Executive Fictions: Revisiting *Information*

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ABSTRACT

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There is growing recognition of the significance of the 1970 MoMA exhibition organized by Kynaston McShine (1935-), *Information*, to broader narratives of Conceptual art and the so-called Information Society. Previous studies have focussed on *Information* as a symptom of processes of informatization (Meltzer, 2006) as well as the aspirational politics of 1960s counterculture (Allan, 2004) and the heightened visibility of corporate sponsorship (Staniszewski, 1998) within the sanctified space of the museum.

The present study amplifies and revises these findings by singling out for exploration the executive roles performed by three exhibition participants, McShine, IAIN BAXTER& (1936-) and Lucy Lippard (1937-). Within the context of the corporate exhibition environment of *Information*, the supernumerary operations enacted by these figures generated an abrasive inter-play of redundant information by calling attention to and multiplying managerial functions traditionally vested in the curator. I argue that this McLuhanesque logic of decentralized management was adopted in response to the effects of information speed-up and youth culture. As the museum is transformed into the technological *newseum* or synaesthetic playground envisioned by McLuhan's associate Harley Parker (1915-1992), the curator *drops out* and the artist *drops in*. The non-oppositional, but nonetheless disruptive, logic of these roles charts a parallel, but distinct, course to the more familiar strategy of institutional *critique* deployed by Hans Haacke (1936-) within the context of the same show.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

vi. List of Figures

1. Executive Fictions: Revisiting *Information*

    16. Methodology

    24. McShine: Curator as Dropout

    50. IAIN BAXTER&: Artist as "Drop-in"

    63. Lippard: The Critic Takes Over

    79. Conclusion: The 'Modular' Museum as Muse

86. Bibliography

96. Figures

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 *Installation View of the Exhibition Information*, 1970. From Ken Allan, "Understanding *Information*," in *Conceptual Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris, 144-168 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28.

Fig. 2 *Installation View of the Exhibition Information*, 1970. From Ken Allan, "Understanding *Information*," in *Conceptual Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris, 144-168 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147.

Fig. 3 Lawrence Fried. *Installation View of the 'Information' Show at the Museum of Modern Art*. From Hilton Kramer, "Miracles, 'Information,' 'Recommended Reading,'" *New York Times* (July 12, 1970): 87.

Fig. 4 Vito Acconci, *Service Area*, 1970. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *The Museum as Muse* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 173.

Fig. 5 N.E. Thing Co., *Thinking Re: Concepts, Art (If That's the Proper Word), Communications, Media, Anything*, 1970. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 89.

Fig. 6 Jan van Raay, *Kestutis Zapkus, Lucy Lippard, Jean Toche, and Other Art Workers (Seen on the Left) Break Up a Trustees' Dinner at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 12 January 1971. From Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 139.

Fig. 7 Hans Haacke, *MoMA-Poll*, 1970. Interactive installation with clear plastic voting boxes, text panel, chart of results, at *Information* exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, 1970. From Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 194.

Fig. 8 *Information Machine*, c. 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 9 *Information, Museum of Modern Art* (showing Olivetti's *Information Machine* at centre), 1970. From Les Levine, "The Information Fall-Out," *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971): 266.

Fig. 10 *Information, Museum of Modern Art*, 1970. From Les Levine, "The Information Fall-Out," *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971): 266.

Fig. 11 Kynaston McShine with the assistance of Charles Froom, *Information*, 1970. From Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 273.

Fig. 12 *Group Frontera installation, Information*, 1970. From Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 274.

Fig. 13 Kynaston McShine with the assistance of Charles Froom, *Information*, 1970. From Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 274.

Fig. 14 *One of Broegger's Platforms Frustrates a Viewer, So He Leans*, 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 15 *Unidentified Images of Sacco Beanbag Chair Originally Reproduced in 'Domus,'* March 1969. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 157.

Fig. 16 *Burlap-draped Two-by-fours by Helio Oiticica are what He Calls a 'Nest' upon which the Public is Invited to Climb, Rest or Sit in Padded Cubicles or Platforms*, 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 17 Harley Parker, *Plan View, Experimental Gallery*, 1967. From Museum of the City of New York and The New York Council on the Arts. *Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values of...Museum Communication with the Viewing Public* (New York: The Museum of the City of New York and The New York Council on the Arts, 1967), 36.

Fig. 18 Façade, Museum of Modern Art, c. 1964. From Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art: The Past's Future," *Journal of Design History* 5, no. 3 (1992): 211.

Fig. 19 IAIN BAXTER&. "IAIN BAXTER& to Kynaston McShine" (May 1, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 20 *Plan for an Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam*, 1960. From Libero Andreotti, "Play-Tactics of the 'Internationale Situationniste,'" *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 51.

Fig. 21 Bror Grenfeldt, *Unidentified Image Originally Reproduced in 'Domus,'* April 1969. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 156.

Fig. 22 N.E. Thing Co., *President Seated at Telex Carrying Out 50,000-mile*

Transmission (at right), 1970; *Telexed Self Portrait From Memory* (at left), 1969. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 91.

Fig. 23 *Lucy Lippard Demanding '50% Black Women Artists' as Part of the Ad Hoc Women's Committee Protest, Whitney Museum of American Art*, 1971. From Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 161.

Fig. 24 *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*, 1971. Book cover featuring *Wall Drawing #1* (1968) by Sol LeWitt.

Fig. 25 James Dee, *Installation Shot of Exhibition to Benefit the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, Inaugural Exhibition, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, October 22-November 1, 1968* [Works by Will Insley (left) and Jo Baer], 1968. From Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 141.

Fig. 26 Lucy Lippard, *Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine*, April 19, 1970. From Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 27. Lucy Lippard, *Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine*, May 5, 1970. From Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 28 Michael Lauretano, *Cover Design, Information Catalogue*, 1970.

Fig. 29 Source *image for Michael Lauretano's design for the cover of the Information catalogue*, c. 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 30 *Source image for Michael Lauretano's design for the cover of the Information catalogue*, c. 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 31 General Idea, *The Boutique from the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion*, 1980. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *The Museum as Muse* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 175.

Introduction

> Our chief resources are the gripes and jokes, the problems and breakdowns, of managers themselves; for therein lie the solutions and breakthroughs via pattern recognition of the processes involved.
>
> —Marshall McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt, *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout*, 1972.[1]

> From now on, it is the businessman who becomes a model for the artist, as in a fair exchange of roles.
>
> —Stephen Wright, "The Double Ontological Status of the Artistic Enterprise," 2008.[2]

There is growing recognition of the significance of *Information* (Figs. 1-3), an exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art from July 2 to September 20, 1970, to broader histories of both Conceptual art and the so-called Information Society. Though not the first exhibition of Conceptualism in North America, *Information* had greater impact than contemporary shows, according to Ken Allan, due to its unprecedented international scope (over 150 artists from countries including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, the United States and Yugoslavia) and geopolitical focus, the accompanying catalogue's singular blend of photo/textual documentation and journalistic materials, and, above all, its innovative curatorial strategy.[3] In addition to these factors, the exhibition warrants special consideration for its attentiveness to the socio-economic effects of processes of

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[1] Marshall McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt, *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1972), 13.
[2] Stephen Wright, "The Double Ontological Status of the Artistic Enterprise," in *Les entreprises critiques/Critical Companies*, ed. Yann Toma, 189-193 (Saint-Etienne: Cité du design, 2008), 186.
[3] Ken Allan, "Understanding Information," in *Conceptual Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris, 144-168 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 144.

informatization, explored by Eve Meltzer, as well as its inauguration of the contemporary phase of intensive and highly visible corporate sponsorship of museums noted by Mary Ann Staniszewski.[4]

As the curator of *Information*, Kynaston McShine (1935-) adopted the strategy—unusual for a group show at MoMA—of soliciting proposals from artists for site-specific works, thereby abandoning the established (connoisseurial) logic of curatorial selection.[5] This strategy resulted in many works being accepted sight-unseen (most notoriously, Hans Haacke's *MoMA Poll*) as well as the inclusion of artists in published lists of exhibition participants who never actually contributed to *Information*. Within the context of 1960s curation, this exercise in out-sourcing redefined the functions of the curator in far-reaching ways that will be explored in greater depth below. As McShine dropped out of the traditional (centralist) curatorial role, IAIN BAXTER& (1936-)—acting in a pseudo-consultancy role as the president of a conceptual business (the Vancouver-based N.E. Thing Co.)—dropped-in, as remote service provider. The Telex and Telecopier works contributed by BAXTER& to *Information* and its catalogue allowed him and his Company's innovative, flexible business model, based on the theories of McLuhan, to infiltrate the Museum. One of the most glaring anomalies effected by McShine's inclusive and permissive approach to the curatorial role was critic-curator Lucy Lippard's contribution to the catalogue: "Absentee Information." Invited to write a critical essay for the catalogue, Lippard (1937-) instead sent instructions to McShine prescribing a series of chance-based actions. Only the first of Lippard's instructions—in the form of a

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[4] Eve Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (2006): 115-135; Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).
[5] Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, 269.

conceptual decision tree—were carried out and its "findings" printed in the catalogue: an archival game delegated to staff of the MoMA Library which resulted in an annotated list of exhibition participants, wherein the annotations—culled from reference works stored in the Library—were determined by chance. The disruptive role-blurring effected by this gesture is registered by the scare quotes deployed by McShine in identifying Lippard as a "critic" in his prefatory remarks in the *Information* catalogue. Lippard's hostile takeover of the *Information* catalogue parallels her coeval role as a decision-maker and leader within the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC); Lippard's intervention recasts criticism as decision and leadership.

The priority accorded to *Information* by Allan and other recent scholars may also be attributed to the general re-evaluation of Conceptualism sparked by Jane Farver and Luis Camnitzer's controversial 1999 Queens Museum of Art exhibition, *Global Conceptualism*. Revisionist accounts of Conceptual art have thrown into crisis American critic Lucy Lippard's influential characterization of Conceptualism as an emancipatory dematerialization of the art object; that is, a strategic short-circuiting of established systems of fine art production, exhibition and—most importantly—consumption through a de-emphasis of the visual, and even physical, attributes of the artwork.[6] By contrast, the most current slew of critical studies of Conceptualism—by such writers as Alexander Alberro, Eve Meltzer, Julia Bryan-Wilson and David Tomas—re-visit the dematerialization thesis, arguing that such Conceptual tactics actually reproduced and

[6] See Lippard's influential "Postface" in her book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, 263-264 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).

colluded with the very market forces and governmental policies which Conceptual art was initially theorized (by Lippard and her followers) as interrupting.[7]

Viewed through this critical lens, dematerialized practices did not necessarily mark a break with the commodity logic of capitalism. Rather, tactics of dematerialization are seen to have mirrored shifts in the late capitalist economy, as investment shifted away from production (the manufacturing of tangible products) to the administration of intangible commodities (e.g., knowledge management) in the late 1960s and 1970s. The principal value of these revisionist narratives lies not, however, in their exploration of the limitations of Conceptualism as an anti-capitalist enterprise (to which Lippard herself readily admitted in the aftermath of Conceptual art's six-year tenure),[8] but in their attentiveness to the effects generated by Conceptual artists' performance of administrative labour and occupation of managerial subject positions specific to an emergent regime of cognitive capitalism.

Largely responsible for this shift in thinking about Conceptual art as labour was a 1990 essay by Benjamin Buchloh, in which he described the practice—made famous by Sol LeWitt—of hiring third parties to execute artworks, as an "aesthetic of administration."[9] "[A]s one [...] merely administering labour and production (rather than producing)," Buchloh likened the role of the Conceptual artist to that performed by the generic functionary of "typical" (i.e. bureaucratic) post-war American corporations. The

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[7] David Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories and the Overdetermination of a Business Practice: N.E. Thing Co. at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, June 4 – July 6, 1969," in *Documentary Protocols (1967-1975)*, ed. Vincent Bonin, 217-253 (Montréal: Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, 2010); Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
[8] Lippard, "Postface," 263.
[9] Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 133.

extent to which this analogy has contributed to the current surge of interest in artists as service providers and cultural workers cannot be underestimated.[10] Yet while Buchloh's bureaucratic paradigm may be well-suited to the analysis of such administrative practices as those deployed within the context of New York dealer Seth Siegelaub's 1969 exhibition, *Office Work*, I will argue that it presents an inadequate account of the imaginary features of the managerial culture performed by such participants in *Information* as IAIN BAXTER&, Lucy Lippard and Kynaston McShine. These figures, I will argue, presented themselves neither as "art workers" nor "administrators" (in the Taylorist signification of these terms articulated by Buchloh *et al*). Rather, they styled themselves in the mould of the New Age executives described pre-eminently by McLuhan in *Culture is Our Business* (1970) and *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (1972).

Buchloh's analysis tacitly draws upon on a discursive tradition in the social sciences which describes the features of post-war America as an "Information Society." Theories of the Information Society posit that, in the 1950s and 60s, America and—to a lesser extent—other developed nations underwent an unprecedented expansion of the tertiary sector (consisting of service and technical/professional or "white collar" jobs). This growth in service- and knowledge-based employment during the 1950s and 60s is associated, in turn, by Buchloh and his followers, with the emergence in the late 1960s of ideational, non-object-based modes of art production, exhibition and consumption that

[10] See, in particular, the above-mentioned work of Tomas, Bryan-Wilson and Alberro in addition to Vincent Bonin's essay, "Documentary Protocols," in *Documentary Protocols*, 17-59 and Chris Gilbert's essay, "Art & Language and the Institutional Form of Anglo-American Collectivism," in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, 77-93 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

mimicked processes of "informatization" which might be defined as the "de-realization" of labour and its products through digitalization.[11]

The notion of informatization is key, for instance, to Eve Meltzer's diagnostic reading of *Information* in "The Dream of the Information World" as a symptom of an epistemic shift in "the broader cultural imaginary […], circa 1970."[12] For Meltzer, this shift was provoked by the codification of sensation *qua* "data transmission." Meltzer thus puts the technological concerns of *Information*'s curator Kynaston McShine into productive contact with "fantasies about contemporary technologies of communication and the revolutionary world politics that grew up with such fantasies."[13] Yet, for Meltzer, the structuralist imaginary conjured by McShine's exhibition was entirely dystopian in character, portending "the total foreclosure of the real and the bracketing of the human subject."[14] However, such a reading is at odds with the contents of McShine's inclusive bibliography, or "recommended reading," in which scientific texts rub shoulders with affirmative literature by the likes of Buckminster Fuller, Herbert Marcuse and Marshall McLuhan.[15]

The techno-utopian speculations catalogued by McShine speak less to the anxieties of "information-subjects" diagnosed by Meltzer than to the "imagined fusions of leisure and labour" discussed by Chris Gilbert in his re-assessment of 1960s cultural practices.[16] In "Herbie Goes Bananas," Gilbert examines the complex ways in which

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[11] Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 108.
[12] Eve Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," 123.
[13] Ibid, 121.
[14] Ibid, 129.
[15] Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 200-205.
[16] Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," 126; Chris Gilbert, "Herbie Goes Bananas: Fantasies of Leisure and Labor from the New Left to the New Economy," in *Work Ethic*, ed. Helen Molesworth, 67-81 (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2003).

Conceptual art was informed by transformations in labour during the 1960s and 1970s. Herbert Marcuse's theorization of unconstrained, liberated labour was particularly influential, according to Gilbert, in shaping artists' visions of the emancipatory potential of new forms of cognitive labour. Gilbert's analysis serves as a counterpoint to the overly-literal interpretations put forward by Buchloh &Co. of Daniel Bell's influential 1973 theorization of an emerging "service economy."[17] In particular, Gilbert's paradigm provides a congenial framework for elucidating the phantasmatic economy of the *executive* roles performed by certain Conceptual artists, imagined to be situated outside of conventional bureaucratic contexts.

There is more at stake in such titular distinctions than competing claims to the corner office. Forecasting, imagineering, decision-making and other executive services are equally characteristic of (and specific to) an economy defined by an unprecedented preponderance of dematerialized "games between people" as the subordinate, bureaucratic forms of service prioritized by Buchloh and his followers in their anachronistic and literalist application of Bell's predictive description of a post-manufacturing, service-intensive society.[18] Whether the cognitive labours of Conceptualism need be formulated today in strictly neo-Taylorist terms (and figurations of the Conceptual artist thereby restricted to the binary roles of rational administrator and bureaucratic service-provider or functionary) or, on the other hand, the growing discourse on this topic can accommodate alternative (hyper-rationalist) economic and (decentralist) organizational models of the post-industrial (or simply "contemporary") condition, will have a direct bearing on how that labour is situated within broader histories of the

[17] Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973 [1999]), 14.
[18] Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, 336.

emergence of an information economy as well as which artistic projects are admitted into, and prioritized within, those historical narratives.

The growth of critical Information Society studies in recent years has spawned a re-appraisal of Bell and other proponents of the tertiary hypothesis. Critics of Bell, such as Christopher May and Frank Webster, have convincingly argued that the economic and social changes attributed by Bell to a paradigm shift could be more effectively understood as symptoms of ongoing processes of modernization or rationalization catalogued as long ago as 1904-05 by economist Max Weber.[19] Although Buchloh's approach to post-industrial labour is by and large compatible with the historiography proposed by May and Webster (in their mutual commitment to accounting for the features of domination immanent in contemporary, hyper-rationalist socio-economic conditions), the spirit of critical reassessment exemplified by their respective scholarly projects sets the stage for a critical re-examination of Buchloh's narrowly bureaucratic reading of Bell's service economy thesis and for proposing alternatives. I will suggest that, in truth, where the Information Society figures in the executive fictions of Baxter&, Lippard and McShine, it does so, not exclusively as a feature or symptom of a structure, but, as a pastiche of competing phantasmatic claims.

Following Allan and Gilbert, this study stresses the aspirational dimensions of the organizational manoeuvres and rhetoric of actors implicated in the emergent cognitive or service economy of the 1960s. Following May and Webster, I resist Bell's characterization of the (very real) features of social and organizational change which

[19] Frank Webster, *Theories of the Information Society* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Christopher May, *The Information Society: A Sceptical View* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2002); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2007). I know this is technically correct, but it always jars me to see a publication date like 2007 on a text like Weber's. There is a way of including the original publication date too, and I think it's extremely helpful to readers to do so.

characterized this period as evidence of a fully epistemic shift. Finally, through a more careful reading of critical histories and theories of the Information Society I shift the focus onto ad hoc executive roles generated by organizational transformations in an effort to add greater dynamism and nuance to the structuralist analyses of the conceptual and museological milieu of the later 1960s advanced by Buchloh and Tomas. In particular, I situate the appearance of supernumerary middle-managers or hybrid consultants at MoMA in the course of *Information* within broader processes of (and crises in) organizational decentralization described variously by Peter F. Drucker (1946), Marshall McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt (1972), and Reinhold Martin (2005).[20]

The speculative dimension of the executive conceptualisms showcased by *Information* is perhaps most evident in the contributions of artist IAIN BAXTER& (1936-), President of the Canadian conceptual enterprise N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. (NETCO).[21] It is significant that the Company, initially consisting exclusively of BAXTER&, only ever contained two members: both of them occupying "executive" positions. Yet, the complex ways in which these roles, as roles, were publicly negotiated by Iain and his then wife, Ingrid (Baxter) Ovesen—including the progressive promotions of the latter (culminating in her election to the position of Co-President in 1972)—remains an important area for investigation that has largely been overlooked by previous commentators. Only A.A. Bronson[22] and, subsequently, Derek Knight are attentive to the performative dimension of the role performed by Company personnel:

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[20] Peter F. Drucker *Concept of the Corporation* (New York: Mentor, 1972 [1946]),; Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
[21] Founded in 1966 as the N.E. (Baxter) Thing Company, but subsequently re-christened the N.E. Thing Company Ltd., for the sake of brevity and variety the Company will be referred to herein alternately as N.E. Thing Co. or NETCO.
[22] A.A. Bronson (ed.), *From Sea to Shining Sea* (Toronto: Power Plant, 1987).

> What remains engaging about Iain and Ingrid Baxter is that in their roles as Company Presidents they were frequently the subject of the camera's scrutiny. Perhaps it is because they were able to define their roles symbolically that they could eschew the conventional image of Company President, preferring instead to live both within, and – depending on circumstances – outside the myth.[23]

The operational significance of the fact that, at the time of its participation in *Information*, the Company had only one President is thrown into relief through comparison with the organizational analyses of McLuhan (a perennial inspiration for BAXTER&)[24] in his 1972 speculative collaboration with consultant Barrington Nevitt, *Take Today*:

> Henry Ford, one of the most antiquated and tribalistic of all industrial managers, was "*The* President." There were no other members of the hierarchy. In dispensing with the conventional organizational hierarchy, Ford naturally resorted to the tribal form of government [...]. He was ahead of his time.[25]

Somewhat paradoxically, McLuhan and Nevitt suggest that the absolute centralism of Ford set in motion the horizontal corporate structure; by collapsing the totality of organizational power into a single office, the organizational hierarchy (pre-eminently at General Motors) was correspondingly flattened and functions dispersed. In McLuhan and Nevitt's inspired reading of the horizontal corporation (as an effect of a new technological environment of service and information), organizational flattening appears

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[23] Derek Knight. *N.E. Thing Co.: The Ubiquitous Concept* (Oakville, ON: Oakville Galleries, 1995), 8.
[24] Ibid, 7.
[25] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 17.

in tandem with processes of radical decentralization: the consultant, or "drop-in," replaces the "dropout" middle manager. Absolute centralism—that is, the absolute concentration of power—appears as the figure of a decentralizing electronic environment (or ground): "In the world of electronic information, all centres of power become marginal."[26] The transformative effects of technological diffusion and decentralization should not be mistaken for a democratic dispersal of power. As authority and responsibility are re-distributed within the decentralized corporation (devolved to semi-autonomous "branch" managers or consultants) organizational power is not correspondingly delegated but is, rather, marginalized: power is no longer at the centre of things. Power divests itself of some of its former (rational) authority (e.g., local decision-making), but monopolies of power persist, invisibly, in the margins.

In place of contemporary representations of the manager-cum-technocrat, McLuhan envisioned the administrator of the Electronic Age as a tribal leader: "The new expert," according to McLuhan, "along with the old executive, has been swept away in a flood of comedies."[27] The "stone-aged manager"[28] forecast by McLuhan abandons specialization in favour of an intuitive, generalist approach: "Looking to the role rather than to the individual, we can see that specialized jobs of managers are universal casualties of the age of electric-information speed."[29] In McLuhan's vision—as in the operations of NETCO—the functionary is replaced by the "many-sided man" or "artist."[30] This substitution sets the stage for the subsequent emergence of a new class of

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[26] Ibid, 13. McLuhan and Nevitt clarify this logic elsewhere in the same text: "Extreme centralism of inputs breeds decentralism of outputs" (Ibid, 221).
[27] Ibid, 23.
[28] Ibid, 21.
[29] Ibid, 4.
[30] Marshall McLuhan, "Sherlock Holmes vs. the Bureaucrat," in *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations*, ed. Marshall McLuhan (New York, Something Else Press, 1967), u.p.

