

BORDERBLUR POETICS: INTERMEDIA AND AVANT-GARDISM IN CANADA, 1963-1988

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Bordering the Blur

*blurring frontiers between art & art, mind & mind, world &
world, mind art & world*

—Dom Sylvester Houédard (1963)

In their 2019 recollection of borderblur activity in Toronto, poets Brian Dedora and Michael Dean claim that “the explosion of literary and related work of an avant-garde inclination in Toronto from the late 1960s to the late 1980s was without precedent in the production of Canadian letters.”¹ They specify that they “aligned [themselves] with an international avant-garde, and were propelled by the force of [their] own creative energies that either did or did not synch with a Canadian zeitgeist.”² In retrospect, Dedora and Dean describe the marginal status held by the literary avant-garde in Canada—and not just in Toronto, as this book shows—and articulate the sense of affinity that they and many intermedia poets in Canada felt with literary cultures abroad. Nichol’s contributions to the concrete poetry anthologies edited by Emmett Williams (1967) and Mary Ellen Solt (1968) were early stages in the alignment between Canadians and other intermedia practitioners, and publications like these did much to foster the sense of connection that Dedora and Dean felt vis-à-vis an international literary network. It should be no surprise, then, that Nichol, bissett, and others latched on to the “borderblur” neologism, which British concrete poet Dom Sylvester Houédard had coined to describe their work. Art critic and scholar Greg Thomas identifies 1963 as the year in which Houédard first conceptualized the term, describing it, in

the context of concrete poetry, as a “rejection of divides & borders, delight in accepting ambiguity/ambivalence: alive blurring frontiers between art & art, mind & mind, world & world, mind art & world.”³ Thomas confirms that in 1966, Houédard used similar phrasing to introduce a series of exhibitions held at the Arlington Mill in Gloucestershire when he commented that “Arlington-une begins w/ the idea that poetry frontiers have been shifting & in fact are being shifted. . . . [B]y crossing and demolishing boundaries [poets] have made it clear that only an aesthetics of nationalism & apartheid could ever continue to defend them.”⁴ Finally, Thomas suggests that the term “borderblur” was also explicitly used in 1969 to introduce an exhibition of concrete poetry that was hosted by another British poet, Bob Cobbing, this time to refer to Houédard’s poetic contributions to the show.⁵ Since Nichol credits Houédard for the term in 1967, it is likely that borderblur was coined *at least* two years earlier than 1969.

Nichol and Houédard were, in fact, in correspondence in 1965. That year, Houédard wrote to Nichol to update him on the status of a concrete poetry exhibit at the Institute of Contemporary Art entitled *Poetry and Painting*. Houédard coordinated Nichol’s involvement in the show⁶ and in their correspondence he recommended that Nichol contact other poets, including Cobbing and Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay. In this same letter, Houédard asked about Nichol’s possible relationship with Marshall McLuhan:

in canada dyou know marshall mccluhan? his books have big influence on especially furnival -- cour bougre - just looked up address - he is yr neighbour - 29 wells hill toronto-4 - like photography liberated from art from having to be a reporters lens -- radio-tv-&c liberates poetry from (& prose from) i mean ALL communication artwise from being written descriptive report - so abstract or concrete poetry is cool in mcluhan sense⁷

While the letter does not explicitly use the neologism “borderblur” to discuss the work of these writers, Houédard’s update for Nichol provides even earlier evidence of Canada’s connection to an international poetic avant-garde whose proponents Houédard would have likely considered to be representative of borderblur poetics. It also provides evidence of the relationship between borderblur, Canada, the international avant-garde, Marshall McLuhan, and the impact of electronic media on poetry. This chapter explores this

relationship to identify how borderblur in a Canadian context comprises literary works that transcend artistic boundaries and is inflected by an awareness of an international avant-garde network.

As discussed in the introduction, Houédard's characterization of borderblur was rehearsed and promoted by Nichol and bissett, both of whom used the term to articulate their poetics during their 1967 television appearance. Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo associate Canadian borderblur, and Nichol in particular, with currents of twentieth-century artistic production that include modernist artist Florine Stettheimer and Fluxus artists such as Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, and Yoko Ono. Gammel and Zelazo recognize that "the generic 'borderblur' of bpNichol's art practice between poetry, prose, sonic performance, and illustration significantly altered Canadian cultural expression in the 1970s and '80s."⁸ Their description of borderblur as a "betweenness" aligns Nichol with others located under the banner of intermedia, suggesting that they see clear commonalities between Nichol and intermedia artists like Higgins. However, the "betweenness" of this creative practice—not limited to Nichol's work alone—is historically under-represented in the Canadian literary context. Despite earlier international avant-garde precedents—Dadaism in the early twentieth century, say, or international concrete poetry in the 1950s, or Fluxus in the 1960s and '70s—Canada in the mid-to late twentieth century, and especially during the so-called CanLit Boom, was home to a dominant, page-based literary tradition in which language was more often than not the sole expressive medium. Canadian literature's historical emphasis on language as the central means for expression is represented by books, anthologies, and collections such as those published as part of the New Canadian Library (NCL). These projects, with their emphasis on the written text, were detrimental to the development of other diverse literary practices in Canada. Not only did they segregate literature from other artistic disciplines, but they also suppressed oral traditions; this was the case with Indigenous storytelling, for example, whose practitioners were consequently banished to the margins of the country's literary culture. While borderblur is not necessarily analogous to Indigenous traditions, and, in fact, certain aspects of borderblur were appropriated from Indigenous cultures (a problem I touch on later in this chapter), Canadian literature's hegemony displaced poets who sought to expand literary artistic practices beyond the singular medium of language.

To develop such expansive literary practices, borderblur poets consciously sought to merge literature with other artistic modes in some of the ways that Houédard had earlier identified. Houédard evidently used the term “borderblur” to describe concrete poetry; however, in its Canadian usage (of which more below), it came to signify the folding of poetry into many other arts forms. I recognize borderblur poets’ work as contributing to the discourse of intermedia—that is, the creative combination of separate artistic domains into a singular work that eludes typical categories and genres. As a critical discourse (and as noted in this book’s introduction), intermediality was theorized by Nichol’s contemporary, Higgins, who tried to provide a critical vocabulary for creative works that “fell between media.”⁹ In the case of borderblur, a shaped concrete poem involves the analysis of the visual layout of the poem and the actual language on the page—and, often, the material elements used to compose the poem (whether it is hand-drawn or typewritten, for example). This methodology implicitly informs the existing criticism of concrete, sound, and kinetic poetries, and will do so in this book. Borderblur poetics comprise an intermedial approach to literary production wherein meaning emerges from the simultaneous interaction of diverse creative media.

As part of a movement that emerged in the 1960s, borderblur poets stood at the vanguard of a dynamically evolving and shifting field of literary production in both the Canadian and the international contexts. The accessibility of printing technologies such as the mimeograph machine; the increasing presence of electronic media such as television, radio, and film; and a shrinking sense of the globe did much to inflect these artists’ poetic purview. This chapter explores borderblur in the Canadian context as a loosely defined intermedial poetic. It articulates the features and concerns of borderblur poets’ work, beginning with the early formation of bissett’s *blewointment* and its subsequent proliferation throughout Canada. It then discusses Canadian borderblur’s connectedness to a concurrent international avant-garde that gave Canadians the very word that would come to describe their work, while also providing them with a receptive audience when one was lacking at home. Building on this international component, this chapter continues to highlight the increasingly globalized sense of literary life and culture that was then developing in Canada, with a particular emphasis on McLuhan’s influence at the time. The chapter concludes with a discussion of borderblur and its connections to historical and contemporary theories of literary avant-gardism.

In doing so, I establish a preliminary, context-based theorization of borderblur as a recognizable avant-garde paratradition.

Before I begin any such theorization, I must admit that any attempt to critically account for this activity violates the spirit of borderblur, which actively worked against discursive closure. As a scholar, I am complicit in such an imposition, yet I am not dissuaded from this task since it adds more complexity to the standard narrative of Canada's national literary development. If the mid- to late twentieth century announced a new phase in the modernization of Canadian culture, then this chapter outlines in broad strokes poets' responses to a rapidly changing cultural landscape that led them to conceive of their work as a cosmopolitan alternate poetics network. I do this work while trying to be cognizant of the movement's open spirit and of the advantage that a term like "intermedia" can offer by breaking down singular categories and circumventing the problematic language of "discipline" as it is frequently applied to the arts (i.e., interdisciplinarity).¹⁰ Readers should keep in mind, of course, that this chapter presents only one of many ways to account for this activity. Nevertheless, I proceed from the premise advanced by Nichol's friend, the Canadian poet and critic Stephen Scobie, who claimed that Canadians came to borderblur and its various iterations "first of all from their own experience."¹¹ This is a point that Nichol confirms when he suggests that avant-garde poets of his time "were operating much like amnesiacs" since avant-garde literature "was not accessible" to them in the 1960s.¹²

In Search of Experience: Borderblur Poetics in Canada

Borderblur in Canada is unlike many of its avant-garde predecessors in that its proponents resisted the impulse to issue programmatic manifestos declaring specific principles, beliefs, and intended courses of aesthetic action. Those statements that were written by borderblur poets in Canada, for example, are unlike the manifestos of André Breton, the French Surrealist, who declared that Surrealism is "[p]sychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern."¹³ In contrast, as Dedora and Dean state, poets affiliated with Canadian borderblur typically "did not name [themselves] or prepare a manifesto" to articulate their work.¹⁴ These poets more often issued artistic statements related to specific texts or forms that outlined their individual

intent and at times their perceived position within literary history. We shall see this with concrete poetry in the case of David UU (see chapter 2) or with sound poetry in the cases of Steve McCaffery and Susan McMaster (see chapter 3). An emphasis on the flexibility of individual practices and aesthetic exploration are primary characteristics of borderblur poetics. This also helps explain why these poets might have eschewed more oft-used terms such as “interdisciplinary” or “multidisciplinary” when describing their work. To refer to borderblur in terms of discipline runs counter to the individualistic, rebellious, and convention-breaking nature of this work. As Houéard describes it above, borderblur is a means to revel in ambiguity and blur artistic and communal lines, not adhere to them. As manifested in Canada, the form remains true to this spirit, which is emphasized by the fact that it has no intentional point of origin. Though evidently circulating in an international network in the 1950s and early 1960s, borderblur was not at first consciously adopted by Canadians. Rather, it grew impulsively and organically as a poetic in Vancouver and only later became associated with Houéard’s term, by which point Canadian practitioners had joined a network of international counterparts.

