

Networked Print Culture

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Before turning to networks, we begin in the archives. In Canada, we are now awash in the print culture of contemporary art – that which has accumulated over the past several decades as magazines proliferated, as the country’s manifold artist-run centres began publishing, and as artists’ books and other experimental publications flourished. Aside from conventional libraries, certain designated sites attest to this material plenitude. Art Metropole in Toronto began its program of collecting and disseminating “artist-initiated” publications in 1974, for instance, while in Montreal, the documentation center Artexte has been assiduously amassing all manner of art-related material since 1981; amongst their archival boxes it is possible to unearth not only magazines and catalogues, but paper ephemera including posters, photographs, press releases, invitations to vernissages, artists’ CVs and statements, and so on. The “Ephemera” category looms large in Art Metropole’s collection too.¹ In addition to the archival holdings in such repositories, many of the country’s artist-run centres have been celebrating anniversaries (30, 35, 40 years in existence), and simultaneously going public with their archives – often taking advantage of digital platforms to do so, of course. What is the significance of this archival consciousness that has seeped through the world of contemporary art in Canada? It is worth remembering Nietzsche’s warning, that carrying too much of the past around with us can be an impediment to moving forward: “There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of ‘historical sense,’ that injures and finally destroys the living thing, be it a man or a people or a system of culture.”² Perhaps too this fascination with arcane art-world documentation is evidence of AA Bronson’s claim (made in 2012) that Canadian artists have become bureaucrats, just as he had predicted years earlier.³ It must be admitted that while a huge quantity of printed items has been stockpiled and made available, it is not obvious what deserves to be looked at, engaged critically with, or appreciated. So we need to ask: What value do these historical artefacts have today? What do we choose to pluck out of the archives?

The first article in this issue is by Anne Whitelaw, and it unpacks the Canadian government’s funding programs for magazines and other arts

publications – the financial foundation that would allow this field to flourish. Each of the subsequent articles in this journal begins with a magazine, exhibition catalogue, or other item of print culture. These are: *Tawow* magazine (1970–79); *image nation* magazine (1970–1982); Roy Kiyooka’s *Transcanada Letters*, an artist’s book (1975); *The Banff Purchase* exhibition catalogue (1978); *Asianadian* magazine (1978–85); Anne Ramsden’s *Relations* exhibition catalogue (1988); and the *CyberPowWow* web project (1996–2004). In each case the contributor has in a sense detached one publication from the archive. I say “the archive” but in reality there is no single physical archive that contains all the items addressed here, which date from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. What is significant, though, is that in each case the scholar recognized something in that fragment of print culture, some spark that could and should be re-kindled. Each case study becomes an opportunity to explore a dynamic network of people, objects, and spaces; this is how we move from the archive to the network, in other words. This special issue is in fact one outcome of a collaborative (SSHRC-funded) research project called *Networked Art Histories: Assembling Contemporary Art in Canada, 1960s to the Present*, where the network is proposed as theme, critical model, and methodology, within the open-ended historical period now known as contemporary art. In addition to this emphasis on print culture, the project explores other manifestations of networked activity, asking how artistic activity becomes deeply embedded in urban environments, for instance. We are also tracking multiple manifestations of a “becoming-global” impulse within contemporary art, whereby local, community-based, and/or Canadian networks develop tentacles that reach out to connect with diasporic and transnational artworks, movements, institutions, and people.

Artists can deliberately set out to create alternative networks, and at times these have been the very same people responsible for today’s bulging archives. For example, beginning in the 1960s the Vancouver-based artists’ collective known as Image Bank and the Toronto-based General Idea instigated a traffic in images (often using the postal system) that was meant to circumvent the authenticating power of museums and established art institutions, while also forging interpersonal bonds between artists. Indeed, General Idea claimed that while an alternative “Canadian network . . . had been building up” during the 1960s, it was their magazine *FILE* that “brought that network of Canadian artists into existence by showing them they were there.”⁴ But the term “network” can have much greater relevance within art historical research – beyond the explicitly networked practices that arose at the intersection of Conceptual Art, Mail Art, and Fluxus, and beyond the internet-dependent networked art that is undertaken at the present time. For instance, the sociological perspective developed by Howard Becker