"culturally sophisticated management elites," who, according to Mark Rectanus, "have attempted to re-establish the aura of the artist's personality and artistic genius as a function of entrepreneurship." [31]

For McLuhan, the "effects" of this reconfiguration of management's functions imply environmental changes far more sweeping than even those forecast by Bell: "As a figure, every manager creates a service environment or ground that is an extension of himself. He puts on his organization like 'The Emperor's New Clothes.'"[32] The sartorial operation invoked by McLuhan in this passage recalls Vito Acconci's appropriation of a (postal) service environment as his contribution to *Information* as well as NETCO's commandeering of the technological landscape qua readymade in the 24 *ACT* and *ART* certificates—annotated photographs of, alternately, "Aesthetically Claimed Things" and "Aesthetically Rejected Things"—by which the Company was, in part, represented at the MoMA show.[33] Though the Company's dept to Marcel Duchamp for the appropriative logic of this series is duly repaid (tongue-in-cheek) through the comic double negation of *ART No. 19: Marcel Duchamp's Total Ready-Made Production Except his Total Art Production (1968)*, a properly McLuhanesque interpretation of such examples of media capture as *ACT No. 107* and *ACT No. 101* is also possible.[34] In these works, industrially-

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[31] Mark Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated: Museums, Artists, And Corporate Sponsorships* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 42, 43.
[32] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 13.
[33] McLuhan and Nevitt liken organizational transformation to a change in clothes: "When [...] structure[s] of massive inertia encounter a driving entrepreneurial force, the rending of social attire and the stripping of social garments is called "revolution" (McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 47). McLuhan and Nevitt's sartorial rhetoric derives, in part, from Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* ("The Tailor Re-Tailored") (1833-34), a metafiction narrating the life and ideas of a mythical philosopher of costume, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh (Ibid, 60).
[34] *ACT No. 107: Triangular Shaped (VSI) Visual Sensitivity Information, Television View of the Moon's Surface from Inside Apollo 8 Spacecraft through Window as Seen on Canadian National C.B.C. T.V. over Sanyo T.V. Set, 9", in North Vancouver, B.C., Canada, December 25, 1968* (1968); *ACT No. 101: Canadian National Railways Symbol "CN" Designed by Allan Fleming Toronto, Canada* (1968). Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

produced objects (media images) are claimed, not—as in the work of Duchamp—as "art," but as acts of incorporation. Works rejected as art are retained as notarized documentation of Company activity. Here, the media image is acted out much as Acconci's *Service Area* (Fig. 4) necessitated that the artist adopt behaviours consistent with his target context: "In going to the museum, I am performing in a different style my ordinary role of going down to get my mail. [...] Learning to make equivalent 'going to the museum' and 'going for my mail.'"[35] In their respective contributions to *Information* Acconci and NETCO alike appropriate the museum as a "staging area" for redundant service transactions that effectively blur institutional or corporate and private functions.[36]

McShine's recasting of the curatorial role vis-à-vis his notorious claim in the catalogue that his "essay is really in the galleries and in the whole of this volume" (which has been variously interpreted as an arrogation of the prerogatives of the artist or an experiment in a journalistic mode, or both of these) can, in light of the coeval corporate incursions noted by Staniszewski, also be understood as enacting a competing executive claim on the exhibition and, indeed, the Museum as a whole, as a platform for corporate operations research and visionary strategic planning activities.[37] In keeping with the futurological rhetoric of such figures as Buckminster Fuller, John McHale and Alvin Toffler, the vision of contemporary art transmitted by McShine via his "international report" on Conceptualism was framed as a probabilistic forecast of the "aesthetic concerns of the seventies."[38] The specifically futurological orientation of McShine's

[35] Vito Acconci, "Service Area," in *Information*, ed. Kynaston McShine, 5.
[36] Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 171.
[37] Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 146-152, 189.
[38] Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information*, 2.

executive activities is underlined by his prominent incorporation of Warhol's influential forecast (both within the catalogue and the exhibition proper): "In the future everybody in the world will be world famous for fifteen minutes."[39] McShine's strategic recycling of this quotation, in tandem with lunar imagery and other journalistic content that spoke to an emergent global awareness, aligned his project with the "One world" vision promoted by McHale (an author "recommended" by McShine).[40]

Viewed through this futurological lens, it is possible to align McShine's project with the popular visions of futurity promoted by more overtly prophetic art world figures of the same era such as Douglas Davis,[41] as opposed to the documentary or journalistic prerogatives ascribed to *Information* by Bryan-Wilson,[42] Kramer and Staniszewski (although, interestingly, Kramer's review alleged that journalism itself was becoming predictive, humorously concluding that a contemporaneous review of the same exhibition—published in *New York* magazine—was penned *in advance* of the installation!). Whereas Bryan-Wilson, Hilton Kramer[43] and Staniszewski view *Information* as the curator's attempt to document contemporary social movements—in Staniszewski's case, situating this journalistic impulse within a continuum of "documentary" installations at MoMA that includes the influential *Family of Man* (1955)—I argue that McShine's exhibition operated as an early exercise in cultural programming as institutional projection and managerial forecast.

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[39] Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, 278.
[40] John McHale, *The Future of the Future* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 12.
[41] Douglas Davis, *Art and the Future: A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration Between Science, Technology, and Art* (New York: Praeger, 1973).
[42] "The trend toward art as journalism was famously institutionalized by the MoMA show *Information*" (Bryan-Wilson, Art Workers, 189).
[43] Hilton Kramer. "Miracles, 'Information,' 'Recommended Reading,'" *New York Times* (July 12, 1970): 87.

A leader within the Art Workers' Coalition, critic Lucy Lippard also emerges as a figure whose contribution to *Information* can be understood to have deployed speculative management techniques. Lippard's recycling of administrative theories drew from an eclectic body of literature devoted to decision analysis which foregrounded the role of chance in executive decision. It is within this context that I situate Lippard's frequent invocation of the chance operations of the *I Ching*, a text which McLuhan dubbed a "4,000-year-old management manual." In her contemporary criticism and nascent literary project *I See/You Mean* (published in 1979, but begun and set in and before the period of *Information*), as in the aleatory administrative labour by which she was represented—as an artist—in the *Information* catalogue, Lippard developed an approach to decision-making that resembled McLuhan's methodology of pattern recognition.[44]

Lippard's harnessing of decision-making techniques in the service of an activist and critical-curatorial practice, in parallel with the futurology and technological play deployed by McShine and BAXTER& at *Information*, signals a "hybridization" of the cultural sphere.[45] The simultaneously decentralist and hybrid orientation of the executive functions enacted by all three figures at *Information* rehearses a logic of "convergence and de-differentiation" which would become a defining feature of the cultural and corporate nexus of the 1980s and 1990s analyzed by Rectanus.[46]

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[44] In the critic's own words, "to facilitate choice" (cited in Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," 130). "The much greater electric speed-up of today enables us to shift from information overload to pattern recognition, from experience to knowledge, and from reaction to anticipation" (McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today,* 64).
[45] John Ury, *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 1995), 151.
[46] Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 195.

Methodology

> Culture has become our business.
>
> —Marshall McLuhan, *Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values of...Museum Communication with the Viewing Public*, 1967.[47]

My bracketing of McShine, BAXTER& and Lippard within the context of an exhibition of more than 150 artists mirrors the discontents of Lippard's contribution to the *Information* catalogue, in which the critic's name—alongside those of N.E. Thing Co. and McShine—was isolated from the primary list of participating artists subjected by Lippard's "subordinates" (staff of MoMA's library) to a transformative procedure or game—discussed at greater length in the section on Lippard below—whose outcomes were determined by chance. Lippard's administrative game draws attention to a ludic logic, at work in the contributions to *Information* of all three figures, symptomatic of a Marcusean desire to effect a "transformation of toil (labour) into play."[48] Marcuse's conception of play offers, indeed, a productive frame for understanding the liberationist aspirations at work in the corporate imaginary embodied by the exhibition as a whole. This perspective (which is aligned with Chris Gilbert's Marcusean reading of the liberationist trajectory of Conceptual labour at large) is echoed by Allan in his insightful

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[47] Marshall McLuhan quoted in *Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values of...Museum Communication with the Viewing Public* (New York: The Museum of the City of New York and The New York Council on the Arts, 1967), 10.

[48] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage, 1955), 176.

commentary on *Information*. Allan proposes that McShine's exhibition coincides with McLuhan's vision of a society transformed by information technologies into a "'workless' world."[49] In Allan's reading, the question advanced by *Information* is coterminous with that posed by contemporary decision analyst Howard Raiffa: "to play or not to play?"[50]

Yet the executive practices enacted by McShine, BAXTER& and Lippard were not all fun and games. These strategies, which Staniszewski associates with an intensified corporate presence within the Museum, also produced a range of disturbing effects, or "disservices," within the very environment which they also served to define.[51] Specifically, the duplication of executive functions effected by BAXTER& (whose very participation necessitated the introduction of an autonomous corporate entity—NETCO—with its independent executive, into the already administratively overdetermined environment of MoMA) and Lippard defined the space of a "counterenvironment" that troubled the integrity of McShine's curatorial procedure by drawing attention to the essential services performed by Museum management and its corporate counterparts (which might otherwise have remained relatively inconspicuous or, at least, maintained a semblance of autonomy).[52] The possibility of a latent (or absentee) space for disservice is elaborated by the speculative management writings of McLuhan: "An antienvironment reveals hidden environments. Disservices become

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[49] Marshall McLuhan cited in Ken Allan, "Understanding Information, in *Conceptual Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 160.
[50] Howard Raiffa, *Decision Analysis: Introductory Lectures on Choices under Uncertainty* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1970), 10.
[51] "During periods of rapid innovation and the consequent interplay of new and old services there is a complementary flood of disruption and disservice" (McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 47). "After increasing beyond some point, any service becomes a disservice" (McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 82).
[52] Ibid, 48.

manifest, not in themselves, but in relation to other services."[53] Although some contemporary reviewers of the exhibition—pre-eminently New York critic Gregory Battock—expressed disappointment that *Information* did not include more overtly oppositional projects (notwithstanding Hans Haacke's controversial *MOMA-Poll* and John Giorno's *Dial-a-Poem*), I argue that BAXTER& and Lippard's duplication of executive functions associated with McShine's reconfigured curatorial role in fact produced significant disjunctive (though not directly antagonistic) effects that have largely been overlooked. Precisely because they *avoided* the overtly critical stance of an artist like Haacke, these figures (perhaps unwittingly) could communicate the contagion of what Stephen Wright has labelled a "genuine corrosiveness in the real."[54]

The disruptive logic of the non-oppositional, hidden environments (re)tailored by BAXTER& and Lippard is also elucidated by Wright's notion of *redundancy*:

> Redundancy is perhaps the concept that best describes a post-mimetic [i.e., non-representational and interventionist] art—an art that is deliberately and perfectly redundant with respect to what it is also. [...] [T]he type of work I refer to as "redundant" inverses the primary-secondary logic [...]. Art used to dream of becoming non art. Now it appears to have opted for a more caustic form of calculated redundancy.[55]

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[53] Ibid, 137.
[54] Stephen Wright, "The Double Ontological Status of the Artistic Enterprise," in *Les enterprises critiques/Critical Companies*, ed. Yann Toma, 189-193 (Saint-Etienne: Cité du design, 2008), 191. The disruptions effected by the counterenvironments staged by BAXTER&, McShine and Lippard may be contrasted with the vulnerability to co-optation of overtly critical positions diagnosed by McLuhan and Nevitt: "Marxism provides the ideal counterenvironment for the business world, bringing out its patterns and contours in strong relief" (*Take Today*, 48).
[55] Wright, "The Double Ontological Status of the Artistic Enterprise," 191.

Traces of disservice and redundant information are legible today in the correspondence between BAXTER& and McShine generated during preparations for *Information* as well as in the difficulty evinced by the curator in attempting to contain the insubordinate "role" of Lippard. In the "N.E. Thing Co., Iain Baxter, Canada" file in the Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research fond at the Museum of Modern Art Archives numerous NETCO artworks, though clearly designated—through the use of the Company seal and other recognized labelling strategies—by the artist as "art" (in the case of the *ART* certificate, tautologically so), have been interfiled with Company correspondence and other records (for instance, two *ACT* and *ART* certificates and numerous photographs as well as the entirety of the Telex and Telecopier transmissions sent by BAXTER& during the course of *Information*): a singular instance—at least within the sprawling, and otherwise meticulous, contents of the fond—of art classified as "documentation." This concrete evidence of the confusion generated by N.E. Thing Co.'s hybrid functions (since art and documentation alike functioned in its practice as Company information that, in this instance, also duplicated some organizational functions of the Museum) recalls Douglas Crimp's meditation in "The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject," on the disruptive capacity of Ed Ruscha's book work, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963). Having encountered the book by chance while browsing the stacks of the New York Public Library in search of material for an industrial film on the history of transportation, and initially concluding that the book must have been misclassified (as a work on transportation), Crimp subsequently recognized that "the fact that there is nowhere for *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* within the present system of classification is an index of the book's radicalism with respect to established modes of thought."[56] Similarly, the

[56] Douglas Crimp, "The Museum's Old, The Library's New Subject," in *On the Museum's Ruins*, by

NETCO artworks which have entered the fonds of the MoMA Archives are improperly understood negatively, as curious examples of *mis*classification; rather, they function positively, as evidence of the concrete effects generated by a hybrid practice through the abrasive interplay of conventionally discrete domains.

It is such traces of disservice which this study undertakes to identify and contextualize in an attempt to proffer preliminary answers to the provocative questions posed by Stéphane Sauzedde in his critical study of contemporary entrepreneurial strategies in the visual arts: "What exactly does it mean to be a businessman? How does the artist mould this entrepreneurial model [...]?"[57] Treating McLuhan's executive as the ideal type (in the Weberian sense of a configuration of attitudes and behaviours privileged by a specific social formation and endowed with phantasmatic coherence or identity) of the roles performed, respectively, by McShine, BAXTER& and Lippard, this study sets out to enrich our understanding of the material and phantasmatic features of the "role characteristics"[58] specific to the executive as they were adapted by those figures in the context of *Information* into the type of the "manager as creative artist" identified by Rectanus.[59] This objective is achieved through a series of three case studies which map data gleaned from analyses of primary published sources (e.g., Battock, Levine, Kramer as well as the *Information* catalogue) and documents deposited in the fonds of the MoMA Archives[60] as well as secondary literature devoted to the exhibition (Allan, Meltzer, Staniszewski) and the selected artists, the history of the MoMA (Staniszewski) and

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Douglas Crimp, 66-83 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993),78.

[57] Stéphane Sauzedde, "Questioning the Critical Potential of the Artistic Entrepreneur," in *Les enterprises critiques/Critical Companies*, ed. Yann Toma, 179-188 (Saint-Etienne: Cité du design, 2008), 185.

[58] Thomas C. Cochran, "The Executive Mind: The Role of Railroad Leaders, 1845-1890" *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 25, no. 4 (December 1951) 230-241.

[59] Rectanus, Culture Incorporated, 42.

[60] Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

theories of "burrowing" (Angus, Zaslove) entrepreneurship and incorporation (considered as artistic strategies) (Sauzedde, Wright) onto a limited range of executive dimensions:

- Futurology
- Play
- Decision-making

These dimensions are derived from a close reading of texts held to be representative of a common speculative framework by virtue of the frequency of their occurrence in contemporary secondary literature: (e.g., Marcuse, McLuhan, Toffler).[61] While they do not exhaust the features of McLuhan's executive, they do describe the defining contours of his ideal type. Though never mutually exclusive, each of the three dimensions is found to have been developed to a greater degree in one of the three roles performed,

[61] In his catalogue essay, McShine succinctly defined this speculative framework as "[a]n intellectual climate that embraces Marcel Duchamp, Ad Reinhardt, Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, the *I Ching*, the Beatles, Claude Lévi-Strauss, John Cage, Yves Klein, Herbert Marcuse, Ludwig Wittgenstein and theories of information and leisure" (140). An internal memo prepared by MoMA Curatorial Assistant Jane Necol, to the effect that "recommended reading" was based, in part, on previous bibliographies complied by *Information* contributors Lucy Lippard and Joseph Kosuth, lends further credibility to the supposition that the contents of McShine's bibliography document something like a common intellectual resource. Jane Necol. "Jane Necol to Kynaston McShine" (May 14, 1970). Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. A literature review reveals that previous commentary on *Information* has been limited in focus to the connections between the exhibition and the theories of Lévi-Strauss (Meltzer) and McLuhan (Allan) as well as information theory (Meltzer). The present study adds to these frames of reference the work of Daniel Bell, Peter Drucker, Johan Huizinga, Herbert Marcuse, John McHale, Harley Parker, Tamotsu Shibutani and Alvin Toffler. Following (but significantly expanding upon) Allan's commentary, McLuhan remains the focus throughout. Yet, by way of enhancing Staniszewski's analysis of the new corporate presence visible at *Information*, it is McLuhan's management theories that are prioritized in my account. Although Toffler's *Future Shock* is not cited in McShine's list of recommended readings, this influential text—released in July 1970—is an unparalleled document of the contemporary "theories of information and leisure" cited by McShine. Likewise, Bell's *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) and McLuhan and Nevitt's *Take Today* (1972)—published in the aftermath of *Information*—would necessarily have been unknown to participants at the time of the exhibition; yet, these works amplify and clarify concerns expressed by their respective authors in texts and interviews that were either broadcast or published prior to the exhibition. They condense ideas that had been "in the air" for some time.

respectively, by McShine (futurology), BAXTER& (play), Lippard (decision-making), to the relative restriction of the other two.

The ultimate goal of this study is to lay the groundwork for a more adequate description of *Information* as a whole and, indeed, of emergent informational strategies in the visual arts circa 1970 in general, with reference to the *paradigmatic* character of the executive dropout/drop-in explored in these pages. The concept of paradigm is invoked here in the precise sense that this term is elaborated by Giorgio Agamben (following, but revising, Foucault):

> Paradigms establish a broader problematic context that they both constitute and make intelligible. [...] Here we are not dealing with a signifier that is extended to designate heterogeneous phenomena by virtue of the same semantic structure; more akin to allegory than to metaphor, the paradigm is a singular case that is isolated from its context only insofar as, by exhibiting its own singularity, it makes intelligible a new ensemble, whose homogeneity it itself constitutes.[62]

Following Agamben, I have chosen to study the executive fictions of McShine, BAXTER& and Lippard in isolation from their exhibition context precisely in order that their paradigmatic singularity might illuminate the "new ensemble" of executive practices (defined by an ambivalent conjunction of activist, curatorial, managerial, political and technological techniques) embedded in the totality of *Information*, much as Goethe's experimental method—held to be exemplary by Agamben—treated the phenomenon as

[62] Giorgio Agamben, "What is a Paradigm?" in *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, by Giorgio Agamben, 9-32 (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2009), 17, 18.

"a freely floating luminous point, that [...] emits rays in every direction." [63] The cool illumination diffused by this ensemble, like that of the entoptic figure in the Bolognese bottle which fascinated Goethe, [64] is immanent to a technological container: that of the Information Society.

Following Webster and May, I reject the claims of Manuel Castells, Charles Leadbeater, Daniel Bell and other advocates of the Information Society thesis that the impact of computer technologies and/or theoretical knowledge produces an expanded service economy in the post-war period which marks a fundamental rupture with the prior regime of progressive rationalization theorized by Weber (as opposed to merely an increase—even an exponential one—in the degree and/or rate of rationalization).[65] I employ the Information Society, rather, as a heuristic device for conceptualizing the crisis in contemporary visualizations of labour discussed by Bryan-Wilson. [66] The executive fictions studied here are thus classified with artists' "complicated fantasies about and identifications with 'workers'" in the 1960s and 70s documented by Bryan-Wilson.[67] Yet, whereas Bryan-Wilson devotes the bulk of her study to fantasies of proletarian collectivism, the figures which I study should be classed with artists such as Frank Stella, Robert Smithson and Andy Warhol who, according to Caroline Jones in *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Post-war American Artist*, positioned themselves as executives

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[63] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe cited in Agamben, "What is a Paradigm?," 30.
[64] According to Frederick Burwick, this phenomenon inspired the figure of bottle-imp Humunculus in Part II of Faust. See: Frederick Burwick, *The Damnation of Newton: Goethe's Color Theory and Romantic Perception* (New York: De Gruyter, 1986), 79, 91.
[65] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996); Charles Leadbeater, "Living on Thin Air," in *The Information Society Reader,* ed. Frank Webster, 21-30 (London: Routledge, 2004); Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*.
[66] "The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed widespread uncertainty about the value of work in an emerging information-based economy [...]. The very definitions of *work* and *labour* in the Vietnam War era were undergoing massive shifts that called their contours relentlessly into question" (Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 33).
[67] Ibid, 5.

in sympathy with emergent New Leftist conceptualizations of "intellectual labour." [68] The present study's attentiveness to the phantasmatic economy specific to executive roles in a horizontal corporation is in no way intended as a refutation of the basic outlines of the analyses of power relationships elaborated by Buchloh and Tomas.[69] Drawing upon Allan and Gilbert, the expanded focus of my enquiry is, rather, intended as a modest corrective to dominant readings of conceptual labour. By broadening definitions of that labour to include supernumerary executive positions excluded by Buchloh and Bryan-Wilson and by reassessing Bell's claim (upon which Buchloh and Bryan-Wilson as well as Tomas—sometimes tacitly—draw) that the advent of informational labour spelled the onset of an epistemic shift, while still accounting for the organizational mechanisms of concrete (albeit moderate) transformation that defined the singular museological apparatus of *Information*, I challenge accepted representations of the Conceptual artist as (bureaucratic) "administrator," "cultural worker" and "art worker" without thereby refuting Buchloh or Tomas's compelling analyses of the exercise of power immanent within the cultural and economic spheres.

McShine: Curator as Dropout

Business and culture have become interchangeable in the new information environment.

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[68] Ibid, 3, 4; Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Post-war American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). In his Foreword to the 1999 edition of *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society,* Daniel Bell affirms that members of the New Left were early adopters of his ideas; indeed, the 1962 *Port Huron Statement* explored some aspects of the post-industrial paradigm *in advance* of Bell's major study (xx).

[69] Both Buchloh and Tomas articulate Marxian analyses of power;Tomas elaborates a particularly nuanced Althusserian reading of the power dynamics immanent in NETCO's *Environment* by way of deploying the latter's concept of "overdetermination" (218).

—Marshall McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 1970.[70]

The dropouts today are those determined to keep *in touch* with a fast-changing scene.

—McLuhan and Nevitt *Take Today*, 1972.[71]

In Bryan-Wilson's meticulous chronicle of artists' protest movements during the Vietnam era, events at MoMA loom large:[72]

> As the most important museum for contemporary art and as the major employer of many art workers who had worked there as pages, clerks and guards [...], MoMA became the primary target for antiwar actions.[73]

MoMA was targeted, in part, due to the presence on its board of trustees of such high-profile Republican figures as David and Nelson Rockefeller (David was chairman and chief executive of Chase Manhattan Bank; Nelson was governor of New York State at the time).[74] For some artists, such overt ties between the culture industry and the military-industrial complex at the peak of the American campaign in Vietnam made the museum a symbol of domination.

