



IAIN BAXTER&: The Artist as Drop-in

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Introduction

From now on, it is the businessman who becomes a model for the artist, as in a fair exchange of roles.

– Stéphane Sauzedde, “Questioning the Critical Potential of the Artistic Entrepreneur,” 2008¹

Information, an exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in 1970, is central to an emerging literature that situates Conceptual art as labour. Though not the first exhibition of Conceptualism in North America, *Information* has always been recognized as having had greater impact than contemporary shows, according to Ken Allan, due to its unprecedented international scope and geopolitical focus, its singular catalogue, and, above all, its innovative curatorial strategy.² As curator of *Information*, Kynaston McShine (1935–) adopted the strategy – unusual for a group show at MOMA – of soliciting proposals from artists for site-specific works. Challenging the connoisseurial convention of selection,³ several works by invited artists were accepted sight unseen (Hans Haacke’s notorious *MOMA Poll* being the most conspicuous example). Programming replaces selection under McShine’s leadership. The inclusion in published lists of exhibition participants of artists who, in the event, did not contribute to *Information* provides evidence of the disruptive effects authorized by McShine’s delegation of curatorial functions. This exercise in decentralization and outsourcing of museum operations redefined the functions of artist and curator alike in far-reaching ways that have only recently been understood as symptomatic of larger economic shifts. As McShine *dropped out* of the (traditionally centralist) curatorial role, Canadian artist IAIN BAXTER& (1936–)⁴ – acting in a pseudo-consultancy role as President of the legally-incorporated Vancouver-based conceptual enterprise N.E. Thing Co. (NETCO) – *dropped in* as a remote service provider.⁵ BAXTER&’s participation in *Information* would, at first level, appear to have been limited to that of content provider – of electronic communications and dematerialized (anti-)aesthetic judgements (i.e., NETCO’s well-known



1 | N.E. Thing Co.,
President Seated at Telex
Carrying Out 50,000-mile
Transmission, 1969, from
 Kynaston McShine (ed.),
Information (New York:
 Museum of Modern Art,
 1970), 91. (Courtesy: IAIN
 BAXTER&)

ACT and ART certificates). By cannibalizing and conflating commercial and documentary conventions, NETCO's judgements and Telecopier transmissions alike destabilized conventional boundaries between art object, commercial entertainment, corporate communications, and museum apparatus. Viewed within the promiscuous mosaic of *Information*, in which art and images reprinted and enlarged – frequently without labels – from contemporary news and entertainment sources were exhibited in tandem with a variety of “information” machines lent by corporate sponsors, the confusion generated by NETCO's approach would have been considerably intensified. Yet BAXTER&'s presidential identity implies the possibility of simultaneously interpreting “products” contributed by NETCO to *Information* as consultancy services. That is, the Telex and Telecopier works contributed by BAXTER& to *Information* and its catalogue, as well as his extended correspondence with McShine leading up to the exhibition, can be seen to have served as channels through which his Company's innovative, flexible business model, based on the distributist management writings of media theorist Marshall McLuhan (a perennial inspiration for BAXTER& from 1965),⁶ were able to infiltrate the MOMA (Fig. 1).

McShine's recasting of the curatorial role vis-à-vis his notorious claim in the *Information* catalogue that his “essay is really in the galleries and in the whole of this volume” (which has been variously interpreted as an arrogation

of the prerogatives of the artist or an experiment in a journalistic mode)⁷ can, in light of Mary Anne Staniszewski's analysis of the newly conspicuous regime of corporate sponsorship (whose visibility was defined by prominent signage, published acknowledgements, and spectacular technologies on loan from corporations displayed in tandem with diametrically dematerialized artworks), also be understood as enacting a competing executive claim on the exhibition and, indeed, the museum as a whole, as a platform for corporate operations research and visionary strategic planning activities.

Most reports on McShine's role in *Information* focus on the enlarged scope of the curator's function. "[T]he only outstanding figure," wrote artist Les Levine in response to the exhibition, "was the curator. The curator in this situation becomes the artist."⁸ Yet, Staniszewski insists that the works shown as part of *Information* "were not selected by a curator" at all.⁹ Rather, McShine's decision to outsource selection responsibilities by inviting proposals for site-specific works from participating artists ensured that "the curator's role [in *Information*] was minimal."¹⁰ In his relative non-participation, the figure of McShine sketched by Staniszewski can be seen as a counterpart of the executive "dropout" sketched by McLuhan and long-time collaborator Barrington Nevitt in *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (1972). In that work, McLuhan and Nevitt apply to the corporate setting McLuhan's insight that when pushed to the limit of their potential, media tend to reverse their effects: "As any executive climbs up the echelons of the organization chart, his involvement in the organization becomes less and less."¹¹ This McLuhanesque reading of McShine's role echoes Allan's interpretation of *Information* as coinciding with McLuhan's vision of a society paradoxically transformed by information technologies into a "workless' world."¹² As such, *Information* must be central to any study of the Conceptual artist as art worker.

Largely responsible for a recent shift in thinking about Conceptual art as labour is a 1990 essay by Benjamin Buchloh, in which he described the practice – made famous by Sol LeWitt – of hiring third parties to execute artworks, as an "aesthetic of administration."¹³ Buchloh likened the role of the Conceptual artist to that performed by the generic functionary of typical (i.e. bureaucratic) post-war American corporations. The extent to which this analogy has contributed to the current surge of interest in artists as service providers and cultural workers cannot be underestimated, and certainly Buchloh's bureaucratic paradigm is well-suited to the analysis of such administrative practices as those deployed within the context of New York dealer Seth Siegelaub's 1969 exhibition, *Office Work*.¹⁴ At the same time, however, it presents an inadequate account of the imaginary features of the managerial culture performed by *Information* participants McShine and IAIN

BAXTER&. These figures presented themselves neither as “art workers” nor “administrators” (in the Taylorist signification of these terms as articulated by Buchloh and others). Rather, they styled themselves in the mould of the New Age executives described pre-eminently by McLuhan in *Culture is Our Business* (1970) and elaborated by McLuhan and Nevitt in *Take Today*. Although these texts were published subsequent to *Information*, the distinct contours of McLuhan’s analysis of the decentralizing effects of electronic media for business and executive roles are recognizable in published texts from at least *The Mechanical Bride* (1951).¹⁵ *Take Today* serves as the principal reference for the present study because it constitutes a convenient and witty *summa* of McLuhanist management concepts that were “in the air” by 1970.

Buchloh’s analysis tacitly draws upon a discursive tradition in the social sciences that characterizes post-war America as an “Information Society.” Theorists of the Information Society posit that, in the 1950s and 60s, the United States and – to a lesser extent – other developed nations underwent an unprecedented expansion of the tertiary sector (consisting of service and technical/professional or “white collar” jobs). This growth in service- and knowledge-based employment during the 1950s and 60s is associated by Buchloh and his followers with the emergence in the late 1960s of ideational, non-object-based modes of art production, exhibition, and consumption that mimicked processes of “informatization,” modes that might be defined as the “de-realization” of labour and its products through digitalization.¹⁶

However, the techno-utopian speculations¹⁷ catalogued by McShine in his inclusive “recommended reading” section of the *Information* catalogue speak less to the anxieties of “information-subjects” diagnosed by Eve Meltzer in her Buchloh-inflected critique of the exhibition than to the “imagined fusions of leisure and labour” discussed by Chris Gilbert in his re-assessment of 1960s cultural practices.¹⁸ In “Herbie Goes Bananas,” Gilbert has examined the complex ways in which Conceptual art was informed by transformations in labour during the 1960s and 1970s. Herbert Marcuse’s theorization of unconstrained, liberated labour was particularly influential, according to Gilbert, in shaping artists’ visions of the emancipatory potential of emergent forms of cognitive labour. Gilbert’s analysis serves as a counterpoint to the overly literal interpretations put forward by Buchloh and his followers of Daniel Bell’s influential 1973 theorization of an emerging “service economy.”¹⁹ In particular, Gilbert’s paradigm provides a congenial framework for elucidating the phantasmatic economy of the executive roles performed by certain Conceptual artists, posited by cultural actors of the 1960s as being situated outside conventional bureaucratic contexts.

There is more at stake in such titular distinctions than competing claims to the corner office. Forecasting, imagineering, decision-making, and other executive services are equally characteristic of (and specific to) an economy defined by an unprecedented preponderance of dematerialized “games between people” as the subordinate, bureaucratic forms of service prioritized by Buchloh and his followers.²⁰ Whether or not the cognitive labour of Conceptualism can be accounted for today in strictly neo-Taylorist terms (and figurations of the Conceptual artist thereby restricted to the binary roles of rational administrator and bureaucratic service-provider, or functionary, which dominate current narratives) will have a direct bearing on how that labour is situated within broader histories of the emergence of an informational economy. Accommodating alternative²¹ economic and organizational²² models of the post-industrial condition will broaden the base of artistic projects which are admitted into, and prioritized within, those historical narratives.

In truth, where the Information Society resides in the executive fiction of BAXTER&, it does so not exclusively as a feature or symptom of a structure but also as a play of competing phantasmatic claims. Following Allan and Gilbert, this study stresses the aspirational dimensions of the organizational manoeuvres and rhetoric of actors implicated in the emergent cognitive or service economy of the 1960s. In keeping with the critical projects of Christopher May and Frank Webster,²³ I resist Bell’s characterization of the (very real) features of social and organizational change that characterized this period as evidence of a complete epistemic break. Through a careful reading of critical histories and theories of the Information Society, I shift the focus onto ad hoc executive roles generated by organizational transformations during the 1960s in an effort to add greater dynamism and nuance to the structuralist analyses of the conceptual and museological milieu of the later 1960s advanced by Buchloh and David Tomas.