in his 1982 book *Art Worlds* undermines the myth of the artist as heroic individualist by emphasizing the web of players who sustain any given art world: “The artist thus works in the center of a cooperating network of people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome.”⁵ A variant of this analysis had been raised in the 1960s by the British art critic Lawrence Alloway, and it is worth noting that the first time he deliberately deployed the term “network” was in a 1966 article in *Canadian Art* magazine, entitled “Art and the Communications Network.” Unlike Becker, Alloway emphasized the enhanced role of technology in the twentieth century: “Art today is distributed in a network of communications more complex though not totally different in kind from the preceding five hundred years.”⁶ For Alloway, the rapidity with which artworks could be reproduced and circulated mattered profoundly, to the point that the “strategy of an art critic today is to look for ways to reduce the quantity of art which the network handles so easily.”⁷ This might seem a curious remark for someone to make long before the internet, but Alloway did regard the constant barrage of information and images as an obstacle to the critic or historian who wants to focus and call attention to one particular thing.

In the intervening years, the term “network” has continued to acquire interdisciplinary complexity. Of particular appeal to researchers across multiple disciplines is Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) because it is fundamentally a methodological imperative, a research model that challenges us to find new ways of describing “assemblages” of human and non-human agents. Other authors confront the political implications of networks, whether on or off the internet. Karl Marx long ago recognized that modern-day capitalism could thrive because of its international network of financiers, while the sociologist Manuel Castells insists that corporate and state power has fully absorbed the structural logic of networks.⁸ Some art practices confront the dystopian implications of interconnectedness: for instance, the US artist Mark Lombardi’s remarkable drawings of the 1980s and 1990s traced elaborate, conspiratorial networks of corrupt politicians, bankers, and arms dealers. This is to say that there is nothing inherently emancipatory about networks; they are one kind of (social, technological, biological) structuring mechanism, amongst many. Still, a number of authors argue that some networks promote alternative, oppositional or emancipatory social impulses. An influential example comes from the political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, whose critique of globalization introduces the possibility of “an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common.”⁹ That utopian view of networked collaboration does inflect many of the case studies gathered in this special

issue, in the sense that the identification of an art-network (whether by the players themselves, or as constituted after the fact by a scholar) can involve community, friendship, solidarity, and often, a commitment to social justice. Finally, there is huge amount of scholarship pertaining to technological, cybernetic, digital networks. It is true that all but one of the case studies addressed in this issue are pre-digital, but that certainly does not mean their identity is non-technological. Specific modes of travel, communications, and reproduction come into play, even if, as Marshall McLuhan suggested, it is often when such technologies become obsolete that we pay attention to their material presence.¹⁰ All the printed matter discussed in the articles depended on complicated printing and photographic technologies, most of which are outmoded today, while on occasion some archaic technological object becomes an integral part of the story (or part of the network in a Latourian sense): the typewriter Kiyooka used to write his letters; the slide carousel that accompanied *The Banff Purchase* exhibition and book; and in the case of *CyberPowWow*, the inaccessible software languishing in someone's office.

There is not a great deal of scholarship that sets out to critically frame the print culture of contemporary art, whether in Canada or internationally. The exception would be artists' books, which flourished throughout the twentieth century and have been the object of many studies.¹¹ While magazines from the modern era have received attention, this is rarely true of the post-60s period. There has been some scrutiny of *Artforum* (probably the most influential US art magazine) and Gwen Allen's 2011 book on artist-initiated magazines (including *FILE*) is an important contribution.¹² In Canada, a number of MA and PhD theses focusing on contemporary art magazines were undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s – mainly focused on the major publications: *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Parachute*, *Vie des Arts*.¹³ If magazines have garnered some interest, there is a marked absence of critical writing about exhibition catalogues as a distinct genre within the print culture of contemporary art.¹⁴ The magisterial, multi-authored, multi-volume project that is *The History of the Book in Canada* encompasses a wide spectrum of readerships and specialized types of publications but doesn't zero in on art-related print culture, while their cut-off date in any case is 1980.¹⁵ In other words, research into the print culture of contemporary art in Canada has barely begun to take shape. One notable exception is Felicity Tayler's scholarship, including the article "Publishing as Alternative Space," which sets out to trace "connections among independent publishing in political movements, the experimental literary small press, and artist-run culture" in Canada during the 1960s and 70s.¹⁶ In this special issue on Networked Print Culture, we don't address Canada's longest-running art magazines and, indeed, the catalogues and other publications we discuss are not necessarily well-known. We do not claim that

this represents a comprehensive or coast-to-coast coverage of print culture in Canada; instead we hope that our efforts point to the value of this kind of investigation. We regard each as having distinctive material attributes, design features, modes of visual layout, and ways of using photography. Moreover, we approach each magazine, catalogue, artist's book, or web project as a crystallization of people, ideas, spaces, technologies; the publication reveals the convergence of social, intellectual, and aesthetic energies; it is evidence of collaborative work. Each piece of print culture has become a node in a vibrant, re-activated network.