Other grievances with the Museum were of a more pragmatic nature. Initially organizing to assert their moral rights, artists affiliated with the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) soon demanded enhanced social protection in exchange for their cultural labour

[70] Marshall McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970). u.p.
[71] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 4.
[72] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 13.
[73] Ibid, 21.
[74] Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 26; Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 18.

as well: "stipends, health insurance, and help for artists' dependents."[75] As a growing number of artists positioned themselves as *art workers*, "museums," according to Bryan-Wilson, "were increasingly implicated as management."[76] Given this context, it is unsurprising that she frames *Information* as a gesture of institutional accommodation.

In this reading, the genesis of *Information* is traceable to the actions of artist Vassilakis Takis on January 3, 1969. Outraged that he had not been consulted by MoMA staff regarding the Museum's decision to include his work, *Tele-sculpture* (1960), in its exhibition *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, the artist—concerned that the aforementioned piece was unrepresentative of his output as a whole—simply entered the Museum and repossessed his artwork (owned by MoMA).[77] A flyer subsequently distributed by the artist appealed for further action against museums. Significantly, Takis called for the transformation of museums into "information centres."[78] Following subsequent AWC protests and a series of both open- and closed-door meetings between protestors and Museum administrators, in which AWC representatives successfully negotiated demands for institutional reform (in tandem with highly-visible interventions by AWC splinter groups, such as the Guerrilla Art Action Group),[79] MoMA approved plans to mount *Information* in late 1969. It is notable that the exhibition was conceived as an international report on the very strategies (conceptual,

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[75] Art Workers' Coalition, "Program for Change," cited in Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 178-179.
[76] Ibid, 179.
[77] Ibid, 13.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Protests culminated in the GAAG performance, *A Call for the Immediate Resignation of All the Rockefellers from the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art*, or *Blood Bath* (November 19, 1969), in which Jon Hendricks, Jean Toche, Poppy Johnson and Silviana distributed demands for institutional reform following a mock wrestling match that unleashed gallons of blood onto the floor of the museum lobby (Ibid, 184). Significantly, this intervention targeted specific members of the museum executive (as opposed to, for instance, programming or access), suggesting that the figure of the executive—as both a vehicle for satire and an object of critique—had accumulated considerable symbolic value at that time.

linguistic and performative) deployed by protestors to mount their critique of the institution. The choice of exhibition title also signalled an appropriation of the language of protest (Takis's utopian formulation) to recuperate critical tactics *as art*. For some critics of the exhibition, from the outset *Information* was an exercise in Marcusean "repressive tolerance."[80]

An alternative genealogy is suggested by the contents of the "N.E. Thing Co., Iain Baxter, Canada" file. A memo dating from January 15, 1969 documents IAIN BAXTER& in dialogue with McShine regarding NETCO's participation in a "display" titled "*NEW MEDIA: NEW DIRECTIONS*,"[81] likely a reference to the travelling exhibition curated by McShine and mounted at MoMA concurrent with *Information* (i.e., March 16, 1969-August 16, 1970): *New Media, New Methods*.[82] BAXTER&'s communiqué makes reference to Company "products" included in the display as well as other, unspecified items sent to McShine in response to an expression of interest from the latter: "much is in the mail to you," wrote BAXTER&.[83] This exchange documents the process by which the contents of "N.E. Thing Co." file—at 52 items—grew to be larger than any other single file in the Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research fond save one (namely, "OHO Group, Yugoslavia").[84] A subsequent memo, dated January 22, 1969, specifies that—in addition to the abovementioned Company "information"—BAXTER& forwarded an exhibition catalogue and photographs to McShine for reuse in a

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[80] Ibid, 192.
[81] IAIN BAXTER&, "IAIN BAXTER& to Kynaston McShine" (January 15, 1969). Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
[82] Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 238.
[83] IAIN BAXTER&, "IAIN BAXTER& to Kynaston McShine" (January 15, 1969). Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
[84] Rona Roob, Apphia Loo and Amanda Sullivan, "Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research in The Museum of Modern Art Archives," http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/InfoExhibitionRecordsf (accessed May 15, 2010).

catalogue for *New Media, New Methods*.[85] Today, the singularly heterogeneous contents of "N.E. Thing Co." file—as discussed above, including documents and artworks alike—serve as a material record of the generative yet destabilizing nature of this exchange.[86] They include: two *ACT* and *ART* certificates, several small *ACT* and *ART* photographs, assorted photographic materials marked with the Company stamp (e.g., *Photo VSI – E(1)* and E*(2)*), exhibition catalogues, press releases and statements in addition to correspondence and project proposals directly related to *Information*.[87]

Given the sustained interest implied by McShine's extended exchange of information with BAXTER&, it is probable that NETCO's seminal installation/performance piece *N.E. Thing Co. Environment* (June 3-July 6, 1969) was not only known to the former figure, but served as a "prototype" for his own informational environment.[88] Described by David Tomas as a "meta-environment," NETCO's installation transformed the ground floor of the Lorne Building, the converted office building[89] which then housed the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), into a temporary

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[85] IAIN BAXTER&, "IAIN BAXTER& to Kynaston McShine" (January 22, 1969). Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. No catalogue was issued for *New Media, New Methods*.

[86] Other files are, for the most part, limited to project proposals and correspondence; original works of art are not included.

[87] E.g. *ACT No. 39: Cement Block Wall and Steel Gutter Strainer, Seymour Parkway, McCarthy Creek, North Vanc., B.C., Canada, 1968*.

[88] On February 9, 1970, McShine's initial Curatorial Assistant on the *Information* project, Cintra Lofting, wrote to IAIN BAXTER& requesting a copy of one of the works by which NETCO was represented at the 1969 São Paolo Biennial: a calendar-catalogue. Cintra Lofting, "Cintra Lofting to Iain Baxter" (February 9, 1970). Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. No catalogue was ever issued for *New Media, New Methods*. On April 30, 1970, McShine wrote to Pierre Théberge requesting permission to borrow the *ACT* and *ART* photographs that accompanied the calendar-catalogue in São Paolo—works which, McShine wrote, had impressed him when he attended the Biennial. Kynaston McShine, "Kynaston McShine to Pierre Théberge" (April 30, 1970). Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. No catalogue was ever issued for *New Media, New Methods*.

[89] For a concise history of the Lorne Building, and commentary on NETCO's critical attentiveness to that history, see Tomas.

trade pavilion.[90] The full complement of NETCO "Departments" took up residence at the NGC for the duration of the show. Secretaries—on loan from a federal department—processed the Company's stock-in-trade, "Visual Sensitivity Information" (VSI), in makeshift offices against a "canned" audio backdrop of office work and industrial manufacture (Fig. 5). The theatricality of the Company's installation was underlined by the performances of its President and Vice-President. Members of the public were invited to explore the office of the former (who greeted visitors dressed in comically "retro" office attire), while Ingrid Ovesen joined hired models in demonstrating Company "products," including vinyl costumes (another instance of the post-industrial service environment conceived in sartorial terms).[91]

Tomas rightly identifies *Environment* as "one of the first meta-artworks to exhibit the multiple contradictions that characterize the contemporary post-industrial artist's practice."[92] However, Tomas confines the scope of that practice to the parameters of institutional critique. Given Tomas's resolutely analytical understanding of critical practice, it is unsurprising that he criticizes NETCO for its insufficiently antagonistic relationship to the museum and the economic sector generally. While Tomas's text registers the advent of a post-industrial paradigm, its description—following that of Helen Molesworth—of the features of that (purported) epistemic shift is limited to a narrative of (manual) de-skilling in the wake of accelerated automation and a parallel

[90] Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories," 220.
[91] Thomas Carlyle—as we have already noted, exerted a significance influence on McLuhan's speculative management theories—connects the function of clothing with role-playing in *Sartor Resartus*: "In all speculations [clothes] have tacitly figured man as a *Clothed Animal;* whereas he is by nature a *Naked Animal;* and only in certain circumstances, by purpose and device, masks himself in clothes." Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.
[92] Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories," 250.

process of (cognitive) re-skilling within the university.[93] While this account of the impact of new labour practices is expedient for elucidating the features of certain "post-studio" practices of institutional critique, as a description of the Information Society and its contradictory effects it is limited in several respects (despite the author's efforts to avoid a reductive reading).[94] The principle defect of Tomas's representation of the coming of a post-industrial regime is its fundamentally anachronistic and static account of the very "business model" on which the coherence of that transformative representation depends. The business model figures in Tomas's account as a static (pre-war) norm of "vertical" bureaucracy (with its hierarchies and functional division of labour) seemingly untouched by the very transformation (in the form of hybrid structures and partnerships) which, Tomas argues, were responsible for introducing into the cultural sphere the contagion of cultural-corporate rapprochement (vis-à-vis NETCO's corporate-inspired *Environment*). This circular logic is perhaps attributable to the (cybernetic) "systems-based economic logic" which Tomas invokes when framing *Environment* as an exercise in cultural integration.[95] (A similarly non-transformative business model plagues Alberro's effort to trace the origins of Conceptual art practices to Madison Avenue in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*; the dialogue between commerce and culture—as I argue here—would be more accurately represented as a process of dynamic co-shaping.)[96] Although static, cybernetic models did (as I demonstrate below) inform experiments in forecasting during the period under study, Tomas appears to have adopted the terms of reference of these recursive models for the

[93] Ibid.
[94] Tomas's attention to NETCO's "multiple frames of reference" and contradictions is exemplary (218).
[95] Ibid, 222.
[96] Donna Haraway, *When species meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

purposes of his own analysis of the business model. Consequently, changes within the cultural sphere are posited as effects of a feedback loop generated by a business model that itself remains unchanged and unresponsive: a rational, vertical holdover from a previous era of functionaries and properly bureaucratic services. Thus, Tomas describes *Environment* as assuming "the material and symbolic trappings of a *traditional corporate environment*" (my emphasis).[97]

Whereas Tomas's narrative hinges on the function of *Environment* as a one-way exercise in *acculturation* (one that "progressively 'sensitized' an abstract model by way of its concrete manifestation"),[98] I propose that the "layers of interaction or performativity" generated by the NGC installation/performance—likewise noted by Tomas—offer a more productive point of entry for situating *Environment* as a dynamic, evental site within broader aspirations of social transformation. My intention is not to refute but, rather, to amplify and correct selected facets of Tomas's text in order to better understand *Information* as a Foucauldian "turning point" in the emergent information economy of the late 1960s and early 1970s.[99] I argue that audience participation in the corporate theatre of *Environment* implies a two-way process, not merely of acculturation (although this element was certainly present), but also of organizational and performative transformation. The museum (and by extension the corporation) itself became a site of

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[97] Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories," 222. William Wood similarly frames the business interests of NETCO within the static rhetoric of rationalization, arguing that the Company's standardized "Information" sheets served "as a means to standardize and systematize the entire venture" (my emphasis). William Wood, "Capital and Subsidiary: The N.E. Thing Co. and the Revision of Conceptual Art," in *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape*, eds. Nancy Shaw, Scott Watson and William Wood, 11-23 (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 14.

[98] Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories," 240. This argument is more fully elaborated by Tomas as follows: "[*Environment*] marshalled activities, defined expectations, promoted work patterns, and *pioneered* a (corporate or economic) world view that gradually acculturated the National Gallery administrators and workers to the *idea* of accepting a corporation [...] as a potential and viable equivalent of an artwork" (Ibid, 243).

[99] Michel Foucault cited in Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 132.

crisis in the collective imaginary as visitors were invited to participate in newly interactive environments. As McLuhan and Nevitt were later to describe in *Take Today*, public participation in corporate operations was a source of considerable disturbance within organizations:

> [W]ithin the very same structure in which the public has become participant, the old management cast finds itself merely holding a fort that is no longer the frontier of action. [...] The new cast is inclined to switch roles, as costumes, in order to keep in touch with the new action. The old cast of 'diehards,' on the other hand, is holding a 'phony fort,' much as the administrative 'establishment' now finds itself in the role of 'office boy' and 'caretaker' of an abandoned operation.[100]

Within the reconfigured organization described in the passage above, executive roles are radically redefined as responsibilities are delegated to a new breed of consumer/producers: "At the top [the executive] is like a dropout."[101] Having unwittingly effected a transfer of executive control to participatory content providers (consumers) through the introduction of cool social media (e.g., television),[102] a newly de-centred, but not powerless, management either ossifies into the reactive (reactionary) posture of the "diehard" or else "'steps down' when the action begins to 'seize up.'"[103]

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[100] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 4.
[101] McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 30.
[102] For a concise introduction to McLuhan's binary classification of "hot" (i.e., non-participatory) and "cool" (i.e., participatory) media, see: Marshall McLuhan, "Media Hot and Cold," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, by Marshall McLuhan, 22-32 (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1964).
[103] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 4. The powerlessness of management in the electronic corporation is a consistent theme of *Take Today*: "The bigger the corporation, the more employees it drops out of sight. At the top, on the one hand, the executive is also swallowed by the corporation, knowing less and less about fewer and fewer people and operations: *as work enables a man to put on his public, he puts off himself*" (ibid, 283).

The latter strategy is exemplified by the inclusive management style of BAXTER&, one which—as deployed in the context of *Environment*—threw open the (habitually shut) doors of conference room and executive office alike to the scrutiny and participation of the public and appropriated the functions of management qua spectacle (although, in the context of *Information*, BAXTER&'s role more closely approximated that of another McLuhanesque type, as I will show shortly: namely, that of the drop-in).

It is in this specific sense that *Environment* is accurately labelled a prototype for the hybrid service environments—the museum as "multiple-use cultural centre"[104] described by Rectanus—generated by the cultural sector in a post-industrial society: as management is transformed into an inclusive public service, the cultural consumer "steps up" to become the content of the reconfigured cultural media.[105] The "figure" of the speculative service environment staged by NETCO is thus not that of the secretary on loan from the government (as Buchloh &Co. would have it), but, rather, the consumer or user of the exhibition. In this formulation, the old functions of management merge with the ground of the new electronic service environment. BAXTER&'s role as "Visual Informer" is not—as Tomas posits—that of a "watchful and discerning eye,"[106] but that of the "hunter and creator of new information and roles" described by McLuhan and Nevitt, where the leading part created by the information manager is that of the user.[107] In thus bringing the consumer into representation as a cultural actor, the executive functions of the Company Presidency dissolve in an excess of participation.

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[104] Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 172.
[105] "The TV user is the *content* of TV" (McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 90).
[106] Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories," 252; N.E. Thing Co., "Some Thoughts Re: Communications and Concepts," in *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape*, eds. Nancy Shaw, Scott Watson and William Wood (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 42.
[107] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 281.

The majority of reports of McShine's role in *Information* generally focus on the enlarged scope of the curator's function. "[T]he only outstanding figure," wrote artist Les Levine in response to the exhibition, "was the curator. The curator in this situation becomes the artist."[108] However, Staniszewski stresses that the works shown as part of *Information* "were not selected by a curator" at all.[109] McShine's decision to outsource selection responsibilities (by inviting proposals for site-specific works from participating artists) ensured that "the curator's role [in *Information*] was minimal."[110] In his relative non-participation, McShine figures in Staniszewski's narrative as a counterpart of the executive "dropouts" sketched by McLuhan and Nevitt: "As any executive climbs up the echelons of the organization chart, his involvement in the organization becomes less and less."[111] The paradoxical logic of McShine's simultaneous aggrandizement and diminution of the curatorial role finds a parallel in the ambivalent logic of the Hollywood "star" system: "It often happened that one of the stars 'stepped down' from his great eminence in order to develop an even larger role."[112] Echoes of BAXTER&'s (at once executive and inclusive) approach to the role of service provider in the NGC *Environment* can also be detected in McShine's self-effacing style. Whether or not BAXTER& served as a direct model for McShine's critical performance of the curatorial role, his brand of executive fiction represents a precedent that—particularly given McShine's sustained engagement with NETCO in the year leading up to *Information*—is deserving of greater attention. In eschewing some of the traditional authority and responsibilities (but not the residual powers) vested in the curator, McShine—in some

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[108] Les Levine, "The Information Fall-Out," *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971): 267.
[109] Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, 269.
[110] Ibid, 270.
[111] McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 30.
[112] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 281.

respects recalling BAXTER&, in *Environment*, before him—was freed-up to entertain hybrid transactions within a newly corporate museological apparatus. While this strategy does not necessarily imply a Marcusean strategy of repressive tolerance, it should be stressed that—in any event—the lion's share of institutional power remained active—not in the role of curator, but—in the Museum's Director (i.e., John Hightower), even in the wake of the distributed systems of authority instituted by McShine.

If, as McLuhan and Nevitt posit, the electronic service environment may be conceived as a *power suit* which the manager "puts on [...] like "The Emperor's New Clothes," it is to the exhibition as environment that we must turn our attention if we wish to adequately conceptualize the role of the curator-cum-post-industrial-manager, or dropout. In McShine's McLuhanesque argot, *Information* was engineered to be "cooly involved" to enable visitors to "participate."[113] Like *Environment* before it, *Information* was thus conceived as an immersive environment for the provision of "personal services."[114] In this respect, *Information* set the stage for the development of the museum into a "mass medium" in 1980s and 1990s "for engaging the visitor through entertainment and information."[115]

The connections drawn by McShine between information and participation are foregrounded by Bryan-Wilson in her account of the MoMA show.[116] If participation was a shibboleth for 1960s fantasies of the integration of art and life, Bryan-Wilson reminds us that "so too did participation become an influential buzzword within labour

[113] McShine (ed.), *Information*, 141.
[114] Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 214.
[115] Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 210.
[116] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 199.

management."[117] In the late 1960s and 1970s, human relations specialists increasingly viewed enhanced worker participation as a tonic against reports of unprecedented alienation afflicting organizations.[118] In Bryan-Wilson's account, participation signifies an ambivalent spectrum of meanings, ranging from "'active viewer engagement' to 'partnerships with industry,' [the latter] connoting corrupt influence from the military-industrial complex."[119] The immanence of such a field of conflicting values in the participatory environment of *Information* may, as Allan suggests, also reflect the ambivalent strategic objectives of then MoMA Director, John Hightower. Both Bryan-Wilson and Allan portray Hightower's administration as one defined by a novel blend of political accommodation and corporate partnership. Having assumed his embattled tenure with the Museum at the height of AWC and GAAG actions (Fig. 6), a mere six months prior to the opening of the exhibition, Hightower was likely keen to strike a new deal with protesting artists and the Museum's new corporate sponsors alike through the conciliatory vision of a technological playground presented by *Information*.[120]

In a contemporary interview with artist Lil Picard, Hightower invokes a logic of arbitration to define his mandate: "I wouldn't have the job if I didn't think that I would somehow accomplish, in my own terms perhaps, the demands of the AWC which I am very sympathetic to, as well as satisfy the yearnings, if you will, of the trustees of the Museum of Modern Art who want to change and recognize the need for change or to

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[117] Ibid.
[118] For insightful discussions of the psychic economy inaugurated by human relations departments, see: Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 200; Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex*, 91-93. For a discussion of increased alienation among U.S. labourers in the post-1968 period, see: Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 33-35.
[119] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 202.
[120] Ibid, 192.

move forward, but are confronted with the specifics on how to go about it."[121] In the same interview, after declaring his admiration for the aesthetic and political efficacy of the GAAG intervention *Blood Bath*, Hightower's rhetoric of accommodation achieved a dizzying intensity as he appealed to the inclusive politics of participation, declaring: "everybody is an artist."[122]

Probably no other work displayed at *Information* is more closely associated with the ambivalent legacy of this participatory mandate than Hans Haacke's *MOMA-Poll* (1970) (Fig. 7). The signal importance assigned to this piece in the literature on *Information* mirrors its original prominence within the exhibition space: situated at the gallery entrance, Haacke's highly-visible questionnaire—affixed directly to the gallery wall—asked visitors a single, but highly-controversial, question: "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" Visitors were invited to cast their ballot in one of two clear plastic voting boxes situated immediately below the questionnaire (the one on the left appropriately designated "yes").

The political efficacy of Haacke's intervention is attested to by Hightower's recollection that he received an order from Governor Rockefeller following the opening of *Information* to "kill that element of the exhibition."[123] Yet, though *MOMA-Poll* is situated within many histories of institutional critique as a foundational work in the development of that radical genre,[124] Gregory Battock attacked the piece for its absence

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[121] John Hightower quoted in Lil Picard, "Interview with John Hightower" *Arts Magazine* 44, no. 7 (May 1970): 20.
[122] Ibid.
[123] John Hightower, interviewed by Sharon Zane, April 1996, transcript, MoMA Oral History Project, MoMA Archives, 60.
[124] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 192.

of utopian capacity or—in the critic's Marcusean argot—"prefigurative" vision.[125] In Bryan-Wilson's assessment, Haacke's piece also suffered from its reliance on the logic of "corporate participation."[126] The ambivalence of *MOMA-Poll*'s foregrounding of audience involvement is rendered visible, in Bryan-Wilson's reading, in the frequently-reproduced documentation of the piece showing a smartly-dressed young woman depositing her ballot in the box at left: any oppositional potential is diffused in this inclusive spectacle.

If, for some, Haacke's *MOMA-Poll* signalled the possibility of critical participation within an institutional milieu, other gadgets at *Information* portended more sinister developments. Staniszewski identifies the monolithic "visual jukebox" or "information machine" (Figs. 8-9) lent by Italian manufacturer Olivetti and televisions funded by J.C. Penny Co. Inc. as symbols of the "highly visible corporate presence at *Information*."[127] She further notes that the *Information* press release prominently acknowledged the support of ITT World Communications and Xerox for the Telex and telecopier machines lent to facilitate the transmissions of N.E. Thing Co. (itself a *bona fide* corporation in its own right) for the duration of the exhibition. For Staniszewski, the appearance, at *Information,* of the corporation as a *visible* exhibition sponsor (through the conspicuous display of corporate logos, affixed to such monolithic company products as Olivetti's "information machine"—perhaps the pre-eminent instance of this novel exercise in "cross-promotion")[128] inaugurated a new "interrelatedness" of exhibition

[125] Battock cited in Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 195.
[126] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 201.
[127] Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, 282.
[128] Rectanus,, *Culture Incorporated*, 30.

design and (sometimes competing) institutional and corporate agendas.[129] Although Victoria D. Alexander and Grace Glueck stress that museum trustees (a population typically composed of the representatives of powerful private and class interests) have, since at least the nineteenth century, exerted pressure on the institution in order to advance their personal goals or augment their prestige and, in turn, cultivated the museum as a brand, Rectanus echoes Alexander in tracing the origins of intensified corporate manipulation of the museum to the 1960s.[130] Rectanus specifically associates the beginnings of the contemporary museum sponsorship with Philip Morris's funding of the 1965 show *Pop & Op* and, subsequently, the 1969 landmark exhibition of conceptualism, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*.[131] Yet neither of these experiments in public relations included the cross-promotion of products seen subsequently in *Information*.

This conjunction is perhaps most legible in the sensuous exhibition environment engineered by McShine in cooperation with MoMA production manager Charles Froom (Figs. 10-13).[132] The "amorphous museum"[133] which they concocted was, as McShine explained in a memo to Arthur Drexler, Director of MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design, intended to amplify the concerns of the artworks (Fig. 14):

> In order to emphasize this 'dematerialization' [of the artworks selected for *Information*] I thought that I could make the point in the galleries in a very subtle visual way by using

[129] Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, 285.
[130] Victoria D. Alexander, *Museums and Money: The Impact of Funding on Exhibitions, Scholarship, and Management* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1; Grace Glueck, "Power and Esthetics: The Trustee," in *Museums in Crisis*, ed. Brian O'Doherty (New York: George Braziller, 1972); Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 26.
[131] Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 26-27.
[132] Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, 270.
[133] Ibid.