It is not the intention of this paper to give an overview of the long and complex career of IAIN BAXTER&; excellent introductions to BAXTER& and the N.E. Thing Co. have been written by Marie Fleming, Nancy Shaw, and William Wood.²⁴ Yet, whereas these authors consistently cite the influence of the thought of Marshall McLuhan on the development of BAXTER&, I perform the first close reading of an aspect of his practice in tandem with an analysis of specific texts by McLuhan. Where N.E. Thing Co. has frequently been described as a conceptual *collaboration*, I pay close attention to the *organizational* dynamics of the Company and uncover the textual foundations of its corporate structure and roles in the managerial theories of McLuhan and contemporaries. Specifically, I situate the appearance of BAXTER& as a

supernumerary middle-manager or hybrid consultant at MOMA in the course of *Information* within broader processes of (and crises in) organizational decentralization described variously by Peter F. Drucker (1946), McLuhan and Nevitt (1972), and Reinhold Martin (2005).²⁵

Redundant Information

The speculative dimension of the executive conceptualisms showcased by *Information* is most evident in the contributions of artist IAIN BAXTER&, President of the conceptual enterprise N.E. Thing Co. It is significant that the Company, initially consisting exclusively of BAXTER&, only ever contained two members, both of them occupying “executive” positions. Yet, the complex ways in which these roles, as roles, were publicly negotiated by BAXTER& and his then wife, Ingrid Baxter – including the progressive promotions of the latter (culminating in her election to the position of Co-President in 1969) – remains an important area for investigation that has largely been overlooked.²⁶ Only A.A. Bronson and, subsequently, Derek Knight are attentive to the performative dimension of the roles enacted by Company personnel.²⁷

The operational significance of the fact that, at the time of its participation in *Information*, the Company was represented by only one “President” is thrown into relief through comparison with the organizational analyses of McLuhan: “Henry Ford, one of the most antiquated and tribalistic of all industrial managers, was ‘The President.’ There were no other members of the hierarchy. In dispensing with the conventional organizational hierarchy, Ford naturally resorted to the tribal form of government . . . He was ahead of his time.”²⁸

Somewhat counterintuitively, McLuhan and Nevitt suggest that the absolute centralism of Ford set in motion the emergence of the horizontal corporate structure: by collapsing the totality of organizational power into a single office, the organizational hierarchy was correspondingly flattened and functions dispersed (a phenomenon visible pre-eminently at General Motors). In McLuhan and Nevitt’s inspired reading of the horizontal corporation (as an effect of a new technological environment of service and information), organizational flattening appears in tandem with processes of radical decentralization: the consultant, or “drop-in,” replaces the “dropout” manager. Absolute centralism, the absolute concentration of power, appears as the figure of a decentralizing electronic environment (or ground). In their now famous formula, “In the world of electronic information, all centres of power become marginal.”²⁹ Yet these transformative effects of technological diffusion and decentralization should not be mistaken for a democratic

dispersal of power. As authority and responsibility are redistributed within the decentralized corporation (devolved to semi-autonomous “branch” managers or consultants), organizational power is not correspondingly delegated, according to McLuhan and Nevitt. Rather, it is marginalized: power is no longer at the centre of things. Power divests itself of some of its former (rational) authority (e.g., local decision-making), but monopolies of power persist, invisibly, in the margins.

In place of contemporary representations of the manager-cum-technocrat, McLuhan and Nevitt envisioned the administrator of the Electronic Age as a tribal leader: “The new expert, along with the old executive, has been swept away in a flood of comedies.”³⁰ The “stone-aged manager”³¹ forecast by McLuhan and Nevitt abandons specialization in favour of an intuitive, generalist approach. In McLuhan’s vision – as in the operations of NETCO – the functionary is replaced by the “many-sided man” or “artist.”³² This substitution sets the stage for the subsequent emergence of a new class of “culturally sophisticated management elites,” who, according to Mark Rectanus, “have attempted to re-establish the aura of the artist’s personality and artistic genius as a function of entrepreneurship.”³³ In “[l]ooking to the role rather than to the individual,”³⁴ closer analysis of IAIN BAXTER&’s performance of futurist tropes of dematerialized and decentralized executive labour – tropes derived from current studies of the changing status of management – reveals that his artistic persona was constructed as a function of entrepreneurship, thereby participating in the earliest phase of the rapprochement of culture and business submitted to theoretical remediation by McLuhan and Nevitt (and, subsequently, by Rectanus). In part, this conflation of managerial and creative functions registers the popular impact of McLuhan’s earlier (unsystematic) analyses of changing business models, cited above.

Accepting Allan’s reading of *Information* as a McLuhanesque carnival of fantasized role reversals, the question advanced by the exhibition may be seen to be coterminous with that posed by the new managerial science of decision analysis: “to play or not to play?”³⁵ An example of the (art) official communication sent by BAXTER& via Telecopier to MOMA during *Information* underlines this ludic dimension of NETCO’s practice. Parodizing the Company’s own Allan Fleming-design logo, BAXTER& solicited playful responses from MOMA visitors with these (absurdly) hand-written instructions:

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Yet the executive practices enacted by McShine and BAXTER& were not all fun and games. As the representative of an autonomous corporate entity (NETCO), BAXTER&'s presence in *Information* may have spelled the utopian possibilities for creative self-management identified by Allan, but it simultaneously implied a multiplication of corporate interests and functions within the museum context that Staniszewski, Bryan-Wilson, and Tomas rightly associate with an intensification of corporate domination. Staniszewski, in particular, stresses that new corporate pressures produced a range of disturbing effects, or, in the language of McLuhan and Nevitt, "disservices," within the museum environment that they served to redefine.³⁶ Staniszewski's critique suggests the possibility that the duplication of executive functions effected by BAXTER&, whose very participation necessitated the introduction of an independent executive office (i.e., "President") into the already overdetermined administrative structure of MOMA, defined the space of a "counterenvironment" that troubled the integrity of McShine's curatorial procedure by drawing attention to the essential services performed by Museum management and its corporate counterparts (which might normally have remained relatively inconspicuous or, at least, maintained a semblance of autonomy).³⁷ The possibility of a latent (or absentee) space for disservice is elaborated by McLuhan and Nevitt, figuring as an anti- or counter-environment: "An antienvironment reveals hidden environments. Disservices become manifest, not in themselves, but in relation to other services."³⁸ Although some contemporary reviewers of the exhibition – notably New York critic Gregory Battcock – expressed disappointment that *Information* did not include more overtly oppositional projects (notwithstanding Hans Haacke's controversial MOMA *Poll* and John Giorno's *Dial-a-Poem*),³⁹ I argue that BAXTER&'s duplication of executive functions associated with McShine's reconfigured curatorial role in fact produced significant disjunctive (though not directly antagonistic) effects that have largely been overlooked. Precisely because he *avoided* the overtly critical stance of an artist like Haacke, BAXTER& could communicate through the contagion of what Stephen Wright has labelled a "genuine corrosiveness in the real."⁴⁰

The disruptive logic of the non-oppositional, hidden environments engineered by BAXTER& is elucidated by Wright's recent, inspired reworking of a concept from information science: *redundancy*. "[T]he type of work I refer to as 'redundant,' states Wright in his study of present-day entrepreneurial conceptualisms, "inverses . . . primary-secondary logic . . . Art used to dream of becoming non art. Now it appears to have opted for a more caustic form of calculated redundancy."⁴¹ In Wright's formula, art no longer comments on or critiques institutions (as did Pop art and, subsequently, practices of

institutional critique). Rather, it intervenes within existing commercial structures immanently and without adopting an overtly oppositional stance. Ironically, it is this very lack of antagonism that permits artists who assume the redundant posture described by Wright to import an entropic multiplication of the real from the corporate into the cultural environment. Such disruptive, but non-critical, traces of disservice and redundant information are legible today in the correspondence between BAXTER& and McShine generated during preparations for *Information*. In the “N.E. Thing Co., Iain Baxter, Canada” file in the Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research fond at the Museum of Modern Art Archives, numerous NETCO artworks, though clearly designated by the creator as “art” through the use of the Company seal and other recognized labelling strategies (in the case of Company ACT and ART certificates,⁴² tautologically so), have been interfiled with Company correspondence and other records. The file contains, for instance, two ACT and ART certificates and numerous photographic works (some sent as samples leading up to the exhibition, others presumably exhibited), as well as the entirety of the Telex and Telecopier transmissions sent by BAXTER& during the course of *Information*. Within the sprawling, and otherwise meticulously classified, contents of the *Information* fond, here is an unmistakable case of art indexed as “documentation.” This concrete evidence of the confusion generated by N.E. Thing Co.’s hybrid functions (since art and documentation alike functioned in its practice as Company information that, in this instance, also duplicated some organizational functions of the Museum) recalls Douglas Crimp’s meditation in “The Museum’s Old, the Library’s New Subject,” on the disruptive capacity of Ed Ruscha’s book work, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963). Having encountered the text by chance while browsing the stacks of the New York Public Library in search of material for an industrial film on the history of transportation, and initially deciding that the book must have been misclassified (as a work on transportation), Crimp subsequently recognized that “the fact that there is nowhere for *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* within the present system of classification is an index of the book’s radicalism with respect to established modes of thought.”⁴³ Similarly, the NETCO artworks that have entered the fonds of the MoMA Archives are improperly understood as curious examples of misclassification; rather, they function positively, as evidence of the concrete effects generated by a hybrid practice through the abrasive interplay of conventionally discrete domains or environments, in the argot of McLuhan and Nevitt.