It is worth asking whether, in art-historical terms, networks can be equated with “artworlds.”¹⁷ The German art historian Hans Belting, addressing the global circumstances of contemporary art, proposes that the idea of a monolithic artworld is out of date and should be replaced with a different model, featuring a plurality of artworlds that are geographically dispersed while possessing distinct qualities.¹⁸ This is deemed necessary because the realm of “contemporary art” has become, in the words of Mexican curator Cuauhtémoc Medina, “a regime of international generalization.”¹⁹ Belting's shift in terminology is promising because it recognizes that the very meaning of art depends on specific places, scenes, contexts, histories, struggles over identity, etc. – unique elements that cannot be assimilated into one master narrative. It should in principle be possible to transpose this template to the national context, in Canada. The *Networked Art Histories* project does not aim for a synthesis of our case studies according to an aesthetically uniform, nationally-determined art history, that's for sure. Instead, we're providing evidence of artistic activity flaring up in multiple contexts, across the Canadian territory; and so the prospect of identifying multiple, coexisting artworlds in Canada is appealing. On the other hand, the “network” model has exemplary qualities that are not necessarily accounted for by the term “artworld.” A network encompasses the energy, momentum, and shared desires that fuel collective artistic projects, as well as the eventual fracturing or dissolution of those projects. The disparate elements that are nodes in networks (an exhibition, conference, piece of art criticism, or informal meeting in a bar) might eventually lead to the founding of a magazine or gallery or movement, but they don't always coalesce into fully-formed, nameable artworlds. It also becomes clear from the case studies that networks weave in and out of more specialized artworlds; two of the magazines addressed here (*Tawow* and *Asianadian*) were not exclusively devoted to visual art, as art is instead conjoined to discussions of politics, activism, and identity.

Anne Whitelaw's article provides a foundation for the case studies in this issue by addressing the economic basis for the efflorescence of print culture

in Canada and, more particularly, the crucial role played by the Canada Council for the Arts. In fact, there is a print-culture dimension to her research too, since she immersed herself in budgets, annual reports, and government papers, to track how a funding program originally intended to support a few key publications had by the 1970s expanded to cover dozens of magazines and, by the 1980s, was underwriting exhibition catalogues produced in small venues across the country. She also parses these government sources to comment on ideological matters: putting money into print culture was supposed to foster the growth of cross-country, coherently nationalistic networks. And yet this did not happen; instead, the proliferation of publications was accompanied by a geographic and discursive dispersal that undermined the construction of a nationalist artworld.

It makes sense to follow with Sherry Farrell Racette's discussion of *Tawow: Canadian Indian Cultural Magazine*, not only because it happens to be the earliest publication under discussion, but also because having heard from Whitelaw about government funding, we now encounter a publication that was indeed an official organ of government. In other words, *Tawow* was not the recipient of so-called "arm's length" government funding, and it was not "alternative" in the way that might be true of other case studies described in this issue. *Tawow* was published by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, but what is remarkable, as Racette points out, is that this became one of the first Canadian publications where Indigenous writers could describe and discuss their own culture. The network triggered by this publication is not easily mapped, since it's difficult to determine in whose hands *Tawow* might have ended up, and to calculate its influence. But Racette tells of her own chance encounters with *Tawow* in Manitoba during the 1970s, and she describes the huge impact the publication had on her personally, and on her future development as a Métis historian – as she encountered a generation of committed and activist Indigenous artists, writers, and curators. This is a striking example of how we can insert ourselves into a narrative, as part of a network-in-formation.

The Banff Purchase catalogue, analyzed by Karla McManus, was not a government publication, but it was nonetheless *official-looking* because of its hard cover, large size, and sober graphic layout. Seven artists received sequential monographic treatment, as if to affirm that Canada possessed great photographic artists, and that photography deserved to be taken seriously. But McManus persuasively shows how *The Banff Purchase* exhibition and catalogue set out to accomplish more than that, by positioning the Banff Center for the Arts at the centre of the discussion, and by asserting its pedagogical value. This last dimension was perhaps the most significant. The artists who appeared in the book also taught "master classes" at Banff, and

likewise the publication was meant to inspire young artists and become a key node in the nation-wide transmission of photographic knowledge.