> some new designs in furniture instead of the usual museum benches in the galleries of my exhibition.[134]

Although Allan associates this selection of non-object-like furniture—notably, a cluster of white Sacco beanbag chairs—with an attempt to re-conceptualize the exhibition environment as itself a form of Conceptual architecture,[135] it is also possible that the curator's interest in the potential for furniture and other design elements to inform viewers' experience of the exhibition as a whole may have had little to do with the frosty ideational qualities imputed by Allan to contemporary Italian design but, rather, may be connected with McShine's acknowledged interest in the "hedonistic" potential of dematerialized environments (Fig. 16).[136] McShine's curatorial effort immediately preceding *Information*, *Five Recent Acquisitions*—showcasing works by Larry Bell, Ron Davis, Robert Irwin, Craig Kauffman, and John McCracken recently acquired by MoMA—likened the ambient effects wrought by the dematerialized practices of Irwin and Bell to hedonistic forms of "embodiment."[137] While the post-minimal, sculptural quality of the works included in *Five Recent Acquisitions* is distinct from the fully dematerialized character of the majority of works included in *Information*, parallels with the furniture and other design elements of the latter exhibition are compelling. Commercial photography—repurposed by McShine in the *Information* catalogue—showing a female model casually interacting with Sacco beanbags (Fig. 15) underlines

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[134] Kynaston McShine, "Kynaston McShine to Arthur Drexler" (February 5, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York
[135] Allan, "Understanding *Information*," 148.
[136] Kynaston McShine, "Five Recent Acquisitions" [Wall text] (1969).
[137] Ibid.

the ergonomic and even erotic connotations of the amorphous forms privileged by McShine in his re-tooling of the exhibition space.

McShine's exploration of sensuous environments may have derived some of its impetus from the visionary prescriptions on exhibition design promulgated by Marshall McLuhan and his associate Harley Parker (1915-1992) at a seminar organized by the Museum of the City of New York in 1967: *Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values of Museum Communication with the Viewing Public.* Allan observes a correspondence between McLuhan's comments on the experiential orientation of Expo '67 and the participatory inflection of McShine's essay in the *Information* catalogue.[138] Allan further notes that the curator's supervisor, John Hightower, had been an attendee of the seminar in his previous role as executive director of the New York State Council of the Arts (which financed the McLuhan event and subsequently co-published a transcript of the seminar).[139] The possibility that McLuhan and Parker's speculations may have exerted a direct influence on McShine's conception of *Information* as a participatory interface between the institution, business and the public is strengthened by the existence of an abbreviated transcript of the seminar in the exhibition fond at the MoMA Archives.[140] Finally, Allan notes that statements made by McLuhan during the 1967 seminar reappeared almost verbatim in Hightower's subsequent published comments.[141] The following overview of McLuhan and Parker's theorization of the museum is intended to situate McShine's approach to the curatorial role as "dropout" within a broader discourse of museology in the 1960s.

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[138] Allan, "Understanding *Information*," 153.
[139] Ibid, 165.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

The museum of the electronic age envisioned by McLuhan abandons its former function as a static "retrieval system for classified objects."[142] Under the influence of new, participatory media, the museum is transformed into a theatre for the "training of perception."[143] The training of post-literate audiences operates through the responsive "interface"[144] of the electronic environment and is itself environmental in its scope and effects: "The real artefacts made by man," argued McLuhan, "are environment, not objects that are contained in environment."[145] Drawing upon the Canadian media theorist's prior insight that the *user* is the content of the medium, McLuhan and Parker's conceptualization of the electronic museum stressed the creative role of audiences in knowledge discovery: "An audience is the surround. It is the new environment for the artefact."[146] This statement closely parallels McShine's framing of *Information* as a relational environment in his catalogue essay: "The constant demand is a more aware relation to our natural and artificial environments."[147] The environmental turn evinced by the writings of McLuhan and McShine is symptomatic of both authors' rejection of the "visual bias" of traditional museum design in favour of an exploration of the synaesthetic possibilities associated with "non-pictorial" approaches.[148]

McLuhan's museological musings were alternately informed and confirmed by the innovative museum designs of his sometime collaborator Parker, an artist and scholar who served as Head of Design and Installations at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto from 1957 to 1967 and was affiliated with McLuhan's Centre for Culture and

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[142] Marshall McLuhan quoted in *Exploration*, 1.
[143] Ibid, 4.
[144] Ibid, 6.
[145] Ibid, 9.
[146] Ibid, 2.
[147] McShine (ed.), *Information*, 141.
[148] McLuhan quoted in *Exploration*, 6, Parker quoted in *Exploration*, 31.

Technology at the University of Toronto (1967-1975) as a Research Associate and held academic appointments with the Ontario College of Art (1947-1957), Fordham University (1967) and Rochester Institute of Technology (1973).[149] Although Parker's graphic designs for the expanded and revised 1969 edition of McLuhan's *Counterblast* are relatively unadventurous, and his watercolours are positively traditional, all indications point to the radical nature of his experiments in installation design. In 1965, Tom Wolfe reported on Parker's innovations in the pages of the *New York Herald Tribune* thus:

> In the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, a McLuhanite named Harley Parker is designing a 'pure McLuhan' gallery for displaying invertebrate paleontology, fishes and things, 'a gallery of total sensory involvement,' Harley Parker says, with the smell of the sea piped in, the tape-recorded sound of waves, coloured lights simulating the fuzzy-plankton undersea green, 'not just a gallery of data, but a total experience.'[150]

Through multi-screen film projections and by harnessing non-visual stimuli (audio, tactile and even olfactory) through—for instance—revolving platforms, Parker hoped to disrupt (visual) habits of perception and produce an "immediate mosaic" of sensory information (Fig. 17).[151] The paradigmatic example of the immersive, audile-tactile environments created by Parker at the ROM was the Eskimo [sic.] gallery:

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[149] Margret Parker, "Harkey Parker: 1915-1992," http://harleyparker.ca/ (accessed May 23, 2010); *Exploration*, u.p.
[150] Tom Wolfe, "The New Life Out There," http://www.digitallantern.net/mcluhan/course/spring96/wolfe.html (accessed May 23, 2010).
[151] Parker quoted in *Exploration*, 1.

> [W]e designed it in such a way that there were no straight lines in it or as few as possible in a rectangular room. We curved from the floor up to the walls; we curved from the walls to the ceilings, all were curves because, according to the anthropologists, this is the quality of the landscape there.[152]

McLuhan's response to this display offers insights into the reciprocal mechanism of post-literate museological environments: [T]hat is the way of tackling the artefact in its natural habitat. But it's also a habitat that tends to *make* an Eskimo world [my emphasis].[153] The capacity of multi-media displays to both simulate and produce pre- or post-literate environments was viewed by McLuhan and Parker alike as an essential tool for curators and museum administrators desirous of reaching out to a new generation of "dropouts." "[W]e're raising a little tribe of Eskimos," declared Parker in a revealing reference to the hippies whom he observed in their Yorkdale milieu (located only a few blocks from the austere, "literate" halls of the ROM).[154] "I think we have to begin to move in and accommodate this generation which is growing up," urged Parker.[155] Like the subsequent design innovations introduced by McShine in *Information*, Parker's designs (and McLuhan's comments on them) explicitly addressed the "changing sensory modalities" of a younger generation.[156] "I have never seen a hippie go inside the Royal Ontario Museum" lamented Parker at the museum seminar hosted by the Museum of the

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[152] Ibid, 4. A similarly immersive approach was adopted by Parker in his recreation of a West Coast Native habitat: "What I did was to produce a case which was almost totally in the round, and you walk into the centre of it. Even though there had to be glass—I'm still toying with the idea of air curtains—but if there has to be glass, people are in a complete surrounding with the round glass. It's all around them. This is one way of breaking through the glass barrier" (Ibid, 20).
[153] McLuhan quoted in *Exploration*, 5.
[154] Parker quoted in *Exploration*, 42.
[155] Ibid, 35.
[156] Ibid, 10.

City of New York.[157] Parker's solution—anticipating that developed by McShine in *Five Recent Acquisitions* and subsequently perfected in *Information*—displaced the traditional emphasis on the curation of objects onto an immersive, haptic environment—"a gallery with no labels"[158]—that would literally permit the curator to keep in touch with a rapidly-changing socio-cultural context by stepping down or dropping out. Such a solution also anticipates the managerial strategies proposed by McLuhan in *Culture is Our Business* and *Take Today*.[159] If, as some have suggested, an element of repressive tolerance was at work in *Information*, such a strategic objective would surely have emanated from the museum's director, John Hightower, rather than McShine, who (more in keeping with the techno-utopian aspirations of McLuhan, as opposed to the more reactive stance of Harley Parker) consistently endorsed the liberating potential of sensuous, participatory environments.

Neither Parker nor McLuhan shied away from the proximity between the instruments of mass entertainment and the "light-and-sound show" with which they hoped to lure boomer youth into the museum.[160] "We live very much in an 'entertainment world,'" stated Parker.[161] "Show business is the main business of mankind from now on."[162] McLuhan echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that the

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[157] Ibid, 39.
[158] Ibid, 14.
[159] That McLuhan agreed to pose for Yousuf Karsh in front of Parker's multi-media invertebrate installation at the ROM (which juxtaposed a score of telephone receivers against highly tactile sculptural representations of fossils) is an indication that Parker's environmental explorations were at the forefront of the media theorist's thought.
[160] Parker quoted in *Exploration*, 140.
[161] Ibid, 43.
[162] Ibid.

entertainment complex now extended to museums[163] and exhorting attendees of the museum seminar to study the business model:

> You can find a lot in common with their problems. You could sit down with any group of managers and discuss organization problems and be amazed at how much you have in common with them. I strongly recommend this, because it's desirable to have dialogue at all levels of the community.[164]

A looming rapprochement of culture and business was predicted a few years earlier by Alvin Toffler in his popular text, *The Culture Consumers* (1964).[165] Toffler prophesied a range of far-reaching consequences for both cultural institutions and businesses that would result from this alliance. Consistent with Toffler's subsequent bestseller, *Future Shock* (1970), *The Culture Consumers* was predictive in its findings. A similarly futurological orientation characterized McShine's forecast, vis-à-vis *Information*, of a coming alliance between corporations and the museum.[166] As an exercise in futurology, McShine's "report" on the coming art of the 1970s is symptomatic of a broader preoccupation with temporality evident in art historiography of the period.

In *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s*, Pamela M. Lee proposes that the art criticism of the 1960s discloses "an almost obsessional uneasiness with time and its measure."[167] For Lee, this obsession with time takes several forms, most notably the recursive temporality of cybernetic feedback associated with the Systems theories

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[163] "I would suggest that museums are in show business, too" (McLuhan quoted in *Exploration*, 43).
[164] Ibid, 25.
[165] Alvin Toffler, *The Culture Consumers* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1964), 92.
[166] McShine (ed.), *Information*, 2.
[167] Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), xii.

spawned by Norbert Wiener. Artists such as On Kawara, on the other hand, instantiate—for Lee—a divergent conceptualization of temporality as forecast.[168] In this formulation, the cybernetic conceit is redeployed to predict future events based upon the probability that previous cycles in the feedback loop will recur:

> [T]he mid-sixties gave rise not only to the institutional study of time […] but the institutionalization of what has come to be known as future studies, futures research, futurology, or technological forecasting […]. Many of these forecasts imparted the seduction of science fiction, the stern admonitions of public policy, or less commonly, the revolutionary energies of counterculture.[169]

At first glance, it would seem paradoxical to interpret what McShine himself described as a report on "the strongest 'style' or international movement of the *last* three years" (my emphasis) in the predictive terms of futurology. Yet, in their speculative management study McLuhan and Nevitt insisted that to engage in forecasting merely requires that one perform an accurate reading of the features of the present: "Only those who have learned to perceive the present can predict the future. They need only predict what has already happened by being the first to see through pattern recognition."[170] This cybernetic definition of forecasting as feedback is echoed by prominent artist/futurologist (and acquaintance of both McLuhan and Parker), John McHale, in his popular text *The Future of the Future* (1969):

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[168] Ibid, 264.
[169] Ibid, 267, 268.
[170] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 134.

> The future of the past is in the future
>
> The future of the present is in the past
>
> *The future of the future is in the present* [my emphasis][171]

The futurological renovation of the curatorial role evinced by McShine's experimentation with trend-watching mirrors transformations in the managerial role documented by McLuhan and Nevitt in *Take Today*: "The manager moves his action from the manipulation of things to the *anticipation* of processes by understanding their causes" (my emphasis).[172] According to Allan, McShine planned *Information* on a similarly predictive basis: "[he] organized the structural format of the show and determined the artist contributors on the basis of their past work and expected *future performance*" (my emphasis).[173] McShine's reconfiguration of curatorial practice into a form of futurology-of-the-present is analogous to the speculative journalism imagined by Parker:

> I want to build what I call a 'newseum,' which consists of a building outside the museum proper, but which draws on the artefacts and materials of the museum for its shows. The idea of a newseum is that it is concern with news, any news in the world which is of great moment, whether it occurs in science or archaeological discovery or what have you, or whether it occurs on the political scene.[174]

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[171] McHale, *The Future of the Future*, u.p., 12.
[172] McLuhan, *Take Today*, 14.
[173] Allan, "Understanding *Information*," 160.
[174] Parker quoted in *Exploration*, 33.

The outlines of Parker's project approximate the plan of the final third of the *Information* catalogue (consisting of recycled newspaper and magazine images documenting contemporary events),[175] the catalogue itself having been conceived by McShine as a McLuhanesque "extension" of the exhibition proper, much as Parker envisioned his *newseum* as drawing from the museum's collections though existing outside its walls.[176] Both projects must be rigorously distinguished from garden variety journalism; their speculative frameworks displace the present tense of the report within the future-oriented schedule of forecasting. McShine's presentation of art *as news* resonates with McLuhan's pointed quotation of Ezra Pound at the 1967 museum seminar: "'Art is news that stays news,'" he insisted.[177] In their news-making effects, both Parker's newseum and McShine's catalogue approximate the regime of environmental administration described by McLuhan and Nevitt: "The familiar idea of 'making the news' now yields to making the world itself."[178] This world-making aspect of McShine's practice is implicated in the transformation for MoMA into a prototypical "space of flows," to invoke Manuel Castells's influential concept (Fig. 18).[179] That is, a "milieu of innovation" which fosters "synergy" and "added value" for both public and private partners as well as for the host metropolis as a whole.[180] In parallel with industrial

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[175] Allan compares this section of the *Information* catalogue to the New York underground magazine *Newspaper*, published by Steve Lawrence and Andrew Ullrick, four issues of which are in the *Information* fond (146).
[176] Kynaston McShine, "Kynaston McShine to Marna Thoma" (April 30, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
[177] McLuhan quoted in *Exploration*, 53.
[178] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today,* 297.
[179] Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society,* 378. For a provocative discussion of the transformation of MoMA into a multi-purpose entertainment (and residential!) complex through successive architectural restorations and expansions, see: Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art: The Past's Future," *Journal of Design History* 5, no. 3 (1992): 207-215.
[180] Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society,* 378.

centres of innovation, the space of flows forecast by McShine is "organized flows of information."[181]

The futurological "programming of total environments" envisioned by McLuhan and Nevitt[182] figures in McShine's curatorial project as the "ESP" of the manager-cum-dropout.[183] In McShine's execution of the curatorial role, a centralist approach to content management and design yields to the responsive programming of future-oriented sensory environments (the synaesthetic newseum). The curator drops out in order to keep in touch—via the ESP capabilities of the information media—with accelerated trends in youth culture and new perceptual data. While the responsibilities of the curator are dispersed in the decentralized, participatory interface of the newseum, conventional power relations continue to inhere in the Museum's directorship. Moreover, the curator does not divest their powers in taking off their power suit.

IAIN BAXTER&: Artist as "Drop-in"

> RENT-AN-EXECUTIVE
>
> —Toronto ad cited in McLuhan and Nevitt *Take Today*, 1972.[184]

> One man's dropout is another man's drop-in e.g., the consultant chooses his place of action.
>
> —McLuhan and Nevitt *Take Today*, 1972.[185]

[181] McLuhan and Nevitt, 393.
[182] Ibid, 97.
[183] Ibid, 14.
[184] Toronto ad cited in McLuhan and Nevitt *Take Today*, 280.

The traditional executive functions vacated by the curator under the impact of new technologies and youth culture (as the savvy curator *drops out*) are re-occupied by a new breed of artist-executive. If McShine is exemplary of the curator who—in keeping with McLuhan's theorization of the executive-as-dropout—steps down to keep in touch, IAIN BAXTER& is representative of the artist-executive described by McLuhan and Nevitt who re-programs the technological environment: "[T]he artist occupies the ivory tower in slow-changing society," they write; "[h]e moves to the control tower in a rapidly changing world. He alone can see the present clearly enough to navigate."[186] BAXTER&'s appropriation of the executive role should not be confused with a monopolization of power or the expression of centralizing ambitions. The *masquerade*[187] of authority performed by BAXTER& is profoundly decentralizing in its impulse. As such, BAXTER& again recalls McLuhan and Nevitt: "As all monopolies of knowledge break down in our world of information speed-up, the role of executive opens up to Everyman. There are managers galore in the global theatre."[188] William Wood has explored the geographical dimensions of N.E. Thing Co.'s marginal practice vis-à-vis the Company's remote location in Vancouver (remote relative to the financial and symbolic "centre" of the art world, New York): "The periphery parodies the centre's claim of authority by ironically assuming that power for itself."[189] While Wood convincingly

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[185] McLuhan and Nevitt *Take Today*, 280.
[186] Marshall McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 16. For an exploration of *Environment* as a "prototype" for the collusion of cultural and economic interests, see: David Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories," 248.
[187] For a discussion of this concept viz. the performance of social roles, see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006 [1990]), 63-72.
[188] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take* Today, 295.
[189] William Wood, "Capital and Subsidiary: The N.E. Thing Co. and the Revision of Conceptual Art," in *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape*, eds. Nancy Shaw, Scott Watson and William Wood, 11-23 (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 16.

argues that peripheralism operated within NETCO's networked practice to effect a "decentred concept of aesthetic geography,"[190] marginality also shaped the internal operations of the Company, informing—in particular—the novel roles performed by its personnel. The horizontal structure of NETCO (which collapsed the traditional organization tree, excluding all but executive positions) exemplified the decentralizing logic of the electric corporation analyzed by McLuhan and Nevitt. Just as in McLuhan and Nevitt's analysis of Henry Ford's presidency, discussed above, executive inputs have been seen to generate new and sometimes unexpected decentralizing outputs, so in BAXTER&'s performance of the McLuhanesque trope of Everyman-as-executive, traditionally centralist executive functions disperse into novel forms of executive labour in the (decentred) arena of consultation.

The flexibility and mobility of NETCO's corporate apparatus is consistent with the new class of executive consultants dubbed "drop-ins" by McLuhan and Nevitt: "The 'mobile executive' is rapidly coming to the position where he [sic.] can choose his place of work."[191] If, in the context of *Information*, McShine's function as dropout was to "reveal the new hidden *ground*" of electronic environments and youth culture, BAXTER&'s mandate as drop-in was "to prop up the collapsing foundations" of the institution.[192] The ludic bravado of BAXTER&'s neon, photo-silkscreened communiqué to McShine[193] in May 1970 (Fig. 19) announces an executive identity consistent with the role of avant-garde consultant described by McLuhan and Nevitt. Alternately visionary

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[190] Ibid, 18.
[191] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 280.
[192] Ibid, 22.
[193] IAIN BAXTER&, "IAIN BAXTER& to Kynaston McShine" (May 1, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; Ann Rosenberg, "An Illustrated Introduction to the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd." *The Capilano Review*, nos. 8/9 (Fall 1975): 140.

and self-deprecating, BAXTER&'s executive identity in this document coincides with the cool, non-specialist "star" of the new knowledge industries described in *Take Today*.[194]

As early as *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* (1967), McLuhan identified the artist as the prototype for new (drop-in) executive roles which, he predicted, would replace bureaucratic models under the impact of an electronic environment.[195] In the later 1960s, BAXTER& drew freely from McLuhan's management speculations in tandem with a broad selection of popular and specialist management literature to develop his role as Company President. The same sources also informed the consultancy functions and roles which BAXTER& and Ingrid (Baxter) Ovesen developed in parallel with their (internal) executive duties beginning in 1970. Following the wholesale transfer of Company operations to the National Gallery of Canada in 1969, BAXTER& experimented with an analogous (but dematerialized) logic of displacement through tactics that transformed the Company President into a "stay at home commuter" and "non-organizational man."[196] The consultancy services offered by NETCO personnel at the Data Processing Management Association (DPMA) conferences held in Vancouver and Seattle in the spring of 1970 (immediately prior to *Information*) turned previous Company functions inside-out.[197] "N.E. Thing Consults with 1% of You" declared Company literature distributed by hired models at the conference and business exposition.[198] Installing itself

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[194] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 282.
[195] By way of explicating the organizational effects of contemporary information flow, McLuhan pits Sherlock Holmes, the epitome of the "many-sided man" or "intuitive genius," against the rational administrators of Scotland Yard, "hostile to the inclusive and instantaneous grasping of situations" (u.p.).
[196] N.E. Thing Co., *Business Philosophy*, 1970 [manila folder printed with Company slogans]. Reproduced in *Les enterprises critiques/Critical Companies*, ed. Yann Toma (Saint-Etienne: Cité du design, 2008), 248-249.
[197] "Supplement from Newsweek on 'International Data Processing Conference and Business Exposition, Seattle...June 23-26, 1970." Reproduced in *Documentary Protocols (1967-1975)*, ed. Vincent Bonin (Montréal: Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, 2010), 82.
[198] N.E. Thing Co., *Business Philosophy*.

amidst such "legitimate" computing concerns as IBM, 3M and Xerox, NETCO exploited the DPMA as a platform for developing new consultancy operations, or "diagnostic service checks" to promote "Gross National Good" or GNG.[199] A last-minute invitation to participate in a panel entitled "The Human Element in the Information Processing Community" earned BAXTER& the highest audience evaluation of any conference participant.[200] Following the success of its DPMA intervention, NETCO was hired as a consultant by a private company located in Renton, Washington (on the outskirts of Seattle). Some semblance of the content improvised by N.E. Thing Co. personnel for their motivational talk—*Your Employee and Motivation*—may be reconstructed from such surviving NETCO pronouncements as: "We up your aesthetic quality of life, we up your creativity."[201] A subsequent contract in Ottawa underscores the McLuhanesque orientation of these consultancy services. According to Ann Rosenberg, *Consultant re Viewer Participation* (1970) involved discussions regarding "a special TV show using television for direct viewer participation."[202] Such real-world consultancy activities, with their consistent emphasis on enhancing employee/viewer involvement, reinforce the possibility of mapping BAXTER&'s coeval role in *Information* onto the coordinates of McLuhan and Nevitt's drop-in. As drop-in, BAXTER& served as an "instant catalyst" for the responsive social environment "imagineered" by McShine.[203]

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[199] Ibid.
[200] William J. Horne, "William J. Horne to IAIN BAXTER&" (July 9, 1970), BAXTER& papers, consulted October 23, 2009.
[201] Ann Rosenberg, "A Selection of N.E. Thing Company A.C.T.'s" *The Capilano Review*, nos. 8/9 (Fall 1975): 147; N.E. Thing Co. in Nancy Shaw, "Siting the Banal: The Extended Landscapes of the N.E. Thing Co.," in *You Are Now in the Middle of a N.E. Thing Co. Landscape*, ed. Nancy Shaw, Scott Watson and William Wood, 25-34 (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993), 25.
[202] Rosenberg, "A Selection of N.E. Thing Company A.C.T.'s," 147
[203] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 295; N.E. Thing Co., *Business Philosophy*, 1970.