By tracing such evidence of disservice within *Information* to its origins in the management speculations of McLuhan, we may proffer preliminary answers to the provocative questions posed by Stéphane Sauzedde in his

critical study of contemporary entrepreneurial strategies in the visual arts. Sauzedde asks, “How does the artist mould this entrepreneurial model [to the prerogatives of contemporary art production and exhibition]?”⁴⁴ Treating McLuhan and Nevitt’s executive as the ideal type of the role performed by BAXTER& enriches our understanding of the material and phantasmatic features of the “role characteristics”⁴⁵ specific to the executive, already circulating in literature on business, as they were adapted by BAXTER& within the context of *Information* into the “manager as creative artist” (a trope subsequently recuperated by non-artists, as described by Mark Rectanus in *Culture Incorporated*).⁴⁶

In Julia Bryan-Wilson’s provocative chronicle of conceptual labour, the genesis of *Information* is traceable to the actions of artist Vassilakis Takis on 3 January 1969. Outraged that he had not been consulted by MOMA staff regarding the Museum’s decision to include his work *Tele-sculpture* (1960) in its 1968 exhibition *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, the artist – believing that the aforementioned piece was unrepresentative of his output as a whole – simply entered the Museum and repossessed his artwork (owned by MOMA).⁴⁷ A flyer subsequently distributed by the artist appealed for further action against museums. Significantly, Takis called for the transformation of museums into “information centres.”⁴⁸ Following subsequent protests of the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC) and a series of both open- and closed-door meetings between protestors and Museum administrators, in which AWC representatives successfully negotiated demands for institutional reform, MOMA approved plans to mount *Information* in late 1969. It is noteworthy that the exhibition was conceived as an international report on the very strategies (conceptual, linguistic, and performative) deployed by protestors to mount their critique of the institution. The choice of exhibition title also signalled an appropriation of the language of protest (Takis’s utopian formulation) to recuperate critical tactics as art. For some critics of the exhibition, *Information* was, from the outset, an exercise in Marcusean “repressive tolerance.”⁴⁹ (Fig. 2)

An alternative genealogy is suggested by the contents of the “N.E. Thing Co., Iain Baxter, Canada” file. A memo dated 15 January 1969 documents IAIN BAXTER&, then President of the N.E. Thing Co., in dialogue with McShine regarding NETCO’s participation in the travelling exhibition curated by McShine and mounted at MOMA concurrent with *Information* (i.e., 16 March 1969 – 16 August 1970): *New Media, New Methods*.⁵⁰ BAXTER&’s communiqué makes reference to Company “products” included in the display as well as other, unspecified items sent to McShine in response to an expression of interest from the latter: “much is in the mail to you,” writes BAXTER&.⁵¹ This exchange documents the process by which the contents of the “N.E.



2 | Installation view of the exhibition, *Information*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2 July – 20 September 1970. (Photo: Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art, Resource, NY, ART375312)



3 | N.E. Thing Co., views of *Environment* (National Gallery of Canada), 1969, black and white prints, reproduced in *N.E. Thing Co. Ltd., Vol. 1* (Vancouver: N.E. Thing Co., 1978), n.p. (Courtesy: IAIN BAXTER&)

Thing Co.” file – at 52 items – grew to be one of the largest in the Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research fond.⁵² Today, the heterogeneous contents of “N.E. Thing Co.” file – including both documents and artworks – serve as a material record of the generative, yet destabilizing, nature of this exchange.⁵³

Given the sustained interest implied by McShine’s protracted exchange of information with BAXTER&,⁵⁴ it is probable that NETCO’s seminal installation/performance piece *N.E. Thing Co. Environment* (National Gallery of Canada, 3 June – 6 July 1969) was not only known to McShine, but served as a “prototype”⁵⁵ for his own informational environment (Fig. 3). Under the aegis of then assistant curator of Canadian art Pierre Théberge (whose role in *Environment* Tomas likens to that of a “supply chain manager”),⁵⁶ but “spearheaded by [NETCO’s] president,”⁵⁷ the Vancouver Company’s installation transformed the ground floor of the Lorne Building – the converted office building⁵⁸ that then housed the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) – into a temporary trade pavilion.⁵⁹ Setting the stage for the subsequent curatorial role of McShine in *Information*, Théberge facilitated the “ambitions and requests of the artist,” having been initially “surprised by the Baxters’ proposal.”⁶⁰ The full complement of NETCO “Departments” took up residence at the NGC for the duration of the show. Secretaries – on loan from a federal department – processed the Company’s stock-in-trade, “Visual Sensitivity Information” (VSI), in makeshift offices against a “canned” audio backdrop of office work and industrial manufacture. The theatricality of the Company’s installation was underlined by the performances of its President and Vice-President. Members of the public were invited to explore the office of the former (who greeted visitors dressed in comically “retro” office attire), while Ingrid Baxter joined hired models in demonstrating Company “products,” including vinyl costumes.

Tomas rightly identifies *Environment* as “one of the first meta-artworks to exhibit the multiple contradictions that characterize the contemporary post-industrial artist’s practice.”⁶¹ However, he confines the scope of that practice to the parameters of institutional critique. Given Tomas’s resolutely analytical understanding of critical practice, it is unsurprising that he criticizes NETCO for its insufficiently antagonistic relationship to the museum and the economic sector, generally. Tomas’s text registers the advent of a post-industrial paradigm, but, following Helen Molesworth,⁶² its description of that shift is limited to a narrative of manual de-skilling in the wake of accelerated automation and a parallel process of cognitive re-skilling within the university.⁶³ While this account of the impact of new labour practices is expedient for elucidating the features of certain “post-studio” practices of institutional critique, as a description of a fantasized Information Society and

its contradictory effects, it is limited in several respects (despite the author's efforts to avoid a reductive reading).⁶⁴ Tomas's account of the coming of a post-industrial regime hinges on an anachronistic and static representation of the very "business model" on which the coherence of his historical narrative depends. The business model figures in Tomas's account as a pre-war static norm of "vertical" bureaucracy (with its hierarchies and functional division of labour) untouched by the very transformations (in the form of hybrid structures and partnerships) which, Tomas argues, were introduced into the cultural sphere through the NGC's adaptation of a commercial mandate to the cultural sector.⁶⁵ In effect, changes within the cultural sphere are posited by Tomas as effects of a cybernetic feedback loop generated by a business model that itself remains unchanged and unresponsive: a rational, vertical holdover from a previous era of functionaries and properly bureaucratic services. Thus, Tomas describes *Environment* as assuming "the material and symbolic trappings of a *traditional corporate environment*" (my emphasis).⁶⁶ Likewise, Vincent Bonin characterizes the installation as "[resembling the] administrative offices and showrooms of *an average-sized business*."⁶⁷

Whereas Tomas's institutional critique pivots on *Environment* as a unilateral *acculturation* (whereby the museum and the artist alike were acculturated to corporate techniques),⁶⁸ I propose that the "layers of interaction or performativity" generated by the NGC installation/ performance – likewise noted by Tomas – offer a more productive point of entry for situating *Environment* as a dynamic site within broader aspirations of social, cultural, and *organizational* transformation. My intention is not to refute but, rather, to amplify elements of Tomas's text in order to better understand BAXTER&'s subsequent participation in *Information* as a turning point in the emergent information economy of the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁶⁹ I argue that audience participation in the corporate theatre of *Environment* implied a two-way process, not restricted to acculturation (although this was certainly present), but also of organizational and performative transformation. As visitors were invited to participate in newly interactive environments, the museum (and by extension the corporation) itself became a site of crisis in the collective imaginary. As McLuhan and Nevitt were later to describe in *Take Today*, public participation in corporate operations was a source of considerable disturbance within organizations: "The old cast of 'diehards,' on the other hand, is holding a 'phony fort,' much as the administrative 'establishment' now finds itself in the role of 'office boy' and 'caretaker' of an abandoned operation."⁷⁰ Within this reconfigured organization, executive roles are radically redefined as responsibilities are delegated to a new breed of consumer/producers: "At the top [the executive] is like a dropout."⁷¹ Having effected a transfer of executive control to

participatory content providers (consumers) through the introduction of cool social media (e.g., television),⁷² a newly de-centred (but not powerless) management either ossifies into the reactive posture of the “diehard” or else “‘steps down’ when the action begins to ‘seize up’.”⁷³ The latter strategy is exemplified by the inclusive management style of BAXTER&, one which – as deployed in the context of *Environment* – threw open the (habitually shut) doors of conference room and executive office alike to the scrutiny and participation of the public and appropriated the functions of management *qua* spectacle (although, in the subsequent context of *Information*, BAXTER&’s role even more closely approximated that of another McLuhanesque type, as I will show below, that of the drop-in).

It is in this specific sense that *Environment* is accurately labelled a prototype for the hybrid service environments – the museum as “multiple-use cultural centre”⁷⁴ described by Rectanus – generated by the cultural sector in a post-industrial society: as management is transformed into an inclusive public service, the cultural consumer “steps up” to become the content of the reconfigured cultural media.⁷⁵ The “figure” of the speculative service environment staged by NETCO is thus not that of the secretary on loan from the government (as Buchloh, Bryan-Wilson, and Tomas would have it), but, rather, the consumer or user of the exhibition. In this formulation, the old functions of management, as “figure,” merge with the ground of the new electronic service environment. In turn, BAXTER&’s role as “Visual Informer” is not – as Tomas posits – that of a “watchful and discerning eye,”⁷⁶ but that of the “hunter and creator of new information and roles” later described by McLuhan and Nevitt, where the leading part created by the information manager is that of the user.⁷⁷ In thus bringing the consumer into representation as a cultural actor, the executive functions of the Company Presidency dissolve in an excess of participation.

If Haacke’s contribution to *Information*, *MOMA Poll*, signalled the possibility of critical participation within an institutional milieu, other gadgets showcased in the exhibition portended more sinister developments. Staniszewski identifies the monolithic “visual jukebox” or “information machine” lent by Italian manufacturer Olivetti and televisions funded by J.C. Penney Co. Inc. as symbols of the “highly visible corporate presence at *Information*.”⁷⁸ She further notes that the *Information* press release prominently acknowledged the support of ITT World Communications and Xerox for the Telex and telecopier machines lent to facilitate the transmissions of N.E. Thing Co. (itself a *bona fide* corporation in its own right) for the duration of the exhibition. For Staniszewski, the appearance at *Information* of the corporation as a *visible* exhibition sponsor (through the conspicuous display of corporate logos, affixed to such monolithic company products as

Olivetti's "information machine" – perhaps the pre-eminent instance of this novel exercise in "cross-promotion")⁷⁹ inaugurated a new "interrelatedness" of exhibition design and (sometimes competing) institutional and corporate agendas.⁸⁰ A close reading of IAIN BAXTER&'s role in *Information* suggests the possibility of third term between the intensification of corporate domination spelled by Staniszewski's reading, on one hand, and the critical possibilities permutations licensed by Haacke's institutional manoeuvres, on the other. BAXTER&'s practice charts a course of non-oppositional McLuhanesque interplay between corporate and museal environments.