It was in the summer of 1958 that nineteen-year-old bissett departed from his home and birthplace of Halifax, Nova Scotia. He and his then boyfriend hitchhiked across the country, leaving behind his repressive middle-class upbringing to eventually arrive in Vancouver, British Columbia. It was there in the early 1960s that he gradually developed his place within the city’s downtown art and literary scene as well as his recognizable, though ever-shifting, poetic signature characterized by a unique orthography, strong visual components, and charged performances. It was also in the early 1960s that he, friend Lance Farrell, and then partner Martina Clinton began to reject traditional writerly practices—namely, by eschewing narrative conventions and experimenting with alternative presentations of poetry on the page. They felt restricted by the mono-spaced linearity of the typewriter and the page’s rectangular shape, and instead sought to explode them.¹⁵ These transgressive impulses manifested in a hybrid poetic—an expansive intermedial practice combining poetry, sculpture, collage, drawing, music, and other artistic forms.

Vancouver in this era was in the midst of an artistic and literary renaissance spurred by the arrival of Beat culture and jazz in the city’s cafés and music venues.¹⁶ *TISH* was launched in 1961 by a group of young poets,

including George Bowering, Frank Davey, David Dawson, Jamie Reid, and Fred Wah, and others at the University of British Columbia (UBC), who drew influence from American poets such as Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Allen Ginsberg, as well as professors such as Warren Tallman. In doing so, they announced themselves as the new generation of poets that Canada's established literati would soon have to recognize. Members of the *TISH* group—along with several other poets from across the city—gathered for what is commonly referred to as the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference, the soon-to-be-legendary meeting between established American poets Olson, Duncan, Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, Philip Whalen, and Canadian poet Margaret Avison, along with an eager cohort of local emerging writers. Arts and culture were thriving in Vancouver at this point, as further evidenced by Léonard Forest's short film *In Search of Innocence* (1964), created for the National Film Board of Canada. Featuring philosophical conversations, roaming shots of Vancouver's cityscape and surrounding landscape, and soundtracked by jazz musician and writer Al Neil, the film presents a documentary montage of Vancouver's jazz, visual art, and poetry scenes, and includes appearances by sculptor Donald Jarvis, painters Jack Shadbolt, Joy Long, and Margaret Peterson, printmaker Sing Lim, and others. bissett and Farrell actually appear in one scene of the film but are not credited.

bissett's *blewointment* magazine and Blew Ointment Press emerged alongside this creative fervour as a little magazine and press for poets and artists who were outside of established cultural vortices.¹⁷ *blewointment* was "a house for the houseless bissett," writes Tallman, and bissett invited many like-minded writers and artists to join him.¹⁸ Thanks to Tallman, they became known as the "downtown poets," a group comprised of bissett, Copithorne, Gadd, Farrell, Clinton, Gerry Gilbert, Roy Kiyooka, John Newlove, and others who "distrusted what seemed like a heavily academic orientation" toward poetry and poetics then being cultivated at UBC.¹⁹ Despite these suspicions, the first issue of *blewointment* was not published as a response to or refusal of UBC's academic poetics; rather, it was a response to Forest's *In Search of Innocence*. The first issue of *blewointment*, published in 1963, includes bissett's reflection on the making of the film:

In a gestalt of montage wkich [sic] dug in

further and further into us you reveald [sic] the questions

of all our lives

what can we know

what is eternal, outside us

what can we do

artists poets, outside the abstraction.²⁰

blewointment, then, began as a response, not to a specific set of poets, nor to UBC's academic literary circles, but to the local culture of visual art and music in Vancouver. bissett positions *blewointment* as an outsider press and little magazine, describing the artists and poets of this first issue as "outside the abstraction."²¹ The abstraction, for bissett, is not the fringe that these bohemian artists occupy; rather, society itself is the abstraction, as it is removed from what he perceives to be the conditions of true living. This was hardly a combative reflection; rather, it complements the film by featuring Vancouver-based artists and poets bissett, Clinton, Copithorne, Farrell, and Maria (Gladys) Hindmarch—none of whom were recognized in the film. Thus, it further expands the sense of community that *In Search of Innocence* began documenting. The first issue of *blewointment* was published prior to the film's 1964 release, thus *blewointment* unwittingly parallels the film's open-ended, narrative-free structure—"a gestalt of montage"—in its aesthetic. In this way, *blewointment*, and its aesthetic, was seemingly more influenced by film than literature, which is hardly surprising given bissett's appreciation for inter-medial poesis and cinema.

Recounting his memories of *blewointment* in 1967 and 1968, Patrick Lane describes how it was literally and figuratively a house not just for bissett and his family, but for this wider faction of like-minded bohemian writers and artists in Vancouver. Recalling the time he spent at their home, Lane writes, "We walk around the room and talk about poetry as we collate the pages of *blewointment*. They are stacked on tables and chairs and we go in a long slow circle picking up page after page of poems until we have a single issue of the magazine then we staple it."²² Lane's comments suggest that *blewointment* was at the centre of bissett and Clinton's life, taking up a large portion of their home space with artists and writers coming in and out to help with the

magazine, including Copithorne, Shadboldt, Neil, Gilbert, and Farrell, as well as Milton Acorn, Gregg Simpson, Beth Jankola, Scott Lawrence, Kurt Lang, and many others. Credit is usually given solely to bissett for *blewointment*'s aesthetic. Poet and critic Ken Norris, for example, states that the project "reflected bissett's experimental and organic poetics."²³ However, *blewointment* and its aesthetic were not bissett's alone; rather, they were developed in dialogue with Clinton. Discussing these early days, bissett recalls with poet Barry McKinnon that

Me and Martina Clinton were working the press together for the central part of the mid-sixties—63–67. Before starting, ie. the press, we would take all night, all day, in going over how we wanted to present the language on the page, paper, to let—have the poem to be a map for a mood/statement, show and tell of feeling message, articulate space between words for pause-emphasis-measure visual presence of that poem.²⁴

In the same interview, bissett further explains that he and Clinton "talked a lot about poetics, what later became known as poetics"²⁵ and that they wanted "each poem to be different than any other poem."²⁶ Thus, it was through collaboration with Clinton that *blewointment*'s intermedial direction emerged, with its inclination toward aesthetic diversity and attention to the way materials and design shape literary meaning-making. Clinton evidently played a significant role in the development of *blewointment*'s editorial and aesthetic principles, a point often overlooked in critical accounts of the project's history. While it is difficult to determine the precise degree of Clinton's involvement, her poetry regularly appeared in the magazine until 1972, though the first few issues featured more of her work than the latter issues. Clinton eventually disappeared from the *blewointment* nucleus, likely because bissett and Clinton ended their relationship in the late 1960s. However, the magazine and later Blew Ointment Press maintained the direction they had established, becoming increasingly intermedial.

The eclecticism of the magazine is apparent, too, when looking over the diverse selection of authors published by bissett. "He published hippies, feminists, red-power advocates, socialists, communists, environmentalists" at many career stages and representing various aesthetic persuasions—from more established figures like Dorothy Livesay, P. K. Page, and Earle Birney, to

the rising stars of mainstream Canadian literature such as Margaret Atwood and Dennis Lee, to Vancouver's downtown artists such as Vincent Trasov (also known as Mr. Peanut) and photographer Ian Wallace, to many of the Canadian and international borderblur poets mentioned above.²⁷ The magazine's radical openness—both in terms of its aesthetic and its editorial principles—articulates bissett's sense of Canadian literature as an open field, not limited to a single aesthetic or social viewpoint, regardless of the dominant trends of the time.

blewointment began as an essential reference point for borderblur, and it often served as a model for other like-minded writers. Nichol published his first poem, "Translating Translating Apollinaire," in *blewointment* in 1964, which evolved into one of his life-long projects. *blewointment* evidently influenced Nichol's work as a publisher and community organizer; it set him on a course to extend the ideas he found in Vancouver to other communities. Until *blewointment* magazine ended in 1977, Nichol—if we don't count bissett—made the highest number of individual contributions to the magazine (with Copithorne and UU just behind them). Nichol was living in Vancouver during the early days of *blewointment* but eventually moved eastward to Toronto in the spring of 1964. As Nichol had claimed during the 1967 television interview with Webb, Toronto was not yet home to the bohemian literary culture that he found out West. So he had to develop it himself with the 1965 launch of his own mimeo press, Ganglia Press, which produced *Ganglia* magazine and later *grOnk*. Poet David Aylward (whom he met while working at the University of Toronto's Sigmund Samuel Library) was one of his earliest collaborators on these projects.²⁸ The first issue featured poets such as Aylward, bissett, Copithorne, Nichol, and others, which indicates that—as Nichol has admitted—it first served primarily as a venue for introducing the avant-garde poets he met in Vancouver to a Central Canadian audience.

In January 1967, Nichol, Aylward, UU, and Rob Hindley-Smith, also known as rah-smith began a Ganglia Press publication called *grOnk*, which was dedicated to "concrete sound kinetic and related borderblur poetry."²⁹ The title was a neologism expressed by a dinosaur character in the famous American comic strip *B.C.* (created by Johnny Hart), which emphasizes *grOnk*'s focus on sound and visuality—the comic strip is identified by Higgins as an intermedial form.³⁰ The allusion to the *B.C.* comic strip also subtly connects this work to British Columbia, thereby acknowledging the influence that Vancouver had on this work at the time. Occasional editors later

included bissett, McCaffery, Nelson Ball, jwcurry, and R. Murray Schafer. These writers and artists formed a basis for Nichol's Toronto literary community, and their presence and assistance with these ventures helped transform borderblur from a localized aesthetic that Nichol found in Vancouver into a transnational paratradition.