In contrast to *The Banff Purchase* publication, the magazine *image nation* was overtly “alternative” in its ambition, as Martha Langford tells us, even as she delves into the connotations of this often-used term. Once again we have an author disclosing her own part in the network she describes – here, in conversation with the magazine’s editor David Hlynsky in 1980, when she was an exhibition producer at the National Film Board of Canada, Still Photography Division. For Hlynsky and his collaborators, “alternative” signified a powerful desire to create objects of culture that circulated outside of pre-existing networks. Langford’s analysis of the magazines themselves reveals another kind of alternativeness, in that photographs were rarely captioned, nor were they supplemented by art-critical or otherwise explanatory prose. In the pages of *image nation*, the meaning of photographs would not be (over)determined by language.

The relationship between language and photographic image was certainly crucial in Roy Kiyooka’s *Transcanada Letters*, as Felicity Tayler demonstrates. This unusual artist’s book consists mainly of letters written by the artist and poet between 1966 and 1974 – linguistically-complex letters that reveal professional, political, personal, and/or erotic attachments to people scattered across the country. In a separate section, a dense grid of photographs evokes a coast-to-coast journey while also offering casual views of Kiyooka with friends. While the book’s title and photo-essay might refer to Canada, and Kiyooka’s writing addressed his Japanese Canadian identity, Tayler describes this book as evidence of a countercultural network that helped to erode conventionally nationalistic paradigms for understanding art and literature.

My own article addresses a flourishing postmodern/feminist network in Montreal during the 1980s. My starting point is *Relations*, a 1988 exhibition catalogue featuring photographic artwork by Anne Ramsden and an experimental text by Reesa Greenberg – a genuinely collaborative project in that the artist seemed to infiltrate the visual culture of museums while the art historian creatively undermined the conventions of museological prose. I argue that these women were part of a dynamic network of women artists, writers, curators, editors, and teachers – all committed in some sense to postmodernism, to feminist ideals, and to experimental modes of photographic practice – although this movement has not to date been adequately described and inscribed into Canadian art history. Since I lived in Montreal during throughout the 1980s, and know many of the players, I have also written myself into the story.

The magazine that Alice Ming Wai Jim has retrieved from the archive, *Asianadian*, was not a specially-designated art magazine, even if the cover

of every issue did feature artwork by Asian Canadian artists. But alongside the intermittent arts coverage, *Asianadian* intervened in an expanded field of visual culture; Jim zooms in on discussions of televisual and newspaper imagery and showcases the magazine's attack on visual stereotypes. It becomes clear that this magazine played an important role in the forging of a politicized Asian Canadian identity. It is no coincidence that Jim's text also functions genealogically, in that she is the founding co-editor of a new journal, *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas*; the question of "visual culture" now takes centre-stage, while *Asianadian*'s Canadian emphasis has been transformed into overtly international forms of networking.²⁰

Mikhel Proulx's article on *CyberPowWow* closes off this special issue for two very good reasons. Firstly, it bookends Racette's presentation of *Tawow*, the government-sponsored publication that was nevertheless appropriated by its Indigenous contributors. In contrast, *CyberPowWow* was entirely dreamed up and sustained by Indigenous artists and scholars, and in this respect exemplifies an epochal change. The other reason Proulx's article comes at the end is of course because unlike all the other publications we address, this was a digital enterprise – although since it did include both writings and images it has much in common with older forms of print culture. *CyberPowWow* was a remarkable example of Indigenous activism intersecting with the utopian aspirations of early internet networking. And yet there is an element of pathos in Proulx's account because, whereas flimsy print publications can survive for hundreds of years, this project is for the most part no longer available. Through this case study, we quickly understand how the circulation of digital information is not really dematerialized at all, but depends on the stability of servers, the capacity for storage, the functionality of software, and so on. Proulx's article therefore calls attention to a strikingly original but ephemeral episode in the digital/print culture of contemporary art.