IAIN BAXTER&: The Artist as "Drop-in"

RENT-AN-EXECUTIVE

– "Toronto ad" cited in McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 1972⁸¹

One man's dropout is another man's drop-in e.g., the consultant chooses his place of action.

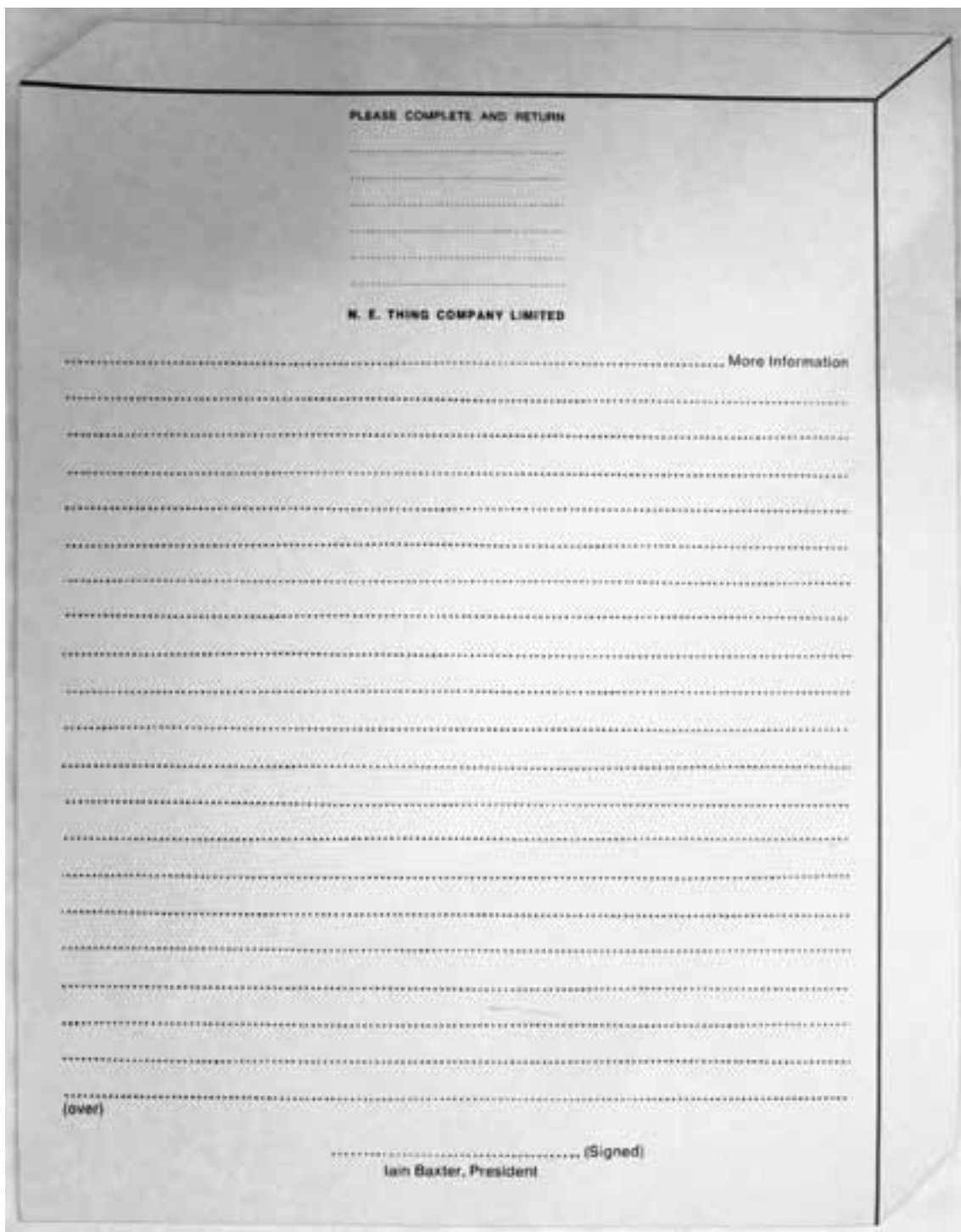
– McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 1972⁸²

The traditional executive functions vacated by the curator under the impact of new technologies, protest movements, and youth culture (as the savvy curator *drops out*) are re-occupied by a new breed of artist-executive. If McShine is exemplary of the curator who – matching McLuhan and Nevitt's theorization of the executive-as-dropout (and following the lead of the NGC's Pierre Théberge) – steps down to keep in touch, IAIN BAXTER& is representative of the artist-executive described by McLuhan and Nevitt who drops in to re-program the technological environment: "[T]he artist occupies the ivory tower in slow-changing society," they write; "[h]e moves to the control tower in a rapidly changing world. He alone can see the present clearly enough to navigate."⁸³ BAXTER&'s appropriation of the executive role must not be confused with a monopolization of power or the expression of centralizing ambitions. The "masquerade"⁸⁴ of authority performed by BAXTER& is profoundly decentralizing in its effect. As such, BAXTER& again coincides with McLuhan and Nevitt: "As all monopolies of knowledge break down in our world of information speed-up, the role of executive opens up to Everyman. There are managers galore in the global theatre."⁸⁵ William Wood has mapped the geographical dimensions of N.E. Thing Co.'s marginal practice vis-à-vis the Company's remote location in Vancouver (remote relative to the financial and symbolic "centre" of the art world, New York): "The periphery parodies the centre's claim of authority by ironically assuming that power for itself."⁸⁶ While Wood convincingly argues that peripheralism

operated within NETCO's networked practice to effect a "decentred concept of aesthetic geography,"⁸⁷ marginality also shaped the horizontal organization and operations of the Company, informing – in particular – the novel roles performed by its personnel. The horizontal structure of NETCO (the collapsing of the traditional organization tree, excluding all but executive positions) exemplified the decentralizing logic of the electric corporation analyzed by McLuhan and Nevitt. Just as McLuhan and Nevitt perceive Henry Ford's presidency, with executive inputs generating new and sometimes unexpected decentralizing outputs, so in BAXTER&'s performance of the McLuhanesque trope of Everyman-as-executive, traditionally centralist executive functions disperse into novel forms of executive labour in the (decentred) arena of consultation.

The flexibility and mobility of NETCO's corporate apparatus is consistent with the new class of executive consultants dubbed 'drop-ins' by McLuhan and Nevitt: "The 'mobile executive' is rapidly coming to the position where he [sic] can choose his place of work."⁸⁸ If, in the context of *Information*, McShine's function as dropout was to "reveal the new hidden ground" of electronic environments and youth culture, BAXTER&'s mandate (but not effect) as drop-in – the new *figure* in this organizational tableau – was "to prop up the collapsing foundations" of the institution under the impact of the coeval protests admirably documented by Bryan-Wilson.⁸⁹ The ludic bravado of BAXTER&'s initial communications with the curator in the months leading up to *Information* – for instance, a neon, photo-silkscreened communiqué to McShine⁹⁰ in May 1970 – announces an executive identity consistent with the role of avant-garde consultant described by McLuhan and Nevitt. Alternately visionary and self-deprecating, BAXTER&'s executive identity, as constructed in this document, coincides with the cool, non-specialist "star" of the new knowledge industries described in *Take Today* (Fig. 4).⁹¹

As early as *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* (1967), McLuhan identified the artist as the prototype for new executive roles which, he predicted, would replace bureaucratic models under the impact of an electronic environment.⁹² In the later 1960s, BAXTER& drew freely from McLuhan's management speculations in tandem with a broad selection of popular and specialist management literature to develop his role as Company President.⁹³ The same sources also informed the consultancy functions and roles which BAXTER& and Ingrid Baxter developed in parallel with their (internal) executive duties beginning in 1970. Following the wholesale transfer of Company operations to the National Gallery of Canada in 1969, BAXTER& experimented with an analogous (but dematerialized) logic of displacement through tactics that transformed the Company President into a "stay at home commuter" and "non-organizational man."⁹⁴ The consultancy services offered by



4 | N.E. Thing Co., *N.E. Thing Co. Letterhead*, c. 1969, Day-Glo green letterhead.
(Photo: author)

NETCO personnel at the Data Processing Management Association (DPMA) conferences held in Vancouver and Seattle in the spring of 1970 (immediately prior to *Information*) turned previous Company functions inside-out.⁹⁵ “N.E. Thing Consults with 1% of You” declared Company literature distributed by hired models at the conference and business exposition.⁹⁶ Inserting itself at the conferences amidst such computing conglomerates as IBM and Xerox, NETCO exploited the DPMA as a platform for developing new consultancy operations, or “diagnostic service checks” to promote “Gross National Good” or GNG.⁹⁷ A last-minute invitation to participate in a panel entitled “The Human Element in the Information Processing Community” earned BAXTER& the highest audience evaluation of any participant,⁹⁸ and, following the success of its DPMA intervention, NETCO was hired as a consultant by a private company located in Renton, Washington (on the outskirts of Seattle). It is possible to reconstruct the tone, if not the unscripted content, of N.E. Thing Co.’s motivational talk – *Your Employee and Motivation* – from such surviving NETCO pronouncements as “We up your aesthetic quality of life, we up your creativity.”⁹⁹ A subsequent contract in Ottawa underscores the McLuhanesque orientation of these consultancy services. According to Ann Rosenberg, NETCO’s Ottawa intervention, *Consultant re Viewer Participation* (1970), involved discussions regarding “a special TV show using television for direct viewer participation.”¹⁰⁰ Such real-world consultancy activities, with their consistent emphasis on enhancing employee/viewer involvement, encourage the possibility of mapping BAXTER&’s coeval role in *Information* onto the participatory coordinates of McLuhan and Nevitt’s drop-in. As drop-in, BAXTER& served as an “instant catalyst” for the responsive social environment “imagined” by McShine.¹⁰¹