The playful tenor of BAXTER&'s consultancy rhetoric should not obscure the serious element of play at work in the horizontal corporation, or "ad-hocracy,"[204] of the information age theorized by McLuhan and Nevitt as well as Toffler, in which the artist's practice is rightly situated. Indeed, play emerges as the defining characteristic of work in the electronic corporation described by McLuhan: "[r]ole-playing supplants job-holding just as knowledge supplants experience" (my emphasis).[205] McLuhan and Nevitt associate this emphasis on play within the post-industrial organization with the incorporation of Operations Research into management functions at all levels of the corporate hierarchy.[206] "[O]peration research forced creativity upon the entire business world because of the need to anticipate problems with solutions."[207] The speculative management theorists trace the emergence of this phenomenon to the routinization of Operations Research during World War II and identify the subsequent decline in efficacy of executive research activity with the assimilation of open-ended inquiry and discussion into obsolete business models (thereby turning playful bull sessions into administrative disservice).[208] The remedy prescribed by McLuhan and Nevitt to alleviate the tensions between innovation and tradition inherent in institutionalized forms of non-directed and collaborative investigation was to welcome the socially- and technically-conscious figure of the drop-in into the sanctum sanctorum of the boardroom:

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[204] Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), chapter 7.
[205] McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), u.p.
[206] "Playfulness and creativity and invention are inseparable. Even before these playful approaches, 'value engineering' had been the name used by General Electric for techniques of meeting new competition in 'hardware' products" (McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 102).
[207] Ibid, 32.
[208] "One of the breakthroughs of World War II was Operations Research, which began as 'brain storming' and soon dried up as expertise" (McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 101).

> Gradually the uptight managers of the most responsible business operations conceded the necessity of sinking into the most undignified forms of mental horseplay in order to cope with their need for information.[209]

Through the stimulating presence of the non-specialist drop-in, the research activities enacted by boardroom personnel abandoned the hum-drum character of the strategic exercises developed by such military-industrial think tanks as RAND in response to the agonistic logic of Cold War politics. Whereas "[t]he drab fact about 'think tanks' is that they are contrived for the mass production and packaging of scenarios and programs for the harassed Establishment,[210]" under the influence of the drop-in, the corporation is transformed into a "funhouse."[211] Although the latter concept accrues a derogatory resonance in Tomas's deployment of it (in relation to NETCO's NGC *Environment*), the futurological writings of McLuhan and Toffler alike elevate play environments into utopian symbols of the electronic society.

The playful environment of Expo '67 was paradigmatic for McLuhan (as evinced by the media theorist's comments at the 1967 museum seminar discussed above) of the potential for electronic media to generate a responsive "world of process" (a model subsequently recycled by MoMA director John Hightower).[212] In *Future Shock*, Toffler similarly chose a playful architectural environment—the flexible and versatile "Fun Palace" (1961-64, unrealized) designed by British architect Cedric Price (1934-2003)—to exemplify the playful attitudes and behaviours of the "modular" society which he

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[209] Ibid, 102.
[210] Ibid, 167.
[211] Tomas, "The Dilemma of Categories," 235.
[212] Allan, "Understanding Information," 153, n. 35.

foretold.[213] If for McLuhan and Parker the synaesthetic environments of the exposition and museum were key sites of subject formation in the information society, Toffler viewed such fun palaces as nodal points in an emergent cultural system which he labelled the "experience industries."[214] In Toffler's forecast, these industries would provide essential services to consumers in the dematerialized psycho-economy[215] of the near future: ephemeral services for brain workers seeking "sexoticism"[216] and other intangible novelties.

If the play tactics of the executive drop-in theorized by McLuhan and Nevitt are consistent with the ludic features of the audile-tactile museum envisioned by Parker and the mobile fun palace celebrated by Toffler, a correspondence with the Marxian futurology of Herbert Marcuse may also be distinguished. Although there is no evidence of a direct influence upon the work of BAXTER&, Chris Gilbert convincingly argues that Marcuse's exploration of the liberationist possibilities of play set the backdrop for "imagined fusions of leisure and labour" in the 1960s in general.[217] In any event, Marcuse's influential discussion of the "play impulse"[218] in *Eros and Civilization* (1955) provides a congenial framework for conceptualizing the play element at work in the executive fiction of BAXTER&. Marcuse identifies play as the mediating term between the sensuous and cognitive registers of human experience.[219] (Compare this formulation with McLuhan and Nevitt, who write that, "[e]xperience is play, and meaning is replay

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[213] Toffler, *Future Shock*, 54.
[214] Ibid, 200.
[215] Ibid, 208.
[216] Ibid, 202.
[217] Gilbert, "Herbie Goes Bananas," 68; Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 31.
[218] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 187.
[219] Ibid.

and recognition".)[220] Marcuse further opposes the "aesthetic dimension" proper to the exercise of play to the reality principle which supports the prevailing regime of "repressive productivity."[221] In contrast to the disapproving light cast on play by such critics of the ludic aspects of *Information* and NETCO as, respectively, Battock and Tomas (who condemn this playful element for being insufficiently "negative"[222] in its interface with the museological apparatus), Marcuse upholds play for its capacity to "literally transform the reality."[223] The play element in the executive practice of BAXTER& is thus improperly conceived as collusion with the productive forces of domination. Play operates, rather, as *interplay*: that is, the abrasive interface between social and economic strata which transforms work into play.[224]

Interplay is the transformative ungrounding of authority (if not power) engendered by ludic transactions that effect an open-ended interpenetration of conventionally of discrete (economic, ideational, institutional, etc.) domains. "[W]e live in worlds that burrow on each other," wrote McLuhan and Nevitt.[225] It is as a form of painstaking burrowing or interplay that BAXTER&'s resonant consultative practice should be situated. In line with the anarcho-modernist institutional burrowing practiced by his former colleague at Simon Fraser University, Jerry Zaslove, BAXTER&'s playful dropping in can be interpreted as an exercise in "anarcho-aestheticism."[226] The ultimate

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[220] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 142.
[221] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 193.
[222] Gregory Battock, "Informative Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art" *artsmagazine* 44, no. 8 (Summer 1970), 24.
[223] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 189.
[224] The concept of interplay is central to McLuhan's environmental theories: "[Marx] was unprepared for *interplay*, the resonant interval where new action is" (McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 75).
[225] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 105.
[226] Ian Angus,"Sharing Secrets, or On Burrowing in Public" in *Anarcho-Modernism: Toward a New Critical Theory. In Honour of Jerry Zaslove*, ed. Ian Angus, pp. 363-377 (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2001), p. 373, 374-375.

burrower, the anarcho-aesthetic person is, according to Zaslove, "a drop-out person who realizes that by being formed in the image of the group, entry into the phantasmagorical world of modernity is assured."[227] The solution is to dig deeper *in*.[228] In keeping with this Kafkaesque logic, BAXTER& has consistently employed the language of burrowing as abrasive (but non-antagonistic) interplay in his published writings and interviews. Consultation as infiltration is the thrust of BAXTER&'s commentary on NETCO in a 1974 seminar published by the Owens Art Gallery: "The N.E. Thing Company wants mainly to poke into business as the major big power base in the capitalistic structure."[229] This strategy recalls that of the consultant discussed by McLuhan: "Peter Drucker, the management consultant, has spent his whole life invading other people's business to reveal to them how little they know about it. They pay him very fancy prices for that"[230] (it is not a little ironic that McLuhan also acted as a corporate consultant—working in association with IBM at the time of this seminar).[231]

A primary tool employed by BAXTER& and NETCO to engage in this "probing" activity of interplay was the electronic communications media. "You can penetrate structures using communications," stated BAXTER& in a 1979 interview with Robin White.[232] It was by employing the emergent telecommunications media of Telex and Telecopier that BAXTER& infiltrated MoMA during *Information*, thereby engaging in

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[227] Jerald Zaslove, "Vindicating Popular Culture in Latin America," *Canadian Journal of Latin American & Caribbean Studies* (January 1998): 146.
[228] Ingrid Ovesen's comments in a 1975 interview with Ann Rosenberg illuminate the logic of burrowing adopted by BAXTER& and NETCO: "I don't see it [engaging in commercial ventures] as getting out; out is the wrong word. It's getting deeper *in*, if anything. [...] We're sold *in*." Ingrid Ovesen quoted in Ann Rosenberg, "Interview/N.E. Thing Co." *Capilano Review*, nos. 8/9 (Fall/Spring 1975), 170, 171.
[229] IAIN BAXTER& quoted in *Investigations* (Sackville, New Brunswick: The Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, 1974), u.p.
[230] McLuhan quoted in *Exploration*, 65.
[231] Ibid, 56.
[232] BAXTER& quoted in Robin White, "Iain Baxter/N.E. Thing Co." *View* 2, no. 4 (1979), p. 15.

an unlikely but prescient form of "long distance" burrowing. Besides the 24 *ACT* and *ART* certificates discussed above, N.E. Thing Co. was represented at *Information* by a series of live transmissions that permitted BAXTER& to effect an interplay of remote environments and penetrate the museum space from the Company's North Vancouver headquarters using equipment on loan from ITT World Communications and Xerox. The *Information* catalogue reproduces a small selection of the textual and graphic communiqués transmitted by the Company President during the show (the full archive of which is preserved in the Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research fond in the MoMA Archives). Like the telecopied works transmitted as part of the earlier project, *Trans-VSI Connection NSCAD-NETCO* (1969), BAXTER&'s *Information* transmissions reveal a playful preoccupation with themes of reproduction and multiplication. For instance, a telecopied drawing of a single large dot is labelled "TWO DOTS": an allusion to the process of optical duplication which occurs when the transmitted information is reconstituted by the receiver. Once received, the electronic message will effectively contain two dots (where formerly there was only one): one will be in the hands of the sender, the other in those of the recipient.

This technique of museological burrowing or dropping-in through fax recalls Harley Parker's proposal—outlined during the 1967 museum seminar discussed above—for a museum consisting entirely of sensuous facsimiles. Building on artist-futurologist John McHale's recognition in his 1966 article in *Macatre*, "The Plastic Parthenon," that reproductions of artefacts imply the "possibility of touch [that] can be a very salient factor in terms of involvement,"[233] Parker seized upon the haptic potential of the

[233] Parker quoted in *Exploration*, 12.

facsimile as a possible support for the synaesthetic *new*seum environment which he envisioned.

The phantasmatic features of Parker's newseum recall Johan Huizinga's influential conceptualization of the "playground" as a symbolic space for the "temporary abolition of the ordinary world,"[234] a notion subsequently rehabilitated by the Situationists. Libero Andreotti identifies Huizinga's playground and Cedric Price's "Fun Palace" as models for Pinot Gallizio's *Cavern of Anti-Matter* (Fig. 20), which transformed the museum space of the Stedelijk into a monumental *derive* qua playground.[235] The *Information* catalogue reveals that Huizinga's playground was also resonant for McShine (Fig. 21).

In BAXTER&'s *Information* transmissions the contents of Parker's facsimile newseum return as playful arti*fax*.[236] The artist treats this playground of *fax* as a costume—or "wearable"[237]—which can be put on (or taken off) at will:

> [I]n art, as in the biggest business innovations (e.g., Xerox), the explorers appear naked even in the act of *putting on* the whole world as their costume. What appears as "nudity" to the common-or-garden sensation seeker is the artistic strategy for taking over the public as a resource or power vortex.[238]

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[234] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955 [1938]).
[235] Libero Andreotti, "Play-Tactics of the 'Internationale Situationniste" *October* 91 (Winter 2000), 38.
[236] McLuhan and Nevitt play on the homophony of "facts" and "fax" in *Take Today* (81).
[237] N.E. Thing Co.'s Research Department claimed to have coined the term wearable to refer to its plastic fashions. *Celebration of the Body* (Kingston, Ontario: N.E. Thing Co.; Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1976), u.p.; Ann Rosenberg, "A Selection of Company A.C.T.'s." *Capilano Review*, nos. 8/9 (Fall/Spring 1975), 145.
[238] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 98.

More radically still, in his self-portrait "Telexed Self-Portrait from Memory," the artist himself appeared as faximile (Fig. 22):

> IAIN BAXTER, PRESIDENT, N.E. THING CO. LTD.
> TELEXED SELF PORTRAIT FROM MEMORY - 1969
> FRONT SIDE: COURSE BROWN HAIR SLIGHTLY BALDING AT
> TEMPLES AND SLIGHTLY OVER EARS WIDTH OR NOSE
> NORMAL AVERAGE LIPS SIDE BURNS TO BOTTOM OF EARS
> FAIR COMPLEXION HAZEL EYES LONG EYELASHES BLACK
> NON-PROTRUDING CHIN ADAMS APPLE GOLD CAP ON FRONT
> RIGHT TOOTH SPACE BETWEEN EYES SHORT DISTANCE
> NAVY BLUE TURTLE NECK SWEATER ...[239]

This gesture of self-copying—or cloning—which anticipated NETCO's subsequent inclusion of dummies representing the Company Co-Presidents in their 1971 exhibition at the Sonnabend Gallery,[240] facilitated the long-distance participation of the "art-official" consultant. In the paradoxical role of stay-at-home-commuter, the artist fits Toffler's description of "'outsider' working within the system."[241]

> Thus we find the emergence of a new kind of organization man—a man who, despite his many affiliations, remains basically uncommitted to any organization. He is willing to employ his skills and creative energies to solve problems with equipment provided by the organization, and within temporary groups established by it.[242]

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[239] IAIN BAXTER&, "Telexed Self-Portrait from Memory," in *Information*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 91.
[240] See *Co-Presidents of N.E. Thing Co. Ltd Attending Exhibition of Company Products at Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1971*. Reproduced in *Celebration of the Body*, u.p.
[241] Toffler, *Future Shock*, 132.
[242] Ibid, 134.

BAXTER&'s work as drop-in for *Information* establishes his executive fiction as a paradigm for the tactics of a subsequent generation of artistic entrepreneurs who, according to Stéphane Sauzedde, "know how to address the business world, to penetrate it, to work inside it, and possibly to carry out a subversive activity within its sphere."[243] Without engaging in the oppositional tactics of *critique* deployed by Haacke, BAXTER&'s contributions to *Information* set a powerful precedent in terms of generating abrasive forms of what Wright has termed "redundant information"[244] as well as new (long-distance) spaces of inter/play. By drawing attention to, and duplicating, the functions of the (dropout) manager, the drop-in generates redundant organizational information in the gaps of institutional power.

Lippard: The Critic Takes Over

> At the moment of information overload, pattern recognition tends to occur.
>
> —Marshall McLuhan quoted in *Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values*, 1967.[245]

Julia Bryan-Wilson's account of the progressive politicization of Lucy Lippard's practice during the 1960s and early 1970s emphasizes the influential critic and curator's

[243] Sauzedde, "Questioning the Critical Potential of the Artistic Entrepreneur," 182.
[244] Wright, "The Double Ontological Status of the Artistic Enterprise," 191.
[245] Marshall McLuhan quoted in *Exploration*, 62.

self-fashioning as an "art worker."[246] Lippard's conversion to the feminist cause—coinciding with her participation in McShine's *Information* show—in the summer of 1970, grew directly, according to Bryan-Wilson, out of the critic's recuperation of her critical and curatorial activity as a form of labour and, more specifically, as "women's work."[247] "As [Lippard] embraced writing as a distinctly political form of labour," writes Bryan-Wilson, "she also turned increasingly to feminist art."[248] "What is more, criticism for Lippard *becomes* housework, a job that is inherently feminized, a form of gendered service rather than making or creating."[249] Although Bryan-Wilson discusses Lippard's contribution to the *Information* catalogue, "Absentee Information," as an experiment in redefining disciplinary and professional boundaries, her revealing study of Lippard does not explore the prominent labour component of this work as a foray in rendering visible the unseen labour of female museum workers (all-importantly, situating "Absentee Information" prior to—in Bryan-Wilson's account— Lippard's abrupt engagement with feminist politics upon her return to New York following the opening of *Information* in July 1970). Consequently, *Art Workers* fails to recognize Lippard's non-participation (as a critic) in *Information* and orchestration of female labour in "Absentee Information" as pivotal episodes in her development into a leading voice in feminist art activism and criticism. Within the context of the present study of the new forms of executive fiction visible in the administrative conceptualism practiced by certain contributors to *Information*, Lippard's feminist adoption of an executive role as part of "Absentee

[246] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 131.
[247] Ibid, 164.
[248] Ibid, 131.
[249] Ibid, 164.

Information" may also be seen to instantiate a third axis or dimension of the ideal type of the conceptual manager: namely, that of the decision-maker.

In Lippard's practice, techniques of decision are indissociable from intuitive processes of pattern recognition. Pattern recognition is also a central theme of the writings of McLuhan (one of Lippard's chief inspirations during the 1960s and '70s).[250] In McLuhan's writings, pattern recognition figures as the chief resource of the theorist in compiling an inventory of the effects generated by a rapidly-changing environment. Significantly, such an "inventory of effects" —the theorist's catchword for his own methodology—is also, in McLuhan and Nevitt's speculative management writings, the principal instrument in the toolkit of the modern executive: "The only method for perceiving process and pattern is by inventory of effects obtained by comparison and contrast of developing situations."[251] Pattern recognition operated in Lippard's early practice as appropriation and compilation.

In her own words, Lippard's early reviews were exercises in a "chameleon (or parasitic) approach to writing."[252] Pattern recognition facilitated analysis of an international field of emergent dematerialized tactics; decision subsequently reconstituted those tactics as criticism. Lippard's camouflage-like criticism and concurrent "number" exhibitions—which transformed the connoisseurship of traditional curation into a neutral compilation of data and collaboration with artists[253]—established her as a leader within

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[250] Ibid, 157.
[251] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 8.
[252] Lucy Lippard, "Curating by Numbers," *Tate Papers*, no. 12 http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/lippard.shtm (accessed June 13, 2010).
[253] Bryan-Wilson notes that Lippard described her role in organizing the seminal May 1969 Paula Cooper exhibition *Number 7* as having been "'compiled' by her" (147); Lippard has written in another context about the same period that, "I saw myself as a writer-collaborator with the artists." Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997 [1973]), x.

the conceptual community by virtue of her seemingly uncanny ability to anticipate and give shape—through pattern recognition—to "ideas in the air."[254] In some respects, the anticipatory orientation of Lippard's criticism and exhibitions recalls the futurology of Bell, McHale and McLuhan. Yet, whereas their forecasts were based on probability, Lippard's vanguard criticism resembled analyst Howard Raiffa's intuitive (Bayesian) account of decision as "a scheme [...] to organize and systematize [...] thinking" for facilitating decision under conditions of uncertainty.[255] Lippard's projects of the 1960s and '70s disclose a progressively greater preoccupation with qualitative decision-making techniques based on pattern recognition.

Fortune cookies,[256] the *Luscher Colour Test*,[257] Tarot cards[258] and, especially, the *I Ching* figure prominently in Lippard's conceptual novel, *I See/You Mean* (1979). A semi-autobiographical anti-narrative in which characters "play[ ] at rituals without knowing it," [259] the pseudo-plot of *I See/You Mean* proceeds through ceremonies of communal decision mediated by impersonal procedures of pattern recognition:

> The *I Ching* queried by three of the four people who threw it once, twenty-five years before, as they spent an evening talking around without ever talking about the subject of their mutual destinies.
>
> Does This Book Have a Happy Ending?
>
> They throw the coins and the hexagram is determined.

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[254]Ibid, ix.
[255] Raiffa, *Decision Analysis*, ix.
[256] Lippard, *I See/You Mean* (Los Angeles: Chrysalis, 1979), 70.
[257] Ibid, 98, 118.
[258] Ibid, 101.
[259] Ibid, 1. Lippard describes the process of consulting the *I Ching* "a real ritual" (ibid, 19).