I opened this introduction saying that we'd begun our research into networked print culture by extracting items from archives, and I'd like to point to Michel Foucault's understanding of the archive in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* – not as this or that pile of documents gathering dust, but as the specific discursive system that allows a person to speak and think in the first place: "the archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events."²¹ At the same time, Foucault made clear that an archive is neither immutable nor securely in the hands of authoritative bodies; he proposed that present-day "redistributions" of knowledge can "reveal several pasts, several forms of connection, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies . . ."²² It seems to me that this analysis corresponds to our collective undertaking here. These articles have indeed

revealed “several pasts,” while each critical re-reading has in some sense shifted the knowledge-base of contemporary art in Canada.

These case studies demonstrate the vital role played by print culture in the networked formations of contemporary art since the 1960s. Examining individual magazines, exhibition catalogues, artists’ books, or websites has proven to be extremely rewarding, and we hope this small collection of case studies will encourage other scholars to continue building up this field of inquiry. Part of the appeal of doing so is of course that knowledge and images are now largely disseminated digitally and cybernetically. But if the legacy of printed matter has thus been defamiliarized, it is precisely through an intimate, hands-on encounter with these objects that the material circumstances of art historical knowledge come into view.

NOTES

- 1 While the Art Metropole holdings are now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, and have since been exhibited, material of this nature more often ends up in the artists’ files kept by museums for their own use.
- 2 Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York: Cosimo, 2005), 7. (originally published 1873).
- 3 Bronson implies that the situation is different, but just as bad, in the USA: “Alas, the artists of Canada have transformed themselves into bureaucrats, much as those of New York City have shape-shifted into simulacra of financiers.” AA BRONSON, “The Transfiguration of the Bureaucrat,” in *Institutions by Artists, Volume One* (Vancouver: Filip Editions, 2012), 37.
- 4 Willoughby SHARP, “The Gold-diggers of 1984: An Interview with General Idea,” *Avalanche* 7 (Winter/Spring 1973): 18–19.
- 5 Howard BECKER, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 25.
- 6 Lawrence ALLOWAY, “Art and the Communications Network,” *Canadian Art* 100 (January 1966): 35.
- 7 Ibid., 37.
- 8 Bruno LATOUR, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Manuel CASTELLS, “A Network Theory of Power,” *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2001): 773–87.
- 9 Michael HARDT and Antonio NEGRI, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), xiii–xiv.
- 10 See Marshall McLuhan, “Technology and Environment,” *artscanada* 105 (February 1967): 5–7.
- 11 See Johanna DRUCKER, *The Century of Artists’ Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1995).
- 12 Amy NEWMAN, *Challenging Art: Artforum, 1962–1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2004). Gwen ALLEN, *Artists’ Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

- 13 Robert GRAHAM, "Understanding *artscanada*: History, Practice, and Idea" (MA thesis, McGill University, 1988); Tim CLARK, "Michel Foucault, Critical Modernism, and Writing on the Visual Arts in English Canada" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1991); Lon DUBINSKY, "Canadian Visual Art Magazines as Cultural Formations" (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1991); Louise MOREAU, "Making Art Modern: The First Decade of *Vie des Arts* Magazine and Its Contribution to the Discourse on the Visual Arts in Quebec during the 1950s and 1960s" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1997); Abby WEINBERG, "Identity Politics in Canadian Artwriting: *C Magazine* and *Parachute*, 1983–1996" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1997).
- 14 The French art historian Anne Moeglin-Delcroix addresses the increasingly slippery boundary between exhibition catalogues and artists' books in the 1960s and 70s: Anne MOEGLIN-DELCROIX, "Du catalogue comme oeuvre d'art et inversement," *Les cahiers du musée national d'art moderne* 56/57 (Summer–Fall 1996): 95–118.
- 15 *History of the Book in Canada* (three volumes). General editors, Patricia Lockhart Fleming and Yvan Lamonde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004–2007).
- 16 Felicity TAYLER, "Publishing as Alternative Space," in *Documentary Protocols*, eds. Vincent Bonin and Michèle Thériault (Montreal: Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery, 2010), 310.
- 17 While some authors refer to "art worlds," I use the increasingly common single word, "artworld."
- 18 Hans BELTING and Andrea BUDDENSIEG, "From Art World to Art Worlds," in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, eds. Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 28–31.
- 19 Cuauhtémoc MEDINA, "Contemp(t)orary: Eleven Theses," *e-flux journal* 12 (2010). Accessed August 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/contemporary-eleven-theses/>.
- 20 *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas*, published by Brill, is co-edited by Alice Ming Wai Jim and Alexandra Chang of New York University. The first issue came out in 2015.
- 21 Michel FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), 129.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 5.