As Tomas rightly argues, NETCO’s actions should not be mistaken for (or dismissed as) mere spoof. The playful tenor of BAXTER&’s consultancy rhetoric should not obscure the serious element of play at work in his practice, nor indeed, in the horizontal corporation, or “ad-hocracy,”¹⁰² of the information age theorized by McLuhan and Nevitt, as well as futurologist Alvin Toffler, in which NETCO – and BAXTER&’s Presidential role – are rightly situated. Indeed, play emerges as the defining characteristic of work in the electronic corporation described by McLuhan: “[r]ole-playing supplants job-holding just as knowledge supplants experience” (my emphasis).¹⁰³ McLuhan and Nevitt associate this emphasis on play within the post-industrial organization with the incorporation of Operations Research into management functions at all levels of the corporate hierarchy.¹⁰⁴ “[O]peration research forced creativity upon the entire business world because of the need to anticipate problems with solutions.”¹⁰⁵ The speculative management theorists trace the emergence of this phenomenon to the routinization of

Operations Research during World War II and identify the subsequent decline in efficacy of executive research activity with the assimilation of open-ended inquiry and discussion into obsolete business models (thereby turning playful bull sessions into administrative disservice).¹⁰⁶ To alleviate the tensions between innovation and tradition inherent in institutionalized forms of non-directed and collaborative investigation, the remedy prescribed by McLuhan and Nevitt was to welcome the socially- and technically-conscious figure of the drop-in into the inner sanctum of the boardroom: “Gradually the uptight managers of the most responsible business operations conceded the necessity of sinking into the most undignified forms of mental horseplay in order to cope with their need for information.”¹⁰⁷

Through the stimulating presence of the non-specialist drop-in, the research activities enacted by boardroom personnel abandoned the humdrum character of the strategic exercises developed by such military-industrial think tanks as RAND in response to the agonistic logic of Cold War politics. Whereas “[t]he drab fact about ‘think tanks’ is that they are contrived for the mass production and packaging of scenarios and programs for the harassed Establishment,”¹⁰⁸ under the influence of the drop-in, the corporation is transformed into a “funhouse.”¹⁰⁹ Although the latter concept accrues a derogatory resonance in Tomas’s deployment (in relation to NETCO’s *NGC Environment*), the futurological writings of McLuhan and Toffler alike elevate play environments to utopian symbols of the electronic society.

The playful environment of Expo 67, the world fair held at Montreal, was paradigmatic for McLuhan (as evinced by the media theorist’s comments at a 1967 seminar organized by the Museum of the City of New York, *Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values of Museum Communication with the Viewing Public*) of the potential for electronic media to generate a responsive “world of process.”¹¹⁰ In *Future Shock*, Toffler similarly chose a playful architectural environment – the flexible and versatile “Fun Palace” (1961–64, unrealized) – designed by British architect Cedric Price (1934–2003) – to exemplify the playful attitudes and behaviours of the “modular” society which he foretold.¹¹¹ If McLuhan and his associate Harley Parker (1915–1992) – an artist and scholar who served as Head of Design and Installations at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto from 1957 to 1967 and was affiliated with McLuhan’s Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto (1967–1975) as a Research Associate – predicted that the synaesthetic environments of the museum were to be key sites of subject formation in the coming information society,¹¹² Toffler viewed such fun palaces as nodal points in an emergent cultural system which he labelled the “experience industries.”¹¹³ In Toffler’s forecast, these experiential industries would provide essential services to consumers in the dematerialized “psycho-economy” of the near

future: ephemeral services for brain workers seeking “sexoticism” and other intangible novelties.¹¹⁴

The play tactics of the executive drop-in theorized by McLuhan and Nevitt evince a correspondence with the Marxian futurology of Herbert Marcuse. Although there is no evidence of a direct influence on the work of BAXTER&, Chris Gilbert convincingly argues that Marcuse’s exploration of the liberationist possibilities of play set the backdrop for a fantasized synthesis of leisure and labour in the 1960s generally. In any event, Marcuse’s influential discussion of the “play impulse”¹¹⁵ in *Eros and Civilization* (1955) provides a congenial framework for conceptualizing the play element at work in the executive fiction of BAXTER&. Marcuse identifies play as the mediating term between the sensuous and cognitive registers of human experience.¹¹⁶ (Compare this formulation with McLuhan and Nevitt, who write that, “[e]xperience is play, and meaning is replay and recognition”).¹¹⁷ Marcuse further opposes the “aesthetic dimension,” proper to the exercise of play, to the reality principle, which supports the prevailing regime of “repressive productivity.”¹¹⁸ In contrast to the disapproving light cast on play by such critics of the ludic aspects of *Information* and NETCO as Tomas or Battcock (who condemns this playful element for being insufficiently “negative” in its interface with the museological apparatus),¹¹⁹ Marcuse upholds play for its capacity to “literally transform reality.”¹²⁰ The compatibility of Marcuse’s resolutely Marxist theory of play with certain aspects of the ludic corporate operations of BAXTER& and McShine underlines that the visions of liberated labour analyzed by Gilbert were informed by a *selective* reading of utopian literature. While not implying a critique of power structures, the play element in the executive practice of BAXTER& is improperly conceived as a collusion with the productive forces of domination. Play operates, rather, as – in the argot of McLuhanism – *interplay*, that is, the abrasive interface between social and economic strata that enacts a rhetorical transformation of work into play.¹²¹

Interplay is the transformative ungrounding of authority (not to be confused with power) engendered by ludic transactions that effect an open-ended interpenetration of conventionally discrete (economic, ideational, institutional, etc.) domains. “[W]e live in worlds that burrow on each other,” wrote McLuhan and Nevitt.¹²² It is as a form of painstaking burrowing or interplay that BAXTER&’s resonant consultative practice should be situated. In line with the anarcho-modernist institutional burrowing practiced by his former colleague at Simon Fraser University, Jerry Zaslove, BAXTER&’s dropping in can be interpreted as an exercise in “anarcho-aestheticism.”¹²³ The ultimate burrower, the anarcho-aesthetic person is, according to Zaslove, “a drop-out person who realizes that by being formed in the image of the

group, entry into the phantasmagorical world of modernity is assured.”¹²⁴ The solution is to dig deeper *in*.¹²⁵ In keeping with this Kafkaesque logic, BAXTER& has consistently employed the language of burrowing as abrasive (but non-antagonistic) interplay in his published writings and interviews. Consultation as infiltration is the thrust of BAXTER&’s commentary on NETCO in a 1974 seminar published by the Owens Art Gallery: “The N.E. Thing Company wants mainly to poke into business as the major big power base in the capitalistic structure.”¹²⁶ This strategy recalls that of the consultant discussed by McLuhan: “Peter Drucker, the management consultant, has spent his whole life invading other people’s business to reveal to them how little they know about it. They pay him very fancy prices for that.”¹²⁷ (It is not a little ironic that McLuhan also acted as a corporate consultant – working in association with IBM at the time of the above-mentioned 1967 seminar organized by the Museum of the City of New York).¹²⁸

A primary tool employed by BAXTER& and NETCO to engage in the “probing” activity of interplay was the electronic communications media. “You can penetrate structures using communications,” stated BAXTER& in a 1979 interview with Robin White.¹²⁹ It was by employing the emergent telecommunications media of Telex and telecopier that NETCO, represented by BAXTER&, infiltrated MOMA during *Information*, thereby engaging in an unlikely but prescient form of “long distance” burrowing.¹³⁰ In addition to 24 ACT and ART certificates, N.E. Thing Co. was represented at *Information* by a series of live transmissions that permitted BAXTER& to effect an interplay of remote environments and penetrate the museum space from the Company’s North Vancouver headquarters using equipment on loan from major American telecommunications companies. The *Information* catalogue reproduces a small selection of the textual and graphic communiqués transmitted by the Company President during the show. Like the telecopied works transmitted as part of the earlier project, *Trans-VSI Connection NSCAD-NETCO* (1969), BAXTER&’s *Information* transmissions reveal a playful preoccupation with themes of reproduction and multiplication. For instance, a telecopied drawing of a single large dot is labelled “TWO DOTS,” an allusion to the process of optical duplication which occurs when the transmitted information is reconstituted by the receiver. Once received, the electronic message will effectively contain two dots (where formerly there was only one): one will be in the hands of the sender, the other in those of the recipient.

This technique of museological burrowing or dropping-in through fax recalls Harley Parker’s proposal, at the above-mentioned 1967 seminar organized by the Museum of the City of New York, for a museum consisting entirely of sensuous facsimiles. Building on artist-futurologist John McHale’s

recognition in a 1966 article in the journal *Macatre*, “The Plastic Parthenon,” that reproductions of artefacts imply – in Parker’s words – the “possibility of touch [that] can be a very salient factor in terms of involvement,”¹³¹ Parker seized upon the haptic potential of the facsimile as a possible support for the synaesthetic “newseum” environment which he envisioned.¹³²

The phantasmatic features of Parker’s newseum recall Johan Huizinga’s influential conceptualization of the “playground” as a symbolic space for the “temporary abolition of the ordinary world,”¹³³ a notion subsequently rehabilitated by the Situationists. Libero Andreotti identifies Huizinga’s playground and Cedric Price’s “Fun Palace” as models for Pinot Gallizio’s *Cavern of Anti-Matter*, which transformed the museum space of the Stedelijk into a monumental *derive* qua playground.¹³⁴ The contents of the *Information* catalogue’s “recommended reading” confirm that Huizinga’s playground was also resonant for McShine.

