights the importance of the notion of intersubjectivity to avant-garde artists in post-war America, especially to those associated with the Black Mountain School and the Beat Movement, about which more is said later in this chapter.³⁷ Intersubjectivity is a key idea in the development of the Eternal Network’s structure of interaction. In opposition to the idea that only an objective position could ascertain reality, intersubjectivity posits that reality results from a process of interpretation and communication about the world between subjects. Intersubjectivity complicates simple definitions of communication, underlining the complexity of the process.

According to Belgrad, the notion of intersubjectivity is integral to the development of what he terms “the culture of spontaneity,” that is, an “alternative

³⁷ Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*. See especially Chapter Nine, “Spontaneous Writing and Beat Intersubjectivity,” 196-221.

metaphysics embodied in artistic forms” which provided a version of humanism that opposed the objectivity of Corporate liberalism.³⁸ Marshall McLuhan, the Black Mountain School, and the Beat Poets were some more prominent proponents of the aesthetic of spontaneity. They embraced and promoted a “third alternative, opposed to both the mass culture and the established high culture of the postwar period”³⁹ and, in so doing, influenced the development of a counter-culture that, during the sixties, sought an increasingly holistic experience of the world, unifying mind and body, art and life, medium and message.

As the focus of an intellectual and artistic inquiry, communication was not viewed as a simple linear exchange of information, as in the previously accepted Shannon-Weaver mathematical model,⁴⁰ but instead became a multi-dimensional constellation of synergistic exchanges.⁴¹ Marshall McLuhan singled out artists as communications

³⁸ Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*, 5.

³⁹ Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*, 5.

⁴⁰ According to the Shannon-Weaver model, information passed linearly from a source as a signal to a receiver, occasionally accompanied by unwanted “noise” that was considered irrelevant. Marshall McLuhan identified this “noise” as part of the communication process. Graeme Patterson, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, the Interpretation of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 98-100.

⁴¹ Buckminster Fuller made “synergy” a common term, seeing all interactive systems in its terms. He developed “Synergetics,” which he described as a “geometry of thinking.” Fuller was a faculty member of Black Mountain College between 1945 and 48, during the same period that Ray Johnson took classes there. Fuller lectured in Vancouver during the 60s. He also coined the term “spaceship earth” and invented the

specialists who would call attention to the ways in which information and knowledge are presented and exchanged through both traditional (printed) and new (electronic) media. Although not commonly noted, I believe he was influenced by John Dewey's views on art. In *Art as Experience* (1932), Dewey explains that "sensitivity to a medium as a medium is the very heart of all artistic creation and esthetic perception" and summarizes with the statement "the medium is a mediator."⁴² McLuhan's proclamation that "the medium is the message" was still far from an overloaded slogan when it first appeared in the mid-1950s.⁴³ He advocated a breakdown of those forms held to be natural through the creation of "counter-environments," which would release previously unanalyzed features of everyday life from the limitations of conventional explanations and definitions. According to McLuhan: "The media are not toys... They can be entrusted only to new artists, because they are art forms – that is, new ways of perception."⁴⁴ He

geodesic dome. See, Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

⁴² John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), 199-200.

⁴³ Between 1954 and 64 Marshall McLuhan published a number of articles on the relationship between the media and art, beginning in 1954 with "Notes on the Media as Art Forms" in *Explorations 2*, "The Verbi-voco-visual" in *Explorations 8* in 1957, and "The Medium is the Message" in *Forum* in 1960.

⁴⁴ McLuhan, *Counter Blast* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World Inc., 1969), 53.

saw the field of Communications as a domain that artists were best equipped to explore and develop for the rest of society.

McLuhan's theorizing about the special role of artists in society and the folly of separating information from its medium of conveyance, as well as his emphasis on the global and decentralized—in essence spatial—nature of communications in the electronic age had a direct impact on the Vancouver arts milieu. In 1959, he visited UBC and was invited to speak to the Arts Club about “the breakdown of artificial barriers between the various arts and their impending recombination in a new form”⁴⁵ According to John Bentley Mays, even at this time

his was hardly an unfamiliar name... [and] artists began to see in McLuhan's utterances a role for themselves as something other than suppliers of objects for consumers; they caught sight of new roles, as communicators, celebrants, and heirophants of the new electronic and media mysteries.⁴⁶

McLuhan's early visits to Vancouver have been credited with providing the impetus for the UBC Festivals of Contemporary Arts, first organized by BC Binning and June Binkert, which ran from 1961 to 1971 and brought avant-garde artists, poets,

⁴⁵ Alvin Balkind, “Body Snatching: Performance Art in Vancouver, A View of Its History,” *Living Art Vancouver* (Vancouver: Western Front, 1980), 72.

⁴⁶ John Bentley Mays, “The Snakes in the Garden,” Robert Bringham et al., *Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 1983), 159.

musicians, and thinkers to an eager Vancouver audience.⁴⁷ The Festivals of Contemporary Arts were one of a series of interdisciplinary arts events and “happenings” that flourished in Vancouver in the 60s, including poetry readings at the Vancouver School of Art, the Vancouver Art Gallery’s Special Events Program, Intermedia events, and multi-media performances at the Sound Gallery.

In 1965, McLuhan’s theories became the focus of a number of events. In February the UBC Festival of Contemporary Arts staged a multimedia performance conceived by Iain Baxter, Arthur Erickson, Helen Goodwin and Takao Tanabe, entitled “The Medium is the Message.”⁴⁸ This was followed in April by a series of lectures held at the Vancouver Art Gallery under the heading “Art and the McLuhan Ideas.” The lectures were given by Ronald Baker, head of the English Department at Simon Fraser University, and Victor Doray, then a medical illustrator for the Vancouver General Hospital. In the same year, the Simon Fraser University Centre for Communications and the Arts was founded under the guidance of R. Murray Schaefer, where, between 1965-73, several

⁴⁷ “Chronology” in *Vancouver Art and Artists: 1933 – 1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 190 – 205. See also Richard Cavell, *McLuhan in Space* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2002), 180-81. Some more prominent artists and thinkers to visit Vancouver through the Festivals of Contemporary Arts were Buckminster Fuller, John Cage, Lucy Lippard, and Merce Cunningham.

⁴⁸ “Chronology,” *Vancouver Art and Artists*, 195.

active participants in the Eternal Network, including Michael Morris, Iain Baxter, Glenn Lewis, and Dana Atchley would serve as artists-in-residence.⁴⁹

Vancouver artist Jack Shadbolt remembers becoming interested in McLuhan in 1965: "I called together everybody I thought would be a germinal thinker about a few things that were happening. We met at my house every week for a whole winter."⁵⁰ These meetings revealed a collective desire to experiment with new forms of media in an interdisciplinary way and resulted in the formation in 1967 of the influential but short-lived artists' collective Intermedia. Stimulated by McLuhan's observations, artists associated with the Intermedia collective, including Victor Doray, Iain Baxter, Michael Morris, Gerry Gilbert, Judith Copithorne, David Orcutt, Glenn Lewis, Gary Lee-Nova, Al Neil, Helen Goodwin, Maxine Gadd, Ed Varney, Henry Rappaport, and numerous others, set out to interrogate existing modes and structures of communication and to create new multi-sensory and unified ones.⁵¹

⁴⁹ "Chronology," *Vancouver Art and Artists*, 195. See also Dana Atchley, *Selected Biography*, April 1973, "Dana Atchley Vertical File," Vancouver Art Gallery Library.

⁵⁰ Jack Shadbolt, *Vancouver Art and Artists: 1933-1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 181.

⁵¹ In fact, there aren't many Vancouver artists who weren't involved somehow in Intermedia events and activities during the 60s. For an in-depth look at the birth, life, and death of Intermedia see Gail Tuttle, "Intermedia Society and Early Vancouver Performance Art," (University of Victoria Master's Thesis, 1994).

These artists were also critically aware of how “art” objects, made by a class of “artists” and shown in “art” institutions, serve implicitly to endorse commodity culture. Their critique of commodity culture was fed by an array of counter-cultural sources, particularly the New Left and its intellectual alliance with post-war Marxist thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse. Through its commitment to “principled nonconformity,” the New Left supported artists, students, and radicals who challenged the status quo.⁵² A 1970 publication entitled *The New Left in Canada* described the alternative culture it embraced:

On a scale unprecedented in the New Left’s short history, thousands of youth are shedding their commitment to the society in which they live. They no longer believe in its claims. They no longer respect its symbols. They no longer accept its goals, and most significantly, they refuse almost intuitively to live by its institutional constraints and social codes.⁵³

Strong distrust of institutions and sharp critique of corporate hegemony pervaded the collective consciousness of a generation of young people. Artists sought new ways to communicate without endorsing commodity culture. Thus, for many artists in the 60s the use of the term “communications” pointed to an awareness that the various modes of

⁵² John McMillian, “You Didn’t Have To Be There: Revisiting the New Left Consensus,” in John McMillian and Paul Buhle eds, *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 3.

⁵³ Dimitrios J. Roussopoulos ed., *The New Left in Canada* (Montreal: Our Generation Press – Black Rose Books, 1970), 133.

communication were not only a means of exchanging information but also formed a vital part of that information.

In Canada, communications occupied a central place in the nationalist agenda. Former University of Toronto Professor Harold Innis is regarded as a foundational thinker in modern communications theory, and his studies of trade and communications in Canada helped shape the way in which Canadian cultural critics, such as Northrop Frye, would characterize the “Canadian sensibility” as a product of the need to master distance through communication.⁵⁴ In his 1951 book *The Bias of Communication*, Innis argued that communication was shaped by either space or time-biased media – a concept that profoundly influenced his colleague and protégé Marshall McLuhan.⁵⁵ In an anthology of essays published in 1962, with contributions by Marshall McLuhan, entitled *Mass Media in Canada*, editor John A. Irving argued that “Owing to Canada’s size, communications have always meant more to us than to most other countries.”⁵⁶

Lamenting Canada’s geographical regionalism, Irving looked to the electronic mass

⁵⁴ See, Northrop Frye, “from ‘Letters to Canada’ *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 1950-1959,” in *Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971), 1-127.

⁵⁵ For more about Innis see Patterson, *History and communications*.

⁵⁶ John A. Irving, “The Problems of the Mass Media,” *Mass Media in Canada*, (Toronto: Ryerson University Press, 1962), 235.

media as a way of shrinking Canada “to the size of, say, Belgium.”⁵⁷ Put another way, the “Electronic Age,” ushered in by McLuhan, would “annihilate space” enabling a sprawling Canada to develop a tidy national identity through mass communications systems. This fixation on the unifying ability of electronic communications systems may have led the Canada Council to award the Intermedia artists’ collective an unprecedented grant of \$40,000 in 1967, at which point the *Vancouver Sun* declared Vancouver “the communications capital of the world.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, through advanced communications systems, Vancouver could end its isolation from world culture capitals like New York and Paris.

Vancouver’s isolation from cultural centres on the East Coast of North America and in Europe is both a geographical reality and an invented condition.⁵⁹ As Philip Resnick comments, “The sense of being a geographical region apart seems deeply ingrained in the BC psyche.”⁶⁰ To understand the distinct context of the Vancouver arts milieu in the 1960s, it is necessary to understand its identification with a West Coast arts community that had acquired international, and utopian, sensibilities. This development

⁵⁷ Irving, “The Problems of the Mass Media,” 224.

⁵⁸ “City Visualized as Media Capital” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 April 1967, 28.

⁵⁹ For more about British Columbia regionalism and its history see: Philip Resnick, *The Politics of Resentment: British Columbia Regionalism and Canadian Unity* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

of—and identification with—a global community of avant-garde artists in Vancouver is important to the development and realization of the Eternal Network.

Due in part to its geographic isolation, a strong regional identity prevails on the West Coast, which artists have heralded as a stimulus to artistic freedom. Vancouver's distance from Eastern cultural centres like Toronto and New York highlights the importance of its relationship with Seattle, Portland, and the California cities, with which it shares geographic proximity and a "West Coast sensibility," that is, perceived freedom from artistic traditions. In an interview with Ursula Meyer in 1969, the New York art critic Lucy Lippard noted that in New York, "the present gallery-money-power structure is so strong that it's going to be very difficult to find a viable alternative to it."⁶¹ In contrast, artist Kate Craig spoke for a majority of Vancouver artists when she stated, "There's a tremendous freedom in Vancouver, much less of a burden of history and culture than there is in eastern Canada."⁶²

The perception of the West Coast as a new and "open-minded" region isolated from cultural centres like New York can be recognized as a vestige of the Frontier thesis

⁶⁰ Resnick, *The Politics of Resentment*, 4.

⁶¹ Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers Inc., 1973), 8.

⁶² Lippard, *Six Years*, 262.

of American History articulated by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893.⁶³ Turner's hypothesis that the constantly receding western frontier, rather than the urban centre, was the driving force behind American democracy influenced the development of a regional identity shared between cities of the mid and far West.⁶⁴ His hypothesis isolated the "pastoral" West from the "civilization" of the urban East and Europe, equating it with simplicity and cultural inferiority:

The West, at bottom, is a form of society, rather than an area. It is the term applied to the region whose social conditions result from the application of older institutions and ideas to the transforming influences of free land. By this application, a new environment is suddenly entered, freedom of opportunity is opened, the cake of custom is broken, and new activities, new lines of growth, new institutions and new ideals, are brought into existence.⁶⁵

Conflation of the "western frontier" with notions of a brighter future, well expressed in the exhortation "Go West, Young Man" seized hold of the American imagination. As Philip Porter and Fred Lukermann point out, "If one thinks of 'West' and 'Frontier' as

⁶³ This was adapted to Canadian conditions by Donald Creighton in the form of the "Laurentian Thesis." Graeme Patterson argues that the communications theory of Innis displaced frontier theory in Canada in his book *History and Communications*, 52.

⁶⁴ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), first edition published in 1894.

⁶⁵ Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier*, Chapter VII "The Problem of the West", 205.

states of mind rather than geographical places, the terms are undoubtedly interrelated.”⁶⁶

Within the cultural imagination, the West assumes mythic proportions. In the 1950s, halfway across America, Beat writer Jack Kerouac paused in the fields of Iowa to envision himself at “the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future.”⁶⁷ As Marshall McLuhan observed, “the Westerner doesn’t have a point of view. He has a vast panorama; he has such tremendous space around him.”⁶⁸

The notion that the West offers a sense of freedom and opportunity is echoed by artists and poets seeking to explain the West Coast’s emergence as a centre for avant-garde activities during the 60s.⁶⁹ According to UBC English professor and American expatriate Warren Tallman, in the West “the environment is so open and undefined that the self stays open and undefined, child-like perhaps, easily given over to a sense of inner

⁶⁶ Philip W. Porter and Fred. E. Lukermann, “The Geography of Utopia,” in David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden eds, *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 201.

⁶⁷ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 17. First edition published by Viking Press, 1957.

⁶⁸ Marshall McLuhan interviewed by Danny Finkleman in *Speaking of Winnipeg*, ed. John Parr (Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1974), 23; as quoted in Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 197.

⁶⁹ Christopher Thomas and Kim Reinhardt have referred to the narratives created around the development of individual cities as “civic myths,” which “become potent sources of direction and energy for writers, artists, and other cultural and political leaders.” See, Christopher Thomas and Kim Reinhardt, “Victoria Moderna (1945-1970): of Civic Myth and Difference in Modern Architecture,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, 26:3/4 (2001), 4.

wonder.”⁷⁰ Indeed, the West has long been associated with utopianism. The West Coast of Canada historically has been thick with utopian communities, from William Duncan’s Christian village at Metlakatla in 1862 to Image Bank’s Babyland commune at Roberts Creek in 1970. Justine Brown states that “traversing, as it does, the borders between history and fiction, utopianism is a truly *cultural* phenomenon in B.C.”⁷¹ She offers the example of “Brother Twelve,” a theosophist in the 1920s who attempted to build an ideal community on the Gulf Islands and prophesied that in the apocalypse to come, “Vancouver would be protected from the worldwide fire and holocaust.”⁷² On the edge of “Nowhere” Vancouver provides “a place of possibility.”⁷³

It is thus no accident that Canada’s first “revolutionary” artist-run centre was formed in Vancouver in 1973 and christened The Western Front.⁷⁴ As Alvin Balkind characterized it, “In this remote, uncrowded, lotus-eating city, seemingly far from many

⁷⁰ Warren Tallman, “Godawful Streets of Man,” *Open Letter* (Third Series, No. 6, Winter, 1976-77), 185.

⁷¹ Justine Brown, “Nowherelands: Utopian Communities in BC Fiction” *BC Studies*, No. 10 (Spring 1996), 7. Italics original.

⁷² Brown, “Nowherelands.” 11. See also, Justine Brown, *All Possible Worlds: Utopian Experiments in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1995).

⁷³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

⁷⁴ See Keith Wallace ed., *Whispered Art History: Twenty Years at the Western Front* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1993).

of the world's agonies and excesses, there is room for art to grow..."⁷⁵ The perception of the West Coast as a new and invigorating environment continues to loom large in the minds of West Coast writers such as Douglas Coupland, who explains, "If you're a Vancouverite, you find the city's lack of historical luggage liberating – it dazzles with a sense of limitless possibility."⁷⁶ Coupland reiterates a long-standing feeling of isolation on the West Coast: "Vancouver is not part of Canada. Not really. There's a genuine sense of disconnection from the Rest of Canada that we feel here...it's a reality fostered by Vancouver's distance from Canada's centre, and from a tradition of abandoning that centre to try something new."⁷⁷ In 1967, art critic and artist Arnold Rockman contemplated this same sense of isolation, calling Vancouver "*the scene in Canada*":

Even if you want to be, you can't be a cultural suburb of New York, as Toronto is, or of Paris, like Montreal. You have to go it alone. Not quite, for you're close to Frisco and L.A. and you can hop down there, and they can come up to Vancouver, easily enough. Besides, there's a sense of Westcoast regionalism, not in style but in shared isolation, in the feeling that New York has its virtues, but the Westcoast has other perhaps even better virtues.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Alvin Balkind, "Joy and Celebration" (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1967), as quoted in "Chronology," *Vancouver Art and Artists 1931-1983* (Vancouver: VAG, 1983), 198.

⁷⁶ Douglas Coupland, *City of Glass* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000), 58.

⁷⁷ Coupland, *City of Glass*, 106.

Geographic proximity and a shared West Coast sensibility encouraged artistic exchanges between the avant-garde of San Francisco, Los Angeles and Vancouver in the 1960s. In the words of Vancouver artist Roy Kiyooka: “The geography of the place added to energy up and down the coast between San Francisco, Los Angeles and Vancouver.”⁷⁹

The result was an experimental collaboration between activists, artists, poets, and musicians that disregarded traditional disciplinary and national boundaries.

San Francisco’s emergence as a centre for avant-garde activity during the postwar era was, in part, a result of the arrival in the 1950s of artists and poets formerly associated with influential Black Mountain College in North Carolina.⁸⁰ Founded in 1933 by John Rice, Black Mountain College was a liberal-arts school that advocated both educational and artistic experimentation. It upheld a holistic form of learning that valued the development of emotional knowledge, communal living, democratic philosophies, and the process of experience.⁸¹ Much of Black Mountain College’s emphasis on experience

⁷⁸ Arnold Rockman, “Michael Morris and how Vancouver is The Scene” **Vancouver Life* magazine (December 1967), 69; clipping from Morris Trasov Archive (56.14/C38), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

⁷⁹ Roy Kiyooka, “Personal Perspectives,” *Vancouver: Art and Artists, 1931-1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 261.

⁸⁰ Belgrad, *Culture of Spontaneity*, 200.

⁸¹ Katherine C. Reynolds, *Visions and Vanities, John Andrew Rice of Black Mountain College*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1998). See also: Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain An Exploration in Community*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1972); and Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002).

was supported by the educational writings of American philosopher John Dewey who stated, “Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication.”⁸² Influential faculty members included Joseph and Anni Albers, Walter Gropius, Willem deKooning, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, and Charles Olson. A “Board of Advisors” later included Albert Einstein and William Carlos Williams.⁸³ Black Mountain College increasingly focused on the arts, and by 1949 the curriculum revolved around music, dance, poetry, and visual arts.

Artists and poets associated with Black Mountain College explored intersubjective modes of communication, using gesture, performance, and “voice poetry” to engage in a total mind-body experience of art.⁸⁴ Influenced by the work of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, Black Mountain poets rebelled against New Criticism’s isolation of the text from both author and reader.⁸⁵ Charles Olson’s influential essay “Projective Verse,” published in *Poetry New York* in 1950, argued that poetry was energy

⁸² John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), 22.

⁸³ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 22.

⁸⁴ Belgrad, *Culture of Spontaneity*, 5.

transferred from the poet through the poem to the reader/listener by means of tension in form.⁸⁶ Olson's essay sparked an international network of correspondences between like-minded writers who exchanged letters, manuscripts, and small journals.⁸⁷ This network, which one writer described as providing "messages of love, support, and solidarity,"⁸⁸ bears a notable similarity to Correspondence Art practices and the later Eternal Network, in which artists exchanged letters, artwork, and small journals.

Much of the experimentation undertaken by former Black Mountain poets and artists took place in underground or alternative literary and publishing circles, reaching an apex in the Beat Poetry movement of San Francisco's North Beach district. The Beats coaxed art out of the galleries, onto the streets, and into the café scene, while co-operative galleries such as the 6 Gallery sponsored experimental poetry readings.⁸⁹ In this environment, artists of every medium exchanged ideas to develop new art forms. Little

⁸⁵ For more on New Criticism see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (Great Britain: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1983), "Chapter One: The Rise of English," 15-46.

⁸⁶ Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 196.

⁸⁷ Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 196.

⁸⁸ Denise Levertov, "Some Duncan Letters – A Memoir and a Critical Tribute," in *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous, Insights: Working Papers in Contemporary Criticism*, eds. Robert J. Bertholf and Ian W. Reid (New York: New Directions, 1979), 114, as quoted in Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 196.

⁸⁹ It was at the 6 Gallery that Alan Ginsberg first read his poem "Howl" in 1955. Lisa Phillips, "Beat Culture: America Revisioned," in *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), 33.

magazines and broadsides such as Wallace Berman's *Semina*, an assemblage begun while he was in Los Angeles in 1955 and later produced in San Francisco, provided a forum for experimental artists and writers. *Semina* printed early excerpts from William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, as well as photographs, drawings, poetry and other prose. Likewise, Diane DiPrima's and LeRoi Jones's publication *The Floating Bear*, along with Allen Ginsberg's *Beatitude* and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore provided additional alternative forums and venues for artists and writers.⁹⁰

Interaction between San Francisco and Vancouver artists and poets accelerated with the 1961 inauguration of the annual UBC Festivals of Contemporary Arts. Between 1961 and 1966, an influx of Black Mountain and Beat poets including Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, Denise Levertov, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, Michael McLure, Jackson MacLow, and Philip Whalen were welcomed in Vancouver by what Warren Tallman characterizes as an unusually responsive audience.⁹¹ Poetry became a prevalent form of counter-cultural expression in Vancouver during the 1960s, linked to the development of publishing projects undertaken

⁹⁰ Phillips, "Beat Culture: America Revisioned," 33.

⁹¹ Warren Tallman, "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver in the 1960s" *The Godawful Streets of Man, Open Letter, Third Series No. 6* (Winter 1976-77), 175-203. See also Ken Norris, *The Little Magazine in Canada*, 109.

by artists experimenting with concrete poetry, performance art at Intermedia, and the alternative press.

A group of students associated with Tallman and the English Department at UBC had been experimenting with “voice poetry” since 1959 and, in 1961, at the prompting of Robert Duncan, they began publishing the influential literary magazine *Tish*, which focused on “vocal” and concrete poetry.⁹² *Tish* had an enormous influence on the alternative publishing scene in Vancouver; some of its policies, such as compiling its own mailing list rather than waiting for subscribers, are similar to tactics employed earlier by *Semina* and *Floating Bear* publishers, and later by Eternal Network participants. The *Tish* editorial staff, initially consisting of Frank Davey, George Bowering, David Dawson, Lionel Kearns, Jamie Reid and Fred Wah, were directly influenced by the Black Mountain School, especially Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, who had published and edited the little magazine *The Black Mountain Review* between 1954 and 1957.⁹³

Tish was not the first little magazine published in Vancouver, however; earlier and contemporary publications such as *Full Tide*, *Western Free-Lance*, *Duo*,

⁹² Gary Lee-Nova, “Voices” *Vancouver Art and Artists*; 177. See Also, Richard Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 136. See especially, Norris, *The Little Magazine in Canada*, 109.

⁹³ Robert Creeley, “On Black Mountain Review” in Elliot Anderson and Mary Kinzie eds. *The Little Magazine in America: a Documentary History* (New York: The Pushcart Press, 1978), 249.

Contemporary Verse, Prism, and Talon had largely undefined policies and eclectic content. In contrast, *Tish*, which has been called “the earliest and still most significant of all the mimeographed, independent and fiercely individual little magazines,”⁹⁴ openly considered itself a mouthpiece for a new poetic and cultural movement. According to its editors, *Tish* was “a moving and vocal mag,” its poems “intended for reading aloud,” which would “publish any poem, short story, or essay which its editors feel shows a direct relationship to *Tish’s* siring movement” —Black Mountain School poetics.⁹⁵ Emphasizing the intersubjective function of poetry, editor Frank Davey wrote “art is a means, a go-between, a communicator...”⁹⁶ According to Davey, and other proponents of Black Mountain School poetics, poetry bridges the experiences of the author and the reader.

Along with its poetic values, *Tish* supported and disseminated the individualistic values of Black Mountain politics and culture. In his book *Poetry and The Colonized Mind*, Keith Richardson criticized *Tish* for its lack of interest in Canadian culture, accusing it of engendering an American artistic fraternity that “invoked a myth of the

⁹⁴ Marilyn Meister, “The Little Magazines of British Columbia: a Narrative Bibliography,” *British Columbia Library Quarterly*, vol 31, no. 2 (October 1967), 9.

⁹⁵ Frank Davey, “Editorial,” *Tish No. 1-19* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975), 13.

⁹⁶ Frank Davey, “Editorial,” *Tish*, No. 10 (June 1962), 1.

'Nationhood of the West Coast' which transcended national cultures in search of an international intellectual/artistic community."⁹⁷ Indeed, *Tish* poets, along with a number of other Vancouver artists, did not appear interested in Canadian nationalism at all. Their paradoxically international yet regionalist perspective was shared by artists who later participated in the Eternal Network. A *Tish* editorial objected outright to classifying poets by their country (though not by their gender):

Poetry is not an international competition. Moreover, poets do not write as patriots but as men. Their country is merely incidental. Canada does not exist except as a political arrangement for the convenience of individuals accidentally happening to live within its arbitrary area...the community of poetry is a universal thing, as is man, and political divisions can never apply.⁹⁸

By the mid-sixties, *Tish* began to expand its interests in local community events. In 1964, Dan McLeod, who would found Vancouver's first alternative newspaper the *Georgia Straight* in 1967, became general editor of *Tish*.⁹⁹ Under his editorship, *Tish* developed a newspaper style, reporting on counter-cultural activities in Vancouver and adopting a typical masthead-with-illustration cover. According to McLeod, it was through his involvement with the local poetry scene that he developed an interest in the

⁹⁷ Kieth W. Richardson, *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish* (Ottawa: Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, 1976), 15.

⁹⁸ *Tish* No 1-19, 155.

alternative press.¹⁰⁰ In 1968, *Tish* shared editors, articles, and office-space with the young *Georgia Straight* (fig. 1).¹⁰¹ While *Tish* and the *Georgia Straight* were closely linked at this time, the *Straight* was a much more popular and wide-reaching vehicle for the dissemination of information. Heralded as Canada's most successful underground paper, the *Georgia Straight* claims to have reached a circulation of 60,000 in its first year.¹⁰²

The *Tish* group also influenced the development of other little magazines and independent presses in Vancouver. At least three little magazines were directly inspired by, or grew out of opposition to, *Tish*. In 1962, Bob Hogg and David Cull published *Motion*, described as a "prose newsletter published in affiliation with Tishbooks," which ran for six issues.¹⁰³ Frank Davey, the first editor of *Tish*, published *The Open Letter** in 1966.¹⁰⁴ In July of the same year, in opposition to established publications like *Tish*, Chuck Carlson and Pat Lane published *Up the Tube with One i (Open)*, which called for "new consciousness pomes from everyone..."¹⁰⁵ *Form*, published in 1967 as a tabloid by

⁹⁹ Richardson, *Poetry*, 55.

¹⁰⁰ Ron Verzuh, *Underground Times: Canada's Flower Child Revolutionaries* (Toronto: Deneau, 1989), 52.

¹⁰¹ Richardson, *Poetry*, 65.

¹⁰² Verzuh, *Underground Times*, 59.

¹⁰³ Marilyn Meister, "Little Magazines," 10.

¹⁰⁴ The Morris/Trasov Archive at the Belkin Gallery, UBC, contains *Open Letter* issues from Winter 1972 to Fall 1975.

¹⁰⁵ *Up the Tube with One i (Open) – Pomes 1* (July 1966), 1.

unnamed editors, protested the lack of content in contemporary poetry and art. Other contemporary Vancouver publications included *Talon*, established in 1961; *Crust*, established in 1966; *Iron*, published by a group at SFU in 1967; *Quolus*, established in 1967; and Bill Bissett's 1963 *blewointment* magazine, which evolved into *blewointmentpress* in 1967.¹⁰⁶

Blewointment was the first Canadian magazine to concentrate exclusively on concrete texts, often in the form of collage. Bissett's *Th Combind blewointment Open Picture Book nd th News* blends text and collage to produce picture poems that are meant to express the unity of thought before it is conceptualized into words. His collage poems were intended to "blur th borders, th margins, th all too purposeful thot patterns of th poem."¹⁰⁷ As he wrote in *What Poetiks* (1967), concrete poetry "is not to be confused with poems in th shape of things."¹⁰⁸ Like *Tish*, *blewointment* concerned itself with the space and orality of poetry.¹⁰⁹ In an article of 1967 for the *British Columbia Library Quarterly*, Marilyn Meister described *Blewointment*:

¹⁰⁶ *ECW's Biographical Guide to Canadian Poets* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1993), 253.

¹⁰⁷ Bill Bissett, *What Poetiks* (Vancouver: Blewointment Press, 1967), n.p.

¹⁰⁸ Bissett, *What Poetiks*, n.p. Bissett often leaves out the "e" in "the".

¹⁰⁹ Caroline Bayard, *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-Modernism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 103.

Perhaps the only accurate description is that it is 'avantgarde' in the furthest possible sense. *Blew Ointment* publishes everything, as the last two issues, which can only be described as assemblages, show. Both thick and literally bursting with material, they contain everything from full-size mimeographed pages to tiny inserts printed with stencils of Porky the Pig, from long strips of coloured cardboard printed with poetry to irregular sections of the coloured newspaper comics...*Blew Ointment* must be examined to be understood or believed.¹¹⁰

Blewointmentpress was eventually housed at the Intermedia collective's warehouse at 575 Beatty Street where Bissett continued to publish his own and other artists' work.¹¹¹

In Vancouver, promotion of poetry as an oral/aural experience was not restricted to literary circles. Indeed, Bill Bissett had begun as a painter who developed an interest in concrete poetry, an international movement which is further explained below. Likewise, artist Roy Kiyooka was instrumental in bringing poetry readings to the Vancouver School of Art and, in so doing, encouraged the combination of traditionally separate artistic expressions into a concept of totality that resonated with other artists seeking to unify the previously divided and hierarchical structure of the art world. Artist Gary Lee-Nova recalled:

Tallman and others at UBC organized a huge conference around the subject of vanguard North American poetics and the outcome of that...was the visiting professorship of Robert Creeley at UBC. Roy Kiyooka made

¹¹⁰ Marilyn Meister, "Little Magazines," 11.

¹¹¹ Tuttle, *Intermedia*, 60.

contact with him, and organized a few readings at the Vancouver School of Art.¹¹²

Visual artists from San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York also came to Vancouver to participate in the annual Festivals of Contemporary Arts, including artist/art critic Lucy Lippard, Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Ann Halprin, and Bruce Conner. In 1965, Gary Lee-Nova met San Francisco artist Bruce Conner, founder of the Rat Bastard Protective Association, which was a parody of art societies and brotherhoods.¹¹³ Both Conner and Lee-Nova were experimenting with film at the time, and after Connor returned to San Francisco they began mailing art works and images to each other.¹¹⁴ Gary Lee-Nova's alias "Art Rat" likely derived from his involvement in the Rat Bastard Protective Association. Their exchange of objects through the mail under the umbrella of a collective identity in 1965 anticipated the Vancouver arrival of Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School in 1968.

¹¹² Gary Lee Nova, "Chronology," *Vancouver Art and Artists*, 177.

¹¹³ The Rat Bastard Protective Association held meetings, and members were given the right to use the Rat Bastard Protective Association seal of approval (rubber stamp) on their art works. See, Rebecca Solnit, "Heretical Constellations: Notes on California, 1946-61" in Lisa Philips ed., *Beat Culture and the New America: 1935-1965* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and Flammarion Press, 1996), 71.

¹¹⁴ Anna Banana, "Mail Art Canada" in Crane and Stofflett eds, " *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984), 233.

Cross-pollination of ideas continued, and poets involved in *Tish* also became involved in experiments with sound, video, and performance. A group often referred to as the “downtown set,” including Al Neil, Bill Bissett, Judith Copithorne, Maxine Gadd, Gerry Gilbert, John Newlove, and Ed Varney, experimented with performance and “visual poetry” through publishing projects.¹¹⁵ Copithorne, Gadd, Varney, and Henry Rappaport published visual/textual works with the help of a Roneo machine housed at the Intermedia collective.¹¹⁶ According to Varney, the first “hard technology” that artists engaged with at Intermedia was the Roneo printer: “The Roneo was a totally new kind of instrument; it was a high-tech tool that was very simple to use. It wasn’t incredibly sophisticated but it could be used for sophisticated means.”¹¹⁷ Artists used this four-colour mimeograph machine to create books with colourful, and sometimes psychedelic, visual effects in a variety of formats. Maxine Gadd worked on her *Book of Practical Knowledge** at Intermedia between 1967 and 1969.¹¹⁸ In 1969 Varney published an envelope containing loose ephemera called *Openings: Poems and Pictures** in an edition

¹¹⁵ Tuttle, “Intermedia,” 74.

¹¹⁶ Tuttle, “Intermedia,” 75.

¹¹⁷ Ed Varney, “Voices,” *Vancouver Art and Artists*, 182.

¹¹⁸ Tuttle, *Intermedia*, 75.

of two hundred and fifty.¹¹⁹ Judith Copithorne's *Miss Tree's Pillow Book*,* a book of "illuminated poems," was published by Intermedia Press in 1971.¹²⁰ Artists' publishing in Vancouver began with these kinds of visual/textual experiments undertaken by individual poets and artists at the Intermedia collective; it was heavily influenced by the burgeoning international concrete-poetry movement.

In her discussion of concretism in Canadian poetics, Caroline Bayard describes concrete poetry as "the rejection of mental abstraction processes and the elimination of mimetic interest in outside phenomena in favour of concentration upon what was viewed as *matter*..."¹²¹ Ken Norris further elaborates,

Concrete poetry works with the idea of 'text' and utilizes the page as the ultimate organizing unit. The visual and graphic possibilities of language are emphasized; repetition is organized around a principle of visual onomatopoeia. It is a poetry of direct presentation, which used the semantic, visual and phonetic elements of language in the service of the word.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Ed Varney. *Openings: Poems and Pictures* (Vancouver: Intermedia Book, 1969); "Edwin Varney Vertical File," Vancouver Art Gallery Library.

¹²⁰ Judith Copithorne, *Miss Tree's Pillow Book** (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1971); Morris/Trasov Archive (57.9/A8), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

¹²¹ Bayard, *New Poetics*, 18.

¹²² Ken Norris, *The Little Magazine in Canada: 1925-1980, Its Role in the Development of Modernism and Post-Modernism in Canadian Poetry* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1984), 141.

Concretism was an international movement that had begun in the 50s with strong roots in Germany, South America, and Japan. The Brazilian group the Noigandres, which involved poets, artists, and musicians, outlined their concept of concrete poetry in a manifesto entitled *Plano Piloto para Poesia Concreta*. According to them, form and content are inseparable.¹²³ The same concern for the ‘truth’ of the material was shared by the Japanese Gutai (concrete) Art Association, founded in 1954, which opposed illusionism.¹²⁴ Concretism was also supported by the Nouveaux Réalistes, who sought to perceive reality “in itself and not through the prism of conceptual or imaginative transcription.”¹²⁵ In 1962, Fluxus artist George Maciunas prepared an address on concretism in which he explained its application in art:

Concretists, in contrast to illusionists, prefer unity of form and content, rather than their separation. They prefer the world of concrete reality rather than the artificial abstraction of illusionism. Thus in plastic arts for instance, a concretist perceives and expresses a rotten tomato without changing its reality or form. In the end, the form and expression remain the same as the content and perception – the reality of rotten tomato...¹²⁶

¹²³ Bayard, *New Poetics*, 23.

¹²⁴ Jiro Yoshihara, “The Gutai Manifesto (1956),” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Perter Selz (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1996), 695.

¹²⁵ Pierre Resany, “The Nouveaux Réalistes Declaration of Intention (1960),” in *Theories and Documents*, 695.

¹²⁶ George Maciunas, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” in Clive Phillpot and Jon Hendricks eds., *Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 25-27.

Concrete poets and artists of the 1950s and 60s looked to the “words in freedom” of the Futurists and the “psychotype” of the Dadaists as precedents for experiments with typography. In Vancouver during the 60s, a number of poets and artists embraced the humor, style, and tactics of the Dadaists; however, their projects differed significantly. The rediscovery of Dada by a variety of performance, conceptual, and assemblage artists in the 60s is often referred to by the somewhat reductive term “Neo-Dada.” Although both Dada and Neo-Dada embraced the use of “anti-art” as a form of social critique, Neo-dada was not a cohesive art movement, but rather a term applied to diverse tendencies, from Pop Art to Fluxus that appeared to reflect the motives of Dada. Many artists refused the label. In an interview with Susan Hapgood, Daniel Spoerri stated, “We – the Nouveaux Réalistes – were not terribly pleased to be called Neo-Dada, which is understandable. There was a very deep difference between our work and the Dadaists.”¹²⁷ Likewise, questioned about the term “Neo-Dada,” Claes Oldenburg replied “...I must have known about it, and I probably reacted against it. Any artist would react against an

¹²⁷ Daniel Spoerri, interviewed by Susan Hapgood, Paris, 26 April 1992, in Susan Hapgood ed., *Neo-Dada Redefining Art 1958-62* (Scottsdale, Arizona: Universe Publishing, 1994), 131.

attempt to take a label from the past and put it on what they're doing."¹²⁸ Allan Kaprow

explained:

Frequently, I thought, we were wrongly associated with Dada. Anti-art isn't something the Dadas invented. There's a whole thread of 'life is better than art' dating at least to the time of Wordsworth, right through Emerson and Whitman, to John Dewey and beyond, emphasizing art as experience, trying to blend art back into life – this tradition influenced me very much. But anti-art is an old Western theme.¹²⁹

Dada had been a “set of strategies” with political motives.¹³⁰ While producers of Dada art, such as Marcel Duchamp, brought everyday objects into the gallery, a great many artists amassed under the rubric of Neo-Dada took art out of the gallery into the everyday world. The Dadaists did not exert a direct influence on Vancouver artists; rather, the Vancouver artists I refer to invented a new use for the anti-art stance associated with Dada, reframing it within their own later counter-cultural experience. An Intermedia-affiliated group called The Galactic Research Council, for example, referred to their work as a “scientific late-late dada process.” Their first project, entitled *The Files*,* was described as “a structured meta-map through all possibilities of connexion and exchange,” which comprised multiples of a box filled with reproductions of works

¹²⁸ Claes Oldenburg, interviewed by Susan Hapgood, New York, 1 March 1993, in *Neo-Dada*, 123.

¹²⁹ Allan Kaprow, interviewed by Susan Hapgood, California, 12 August 1992, in *Neo-Dada*, 115.

works were collected just like any other artist's. One of the objectives of Duchamp's Dada — creating “unacceptable art” — was employed and reworked by artists in the 60s, who attempted not just to undermine the aesthetic object, but to do away with the object altogether. This “idea art” — or Conceptual Art, as it would come to be known — was fueled in large part by a need to overturn traditional definitions and authority structures. Artists' attempts at liberation were supported and fed reciprocally by leftist thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, whose *Essay on Liberation* directly addressed the role of art in the spirit of rebellion:

The radical character, the ‘violence’ of the reconstruction in contemporary art, seems to indicate that it does not rebel against one style or another, but against ‘style’ itself, against the art-form of art, against the traditional ‘meaning’ of art.¹³⁴

Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth elaborated on this attitude to art in an article of 1969 entitled “Art after Philosophy,” printed in *Studio International*.^{*135} After establishing through logic that aesthetics are conceptually irrelevant to art, he points out that “being

(Summer 2003), 177-182. For an opposing view which sees Dada as giving rise to postmodernism see David Lochner, “Unacknowledged Roots and Blatant Imitation: Postmodernism and the Dada Movement” *Electronic Journal of Sociology* (1999) <<http://www.sociology.org/content/vol004.001/lochner.html>>

¹³⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 40.

¹³⁵ The Morris/Trasov Archive at the Belkin Gallery, UBC, contains various issues of *Studio International*.

sent through the mail in reply to a call for submissions.¹³¹ Though similar to Duchamp's *Green Box*, which stood as a singular work containing the artist's notes on the process of making his glass assemblage *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even, The Files* was a multiple, collaborative work, less concerned with authorship than with exchange and communication. Likewise, concrete poet Bill Bissett explained his relationship to Dada, and its successor Surrealism:

th surrealists wer nevr an influens on us or th dadaists ...but dadaist texts for/ with that I think what we wer all uv us finding was/ is a confirmashun looking for that rathr than models say or that's how it was/ is but the dadaists/ surrealists cubists in breking up the tradishyunal elements veree important to anywhum looking at th lineage/linear but we werent in fact dadaists...¹³²

In other words, rediscovery of the Dadaists provided Vancouver-based concrete poets and artists with a sense of historical lineage and confirmation.

As an "anti-art" movement which, in Duchamp's version, rebelled against commercial culture's obsession with aesthetic objects, Dada fell short.¹³³ Duchamp's

¹³⁰ Helen Molesworth, "From Dada to Neo-Dada and Back Again," in *October* (Summer 2003), iss. 105, 177.

¹³¹ *Metaspherosynoptics publication,** (Vancouver: Intermedia, n.d.), Morris/Trasov Archives, 57.44/C38. Belkin Gallery, UBC.

¹³² Bill Bissett, quoted in Ken Norris, *The Little Magazine in Canada*, 143

¹³³ Ursula Meyer, "The Eruption of Anti-Art" in Gregory Battcock ed., *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1973), 118. For an opposing view which sees Dada as a successful critique of life rather than art, see Helen Molesworth, "From Dada to Neo-Dada and Back Again" in *October*, Iss. 105

an artist now means to question the nature of art"¹³⁶ because to do otherwise is to get caught up in the "European tradition of a painting-sculpture dichotomy."¹³⁷ Kosuth defined conceptual art as an inquiry into the meaning of the concept "art."¹³⁸

By focusing on concepts rather than objects, conceptual artists sought to dematerialize art, and to liberate art from the power structure of the gallery space. In Vancouver in the mid-sixties, the communications-based work of Iain and Ingrid Baxter, under the corporate identity of N.E. Thing Co., earned them international attention and influenced other Vancouver artists.¹³⁹ N.E. Thing Co.'s parody of corporate structures and use of information theory were heavily indebted to Marshall McLuhan's communications theory and were especially influential for Vancouver groups who circulated collaborative projects through the Correspondence Art network. Most of these groups were inspired to adopt corporate identities, including Image Bank, Poem Company, and Ace Space Co.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Josph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," *Studio International*, vol. 178 no. 915 (Oct. 1969), 135.

¹³⁷ Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," 135.

¹³⁸ Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," 160.

¹³⁹ For more information on Iain and Ingrid Baxter see Marie L. Fleming, *Baxter's Any Choice Works* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1982). See also, Diana Nemiroff, "Rethinking the Object," *Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 193-225.

¹⁴⁰ Although these groups used corporate personas, it should also be mentioned that the use of the word "Company" or "Co." is a tradition equally inherited from theatre and dance companies. The influence and

Against a background of thriving alternative publishing activity referred to by Michael Rhodes as “the journal phenomenon,” Vancouver artists looked to printed media as a cheap and fast way of disseminating their ideas.¹⁴¹ Many began publishing in different formats such as collage, assemblage, and concrete poetry. Michael Morris, for example, had been developing an interest in the relationship between letters and the graphic image since 1965. In 1968, he began working on a concrete poetry book called “The Problem of Nothing,” which consisted of letter drawings, photographs, and collages unbound in a black box.”¹⁴²

Concrete poetry, Dada, Marshall McLuhan’s communications theories, and the newly christened Conceptual Art movement merged in the 1969 exhibition *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts** at the Fine Arts Gallery at UBC.¹⁴³ The exhibition serves as an example of how by the late 60s these elements, grouped under the umbrella of concrete poetry, were used in support of each other to represent an avant-garde perspective in Vancouver. Essays in the exhibition catalogue are steeped in

importance of performance is evident in a number of works carried out by these groups, thus the use of “Company” can also be seen as an acknowledgement of the collective nature of performance.

¹⁴¹ Michael Rhodes, “Untitled Essay,” *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts** (Vancouver: Fine Arts Gallery UBC, 1969), n.p.

¹⁴² Joan Lowndes, “Multi happening of Michael Morris,”* *The Province*, 27 September 1968, 11.

McLuhanesque language. Ed Varney's concrete poem/essay likened concrete poetry to "medium as message," defining it as "allatonceness," and used a variety of letraset fonts to emphasize the aural nature of poetry (fig. 2).¹⁴⁴ In his essay on Michael Morris, Kurt Von Meier referred to Marshall McLuhan's exploration of "mosaic patterns" and "new models for alternate culture."¹⁴⁵

The exhibition included a selection of recent concrete poems by international poets and artists including locals Bill Bissett, Judith Copithorne, Gerry Gilbert, Ed Varney, Gary Lee-Nova, and conceptual artists tied to Fluxus Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, Diter Rot, Joseph Kosuth, Robert Filliou, and others. An audio-visual component consisting of slides of work by Guillame Apollinaire, Alfred Jarry, Hugo Ball, Marcel Duchamp, and others, was accompanied by film clips and recordings of sound poets. One section of the exhibition was devoted to twenty-four "letter drawings" by Michael Morris (fig. 3); another showcased nineteen collages by New York artist Ray Johnson.

¹⁴³ The poster and catalogue for this show can be found in the Morris/Trasov Archive (54.7/C37), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

¹⁴⁴ Ed Varney in UBC Fine Arts Gallery, *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts*, (Vancouver: Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, 1969), n.p.

¹⁴⁵ Michael Morris in UBC Fine Arts Gallery, *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts*, (Vancouver: Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, 1969), n.p.

According to Morris, Ray Johnson, founder of the New York Correspondence School and “sugar dada” of Correspondence Art, sent him a “mysterious letter” in 1968 after seeing a reproduction of one of his paintings in *Artforum** magazine.¹⁴⁶ Morris replied through the mail with a package of ephemera. A correspondence and friendship ensued, and Morris arranged for the inclusion of Ray Johnson’s collage work in the 1969 Vancouver concrete-poetry exhibition. Johnson had attended classes at Black Mountain College from 1945 to 1948, while John Cage and Buckminster Fuller were faculty members.¹⁴⁷ The Black Mountain focus on group experience and intersubjectivity had an influence on Johnson’s New York Correspondence School, which was built on the premise of interactive exchange.¹⁴⁸ Considering the consistent history of direct interaction between Vancouver artists and Black Mountain School poets through the UBC Festivals of Contemporary Arts, as well as *Tish*’s long-term promotion of the Black Mountain School’s poetic and cultural philosophies, it is not surprising that Johnson’s New York Correspondence School would appeal to Michael Morris and other Vancouver artists.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Morris, “Ray Johnson,” *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts*, (Vancouver: Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, 1969), n.p. The Morris/Trasov Archive at the Belkin Gallery, UBC, contains *Artforum* issues from 1966 to 1974 (66.3/C43). In reference to “sugar dada” see, Michael Morris, “The Artist as Curator of the Imagination,”* *Arts Canada*, 35:220-221 (April/May, 1978), 41-43.

¹⁴⁷ de Salvo, Donna and Catherine Gudis eds, *Ray Johnson: Correspondences, Exhibition organized by Donna de Salvo* (New York: Flammarion, 1999).

While Morris had, at this point, become one of Johnson's mail art correspondents, Johnson also became one of Morris's "network of international contacts."¹⁴⁹

The 1969 Concrete Poetry exhibition foregrounded the work of Morris and Johnson against a backdrop of local and international contemporary artists and poets experimenting with the "verbi-vocal-visual." The linear structure of the accompanying slide show linked the work of Morris and Johnson to a long line of historical works, beginning in 4000 BCE and ending in 1954. Along the way, Neolithic engravings, the Rosetta Stone, illuminated manuscripts, William Morris designs, Lewis Carol drawings, and work by Futurists and Dadaists were used to illustrate an historically consistent focus on text and/as image.

Ray Johnson's initial correspondence with Michael Morris introduced the Correspondence Art movement to Vancouver. By the time Johnson contacted Morris, Vancouver was steeped in a communications-centred arts milieu. Through a real and imagined sense of isolation from the cultural centres of East Coast North America and Europe, Vancouver's avant-garde aligned itself with a West Coast arts community that had a "Frontier" sensibility and global, utopian aspirations. Vancouver's isolation, while

¹⁴⁸ de Salvo, and Gudis eds, *Ray Johnson*.

¹⁴⁹ Joan Lowndes, "Multi Happening of Michael Morris, *The Province*, 27 September 1968, 11.

it allowed for freedom to experiment, also fueled a growing fixation on the need to communicate with other international cultural centres.

Marshall McLuhan's communications theories helped to foster an interest in alternative modes of communication among artists in Vancouver, providing the impetus for multi-media public arts events and the development of the influential Intermedia collective. McLuhan's focus on the aural environment also lent support to Black Mountain-inspired experimentation with projective verse in Vancouver, where poetry became a vehicle by which artists could break free from traditional definitions of art. The little magazine *Tish* became both a literary beacon and a counter-cultural advocate, prompting the publication of several other experimental magazines and directly influencing the development of an alternative press in Vancouver. Against a backdrop of considerable alternative publishing activity, conceptual art further encouraged and facilitated ongoing engagement with printed media. Techniques utilized by conceptual artists toward the goal of decentralization, democratization, and distribution were adopted and adapted to suit the emerging Correspondence Art Network. Within this West Coast context, Correspondence Art would be transformed into an Eternal Network of artists

exchanging ideas and collaborating on works, outside of the conventional arts
community.

CHAPTER TWO

Robert Filliou's Eternal Network

Ray Johnson provided Michael Morris and other Vancouver artists with a link to his Correspondence School network; however, it was French artist Robert Filliou who introduced the concept of the Eternal Network. Both Ray Johnson and Robert Filliou, who directly “influenced a generation of Vancouver artists from the late sixties,”¹⁵⁰ were affiliated with the international Fluxus group; thus, one aim of this group that resonated with Vancouver artists involved in Correspondence Art—the use of art as an experiential event or as an intersubjective form of communication between participants—must be understood. In Chapter One, I focused specifically on the development of the Vancouver Arts milieu in the 60s; I now want to introduce the experiential aims of the international Fluxus movement and expand on the origins of the “experiential event” in the development of process philosophy. Following this, I define the Eternal Network as a fiction in order to explain how it functions in practice as an imagined community through the circulation of spatially arranged publications. This chapter provides a bridge between

¹⁵⁰ Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov, “Letter From Berlin” in *Robert Filliou: From Political to Poetical Economy* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, UBC, 1996), 72.

Filliou's conceptualization of the Eternal Network and the steps taken by Vancouver artists to develop it, which are discussed in Chapter Three.

Even though the Vancouver artists discussed in this thesis were not directly involved in the Fluxus movement, both groups were stimulated by Concretism and its emphasis on the meaning produced through the "experiential event." At the same time, it is equally likely that Marshall McLuhan's theorizing provided another stimulus for both international Fluxus artists and Vancouver artists. As Richard Cavell emphasizes in his study of McLuhan's ideas about spatiality, "It is important to remember that McLuhan's reputation was already significant prior to the 1960s."¹⁵¹ McLuhan had published widely in avant-garde periodicals in the United States and England during the late 40s, and by the late 50s had become an internationally known cultural theorist.¹⁵² Cavell points out that "McLuhan's influence was felt by the Independent Group in England, by the Situationists in France, and by the Fluxus movement nearly everywhere else."¹⁵³ While Cavell's interest is in sleuthing out McLuhan's consistent focus on spatiality, McLuhan's focus on the role of experience in perception is equally prominent. Thus, McLuhan's direct influence on the Vancouver arts milieu during the 60s meant that a number of

¹⁵¹ Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 186.

¹⁵² Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 188.

artists already shared, or were familiar with, Fluxus artist Robert Filliou's concern for experiential modes of communication. McLuhan, the Concretists, and a number of artists associated with Fluxus were, in turn, informed by theories of reality arising out of what Daniel Belgrad calls an "alternative metaphysics"—now known as process philosophy—which was propagated by a number of well-known early-twentieth-century philosophers including John Dewey, Henri Bergson, and Alfred North Whitehead. The role of process philosophy in the evolution of the experiential event will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The general consensus among Correspondence Artists is that their movement underwent two phases. Fluxus artist Ken Friedman distinguishes between an early phase of Correspondence Art in which artist Ray Johnson instigated an exchange of private works of art and letters with friends, acquaintances, and strangers, and a later public phase in which, as a result of Fluxus involvement during the late 60s, "correspondence art turned outward to the world."¹⁵⁴ It is in this later phase that the Eternal Network came to life. From its inception Fluxus was international in scope, with pre-Fluxus events encouraged in Europe by the Lettrists, German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, and

¹⁵³ Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 94.

Korean artist Nam June Paik. A number of artists later identified with Fluxus had attended experimental musical composition classes offered by John Cage at the New School for Social Research in New York in the late 50s.¹⁵⁵ After the classes ended, many of these composers and artists continued to experiment with performance as a way to reunite art with the experience of everyday life. In her recent book on the Fluxus movement, Hannah Higgins argues that the experiential event provides a common—and largely overlooked—ground amongst Fluxus artists, one that has been overshadowed by the limited point of view that sees Fluxus only as a continuation of the historical avant-garde.¹⁵⁶ Her reading is sympathetic to the holistic experiential goals discussed previously in reference to Black Mountain College, the Beats, and Marshall McLuhan’s theorizing about the role of the artist in society, as well as those discussed later in this chapter in reference to the propositions theorized by Robert Filliou.

According to Higgins, Fluxus has been viewed mainly through two art historical lenses: “of the two points of view, one describes Fluxus as discontinuous and in essence experiential, the other as continuous with the historical avant-garde, which issued

¹⁵⁴ Ken Friedman, “The Early Days of Mail Art,” in Chuck Welch ed., *Networking Currents: Contemporary Mail Art Subjects and Issues* (Boston: Sandbar Willow Press, 1986), 5.

¹⁵⁵ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 70.

political manifestos based on ‘agreed on aims or methods’ that set out a comparatively narrow menu of stylistic possibilities.”¹⁵⁷ The characterization of Fluxus as an anti-art movement with political motives is based largely on the writings of the New York/Lithuanian artist George Maciunas, who was influenced by the radical politics of his friend Henry Flynt.¹⁵⁸ While planning a magazine entitled *Fluxus* in 1961, Maciunas began formulating a collective Fluxus identity, which he outlined in his “Purge Manifesto” two years later:

“Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, ‘intellectual,’ professional and commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art – PURGE THE WORLD OF ‘EUROPANISM’! PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART. Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.”¹⁵⁹

Maciunas advocated an activist stance toward commercial culture and planned, but did not enact, elaborate propaganda stunts, which included stopping the flow of U.S. mail and causing citywide traffic jams.¹⁶⁰ Of the artists commonly associated with Fluxus,

¹⁵⁷ Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 70.

¹⁵⁸ Clive Phillpot, “Fluxus: Magazines, Manifestos, *Mutum in Parvo*” in Clive Phillpot and Jon Hendricks eds., *Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 11.

¹⁵⁹ Phillpot, “Fluxus: Magazines, Manifestos, *Mutum in Parvo*,” 11.

¹⁶⁰ Phillpot, “Fluxus: Magazines, Manifestos, *Mutum in Parvo*,” 9.

such as George Brecht, Daniel Spoerri, Dick Higgins, Nam June Paik, and John Cage, no one signed the manifesto. Most expressed the same confusion as George Brecht when he asked in a letter to Maciunas, “What is Fluxus Propaganda?”¹⁶¹ Maciunas later amended his *Manifesto* to include “Fluxamusement”—the employment of games and gags, which would function in a satori-like way, opening up the consciousness to the absurdities of everyday life and the transformative power of the experiential event.¹⁶²

Indeed, the significance of the experiential event, evident in a number of Fluxus works, can be seen in the writings of Maciunas. In 1962 he staged a Fluxus concert in Weisbaden, West Germany, at which his address on concretism “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” was read aloud by Arthus C. Caspari: “If man could experience the world, the concrete world surrounding him, (from mathematical ideas to physical matter) in the same way he experiences art, there would be no need for art, artists, and similar ‘nonproductive’ elements.”¹⁶³ While it can be interpreted as an anti-art Neo-Dada manifesto, Maciunas’s address reiterated a central theme of John Dewey’s much earlier book *Art as Experience* (1934)—the idea that if everyday life was experienced in the

¹⁶¹ Brecht to Maciunas; quoted in Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 77.

¹⁶² Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 13

same way as art, the “conception of art that ‘spiritualizes’ it out of connection with objects of concrete experiences” would no longer be necessary.¹⁶⁴ Dewey further explained, “Even a crude experience, if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of esthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience.”¹⁶⁵

What did Dewey mean by “experience,” and why did the role of experience in perception become so important to artists during the late 50s and early 60s? Widespread interest in the experiential event stemmed ultimately from ideas put forth by early-twentieth-century thinkers, now known as process philosophers, among them John Dewey, but particularly including Alfred North Whitehead.¹⁶⁶ Although the idea behind process philosophy can be traced back to the Greek theoretician Heraclitus of Ephesus (b. ca. 540 B.C.), the process approach to reality really began to develop in the mid-eighteenth century in opposition to “scientific materialism” which understood all existing

¹⁶³ George Maciunas, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” in Clive Phillpot and Jon Hendricks eds., *Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), 25-27.

¹⁶⁴ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 11.

¹⁶⁵ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 11.

¹⁶⁶ George R. Lucas, *The Rehabilitation of Whitehead: An Analytic and Historical Assessment of Process Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 18.

things to be composed of matter.¹⁶⁷ According to the materialist view, things that do not appear material in nature, such as thoughts, are reducible to material functions, such as brain cell activity. In contrast, process philosophy seeks to explain reality in terms of dynamic change. Process philosophers shift the focus away from static objective reality and towards the *experience* of reality. In fact, according to process philosophers, things that appear to be substantial material objects are in reality unified patterns of stability. The advent of quantum theory in the early-twentieth century provided further evidence that things indeed break down, not into smaller things, but into statistical patterns or waves. Throughout the 1920s and 30s Whitehead drew on quantum theory to support his idea that human reality is a process unfolding through experiential events.¹⁶⁸ Whitehead's language is notoriously complex, often relying on a metaphorical and open-ended terminology of "feeling."¹⁶⁹ In simple terms, his theory foregrounds the interactive, holistic, and dynamic nature of reality, emphasizing the primacy and flux of relations:

In the inescapable flux, there is something that abides; in the overwhelming permanence, there is an element that escapes into flux.

¹⁶⁷ Lucas, *The Rehabilitation of Whitehead*, 18.

¹⁶⁸ Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*, 121; see also, William A. Christian, *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 18

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth M. Kraus, *The Metaphysics of Experience* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 9.

Permanence can be snatched only out of flux; and the passing moment can find its adequate intensity only by its submission to permanence.¹⁷⁰

Similarly, for Dewey experience was intersubjective and dependent on social interaction: “Instead of signifying being shut up within one’s own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events.”¹⁷¹ In this respect, experience itself becomes a form of communication; it affords a change in perception that can only come about through engagement, participation, and interaction. Likewise, for Maciunas and other proponents of concretism it is in experiencing the reality of—to take his example—rainfall that a true understanding of rain is possible.¹⁷² Marshall McLuhan too, was emphasizing the crucial role of experience when he stated that “the medium is the message,” perhaps, as above noted, elaborating on Dewey’s assertion that “the medium is a mediator.”¹⁷³ For, as McLuhan points out, information is always accompanied by “noise” that affects—even shapes—perception and understanding. In the

¹⁷⁰ Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 513.

¹⁷¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 19.

¹⁷² Maciunas, “Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art,” in Phillipot and Hendricks eds., *Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, 25-27.

¹⁷³ See page 30, n. 42.

realm of experience, features that can be intellectually separated remain crucially relational.

Robert Filliou's work has more in common with the experiential aspect of Fluxus than with any particular program of avant-gardism. This is especially evident in his desire to replace the notion of the avant-garde with a concept of never-ending collaboration and exchange between artists world-wide, which he called the Eternal Network. Filliou's Network is fundamentally experiential, as was his approach to all forms of art-making. In his writing, he focused on the benefits of intersubjective experience and interdisciplinarity, believing that techniques used by artists to create an experience can be adapted to other learning environments. In the introduction to his book *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, written between 1967 and 1970, Filliou outlined the book's objective:

to show how some of the problems inherent in teaching and learning can be solved – or let's say eased – through an application of the participation techniques developed by artists in such fields as: HAPPENINGS, EVENTS, ACTION POETRY, ENVIRONMENTS, VISUAL POETRY, FILMS, STREET PERFORMANCES, NON-INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC, GAMES, CORRESPONDENCES, ect.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts by Robert Filliou and the READER if he wishes, with the participation of JOHN CAGE, BENJAMIN PATTERSON, GEORGE BRECHT, ALLEN KAPROW, MARCEL, VERA AND BJOESSI AND KARL ROT, DOROTHY IANNONE, DITER ROT, JOSEPH BEUYS* (Cologne: König Verlag, 1970), 12.

Filliou was dedicated to the idea of work as play and play as a method of problem solving, and he developed a number of propositions and principles that he used as launching points for new projects. The Eternal Network grew out of Filliou's principle of *La Fête Permanente*—Permanent Creation—a playful activity realized in collaboration with George Brecht, when the two artists established a “non-shop”—it was always closed—called *La Cédille qui Sourit* in the French fishing-village of Villefranche, near Nice.¹⁷⁵ In an article for the local press, Filliou explained, “we wanted to create a ‘Free City of the arts,’ a centre of research, of ideas.”¹⁷⁶ At *La Cédille qui Sourit*, Brecht and Filliou practiced art as spontaneous creativity, inventing absurd games, jokes, events, and “one-minute scenarios” seen through the eyes of a film camera, which they later recorded in their book *Games at the Cedilla or The Cedilla Takes Off** (1967).¹⁷⁷ Filliou's dedication to living art as life and work as play was supported, not only by Fluxus associates, but also by the socio-spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre, especially his

¹⁷⁵ George Brecht and Robert Filliou, *Games at the Cedilla or The Cedilla Takes Off** (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), n.p. Brecht and Filliou translated “La Fête Permanente” into English as either “Permanent Creation” or “The Eternal Network.”

¹⁷⁶ Robert Filliou, *L'espoire*, Oct. 29, 1966, quoted in Brecht and Filliou, *Games at the Cedilla*, n.p.

¹⁷⁷ An example of a One-Minute Scenario: “A huge wall is being built by workers. The camera moves to the other end. There the wall is being pulled down by other workers as fast as it is built.” For more see Brecht and Filliou, *Games at the Cedilla*.

Critique of Everyday Life, which looked at leisure, or play, as a site of protest against the alienation inherent in consumer culture.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the spontaneous *Fête* became a revolutionary symbol in France, adopted by the New Left, the Situationist International, student radicals, and workers during the May uprising in 1968.¹⁷⁹

Above all, however, Filliou based his theory of art as a form of organized leisure on the ideals of the early-nineteenth-century French utopian philosopher Charles Fourier, who believed that society should reflect human nature, not repress it. Fourier's social philosophy also had a long history in North America, embraced by mid-nineteenth century American Transcendentalists. The utopian community, Brook Farm, established at Roxbury, Massachusetts in 1841, converted itself to a Fourierist "Phalanx"—a type of commune—in 1844, and began printing a journal called *The Harbinger*, which promoted Fourier's ideals.¹⁸⁰ Fourier's American disciple Albert Brisbane emphasized the key role played by communications networks in the realization of Fourier's utopian "Social Body." In 1856, Brisbane wrote of "vast lines of communication, natural and artificial"

¹⁷⁸ Henri Lefebvre, "Work and Leisure in Everyday Life," in Ben Highmore ed. *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 225-236. Lefebvre is better known in North America for his book of 1974, *The Production of Space*, which was translated into English in 1991.

¹⁷⁹ Sava, "The Filliou Tapes," 32-28. See also Stuart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* (London: Aporia Press and Unpopular Books, 1988), 8-16.

that would “be the medium of transmission of the collective thought of humanity.”¹⁸¹

Fourier’s vision of a non-repressive, sexually liberated form of social organization based on the laws of “passional attraction” gained considerable cachet in North America during the 1960s.¹⁸² As Filliou reasoned in his 1977 video work *Porta Filliou*, “Fourier in particular is a precursor of many of the liberation movements that we see now.”¹⁸³

After the dissolution of *La Cédille qui Sourit* in 1968, Brecht and Filliou announced the birth of the Eternal Network in a poster, which they sent to other artists through the correspondence-art circuit:

La Cédille qui Sourit tourne encore la page, et puisque...
 La Fête est Permanente
 annonce la réalisation prochaine de
 THE ETERNAL NETWORK,
 manifestations, meanderings,
 meditations, microcosms, macrocosms,

¹⁸⁰ William F. Hennessey, “Brook Farm: A Nineteenth-Century Social Experiment,” CRM, no. 9, 2001; <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/24-09/24-09-2>.

¹⁸¹ Albert Brisbane, *Theory of the Functions of the Human Passions* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856), 158. I am indebted to Stephen Perkins, “Artists’ Periodicals and Alternative Artists’ Networks: 1963-1977,” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Iowa, 2003) for calling my attention to the writings of Brisbane. See especially, 143.

¹⁸² Though most of Fourier’s work was published in 1845, his text *Le Nouveau monde amoureux* was not published until 1967. Nevertheless, his name has been invoked as a precursor of Marx by Engels in his 1878 *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* and, in the twentieth century during the post-war era, as a precursor to Freud by Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown. Fourier’s philosophy was also promoted by Andre Breton in his 1947 *Ode a Fourier*. See Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), especially 2-3.

¹⁸³ Robert Filliou, “Porta Filliou,” in *Robert Filliou: From Political to Poetical Economy* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, 1995), 86.

mixtures, meanings.¹⁸⁴

According to Filliou, the Eternal Network “functions in such a way that there is no more art centre in the world. Nobody can tell us ... where the place is—where we are is where the things are taking place and although we may need to meet at times or gather information at certain places—the network works automatically.”¹⁸⁵ This decentralization especially appealed to artists working in “ex-centric” regions like Vancouver.¹⁸⁶ It is worth briefly revisiting the fact, elaborated on in Chapter One, that Canada, and Vancouver in particular, had long been preoccupied with ideas about communications and space. As Northrop Frye characterized it in 1952, “There would be nothing distinctive in Canadian culture at all if there were not some feeling for the immense searching distance, with the lines of communication extended to the absolute limit...”¹⁸⁷ Both physically and imaginatively situated on the western edge of a nation in which “the frontier was all around one, a part and a condition of one’s whole imaginative being,”

¹⁸⁴ La Cédille qui Sourit announcement of store closing, 1968, reprinted in *Robert Filliou From Political to Poetical Economy*, 20.

¹⁸⁵ Filliou, “Porta Filliou,” in *Robert Filliou: From Political to Poetical Economy*, 80.

¹⁸⁶ Linda Hutcheon uses this term in her introduction to *The Canadian Post Modern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, in which she writes: “Canada can in some ways be defined as a country whose articulation of its *national* identity has sprung from regionalist impulses: the ex-centric forces of Quebec, the Maritimes, the west. Its history is one of defining itself against centres.” Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Post Modern* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4.

Vancouver artists were eager to create links between themselves and an international community of artists.¹⁸⁸ Familiarity with the spatial and communications theories of Marshall McLuhan paved the way for an imaginative leap into the “fictive space” of the Eternal Network.

Filliou’s vision of an endless system of creation and exchange between artists found a conceptual affinity with Vancouver artists, and, according to Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov, Filliou’s work influenced them profoundly.¹⁸⁹ Likewise, Filliou asserted that the birth of the Eternal Network “was assisted particularly by the artists working in Canada.” In fact, he stated, “There was no doubt that at that time, really I think the impetus for the actual creation of the Eternal Network has come from these people in Canada...”¹⁹⁰ Robert Filliou’s work was known to Vancouver artists through the Correspondence network and the 1969 Concrete Poetry Show; however he did not visit Vancouver until 1973, when the artists’ collective The Western Front formed. It was between 1969 and 1973 that Vancouver artists initiated a number of publications that

¹⁸⁷ Northrop Frye, “Letters In Canada,” *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi Press Ltd., 1971), 10.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov, “Letter from Berlin,” in *Robert Filliou from Political to Poetical Economy*, 72.

prepared the ground for visualizing and substantiating the imagined community of the Eternal Network. According to Michael Morris, "By 1973, the idea of networking had taken hold. Artists were going back and forth across Canada, addressing new audiences through independent dialogue and exchange... Artists had become their own curators and were determining the cultural ecology. Filliou legitimized and participated in this activity, both in Vancouver and the rest of Canada."¹⁹¹

Not only did the Eternal Network provide an appealing decentralized distribution and communication system, it also provided a de commodified art process. According to Filliou, the concept of an egalitarian, decentralized Eternal Network would allow artists to "be creative outside or without the advice, or opinion, or concern even at times of the media, or the art establishment."¹⁹² Intellectual developments, emerging from postwar philosophical questioning of cultural conventions, made it difficult for some artists to rationalize their participation in the official art world, which increasingly seemed devoid of meaning. In 1967 Arnold Rockman wrote in *Vancouver Life** magazine, "Sure we're all part of a collective network called the 'art world.' But usually the relationship is based

¹⁹⁰ Filliou, "Porta Filliou," 78. The Canadians he refers to are Image Bank (Vancouver), WORKS (Calgary), and General Idea (Toronto).

¹⁹¹ Morris and Trasov, "Letter from Berlin," in *Robert Filliou*, 72.

¹⁹² Filliou, "Porta Filliou," in *Robert Filliou*, 78.

on ‘what’s in it for me buster?’: cash, the promise of an advance, a new show, more column-inches in the paper or the magazine.”¹⁹³ Evidently the network provided by the official art world left something to be desired.

If the “official art world” refers to the conventional system of art institutions like galleries and museums in which art plays a capital-generating role, as well as their vehicles of communication such as institutionally and commercially backed art journals and magazines, then the Eternal Network provides an alternative world, free from materialistic interests. The Eternal Network, then, can be thought of as a conceptual space that operates utopically outside of the official art world. In his sociological analysis of “art worlds,” Howard Becker defines an art world as “an established network of cooperative links among participants.”¹⁹⁴ While he argues that essentially “art worlds do not have clear boundaries around them”¹⁹⁵—that is, they always relate to other parts of society—participants in the early Eternal Network envisioned their alternative space as clearly distinct from the official art world. Networker Geza Perneszy asserts that the Eternal Network developed as a result of artists’ attempts to occupy an “unnamed world”

¹⁹³ Arnold Rockman, “Michael Morris and how Vancouver is The Scene” *Vancouver Life** magazine, (Dec. 1967), 69; Morris/Trasov Archive (56.14/C38), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

¹⁹⁴ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 35.

¹⁹⁵ Becker, *Art Worlds*, 36.

free from “areas which had already been defined culturally and historically...These areas were to be sought not only beyond the boundaries of history but also outside all forms of art that have ever existed. Beyond the boundaries of anti-art as well.”¹⁹⁶ In this way the Eternal Network exists parallel to, but outside, the official art world. As Pernezky further explains,

The network differs from...the avantgarde in that it has never spared a moment in creating models of these requirements in the context of the real world, or in confronting them with reality, arbitrarily conceived as it was. Rather than devising a strategy for realizing social utopias, it simply declared them realized within its own narrow world. There was nothing to prevent it from doing so, since its actions have always taken place outside the bounds of history and reality. However, this can only strengthen our belief that the utopias of the network have the most to do with faith, and so we have every reason to consider them religious or irrational.¹⁹⁷

Eternal Network participants often speak of their activities in spiritual, rather than avant-garde terms. As Michael Morris declared, “An image bank reality exists somewhere out on the subliminal and all we do is plug into it.”¹⁹⁸ Networker Chuck Welch explains in the introduction to his book *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology*, “Many networking artists look within themselves to find the spiritual experience of

¹⁹⁶ Geza Perneszy, *The Magazine Network: The Trends of Alternative Art in Light of Their Periodicals, 1968 – 1988* (Budapest, Hungary: Hettorony Edition, 1991). 189.

¹⁹⁷ Perneszy, *Magazine Network*, 192.

creativity, not for the sake of art or a profession, but to return to art as an experiential process shared by all.”¹⁹⁹ Welch equates spiritual fulfillment with experiential process. Referring to experiential process in spiritual terms tends, however, to obfuscate rather than clarify the purpose of this utopian concept. In understanding how the Eternal Network positions itself outside of the official art world, it is helpful to develop a definition of the Network that does not resort to mysticism, which, while imaginatively rewarding, can also be bewildering. Although, as noted above, the Eternal Network is fundamentally experiential—that is, best understood through the experience of participation—it is possible to come up with a satisfactory interpretation by referring to it as a shared “fiction.” At this point, I would like to begin to develop a definition of the Eternal Network as a fictive space of transgression. This definition is intended to augment rather than negate other definitions, and it is offered as way to understand how the Eternal Network can be imagined individually *and* collectively.

Theories of fiction have been developed in the disciplines of philosophy and literary studies, where they have been used to clarify the murky role of the imagination,

¹⁹⁸ Michael Morris quoted by Thomas Albright, “New Art School: Correspondence, Rolling Stone Iss. 106 (April 13, 1972).

¹⁹⁹ Chuck Welch, “The Ethereal Open Aesthetic,” Chuck Welch ed., *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), xx.

especially in reference to utopian thinking. Within empirical philosophical discourse, fiction, long viewed as self-deception, was fixed as the opposite of reality.²⁰⁰ Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a number of philosophers periodically re-evaluated fictions based on the premise that they can be experienced by an individual and produce effects.²⁰¹ Thus fictions began to be valued for their usefulness in opening up possibilities. In the late-nineteenth century, German philosopher Hans Vaihinger introduced his philosophy of “As If,” which he based on the “As If” theory offered by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.²⁰² Vaihinger’s philosophy, which he defined as “pragmatic idealism,” proposes that unattainable ideals and utopias operate as fictions that can provide practical and ethical value even though they do not exist in what might be called “objective reality.” Although Vaihinger’s theory is considered intrinsically flawed by postmodernists because it is based on the premise that there is a pre-given objective reality from which to construct alternative fictions and it presupposes the existence of a transcendental subject (the author), it continues to be used as a mechanism

²⁰⁰ Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 1993.

²⁰¹ A wide number of philosophers, notably Kant, Fichte, Kierkegaard, and Bentham, have examined the role of fictions and the imagination in perception. For more on this see Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, 118-119.

for comprehending that which is acknowledged to be unknowable.²⁰³ According to Barry Stampfel, a number of scholars across disciplines have made use of Vaihinger's "As If" theory, without directly referring to Vaihinger himself, in order to "productively factor what they know to be unreal conditions into comparative apperceptions."²⁰⁴ Anyone attempting to solve a problem, even an adherent of postmodernism, who is aware that there is no objective reality or transcendent point of view, can proceed methodologically "as if" there were in order to construct, rather than continually deconstruct, an argument.

I have found Vaihinger's theory to be a useful, if somewhat simplistic, tool for explaining the purpose of the fictive space created by the concept of the Eternal Network, which does not seek to become part of, or to confront, the "official art world," but rather remains in the realm of the fictive in order to preserve its autonomy. Vaihinger's theory is particularly useful because, unlike most theories of fiction, it is not limited to a discussion of literary fictions, but also addresses those considered theoretical, practical,

²⁰² Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of 'As If': A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind* (London, 1924), 271-73.

²⁰³ Other theories that are accepted by adherents to postmodernism include Nelson Goodman's theory of many versions of world, see Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978); and the "possible worlds theory" popularized by Lubomir Dolezal, Thomas Pavel, and Wolfgang Iser.

²⁰⁴ Barry Stampfel, "Hans Vaihinger's Ghostly Presence in Contemporary Literary Studies," *Criticism* (Summer, 1998), 3. Stampfel analyses essays by J.Hillis Miller, Barbara Johnson, Susan Stanford Fiedman, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

and religious. According to Vaihinger, “the object of the world of ideas as a whole is not the portrayal of reality... *but rather to provide us with an instrument for finding our way about more easily in this world.*”²⁰⁵ In other words, fictional worlds are not created in imitation of the “real” world (proceeding as if there were a pregiven reality), but rather as guides for negotiating a way through that reality’s inconsistencies. Such is the function of the Eternal Network, which provides an alternative system in which artists can adhere to ideals such as the decommodification, democratization, and decentralization of art. According to Vaihinger’s philosophy, artists would act “as if” there were an alternative to the commodity-driven “official art world,” constructing a conceptual system in order to satisfy their need for such an alternative. Within the fictive realm of the Eternal Network, artists are able to avoid absorption back into the official art system that befell prior counter-cultural avant-garde art movements such as Dada.

While Vaihinger’s “As If” philosophy facilitates a general theoretical understanding of the purpose of fictions, literary theorist Wolfgang Iser has gone on to explore how fictions can be understood as acts of boundary-crossing. If Vaihinger’s philosophy helps to explain what the eternal network *is*, then Iser’s notion of boundary-

²⁰⁵ Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of ‘As If’: A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind* (London, 1924),15. Italics original. Critical discussions of Vaihinger’s philosophy have been

crossing helps to explain what the Eternal Network *does*. In his book *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Iser focuses on ways in which literary fictions result from the interplay of the real, the fictive, and the imaginary. According to Iser, the fictive oversteps both the real and the imaginary through acts of selection and combination to produce a possible world that self-discloses its own fictionality.²⁰⁶ Even though Iser's focus is on literary fictions, his notion of the fictive as a transgressive act can be applied to the Eternal Network.²⁰⁷ Play, which Iser calls the "structure that regulates the interplay between the fictive and the imaginary," was a tool Robert Filliou used often for problem solving. Indeed, the Eternal Network is a manifestation of his concept of Permanent Creation—a never-ending process of play. The Eternal Network provides a space in which participants, masking as corporate personas or alter egos, engage in acts of play by transforming images and texts, often "poached" from popular culture, to create new multi-layered meanings. These images and texts circulate throughout the Network providing a shared source for further fictionalizing.

If the Eternal Network is a fictional space experienced by engaged participants, then it is through representations of this space that participants perceive it as a collective.

undertaken by Frank Kermode, Wolfgang Iser, and David Wayne Thomas.

²⁰⁶ Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, 11-13.

As representations, publications played a key role in the creation of communion among Eternal Network participants. Benedict Anderson's discussion of nations as "imagined communities" provides a model of how fictions can be imagined collectively. In particular, Anderson explains that it has historically been through publications and other later communications media that representations are imbedded "simultaneously" in the minds of multiple readers/viewers to create "an image of their communion."²⁰⁸ Anderson draws from Walter Benjamin—and clearly also from McLuhan—for his concept of simultaneity, as well as for his choice of examples of forms that express it—the novel and the newspaper.²⁰⁹ McLuhan in particular dwelt on the idea that the "the press is a group confessional form that provides communal participation. It can 'color' events by using them or by not using them at all. But it is the daily communal exposure of multiple items in juxtaposition that gives the press its complex dimension of human interest"²¹⁰

According to Anderson, publications re-present events as if they were occurring at the

²⁰⁷ Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, xiv.

²⁰⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15, 30.

²⁰⁹ See, for example, Marshall McLuhan, *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations** (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), item 14, n.p.

²¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), 204; first printed 1964.

same time, through the technique of juxtaposition.²¹¹ McLuhan called this a “mosaic” form, in which ideas are not just presented but also created: “the press is a daily action and fiction or thing made, and it is made out of just about everything in the community. By mosaic means, it is made into a communal image or cross-section.”²¹² In this way, comments Anderson, “fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality.”²¹³ The spatially arranged publications produced by the Vancouver artists discussed in this thesis are structured in a “mosaic” way. They do not reconstruct a narrative of the Eternal Network, they represent the imaginative acts and experiences of Eternal Network participants.

In summary, this chapter began with a discussion of Vancouver artists’ engagement with Marshall McLuhan’s communications theories and Concretism, and made the assertion that this familiarity encouraged them to adapt Fluxus artist Robert Filliou’s concept for an Eternal Network to their correspondence art activities. McLuhan, Concretism, and Fluxus all shared a common concern for the experiential event, which developed within process philosophy—an alternative metaphysics largely popularized by

²¹¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 30.

²¹² McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 212. Marshall McLuhan was particularly interested in the effects of the development of the printing press. He felt that conventional printed matter had resulted in the formation of a linear, logical, and universal social space, which privileged visual perception. It was McLuhan who first pointed out the connections between the birth of the printing press, nationalism, and individualism.

²¹³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 40.

Alfred North Whitehead. The fundamentally experiential nature of the Eternal Network has led many of its participants to explain its function in spiritual terms. In contrast, I have defined the Eternal Network as a fictive space that transgresses the real and the imaginary to produce possibilities. This fictive space is imagined as a collective, or community, through representations in the form of spatially arranged publications. Image Bank, Ace Space Co., and Poem Company envisioned themselves as vital links in this community and promoted its development through collective, spatially arranged publications that reflected their democratic, decentralized, and anti-commodity sensibilities. The following chapter discusses these three groups and their publications.

CHAPTER THREE

Spatial Communication:

Image Bank, Ace Space Co. and Poem Company Publications, 1969-74

Under the umbrella of corporate identities, Image Bank, Poem Company, and Ace Space Co. produced a number of books and serials that functioned to promote the Eternal Network's utopian ideals; to disseminate and share ideas and images between artists; and to provide the emerging Network with tangible proof of its own existence as an alternative community. By working under the umbrella of corporate identities they were able to facilitate large-scale collaboration. For example, Poem Company included in its publications work by local poets such as Judith Copithorne, Maxine Gadd, and Gerry Gilbert; well-known international poets such as Pablo Neruda, William Burroughs, and Iris Murdoch; and artist collectives such as General Idea, Image Bank, North West Mounted Valise, and Fluxus.²¹⁴ Vancouver groups such as the New York Corres Sponge Dance School of Vancouver, affiliated individuals such as Anna Banana and Dr. and Lady Brute, as well as unidentified artists, also collaborated on publications, and their

²¹⁴ Edwin Varney and Henry Rappaport eds, *Poem Company** (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1972).

participation was integral to the development of the Eternal Network. This chapter does not offer a comprehensive discussion of the complex relationships between Correspondence Artists in Vancouver, but rather focuses on three prominent groups who adopted corporate personas and who were concerned with problems of spatial communication.²¹⁵

The three groups singled out here were chosen because they provide a cross-section of different kinds of publishing projects produced in Vancouver by Correspondence Artists, including lists, quick-print assemblages, and fine-printed edited compilations. In addition, the three share certain features: they published during the same early period when the Eternal Network was developing and participated in one another's projects. Most important, publications produced by Image Bank, Ace Space Co., and Poem Company exhibit a shift from linear to spatial thinking, and they focus on the problem of how to communicate effectively in an age of instant information. This move from one way of thinking to another was integral to the success of the Eternal Network.

For many Vancouver artists, the development from linear to spatial thinking was mainly built on Marshall McLuhan's theories about the dynamic nature of acoustic space.

²¹⁵ For a historical outline of events told by an insider see Anna Banana, "Mail Art Canada," in Crane and Stofflet eds, *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity*, 233-

Beginning from Harold Innis's premise that communications media develop time and spatial biases — that is, durable media like etched stone are time-biased, and portable media like paper are spatially-biased— McLuhan attempted to integrate the notion that time and space were relational.²¹⁶ He agreed with Innis that the modern world of instant information was spatially biased; however, he envisioned this space as dynamic rather than static. McLuhan moved out of the realm of static visual space into the non-linear, field-based space of quantum physics popularized by Alfred North Whitehead.²¹⁷ Dynamic space could be a site of resistance through the creation of counter-environments that allow for an “acoustic model” of spatial perception, rather than purely visual perception.²¹⁸

McLuhan advocated the use and manipulation of visual space in terms of dynamic acoustic space, as in collage or concrete poetry.²¹⁹ In this way, he attempted to treat visual media, like books, with acoustic sensibilities in order to highlight the ways in which media integrate themselves into the information they convey. According to

263.

²¹⁶ Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 18. See also Patterson, *History and Communications*.

²¹⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures in Ideas* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1933). For a discussion of the influence of Whitehead on avant-garde thinkers in America see Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*, 120-141. For a discussion of Whitehead's influence on Marshall McLuhan see Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 173.

McLuhan, "It would be a mistake to suppose that the trend of culture toward the oral and acoustic means the book is becoming obsolete. It means rather that the book, as it loses its monopoly as a cultural form will acquire new roles."²²⁰ A number of Vancouver artists were deeply affected by McLuhan's theorizing and participated, throughout the sixties, in multimedia and multi-sensory events that attempted to demonstrate dynamic spatial perception.²²¹ Many of the publications and ephemera exchanged by Correspondence Artists were arranged in what McLuhan called a "mosaic" form that relied on the spatial tactic of juxtaposition rather than the time-based tactic of linear narrative in order to communicate ideas, information, and experiences.

In Vancouver, the transition from Correspondence Art practice to the creation of a fictive utopian space began when circles of artists, who had been compiling and sharing mailing lists, began collaborating on publishing ventures. According to Michael Morris, "the availability and distribution of information [was] imperative for the development of a climate in which new art activity [could] have a recognized relevance in its own time."²²²

²¹⁸ Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 27.

²¹⁹ Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 25.

²²⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Counter Blast** (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1969), 98.

²²¹ See Margaret Pinney, "Voices" in *Vancouver: Art and Artists 1931 – 1983* (Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 174-187.

²²² Morris, "Artist as Curator," 43.

Founded in 1969, Image Bank was the brainchild of Michael Morris (a.k.a. Marcel Dot, a.k.a. Miss General Idea), Vincent Trasov (a.k.a Mr. Peanut), and, until c.1973, Gary Lee-Nova (a.k.a. Art Rat).²²³ Each of these artists brought their own interests and objectives to bear upon the collective endeavor, and they also undertook projects unrelated to Correspondence Art. What these artists shared was an interest in communications systems and a McLuhanesque vision of the artist as perceptions specialist and cultural researcher.

According to the group's most outspoken member Michael Morris, "Image Bank is an ideal derived from numerous contemporary and popularized theories from William Burroughs to Claude Levi-Strauss."²²⁴ Both Burroughs and Levi-Strauss provide insight into the purpose of, and doctrine behind, Image Bank's activities. Following the Levi-Strauss avenue, Scott Watson has attributed the origin of the name "Image Bank" to a phrase in *The Savage Mind*, which likens the act of classifying signs to the creation of a "memory bank."²²⁵ Given Morris's later focus on art as a form of myth-making, the link

²²³ Western Front, *Art and Correspondence from the Western Front* (Vancouver, 1979), 64. Contributors include Craig, Lewis, Metclfe, Morris, Trasov.

²²⁴ Western Front, *Art and Correspondence from the Western Front*, 35.

²²⁵ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 16. In his essay "Hand of the Spirit: Documents of the Seventies from the Morris/Trasov Archive" Scott Watson points out that Levi-Strauss's text has commonly been misquoted, and that the term "Image Bank" does not occur in his book. Scott Watson, *Hand of the Spirit* (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1994), 28.

between Image Bank and the anthropological theory of Levi-Strauss is strong.²²⁶ Morris explains that artists working in groups such as Image Bank “adopt a long-term view of their work as research... and their work can be better understood if considered within the sociological, anthropological and psychological spheres that myth attempts to encompass and define.”²²⁷

Claude Levi-Strauss, adapting the methods of structural linguistics to anthropology, believed that binary oppositions formed the underlying structure of all concepts. Accordingly, a structural approach to myth reveals two layers of meaning: one that is historically and contextually specific; another that is ahistorical, universal, and therefore structural. Of particular importance to the work conducted by Image Bank is Levi-Strauss’s notion that “mythical thought is a kind of intellectual ‘bricolage.’”²²⁸

²²⁶ While Roland Barthes’s writings on myth are also extensive and pertinent, his book *Mythologies* was not translated into English until 1972. Claude Levi-Strauss’s *Structural Anthropologie*, on the other hand, had been available in English since 1963. Furthermore, the Vancouver artists I discuss in this thesis do not refer to Barthes; in contrast, Levi-Strauss is referred to directly. A further connection to Barthes can be traced, however, via Marshall McLuhan’s use of a “counter-environment” as a tool that brings the constructed nature of reality into sharp relief. Barthes was similarly engaged in deciphering meanings underlying the cultural objects and practices of everyday life, and emphasized – like McLuhan – that nothing can be exempted from meaning. In his early writing, McLuhan analyzed comic books, advertisements and other cultural artifacts, and a case can be made that McLuhan influenced Barthes. See, Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 91-92; and Donald F. Theall, “McLuhan’s Aesthetic Explorations,” *Vie des Arts*, xviii:72 (Fall 1973), 90.

²²⁷ Michael Morris, “The Artist as Curator of the Imagination” *ArtsCanada*,* vol. 35 (April/May 1978), 41.

²²⁸ Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 17.

Although the French word “bricoleur” has no English equivalent, Levi-Strauss defines the act of bricolage as piecing together structures from odds and ends. In this way, “mythical thought builds up structured sets by using the debris of events.”²²⁹ While Levi-Strauss was interested in the *structure* of mythical thought, the act of bricolage, in this context, can also be understood as a *process* involving the interplay of the real and the imaginary. Image Bank saw itself conducting research into the underlying structures of modern-day myths, and using that information, or debris, to forge new cultural directives.

Through the amassing of specialized information ...artists are defining modern-day myths... We live in an information-oriented society in which everything must be accounted for. Each individual is an “image bank,” a terminal constantly accumulating and processing a vast amount of information. This cultural reality, as it operates on the individual and on collective levels, is being understood more and more by artists who function as curators of the imagination.²³⁰

Morris’s vision of the individual as a terminal processing endless images and texts can also be linked to William Burroughs’s early writing. In an article of 1973 by Thomas Albright for *Rolling Stone* magazine, Morris is quoted as saying, “we found the name [Image Bank] in Burroughs’s *Nova Express*.”²³¹ In spite of its seeming initial incongruity

²²⁹ Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 21.

²³⁰ Morris, “The Artist as Curator,” 41.

²³¹ Michael Morris quoted in Thomas Albright “New Art School: Correspondence,” *Rolling Stone*, iss. 106 (April 13, 1972).

with structural theory, Burroughs's novel provides an example of an artist/poet employing bricolage. Using what he called his "fold-in" technique, Burroughs created a montage of relentless images culled from his own and other people's writing. In *Nova Express*, technology confronts the body in a cosmic struggle against the corporate "Nova Conspiracy," which attempts to control the "Reality Studio" through the use of an "Image Bank." According to the Nova mythology, when the Subliminal Kid "breaks out all the ugliest pictures in the Image bank and puts it out on the subliminal so one crisis piles up after the other right on schedule,"²³² he starts a chain reaction because "Image is Virus."²³³

It makes exact copies of itself that start eating to make more copies that start eating to make more copies that start eating and so forth to the virus power the fear hate virus slowly replaces the host with virus copies – Program empty body – A vast tapeworm of bring down word and image moving through your mind screen always at the same speed on a slow hydraulic-spine axis ...²³⁴

In other words, explained Marshall McLuhan in an article of 1964 entitled "Notes on Burroughs," in this parasitic information age "each technological extension involves an act of collective cannibalism. The previous environment with all its private and social

²³² William Burroughs, *Nova Express* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 20.

²³³ Burroughs, *Nova Express*, 56.

values, is swallowed by the new environment and reprocessed for whatever values are digestible...²³⁵ Image Bank shared Burroughs's suspicion of the corporate world and its use of word and image to control society; however, for them the information age presented a positive challenge because artists, according to McLuhan, were "experts in sensory awareness, [and] tend to concentrate on the environmental as the challenging and dangerous situation."²³⁶ As Michael Morris put it, "all of us have access to visual information generated by media, the images that spill out all over nonstop belong to everyone, there can be no copyright on what effects [sic] the imagination... As artists, we have endless ways of responding to the environment."²³⁷

The condition of information overload, dealt with by Burroughs, McLuhan, and Image Bank, also provided part of the incentive for Filliou's initial conception of the Eternal Network. Rather than envisioning the relentless nature of the "Information Age" as an oppressive nightmare, Filliou saw it as an opportunity to abandon the linear concept of an avant-garde and replace it with that of the Eternal Network. Inspired by a remark

²³⁴ Burroughs, *Nova Express*, 81.

²³⁵ Marshall McLuhan, "Notes on Burroughs" in Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg eds, *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception, 1959-1989* (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1991), 69. Originally printed in *The Nation* (Dec. 28, 1964), 517-519

²³⁶ McLuhan, "Notes on Burroughs," 70.

²³⁷ Morris, as quoted by Albright in "New Art School: Correspondence," *Rolling Stone*, 2.

that, at his death in 1912, the research mathematician Poincaré had been the last to know all the mathematics of his own time, Filliou surmised that this statement could also be applied to artists.²³⁸ If no one artist could know all the art of her time, then the concept of an avant-garde was irrelevant. It was more useful to replace this linear, or time-based, model with a spatial or field-based one that posited artists as members of a web-like Eternal Network. In this sense the Eternal Network is a conceptual matrix, growing all the time in all directions. With their longstanding interest in McLuhan, Vancouver artists were receptive to Filliou's vision.

At first, Image Bank functioned as a network facilitator by collecting, maintaining, and mailing monthly *Image Request Lists*,* in which artists solicited images and ideas, from "everyone's favorite hair story ...[to]... images of people posting images."²³⁹ *Image Request Lists* revealed shared themes that preoccupied a number of artists. These were then used to create multi-layered jokes, puns, and even mythologies that circulated on the Network and generated new variations and mutations. An example provided by Glenn Lewis describes the Network's use of the "1984" slogan:

²³⁸ Filliou, "Porta Filliou," 80.

²³⁹ "Your Letters Conquer Time and Space... They Bring the 'Far Away' as Close-by as the Nearest Mail Box! Image Bank Image Request List: Image Is Virus," *File* vol. 3, no. 4, (Fall 1975), 12. The

Originally Michael Morris sent out a lighting bolt drawing saying '1984.' It became part of the general fund of images and concepts that were floating around through the mail so anybody could use it. The group General Idea picked up on it and developed it. I also used it in my mural of 365 plastic boxes for the National Research Library in Ottawa...1984 came from Michael's perception of *Life* magazines from the 1940s.²⁴⁰

Re-presenting shared jokes and visual puns through published lists encouraged the development of a collective identity. Indeed, William Burroughs's aphorism "Image is Virus" was often used as a sub-heading on *Image Request Lists**. Through these lists, Image Bank connected artists to each other, and perpetuated and publicized the existence of an alternative network. In this way, Image Bank's *Lists* reinforced collective perception of a network of exchange among participants.

By 1972, Image Bank was publishing *Image Request Lists* in the Toronto-based group General Idea's *File** magazine, which had been started that year as a vehicle to disseminate Correspondence Art.²⁴¹ General Idea, comprising A.A. Bronson (a.k.a Michael Tims), Felix Partz (a.k.a Ron Gabe), and Jorge Zontal (a.k.a Jorge Saia),

Morris/Trasov Archive contains "Image Bank Mailings," 1967-73 (54.10/C37), and 1971-73 (64.7/C42), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

²⁴⁰ Glen Lewis, "Voices," 263. Lewis used the "1984" slogan as a theme for his sculpture commission for the National Research Library in Ottawa in 1973. He sent out a call for submissions through his correspondence art mailing list asking for participants to fill plexiglass boxes, which were stacked to create a *Great Wall of 1984*. It also became the slogan for the Network's performance party, *the Hollywood Decca Dance*, which took place in Los Angeles in 1974.

²⁴¹ The Morris/Trasov Archive contains *File*, 3:4 (Fall 1975) (62.4/C40), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

collaborated on a number of projects with Vancouver artists. Bronson (originally from Vancouver) attended several Little Hot Stove League meetings at the New Era Social Club in 1971- 72, where he discussed the creation of a monthly artists' tabloid "as a free space for artists to plug into."²⁴² General Idea was initially active in collaborative Correspondence Art projects but abandoned the Network in 1974 to pursue their work with multiples and images of glamour.²⁴³ According to General Idea, "the backbone of those early issues [of *File*] was the *Image Bank Request Lists*."²⁴⁴ Eternal Network historian and Hungarian artist Geza Perneczky asserts:

There is no denying the pivotal role these lists of addresses have played in the emergence of mail art. One way or another, the first generation of mail artists relied on the addresses they had copied from *File* in establishing contacts in the western hemisphere. I only wonder whether the artists of the Image Bank had any inkling of the importance their lists of addresses were bound to assume...²⁴⁵

During this same period, Dana Atchley, an American artist who taught film and photography in the Visual Arts department at the University of Victoria, embarked on a series of collaborative multiple assemblages using quick-print technology and the mails. A

²⁴² "Little Hot Stove League Minutes, Feb. 23, 1972," printed in *IS*, iss. 12 (Winter 1973), n.p.

²⁴³ General Idea, *General Idea: Multiples, Catalogue Raisonné Multiples and Prints 1967-1993* (Toronto: S.L. Simpson Gallery, 1993). General Idea embraced the image of glamour to expose the power constructs of the official art world, creating a mock beauty pageant mythology and disseminating it through *File*.

²⁴⁴ General Idea, *General Idea: 1968-1984* (Basel: Kunsthalle, 1984), 38.

former graduate student of Yale, Atchley had a background in fine printing and publishing. In Boston between 1961 and 1965 he had owned his own press and published small books and broadsides, winning a jury prize for his book *Charon's Quince* in the 1963 New England Bookshow.²⁴⁶ After moving to the West Coast, Atchley adopted the corporate identity Ace Space Co., or sometimes simply SpaceCo. While his use of a corporate identity was directly inspired by the Baxters's N. E. Thing Co., the name reflected Atchley's belief that "Space is the connector of all things":

Space is what defines the relationships between people. We communicate through space when we talk. We send radio waves through it, along with all these other kinds of vibratory energies. So one day, I said to myself, I'll start a company called Spaceco and call myself a Coordinator of Space.²⁴⁷

In accordance with this emphasis on space, the purpose of Ace Space Co.'s publications was to connect people and ideas and to "develop structures capable of creating gestalt communities."²⁴⁸ Theories of gestalt, from the German word meaning "organized whole," promoted a holistic life experience in which the self and the external world operate collaboratively. Gestalt emphasizes the importance of intersubjective

²⁴⁵ Perneczky, *The Magazine Network*, 52.

²⁴⁶ Dana Atchley, Letter to Nini Baird, SFU, April 1973, Vancouver Art Gallery Artist Files: Dana Atchley.

²⁴⁷ Dana Atchley quoted by Laddie Kite in "Ace Space's Electronic Vaudeville Show," *Afterimage Magazine* (February 1976), 24.

²⁴⁸ Atchley quoted by Laddie Kite in "Ace Space's Electronic Vaudeville Show," 24.

engagement between the perceiver and the perceived, and seeks to unify figure and ground.²⁴⁹ Its emphasis on spontaneity in art and play relates to Filliou's idea of *La Fête Permanente* and, similarly, recalls the doctrine behind teaching at Black Mountain College.²⁵⁰ Gestalt is especially sympathetic to McLuhan's interest in figure/ground relationships. Frederick S. Perls's assertion, in his book *Gestalt Therapy* (1951), that "the greatest value in the Gestalt approach perhaps lies in the insight that the *whole determines the parts...*,"²⁵¹ parallels the thinking behind McLuhan's insistence that the medium is the message.

The first Ace Space Co. publication was called *Notebook I**. In 1969, Atchley mailed a request to other artists for 250 photocopies of a single page of art, which were then assembled into three-ring binders with help from student Eric Metcalfe and friend

²⁴⁹ Paul Goodman, "Vol II: Novelty, Excitement and Growth" in Frederick S. Perls, Ralph F. Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy* (Bantam Books, Toronto, 1977, first published 1951), 288. The co-author of this book, Paul Goodman, attended Black Mountain College and became a fiction writer, pamphleteer, and socialist utopian community planner embraced by the American counter-culture in the 1960s. For more on Goodman see Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Youthful Opposition* (Anchor Books: New York, 1969), 178-204.

²⁵⁰ Influential Black Mountain College art instructor Josef Albers developed an interest in gestalt after attending lectures by Wilhelm Durckheim at the Bauhaus in 1930-31. See Marianne Teuber "Blue Night by Paul Klee," in Mary Heule, ed., *Vision and Artifact* (Springer: New York, 1976), 144. Likewise, Charles Olson's essay *Projective Verse* espouses ideas sympathetic and parallel to theories of gestalt, and another Black Mountain College faculty member Paul Goodman co-authored the seminal book *Gestalt Therapy* with Frederick S. Perls in 1951.

²⁵¹ Italics original. Frederick S. Perls, "Introduction" in Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman eds, *Gestalt Therapy*, xix.

Kate Craig.²⁵² Each of the sixty contributors received two copies; all material submitted was included, and no copies were sold. *Notebook I* was followed in 1970/71 by another assemblage, *Space Atlas** (fig. 4), which Atchley described as “the visions, charts, maps, plans and reflections of the spaces coordinated by about 100 people.”²⁵³ This time, the number of contributors doubled to 120. Leafing through the *Atlas*, the viewer experiences the assemblage spatially rather than linearly. In spite of the book-format’s natural inclination toward a time-based linear progression with each turn of the page, in the space produced by the *Atlas* each new page presents a juxtaposition to, rather than a continuation of, the previous and the next. Within the context of this thesis, it is not particularly important to analyze each page of the *Atlas* in an effort to describe how it can be experienced, but rather to point out that the drawings, silkscreens, collages, poetry, letters, images, and artists’ stamps, submitted in multiples of 250 are assembled together in a “mosaic” structure that emphasizes juxtaposition rather than narrative sequence. In fact, Atchley encouraged artists to reassemble their own copies of the *Atlas* according to their own interpretation, or to remove works they didn’t want. The assemblages produced

²⁵² Anna Banana, “Mail Art Canada, 238; See also Morris/Trasov Archive 23.28 and 23.26.

²⁵³ Dana Atchley, quoted by Clyde McConnell, “Some Thoughts – theoretical and practical – On the gifts artist make” *ArtsCanada* (Dec. 1970 – Jan. 1971) iss 150/151, vol xxvii, no. 6, 36-40.

by Ace Space Co. juxtapose the work of different artists to produce a new dynamic space representative of their interaction.

After Atchley's appointment at the University of Victoria ended in 1971, he packed the remaining *Space Atlases* into a van and set out to deliver them to the contributors.²⁵⁴ Thus began the ten-year *Roadshow*, in which he traveled across North America, electrifying artists and institutions along the way with his multimedia performances.²⁵⁵ During his period on the road, Atchley continued to produce a number of self-published works, including *Word*pack,** an envelope containing six verbal/visual pieces exploring the meaning of language (fig. 5); *Spacecharts,** a cosmic map of

²⁵⁴ Atchley to Baird, 1973. According to Anna Banana, Atchley was fired from the University of Victoria after he brought in artist/filmmaker Paul Sharits, who may have done something untoward to the department's xerox machine. Following this episode Atchley was sued for libel by the chairman of the department. In the same year, Atchley received a Canada Council travel grant which enabled him to go "on the road." See Anna Banana, "Mail Art Canada," 243. For more information about the lawsuit see *In the matter of the universities act, section 53 : and, In the matter of an investigation into certain allegations made by members of the Department of Visual Arts concerning the chairman of that Department: visual Arts Advisory Board report* (Victoria, BC: Visual Arts Advisory Board, 1971), University of Victoria Archives.

²⁵⁵ Banana, "Mail Art Canada," 243. The *Roadshow* has been described by Laddie Kite in "Ace Space's Electronic Vaudeville Show," *Afterimage Magazine* (February 1976), 24: "The Space Show itself is rather difficult to describe, because it is so distinctive that one is hard pressed to draw analogies. Color slides play a major role in the presentation, but by no means can it be described as a slide show. Much of the audio is prerecorded and reproduced from cassette cartridges. This information may be music, dialogue, or wild-sound recorded at the time the visuals were shot. A great deal of the audio is "live", interjected into the presentation by speaking into a microphone...The Colorado Spaceman steps in front of the...scene (and the audience) wearing a hard hat to which a film strip projector has been attached. He reaches up, turns on the

mystical and astrological signs; *SpaceCo 1984: Spacepack 5*,* a 1972 update of Atchley's Roadshow activities (fig. 6); and a *Kwikdraw Collage** publication edited by Atchley and sponsored by SpaceCo and the Centre for Communications and the Arts at SFU in March of 1973.²⁵⁶ Each of these publications served to show the developing network that it did exist. David Zack summarized this activity: "Each place Ace Space stops he passes out fragments and sets people—one or two up to hundreds—in space to connect with new people."²⁵⁷

According to Anna Banana, Atchley's compilations inspired a number of projects undertaken by Image Bank. Such reciprocal influence and collaboration were integral to the development of the Eternal Network. In October 1971, Image Bank organized a *Post Card Show* at the Fine Arts Gallery at UBC.²⁵⁸ Participants were informed of it through Dana Atchley's Ace Space Co mailings, the *Space Atlas*, and Image Bank mailings. The idea for the exhibition grew out of Image Bank's concern for "opening communications

projector on his hat, and proceeds to show images on the screen that is within the image being projected on the larger screen."

²⁵⁶ Morris/Trasov Archives 23.28, 23.26, 23.11.

²⁵⁷ David Zack, "An Authentic and Historical Discourse on the Phenomenon of Mail Art," *Art in America*, Vol. 61, No.7 (Jan. – Feb., 1973), 50. Dana Atchley continued to be active in multimedia communications, forming his own "digital storytelling" production company called Dana Atchley Productions Inc. His corporate clients included Coca-Cola and Price Waterhouse Coopers. Sadly, the life of this amazing artist came to a premature end in 2000.

²⁵⁸ Michael Morris, "Greetings from Image Bank," *Artscanada* (Dec.1971-Jan.1972), 37.

media as alternate outlets for artistic expression” to “increase awareness in each of us of the effectiveness of communications systems in expanding the general consciousness.”²⁵⁹

An international response from over three hundred artists, private galleries, and small presses resulted in the submission of over five thousand postcards.²⁶⁰ An important component of the exhibition was the printing of twelve hundred sets of eighty postcards for the participating artists.²⁶¹ The exhibition was circulated by the Extension Services of the National Gallery of Canada and received a four-page spread in *Artscanada* magazine.²⁶²

In 1972, Image Bank produced a significant publication that consolidated a number of international mailing lists, including Ken Friedman’s Fluxus List, Ray Johnson’s New York Correspondence School list, and the Image Request Lists from the first three issues of *File* magazine.²⁶³ The *International Image Exchange Directory*,* published in Vancouver by Talon Books, contained requests, addresses, images, and an index. According to Ken Friedman, “The list became the core of the first *File* magazine

²⁵⁹ Morris, “Greetings from Image Bank,” 37.

²⁶⁰ Morris, “Greetings from Image Bank,” 37.

²⁶¹ Morris, “Greetings from Image Bank,” 37. The printing was done by Coach House Press in Toronto.

²⁶² Joan Lowndes, “Postcard as Art and Communication,” *Vancouver Sun*, Oct. 14, 1971, 8.

²⁶³ Image Bank, *Image Exchange Directory* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1972), Morris/Trasov Archive, UBC. See also, Ken Friedman “The Early Days of Mail Art”, 9.

artists' directory, was used to develop Flash Art's* *Art Diary*, and, in expanded and better researched versions, served such staid reference tomes as *Who's Who in American Art*.²⁶⁴ Distributed to artists and arts organizations around the world for free, Image Bank's directory gave even more artists access to the growing Network

The *International Image Exchange Directory* was dedicated to "members of the New York Corres-Sponge Dance School of Vancouver," a group initiated in 1970 by Glenn Lewis (a.k.a. Flakey Rose Hip) in response to Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School.²⁶⁵ Membership was open, international, and unstructured; it included local Vancouver artists as well as international artists such as Robert Filliou, Ben Vautier, and Yvonne Rainer.²⁶⁶ The activities of this group, which "essentially exists in the mind," included correspondence, performance, and synchronized swimming.²⁶⁷ One of the most successful collaborative projects of the New York Corres Sponge Dance School of Vancouver was Glenn Lewis's 1974 mural of 365 Plexiglas boxes for the National Science Library in Ottawa, entitled *The Great Wall of 1984*. Lewis mailed

²⁶⁴ Friedman "The Early Days of Mail Art", 9. The Morris/Trasov Archive has issues of *Flash Art* from 1974 to 77 (63.19/B7), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

²⁶⁵ The Western Front, "The New York Corres Sponge Dance School of Vancouver Reunion," Kate Craig, Glenn Lewis et al., *Art and Correspondence From the Western Front* (Vancouver: Western Front Publications, 1979), 34.

²⁶⁶ Joan Lowndes, "Little Boxes... but they don't look just the same" *Vancouver Sun*, March 5, 1974, 35.

invitations to each of his correspondents to select a box and fill it. The resulting wall of encased objects was described by Michael Morris as “the most anarchistic yet democratic and intelligent manipulation of official bureaucracy to date.”²⁶⁸ After viewing the completed wall, *Vancouver Sun* art critic Joan Lowndes stated, “It does not, as one might fear, present a hodge-podge of trivia. Physically it is colorful and arresting, while intellectually it provides food for endless speculation. That bale of hay, that crinkled screenprint, those plastic bananas...”²⁶⁹ Although the New York Correspondence School of Vancouver did not focus on publishing, with its “cabinet of curiosities” the group turned a single artist’s government commission into a monument to the Eternal Network’s subversive ideals.

While Image Bank and Ace Space Co. promoted the Network by publishing mailing lists and using quick-print technology, Poem Company carried on the tradition of quality printing that had begun with the Intermedia collective’s *Roneo* book experiments. Poem Company, initiated by Edwin Varney (a.k.a. Mr. Poem), can be seen as a continuation and expansion of the concrete poetry movement in Vancouver that predated and overlapped the production of ephemera circulated through the Correspondence Art

²⁶⁷ Craig, Lewis, et al., *Art and Correspondence*, 3.

²⁶⁸ Morris, “The Artist as Curator,” 43.

circuit. Varney was a founding member of the Intermedia collective and, together with Henry Rappaport, took over Intermedia Press after the collective's demise in 1973.²⁷⁰ During the early 70s, Varney and Rappaport held Roneo print workshops, undertook a Print Project in conjunction with the UBC Festival of Fine Arts, and produced a sixteen-page booklet.²⁷¹

Intermedia's Roneo machine was frequently used to create "mail-out" publications with no attribution of authorship, which reflected the interdisciplinary and experimental aims of the Intermedia collective. Varney was involved in a number of groups that branched out from Intermedia, including Pacific Rim Consciousness, The Little Hot Stove League, The Poetry Front, and The Galactic Research Council. A mail-out publication entitled *Galactic Research Council** stated: "we are involved in the Intermedial print process learning and refining Roneo and offset technique and experimenting with the mailing system as an amplification device."²⁷² The Galactic Research Council was engaged in something called "metaspherosynoptics," in which the

²⁶⁹ Lowndes, "Little Boxes," *Vancouver Sun*, 35.

²⁷⁰ Glennis Zilm, "Intermedia: Poetry, Art and Printing," *Quill and Quire*, 42, no.8 (1976), 25.

²⁷¹ Intermedia Press Papers, Vancouver BC, 1967/1980, BC1518/1-723, UBC Archival Collections

²⁷² *Galactic Research Council, Metaspherosynoptics* (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1970), np, Morris/Trasov Archive, Belkin Gallery, University of British Columbia, (S7.13/A8). See also, Untitled*

metasphere was described as a state of mind. Largely concerned with the "aural/oral environment," their booklet reflects the continuing influence of Marshall McLuhan's theories of acoustic space.

Along with Gerry Gilbert, Maxine Gadd, Henry Rappaport, and Judith Copithorne, Varney formed the Vancouver Poetry Front, which performed oral poetry in unconventional ways and experimented with printed concrete poetry.²⁷³ Richard Cavell calls the simultaneous interest in printed and oral communication "one of the great paradoxes associated with the 'culture of orality'" that emerged out of the avant-garde during the post-war era.²⁷⁴ While the tangible quality of concrete poetry would seem to be at odds with the ephemeral nature of the spoken word, Cavell points out that both voice poetry and concrete poetry attempt to illuminate the unexamined relationship between orality and literacy, primarily the unifying common denominator of the production of space.²⁷⁵ Concrete poetry attempts to use the page as a graphic field with the words—and even letters—of the poem performing a kind of visual phonetics. Concrete poems take numerous forms but are often hand-written, typed, or collaged.

(Vancouver: Metapherosynoptics, n.d.), Morris/Trasov Archive (57.44/A10), Belkin Gallery, University of British Columbia.

²⁷³ Tuttle, "Intermedia Society," 74.

²⁷⁴ Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 136.

Marshall McLuhan's own innovative publishing projects, such as his *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* (figs. 7 & 8), first printed in 1957 as *Explorations 8*, and reprinted as a book in 1967, made use of exploded type, concrete poetry forms, and listed the first section of the contents by item rather than page number. Similarly, his *Dew-line Newsletter*, produced between 1968 and 1970, was printed in a variety of experimental formats including a pamphlet, essay binder, booklet, a series of posters, and a deck of cards.²⁷⁶ A subscription form-letter written by the President of the Human Development Corporation described the multimedia formats of McLuhan's *Dew-Line*:

So far, for example, these new formats have consisted of some of the following: A copy of Dr. McLuhan's latest book, with a sensory retraining kit designed to teach the reader several different ways of approaching it – both linear and mosaic. The first McLuhan FUTURGRAM, with Dr. McLuhan's specific predictions concerning the interface of education and business, in surprising areas of American life. A 33-page tactile book, which is to be read as a series of icons rather than progressive, discursive thoughts... To follow will be records... new sensory retraining kits... essay message charts... and much more.²⁷⁷

Through the use of unconventional formats, McLuhan attempted to engage the viewer in the creation of the information conveyed – that is, to provoke an experience. It is

²⁷⁵ Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 138.

²⁷⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *The McLuhan Dew-Line vols. 1-3* (New York: Human Development Corporation, 1970). See also Cavell, *McLuhan in Space*, 132.

important to note that McLuhan's theories about the dynamic nature of acoustic space were embodied in forms as much as scholarly prose.

Likewise, Varney warned that "concrete poetry should be looked at – not written about;"²⁷⁸ however, he also explained, "For me a poem is an event. Something happens in the space of time the poem encompasses."²⁷⁹ The experience of the poem is heightened in concrete poetry, which "respects the integrity of the poem as object, ...since it is not linear there can be no sense of progression, no plot or story, no structuring of time elapsed."²⁸⁰ Accordingly,

**"CONCRETE POETRY IS IMMEDIATE
ALLATONCENESS"²⁸¹**

According to Black Mountain School Poet Charles Olson, this kind of "composition by field," which he also called "projective" or "open" verse, involves, not just the technical aspects of poetry, but also the author taking a spontaneous and spatially aware stance

²⁷⁷ Eugene M. Schwartz, President, Human Development Corporation, "Subscription Form Letter," 1969; University of Victoria Special Collections Library (P91 M278 1970).

²⁷⁸ Edwin Varney, "Untitled Poem/Essay," *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts** (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1969), n.p.

²⁷⁹ Edwin Varney in Fred Candelaria ed., *New West Coast: 72 contemporary british columbia poets* (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1977), 134.

²⁸⁰ Edwin Varney, "Concrete Poetry," *Poem Company** (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1972), n.p.

²⁸¹ Edwin Varney, "Untitled Poem/Essay," *Concrete Poetry*, n.p.

toward reality.²⁸² In spite of the fact that the content of each poem may vary widely, as Daniel Belgrad has pointed out the spontaneous act also had a social meaning. Through its emphasis on holistic experience, it challenged the “rational progress of Western civilization which had succeeded in developing technologies and principles of organization that threatened human life and freedom.”²⁸³ Open verse, oral poetry, and concrete poetry were cultural tactics employed by artists and poets to reveal the existence, and value, of intersubjective communication.

In 1970 Varney began printing an eight-page, quarter-size magazine called *The Poem Company*,* which he mailed to three hundred people.²⁸⁴ It featured poetry, collage, and art, and asked individuals to respond with a poem or other art form. Some were sent to artists he admired such as William Burroughs, others to artists and poets he knew personally, and others to names from shared mailing lists. Between 1970 and 1971 Varney also bound fifty copies of *The Poem Company* mail-outs into single volumes for distribution to friends.²⁸⁵ In 1971, he produced *Junk Mail: A Pacific trans-power publication** (figs. 9, 10, & 11), which consisted of ninety-six cards in a box printed in an

²⁸² Olson, “Projective Verse,” 241-243.

²⁸³ Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity*, 15.

²⁸⁴ Anna Banana, “Mail Art Canada,” 241.

²⁸⁵ Banana, “Mail Art Canada,” 258.

edition of one thousand. It contained the experimental work of over forty artists and poets. Like Atchley's assemblages, *Junk Mail* stressed the collective and intersubjective nature of the emerging network. Each card is the same size, printed in black and white ink and unsigned, emphasizing the democratic nature of the publication. The cards can be viewed individually or laid out in patterns to be viewed all at once. They can be shuffled to change the order, or cards can be removed to create new relationships between the images and words presented on each card. Unlike the traditional book format, the unbound cards are a dynamic format that can be interacted with in multiple ways depending on the viewer's level of engagement.

A second *Junk Mail* publication consisted of an edition of five hundred envelopes containing loose printed ephemera from Intermedia Press. In 1972, Poem Company published a book entitled *Poem Company**, which contained works by a number of "contributing members," including Image Bank, General Idea, Ray Johnson, Ken Friedman, Fluxus, William Burroughs, Bill Bissett, Pablo Neruda, Maxine Gadd, Judith Copithorne. It contained images produced by Image Bank, the Galactic Research

Council, the New Era Social Club, Canada's National Magazine, Intermedia Press, Coach house Press, Art Rat, and others.²⁸⁶

Publications produced for, and circulated within, the Eternal Network attempted to use the "visual" medium of print acoustically in order to emphasize a spatial understanding of communication. Unlike the traditional book form, which McLuhan described as "a private confessional form that provides a 'point of view,'" the publications produced by Image Bank, Ace Space Co., and Poem Company presented information in a dynamic "mosaic or participational" form.²⁸⁷ In a discussion of the popular press, McLuhan explained that "mosaic form means, not a detached 'point of view,' but participation in process."²⁸⁸ For Vancouver artists, the medium of print was less a vehicle of information, than "a tool in the training of perception."²⁸⁹

The outcome of this alternative publishing activity was manifold, leading to expansion of the Network through increased participation; increased attention from the mass media; and the withdrawal of a number of artists from association with the Network. The Eternal Network's existence as a counter-environment was strengthened by

²⁸⁶ Henry Rappaport and Edwin Varney eds, *The Poem Company* (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1972).

²⁸⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1964), 204.

²⁸⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 210.

increased participation and publicity garnered through publications produced by Vancouver artists. At the same time, this heightened visibility also led to press coverage in magazines such as *Art in America* and *Rolling Stone*, which printed the addresses of a number of groups, “so that you too can be an artist, as easily as getting to your nearest mailbox.”²⁹⁰ Numerous people responded to this invitation and Correspondence Artists were inundated with what *File* magazine labeled “quick-kopy krap.”²⁹¹

Heightened Network activity provided a crucible in which conflicting views about the role of aesthetics were brought to the surface. Correspondence Art claimed to be free from censorship, yet many artists censored their mail based on personal taste and aesthetic judgement. According to Gary Lee-Nova, “I got a lot of garbage and threw out most of it... just dog shit, at the visual level. It was so shallow and poorly put together I just couldn’t take it seriously.”²⁹² Artists who were depressed by the poor aesthetic quality of Correspondence Art eventually withdrew from the Network.²⁹³ This crisis

²⁸⁹ McLuhan, *Counter Blast*, 99.

²⁹⁰ Albright “New Art School: Correspondence,” *Rolling Stone*. The other influential article by David Zack is “An Authentik and Historikal Discourse on the Phenomenon of Mail Art,” *Art in America*, (Jan – Feb, 1973).

²⁹¹ Chuck Welch, “Corresponding Worlds: Debate and Dialogue,” in Welch ed., *Networking Currents: Contemporary Mail Art Subjects and Issues* (Boston: Sandbar Willow Press, 1986), 189.

²⁹² Gary Lee Nova, as quoted by Anna Banana, “Mail Art Canada,” 250.

²⁹³ Gary Lee Nova withdrew from the Network in 1973. General Idea stopped printing Image Request Lists in *File* magazine in 1975. Ray Johnson announced the death of the New York Correspondence School in

helped participants to refocus their energy toward the process and meaning of the Eternal Network, rather than the quality of work being circulated.

For staunch defender of Correspondence Art Anna Banana, who described herself as “more interested in communications and the process of exchange than in products and markets,” the concept of the Eternal Network superseded aesthetic quality.²⁹⁴ Like the artists masking as corporate identities discussed here, Banana was dedicated to the process and helped promote the Eternal Network as a global community throughout the early 70’s. She circulated her newsletter the *Banana Rag** (fig. 12) through the New York Corres Sponge Dance School of Vancouver from 1971-1981.²⁹⁵ After relocating to San Francisco and becoming involved with Bill Gaglione and the Bay Area Dadaists, she began producing *Vile** magazine, which published the work of international Correspondence Artists from 1974 to 1983.²⁹⁶

1973 by sending an obituary to the *New York Times*. Nevertheless, the New York Correspondence School was quickly reincarnated as “Buddha University.” See Michael Crane, “The Origins of Correspondence Art,” in Crane and Stofflet eds, *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984), 87.

²⁹⁴ Anna Banana, Archive Proposal, 22 October 1981, Vancouver Art Gallery Artist Clipping File: Anna Banana.

²⁹⁵ Banana, Archive Proposal. The Morris/Trasov Archive has *Banana Rag*, 12 (55.13/A4), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

²⁹⁶ Anna Banana, *Book About Vile* (Vancouver: Banana Productions, 1984), 2. The Morris/Trasov Archive has *Vile* 1:4 (Sept. 1974) (60.12/A18), Belkin Gallery, UBC.

In spite of debates about its adherence to its own ideals, Vancouver artists continued to promote the concept of the Eternal Network originally envisioned by Robert Filliou as an imagined community and a dynamic space that artists could inhabit. Image Bank's Lists, Ace Space Co.'s quick print assemblages, and Poem Company's concrete and visual poetry compilations offered the Eternal Network an image of itself that encouraged spatial communication. Most importantly, the publications produced by these artists' collectives helped imbed representations of community simultaneously in the minds of Eternal Network participants world-wide.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to define the Eternal Network as a fictive space, collectively imagined as a community through the exchange of spatially-arranged artists' publications. In its initial stage, this study was inspired by a lack of information about the role of Vancouver artists in the development of the Eternal Network and the sweeping pronouncement of their importance to its development in collective historical surveys of Correspondence Art. In his foundational Correspondence Art bibliography, John Held asserted that "*FILE* [and thus, Image Bank Request Lists] served as an international switchboard of artists becoming interested in the Eternal Network."²⁹⁷ Network historian Chuck Welch agreed, stating that "from 1970-1973, two Canadian-funded artists' publishing projects, *FILE Magazine* and Image Bank's *Image Exchange Directory* became decentralized clearing houses that introduced correspondence art to a global audience in North America, South America, Europe and Australia."²⁹⁸ In his historical survey of art periodicals circulated through the Eternal Network, Geza

²⁹⁷ Held, *Mail Art an Annotated Bibliography*, xvii.

²⁹⁸ Welch, "Corresponding Worlds," in Welch ed., *Eternal Network*, 188.

Perneczky supported these claims by singling out the initiatory publishing projects of Ace Space Co., Image Bank, and Anna Banana.²⁹⁹ Longtime chronicler of Fluxus-west, Ken Friedman, concurred, explaining that in the early 70s:

Canada began to fill the vacuum, serving as a powerhouse and beacon in helping to promote and develop what the Canadians called “eternal network” consciousness around the world. The list of Canadian leaders includes now major art-world figures such as Michael Morris, Mr. Peanut, Clive Roberston and the honorary Canadian Robert Filliou, as well as cult heroes such as A.A. Bronson, John Jack Baylin, and the well-loved Ed Varney of the anonymous Poem Company.³⁰⁰

Such assertions persuaded me that, without a doubt, Vancouver artists played a significant part in the development of the Eternal Network. This study has allowed me to draw several conclusions about *why* and *how* three specific groups, Image Bank, Ace Space Co., and Poem Company, used publications to promote and represent the emerging Network.

In examining why these groups turned to self-publishing as a way to communicate with other artists, I became aware of the unique cultural and intellectual development of the arts in Vancouver specifically, and on the West Coast more generally. Thus, I approached this topic as a “case study” that considers the specific context in which

²⁹⁹ Perneczky, *The Magazine Network*, 16, 20, 21, 63.

³⁰⁰ Friedman “Notes,” 5; Glenn Lewis Artist File, Vancouver Art Gallery Library

Vancouver artists produced spatially arranged publications that publicized and represented the “imagined community” of the Eternal Network. A deep sense of geographical isolation on the West Coast, coupled with a lack of historical and institutional restrictions, fostered a willingness to experiment with and develop new structures of communication. This sense of isolation was shared among the larger West Coast cities in the U.S. and Canada, and artistic exchanges between Vancouver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles are well documented during this period.³⁰¹ Indeed, publishing projects undertaken by San Francisco- and Los Angeles-based Black Mountain and Beat poets experimenting with concrete and performance poetry provided a precedent for artists’ publishing in Vancouver, ultimately influencing the development of the alternative press and performance art, as well.

While the sense of isolation felt by West Coast artists is the result of geographical distance from traditional cultural centres in North America and Europe, it also stimulated an imaginative, or fictive, sense of marginality. Both the actual geographic isolation and the fictive sense of marginality encouraged Vancouver artists to seek association with a West Coast arts community, and intensified their fascination with global communications

³⁰¹ See, for example, Vancouver Art Gallery, *Vancouver Art and Artists: 1933 – 1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983).

systems, such as the decentralized and democratic Eternal Network. The role played by “fictive” thinking in the development of place-identity is a topic that has been repeatedly addressed by scholars across disciplines, and deserves more consideration in terms of its effect on cultural formation. In his article of 1989 entitled “The Intellectual and Imaginative Development of British Columbia,” Douglas Cole urged scholars to explore the cultural and intellectual history of British Columbia, explaining that geographic isolation “pulls the province toward marginality, provincialism, and insignificance.”³⁰² Cole further emphasized the region’s unique status: “to an undemonstrable extent, British Columbia simply does not fit into Canadian, even English-Canadian, intellectual and cultural history.”³⁰³ Yet, if British Columbia exists on the margins of Canada, then as Linda Hutcheon points out in *The Canadian Postmodern*, “the periphery is also the frontier, the place of possibility.”³⁰⁴ This notion has been explored, with specific reference to Vancouver and its “civic myth,” by Christopher Thomas and Kim Reinhardt, who recognize Vancouver’s myth as one of “youth and novelty... a coastal version of the

³⁰² Douglas Cole, “The Intellectual and Imaginative Development of British Columbia, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 24:3 (Fall, 1989), 70.

³⁰³ Cole, “Intellectual and Imaginative Development,” 74.

³⁰⁴ Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 3.

pioneer myth, or frontier thesis...³⁰⁵ Recently, too, Gerard Boychuk and Debora Vannijnatten have questioned whether the region of the “Canadian West” can be identified as a unique political, economic, or cultural space. While they acknowledge a shared “sense of regional alienation from the rest of Canada in political, economic, and cultural terms,” they also conclude that “to the extent that a West exists – or persists – it does so in spite of the lack of formal institutions.”³⁰⁶ Regardless of measurable differences in public policy, place-identity shapes perception. As Thomas and Reinhardt point out, “however susceptible to analysis and deconstruction, such civic myths become potent sources of direction and energy for writers, artists, and other cultural and political leaders.”³⁰⁷ This was especially true for the Vancouver-based artists discussed in this thesis, who aligned themselves with a West Coast arts community with global, utopian sensibilities.

The regionalist yet simultaneously internationalist interests of these artists would seem to preclude situating their activities within a national context. Yet, as Linda

³⁰⁵ Thomas and Reinhardt, “Victoria Moderna (1945-1970,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, 26:3/4 (Winter, 2001), 4, 5.

³⁰⁶ Gerard W. Boychuk and Debora L. Vannijnatten, “The Canadian ‘West’ as a Public Policy Space” Public Policies in Western Canadian Provinces from a National and Cross-National Perspective, *BC Studies*, No. 133 (Spring 2002), 11.

Hutcheon points out, "Canada can in some ways be defined as a country whose articulation of its *national* identity has sprung from regionalist impulses: the ex-centric forces of Quebec, the Maritimes, the west. Its history is one of defining itself against centres."³⁰⁸ Focus on communications in the Canadian national agenda during the 1960s led me to situate the communications-oriented activities of Vancouver-based Eternal Network participants within the larger Canadian context. A number of the primary aims of the Correspondence Art movement, particularly the democratization and decentralization of art, emerged in Canadian cultural policy during the same period. In 1969 the federal government announced its cultural "democratization and decentralization" program at a seminar organized jointly by the Canadian Conference of the Arts and the United States Associated Council of the Arts. The program set out to expand cultural institutions outside Central Canada and to encourage cultural pluralism.³⁰⁹ The national and, to a greater degree, the regional context within which

³⁰⁷ Thomas and Reinhardt, "Victoria Moderna (1945-1970), *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, 4.

³⁰⁸ Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 4.

³⁰⁹ Paul D. Schafer and Andrea Fortier, *Review of Federal Policies for the Arts in Canada 1944-1988* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of the Arts, 1989); See also, Paul Schafer, *Aspects of Canadian Cultural Policy* (Paris; Unesco, 1976), 24.

Vancouver artists were working encouraged them to participate in alternative communications systems such as the Eternal Network.

To an even larger extent, the Vancouver arts milieu was shaped by Marshall McLuhan's communications theories during the 1960s. Vancouver artists' apparent lack of interest in Canadian nationalism and their alliance with a global arts community reflects the influence of McLuhan's anti-nationalist stance and his promotion of the "global village." At every turn, I was confronted by the primacy of Marshall McLuhan's role in the development of a communications-centred arts milieu in Vancouver.

McLuhan's own use of publications as perceptual tools lead me toward an examination of *how* Vancouver artists used publications to represent the emerging Network. This study has shown that the artists' collectives and individuals discussed in this thesis used the spatial tactics of juxtaposition and mosaic form, promoted by McLuhan, to foreground the democratic, decentralized and experiential nature of the Eternal Network. In doing so they helped to create an imagined community that encouraged them to envision an alternative structure to the "official art world." As members of the artists' collective The Western Front explained,

The Network activity began as an experiment in communications on a creative level, correspondence by mail proving to be the most convenient,

accessible and inexpensive means available. It led, inevitably to a wider understanding of the use of media. This in turn allowed artists to assume a much greater degree of control over their own work... Artist controlled spaces which began to sprout up almost spontaneously in the 1970s are partly a result of the Network correspondence activity.³¹⁰

The parallel gallery system in Canada is indebted to the success of the Eternal Network, which provided artists with a utopian model and incentive for change. While my study focused mainly on the Eternal Network as an autonomous system, another study might explore ways in which this system encouraged change in the “official art world.”

McLuhan’s connection to Fluxus artists such as Dick Higgins, who published his book *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* and coined the term “intermedia,” helped explain the ease with which Vancouver artists grasped Fluxus artist Robert Filliou’s concept of the Eternal Network, which, in many ways, paralleled McLuhan’s own thinking. Indeed, this study has shown that McLuhan’s communications theories provided Vancouver artists with a foundation from which to further develop Filliou’s concept. Like McLuhan, Filliou foregrounded the essential role of experience in perception and learning. The primacy of experience in art during the 1960s grew out of theories emanating from process philosophy, popularized by Alfred North Whitehead and the educational

³¹⁰ Kate Graig, Glenn Lewis, Michael Morris, Vincent Trasov, *Art and Correspondence from the Western*

philosophy of John Dewey. The view of reality as a process was shared by a number of Black Mountain School poets and artists, members of the international Concrete poetry movement and other concretist manifestations, as well as Fluxus and Conceptual artists.

The experiential aspect of the Eternal Network often has been interpreted by participants in mystical terms. In contrast, I have attempted to trace the importance of the experiential event as it developed in a legitimate alternative metaphysics. My aim in doing so has been to clarify the purpose served by the Network, which offers a working model of dynamic exchange between engaged participants. The Eternal Network has been criticized for its lack of theoretical rigor, political content, and social relevance. For example, Michael Crane points out that “Correspondence art can express concern with crucial issues of the day without assuming the responsibility for producing real effects or responding to challenging feedback.”³¹¹ Punctuating this, networker Chuck Welch asks “What possible ‘threat’ can mail delivered by artists have upon a political dictatorship?”³¹² Nevertheless, to criticize the Network for its lack of overtly social, political, or theoretical rigor is to miss the point that through its emphasis on process,

Front (Vancouver: Western Front Publication, 1979), 2-3.

³¹¹ Michael Crane, “A Definition of Correspondence Art,” in Crane and Stofflet eds, *Correspondence Art*, 3.

³¹² Chuck Welch, *Networking Currents*, 35.

intersubjective communication, and experience, it fundamentally opposes the objective rationalism and bureaucratic structures supported by the dominant culture.

Because experiences are perceived on an individual level, I have offered an additional definition of the Eternal Network as a fictive space, which more readily allows for discussion of the collective perception of the Network through representations. As a fictive space, the Network provides a site of possibilities in which the interplay of the real and the imaginary crosses over the boundaries established by the dominant culture. The publications produced by Vancouver artists and artists' collectives between 1969 and 1973 represent the experiential process of the Network, but they also provided a basis for further collective imagining by supplying each perceiver with a particular image of communion. Although they can appear nonsensical, and even trivial, the publications circulated through the Eternal Network are important documents that testify to a community of artists' shared faith in a utopian communications system. The evolution of the Eternal Network is revealed in the development of its publications. They are the raw materials from which ideas about societal transformation were exchanged between artists resisting the assimilating force of the official art world.

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"Your Letters Conquer Time and Space... They Bring the 'Far Away' as Close-by as the Nearest Mail Box! Image Bank Image Request List: "Image Is Virus" *File* Vol 3, No. 1, (Fall 1975), 12.

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Figure 1. Cover, *Georgia Straight*, vol. 1, no. 13, June 1969. Permission courtesy of the *Georgia Straight*.

GREEK & LATIN

LETTERS = SOUNDS

SOUNDS ARE SYLLABLES

SYLLABLE LENGTH IS TIME

TIME DIVIDED IS MUSIC

poetry is music

CONCRETE POETRY

IS FORM AS CONTENT

MEDIUM AS MESSAGE

POEM AS OBJECT

(Is this phase 1 of a pure visual language?)

CONCRETE POETRY IS IMMEDIATE

ALLATONCENESS

SELFREFERENTIAL

ALL REPRODUCTIONS RESPECT THE ORIGINAL

POETRY

written with new tools

LETRASET

CELLO-TAK

Figure 2. Edwin Varney, Concrete Poetry Essay/Poem. Illustration from *Concrete Poetry Exhibition in 4 Parts* (Vancouver: Fine Arts Gallery UBC, 1969), n.p. Permission courtesy of EdVarney.

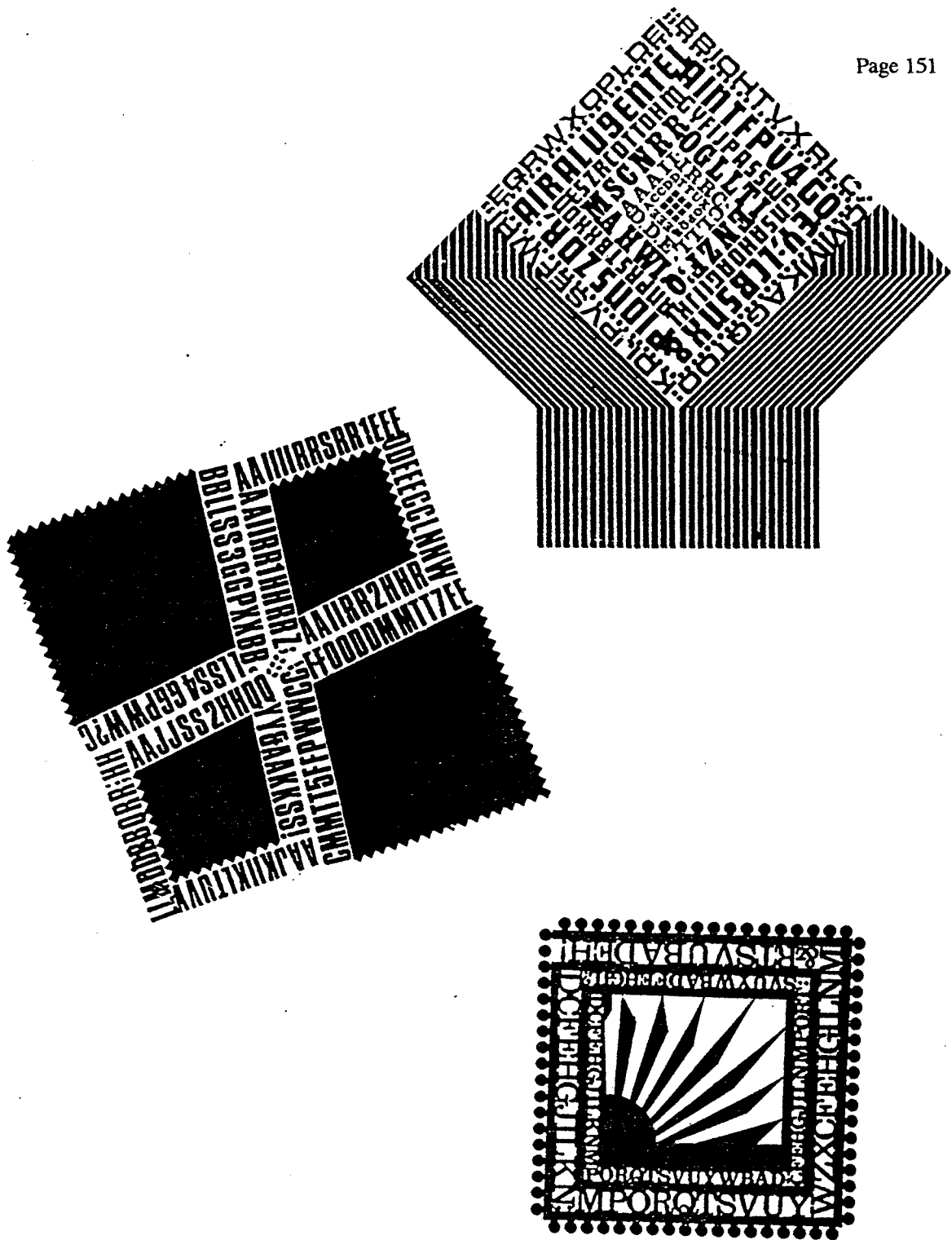


Figure 3. Michael Morris, *Letter Drawings*, 1969. Illustration from *Concrete Poetry Exhibition in 4 Parts* (Vancouver: Fine Arts Gallery UBC, 1969), n.p. Permission courtesy of Michael Morris.

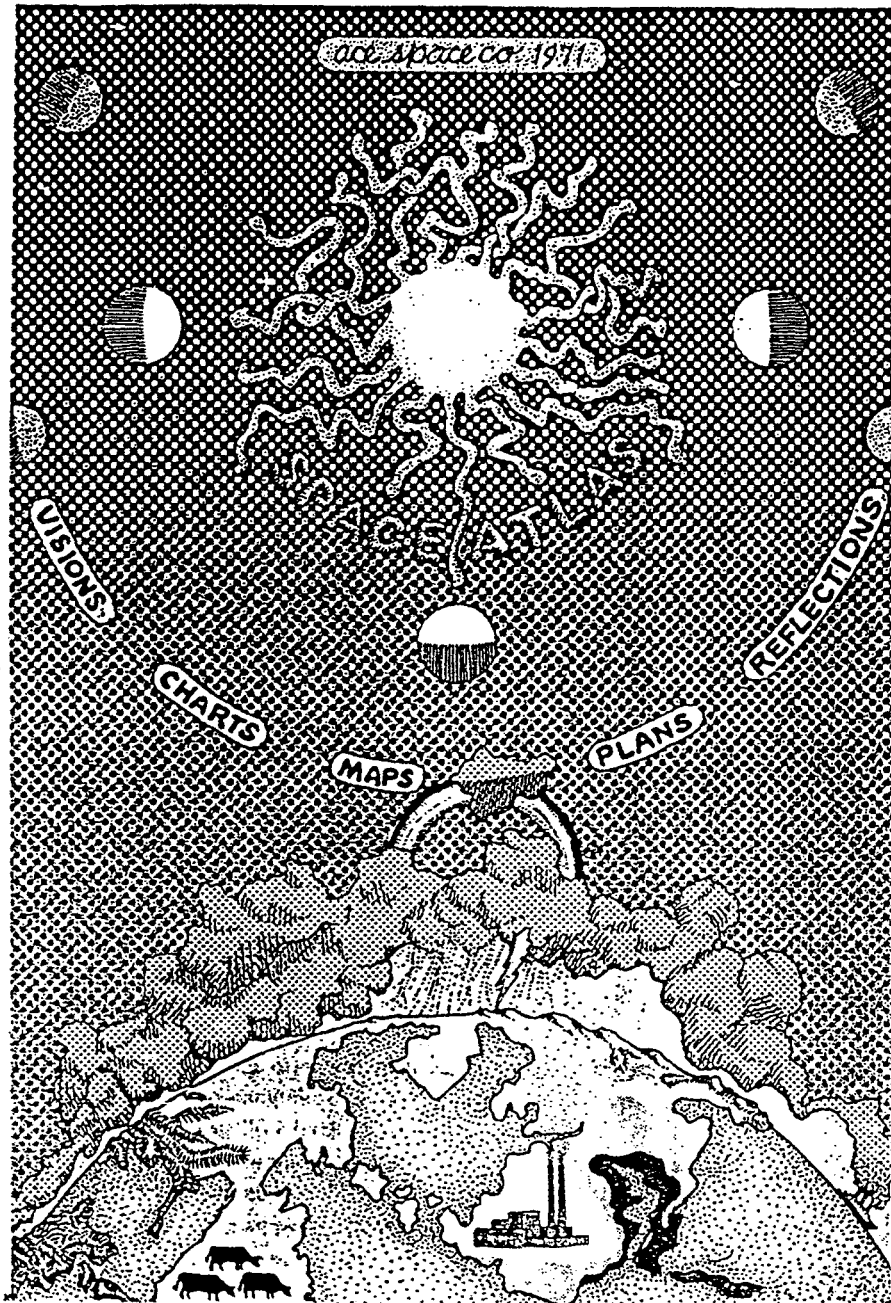


Figure 4. Dana Atchley, Cover, *Space Atlas*, 1970. Permission courtesy of the Estate of Dana Atchley.

RED
HERE
NOW

POEM TO BE VIEWED THROUGH RED SPECTACLES • ATCHLEY

Figure 5. Dana Atchley, page from *Word Pack*, 1971, n.p. Permission courtesy of the Estate of Dana Atchley.

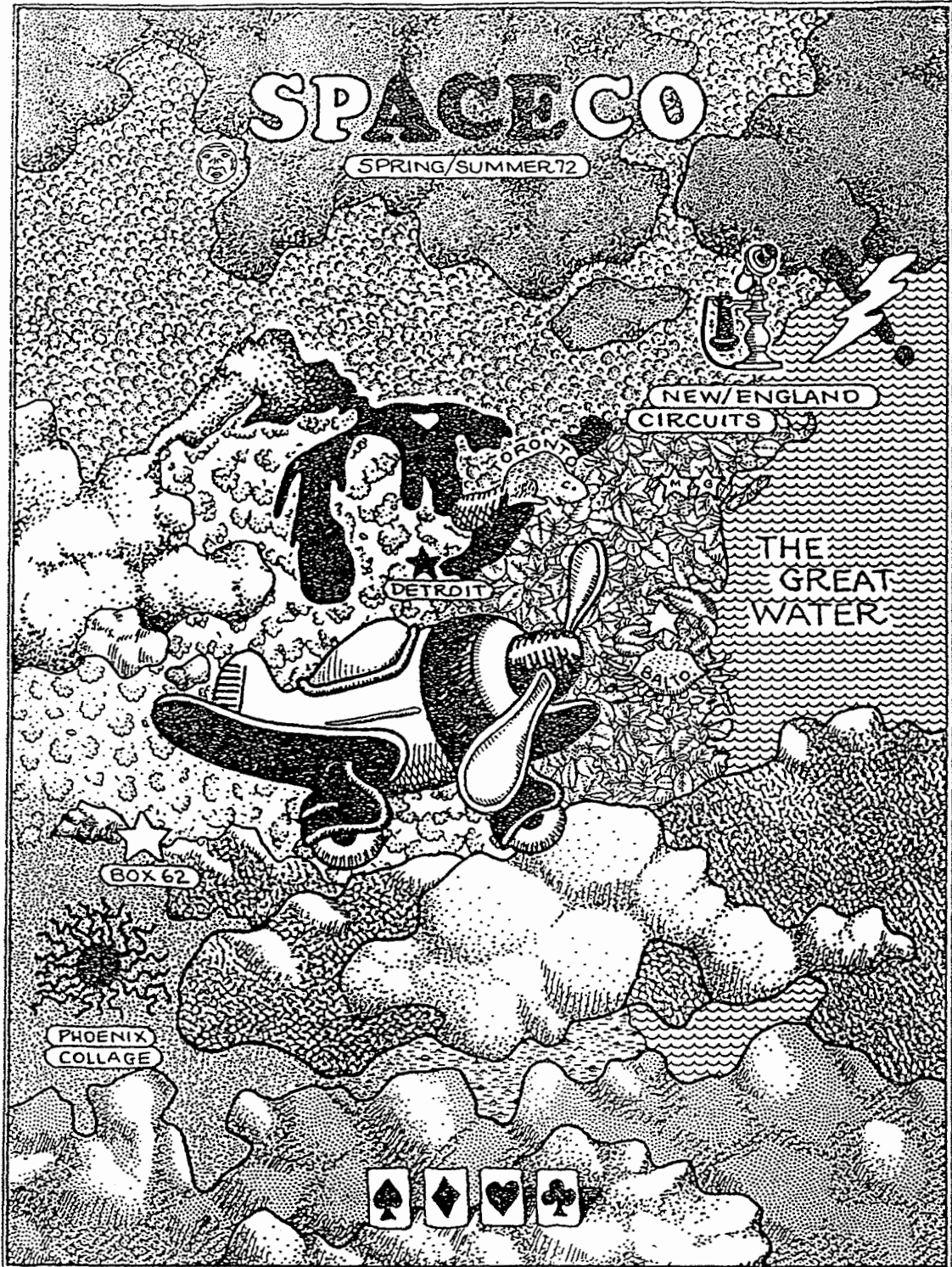


Figure 6. Dana Atchley, Cover, *SpaceCo* 1984: *Spacepack* 5, 1971-72. Permission courtesy of the Estate of Dana Atchley.

VORTEX
O
VORTEX
VORTEX

GAUDIER BRZESKA

The sphere is thrown through space, it is the soul and
object of the vortex—

The intensity of existence had revealed to man a
truth of form—his manhood was strained to the
highest potential—his energy brutal—

HIS OPULENT MATURITY WAS CONVEX

Religion pushed him to the use of the

VERTICAL which
inspires
awe.

His gods were self made, he built them in his image,
and RETAINED AS MUCH OF THE SPHERE AS
COULD ROUND THE SHARPNESS OF
THE PARALLELOGRAM.

Figure 7. Marshall McLuhan, page from *Verbi-Vocal-Visual Explorations* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967). Reprinted from *Explorations* 8. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1957, n.p. Permission courtesy of the Estate of Marshall McLuhan.

NOBODY yet knows the language inherent in the new technological culture; we are all deaf-blind mutes in terms of the new situation. Our most impressive words and thoughts betray us by referring to the previously existent, not to the present.

WE ARE BACK IN ACOUSTIC SPACE

We begin again to structure the primordial feelings and emotions from which 3000 years of literacy divorced us.

Counterblast, 1954

Figure 8. Marshall McLuhan, page from *Verbi-Vocal-Visual Explorations* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967). Reprinted from *Explorations 8* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1957), n.p. Permission courtesy of the Estate of Marshall McLuhan.

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Brad Wendkos
Vents Baumanis
Julie Cowan
Clifford Mandell
Wayne Nyberg
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Gregg Simpson
Jim Munro
Kathy Razutis
Dorio Lucich
Ken Hanson
Gerry King
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IMAGES FOR THE EVOLUTION OF MAN

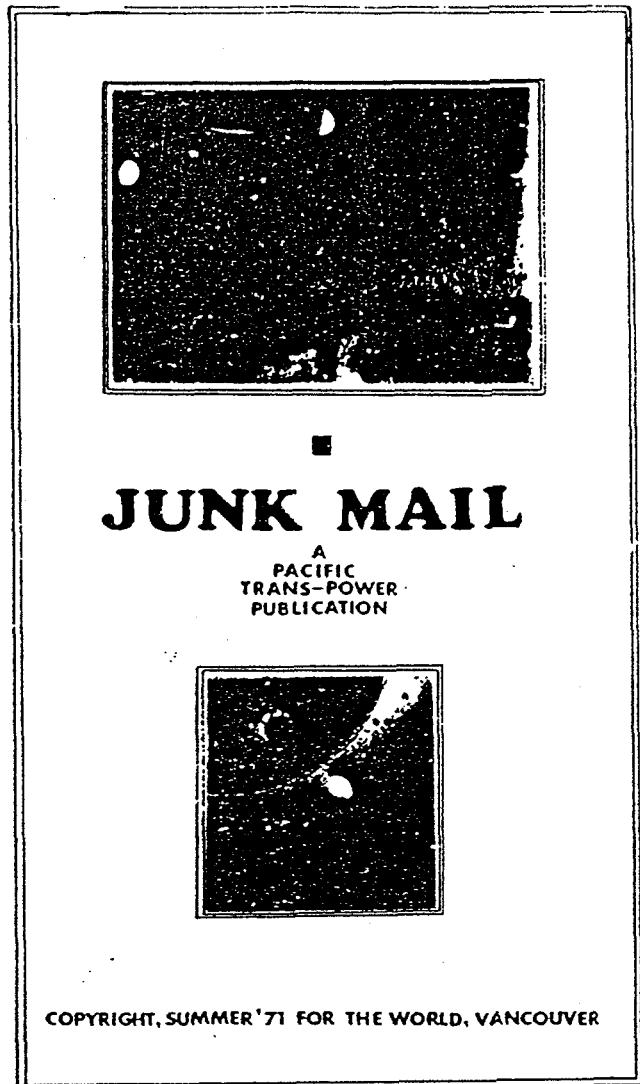
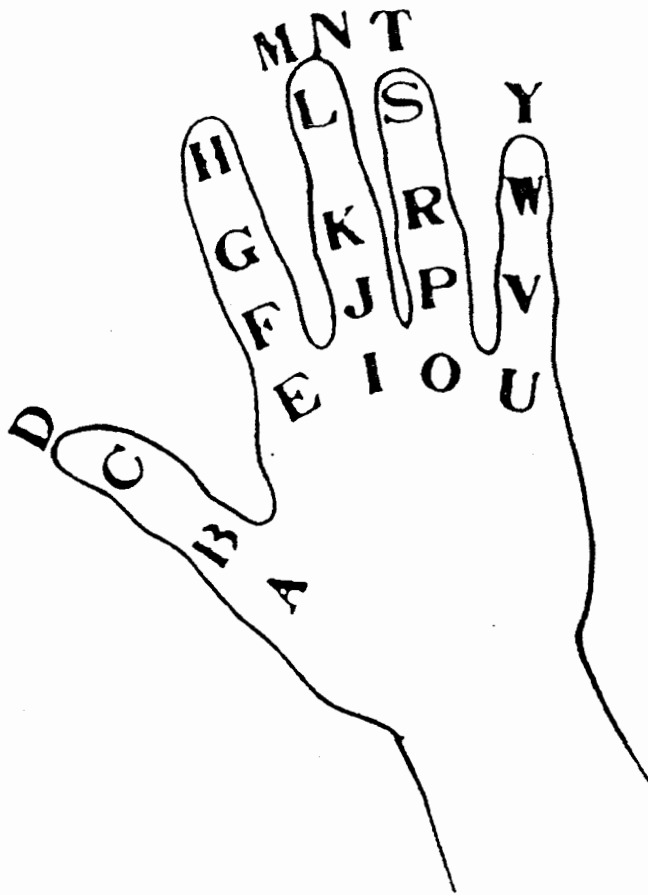


Figure 9. Cards 1 and 2 from *Junk Mail: A Pacific Trans-Power Publication* (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1971), n.p. Permission courtesy of EdVarney.



It is a sleep
from which I will
awaken.
It is a dream I will not
dream agAin.

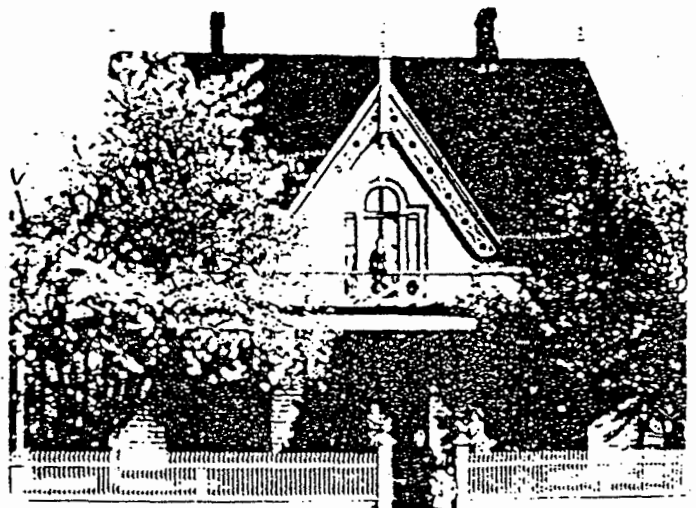


Figure 10. Cards from *Junk Mail: A Pacific Trans-Power Publication* (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1971), n.p. Permission courtesy of EdVarney.

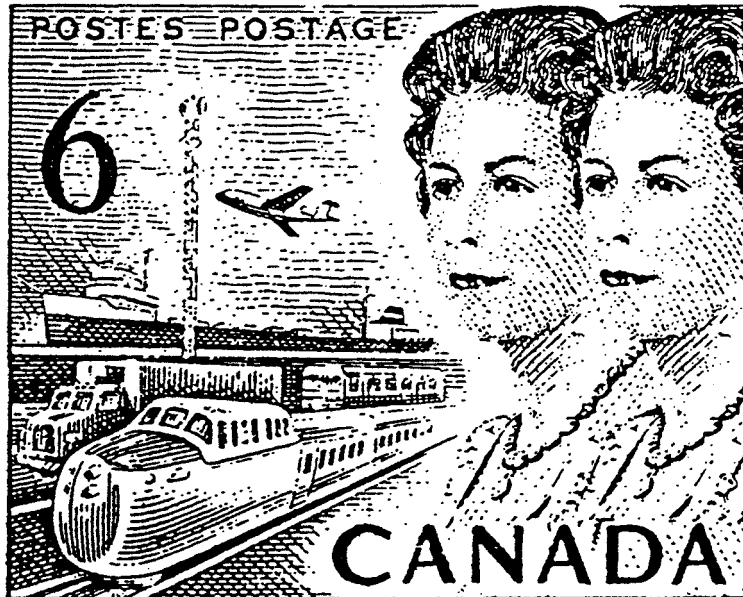


Figure 11. Cards from *Junk Mail: A Pacific Trans-Power Publication* (Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1971), n.p. Permission courtesy of EdVarney.

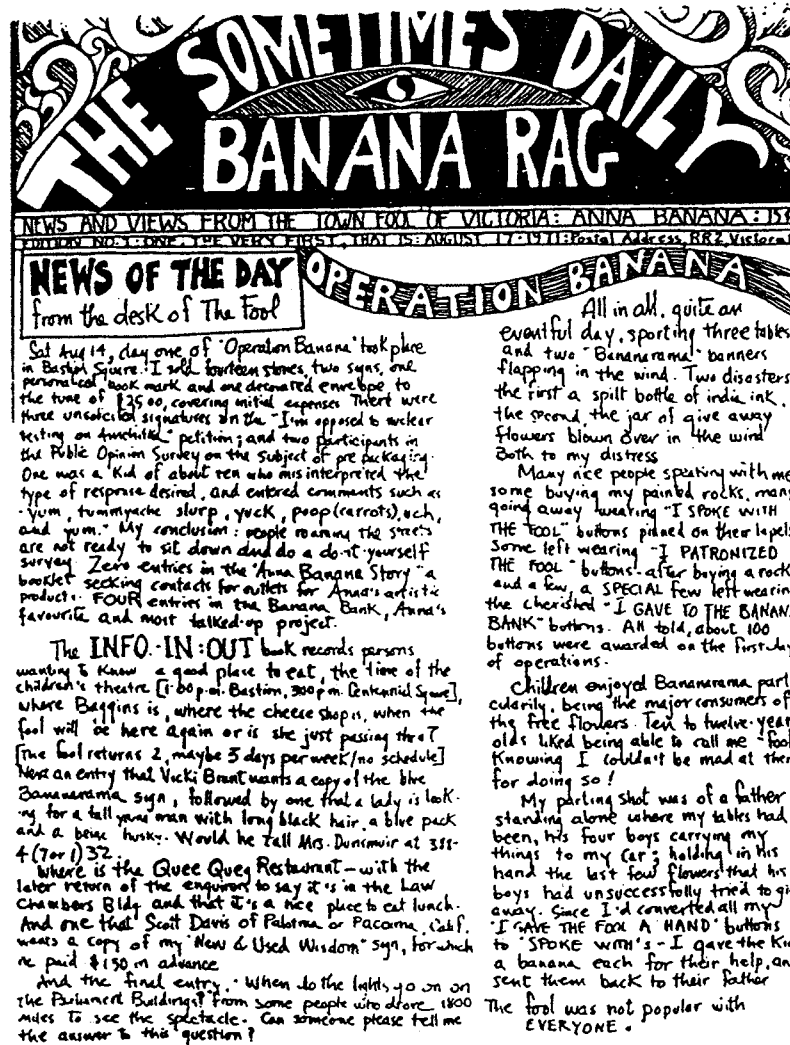


Figure 12. Anna Banana, *Banana Rag*, No. 1, Cover, 1971. Illustration from Michael Crane and Mary Stofflet eds. *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity* (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984), 137. Permission courtesy of Anna Banana.