The creative energy generated by these publications inspired similar and no less significant forums for the proliferation of borderblur, such as UU's Fleye Press and *Spanish Fleye* magazine, the latter of which was limited to a single issue. This first issue appeared in 1966 and adopted the editorial principles and mimeo aesthetic UU used with Nichol on *grOnk* and features a mix of lyric and pattern poems, asemic writings, line drawings, and a book review. UU had ambitions to continue publishing the magazine with three further issues, none of which materialized. Though the magazine was short-lived, UU continued to publish through Fleye Press, including a series of pamphlets by himself and Nichol and a book by bissett entitled *Where Is Miss Florence Riddle?* (1967).

With more longevity than Fleye, Underwhich Editions was formed in 1979, a joint effort by Nichol, McCaffery, Riddell, Michael Dean, Brian Dedora, Paul Dutton, Steven Ross Smith, and Richard Truhlar. Dutton, the remaining steward of the publishing imprint, describes their mission thusly: "unorthodox content, unorthodox publication, efforts to economise (the projects being self-financed, with costs barely recovered and any surplus going into subsequent publications), low print-runs and individual initiative."³¹ Each member of the collective was responsible for their own projects, giving them the freedom to publish a variety of authors with a wide range of media and formats, including books, broadsides, chapbooks, pamphlets, cassettes, vinyl, microfiche, and more. The collective managed several significant projects that widened the network's reach, such as sound poetry scores by Ottawa-based collective First Draft—*Pass This Way Again* (1983), composed by Susan McMaster, Andrew McClure, and Claude Dupuis, and *North South* (1987), composed by McMaster, McClure, and Colin Morton. Sound poetry was central to the imprint's operations. Indeed, its flagship publication was *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue* (1978), edited by Nichol and McCaffery on the occasion of the eleventh International Sound Poetry Festival, which was hosted in Toronto and organized by McCaffery, Smith, and Sean O'Huigin. Truhlar and McCaffery would later develop the Underwhich Audiographic series, which published tape cassettes of sound poetry by national and international

GROK

NUMBER 1 JANUARY 1967

edited by david w harris bpNichol rah-smith
from 600 Huron Street toronto canada
manuscripts concerned with concrete
sound kinetic and related borderblur
poetry welcome distributed by mailing
list limited number for public sale
published monthly

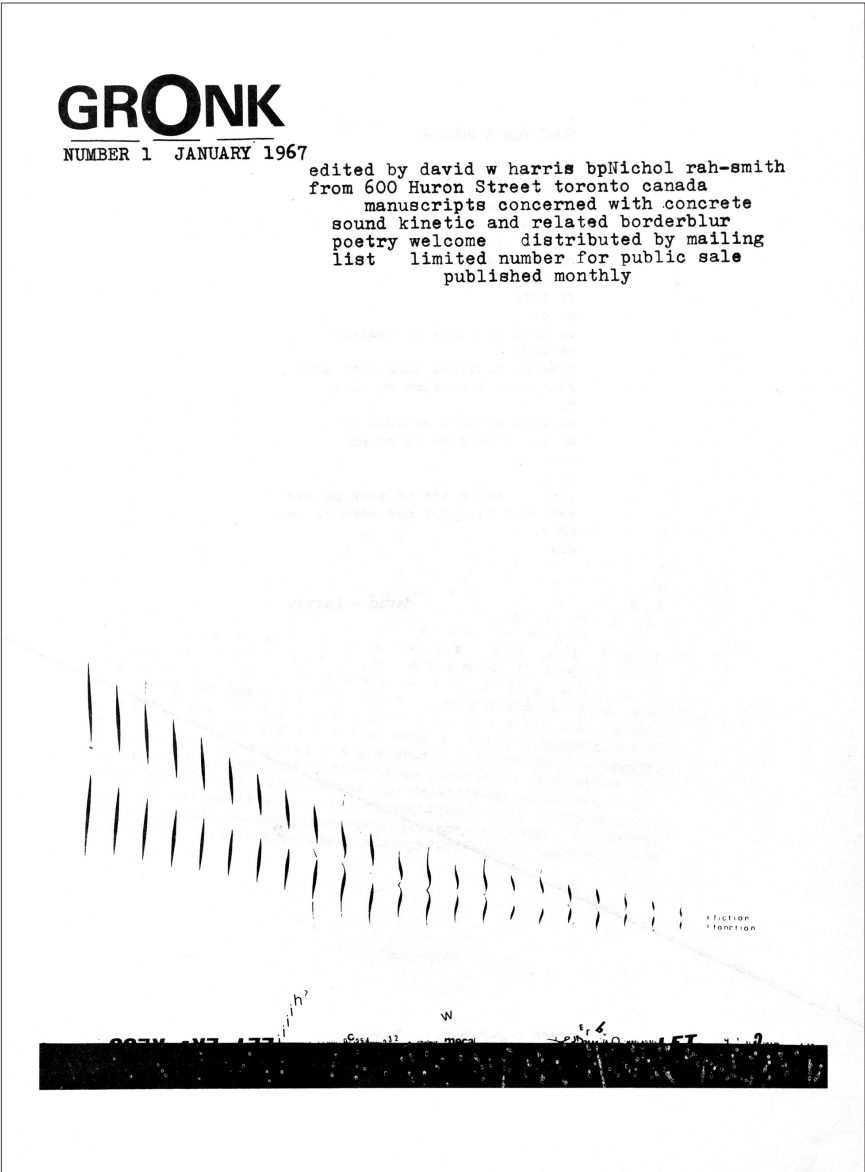


Figure 1.1: Front cover of *grOnk*, no. 1, published January 1967.

practitioners, including Paula Claire (England) and Susan Frykberg (New Zealand/Canada).

As these projects emerged and proliferated, borderblur and its poetic subcategories were debated and discussed by Canadian practitioners. Nichol, for example, outlined his poetics on the back of his intermedia publication *Journeying & the returns* (1967; sometimes also referred to as *bp*). The publication comprises a slipcase of poems and poem-objects, printed and recorded across a variety of media, including a perfect-bound book, postcards, flip-books, an audio disc, and more. Adhered to the back of the slipcase is Nichol's "Statement." He writes,

now that we have reached the point where people have finally come to see that language means communication and that communication does not just mean language, we have come up against the problem, the actual fact, of diversification, of finding as many exits as possible from the self (language/communication exits) in order to form as many entrances as possible for the other.³²

Further down the slipcase, Nichol continues to state that "there are no barriers in art. where there are barriers the art is made small by them," and he further recognizes that "traditional poetry is only one of the means by which to reach out and touch the other."³³ While Scobie refers to this text as a "manifesto," Nichol's language is far less combative and programmatic than the language found in many manifestos of the historical avant-garde.

Nichol here articulates his outlook on language's relationship to communication in the late 1960s, a period during which the technological landscape of media and communication technologies was rapidly transforming. For Nichol, these shifts expand the possibilities for human connection since image and sound, for example, have begun to occupy more prominent positions in everyday life, as described in the writings of McLuhan (which Nichol likely knew well, as we will see later in this chapter). It is worth noting, too, that Nichol does not seek to disparage traditional poetic modes; rather, he stresses that traditional poetics such as free verse are only one of many modes of literary expression. Instead, Nichol muses, "how can the poet reach out and touch you physically as say the sculptor does by caressing you with objects you caress?"³⁴ With such provocations, Nichol invokes borderblur as it

is described by Houédard, to envision a means of broadening aesthetic scopes and transmission in communal exchange.

Nichol's "Statement" establishes a set of common presumptions that other poets could gather around (and they did). However, his anthology *The Cosmic Chef* (1970) functions even more like a manifesto because it directly invokes borderblur while actively forming a loose coterie of poets. It is useful here to consider poet and anthologist Jerome Rothenberg's notion of the anthology as a manifesto and, by example, an articulation of this active poetic.³⁵ *The Cosmic Chef* features work by Aylward, bissett, Clinton, Copithorne, McCaffery, Riddell, UU, Hart Broudy, Earle Birney, Jim Brown, Barbara Caruso, Victor Coleman, John Robert Colombo, Greg Curnoe, Gerry Gilbert, Lionel Kearns, Seymour Mayne, David McFadden, Sean O'Huigin, Jerry Ofo, Stephen Scobie, Peter Stephens, and Ed Varney, alongside perhaps unexpected—but aptly selected—poets such as Margaret Avison, Phyllis Webb, Michael Ondaatje, and George Bowering. In the afterword, Nichol claims that "this whole book is best described by the term dom sylvester houedard coined BORDERBLUR," and he goes on to explain, alluding to the notion of intermedia, that "everything presented here comes from that point where language &/or the image blur together into the inbetween & become concrete objects to be understood as such."³⁶ While emphasizing the way these works occupy an in-between space, Nichol specifically treats borderblur as a visual form but does not preclude sound or kinetic poetry. The poems range drastically in style and method. Webb's sparse minimalism is presented alongside McCaffery's multidirectional typestracts, Birney's thinly handwritten text spiral "Like an Eddy" is featured next to Copithorne's thickly lined asemics, which in turn appears beside bissett's chant-poem comprising the lines "yu are imprisond in th city."³⁷ It is clear from these selections that Nichol's sense of borderblur is broad and inclusive. By using Houédard's coinage to describe their work, Nichol identifies an emergent poetic community within a larger, international avant-garde network and theorizes an expansive poetic during a time when definitions of poetry were narrowing as part of Canada's nationalist surge. This was representative of a larger movement in Canadian poetry that Dean and Dedora described as an effort to get "outside quatrain, couplet, maple leaves, and snowshoes."³⁸