In BAXTER&’s *Information* transmissions the contents of Parker’s facsimile newseum return as playful *artifax*.¹³⁵ In “Telexed Self-Portrait from Memory,” the artist himself appeared as facsimile:

IAIN BAXTER, PRESIDENT, N.E. THING CO. LTD.
TELEXED SELF PORTRAIT FROM MEMORY – 1969
FRONT SIDE: COURSE BROWN HAIR SLIGHTLY BALDING AT
TEMPLES AND SLIGHTLY OVER EARS WIDTH OR NOSE
NORMAL AVERAGE LIPS SIDE BURNS TO BOTTOM OF EARS.¹³⁶

This gesture of self-copying (or cloning), which anticipated NETCO’s subsequent inclusion of dummies representing the Company’s Co-Presidents in their 1971 exhibition at the Sonnabend Gallery,¹³⁷ facilitated the long-distance participation of the “art-official” consultant (Fig. 5). In the paradoxical role of stay-at-home-commuter, the artist fits Toffler’s description: “‘outsider’ working within the system . . . Thus we find the emergence of a new kind of organization man – a man who, despite his many affiliations, remains basically uncommitted to any organization. He is willing to employ his skills and creative energies to solve problems with equipment provided by the organization, and within temporary groups established by it.”¹³⁸

BAXTER&’s work as drop-in at *Information* establishes his executive fiction as a paradigm for the tactics of a subsequent generation of artistic entrepreneurs who, according to Stéphane Sauzedde, “know how to address the business world, to penetrate it, to work inside it, and possibly to carry out a subversive activity within its sphere.”¹³⁹ Without engaging in the oppositional tactics of *critique* deployed by Hans Haacke, BAXTER&’s contributions to *Information* set a powerful precedent for contemporary



5 | N.E. Thing Co., Co-Presidents of N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. Attending Exhibition of Company Products at Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1971 (right) with Self-Portrait Project Using Dummies (left), both images from 1971. Documentation reproduced in *Celebration of the Body* (Vancouver: N.E. Thing Co., 1976), n.p. (Courtesy: IAIN BAXTER&)

artists in terms of generating abrasive forms of redundant information¹⁴⁰ as well as new (long-distance) spaces of inter/play. By drawing attention to, and duplicating, the functions of the (dropout) manager, the drop-in generates redundant organizational information in the gaps of institutional power.

Conclusion: The ‘Modular’ Museum as Muse

Contrary to the administrative readings of conceptual practice proposed by Buchloh, Tomas, and others, stalled as they invariably are in anachronistic and static business models and resolutely subaltern characterizations of service sector labour, my investigation of the ideal type of McLuhan’s executive-as-artist has been modelled on Chris Gilbert’s examination of the dialogic influence of utopian literature on the art of the 1960s in tandem with Drucker and Martin’s studies of the decentralization of corporations.

In contrast to recent criticisms of the “artistic entrepreneur” mounted by, for instance, Stéphane Sauzedde, which censure the non-oppositional valence of corporate practice, I have followed Stephen Wright in choosing to explore the abrasive effects of redundant information generated by the duplication of corporate functions and roles. The non-oppositional dropping-in enacted by BAXTER& significantly troubled the coherence of the exhibition by calling attention to and doubling its corporate frame. In this precise sense, the executive manoeuvres of BAXTER& should be recognized as operating in parallel (or perhaps at tangents) to the better-known tactic of institutional critique proposed by Haacke in the context of the same show.

The executive role inhabited by BAXTER& and the institutional critique of Haacke alike are symptoms of a fantasized “managerial revolution”¹⁴¹ chronicled by a diversity of speculative historians including, respectively, C. Wright Mills, McLuhan, and Toffler: “The old entrepreneur succeeded by founding a new concern and expanding it. The bureaucrat gets a forward-looking job and climbs the ladder within a pre-arranged hierarchy. The new entrepreneur makes a zig-zag pattern upward within and between established bureaucracies.”¹⁴²

The newly mobile executive who figures in the passage above by Wright Mills appears in a range of 1950s and 60s texts touting the emergence of a flexible labour market and what Toffler would later term the “throw-away” (experiential) economy.¹⁴³ As impermanence and turnover are routinized and more and more executive functions are off-loaded onto drop-ins, the abrasive effects of decentralization are imprinted onto the psychic economy of new executive roles: “It is a joke among executives of the International Business Corporation that IBM stands for ‘I’ve Been Moved.’”¹⁴⁴ The drop-in practice of IAIN BAXTER& capitalizes on the abrasive potential of the comedy occasioned by the emergence of a dematerialized economy and its decentralized organizations, transforming flexible white-collar labour into a playful but nonetheless corrosive exercise in redundant authority.

Toffler’s futurological theorization of a “resurgence of entrepreneurialism within the heart of large organizations”¹⁴⁵ echoes McLuhan and Nevitt’s reflections on the tensions generated within large organizations between centralist insiders and decentralist drop-ins or vanguard cliques:

[T]he pattern of social organization and management swings violently from stress on the entrepreneur and the virtues of the lonely individual to the close-knit and emotionally-involved group. In the diversified scope of the modern business structures, these extremes can express themselves at different levels of the same organization. Tribal cliques can grow in the shade of the old organization tree.¹⁴⁶

McLuhan and Nevitt's analysis drew upon the findings of management consultant Peter F. Drucker's influential case study of General Motors – the first corporation to adopt decentralization as a strategy for “manag[ing] diversity and complexity” – in *Concept of Corporation* (1946).¹⁴⁷ Succeeding the “old [modernist, centralist] organization pattern”¹⁴⁸ exemplified by Ford, GM president Alfred P. Sloan “developed the concept of decentralization into a philosophy of industrial management and into a system of local self-government.”¹⁴⁹ Under this system, 95% of administrative decisions are made by divisional managers;¹⁵⁰ central management “thinks ahead.”¹⁵¹ In the work of McLuhan and Nevitt, this system figures a “Court of King Arthur”-inspired “dream of decentralization.”¹⁵² Similar symptoms of a “baronial pattern of managerial bosses and autonomous groupings”¹⁵³ made their first appearances in the museum world with the decentralist approaches of BAXTER& and McShine to, respectively, *Environment* and *Information*; it is in that system that the flexible, consultative executive interventions of BAXTER& are properly located. As such, the redundant information generated by his practice may be legitimately likened to the entropic effects produced by “destabilizing manoeuvres” within the decentralized organizational complex of the 1970s described by Reinhold Martin.¹⁵⁴ Martin's discussion of corporate entropy lends a specifically organizational resonance to Stephen Wright's notion of redundancy: multiplication of organizational functions effected through decentralization (as distinguished from both strategies of institutional critique and the parodic performance of hierarchical techniques of administration) unleashes a corrosive oversaturation of information flows within the corporation.

Significantly, the redundant executive information to which I have drawn attention was excluded from McShine's museological retrospective, *The Museum as Muse* (1999), in which *Information* was situated by the curator as a pivot in the development of the contemporary museum. Though he is conspicuously absent from *The Museum as Muse*, there is compelling evidence that the abrasive administrative work of BAXTER& left other traces on MoMA's institutional frame. Vestiges of the Canadian artist's disservice survive today in MoMA's ongoing *Projects* series of invited installations by contemporary artists, for which, Staniszewski suggests, the site-specific installations of *Information* served as a model. There is a strong organizational correspondence between the consultative function of dropping-in instigated by BAXTER&, also at *Information* (and at the DPMA and National Gallery of Canada before that), and the invitational basis of participation in the subsequent *Projects* series: “In keeping with the new institutional practices that were introduced with the *Information* show,

for each *Projects* exhibition the Museum invited a single artist to install a piece or an exhibition in a gallery.”¹⁵⁵ The policy of containment instituted in the fall-out of McShine’s delegation of selection responsibilities to the artists of *Information* (“the first and last conceptual group show at MoMA in the 1970s”),¹⁵⁶ may be interpreted as, simultaneously, a manoeuvre to shield the Museum from the slings and arrows of institutional critique and a check against the abrasion generated by non-oppositional drop-ins, even as the latter’s consultative labour – first realized at MoMA by BAXTER& – was responsible for carving out the entropic space for experimentation and (to a lesser degree) protest within the neutralized and politically-disengaged information flows of MoMA’s apparatus in which the *Projects* later unfolded.¹⁵⁷ However minor the impact of subsequent interventions upon the corporatized power structure of MoMA (where power – never directly engaged in the responsibilities of production – nonetheless remains active “underground”),¹⁵⁸ it is significant that Staniszewski credits all challenges to MoMA’s institutional practices during the 1980s and 1990s to *Projects* participants, whose activities mirrored – in their drop-in function – those of BAXTER&.¹⁵⁹ If the contribution to *Information* of BAXTER& may be justly credited with substantively positive (albeit structurally-contained) long-term outcomes for the Museum, it must be acknowledged that McShine’s exercise in McLuhanesque tactics of decentralization and outsourcing achieved more mixed results as a large-scale rehearsal for the subsequent emergence of “satellite” or “branch” museums such as P.S.1 and, latterly, the Guggenheim franchise.¹⁶⁰ Perhaps the more impactful legacy of *Information*, though overshadowed by the critique of Hans Haacke, is the horizontal museum first formulated in the actions of McShine and BAXTER&.

NOTES

- 1 Stéphane SAUZEDDE, “Questioning the Critical Potential of the Artistic Entrepreneur,” in *Les entreprises critiques/Critical Companies*, ed. Yann Toma (Saint-Etienne: Cité du design, 2008), 186.
- 2 Ken ALLAN, “Understanding Information,” in *Conceptual Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 144.
- 3 Mary Anne STANISZEWSKI, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 269.
- 4 IAIN BAXTER&, who at different periods in his career has also exhibited under the moniker Iain Baxter (and is sometimes conflated with his former conceptual enterprises, IT and N.E. Thing Co. Ltd.), legally changed his name in 2005 and, more recently, has self-identified in all caps.