> Vast indeed is the sublime Creative Principle, the Source of All co-extensive with the heavens! The Creative Principle functions through Change. [...][260]

The *I Ching*, or "Book of Changes," a classical Chinese text whose earliest constituent elements may date from as early as the third millennium BCE, consists of meditations on sixty-four possible combinations, or "hexagrams," of binary units, or "trigrams," which may be queried by the reader—or, more properly, *user*—through chance operations.[261] The sage Bao Xi or Fu Xi was traditionally credited with devising the system of trigrams (figures defined by three, alternating solid and broken, lines). King Wăn or Wen, lord of Kâu, was further credited with devising strategic mystical interpretations of the hexagrams—forming the core of the modern *I Ching*—while a political prisoner in Yû-lî in 1143 BCE:

> He named the figures, each by a term descriptive of the idea with which he had connected it in his mind, and then he proceeded to set that idea forth, now with a note of exhortation, now with a note of warning.[262]

Incorrectly understood as a tool of divination, the *I Ching*—a popular "game" in 1960s counterculture—figures in the work of Lippard, much as in the contemporary management speculations of McLuhan, as a tool for environmental pattern recognition in the service of decision. "The West has 'discovered' the I Ching and a concern with the

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[260] Ibid, 149.
[261] Richard John Lynn and Bi Wang, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the "I Ching" as Interpreted by Bi Wang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Current scholarship tends to view modern iterations of the classic text as amalgams of anonymous commentaries.
[262] *I Ching*, trans. James Legge (New York: Dover, 1963 [1899]), 20.

process of hidden environments."[263] Whereas BAXTER&'s consultancy practice harnessed the "counterenvironment" of disservice to probe capitalist (and museological) systems, Lippard deployed the hidden environments revealed by pattern recognition to achieve decision. Furthermore, while the *I Ching* primarily served as a tool for executive decision in the writings of McLuhan, it functioned as a platform for community decision in the work of Lippard. If the social commitment of Lippard's critical and curatorial exercises in decision-making distinguished her community-based practice from the self-referentiality of McShine and BAXTER&'s executive fictions, her critical role was nonetheless defined as one of community leadership. Bryan-Wilson is attentive to Lippard's leadership role within the AWC. As a figure "much respected by AWC," Lippard was granted executive powers by the community through her participation in such executive committees as the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee (Fig. 23).[264]

Lippard's allusion, vis-à-vis the title of her critical anthology, *Changing*, to the *I Ching* as a metaphor for the possibility of effecting community transformation through processes of systematic but aleatory decision, sheds new light on the watershed work by Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #1*, which graces the cover of the 1971 collection (Fig. 24). A paradigmatic example of the dematerialized condition of Conceptual art, *Wall Drawing #1* consists of a square divided into four quadrants filled with parallel lines, each oriented in a different direction (horizontal, vertical, diagonal, etc.), which may be executed—in graphite—on any suitable white surface. Perhaps more saliently, given that the work was simply painted over when the exhibition at Paula Cooper closed, *Wall Drawing #1* is defined by a set of impersonal instructions drafted by LeWitt which ensure that the work

[263] McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 20.
[264] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 154, 160.

may be re-created at any time by whoever holds the rights (i.e. owns the work).[265] The conceptual artist's inaugural foray into the wall drawing format (with which his name is virtually synonymous today), *Wall Drawing #1* is also notable for its radical political associations. These disturbing associations (disturbing within the context of Michael Fried's influential anti-theatrical theorization of Minimalism as well as Buchloh's subsequent, bureaucratic reading)[266] stem not only from the artist's transformation of artistic fabrication into a form of wage labour (the work was priced according to an hourly rate of execution)—a wage labour initially carried out by the artist himself (in defiance of Buchloh's theorization of LeWitt's labour as a form of delegated)—but, *a fortiori*, because it was originally executed at Paula Cooper's gallery on Prince Street in the context of Lippard's collaborative curatorial endeavour (Fig. 25) with Robert Huot and Ron Wolin in support of the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, October 22-November 1, 1968.[267] Whereas Buchloh arrogates LeWitt's ("irrational") tautological practice to an administrative logic of rational instrumentality, Lippard appropriates LeWitt's exercise in conceptual pattern-making to the prerogatives of "mystical" recognition and decision in the service of peace.[268] In its new context on the cover of Lippard's aptly-titled *Changing*, LeWitt's minimal pattern assumes a function analogous to that of King Wǎn's hexagram, as an environmental platform for the orchestration of peace through intuitive community decision. An anecdote related by Bryan-Wilson underlines the politics latent in LeWitt's minimal practice: Lippard's son,

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[265] Ibid, 145.
[266] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12-23.
[267] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 140, 142.
[268] Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *0-9*, no. 5 (January 1969), 3-5.

referring to LeWitt's meditative process of drafting a similar wall drawing in the critic's apartment somewhat later, spoke of the artist's "making peace."[269]

Lippard's utilization of non-probabilistic techniques "to facilitate choice"[270] during the period of intense social crisis which marked the height of the Vietnam era may also be likened to Tamotsu Shibutani's theorization of leadership and decision-making in his influential study of the function of rumour in times of crisis, *Improvised News* (1966).[271] Parallel to Raiffa's Bayesian approach to decision analysis, Shibutani explored rumour as a "problem of how people make up their minds in ambiguous situations."[272] Contrary to conventional conceptions of rumour as a "false report," Shibutani viewed rumour as "a *division of labour* among participants, each of whom makes a *different* contribution," toward the "formation of a public."[273] Shibutani proposes a constellation of ideal types which fulfill these diverse roles in rumour transmission *qua* collective decision: the messenger, the interpreter, the sceptic, the protagonist, the agitator, the auditor and the *decision-maker*.[274] Within Shibutani's typology, Lippard—elected to positions of "collective problem-solving" by her peers within the AWC and involved in the planning and execution of important anti-war actions—clearly fits the role of the "'natural leader,'" described by Shibutani as "someone who is widely respected for his [sic.] personal qualities who takes command."

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[269] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 145.
[270] Lucy Lippard cited in Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," 130.
[271] "What makes decisions in such unsettled times so important is that crises are the crucibles out of which many innovations emerge." Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis; New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966), v; "Rumours [...] flourish in situations characterized by social unrest" (ibid, 46).
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid, 13, 37. "Each crisis generates its own public" (ibid, 38).
[274] Ibid, 15.

([275] No leadership or decision would be possible, however, in times of crisis without "*news*, which," he insists, "is not mere information but information that is *important*." At bottom, "rumour is a form of news."[276] As in Harley Parker's imaginative reconfiguration of the museum as information centre, in Shibutani's study news plays a central role as "the basis of for maintaining a working orientation toward a changing environment."[277] Indeed, the primary work of leaders during times of crisis and social unrest is to construct "auxiliary channels" for the transmission of timely information when institutional channels are severed or repudiated.[278]

Shibutani's formulation of news as the basis for collective decision resembles Bryan-Wilson's account of the symbolic value of "information" with the conceptual economy of late '60s art. According to Bryan-Wilson, "information became inherently political"[279] as it came to symbolize—for Lippard and her peers—the possibility of constructing an "alternative information network" for a counterpublic.[280] (Yet, as I will explore in greater depth below, Lippard's actions as leader of a counterpublic were not incompatible with the amorphous and decentralized system of the newly horizontal corporate museum; in Shibutani's words: "[e]very bureaucracy has ways of 'cutting the red tape'".)[281]

If Lippard deployed LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #1* to pacific ends in the context of the inaugural show at Paula Cooper which she co-curated, her own subsequent contribution to McShine's exhibition, "Absentee Information," performed a different sort

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[275] Ibid, 16.
[276] Ibid, 57.
[277] Ibid, 41.
[278] Ibid, 22.
[279] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 137.
[280] Ibid, 171; Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005). "[R]umour reflects the evolving structure of the public" (Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 70).
[281] Ibid, 22.

of *piece*work. Recalling forms of piecework traditionally carried out by women labourers (e.g. paid domestic labour, semi-industrialized sewing and other technologically-mediated crafts as well as clerical work),[282] "Absentee Information" comprised a set of open-ended[283] instructions sent to McShine by Lippard from Carboneras, Spain (where she was at work on the manuscript of her novel) which, among other things, harnessed the female staff of MoMA's Library to execute a series of aleatory conceptual procedures.[284] Having been commissioned to write a critical essay for the *Information* catalogue, but being unable to access galleys of other content in absentia due to a mail strike (Figs. 26-27),[285] Lippard surprised McShine with "an incomprehensible randomly selected 'thing.'"[286] The genesis of this "archive game"[287] lay in Lippard's chance encounter with a misplaced pair of movie tickets while searching the thesaurus for the word "absence."[288] Proceeding from this fortuitous discovery, Lippard devised a system of similarly randomized displacements which paired the names of artists participating in *Information* with textual extracts appropriated either (depending on whether the name in question began with a consonant or a vowel) from the first work

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[282] For an excellent historical overview of the function of representations of women at work "as seductive lures in factory-machine advertising," see: Julie Wosk, *Women and the Machine: Representations from the Spinning Wheel to the Electric Age* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 20.
[283] It is not always noted in commentaries on *Information* that only the first item on Lippard's list of instructions was actually carried out. Subsequent instructions were far less pragmatic (and also more overtly political). For example, Lippard instructed McShine to "[m]atch the name of each artist in the exhibition who is or will be in New York or environs with that of a Trustee of the Museum of MODERN Art whose last name begins with the same letter […]; ask each trustee to spend 8 hours talking to that artist about art, artist's rights, the relationship of the museum to society at large, or any other subject agreed upon by the two of them […]." Lippard in *Information*, 81.
[284] Lucy Lippard, "Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine" (April 19, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; Lucy Lippard, "Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine" (May 5, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
[285] Lucy Lippard, "Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine" (April 19, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; Allan, "Understanding Information," 150.
[286] Lippard, "Curating by Numbers."
[287] Allan, "Understanding *Information*," 159.
[288] Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," 131.

(article or book) indexed in the card catalogue of the MoMA Library under that name (or, in the event that nothing been thus indexed, the closest approximation thereto), or from the entry in the *Art Index* corresponding to a predetermined mathematical permutation of the artist's name. The outcome of these manoeuvres being unknown to their author,[289] Lippard's conceptual "code" functioned as a conceptual decision tree for the curator/library worker.[290]

> Carry out as much of the following as you can (ahem). But definitely do carry out part I and insert it in the text as noted so that is really the contribution to the catalogue (along with all the instructions). If there isn't much space, put it all in itty bitty print unless there's time to get it back to me and for me to cut it etc. I don't want anyone else, even you love, fucking around with it.[291]

Of the practices explored in this paper, Lippard's undoubtedly comes closest to Buchloh's formulation of administrative conceptualism, with the notion of delegation figuring prominently in Lippard's scheme:

> Hope it was clear you have to do those parts and insert thesaurus where it says so delete "insert the completed list here" on ms and just insert your findings. You can do it yourself or have someone in the library do it.[292]

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[289] "Am most curious about the outcome." Lucy Lippard, "Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine" (May 5, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Lucy Lippard, "Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine" (April 19, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
[292] Lucy Lippard, "Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine" (May 5, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Yet, Lippard's utilization of techniques of delegation may be distinguished from the practices of her (male) peers analyzed by Buchloh, in that the administrative labour (of community decision) enacted by the critic-curator's delegates was the specifically gendered labour of clerical work. In *Women in the Administrative Revolution* (1987), Graham S. Lowe analyzes the process by which "clerical work was transformed from a strictly male dominated occupation in the late nineteenth century to the leading occupation of today."[293] Lower pay and reduced educational opportunities for women resulted in structural inequalities within the clerical labour force that ultimately favoured the development of what Lowe has labelled a "permanent secondary labour market."[294] It is this disadvantaged labour which Lippard brings into representation through the intuitive administrative logic of "Absentee Information." That Lippard invited McShine to execute "Absentee Information" himself does not obscure the gendered associations of the subordinate clerical labour which that execution required (which must be distinguished from the gender of the *labourer*) nor the structural disparities which characterized the division of labour at MoMA in the 1960s, to which her invitation simultaneously draws attention. (Given the hectic preparations leading up to *Information*—which Lippard's missive also acknowledges—the overtone of her invitation is, in any event, surely ironic.)

Although Bryan-Wilson repeats the critic-curator's own claim[295] that her involvement with feminism dates from her return from Spain in the summer of 1970 (only after which time did Lippard join the AWC's Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee), "Absentee Information" foregrounds women's work in parallel with the contemporary

[293] Graham S. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 1.
[294] Ibid, 4-5.
[295] "[F]eminist art […] hit me and New York in the fall of 1970" (Lippard, "Curating by Numbers").

"maintenance art" performed by Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Bryan-Wilson reports that "Ukeles proposed making [...] unseen labour visible within the art museum."[296] For her 1973 piece, *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance*, included in Lippard's exhibition *c. 7,500*, Ukeles performed the conventional duties of a maintenance person: dusting, mopping and scrubbing the display surfaces of the Hartford Wadsworth Atheneum.[297] For Bryan-Wilson, Ukeles's notion of maintenance derives from her engagement with the gendered history of domestic work, the proverbial woman's "'work that is never done.'"[298] Similarly, Bryan-Wilson narrowly associates Lippard's critical and curatorial practice with domestic work; going so far as to claim that, "criticism for Lippard *becomes* housework."[299] Yet, it is also possible to read "Absentee Information" as both an activist gesture to bring into representation the "unseen labour" of MoMA's mostly female staff[300] as well as "an exasperated reply to those who say 'there are no women making conceptual art'" *in advance* of *c. 7,500* (and even of Lippard's AWC committee work).[301] Unlike the cheery and smartly-dressed secretaries (or models posing in secretarial roles) who grace Michael Lauretano's memorable design for the cover of the *Information* catalogue (Figs. 28-30) as spectacular appendages to the machine, the library staff who participated in Lippard's archive game were implicated in a two-fold labour of paid (clerical) work and conceptual practice. In place of Lauretano's instrumentalized "images of erotic women [devised to] sell machines to men,"[302] the

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[296] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 165.
[297] Ibid, 165-166.
[298] Ibid, 164.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Bryan-Wilson reports that "the union of museum workers, PASTA MoMA, was composed of mostly women, for reportedly 75 percent of the museum staff was female as opposed to 25 percent of the management" (164).
[301] Lippard quoted in "Curating by Numbers."
[302] Wosk, *Women and the Machine*, 23.

labour rendered visible by Lippard insists on the dignity and value as well as the creative potential of paid work for women. The labour performed by the MoMA library staff also resonates with Lippard's own critical and curatorial endeavours, for which, she subsequently claimed, the only training she ever received was as an employee of the MoMA Library. In this way, the personal was truly made political through Lippard's work:

> I have no curating methodology nor any training in museology, except for working at the Library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for a couple of years when I was just out of college. But that experience – the only real job I have ever had – probably prepared me well for the archival, informational aspect of conceptual art. [303]

In thus bringing into visibility the gendered services performed by MoMA's clerical staff—future members of the Museum's union, PASTA MoMA (one of the few enduring legacies of the AWC)—Lippard was also serving a proto-feminist tonic against the excessively masculinist determinations of the "information world" configured by McShine.[304] As Rob Milthorp has written, the world of information technology is one dominated by "boy's toys" in which the fascination exerted by depersonalized objects reigns supreme.[305] Yet Lippard insists on making visible the participation of women in the aesthetic labour of a technologized environment defined by values of "sensuality, the

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[303] Lippard, "Cuarting by Numbers."
[304] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 164; Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World."
[305] Rob Milthrop, "Fascination, Masculinity, and Cyberspace," in *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, ed. Mary Anne Moser and Douglas MacLeod, 129-150 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 135.

aesthetic fascination that keeps men, whether 'console jockeys,' computer hackers, or tyros, in the embrace of their machine."[306]

Despite Bryan-Wilson's repeated invocation of Lippard's self-identification as the "proletarian of the Institute,"[307] the executive role which the critic-curator assumed as part of "Absentee Information" aligns her activist practice, rather, with contemporary theorizations of a "white-collar proletariat."[308] As such, Lippard's political identification would have been in line with the ambivalent ideological position occupied by many of her peers within the AWC, who, according to Bryan-Wilson, "were in the process of rethinking long-held ideas about the revolutionary potential of workers" under the impact of post-industrial processes of informatization.[309] While some participants in the AWC identified with the figure of the blue-collar labourer, few concrete steps toward unionization were taken by Coalition members, nor were ties with factory workers or other blue-collar groups actively cultivated. Lippard herself noted that, although involved in the AWC, "the Conceptualists nevertheless stopped short of [political] engagement."[310] Viewed through the lens of contemporary fantasies of white-collar unionism, Lippard's administrative activism is seen to share features with the post-Marxist aspirations of contemporary futurologists such as Bell and Toffler. Whereas Bryan-Wilson casts Lippard's activism of the AWC period as the symbolic *housework* of a single parent struggling for legitimacy in a profession dominated by male gatekeepers such as (in Lippard's view) Clement Greenberg, I would propose that "Absentee

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[306] Ibid, 141.
[307] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 130. The reference is to New York University's Institute of Fine Art, where Lippard completed her master's degree while working as a freelance researcher.
[308] Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, 71. For an informative introduction to the concept of "white-collar unionism,", see C. Wright Mills's influential discussion in *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 301-323.
[309] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 24.
[310] Lippard, *A Different War*, 30.

Information" is, rather, more productively viewed as an outgrowth of Lippard's failed attempt to form a critics' union in 1966: a demand for equitable conditions for and opportunities for paid work, in particular, *paid* work.[311] Although, as Bryan-Wilson notes, "Lippard did not join any women's art group until late in 1970,"[312] "Absentee Information" is significant for showing Lippard at work in a proto-feminist vein in the leadership role of decision-maker already in spring of that year.

In bringing the new "cybernetic organism"[313] of the post-industrial female clerical or service (art) worker into visibility through the administered, decision-driven labour of "Absentee Information," Lippard did more than effect a transference of the domestic into the public sphere. Lippard's insubordinate "role-blurring" [314] also undermined the (traditionally masculinist) authority of the Museum's curatorial and artistic functions, thereby enacting a form of what Judith Butler has termed "gender insubordination": a "deep-seated play" which defies foundationalist constructions of gender roles.[315] By claiming the space of the library as a conceptual prosthesis and McLuhanesque "extension" of the exhibition space, Lippard was enacting a competing gesture of (tacitly masculinist) possession to that elaborated by McShine in a letter from to the head of the MoMA Bookstore, Marna Thoma: "I consider it [the Bookstore] as *extension* of both the show and its catalogue" (my emphasis).[316] The disruptive effects of Lippard's role-

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[311] Bryan-Wilson, *Art* Workers, 154.
[312] Ibid, 153.
[313] Donna Haraway, "A Cybernetic Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149 (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149.
[314] Lippard, "Curating by Numbers."
[315] Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The New Social Theory Reader: Contemporary Debates*, eds. Steven Seidman and Jeffrey C. Alexander (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 337.
[316] McShine, "McShine to Thoma" (April 30, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

blurring are legible in McShine's bracketing her participation in the exhibition catalogue: "I especially wish to acknowledge the 'presence' in this book of the 'critic' Lucy R. Lippard, who also made available to me her 'information' on so many of the people represented here."[317] Finally, Lippard's absentee criticism may also be interpreted as an exercise in "non-participation": a protest tactic frequently practiced by contemporary leftist artists, according to Bryan-Wilson.[318] Viewed thus, "Absentee Information" extends and repeats the insubordinate "play" of the critic-curator's self-proclaimed "boycott" of *Artforum* magazine in April 1970.[319]

Conclusion: The 'Modular' Museum as Muse

> Many people will say that the effect of this show was to de-mythologize art. I don't think they de-mythologize art. They put art in line with the social conditions.
> —Les Levine, "The Information Fall-Out," 1971.[320]

This thesis has examined the executive fictions enacted by three participants in the landmark exhibition of Conceptual art, *Information*. I have argued that the executive roles performed, respectively, by Kynaston McShine ("dropout"), IAIN BAXTER& ("drop-in") and Lucy Lippard ("leader") within the context of *Information* each exemplify one of the three primary dimensions or role characteristics of McLuhan's paradigm of the New Age executive: futurology (McShine), play (BAXTER&) and

[317] McShine (ed.), *Information*, 3.
[318] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 134.
[319] Ibid, 149-150.
[320] Levine, "The Information Fall-Out," 266.

decision (Lippard). Furthermore, the executive personas acted out by all three figures are symptoms—not of the one-dimensional bureaucracy of the immediate post-war period, but—of the *imagined* horizontal corporation of the 1960s. Contrary to the administrative readings of conceptual practice proposed by Buchloh, Tomas and others, grounded as they invariably are, in anachronistic and static business model, my investigation of the ideal type of McLuhan's executive-as-artist has been located within a project of psychic geography modelled on Chris Gilbert's examination of the influence of aspirational literature on the art of the 1960s. In contrast to recent criticisms of the "artistic entrepreneur" mounted by, for instance, Stéphane Sauzedde, which censure the non-oppositional valence of corporate practice, I have followed Stephen Wright in choosing to explore the abrasive effects of *redundant information* generated by the duplication of corporate functions and roles. The non-oppositional dropping-in enacted by BAXTER&, like the hostile take-over performed by Lippard, significantly troubled the coherence of the exhibition by calling attention to and doubling its corporate frame. In this precise sense, the executive manoeuvres of BAXTER& and Lippard should be recognized as operating in parallel (or perhaps at tangents) to the better-known tactic of institutional critique proposed by Haacke in the context of the same show.

The executive *roles* inhabited by BAXTER& and Lippard in parallel to the *institutional* critique formulated by Haacke are symptoms of a fantasized "managerial revolution"[321] chronicled by speculative historians such as C. Wright Mills, McLuhan and Toffler.

[321] Wright Mills, *White Collar*, 102.

> The old entrepreneur succeeded by founding a new concern and expanding it. The bureaucrat gets a forward-looking job and climbs the ladder within a pre-arranged hierarchy. The new entrepreneur makes a zig-zag pattern upward within and between established bureaucracies.[322]

The newly mobile executive who figures in the passage above by Wright Mills appears in a range of contemporaneous texts touting the emergence of flexible or "throw-away" economy.[323] As impermanence and turnover are routinized and more and more executive functions are off-loaded onto drop-ins, the abrasive effects of decentralization are imprinted onto the psychic economy of new executive roles: It is a joke among executives of the International Business Corporation that IBM stands for "I've Been Moved.[324] A museological parallel is suggested by the "suitcase shows"[325] proposed by a globe-trotting Lucy Lippard just prior to making her contribution to *Information* (itself executed in absentia halfway around the world). These mobile exhibitions were designed so that they "could be transported from country to country by artists, bypassing institutions and allowing more international networking."[326] (The Duchampian genealogy[327] of this strategy is likely not fortuitous: McShine's memos, preserved in the MoMA Archives, underline the influence of Duchamp on *Information*; furthermore, Lippard's subsequent contribution to the catalogue of McShine and Anne d'Harnoncourt's 1973 Duchamp retrospective repeated the aleatory logic of "Absentee

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[322] Ibid, 95.
[323] Toffler, *Future Shock*.
[324] Ibid, 74.
[325] Lippard, "Curating by Numbers."
[326] Ibid.
[327] Between 1935 and 1940, Duchamp created an edition of twenty *Boîtes-en-valise*: a portable retrospective monograph or exhibition housed in a carrying case. A later edition, issued in the 1950s and 60s,

Information.")[328] Lippard's portable critical and curatorial work may be likened to the "resurgence of entrepreneurialism within the heart of large organizations " theorized by Toffler.[329] Toffler's futurological diagnosis echoes McLuhan and Nevitt's reflections on the tensions generated within large organizations between centralist insiders and decentralist drop-ins or cliques:

> [T]he pattern of social organization and management swings violently from stress on the entrepreneur and the virtues of the lonely individual to the close-knit and emotionally-involved group. In the diversified scope of the modern business structures, these extremes can express themselves at different levels of the same organization. Tribal cliques can grow in the shade of the old organization tree.[330]

McLuhan and Nevitt's analysis drew upon the findings of management consultant Peter F. Drucker's influential case study of General Motors—the first corporation to adopt decentralization as a strategy for "manag[ing] diversity and complexity"—in *Concept of Corporation* (1946).[331] Succeeding the "old [modernist, centralist] organization pattern"[332] exemplified by Ford, GM president Alfred P. Sloan "developed the concept of decentralization into a philosophy of industrial management and into a system of local self-government."[333] Under this system, 95% of administrative decisions are made by

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[328] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 151; Kynaston McShine (ed.), *The Museum as Muse* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999). Ironically, Lippard had experience organizing exhibitions for MoMA's traveling exhibitions department (Lippard, "Curating by Numbers").
[329] Toffler, *Future Shock*, 133.
[330] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 22.
[331] Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation*, 11.
[332] Ibid, 8.
[333] Ibid, 50.

divisional managers;[334] central management "thinks ahead."[335] In the work of McLuhan and Nevitt, this system figures a "Court of King Arthur"-inspired "dream of decentralization."[336] It is a symptom of a similar "baronial pattern of managerial bosses and autonomous groupings"[337] which made its first appearance in the museum world with McShine's decentralist approach to *Information*, that the flexible, consultative executive interventions of BAXTER& and Lippard are properly located. As such, the redundant information generated by their practices may be legitimately likened to the *entropic* effects produced by "destabilizing manoeuvres" within the emergent decentralized *organizational complex* of the 1970s described by Reinhold Martin.[338]

Whereas McShine's timely 1999 exhibition, *The Museum as Muse*, situated the emergence of the museum as "an important site not only of inspiration but of practice and of patronage"[339] within the institutionalization of institutional critique effected by such exemplars of the literalist approach to tertiary (service-based) economics as Canada's General Idea (which was represented by *The Boutique from the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion* (Fig. 31)) and Vito Acconci (whose contribution to *Information*, *Service Area*, made a reappearance in *Muse*), I have attempted to draw attention to the redundant executive information excluded from McShine's museological retrospective; notably, the abrasive administrative works of BAXTER& and Lippard. Traces of their disservice survive today in the PASTA MoMA union formed, according to Bryan-Wilson, as a direct outcome of the feminist agitations of Lippard and fellow AWC members in 1970-

[334] Ibid, 57.
[335] Ibid, 53.
[336] McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 17.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Martin, *The Organizational Complex*, 214.
[339] McShine, *The Museum as Muse*, 6.

71 (for which "Absentee Information" may be seen as something of a rehearsal) as well as the *Projects* series of invited installations, for which, Staniszewski suggests, the site-specific installations of *Information* served as a model.

In addition to the formal correspondence between *Projects* installations and the innovative installation techniques developed by McShine and Froom at *Information*, which are noted by Staniszewski, there is also a strong organizational correspondence between the consultative function of dropping in instigated by BAXTER&, also at *Information* (and at the DPMA before that), and the invitational basis of participation in the subsequent *Projects* series:

> After the *Information* exhibition, the Museum of Modern Art relegated this type of conceptual work to the *Projects* series, which started the following year with a Keith Sonnier video installation. In keeping with the new institutional practices that were introduced with the *Information* show, for each *Projects* exhibition the Museum invited a single artist to install a piece or an exhibition in a gallery.[340]

This policy of containment, instituted in the fall-out of McShine's delegation of selection responsibilities to the artists of *Information* ("the first and last conceptual group show at MoMA in the 1970s"),[341] may be interpreted as, simultaneously, a manoeuvre to shield the Museum from the slings and arrows of institutional critique and a check against the abrasion generated by non-oppositional drop-ins, even as the latter consultative labour—first realized at MoMA by BAXTER&—was responsible for carving out the entropic space for experimentation and (to a lesser degree) protest within the neutralized and

[340] Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*, 286.
[341] Ibid, 285.

politically-disengaged information flows of MoMA's apparatus in which the *Projects* later unfolded.[342] However minor the impact of subsequent interventions upon the corporatized power structure of MoMA (where power—never directly engaged in the responsibilities of production—nonetheless remains active "underground"),[343] it is significant that Staniszewski credits all challenges to MoMA's institutional practices during the 1980s and 1990s to *Projects* participants, whose activities mirrored—in their drop-in function—those of BAXTER&.[344] If the contributions to *Information* of BAXTER& and Lippard may be justly credited with substantively positive (albeit structurally-contained) long-term outcomes for the Museum, it must be acknowledged that McShine's exercise in McLuhanesque tactics of decentralization and outsourcing achieved more mixed results as a large-scale rehearsal for the subsequent emergence of "satellite" or "branch" museums such as P.S.1 and, latterly, the Guggenheim franchise.[345] Perhaps the more impactful legacy of *Information*, though overshadowed by the critique of Hans Haacke, is the horizontal museum first formulated in the actions of McShine, BAXTER& and Lippard.

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[342] Ibid, 295.
[343] Ibid, 285.
[344] Ibid, 295-296.
[345] Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, 177.

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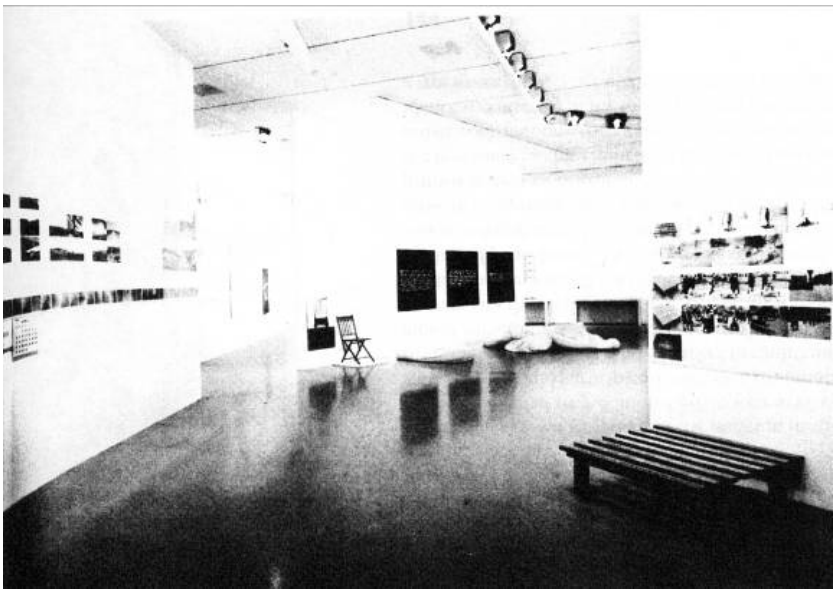

Fig. 1 *Installation View of the Exhibition Information*, 1970. From Ken Allan, "Understanding *Information*," in *Conceptual Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris, 144-168 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 145.

Fig. 2 *Installation View of the Exhibition Information*, 1970. From Ken Allan, "Understanding *Information*," in *Conceptual Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed.Michael Corris, 144-168 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147.

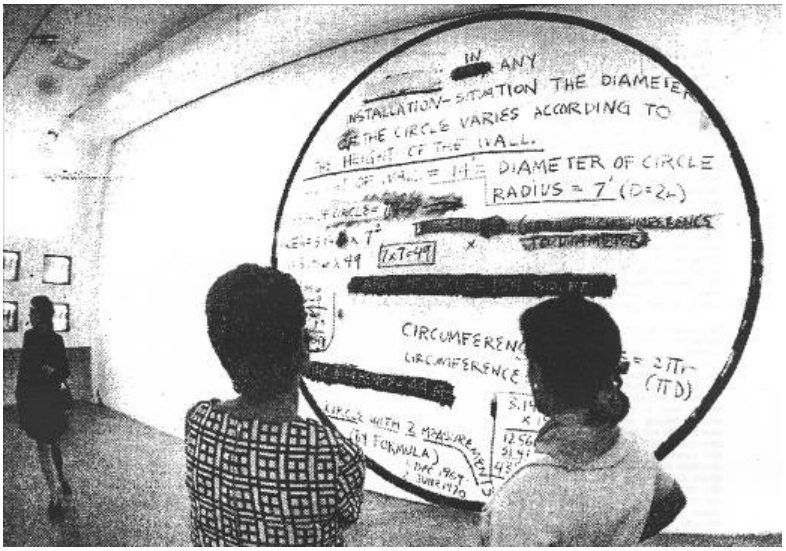

Fig. 3 Lawrence Fried. *Installation View of the 'Information' Show at the Museum of Modern Art*. From Hilton Kramer, "Miracles, 'Information,' 'Recommended Reading,'" *New York Times* (July 12, 1970): 87.

Fig. 4 Vito Acconci, *Service Area*, 1970. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *The Museum as Muse* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 173.

Definitions:

1. c o n c e p t
   concept on new causes effecting perceptual thinking

   * We have developed a new system at NETCO for defining words (see above). This system accepts the word as a complete concept in itself and that its component parts (each letter) can and should describe the meaning. It provides some very profound ways of defining with many times some new insights into the way a word works. We would like to publish a DICTIONARY which defines words in this manner.
   - It should be remembered that you can come up with a number of combinations, sometimes all can be put down, - some usually feel better than others.

2. c o n c e p t a r t
   coming on new causes effecting perceptual thinking and recording them

3. N. E. THING CO. NOMENCLATURE

   ACT - Aesthetically Claimed Thing
   ART - Aesthetically Rejected Thing
   VSI - Visual Sensitivity Information (term NETCO uses instead of "art")
   SI - Sensitivity Information (all cultural information)
   SSI - Sound Sensitivity Information (music, poetry /read/, singing, oratory, etc.)
   MSI - Moving Sensitivity Information (movies, dance, mountain climbing, track, etc.)
   ESI - Experiential Sensitivity Information (theatre, etc.)
   ** - It should be recognized that there are categories where certain types of sensitivity information are combined with others to provide their form, but for the most part the categories above have been established because the "arts" tend to have a particular emphasis on one kind of information characteristic.
   - We find that by setting up a new set of definitions like this that people are better able to see the cross-relationship between the "arts" and in so doing can become much more involved and supportive of the new types of "arts activity" - Sensitivity Information - SI - that are going on.
   - The idea of comprehending "all arts as information handled sensitively" breaks the historical chains that keep them apart from each other and grossly misunderstood.

Expanded definitions:

VSI - Visual Sensitivity Information
A term developed and used by the N. E. Thing Co. to denote more appropriately the meaning of the traditional words "art" and "fine art" or "visual art." Refers to the handling of visual information in a sensitive manner. Also refers to the "artist" as a VISUAL INFORMER, as someone who knows how to handle visual information sensitively.

SI - Sensitivity Information
A term developed by NETCO to denote all forms of cultural activities, i.e. dance, music, theatre, film, fine art, poetry, novels, etc. It is based on the theory that there are all types of INFORMATION around in the world. INFORMATION is usually, or tends to be, confronted with and dealt with in either a practical or sensitive manner. Thus INFORMATION which is handled in this pure or sensitive way culminates in SI (Sensitivity Information) in general context, and eventually leaves its mark on our life as culture. The divisions within SI are based on the dominant characteristic of that particular area of information, for example: Vision - VSI - Visual Sensitivity Information (painting, sculpture, architecture, books, etc.)

Fig. 5 N.E. Thing Co., *Thinking Re: Concepts, Art (If That's the Proper Word), Communications, Media, Anything*, 1970. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 89.

Fig. 6 Jan van Raay, *Kestutis Zapkus, Lucy Lippard, Jean Toche, and Other Art Workers (Seen on the Left) Break Up a Trustees' Dinner at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 12 January 1971. From Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 139.

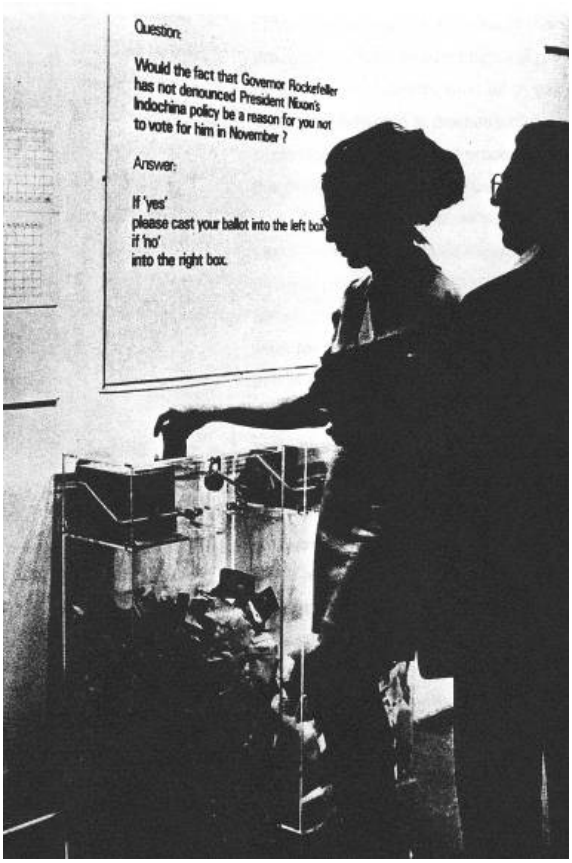

Fig. 7 Hans Haacke, *MoMA-Poll*, 1970. Interactive installation with clear plastic voting boxes, text panel, chart of results, at *Information* exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, 1970. From Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 194.

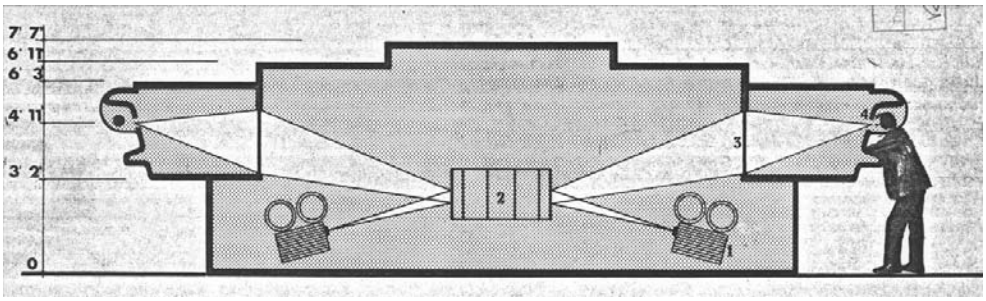

Fig. 8 *Information Machine*, c. 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

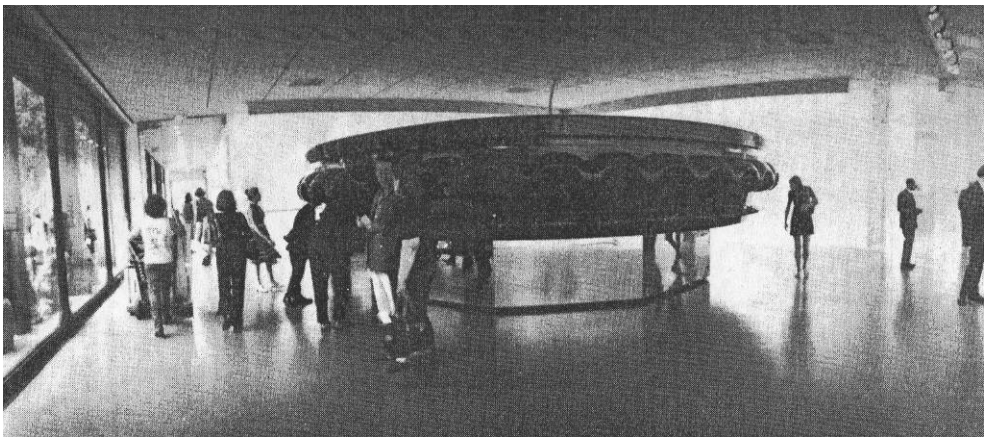

Fig. 9 *Information, Museum of Modern Art* (showing Olivetti's *Information Machine* at centre), 1970. From Les Levine, "The Information Fall-Out," *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971): 266.

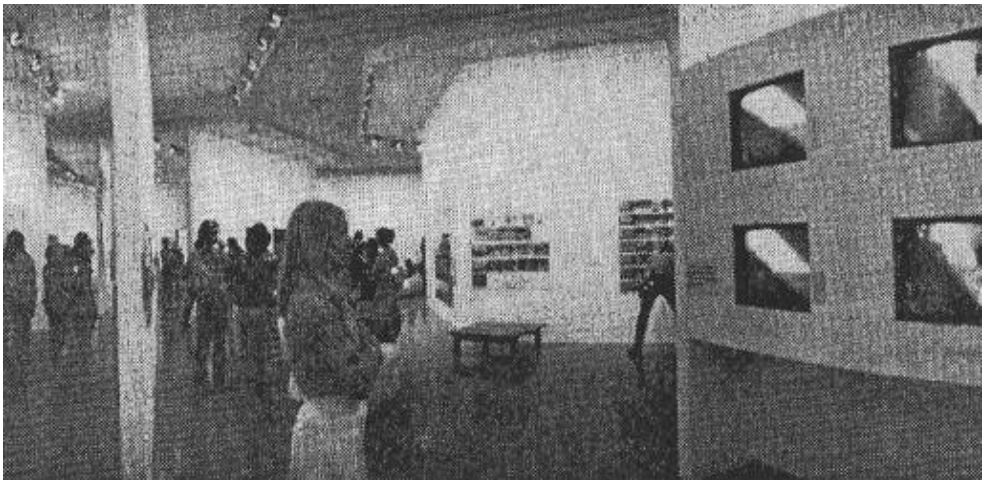

Fig. 10 *Information, Museum of Modern Art*, 1970. From Les Levine, "The Information Fall-Out," *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971): 266.

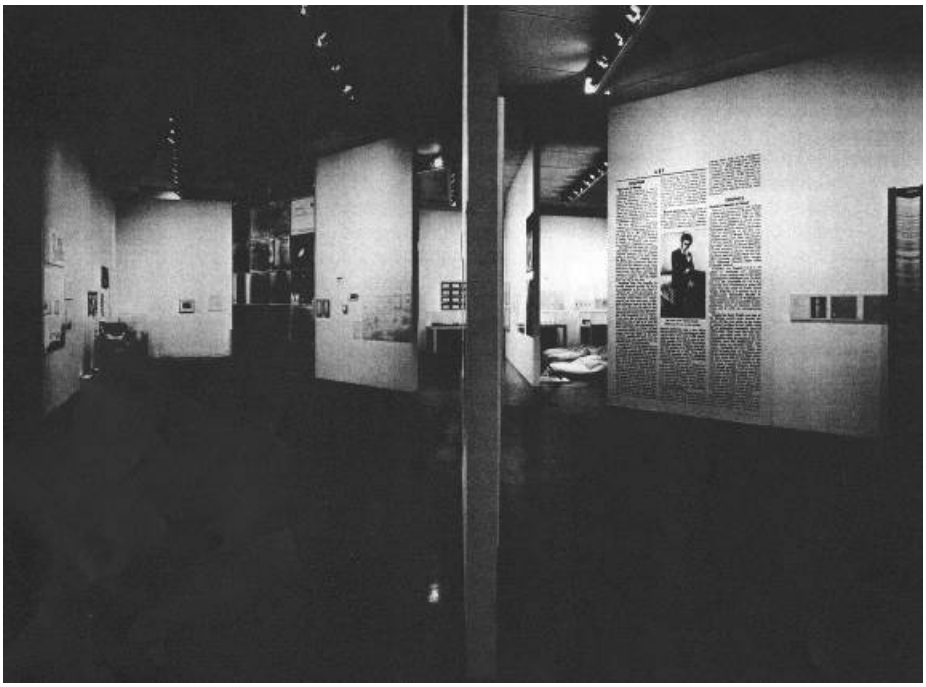

Fig. 11 Kynaston McShine with the assistance of Charles Froom, *Information*, 1970. From Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 273.

Fig. 12 *Group Frontera installation, Information*, 1970. From Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 279.

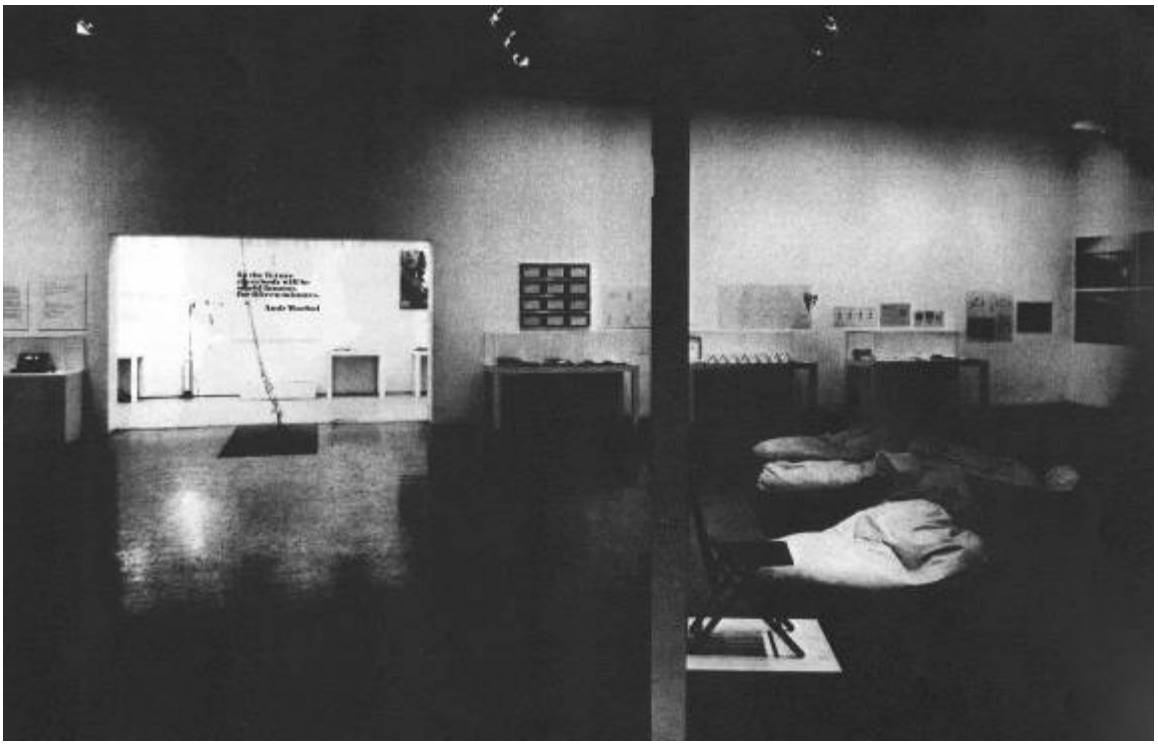

Fig. 13 Kynaston McShine with the assistance of Charles Froom, *Information*, 1970. From Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 274.

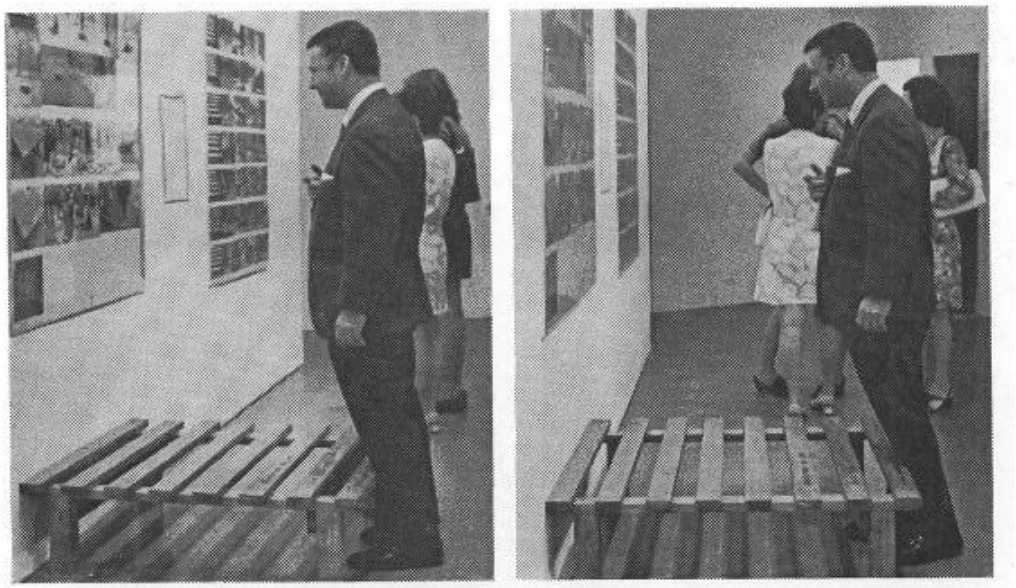

Fig. 14 *One of Broegger's Platforms Frustrates a Viewer, So He Leans*, 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 15 *Unidentified Images of Sacco Beanbag Chair Originally Reproduced in 'Domus,'* March 1969. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 157.

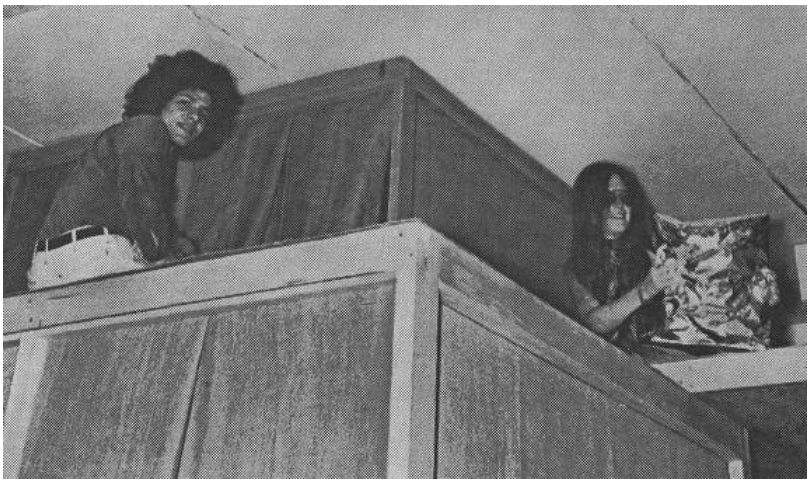

Fig. 16 *Burlap-draped Two-by-fours by Helio Oiticica are what He Calls a 'Nest' upon which the Public is Invited to Climb, Rest or Sit in Padded Cubicles or Platforms*, 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

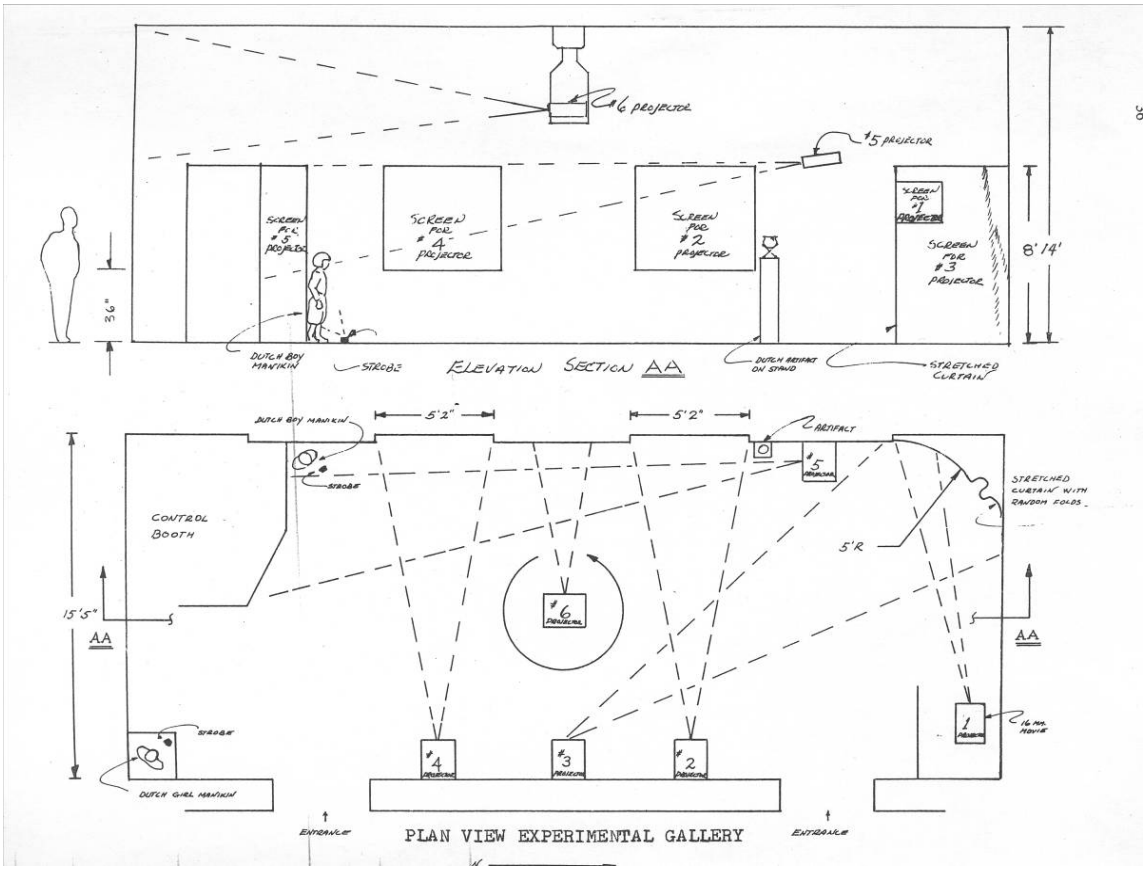

Fig. 17 Harley Parker, *Plan View, Experimental Gallery*, 1967. From Museum of the City of New York and The New York Council on the Arts. *Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values of...Museum Communication with the Viewing Public* (New York: The Museum of the City of New York and The New York Council on the Arts, 1967), 36.

Fig. 18 Façade, Museum of Modern Art, c. 1964. From Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art: The Past's Future," *Journal of Design History* 5, no. 3 (1992): 211.

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PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY:
REG 934

N. E. THING COMPANY LIMITED

Name in Full: Kynaston McShine Date: May 1, 1970

Business Address: Museum of Modern Art , New York, NY.

Information: Dear Kynaston: Enclosed please find material re: the Xerox Telecopier, (which Xerox should donate for the publicity) and regarding the Telex, (contact Wetern Union Telex newyork and they'll put one in for you , they probably wont donate it but try) We will be able to have access to a Telecopier here and could send a work once a week for the duration of the show , also We have a telex in our establishment and would easily be able to send in works and statements over it at any time during the exhibition(it works 24hrs a day) these could then be torn off and displayed on the wall near the machine. We could establish how often you would wish us to transmit and then we could work to that involvement.

We will be working on a number of projects this summer which will be done with your show in mind, these could be described on telex and when you do the final ---

Firm or Company Name: N. E. THING COMPANY LIMITED (NETCO)

Company Address: 1419 Riverside Drive, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Cable Address: " ANYTHING " Phone: (604) 929-3662

List Company Departments: THING, RESEARCH, MOVIE, PROJECT, ACT & ART, SERVICE, COP, PRINTING, PHOTOGRAPHY, COMMUNICATIONS, CONSULTING

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(over)

(Signed) President, Iain Baxter

Fig. 19 IAIN BAXTER&. "IAIN BAXTER& to Kynaston McShine" (May 1, 1970), Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

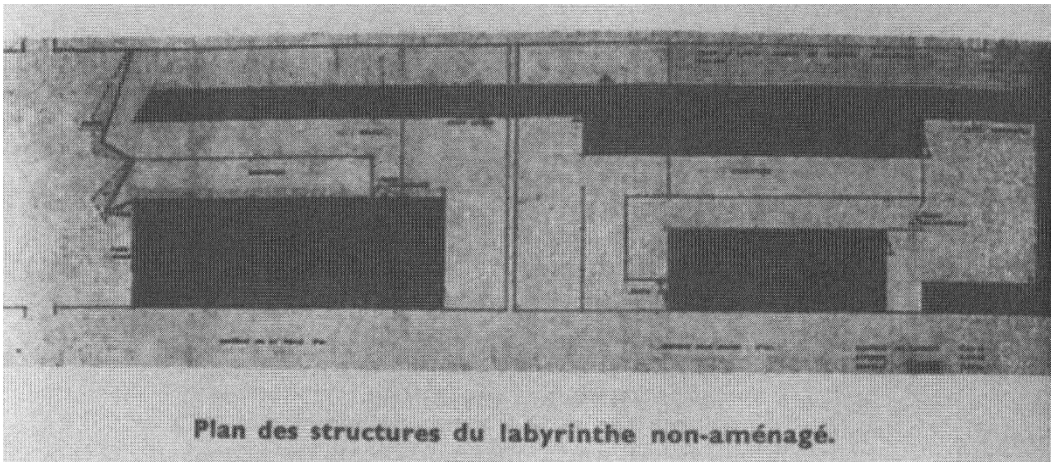


Fig. 20 *Plan for an Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam*, 1960. From Libero Andreotti, "Play-Tactics of the 'Internationale Situationniste,'" *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 51.

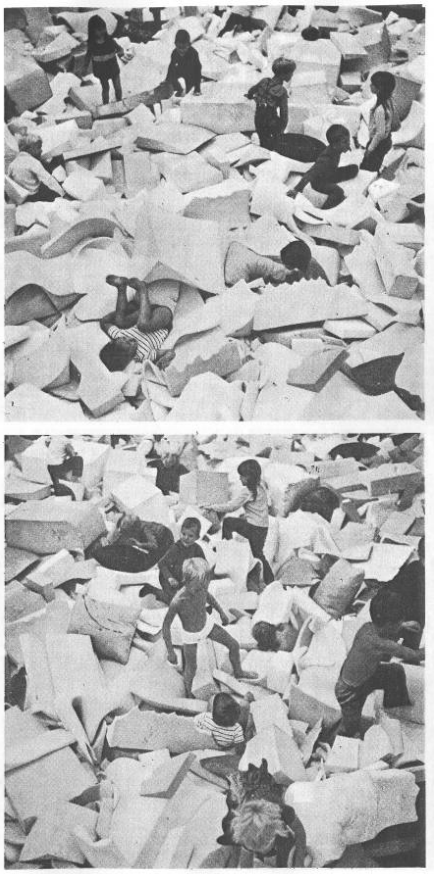
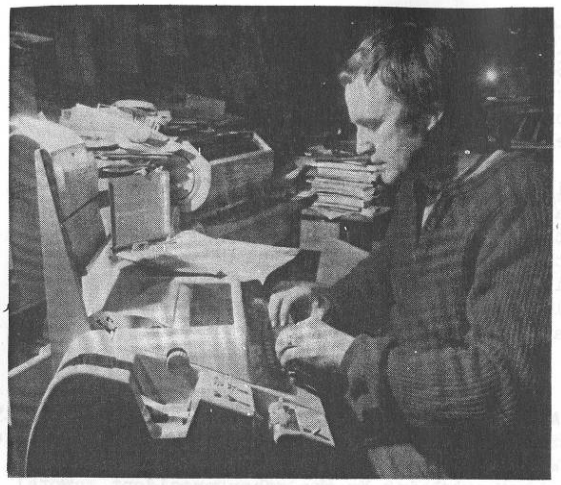


Fig. 21 Bror Grenfeldt, *Unidentified Image Originally Reproduced in 'Domus,'* April 1969. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 156.



President seated at telex carrying out
50,000-mile transmission

Via WUI

MODERNART NYK

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N E THING VCR

VANCOUVER BC CANADA APRIL 20 1970

KYNASTON MCSHINE

ASSOC CURATOR OF MODERN ART

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET NEW YORK NY

IAIN BAXTER, PRESIDENT, N.E. THING CO. LTD.

TELEXED SELF PORTRAIT FROM MEMORY - 1969

FRONT SIDE:COURSE BROWN HAIR SLIGHTLY BALDING AT TEMPLES AND SLIGHTLY OVER EARS WIDTH OF NOSE NORMAL AVERAGE LIPS SIDE BURNS TO BOTTOM OF EARS FAIR COMPLEXION HAZEL EYES LONG EYELASHES BLACK NON-PROTRUDING CHIN ADAMS APPLE GOLD CAP ON FRONT RIGHT TOOTH SPACE BETWEEN EYES SHORT DISTANCE NAVY BLUE TURTLE NECK SWEATER

LEFT SIDE :COURSE BROWN HAIR SLIGHTLY OVER EARS NORMAL SHAPED NOSE AVERAGE LIPS SIDE BURNS TO BOTTOM OF EARS FAIR COMPLLLLLLL LONG BLACK EYE LASHES NON-PROTRUDING CHIN ADAMS APPLE NON-PROTRUDING CHEEK BONES COURSE RED-BROWNISH EYE BROWS

RIGHT SIDE:SAME AS LEFT SIDE ONLY IT IS THE RIGHT SIDE

BACK SIDE :COURSE BROWN HAIR TO SLIGHTLY OVER COLLAR OF NAVY BLUE TURTLE NECK SWEATER HAIR COVERS MOST OF EARS EXCEPT FOR BOTTOM LOBE AREA FAIR COMPLEXION

TOP SIDE :COURSE BROWN HAIR FRONT AREA SLIGHTLY THINNED OUTNORMAL PROTRUSION OF NOSE AND CHIN AND CHEEK BONES FAIR COMP-LEXION SHOULDERS FAIRLY BROAD

N. E. THING CO LTD

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Fig. 22 N.E. Thing Co., *President Seated at Telex Carrying Out 50,000-mile Transmission* (at right), 1970; *Telexed Self Portrait From Memory* (at left), 1969. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 91.

Fig. 23 *Lucy Lippard Demanding '50% Black Women Artists' as Part of the Ad Hoc Women's Committee Protest, Whitney Museum of American Art*, 1971. From Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 161.

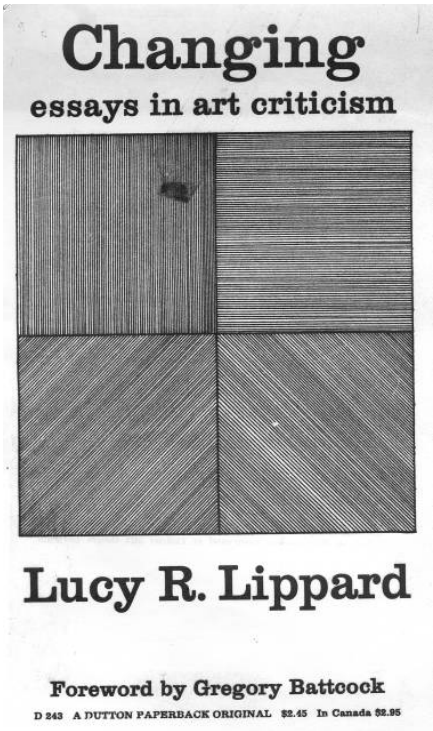


Fig. 24 *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*, 1971. Book cover featuring *Wall Drawing #1* (1968) by Sol LeWitt.

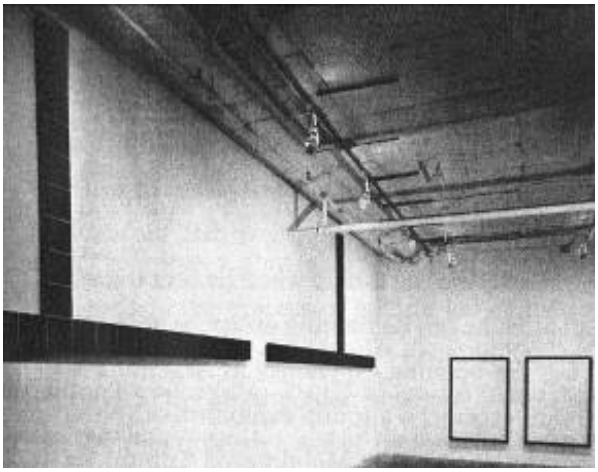
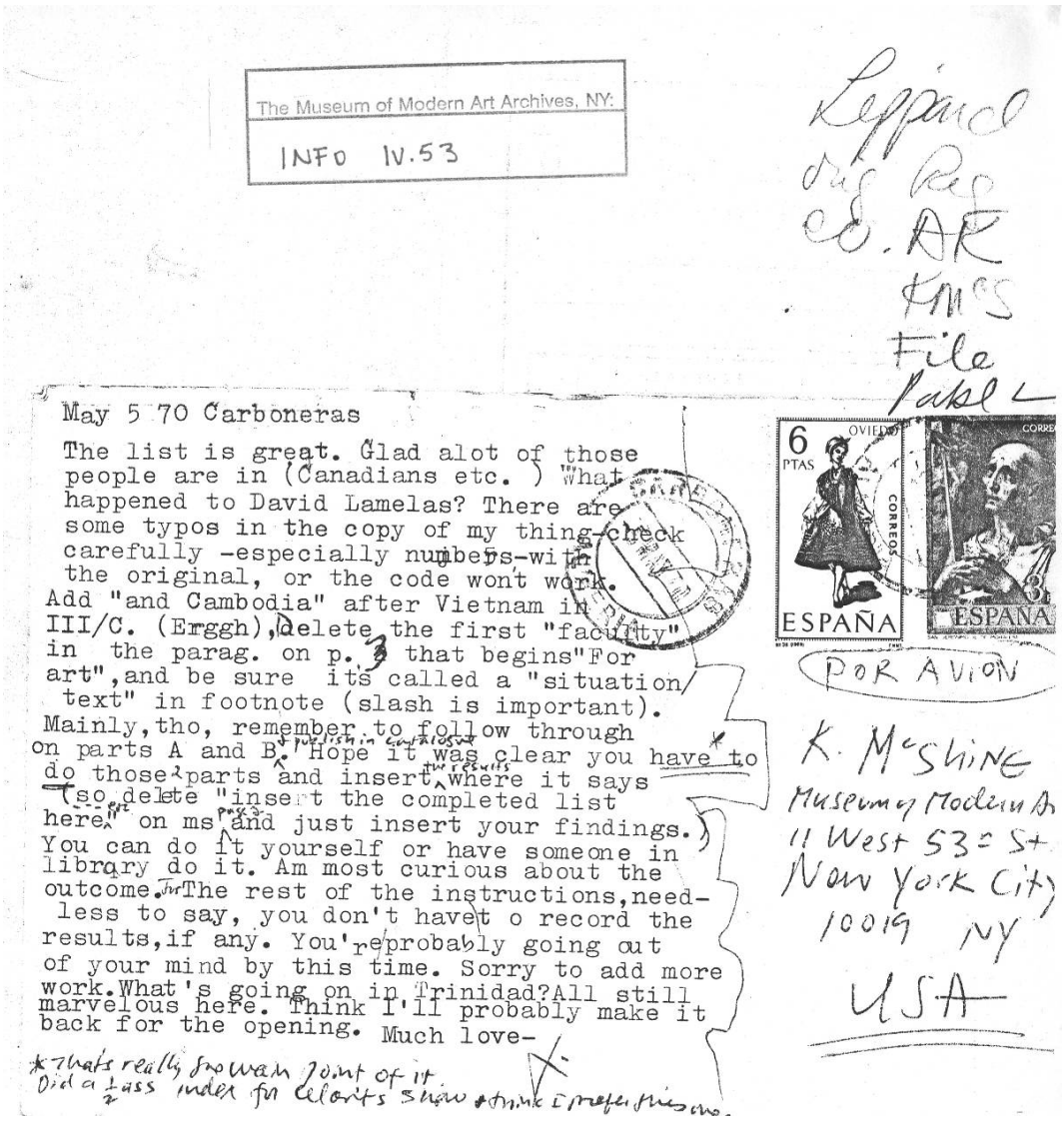


Fig. 25 James Dee, *Installation Shot of Exhibition to Benefit the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, Inaugural Exhibition, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, October 22-November 1, 1968* [Works by Will Insley (left) and Jo Baer], 1968. From Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 141.

April 19,1970

Dear K- Enclosed Mas is a substitute forthe Index. Still hadn't heard from you andfigured getting galleys was hopeless given mail problems here so I did this other thing. Would much rather have done index but will try to do that elsewhere. Carry out as much of the following as you can (ahem). But definitely docarry out part I at least and insert it in the text as noted so that is really the contribution to the catalogue (along with all the instructions). If there isn't xxxxmuch space, put it all in itty bitty print unless there 's time to get it backto me and for me to cut it etc. I don't want anyone else, even you m'love, fucking around with it. [redacted] The Thesaurus bits (ABSENCE,etc) can be in very small print under the title so that the italicized quote and PART I really begin the thing. Footnote must be readable and at bottom of first page so it's read right after the title. I got a few licks in anyway. Couldn't do index without list of artists at least. Many thanx forbooks. Am getting alot of reading done and atill adoring every minute, Book is crazy and not at all what I'd ex ected to do but what the hell. Have a lovely tan and swim every day on top of it. Hope you're bearingup under the weight of all (sorry not there to help support the upper lip —) that info and that my thing doesn't complicate matters too much. ~~xxxx



The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY:
INFO IV.53

May 5 70 Carboneras

The list is great. Glad alot of those people are in (Canadians etc.) What happened to David Lamelas? There are some typos in the copy of my thing-check carefully -especially numbers-with the original, or the code won't work. Add "and Cambodia" after Vietnam in III/C. (Erggh), delete the first "faculty" in the parag. on p. 3 that begins"For art",and be sure its called a "situation text" in footnote (slash is important). Mainly,tho, remember to follow through on parts A and B. Hope it was clear you have to do those parts and insert where it says (so delete "insert the completed list here" on ms and just insert your findings.) You can do it yourself or have someone in library do it. Am most curious about the outcome. The rest of the instructions,needless to say, you don't have to record the results,if any. You're probably going out of your mind by this time. Sorry to add more work.What's going on in Trinidad?All still marvelous here. Think I'll probably make it back for the opening. Much love-

POR AVION

K. McShine
Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 St
New York City
10019 NY
USA

Fig. 27 Lucy Lippard, *Lucy Lippard to Kynaston McShine*, May 5, 1970. From Kynaston McShine *Information* Exhibition Research, IV.59. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

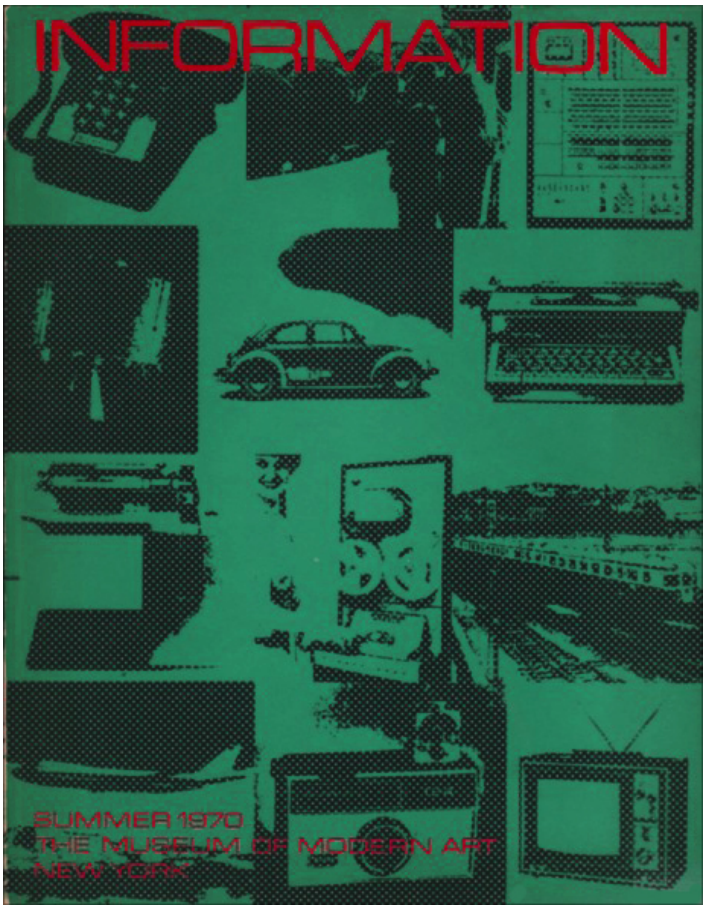


Fig. 28 Michael Lauretano, *Cover Design, Information Catalogue*, 1970.

Fig. 29 *Source image for Michael Lauretano's design for the cover of the Information* catalogue, c. 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 30 *Source image for Michael Lauretano's design for the cover of the Information* catalogue, c. 1970. From Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #934. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Fig. 31 General Idea, *The Boutique from the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion*, 1980. From Kynaston McShine (ed.), *The Museum as Muse* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 175.