As I have demonstrated thus far, Nichol and bissett saw their work as distinctive from the mainstream literary culture that was forming around them. The discussions of their poetics that Canadian audiences saw on television

in 1967 continued privately in mail correspondence in 1972. As evidenced by a thirty-page, mostly handwritten letter from bissett to Nichol, they were evidently still working toward a sense of their poetics, determining where it fit within established literary cultures. This letter was written and sent just before the release of his book of poems and collages *pass th food release th spirit book* (1973). It addresses an essay Nichol had recently drafted for inclusion in the collection but ultimately excised from the final version of the book at bissett's request. As evidenced by the letter, bissett was initially excited by the connections Nichol made between bissett's work and other writers in their nexus, including their contemporaries and modernist predecessors. Ultimately, though, more than twenty pages into the letter—and having read the essay many, many times—bissett asks Nichol to remove it, preferring to let the work speak for itself and pointing out that few of Nichol's own books have an explanatory apparatus. Nichol's essay eventually appeared reworked for publication in *BRICK* in the winter of 1985 under the title "PASSWORDS: The Bissett Papers," wherein he attempts to situate bissett within a tradition of poetry that extends from and includes Birney, *TISH*, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Raoul Hausmann. Nichol's essay usefully contextualizes bissett's practice within national and international currents of literary and artistic innovation. In the letter, however, bissett is adamant that his work exists separately from these modernist predecessors and other international writers with whom he may share aesthetic similarities: "i meen a new line has startid like yu say in *PASSWORDS*. it dont fit in with anything els apriori really," he contends.³⁹ bissett, eager to differentiate his own work and that of his peers, is reluctant to give too much credit to European or American literatures as an influence on their work. While he is eager to articulate his cosmopolitanism—as he did with Webb on television in 1967—he is also careful not to give himself over entirely to other established traditions. bissett's comments are undoubtedly hyperbolic and perhaps too narrow—consider, for example, the fact that he and Nichol use Houédard's coinage to describe their work. However, it does underline what is at stake for bissett in these discussions: to ensure openness and an open perception of his poetics that is neither part of the dominant Canadian literary mainstream nor merely a transplant of American or European modernism. Borderblur, for bissett, must be, as the name implies, a blurring of borders between aesthetic, historical, and national contexts.

Borderblur, and notably Houédard's definition of the term, was still central to Nichol's conception of writing even in the late 1980s. Echoing his "Statement," Nichol maintained that writing inherently blurs borders between media; he writes, "Writing, precisely because it is *written*, is, at least in part, a visual art. It's also a sound art. . . . It lies, therefore, at the juncture between painting & music, taking something from each but remaining itself. . . . between those juncture points is the area which Dom Sylvester Houedard [*sic*] referred to as 'borderblur,' the area where the distinctions break down and become useless."⁴⁰ He lamented, however, that even after decades of sustained publishing of intermedial works like his own and many of his peers, this approach to writing "still seems to be news to some people."⁴¹ For Nichol, literature was often misunderstood as being singularly expressed through language. Despite the substantial cultural capital that Nichol accrued over the course of his life as one of its leading practitioners, borderblur in Canada was always a fringe poetic. Writers tend to focus on language as a container for content, for communicating meaning rather than focusing on it as a medium that is also inherently visual and musical. To a lesser extent, the conservative conception of literature in Canada had returned in the 1980s according to Nichol: "That is to say, attacks on experimental writing, attacks on deconstructionism or anything that has a certain life and vitality to it."⁴² Highlighting these other dimensions of writing and their importance to communication is a tenet of borderblur activity. It is the form's persistent outsider status that makes it one of Canada's significant literary paratraditions.

Dropping Off the Borders: An International Network of Alternative Poetics

While Nichol seemingly felt that borderblur poetics was relegated to the margins of Canadian literary culture, the creation of vibrant and active borderblur communities made it relevant to a niche group of writers and readers. In the previous section, I mentioned a limited number of small presses and little magazines that provided essential forums for borderblur poetry in Canada. More could also be said about the importance of Copithorne's *Returning*, Very Stone House press (edited by bissett, Patrick Lane, Seymour Mayne, and Jim Brown), or even the role of Stan Bevington at Coach House (where Nichol worked as an apprentice typesetter) in the creation and sustaining of borderblur as a Canadian avant-garde paratradition.⁴³ In *Imagined Communities*, cultural theorist Benedict Anderson convincingly suggests that print media

is one of the crucial ways in which people—whether in local, national, or international contexts—come to think of themselves as part of an identifiable community.⁴⁴ Literary production in the late 1960s and '70s lends support to this thesis, especially the critical projects bolstered by literary Canada's then emerging mainstream "stars" such as Margaret Atwood and Dennis Lee, projects such as McClelland and Stewart's NCL, and studies such as *Survival* (Atwood) and *Savage Fields* (Lee), which did much to promote the writers in Anansi's catalogue at the time. Poets like those mentioned above, however, also saw publication as a powerful tool for formulating an alternative literary community. As quoted in the previous chapter, bissett speaks to this conception of print in a 1978 interview with Alan Twigg: "We started it in the 60's cuz no one else would print us."⁴⁵ From the beginning, all of these projects were formed out of a desire to create vibrant literary and artistic communities—whether that meant providing additional venues for Vancouver's overlooked downtown poets or creating a bohemian literary culture that was missing in Central Canada.

The sense of community cultivated by and through these projects extended to an international network of poets and artists who were also exploring borderblur, indicating that not only was this an alternative literary community that opposed mainstream culture in a domestic context, it was also connected to a broader avant-garde tradition. McCaffery has described magazines like bissett's and Nichol's publishing ventures as having a "loose editorial policy of national alongside international content."⁴⁶ After the first issue of *Ganglia*, its pool of contributors expanded well beyond Toronto and Vancouver, to include Ian Hamilton Finlay (Scotland) and d. a. levy (United States) in *Ganglia* number 3, and John Furnival (England) in *Ganglia* number 5. Series 1 of *grOnk* continued this tradition in 1967: number 1 features Pierre Garnier (France) and d. r. wagner (United States), number 2 features Furnival and Cavan McCarthy (England), number 3 features Ivo Vroom (Belgium) and Ernest Jandl (Austria), and numbers 6 and 7 feature Hansjorg Mayer (Germany), Jiří Valoch (Czech Republic), and Edwin Morgan (Scotland). *blewointment* magazine had similar but comparatively smaller roster of international contributors, including d. a. levy, Diane di Prima, and Richard Kostelanetz (United States); Vroom and Pierre Albert-Birot (France); bob cobbing (England); and others.

With *grOnk* and *Ganglia* Press, "Nichol made concerted attempts to expose different literary communities to one another,"⁴⁷ as did bissett, evidently

by bringing together British, Czech, American, Canadian, German, French, and Austrian poets in the pages of their publications. Nichol also used *grOnk*'s mailouts to make interested readers known to one another so as to effectively trace the connections of this international avant-garde network. He acknowledges, for example, their presence by listing writers involved or connected to *grOnk* in the 1969 *END OF AUGUST GRONK MAILOUT*. The list includes Nichol, UU, bissett, d. r. wagner, John Simon, David Aylward, Rob Smith, Dave Phillips, Andy Phillips, Captain George Henderson, Andrew Suknaski, Eleanor Hiebert, John Riddell, Cavan McCarthy, Nicholas Zurbrugg, Jiri Valoch, David McFadden, Michael Ondaatje, Nelson Ball, Barbara Caruso, Judith Copithorne, Gerry Gilbert, Victor Coleman, Stan Bevington, Hart Broudy, Barry McKinnon, Denise Phillips, Carol Giagrande, Julie Keeler, Colin Jackson, Paul Dutton, Ivan Burgess, Scott Lawrence, Jo O'Sullivan, Pearlina Beaton, Rene Young, Wayne Clifford, and Julie Clifford. According to Graham Sharpe's count, *grOnk* had acquired a national and international subscriber base, comprising 273 individuals. Many readers were based in Canada but there were 45 in the United States, 14 in South America, 3 in Japan, and 55 across Europe.⁴⁸ Sharpe claims that this subscriber base "provided international exposure" that served "to validate the work that was begun and ongoing here [in Canada]."⁴⁹ This was undoubtedly because borderblur was nearly invisible to the literati at home, but this cultivated sense of internationalism is also crucial to understanding the poetic.

The role of internationalism looms large in the imaginations of Canadian borderblur poets as the poetic emerged and proliferated from 1963 onward. This period saw the dawning of a global age and the emergence of new networks that challenged the theoretical foundations of what it meant to be a national community. McCaffery recalls the feeling in Toronto in 1968 as being "backward and repressive" on account of his "feeling this terrible pressure as an artist to contribute to the dissemination of national identity."⁵⁰ As an immigrant from England, McCaffery's sense of community exceeded geographic boundaries. "The fact that both sound and concrete poetry emerged as international phenomena, was what I found attractive,"⁵¹ he says. McCaffery did not occupy this position alone. Four Horsemen collaborator Rafael Baretto-Rivera immigrated from Puerto Rico in the 1960s, evidently with similar interests since he approached McCaffery and Nichol in 1970 to "jam." Similarly, but travelling in the opposite direction, Gerry Shikatani lived for many years in France, where he performed and developed close bonds with

END OF AUGUST GIANT grOnk MAILOUT

bpNichol - co-ordinating editor
david uu & bill bissett - editors at large (yuk yuk - i just realized
someone else who has that title)

D.r.Wagner - RUNCIBLE SPOON/grOnk brotherhood of mimeo.madmen chief
John Simon - holy ghost
David Aylward & Rob Smith - founding editors (along with bp & dave)
Dave Phillips - head of old friends department
Andy Phillips - head of agriculture & photography department
Captain George Henderson - guru of comic books
Andrew Sukn'ski - guiding light of the FREE POEMS department
Eleanor Hebert - tender love and care division (also circulation)
John Riddell - chief of the "it's great but where do we get the
bread to publish it" suggestion box
Cavan McCarthy - "hands across the ocean" department
Nicholas Zurbrugg - questions & prodding
Jiri Valoch - soul brothers of brilliant cen corporate division
Dave McFadden, Mike Ondaatje, Nelson Bell, Barbara Cerase, Judy
Cepithorne, Gerry Gilbert, Victor Coleman, Stan Bevington, Hart
Brody, Steven McCaffery, Barry McKimmon, Denise Phillips, Carol
Giagrande, Julie Keeler, Colin Jackson, Paul Dutton, Ivan Burgess,
Scott Lawrence, Jo O'Sullivan, Pearlina Beaton, Rene Young, & a
cast of thousands participating friends.

Hello Wayne Clifford &
Julie Clifford wherever you are.

ANNOTATED LIST OF GOODIES IN THIS MAILOUT

- series 4 #4 - WAR AGAINST THE ASPS (time wise this work pre-dates
TYPESCAPES (published in 1967 by COACHHOUSE PRESS
401 (rear) Huron Street, Toronto) as does his WOURNEYS
(also included in this mailout). we should have pub-
lished these years ago but hit a giant two year period
of lethargy) - David Aylward
series 5 #1 - done somewhat in the runcible spoon format to turn you
on to that variously/spidly moving magazine edited by
D.r.Wagner. send him bread & love c/c P.O. BOX 4622
Sacramento California 95825 USA. also numbered Synopsis
2 because in terms of what synopsis is attempting to
do it fits that format.
series 5 #2 - excerpt from CARNIVAL by Steve McCaffery. author's note
explains everything.
series 5 #3 - ~~xxx~~WOURNEYS~~xxx~~ David Aylward (see 4#4)
series 5 #4 - SOMETHING in - poems by Martina Clinton - an excerpt from
her long awaited eventually to be published MAYAN
FRACTURES.

we've been getting a lot of action lately about erratic numbering.
therefore (as a service to our readers) here's the lowdown on what
we've published so far.

- series 1 - numbers 1 to 8
- series 2 - numbers 1, 2, 3, & 7/8
- series 3 - numbers 1 to 7
- series 4 - numbers 2 & 4
- series 5 - numbers 1 to 4

there are eight numbers
to a series. the gaps in series two are being filled by John Simon
at some unspecified point. the gaps in series 3 & 4 are cause i'm still
putting those numbers together.

Figure 1.2: Excerpt from *END OF AUGUST GIANT grOnk MAILOUT*, published 1969.

French sound poets such as Bernard Heidsieck. Notably, too, Shikatani is a second-generation Japanese Canadian, and his 1981 anthology *Paper Doors* (co-edited with Aylward) confronts, among other things, the legacy of the Canadian government's racist internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. The global flows of travel and immigration, as theorist Arjun Appadurai suggests, were among the factors at this time that created an "instability in the production of the modern subjectivities,"⁵² which in turn could destabilize the subject's sense of self within a nation. With increasing access to international travel for the middle class in the mid- to late twentieth century, it's surprising that Canadians had not yet conceived of a broader conception of their literature in their efforts to define their own, unique literary identity.

Alongside the increasingly commonplace activity of international travel, electronic media was becoming a core component of everyday life during the twentieth century, which in turn affected the flow of news, culture, ideas, and visions across national lines. Appadurai recognizes the proliferation of electronic media—notably television, radio, and film—as part of a globalizing modernity that offered new resources and disciplines for the imagination of self and community. This includes the transmission of entertaining television shows and films, horrifyingly violent images broadcast from the war in Vietnam, and the paranoia of the Cold War arms race channelled directly into the living rooms of many Canadians. Within this context, "Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces," which in turn affects the production of the modern nation.⁵³ This sense of the world provides the larger backdrop against which we must view these poets' work—Nichol, and especially bissett, adopted a global perspective: they wanted to "drop off the borders."⁵⁴ With that said, their relationship to global flows is complex and should not be assigned one specific meaning, just as their relationship to national literary identity encompasses many complexities. Rather, their work embodies a collision of the local, national, and global, one that serves to highlight the oversimplification of nationalist essentialism. Electronic media also opened new possibilities for art and culture. As Houéard, recognized for coining the neologism "borderblur," mentions in his above-cited letter to Nichol, television and radio encouraged some poets to escape realist aesthetics and to pursue more abstract forms. They certainly pushed the borderblur poets featured in this book to conceive of their work in dialogue with the multiple

modes of communication they encountered in their day-to-day lives. To fully appreciate this foundation, it is crucial to look at one critic in particular whose influential work captures much of the anxiety and optimism that attended a rapidly changing, seemingly borderless world as it formed in real time: Marshall McLuhan.

Intermedial Poesis in the Electric Age

The Toronto-based, internationally renowned media critic Marshall McLuhan shared with Nichol, bissett, McCaffery, and others a notable distrust of nationalism in the mid- to late twentieth century. McLuhan's vision for Canada was pluralist and dynamic, subject to the influence of a rapidly changing mediascape. "The vast new borders of electric energy and information that are created by radio and television," he wrote in 1977, "have set up world frontiers and interfaces among all countries on a new scale that alter all pre-existing forms of culture and nationalism."⁵⁵ This thinking, however, was apparent in the much earlier *Counterblast* (1954)—a short, eighteen-page manifesto that McLuhan self-published. An expanded version of *Counterblast* was published in 1969 (somewhat surprisingly, perhaps) by McClelland and Stewart, "making it likely," as Stephen Voyle suggests, that "Steve McCaffery and bpNichol encountered it."⁵⁶ In *Counterblast*, McLuhan lambastes Canadian nationalism:

B L A S T (for kindly reasons)
C A N A D A
The indefensible canadian border
The SCOTTISH FUR-TRADERS who haunt
the trade routes and Folkways of the
canadian psyche
B L A S T all FURRY thoughts
The canadian BEAVER,
submarine symbol of the
SLOW
UNHAPPY
subintelligentsias.
....
Oh BLAST

The MASSEY REPORT damp cultural igloo
for canadian devotees of

T I M E

&

L I F E

...

BLESS

THE MASSEY REPORT

HUGE RED HERRING for

derailing Canadian kulcha while it is
absorbed by American ART & Technology.⁵⁷

McLuhan criticizes the insularity of Canadian nationalism, deploring its symbols such as the beaver. McLuhan takes aim at the findings of the 1951 Massey Report (the product of the so-called Massey Commission, officially known as the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences), which would eventually lead to the formation of the Canada Council in 1958 and the pressure to create a national literary identity in the 1960s—exactly the sort of pressure that McCaffery and others found oppressive. McLuhan jabs at the commission, suggesting that its findings reduce Canadian life to the sort of discourse found in commercial magazines such as *Time* and *Life*. McLuhan's vision of Canadian culture was far less segregationist than the report's definition of culture, with its emphasis on high art and the separation from American culture. Rather, McLuhan's notion of Canadian culture acknowledges the blending of cultural forms, including sports ("B L E S S / French Canadian HOCKEY PLAYERS / for keeping art on ice") while acknowledging the unavoidable influence of American culture on Canadian life ("B L E S S USA cornucopia of daily / SURREALISM"). This conception of Canadian culture and its interconnectedness to international contexts is directed by his understanding of media in the mid-twentieth century.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan advances his theories of media with a special focus on print and literacy. A fundamental thesis of the work is that the adoption of new (especially electronic) technologies is causing major shifts in human speech and writing.⁵⁸ McLuhan theorizes differences between auditory cultures and literate cultures as an attempt to understand what he

believed to be the drastically different world views conveyed in manuscript culture, on the one hand, and typographic culture, on the other. McLuhan further suggests that the new electronic age—the so-called post-typographic world—renders “individualism obsolete” and “corporate interdependence mandatory.”⁵⁹ This concept of corporate independence is modelled on what McLuhan refers to as “tribal” or oral and auditory cultures—the new image of the global village. However, it also effectively captures the promise that media could present a way of opening the world. In his biographical note to his poetry collection *Nobody Owns Th Earth* (1971), bissett hopes “that th world be mor open as what is possibul that ther be less imperial isms”⁶⁰—despite, perhaps, not yet seeing the imperialism at the heart of some aspects of rising global modernity and this newly mediated world. Nonetheless, the arrival of electronic media facilitated this shrinking sense of the world and offered new access to other cultures since they so easily transmit images and ideas from elsewhere.

In McLuhan’s next book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), he situates even more forcefully the role electric and electronic media play in connecting persons and places around the globe: “after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace,” he writes, before suggesting that media is an “extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, [that] affects the whole psychic and social complex.”⁶¹ His chapters on radio, film, and television, for example, reflect on the ways these media have impacted the development of social and psychic life. These media compelled new collective formations between audience and producer. The radio is a means of broadcasting distant voices into the home while the television, a relatively new medium, delivered the horrors of war, and particularly the Vietnam War, directly into the homes of television audiences.

McLuhan’s conception of culture, media, and borders effectively articulated the dynamic social and technological shifts taking place at the time. He declared the arrival of the electronic age, a term that adequately describes the intensifying conditions of globalized modernity with an emphasis on mass media’s role in shaping an emergent human imaginary. McLuhan’s description of this period matches characterizations of the global age offered by later theorists such as Arjun Appadurai, who in subsequent decades would echo the claim that the imaginations of artists, poets, and citizens are altered by electronic media that, in turn, alter their sense of belonging within

the nation.⁶² Nationalism, as a basis for communal belonging, is complicated when daily life is interfaced with ideas, things, persons, and art from elsewhere. In Canada, this has always been the case; yet many of the existing narratives—some old, some surprisingly recent—affirm a desire for a definitive sense of Canadian identity produced by the country's art and culture. Within this paradigm, borderblur poetry offers a compelling case study since it emerged concomitantly with Canada's nationalistic surge, and yet, the work of these artists did not contribute to the same mode of belonging. McLuhan's theories are essential to this context for the way he expressed the perceived impacts of global mediation for a whole generation of people, and especially the borderblur poets.

McLuhan's writing also presented new ways of understanding the relationship between artistic production and the media used in such production—that is, the ways of producing art in a society comprising competition between multiple mediums of communication. In his "Statement," Nichol articulates his sense of the seismic shifts underway among his generation: "there's a new humanism afoot that will one day touch the world to its core."⁶³ Nichol offers no clear description of what this new humanism looks like, but it seems to signal a possible departure from previous systems of thought that centre humans instead of the divine or ecological. For Frank Davey, this claim of a new humanism places Nichol on one side of the debate regarding the relationship between literature and national literary politics. He describes the "aesthetic/humanist" camp as being concerned with humanity, detached from nationalist ideologies, while the literary nationalist argues for the "particularity of human social forms within specific national boundaries."⁶⁴ It seems likely that Nichol, in his conception of a new humanism, may have been revising what he perceived to be a humanist system in order to consider the implications of the new technological moment that he and his peers were living in. Those conditions stretched across national boundaries and affected human life wherever it was present. Nichol opens his "Statement" by generalizing this conception as a universalism: "we have reached a point where people have finally come to see that language means communication and that communication does not necessarily mean language."⁶⁵ For Nichol, this raises problems of human relations and commonality. The fact that Nichol describes language *as* communication in this passage, and specifies that not all communication is language, corresponds to the emergent conditions faced by his generation while also indicating his faith in intermedial works. The

dominance of electronic media suggests there needs to be a new way of expressing life—a new humanism—and also speaks to how language now fits within that paradigm.

While it is profitable simply to acknowledge that a shared interest unites McLuhan and the borderblur poets in exploring the emergent conditions of the electric age, there is evidence to suggest that McLuhan was particularly influential on these poets and assisted in articulating the grounds from which much of their work was produced. McLuhan made a significant impact on Vancouver, including in the late 1950s, when he gave a lecture at the Arts Club, and in 1965, when the Festival of Contemporary Arts paid tribute to McLuhan with its nickname “The Medium Is the Message.” McLuhan’s most striking early appearance in the work of the borderblur poets is in the epigraph to bissett’s 1966 book of poetry *We Sleep Inside Each Other All*, published by Nichol through Ganglia Press. bissett writes,

Marshall McLuhan sz we are poisd between th typographic individualist trip th industrial revolution & the electronic age we have been in for sum time, between a unique dis tance and alienation privacy well now iullbe in th study for th rest of th night with my nose in a boo k & th corporate image tribally we are a part of out extensions do reach now have been reach thruout all time th historical jazz consumd in th greater fire of mo vies t v & lo ve.⁶⁶

As a partial explanation of his book, bissett locates his writing at the intellectual vanguard, articulating, through McLuhan, an awareness of the shifting nature of the mid-twentieth century from the industrial age toward the electronic age. It is not entirely clear if bissett is positioning *We Sleep Inside Each Other All* as a response to McLuhan’s theorization of the age, for there is a cheeky quality to his quip “iullbe in th study for th rest of th night with my nose in a boo k.”⁶⁷ bissett’s tone may be unclear, and he does have a complicated relationship with academic modes of thought and writing; however, a survey of his poetry from 1966 onward suggests that he was writing in response to many of the cultural maladies and trends identified in McLuhan’s writing.

McLuhan’s influence was apparent in many of the borderblur poets’ subsequent activities and publications. Though McLuhan’s name is not explicitly

used in the previously mentioned segment on *Extension*, his thinking permeates Webb's discussion with Nichol and bissett regarding their "nonlinear" poetics, a buzzword likely borrowed from McLuhan since he, too, liked to use that as a description for his aphoristic style of writing. bissett's mention of Canada within an international network of poetry—encompassing Brazil, Belgium, Holland, England, Scotland, and Japan—is indicative of the McLuhanesque conception of the world as a "global village." Webb also mentions Nichol's tape machine experiments and asks, "Is this just extending yourself, or is it more connected with leaving the meaning out of the word?" Nichol suggests that it is more about giving an "electric context to the word," and Webb's use of the word "extending" in reference to the tape machine is equally telling.⁶⁸ It is a reference to the notion of extension that McLuhan develops in *Understanding Media*, which Webb uses to understand Nichol's and bissett's poetry.⁶⁹ The interview is indicative not only of McLuhan's influence on bissett, Nichol, and Webb, and of their understanding of poetry more generally, but also of just how deeply McLuhanesque thinking had embedded itself in the cultural zeitgeist during this period.

Nichol most directly engaged McLuhan's thinking in 1982 in an essay that remained unpublished until 1989 (when it was featured in a special issue of the *Journal of Canadian Poetry*). The text was initially intended to appear in a book on McLuhan, presumably to be edited by Fred Flahiff and Wilfred Watson, but was never published. Nichol draws a clear connection between his work and McLuhan's writing style by way of the pun, a literary device both authors evidently loved. "No one punned more seriously than McLuhan," writes Nichol, suggesting that McLuhan's punning "is not trying to fix 'a' or 'the' reality—he wants to open realities."⁷⁰ This inclination toward "openings" guided Nichol, as seen in many works, including *Still Water* and *The Martyrology* (the latter his life's work). Indeed, McLuhan and Nichol both share a linguistic playfulness and a desire to liberate its meaningfulness from singular and standardized usage. The pun is one of the many ways Nichol's writings engage an aesthetic register of borderblur since the pun is typically used to blur the multiple meanings that might be assigned to a single word.

McLuhan directly influenced Nichol and bissett in ways that apparently affected their writing. They found inspiration in his work and used him as a foil. However, McLuhan is cited by many like-minded poets throughout the second half of the twentieth century. In the catalogue for the exhibiton *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts*, held at UBC in 1969, Ed Varney

declares that concrete poetry is “medium as message.”⁷¹ He made this claim on behalf of sixty-three artists and poets from Canada and abroad, including Nichol, bissett, Copithorne, Gerry Gilbert, and Stephen Scobie. In his 1970 revolutionary statement “for a poetry of blood,” McCaffery refers to sound as “the extension of human biology,”⁷² echoing the subtitle of McLuhan’s *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. One year later, John Robert Colombo uses McLuhan as a point of entry for readers of *New Direction in Canadian Poetry* (1971), an anthology of mostly concrete poetry that featured Nichol, bissett, McCaffery, Copithorne, UU, Aylward, Hart Broudy, and Andrew Suknaski. In a note accompanying McCaffery’s contribution, an untitled work that would later be featured in *Broken Mandala* (1974), Colombo asks, “Is the ape-man emerging from what Marshall McLuhan called ‘the age of literacy’ into a post-literate age of electronic communication?”⁷³ There are more examples to be catalogued, but all of this is to say that McLuhan’s writings loomed over this generation of writers, who engaged with his work explicitly so as to theorize their own practices. They took seriously both his prophetic concepts of media and community, as well as his warning about media’s impacts on human life. Most importantly, however, their poetry resonates with McLuhan’s theorizations of an emergent culture that in turn informed their own avant-garde poetics.

“Fuck the Avant-Garde”: Borderblur and Theories of the Avant-Garde

The previous sections of this chapter have portrayed Canadian borderblur as an intermedial approach to literary production that was influenced by the intellectual vanguard of its day and was incongruous with an ascendant mainstream Canadian literary tradition. These writers positioned themselves as anti-establishment individuals who produced work that was aesthetically and often sociologically distinct from Canada’s nationalist tradition. These characteristics neatly align borderblur with conventional definitions of the avant-garde, which, according to scholar Pauline Butling, identifies “both a social position—ahead of the mainstream—and to a subject position—that of adventurous, forward looking individuals.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Gregory Betts and Christian Bök describe avant-gardists as “deviant writers who, against prudence, decide to break from the orthodox pathways to fame in order to become not so much unseemly to their contemporary peers as untimely to their contemporary epoch.”⁷⁵ To a great extent, these attributes are drawn

from foundational avant-garde theorizations by such writers as Peter Bürger, Renato Poggioli, Matei Călinescu, Charles Russell, and others. At the risk of oversimplifying, this body of scholarship has assisted in creating roughly two frameworks for thinking about the avant-garde: a traditional aesthetic model and a sociological model. The former emphasizes challenging and reinventing artistic expression, while the latter, according to Bürger, tends to advance institutional critique and offer alternative forums for aesthetic activities and is often guided by programmatic texts. These two approaches to avant-gardism have dominated the discourse for decades.

In her 2014 essay “Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde,” poet and critic Cathy Park Hong criticizes the historical avant-gardes on account of their exclusionary logic. Writing within the American context, she states that “to encounter the history of avant-garde poetry is to encounter a racist tradition.”⁷⁶ “American avant-garde poetry,” she continues, “has been an overwhelmingly white enterprise, ignoring major swaths of innovators—namely poets from past African American literary movements—whose prodigious writings have vitalized the margins, challenged institutions, and introduced radical languages and forms that avant-gardists have usurped without proper acknowledgment.”⁷⁷ Hong further explains that poets who write about issues related to identity, especially racial identity—though they may write in ways that are recognizably avant-garde in terms of their aesthetic (take Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée* [1982], for example)—are excluded and instead framed as “anti-intellectual, without literary merit, no complexity, sentimental, manufactured, feminine, niche-focused, woefully out-of-date and therefore woefully unhip, politically light, and deadliest of all, used as bait by market forces’ calculated branding of boutique liberalism.”⁷⁸ Hong offers an understandably polemical solution to this problem: “Fuck the avant-garde. We must hew our own path.”⁷⁹ Importantly, Hong identifies a crucial aporia within the thinking and art making of the historical avant-gardes, highlighting avant-gardism’s lack of self-criticism regarding the historical and ongoing exclusion of writers of colour from its canons. While Hong’s necessary critical intervention is focused primarily on American avant-garde poetry, her critique can be applied to a variety of national contexts.

In Canada, similar critiques of avant-gardism have been periodically advanced in recent decades. Preceding Hong’s call by nearly a decade, Butling suggests that the established discourse of avant-garde theorization requires reinvention because, in Canada as in the United States, it is typically bound to

white, masculinist cultural rebellion that excludes women and writers of colour. Like Hong, Butling's solution is to abandon such descriptors as "avant-garde" and to instead theorize unorthodox, disruptive, and deviant writers and texts. Butling therefore calls for new terminology, privileging the word "radical" to describe this work and seeking to characterize it by underscoring the power of the prefix "re" in this context. Butling here draws from Fred Wah's notion of "re poetics," which gestures toward processes of "redefining, rewriting, reclaiming, rearticulating, reinventing, reterritorializing, and reformulating."⁸⁰ For Butling, such gestures constitute a kind of literary radicalism: "rewriting cultural scripts and reconfiguring literary/social formations. The goal is to *change*, not conserve, past and present constructions."⁸¹ Working within this revisionist framework, the avant-garde's hopefulness and unorthodoxy are preserved, but in a way that is potentially less exclusionary than established models.

Butling's and Hong's concerns regarding the avant-garde's overwhelming exclusionary logic are not to be ignored, and both writers make useful interventions in the field. While I am certainly an advocate for inventing entirely new ways of thinking about literature, and especially unorthodox literature, I worry that doing so in this context might disconnect Canadian borderblur poetics from historical and concurrent avant-garde movements with which they identified. Additionally, along with a new generation of avant-garde scholars such as Sophie Seita, Jean-Thomas Tremblay, and Andrew Strombeck, I believe there is something worth saving, or at least salvaging, from the term "avant-garde." To counter the exclusionary logic that informs the legacy of avant-gardism, these scholars advocate for a redefinition of the term, approaching it with more flexibility and a willingness to tie it to a wider variety of aesthetic, social, and political commitments. They outline new, alternative models to reinvigorate the discourse, and these inform my thinking in the remainder of this chapter. As I outline in this section, Canadian borderblur is representative of both the aesthetic and the sociological arms of avant-gardism, but there are incongruities between existing historical theorizations and the literary practices of borderblur in Canada that prompt me to consider an alternate formation of avant-garde theory, drawing from post-1945 considerations of avant-gardism as advanced by Seita, Charles Bernstein, and David Antin. Doing so allows me to locate Canadian borderblur within avant-garde discourse while acknowledging its distinctive qualities.

As suggested above, the principles of avant-gardism are largely drawn from the foundational writings of such theorists as Bürger, Călinescu, Poggioli, Russell, and others whose work paints a complex portrait of historical avant-garde movements and their identifiable leaders, goals, manifestos, and coherent aesthetics. The canonization of Surrealism and its goals, for example, as outlined in Breton's manifesto (noted earlier in this chapter), is evidence of the mutual interrelationship between established avant-garde theorizations and avant-garde movements. Movements like Surrealism informed the discourse of avant-gardism, and, in turn, theories pertaining to the avant-garde secured Surrealism's lasting presence within the discourse. The work of Bürger and other scholars have formulated what I understand to be conventional theorizations of avant-gardism. Their theories, however, do not fulsomely support discussions of Canadian borderblur, whose adherents gathered around a loose set of social and aesthetic principles. They were not necessarily writing collectively out of an allegiance to a specific social or political cause, but they did seek to expand the field of writing and publishing in Canada by opening more pathways between artistic modes so as to expand the possibilities of expression.

The word "avant-garde," as a descriptor for borderblur, is problematic in itself since it denotes militarism. It was used early on by the French military to describe a small group of shock troops who would scout ahead of the main body of soldiers and clear a path for its safe arrival at the place of battle. According to traditional theories of avant-gardism, avant-gardists are the literary counterparts to the military shock troops forging ahead to intercept an oncoming force. Hence, one of the customary objectives of avant-garde writing and art is to shock its audience, either morally or psychologically. The violent connotations of the word tend, however, to overshadow the history of avant-gardism itself. While avant-garde movements such as Futurism undoubtedly embraced violence within their aesthetic and social purviews, other movements like Dadaism and Surrealism were decidedly anti-war and populated with pacifists who co-opted the language of physical conflict to describe their own war against the violent culture of their time. It seems wholly inappropriate to dismiss the term on the grounds of its violent connotations; rather, Futurism aside, we might say that one of the central aims of the historical avant-garde was to invert violent connotations, or, in the case of Surrealism and Dadaism, to turn the violence back onto the violent culture in which these artists were working.

As with these historical examples, the militaristic connotations of the avant-garde label are incommensurate with borderblur since many of these writers held anti-war sentiments. One of the founding editors of *TISH*, Jamie Reid, a poet and friend to bissett, Nichol, and others, describes the psychological threats posed by the Cold War and the lasting traumas of nuclear destruction during the Second World War: “[We] lived every day and dreamed every night in fear that the city might actually be incinerated, the entire earth of people wasted and destroyed.”⁸² bissett, as critic Jim Daems argues, “has been critically attuned to the infiltration of militarization in Canadian culture—from his early anti-Vietnam work to the present day conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with Canadian corporate complicity in these military theatres.”⁸³ Copithorne, too, highlights her involvement in the anti-war movements as fundamental aspects of her experiences in the literary scene in 1960s Vancouver.⁸⁴ In noting these two figures, whose writings helped to lay the foundations of this paratradition, it’s appropriate to suggest that borderblur also grew out of the counterculture’s anti-war values.

For these reasons, traditional conceptions of the avant-garde are somewhat incongruous with Canadian borderblur. The work of these poets, then, also asks us to reconsider and reinvent certain facets of avant-gardism in order to swerve from the word’s erroneous associations with violence and monolithic theories to acknowledge new possibilities for appreciating these artists’ status as cultural outsiders. Betts, for example, has claimed that poets such as bissett, Copithorne, McCaffery, and Nichol comprise an avant-garde node he identifies as *Canadian postmodern decadence*. As such, their work is characterized by “a liberating turn away from convention, order, and Western traditions.” Echoing Perloff, Betts also sees in these writers’ work a “poetics of rupture . . . that gleefully cast aside meaning, closure, and denotative signification.”⁸⁵ As an emergent force during what is now often recognized as the advent of Canadian postmodernism, their work signified a loss of faith in language as a communicative mode, a process that played itself out in acts of “creative destruction” to “explore and expose the limits of an overly conventionalized language.”⁸⁶ Betts notes, too, that despite this inclination toward disruption, a “sense of possible redemption or even revolution, never quite formulated or realized, lurks behind a great deal of this experimental activity.”⁸⁷ Instead, the borderblur poets’ work—without the autotelic aims of a revolutionary order—“halted their rebellion at the stage of personal liberation.”⁸⁸ Betts’s argument captures borderblur’s spirit as a concerted

movement characterized by linguistic disruption and eschewal of literary convention, but his account ends in the early 1970s, even though these poets continued to work in the modes described here well into the 1970s and '80s. And some of course continue to do so today. However, regardless of the particular temporal frame, I am concerned that characterizing borderblur poets broadly as negative revolutionaries who stopped at personal liberation will inadvertently obscure the sociological dimension of avant-gardism and its centrality to Canadian borderblur.⁸⁹ This social dimension understandably exceeds the scope of Betts's analysis. However, for all the emphasis on the avant-gardists' intention to blur "life and art," as is frequently repeated by scholars like Bürger and Russell, borderblur poets' role as social agents active within various local, national, and international networks must be accounted for. While Betts's theory of Canadian postmodern decadence is quite robust, a wider and more open definition of this particular avant-garde paratradition is needed to account for both the aesthetic and sociological aspects of Canadian borderblur.

Theorist and artist Sophie Seita adds much-needed nuance to the discussion of avant-gardism when she refers to *avant-garde proto-forms*, which she defines according to four specific criteria: "(1) the avant-garde is a print or publishing community consisting of multiple participants and heterogenous materials; (2) it usually engages inventively with its medium of publication; (3) it is provisional in its aims, practices, and participants; and (4) the avant-garde is what is called avant-garde. It is a discursive and malleable construct within a not necessarily cohesive interpretive community."⁹⁰ This definition largely informs my own understanding of avant-gardism, and in subsequent chapters I try to show how these characteristics resonate in the context of Canadian borderblur. Seita's theory combines the aesthetic and sociological sides of avant-garde theorization. She "conceives of avant-gardes as provisional networks of affiliation rather than rigidly demarcated groups, where *proto-* suggests provisionality and heterogeneity, while *forms* stress media, genres, and groups."⁹¹ Given that the poets considered here formed a loose constellation based on intermedial approaches to poetic practice, a "network of affiliation" is already a better description for borderblur's Canadian proliferation since it acknowledges the group's interconnectedness even in the absence of programmatic texts around which the poets would rally. This comes from Seita's focus on little literary magazines that challenge common conceptions of how avant-garde networks form. These networks, for example,

accommodate avant-gardist movements that do not fit neatly within a single aesthetic or medium and lack manifestos, and that accommodate a broad range of related activities. Much of the work examined in this book was published in either little magazines or through poet-run small presses; likewise, the performance-based works were often staged at alternative venues such as artist-run centres and independent art spaces. These forums emerged in response to the gatekeeping mechanisms of established and authoritative Canadian cultural institutions. Seitá's model of avant-gardism accounts for the social structure and heterogenous aesthetics of these networks.

The sociological aspects of Seitá's theorization are drawn in part from poet Charles Bernstein's writing on the value of alternative poetics and the social and economic networks that form around them. Put differently, Bernstein concretizes the sociological dimensions of avant-garde practices, with an emphasis on their propensity for community building. He describes alternative poetics as conveying a "refusal to submit to marketplace agendas,"⁹² a phrase that describes numerous avant-gardes and resonates with borderblur's relationship to mainstream Canadian literary culture. However, the "power of our alternative institutions of poetry," Bernstein writes,

is their commitment to scales that allow for the flourishing of the artform, not the maximizing of the audience; to production and presentation not publicity; to exploring the known not manufacturing renown. These institutions continue, against all odds, to find value in the local, the particular, the partisan, the committed, the tiny, the peripheral, the unpopular, the eccentric, the difficult, the complex, the homely; and in the formation and reformation, dissolution and questioning, of imaginary or virtual or partial or unavowable communities and/or uncommunities.⁹³

Bernstein's analysis is notable for the way it also presents avant-garde poetic paratraditions as sites of opening rather than opaque, closed communities that abide by predefined sets of principles. Bernstein claims that "when you touch this press, you touch a person."⁹⁴ His conception of avant-gardism as social work directly connects with Nichol's conception of borderblur, wherein he emphasizes that intermedial approaches to literary practice open new ways of communicating and connecting with people: "how can the poet reach out

and touch you physically as say the sculptor does by caressing you with objects you caress?”⁹⁵ Seita and Bernstein, for their part, outline an avant-gardism that connects to some traditional meanings of the word while reinventing certain facets of it. “Avant-garde,” then, comes to describe a constellation of like-minded poets and their aesthetic practices without imposing an artificial homogeneity or adopting a nakedly exclusionary lens.

If Seita and Bernstein create an aperture in the discourse through which to better articulate a sociological reading of the non-programmatic avant-garde, there remains the issue of accounting for both the rebellious aesthetic of borderblur and its timeliness in the context of Canada’s cultural development. There is substantial evidence to suggest that these writers and their aesthetics were seen as rebellious—recall the descriptions of Nichol’s and bissett’s work in the House of Commons. However, their work also asks us to reconsider the avant-garde’s relationship to time and the common association of avant-gardism with futurity to which Butling, Bök, and Betts earlier gestured. Thus far, I have implied that borderblur is not necessarily a forward-looking movement—though, in hindsight, we can see how these poets’ intermedial approach to literary production anticipated the work of certain digital literary forms (as discussed in the conclusion to this book). While McLuhan’s writings represented an intellectual vanguard in the 1960s and ’70s, they were also the work of an intellectual trying to make sense of the emergence of media in his exact moment. Borderblur was a response to these ideas, and these poets were clearly trying to reconceive art’s meaning-making possibilities within these conditions. Likewise, Canadian literary scholar Caroline Bayard, in her book *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-modernism* (1989), outlines the ways in which concrete poets like Nichol, bissett, and McCaffery drew from emergent post-structuralist and deconstructionist ideas. Thus, to describe borderblur with reference to the avant-garde’s supposedly “forward-looking” ethos risks misrepresenting Canadian borderblur. These poets were, in fact, quite timely.

Poet David Antin offers an interesting reconfiguration of avant-gardism in his talk poem “what it means to be avant-garde.” Antin, who as an associate of Fluxus during the 1960s and ’70s has been described as an avant-gardist himself, rejects a monolithic view of avant-garde scholarship, knowing that this largely means describing work in reductive terms such as “shocking or making new.”⁹⁶ For Antin, avant-gardism is characterized by responsiveness to the conditions of the present, to the time and place in which one is working,

without necessarily being preoccupied with innovation, newness, or shock. A transcription of this talk poem relays these ideas in the following terms:

and i did the best I could under the circumstances of being there then which is my image of what an artist does and is somebody who does the best he can under the circumstances without worrying about making it new or shocking because the best you can do depends on what you have to do and where and if you have to invent something new to do the work at hand you will but not if you have a ready-made that will work and is close at hand and you want to get on with the rest of the business

then youll
pick up the tool thats there a tool somebody else has made that will work and youll lean on it and feel grateful.⁹⁷

Antin thus conceives of the avant-garde artist as someone who is responsive to their moment, to the specific conditions in which they are working.

This decentering of newness and invention directly applies to borderblur since these poets began with the pursuit of something they thought was new only to learn that the possibility of intermedial poetics was already being actively explored by other poets around the world. Antin continues: “and as for the future it will find us all by itself whether we look backwards or forwards it will be there at the top of the stairs.”⁹⁸ Antin here encapsulates a flexible avant-gardist ethos, not as a forward-looking and militaristic operation but as an openness to the present and willingness to work within it. The work of Canadian borderblur poets, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, offered responses to the emergent conditions of the electronic age—its technologies, economies, culture, and aesthetics. We shall see how much of this intermedial work emerged in dialogue with the dominant communication technologies of the time—mimeograph machines, typewriters, television, tape recorders, and more—and how these technologies gave shape to borderblur poetry. Combined with Bernstein’s and Seita’s sociological theories of avant-gardism, Antin’s ethos captures the spirit of borderblur with its networked affiliations, its emphasis on finding alternatives to artistic hegemonies, and of its willingness to create a dialogue with the conditions of the present.

Antin's characterization of avant-gardism as a response to the conditions of the present point back to Hong's comments regarding the exclusionary logic that informs conventional avant-gardism, and especially the historical avant-garde's overwhelming whiteness. Theoretically, Antin's positioning of avant-gardism as an art concerned with the present should serve to create space for excluded writers. Placing the present at the centre of avant-gardism should create room for works that are aesthetically recognizable as avant-garde but that have been dislocated on account of the dominant focus on identity. Identity, after all, is always a central concern in any present context, and contemporary avant-garde scholarship should recognize its relevance. With that said, positioning Canadian borderblur within the avant-gardist discourse described above does not entirely shield it from the critiques made by Hong, Butling, or others. In the case of borderblur, the poets comprising this paratradition are, with some exceptions, predominantly white men, with some white women.⁹⁹ While issues related to race and cultural appropriation evidently stirred relatively little debate at the time, I believe, at the risk of being accused of presentism, that these issues are worth briefly examining here. What follows is neither defence nor condemnation. Rather, I point to these issues so as to recognize that so-called progressive literary movements intended to create openings can also have their limits.

We might take Nichol's interest in non-European cultures as an instructive example of Canadian borderblur's complex relationship to questions of identity, race, and cultural appropriation. In *Doors: To Oz & Other Landscapes* (1979), Nichol states that he described his earliest concrete poems as "ideopoems," a term that nods to Ernest Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (1919). He was, as he admits, "very interested in Chinese, Japanese, Haida, and Kwakiutl poetic modes."¹⁰⁰ Referring to the latter Indigenous poetic mode, Nichol indirectly describes his approach as working in consonance with these poetics while conversing with Butling and Wah in 1977 and 1978. Discussing Wah's *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (1975), Nichol and Wah acknowledge their approach to Indigenous cultural forms as outsiders, remarking upon how they project their own experience onto what they see in pictographic writings. Wah used pictographs as a kind of raw material for his poetry, an approach that Nichol seems sympathetic to during their discussion. Though such practices did not seemingly cause a stir at the time, Hong might identify this as an instance where "avant-gardists have usurped without proper acknowledgment."¹⁰¹ Such an approach suggests

a lack of sensitivity to problems caused by the appropriation of Indigenous cultures by non-Indigenous poets.

In terms of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity, some poets' inclination toward what they considered "openness" enabled them to cherry-pick certain aspects of other cultures with seemingly little consideration for the significance of their actions. I find possible traces of this in bissett's early sound poetry, wherein he integrates tropes of Indigenous chant into his work. Maxine Gadd has described bissett's use of both Indigenous and cowboy imagery as a form of escapism, an "attempt to get the hell out of being a weak, miserable, near-sighted, undernourished, physically rundown, feeble city intellectual."¹⁰² Gadd explains away bissett's actions as mere "fantasy."¹⁰³ However, bissett's seeming appropriation of Indigenous chant forms may inadvertently contribute to Canada's long-standing history of colonial violence through the appropriation and misrepresentation of Indigenous traditions.¹⁰⁴ As I will explore in the next chapter, McCaffery's poetry—especially *Carnival*—makes privileged assumptions about the body and disembodiment. Poet and critic Andy Weaver argues that McCaffery occupies a position of white male privilege and that this positionality is at the core of much of his work.¹⁰⁵ Many writers who are marginalized by culture are forced to acknowledge the subject position from which they write, while white, able-bodied male writers can assume that the body is a neutral, non-signifying thing. This underscores a seeming problem with the universalist principles that guide the poetics of some of the artists within Canadian borderblur's network of affiliation, leaving them blind to the nuances of white privilege and cultural appropriation.

On the other side of this, we will also see in the following chapters compelling works by writers who take issues of identity seriously. Copithorne, Rosenberg, Kemp, Shikatani, and others treat their intermedial work as more than just a means of resisting the Canadian literary tradition in order to advance sharp social critiques of racial and gendered oppression. Subsequent chapters will at times address these issues in the context of individual works. For now, the issues that arise when considering identity and borderblur's general desire for an expansion of Canadian literary traditions illustrate two key points. First, I see these poets' efforts to both appeal to other cultural forms and to privilege disembodiment as attempts to divorce themselves from the resoundingly white, anglophone colonial literary and artistic traditions on which Canada was founded—traditions that were being formalized and enshrined during the mid-twentieth century as Canadians were supposedly

formulating an image of their own. They engaged with and appropriated other cultural forms in an attempt, perhaps, to escape their own. On the other hand, issues such as cultural appropriation highlight one of the consequences of perceiving a vast, open world amid the thrall of globalizing processes: these poets saw the world as a more open space for increased cross-cultural dialogue, even if they had not yet perceived the ethical quandaries and colonial legacies that such an approach entails. The following chapters will examine how this emergent sense of an electronic, networked, and open world compelled intermedial poetics of Canadian borderblur to create new forms, and, more importantly, how its conditions informed the creation and proliferation of a significant Canadian literary paratradition.