- 5 Founded in 1966 as the N.E. (Baxter) Thing Company, but subsequently renamed the N.E. Thing Company Ltd., for the sake of brevity and variety the Company will be referred to here alternately as N.E. Thing Co. or NETCO.
- 6 Derek KNIGHT, *N.E. Thing Co.: The Ubiquitous Concept* (Oakville, ON: Oakville Galleries, 1995), 7; IAIN BAXTER, conversation with the author, 12 December 2010.
- 7 Kynaston McSHINE, *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 141; Julia BRYAN-WILSON, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).
- 8 Les LEVINE, "The Information Fall-Out," *Studio International* 181:934 (June 1971): 267.
- 9 STANISZEWSKI, *The Power of Display*, 269.
- 10 Ibid., 270.
- 11 McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 30.
- 12 Marshall McLuhan cited in ALLAN, "Understanding Information," 160.
- 13 Benjamin BUCHLOH, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 133.
- 14 See, in particular, Alexander ALBERRO, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Vincent BONIN, "Documentary Protocols," in *Documentary Protocols (1967–1975)* (Montreal: Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, 2010), 17–59; BRYAN-WILSON, *Art Workers*; Chris GILBERT, "Art & Language and the Institutional Form of Anglo-American Collectivism," in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 77–93; David TOMAS, "The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice: N.E. Thing Co. at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, June 4 – July 6, 1969," in BONIN, *Documentary Protocols (1967–1975)*, 217–53.
- 15 *The Mechanical Bride* describes transformations in executive roles under the impact of the computer: "The century of spectacular prize fighting which lies behind us coincides with the era of the maulers and bruisers of industry. A more subtle age of bureaucratic and monopolistic business enterprise calls for the more complex sport of 'push-button football.' Modern football would have bored to death the tycoons of yesteryear, because they would have found in it none of the dramatization of their own lives." Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951), 123. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* McLuhan defines the features and causes of "changes in the world of management and of industrial organization" more systematically; for instance: "In our electronic age the specialist and pyramidal forms of structure, which achieved vogue in the sixteenth century and later, are not any longer practical . . . The 'simultaneous field' of electronic information structures, today reconstitutes the conditions and need for dialogue and participation." Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002 [1962]), 140–1.
- 16 Franco "Bifo" BERARDI, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 108.
- 17 McSHINE, *Information*, 200–5.
- 18 Eve MELTZER, "The Dream of the Information World," *Oxford Art Journal* 29:1 (March 2006): 126; Chris GILBERT, "Herbie Goes Bananas: Fantasies of Leisure and Labor from the New Left to the New Economy," in *Work Ethic*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2003), 67–81.

- 19 Daniel BELL, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973 [1999]), 14.
- 20 Ibid., 336.
- 21 E.g., Christopher May and Frank Webster's hyper-rationalist critiques of Information Society discourse. Christopher MAY, *The Information Society: A Sceptical View* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002); Frank WEBSTER, *Theories of the Information Society* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 22 E.g., McLuhan and Nevitt's decentralist model.
- 23 MAY, *The Information Society*; WEBSTER, *Theories of the Information Society*.
- 24 Marie L. FLEMING, *Baxter²: Any Choice Works* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1982); Nancy SHAW, "Siting the Banal: The Expanded Landscapes of the N.E. Thing Co," in *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape: Works by Iain and Ingrid Baxter, 1965–1971*, ed. Nancy Shaw, Scott Watson, and William Wood (Vancouver: Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, 1993), 25–35; William WOOD, "Capital and Subsidiary: The N.E. Thing Co. and the Revision of Conceptual Art," in *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape*, 11–23.
- 25 Peter F. DRUCKER, *Concept of the Corporation* (New York: Mentor, 1972 [1946]); Reinhold MARTIN, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
- 26 BAXTER& continued to identify as President in some contexts, such as *Information*, until at least 1972 although Ingrid Baxter is cited as Co-President in internal documents from January 1969 onwards and even as President in *North American Time Zone Photo-V.S.I. Simultaneity* (1970). The uneven application of these titles is consistent with the organizational manoeuvres and pseudo-autonomous status of branch plants and consultants within the horizontal corporation described by McLuhan and Nevitt. N.E. Thing Co., "Minutes of the First Meeting of Directors of the N.E. Thing Co. LTD." (18 January 1969), Box 9, File 18, Iain Baxter Fonds, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.
- 27 A.A. BRONSON (ed.), *From Sea to Shining Sea* (Toronto: Power Plant, 1987); KNIGHT, *N.E. Thing Co.*
- 28 Marshall MCLUHAN and Barrington NEVITT, *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1972), 17.
- 29 Ibid., 13. McLuhan and Nevitt clarify this logic elsewhere in the same text: "Extreme centralism of inputs breeds decentralism of outputs" (Ibid., 221).
- 30 Ibid., 23.
- 31 Ibid., 21.
- 32 Marshall MCLUHAN, "Sherlock Holmes vs. the Bureaucrat," in *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* (New York, Something Else Press, 1967), u.p.
- 33 Mark W. RECTANUS, *Culture Incorporated: Museums, Artists, And Corporate Sponsorships* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 42–3.
- 34 MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 4.
- 35 Howard RAIFFA, *Decision Analysis: Introductory Lectures on Choices under Uncertainty* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1970), 10.
- 36 "During periods of rapid innovation and the consequent interplay of new and old services there is a complementary flood of disruption and disservice" (MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 47). "After increasing beyond some point, any service becomes a disservice" (Ibid., 82).

- 37 Ibid., 48.
- 38 Ibid., 137.
- 39 Gregory BATTCOCK, "Informative Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art," *artsmagazine* 44:8 (Summer 1970).
- 40 Stephen WRIGHT, "The Double Ontological Status of the Artistic Enterprise," in *Les entreprises critiques/Critical Companies*, ed. Yann Toma (Saint-Etienne: Cité du design, 2008), 191. The disruptions effected by the counterenvironments staged by BAXTER&, McShine, and Lippard may be contrasted with the vulnerability to co-optation of overtly critical positions diagnosed by McLuhan and Nevitt: "Marxism provides the ideal counterenvironment for the business world, bringing out its patterns and contours in strong relief" (MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 48).
- 41 WRIGHT, "The Double Ontological Status of the Artistic Enterprise," 191.
- 42 *Aesthetically Claimed Things (ACT)* and *Aesthetically Rejected Things (ART)*.
- 43 Douglas CRIMP, "The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject," in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 78.
- 44 SAUZEDDE, "Questioning the Critical Potential of the Artistic Entrepreneur," 185.
- 45 Thomas C. COCHRAN, "The Executive Mind: The Role of Railroad Leaders, 1845–1890," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 25:4 (December 1951): 230–41.
- 46 RECTANUS, *Culture Incorporated*, 42.
- 47 BRYAN-WILSON, *Art Workers*, 13.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid., 192.
- 50 IAIN BAXTER&, "IAIN BAXTER& to Kynaston McShine" (15 Jan. 1969). Kynaston McShine, *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; Lucy LIPPARD, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 238.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Rona ROOB, Apphia LOO and Amanda SULLIVAN, "Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research in The Museum of Modern Art Archives," <http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/InfoExhibitionRecordsf> (accessed 15 May 2010).
- 53 Other files are, for the most part, limited to project proposals and correspondence; original works of art are not included.
- 54 On 9 February 1970, McShine's initial Curatorial Assistant on the *Information* project, Cintra Lofting, wrote to IAIN BAXTER& requesting a copy of one of the works by which NETCO was represented at the 1969 São Paulo Biennial: a calendar-catalogue. Cintra Lofting, "Cintra Lofting to Iain Baxter" (9 February 1970). Kynaston McShine, *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. No catalogue was ever issued for *New Media, New Methods*. On 30 April 1970, McShine wrote to Pierre Théberge requesting permission to borrow the *ACT* and *ART* photographs that accompanied the calendar-catalogue in São Paulo – works which, McShine wrote, had impressed him when he attended the Biennial. Kynaston McShine, "Kynaston McShine to Pierre Théberge" (30 April 1970).
- 55 TOMAS, "The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice," 242.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid., 238.

- 58 For a concise history of the Lorne Building, and commentary on NETCO's critical attentiveness to that history, see TOMAS, "The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice."
- 59 Ibid., 220.
- 60 Ibid., 242, 244.
- 61 Ibid., 250.
- 62 Helen MOLESWORTH, "Work Ethic," in *Work Ethic* (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2003), 25–51.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 TOMAS, "The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice," 218. Tomas's attention to NETCO's "multiple frames of reference" and contradictions is exemplary.
- 65 Ibid., 222.
- 66 Ibid. William Wood similarly frames the business interests of NETCO within the static rhetoric of rationalization, arguing that the Company's standardized "Information" sheets served "as a means to standardize and systematize the entire venture" (my emphasis). WOOD, "Capital and Subsidiary," 14.
- 67 BONIN, "Documentary Protocols," 32.
- 68 TOMAS, "The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice," 240. This argument is more fully elaborated by Tomas as follows: "[Environment] marshalled activities, defined expectations, promoted work patterns, and pioneered a (corporate or economic) world view that gradually acculturated the National Gallery administrators and workers to the *idea* of accepting a corporation . . . as a potential and viable equivalent of an artwork" (243).
- 69 Michel FOUCAULT cited in RECTANUS, *Culture Incorporated*, 132.
- 70 McLuhan and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 4.
- 71 McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 30.
- 72 For a concise introduction to McLuhan's binary classification of "hot" (i.e., non-participatory) and "cool" (i.e., participatory) media, see Marshall McLuhan, "Media Hot and Cold," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 22–32.
- 73 McLuhan and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 4. The powerlessness of management in the electronic corporation is a consistent theme of *Take Today*: "The bigger the corporation, the more employees it drops out of sight. At the top, on the one hand, the executive is also swallowed by the corporation, knowing less and less about fewer and fewer people and operations: *as work enables a man to put on his public, he puts off himself*" (Ibid., 283).
- 74 RECTANUS, *Culture Incorporated*, 172.
- 75 "The TV user is the *content* of TV" (McLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 90).
- 76 TOMAS, "The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice," 252; N.E. Thing Co., "Some Thoughts Re: Communications and Concepts," in *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape*, 42.
- 77 McLuhan and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 281.
- 78 STANISZEWSKI, *The Power of Display*, 282.
- 79 RECTANUS, *Culture Incorporated*, 30.
- 80 STANISZEWSKI, *The Power of Display*, 285. Although Victoria D. Alexander and Grace Glueck stress that museum trustees (a population typically composed of

- the representatives of powerful private and class interests) have, since at least the nineteenth century, exerted pressure on the institution in order to advance their personal goals or augment their prestige and, in turn, cultivated the museum as a brand, Rectanus echoes Alexander in tracing the origins of intensified corporate manipulation of the museum to the 1960s. Victoria D. ALEXANDER, *Museums and Money: The Impact of Funding on Exhibitions, Scholarship, and Management* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1; Grace GLUECK, "Power and Esthetics: The Trustee," in *Museums in Crisis*, ed. Brian O'Doherty (New York: George Braziller, 1972); RECTANUS, *Culture Incorporated*, 26.
- 81 Toronto ad cited in McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 280.
- 82 McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 280.
- 83 McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 16. For an exploration of *Environment* as a "prototype" for the collusion of cultural and economic interests, see Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice," 248.
- 84 For a discussion of this concept viz. the performance of social roles, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006 [1990]), 63–72.
- 85 McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 295.
- 86 Wood, "Capital and Subsidiary," 16.
- 87 Ibid., 18.
- 88 McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 280.
- 89 Ibid., 22.
- 90 Iain Baxter&, "Iain Baxter& to Kynaston McShine" (1 May 1970), Kynaston McShine, *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; Ann Rosenberg, "An Illustrated Introduction to the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd.," *The Capilano Review*, nos. 8 & 9 (Fall 1975): 140.
- 91 McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 282.
- 92 By way of explicating the organizational effects of contemporary information flow, McLuhan pits Sherlock Holmes, the epitome of the "many-sided man" or "intuitive genius," against the rational administrators of Scotland Yard, "hostile to the inclusive and instantaneous grasping of situations," u.p.
- 93 Communication with the author, 11 Oct. 2009.
- 94 N.E. Thing Co., *Business Philosophy*, 1970 [manila folder printed with Company slogans]. Reproduced in *Les entreprises critiques/Critical Companies*, ed. Yann Toma and Rose Marie Barrientos (Saint-Etienne: Cité du design, 2008), 248–9.
- 95 "Supplement from Newsweek on 'International Data Processing Conference and Business Exposition, Seattle . . . June 23–26, 1970.'" Reproduced in *Documentary Protocols*, 82.
- 96 N.E. Thing Co., *Business Philosophy*.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 William J. Horne, "William J. Horne to Iain Baxter&" (9 July 1970), Baxter& papers, consulted 23 Oct. 2009.
- 99 Ann Rosenberg, "A Selection of N.E. Thing Company A.C.T.'s," *The Capilano Review*, nos. 8 & 9 (Fall 1975): 147; N.E. Thing Co. in Shaw, "Siting the Banal: The Extended Landscapes of the N.E. Thing Co.," 25.
- 100 Rosenberg, "A Selection of N.E. Thing Company A.C.T.'s," 147.
- 101 McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 295; N.E. Thing Co., *Business Philosophy*, 1970.
- 102 Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), Chapter 7.

- 103 MCLUHAN, *Culture is Our Business*, u.p.
- 104 “Playfulness and creativity and invention are inseparable. Even before these playful approaches, ‘value engineering’ had been the name used by General Electric for techniques of meeting new competition in ‘hardware’ products” (MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 102).
- 105 Ibid., 32.
- 106 “One of the breakthroughs of World War II was Operations Research, which began as ‘brain storming’ and soon dried up as expertise” (MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 101).
- 107 Ibid., 102.
- 108 Ibid., 167.
- 109 TOMAS, “The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice,” 235.
- 110 ALLAN, “Understanding Information,” 153, n. 35.
- 111 TOFFLER, *Future Shock*, 54.
- 112 See *Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values of . . . Museum Communication with the Viewing Public* (New York: The Museum of the City of New York and The New York Council on the Arts, 1967).
- 113 Ibid., 200.
- 114 Ibid., 202, 208.
- 115 HERBERT MARCUSE, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage, 1955), 187.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 142.
- 118 MARCUSE, *Eros and Civilization*, 193.
- 119 BATTCOCK, “Informative Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art,” 24.
- 120 MARCUSE, *Eros and Civilization*, 189.
- 121 The concept of interplay is central to McLuhan’s environmental theories: “[Marx] was unprepared for *interplay*, the resonant interval where new action is” (MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 75).
- 122 Ibid., 105.
- 123 IAN ANGUS, “Sharing Secrets, or On Burrowing in Public” in *Anarcho-Modernism: Toward a New Critical Theory. In Honour of Jerry Zaslove* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2001), 373–5.
- 124 JERALD ZASLOVE, “Vindicating Popular Culture in Latin America,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American & Caribbean Studies* (January 1998): 146.
- 125 Ingrid Baxter’s comments in a 1975 interview with Ann Rosenberg elucidate the logic of burrowing adopted by NETCO: “I don’t see it [engaging in commercial ventures] as getting out; out is the wrong word. It’s getting deeper *in*, if anything. . . . We’re sold *in*.” Ingrid Baxter quoted in ROSENBERG, “Interview/N.E. Thing Co.,” *The Capilano Review*, nos. 8 & 9 (Fall/Spring 1975): 170–1.
- 126 IAIN BAXTER & quoted in *Investigations* (Sackville, New Brunswick: The Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, 1974), u.p.
- 127 MCLUHAN quoted in *Exploration*, 65.
- 128 Ibid., 56.
- 129 BAXTER & quoted in Robin White, “Iain Baxter/N.E. Thing Co.,” *View* 2:4 (1979): 15.
- 130 For a discussion of NETCO’s use of Telex and telecopier media as a precursor to the Internet, see: Tilman BAUMGÄRTEL, “On the History of Artistic Work with

- Telecommunications Media,” in *Net Condition: Art and Global Media*, ed. Peter Weibel and Timothy Druckrey (Graz, Austria; Karlsruhe, Germany; and Cambridge, MA: Steirischer Herbst, ZKM/Center for ART and Media, and MIT Press, 2001), 154–61; Tilman BAUMGÄRTEL, “Immaterial Material: Physicality, Corporeality, and Dematerialization in Telecommunication Artworks,” in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 60–71; Richard CAVELL, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002).
- 131 PARKER quoted in *Exploration*, 12.
- 132 “I want to build what I call a ‘newseum,’ which consists of a building outside the museum proper, but which draws on the artefacts and materials of the museum for its shows. The idea of a newseum is that it is concern with news, any news in the world which is of great moment, whether it occurs in science or archaeological discovery or what have you, or whether it occurs on the political scene” (PARKER quoted in *Exploration*, 33).
- 133 Johan HUIZINGA, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955 [1938]).
- 134 Libero ANDREOTTI, “Play-Tactics of the ‘Internationale Situationniste,’” *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 38.
- 135 McLuhan and Nevitt play on the homophony of “facts” and “fax” in *Take Today*, 81.
- 136 IAIN BAXTER, “Telexed Self-Portrait from Memory,” in MCSHINE, *Information*, 91.
- 137 See *Co-Presidents of N.E. Thing Co. Ltd Attending Exhibition of Company Products at Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1971*. Reproduced in *Celebration of the Body*, u.p.
- 138 TOFFLER, *Future Shock*, 132, 134.
- 139 SAUZEDDE, “Questioning the Critical Potential of the Artistic Entrepreneur,” 182.
- 140 WRIGHT, “The Double Ontological Status of the Artistic Enterprise,” 191.
- 141 Wright MILLS, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 102.
- 142 *Ibid.*, 95.
- 143 TOFFLER, *Future Shock*.
- 144 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 145 *Ibid.*, 133.
- 146 MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 22.
- 147 DRUCKER, *Concept of the Corporation*, 11.
- 148 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 149 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 150 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 151 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 152 MCLUHAN and NEVITT, *Take Today*, 17.
- 153 *Ibid.*
- 154 MARTIN, *The Organizational Complex*, 214.
- 155 STANISZEWSKI, *The Power of Display*, 286.
- 156 *Ibid.*, 285.
- 157 *Ibid.*, 295.
- 158 *Ibid.*, 285.
- 159 *Ibid.*, 295–6.
- 160 RECTANUS, *Culture Incorporated*, 177.

IAIN BAXTER&: l'artiste devenu « Drop-in »

ADAM LAUDER

On reconnaît de plus en plus l'importance de l'exposition *Information*, organisée au MOMA en 1970 par Kynaston McShine (1935–), dans le champ plus large du discours de l'art conceptuel et du travail. Dans le contexte du nouvel environnement corporatif d'*Information*, les opérations surnuméraires effectuées par l'artiste canadien IAIN BAXTER& (1936–), en tant que président de l'entreprise autonome N.E. Thing Co., ont généré une interaction caustique d'informations redondantes en multipliant les fonctions de gestion traditionnellement confiées au commissaire et aux commanditaires de l'exposition et en attirant l'attention sur elles. La logique à la McLuhan d'une gestion décentralisée adoptée par McShine répondait aux représentations fantasmatisques d'une future « Société de l'information », des mouvements de contestation et de la culture jeune. L'installation performative *Environment* de N.E. Thing Co. à la Galerie nationale du Canada, en 1969, où BAXTER& s'est coulé lui-même dans le moule des gestionnaires du futur qu'avaient annoncés les premiers théoriciens du travail cognitif, tels Peter F. Drucker (1909–2005), C. Wright Mills (1916–1962), Daniel Bell (1919–), Alvin Toffler (1928–) et, en particulier, Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980), bien qu'ignorée dans des rapports précédents sur *Information*, l'a probablement aussi influencée. À mesure que le musée se transforme en jeu technologique, selon la théorie de McLuhan et de son associé Harley Parker (1915–1992), le commissaire abandonne (drop-out) ses responsabilités administratives et l'artiste les reprend (drop-in) en tant que conseiller expert en s'appropriant les technologies des communications et des réseaux corporatifs. La logique non oppositionnelle, mais néanmoins dérangeante, de ces rôles à la McLuhan trace une voie parallèle, mais distincte, vers la stratégie plus familière de la *critique* institutionnelle déployée par Hans Haacke (1936–) à l'intérieur de la même exposition.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette