AS IF THE OCEANS WERE LEMONADE:
THE PERFORMATIVE VISION OF ROBERT FILLIOU
AND THE WESTERN FRONT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a cultural community in Vancouver during the 1970s, focussing on the group of artists, poets and musicians active in the formation of the Western Front. While the Front is still active today my research is focussed around the initial formation of the Front community, from its inception in 1973. The utopian and countercultural artistic practice which developed there during the early seventies has made a significant contribution to recent Canadian art. I examine the Western Front through the presence of French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou, as he figures prominently in the written history of that period and provides a critical point of entry into its activities. In the Vancouver scene Filliou operated as an emblem of utopian possibility, representing art as an imaginary space in which to develop ideas about social transformation.

The pivotal concept of this thesis relies on what Filliou referred to as "la Fête Permanente" or, alternately, as "the Eternal Network". I use this dual term as a means of comparing emergent cultural politics, examining the implications carried by the French usage of la fête versus the North American usage of the network. In the first section of the text Filliou's ludic artistic strategies are situated within the performative praxis of the Fluxus movement, which had become active in New York and Europe in the early sixties. I also try to show the way in which his commitment to la fête relates to the widespread counter-establishment protests which, in France, were to culminate in the Events of May, 1968.

In 1973, when Filliou made his first visit to Canada, the Western Front was being promoted by its members as an important "node" on an emergent "network" of global artist connections. I examine how the idea of "network consciousness" was seized by members of the Western Front as a means of speaking within the dominant logic of media culture. The distance which separated the Front from the Fluxus generation was, so to speak, a ricochet through the "new" space of orbiting communications satellites.

While my consideration of la fête versus the network stresses the contrast between oppositional strategies as they were articulated in Europe and North America, the thesis also draws attention to the strong alignments between Filliou and the artists at the Western Front. I argue that the prominent position given
to Filliou by its members was a signal of their collective resistance to the technological imperative which guides media culture. One sees, through Filliou, that during the early seventies the Western Front made a valiant attempt to construct a network which would align the banal sophistication and glamour of Hollywood with the intimacy of a bohemian community. These artists, including Filliou, integrated decadence and festive abandon into their artistic practice as a means of asserting their difference from the conventional middle class values being advanced through the mass media. In the final section of the thesis I use the building of the Pompidou Center in Paris as a symbol of the international shift which announced the dispersal of these counter-cultural, bohemian ideals. By the late seventies, both in Canada and in France, the visionary promise upheld by "the Eternal Network/La Fête Permanente" was compelled to assume a new and more resilient configuration.
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Sections of chapter two were previously published in an essay entitled "The Filliou Tapes — from Political to Poetical Economy (caught in the word storm of May)" in the exhibition catalogue Robert Filliou: From Political to Poetical Economy. Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1995. 16-48.
Ours is a brand-new world of allatoniceness. 'Time' has ceased, 'space' has vanished. We now live in a global village... a simultaneous happening. We have begun again to structure the primordial feeling, the tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy has divorced us.

— Marshall McLuhan The Medium is the Massage 1967

You are no longer brutally removed from daily life to be delivered up to machines. But rather, you are integrated: your childhood, your habits, your human relations, your unconscious instincts, even your rejection of work... In any case, you will never be left on your own. The important thing is that everyone be a terminal in the network, a tiny terminal, but a term nevertheless: certainly no inarticulate cry, but a linguistic term, and in terms of the whole structural network of language.

— Jean Baudrillard Symbolic Exchange and Death 1976

This thesis examines a cultural community in Vancouver during the 1970s, focussing on the group of artists, poets and musicians active in the formation of the artist-run centre the 'Western Front'. While the Front was founded in 1973 and is still active today, my research is concerned with the definition of the Front community during its formative years. The Western Front was a locus of countercultural utopian explorations as they were variously and diversely formulated during that period and, as such, provides an intriguing point of study. I examine the Western Front, in large part, through the presence of French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou, as he figures prominently in the written history of that period and provides a critical point of entry into its activities.¹

¹ This thesis, because it isolates 1973 as a key year, does not detail the full range of exchanges that took place between Filliou and Canada. A more detailed historical account (though still incomplete) can be found in the exhibition catalogue Robert Filliou: From Political to Poetical Economy (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1995).
In considering both Robert Filliou and "the Western Front" I am also establishing a dialogue between obviously distinct locales. One of my central questions is to ask how, in the decade following 1968, the eight founding members of the Front fashioned their own terrain of meaning as a way into, or out of, the constitutive, heterogenous semaphores flashing on the horizon of Vancouver's skyline. Second, I aim to understand the way in which Filliou's semantic anchors — for instance, of European tradition, clashing political radicalisms or artistic avant-gardism — translated within the relatively youthful cultural milieu in which the Front was built. Writing this thesis has meant a struggle to cut into a project that has for the most part remained shrouded in the arcane gloss of its creators. Consideration of art production as enmeshed within a specific, and traceable, range of social conditions — what I think of as 'social art history' — has been a way of conceiving the circumstances that informed, resisted and defined the ideals at issue in the founding of the Western Front. Abutting contiguous histories (in this case at least two — a here and a there), offers a greater possibility of fracturing the persuasive coherence, and mythic costume, that cloaks a single narration.

At first glance there seems a lively confluence of longings in the history of Robert Filliou and his occasional visits to Western Canada. Reading the Front through him opens into this confluence, providing a means by which to examine how notions of cultural opposition developed, and were articulated, in both 'old' and 'new' worlds. Filliou was among many artists whose European roots conferred automatic status locally — one might describe this as willing self-colonization, but it was admittedly also fertile cross-germination. Although split by a generation, the relative economic richness, conspicuous consumption and increasing dominance of 'information' were significant components of the social fabric in which both Filliou and the Fronters resided, and into which they
attempted to speak — he as Fluxus Father and they as the successive media generation.

In the following chapter, with the intention of identifying certain strategies that informed Filliou's production, I take up the turbulent milieu of the late sixties in France. The ludic stance that characterizes student protest in May '68 in Paris finds some relation not only to Filliou, but also to the performative antics that took place at the Western Front in the early seventies. Filliou integrated the notion of play into his own production in projects such as "poetical economy", "the birthday of art" or in his insistence on using a "new language", and these are what I follow up in greater detail. The pivotal concept in terms of this thesis, however, is what Filliou called "the Eternal Network". The "pivot" is actually his calculated mistranslation of the term, for when he used the term in French he chose to say "La Fête Permanente". An evocative conceit, and one that offers a workable terrain for comparing emergent cultural politics: in English what is called a network in French was called a fête.

In the third chapter, having explored aspects of the fête in France in chapter two, I return to Canada, to consider the specific constellation of social forces shaping production at the Front. The Western Front has, since its inception, been positioned by its members as an important node on an emergent network of global artist connections. I see networks as a key instance of how playful, apolitical protest was absorbed, spinned around and regurgitated by artists whose cultural environment was crammed with images of Hollywood, opulence and Planters peanuts.

Indeed, references to network appear throughout the Western Front archive. The popularity of this term is shown, for example, in a 1974 advertisement, evidently intended to introduce an unfamiliar audience to the recent and future activities of their new and exciting artist-run centre [Figure 1].
In the single page that reports on the diverse facets of the organization, the term network appears on seven different occasions. The reader is informed that the Front "creates"; "covers"; "provides evidence of"; "brings together"; and "acts as a centre for" the network, in its variant manifestations. The diverse aspects of the centre's programming — communications, performance events, social gatherings, exhibitions — are written through the ambiguous signifier of network. Explanations of the Front, when they circulated in the media, characteristically relied on oblique description and reference to "a network" which was at once or alternately media based, electronic, conceptual, artistic or eternal. As in this interview, when 'Marcel Idea' elaborates on the group's motives:

Ml: The myth is taken for granted and the activity is being duplicated all over. Interviewer: Which activity?
Ml: Well, banking, networks and associations in general.... The network is not so much making art as it is business as usual.²

It soon becomes apparent that the declarations were not burdened with the weight of studied detail. Rather, network consciousness was always floated outside specific definition, a sign detached from any singular referent. As cast, the spell of the consciousness was perpetually veiled in the arcane, a strategy of enthral and a means, for these artists, of retaining the power of signification, of holding meaning. While recent accounts of the Western Front frequently draw attention to the popularity of the network idea that had circulated at the time, none have gone far in addressing the social references embedded there.³

² "Business as Usual at the Western Front" Avalanche summer (1973): unpaginated. The interviewer is New York artist Willoughby Sharp and 'Marcel Idea' is one of the personae adopted by Front artist Michael Morris.
To view network consciousness as a chimeric, mythologized ideal, as it certainly was, is not to suggest that it failed to leave traces in the real world of social relations. On the contrary, it was this very fiction that allowed for a temporary coalescence of dream threads, threads that held various histories, various desires and various visions of what the future ought to be.

My argument relies on the premise that the Western Front picked up on "network" because it is the logic of media culture. In recent decades a critical facet of our highly rationalized global economy has been this reconceptualization of space. Flows of information, rather than being carried from 'origin' to 'destination', are networked through an ever-expanding, interconnecting grid. This paradigmatic shift into network systems, the result of computer-mediated communications development, increasingly forms the basis of economic, scientific and cultural models of organization. In my use of the term 'media culture' I am drawing on Douglas Kellner and his elaboration of it as the dominant shaping mechanism of contemporary society. By the early 1970s a pessimistic vein of techno-theory had already announced the awesome, infiltrating capacity of mass media; a totalizing union of mass communications devices to form one universal, networked system. Kellner's account is valuable in that it calls attention to media as both the built infrastructure of information-processing/communications technologies and as its visible materiality as information and image proliferation. The network consciousness transmitted

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4 This reconceptualization reflects theories of the postindustrial economy such as Daniel Bell and Alain Touraine, and of urban geography, particularly Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey.


through the Western Front had been spawned directly from this web of media culture. It is in this aspect that their difference is marked; the distance between the Front and the Fluxus generation was, so to speak, a ricochet through the "new" space of orbiting communications satellites. While also pursuing the facets of their alignment, accepting the space between fête and network will be a means of showing how articulations of cultural production attest to the specificity of their locale.

In his address to the Liberal Policy Convention of 1970, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, recognizing the global technological transformation underway, called upon the Liberal party members to invent a "technological humanism" which, as he desired, would "integrate technology into our culture."[7] The Liberals opted enthusiastically for techno-advancement, making research and experiments in new technologies a priority for the 1970s. The wedding of information processing and communications transmissions was seen, from the federal point of view, as a way to develop and maintain competitive, cutting-edge industry in Canada. The launch of Anik I by Telesat on January 1, 1973, made Canada the first country in the world to have a geostationary satellite as part of its domestic communications system, acting as an important signifier of Canada's status as a progressive, technological 'Communications Frontier'. What I want to stress here is that network consciousness was a strategy steeped in this communications fervour. It was intended to penetrate technocratic, nationalistic aspirations, layering another reading onto assertions such as that of Communications Canada's 1972 Annual Report: "The ubiquitous telephone and telegraph lines, a part of the Canadian landscape for years, are now only one of many transmission methods" [Figure 2].

By 1973 Vancouver had already established a weighty reputation as a city where lively and surprising experiments in art and technology went on. Between 1967 and 1972 the Intermedia Society enacted the first wave of experimentation, with a take on technology that encompassed all the exuberance of their space age era.\(^8\) Inspired by Marshall McLuhan's theorization of a new role for the artist as educator and "antenna of the new electronic age", Intermedia members worked at a local, civic level — facilitating projects such as an alternative kindergarten, a free high school and art-based community centres around Vancouver. In that five out of eight of the original Fronters had been involved with the group, Intermedia's experiments are an important aspect of the group's history.

One of the key distinctions between Intermedia and the Front was their respective relation to the local, lived environment. In both instances, I should stress, Marshall McLuhan was a significant influence. However, where Intermedia clearly took a McLuhanist position in seeing the artist as the antenna of the electronic age, the Fronters were to enact another aspect of his ideas. Their own experiments in art and technology were always encoded in grids and connectors; the Western Front, stationed on the crest of the electronic frontier, was built as a home for the artists living in the 'Global Village'.

In Intermedia History, a video documentary made on the occasion of Filliou's first visit to Vancouver in 1973, one sees the way in which the Western Front would be positioned within the local scene as the site of a nascent, global network consciousness. The still camera shoots several artists, former members of the Intermedia Society, as they speak to Filliou of Intermedia's efforts to

\(^8\) For further reference see Rebecca Fairbairn, "A Short Trip on Spaceship Earth: Intermedia Society 1967-1972" (Vancouver: University of British Columbia M.A. thesis, 1991). Fairbairn's persuasively made argument focuses on Intermedia's predominantly optimistic use of technology and the way in which it inevitably became aligned with the technical humanism advocated by the Liberal government. What I try to show here is how the Western Front was, by contrast, just a few years later, permeated with technological ambivalence, even retreat.
break out of conventional conceptions of art production via technological innovation, drug experimentation and collaborative activity. In the tape one sees the history of Intermedia is also being undone, ever so slightly displaced by this newly unfolding story. As the past and present is spoken to an attentive listener, a rupture seeps in, the first articulation of a terrain of conflicting aspirations. In the video, one sees Vancouver poet Gerry Gilbert talk about the departure the Western Front signified to him, within his own surroundings. Pointing out a detail in a photograph, he stresses, "This is pre-correspondence in Vancouver — this is people meeting in real time, doing work together." The Front opened its doors at a moment in the local history in which the ground was shifting underfoot, when conventional notions of 'distance' and 'time' were becoming unfixed from their mooring in the real. As the network consciousness was taking hold, the local community was becoming just one place among many for the mode of cultural opposition at hand.

In the fourth chapter I continue to elaborate on examples of production at the Western Front, incorporating writings on media culture and technology circulating during that time in order to situate the emergence of network consciousness. These performative interventions, distant from the weighty history of political radicalism as it had been lived in Europe, suggest the ways in which opposition to the technocratic machinery of dominant society was manifest in North America. It soon becomes clear that network, as it was used by the Front, remained a vague and slippery concept, never solely a question of technological adaptation.

What I am looking at, then, is how, for several years in the early seventies, the artists at the Western Front sustained a formation (identifiable as network consciousness) that worked in opposition to the dominant technological media apparatus. This formation, built of diverse and contradictory components,
was subject to eventual dispersal, and this is what I examine in the concluding chapter. Through the process of unravelling the layers that comprise the network consciousness, it becomes possible to see how Filliou came to hold such a prominent position in the annals of the Western Front. His idea of the Eternal Network was unconstrained by historical imperatives, the fluid sticky substance of pure idealism that glued all the other versions of "network" together. In the decades since Filliou visited Canada, network logic has become increasingly pervasive. Emergent information systems ("the Internet") have reinvigorated curiosity around the role of technology and its impact on our social environment. Recent ideas about "the Net" and "the Counter-Net" echo these earlier forays, suggesting that network remains a critical point of investigation, and is still seen by many as the fertile matrix of contestatory cultural politics.  

From Political to Poetical Economy  
(caught in the word storm of May)

During the May events in Paris the reversion to archaic forms of production was particularly characteristic. Instead of carrying out agitation among the workers with a modern offset press, the students printed their posters on the hand presses of the Ecole des Beaux Arts... It was not the radio headquarters that were seized by the rebels, but the Odeon Theatre, steeped in tradition.

— Hans Magnus Enzenberger "Constituents of a Theory of Media" 1970

In A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, the companion volume to Anti-Oedipus, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari intensify the distance between Europe and North America through their articulation of "the rhizome". 1 Their writing differentiates this opposition with reference to mobility, drawing out divergent geographical, historical and aesthetic fluctuations. Where the Far East is "rhizomatic", an aggregate pattern of intertwining rope-like roots, the European West is "arborescent", assembled along the vertical ordering of the tree. I draw attention to their positioning of America as nomadic and deterritorialized because of its congruence with the concept of "network". The rhizomatic space is defined through connections rather than hierarchy; joining points one to another, without a nucleic centre. The authors stress the special place that America has since it incorporates aspects of both East and West, but they clearly favour its rhizomatic elements: "Nevertheless, everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs..." 2 The authors depart from the industrialized east coast, locating this deterritorialization on the

2 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus 119.
Western frontier, for it is "the rhizomatic West, ... with its ever-receding limit, its shifting and displaced frontiers. There is a whole American 'map' in the West, where even the trees form rhizomes." And much later on in the text they continue, saying "the West... played the role of a line of flight combining travel, hallucination, madness, the Indians, perceptive and mental experimentation, the shifting of frontiers, the rhizome (Ken Kesey and his 'fog machine', the beat generation, etc.)."

The mythologized, rhetorical construction offered up by Deleuze and Guattari draws attention to a symbolic terrain that places a distance between here and there, reinscribing the divide between old and new worlds. It was particularly during the sixties and seventies that the Californian coast had come to signify the Edenic and utopian edges of the postindustrial world. French intellectuals such as Deleuze and Guattari played with the possibility of the frontier, and the Pacific coast of North America, in all its rhizomatic unboundedness, was well suited to the projection of their longing. The politics of liberation developed in their work was shaped during what Foucault has described as "the five brief, impassioned, jubilant, enigmatic years" of the late sixties. Their concept of nomadic thought and its rhizomatic organization was an enraged opposition to the arborescent model of hierarchical, rationalist Enlightenment thought. "We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics." America as a spatial field is

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3 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus 19.
4 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus 520.
5 Jean-Philippe Mathy, in his book Extrême-Occident: French Intellectuals and America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), surveys the ways in which the West Coast became the locus of this mythologization after World War II. His discussion of the sixties includes a consideration of Deleuze and Guattari, Michel Butor and Jean-François Lyotard. See in particular chapter 5, "Poetics of Space: The Body of America," 163-206.
6 Michel Foucault, "Preface," Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, xi.
7 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus 15.
contrasted with the history of European thought weighed down by the tradition, vision and structure of arborescence: "The French are too human, too historical, too concerned with the future and the past. They spend their time in in-depth analysis. They do not know how to become, they think about a 'future of the revolution' rather than a revolutionary-becoming." 8

Covering a broad range of concerns, Filliou's work persistently spoke in various and subtle ways about these larger wars, about the intensity of the battles then being waged against social exploitation and psychic repression. His art partakes of the socio-political alignments particular to France, but continues to draw from elsewhere. Western Canada, for instance, was also a fertile and important milieu, and because of this, the complexities between here and there have to be kept in motion. Through the gaze of the French, 'America' was envisioned as the land where rhizomatic "grass roots" could flourish, rather than being churned to death by the slow machinery of a more deeply entrenched political milieu. As one writer of the time commented, referring to the European student movement, America was both villain and hero. 9 While it was target for its imperialistic war in Vietnam and its "Coca-Cola-ization" of the globe, there was also "the other America", whose heroes (Allen Ginsberg, Berkeley students, Malcolm X) had forcefully commenced their own war against "arborescence". 10 In Europe during the sixties the ideas of the old left were often a hindrance to visions of social transformation; rather than providing a model for revolutionary change, wary elders attempted to deter what they deemed inappropriate upheaval. At the time Theodore Roszak argued that, because the opposition of youth culture in both Europe and America was an attack on the emergent and powerful technocratic order, old style politics were bound to fail: "The American

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10 Corsini 751.
young have been somewhat quicker to sense that in the struggle against the enemy, the conventional tactics of political resistance have only a marginal place, largely limited to meeting life and death crises. Beyond such front-line issues, however, there lies the greater task of altering the total cultural context within which our daily politics takes place."\(^{11}\) The rejection of arborescence that Deleuze and Guattari express in their writings was only one iteration of the vast opposition to established culture and institutional order that swept the globe during the 1960s. It is their discourse of the rhizome in particular, though, which effectively poses the distance between Vancouver and Paris.

In this chapter I follow the sporadic development of "poetical economy", one of Filliou's conceptual inventions. During the sixties and seventies, in writing, sculpture and video, Filliou repeatedly made reference to the notion of poetical economy. The term had first appeared in an essay in 1966, where he stated: "A problem, the one and only, but massive: money, which creating does not necessarily create. A *Principles of Poetical Economy* must be written. Write it."\(^{12}\) At the time Filliou did not elaborate; the text leaves no clue as to the motives that compel him to unequivocally claim a space for "the poetical". Perpetually eluding concise definition, poetical economy remained an intriguing notion, both ambitious and absurd. The way in which Filliou advocated a non-instrumental logic through ideas such as this is worth exploring in more depth, for it also illuminates his conceptual affinity with the alternative Canadian scene. In 1970, three years before his first visit to Canada, Filliou's *Teaching & Learning as*

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\(^{12}\) Robert Filliou, "A Proposition, a problem, a danger and a hunch," *Manifestos, Great Bear Pamphlet series* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966). Intended as a supplement to the books published by Something Else Press, twenty Great Bear pamphlets were issued by the Something Else Press between 1965 and 1967. The majority of the authors of these pamphlets were involved in Fluxus activities, as indeed the press itself was considered an outgrowth of the Fluxus group in New York. Titles and descriptions are given in Peter Frank, *Something Else Press: An Annotated Bibliography* (U.S.A.: McPherson and Co., 1983).
Performing Arts was published. The book, a comprehensive, erratic compendium (published only in a German/English edition), was written between 1967 and 1970. Because it draws upon a diverse selection of the projects he had completed up to that time, the book acts as a good source text. In the first chapter, 'Reflections on the working of the System - what we are up against and why', Filliou draws poetic economy into a discussion of what "art" ought to entail. Disregarding technical finesse, or even the making of objects, he redefines art as "a form of organized leisure"\(^{15}\), capable of providing "a potentially revolutionary set of values".\(^{14}\) He repositions art in relation to an alternative theory of value, positing an enhanced economy where abstract labour, instead of being defined through the relative exchange value of the commodity, could be evaluated in relation to the "innocence", "imagination" or "freedom" it was worth.\(^{15}\)

Having travelled and lived outside of France for more than a decade, Filliou had returned in 1959 to a nation that was undergoing a drastic reconstruction. At that time, all around him, the work and play of modern French society was being reconstituted by affluence and technological progress.\(^{16}\) The abundance of modern convenience, the Americanization of France, was completely and irrevocably transforming the way that free time had been thought of and enacted in everyday French life.\(^{17}\) As I try to show in this chapter, it is of little surprise that an artist working in France during the 1960s had become interested in reconceptualizing the practice of leisure as an aspect of art. The playful current in Filliou's art production circulates engagingly, and

\(^{14}\) Robert Filliou, Teaching & Learning 78.  
\(^{15}\) Robert Filliou, Teaching & Learning 45.  
\(^{16}\) This transition is discussed in Kristin Ross, Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture (Cambridge: MIT, 1995).  

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intentionally, within frequent, and heated, discussions of leisure. The reorientation of political thought toward an analysis of leisure informs Filliou's theorization, animating the intended drama of poetical economy. During this era of modernization, Robert Filliou and his lifelong partner Marianne Staffaeldt (Filliou) lived on the margins of this economic shift, refusing professional ties and without any reliable income. Living in and out of Paris during the sixties, they found the least expensive places they could, travelling to keep in touch with friends and art circles. Accepting a poverty that put them on the outside of emergent social norms, the way in which it permeated their everyday life is undeniable.16 As in 1961, the year their daughter Marcelline was conceived, Robert and Marianne lived in a tent in the country outside of Paris, under an apple tree. They relied on three sawed-off tree trunks — one for cooking, one for cleaning and one for Robert's typewriter. Rejecting the nascent consumerism of post-World War II France and the competitive ambitiousness of the international contemporary art market, the Filliou family embraced the poverty and freedom of a decidedly bohemian lifestyle.

During the fifties commentators had seen the advent of the new economy, the era of abundance, as progressive, offering new possibilities for pleasure in leisure time. This emergent optimism is expressed in Antony Crosland's 1956 text, The Future of Socialism:

As these objectives are also gradually fulfilled, and society becomes more social-democratic with the passing of the old collective grievances and injustices (and perhaps as automation carries us towards the 30- or even 20- hour work week), we shall turn our attention to other, in the long run, more important spheres - of personal freedom, happiness and cultural endeavour: the cultivation of leisure, beauty, grace, gaiety, excitement...15

16 Blending the personal and social, Filliou integrated poverty into his artistic discourse; Teaching & Learning as Performing Arts is a good example.
Filliou's vision, attuned to the voices of the counter culture and of the New Left as they developed during the sixties, works in opposition to accounts such as Crosland's — alongside those who inverted the progressivism of the preceding era, turning leisure (from its previous connotation of being the site of pleasure and a respite from labour), into a site of conflict.

In European circles resistance to the emergent consumer culture was diversely articulated in art practice. Contact with the Fluxus actions and performances that took place in Europe and the States from 1962; with the circle around Jean-Clarence Lambert's Domaine Poétique in Paris, or with Les Nouveaux Réalistes, saw Filliou situated in among the tiny pockets of vanguardist opposition at work during this period. Filliou is the ludic hero of Lambert's 1971 manifesto on "artes", defined as "those for whom the very meaning of artistic activity has undergone so complete a mutation that they can no longer be considered artists in a conventional sense." It is important to stress that these various groupings did not manifest in a coherent or united opposition. As Michel Giroud has addressed in an essay on art in Paris during the fifties and sixties, the artistic groups in favour of such a "bouleversement total de l'art" drew upon disparate, even contradictory claims.

20 While the group's spokesperson, Pierre Restany, and certain of its members were not explicitly critical of consumerism (i.e., Arman, Klein), there was also an aspect of contestation carried on by certain members of the group (i.e., Spoerri, Tinguely). The strongest tie Filliou had to the New Realists was with Daniel Spoerri. A funny and insightful account of their friendship in Paris in the sixties is in Spoerri's Anecdoted Topography of Chance (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), which is subtitled Done with the help of his very dear friend Robert Filliou. See also the personal testimonies by friends of Filliou including Spoerri, Emmett Williams and many others in Fondation Danae, Autour de Robert Filliou: Espaces Affranchis (Pouilly, France: Cahiers Danae 4-5, été 1989), published for the Robert Filliou memorial celebration held in 1988 in France.


Filiou's closest affiliations were with Fluxus artists; he was involved in many Fluxus festivals and projects during this period, and is well positioned within its idiom.\textsuperscript{25} The term *Fluxus* had been launched by Lithuanian New Yorker George Maciunas around 1962, and it acted simultaneously as the title of a publication he planned to put together, the producer of artists' multiples and as a sponsor of international performance activities. Maciunas had attempted, with tremendous energy and effort, to organize many of the diverse and provocative artistic experiments then going on in Europe and New York into a coherent and comprehensible program. [Figure 3] While he functioned as the central organizer of the group, though, the Fluxus program he envisioned was also contested by several of its core participants. The manifesto he produced, informed by the rhetoric of the 1920s avant-garde, was never to be signed by Fluxus members. Similarly, his "Fluxus News Policy Letter" of 1963, which proposed sabotage and disruption of New York city subways, postal boxes and museums for 'action propaganda' was resisted by many members, including Jackson Mac Low, Dick Higgins and George Brecht.\textsuperscript{24} It is the concept of art production defined through these latter artists, the ones opposing a politically radical avant-garde, that is of interest to me here because, more than with Maciunas' avant-gardism, this is where Filiou finds his place.

In the 'Festival of Misfits', organized in London in 1962 by Filiou and Spoerri, one of the central tenets of this type of artistic practice was demonstrated. In assuming a humorous tone, which came across as both


\textsuperscript{24} Hannah Higgins, "Demonstrations: The Implications of the Stockhausen Controversy in Evaluating the Internal Dynamics of Fluxus," unpublished College Art Association panel paper, 1993. 6
sophisticated and friendly, the invitation was a shrewd social gesture [Figure 4]. The text describes an exhibition of 'misfit' art, warmed by the promise of a community for those excluded by grander schemes of all sorts. What is embedded in this candid framing, though, is the change that had been made to the artist's guest list: artist Gustav Metzger was disinvited because "he had proposed to exhibit two copies (front and back) of the Daily Express, a London newspaper, each consecutive day of the show." By contesting the rhetorical open-ness of the invitation we can see that there was a careful negotiation made by the artists regarding their relation to the actual world events surrounding them. Metzger's gesture can be contrasted with Ben Vautier's, whose contribution to the festival was to live on display in a London gallery vitrine [Figure 5]. Vautier's intervention, rather than introducing a current of social and political events, is a staged exhibition of his personal and unremarkable everyday life. Insofar as the Misfits Festival asserted a lifestyle and artistic practice contingent on "the everyday", Metzger was bound to misfit the Misfits. The Fluxus artists preferred, instead, to create works that were systematically constrained by chance operations and everyday experience, taking up an 'anti-art' position that they credited to the experiments in music made by John Cage. Their definition of everyday life conspicuously elided any political proclamations. These strategies can be seen in a work such as Dick Higgins' 1000 Symphonies, where a musical performance was determined by the 'arrangement' of gunshots on musical score sheets [Figure 6]. A performance piece calling attention to concrete experience was Yes - an action poem written by Robert Filiou and performed by him and Alison Knowles in New York.

25 This is discussed in Stiles, "Between Water and Stone" 97
26 Many Fluxus artists also trace their initial interest in Zen Buddhism and its engagement in "nowness" and everyday life through Cage. For a history that attempts to bridge Zen practice and philosophy with the Western avant-gardist idiom of Fluxus, see David Doris, "ZEN Vaudeville: A Med(a)ttation in the Margins of Fluxus" (M.A. thesis. Hunter College of the City of New York, 1993).
City in 1965. The main event of the poem was pointedly use-less: Filliou performs the action poem he has written, which amounts to "sitting quietly, doing nothing". In instances such as this, where observation and attentiveness replace any type of committed action, Fluxus gestures demonstrate a pointed preference for silence and emptiness over any assertions of authority or individual will.

It appears that a significant contingent of artists who were active in Fluxus events in the States and Europe did suffer from their self-imposed restrictions, compelled as they were to resist the struggles of the earlier avant-garde (such as Maciunas wanted) while also attempting to displace conceptions of 'serious culture' by adopting an idiom that was distinctly anti-aesthetic. This compromised position — often consisting of unadulterated re-enactments of everyday actions — when it didn't offend the expectations of a sophisticated cultural elite, seemed quite silly. Even Allan Kaprow, whose 'Happenings' were based on a rhetoric about the merging of 'art' with 'life', steered clear of the group because he saw the Fluxus artists as merely "goofing off". If we can say there is a banality that characterizes a significant part of Fluxus, then what is the necessity underlying these performative gestures?

This Fluxian commitment to revitalizing everyday life draws on a certain heritage in pre-war surrealist ideas. In fact, the presence of Breton and the program of surrealism had provided a significant fount of ideas for Fluxus artists, based as they were on a desire to completely transform conventional social and aesthetic values. Interestingly, surrealism's impact reached Fluxus on both French and American ground. Artist and writer Dick Higgins, having learned about...
surrealism while going to school with Breton's daughter in New Jersey, admits that in terms of the American Fluxus scene surrealism was "locked into our sensibility" — it was "absolutely the prototypical art movement."25

The Fluxus move to integrate everyday life into art was not underwritten by the same strategies, however, as had been expressed in surrealist doctrines. For the surrealists the transformation of the everyday — oneself, language, society — was entwined in a revolutionary vision, in close proximity to Freud and his elaboration of the unconscious. For the surrealists the limitations of quotidian experience could be shattered through dream states, hallucination or creative disparate juxtaposition. The limits were both individual and social. As Helena Lewis writes, it gradually became clear to Breton that a merely symbolic and verbal transformation of reality was inadequate. "If the 'revolution in men's minds' was ever to become a reality, it would have to be through other means and gradually, the definition of the Surrealist Revolution expanded to include revolution in the political sense."30 At a certain point Breton did not see Marxism as incompatible with the goals of surrealism. His own work was, as he said in a 1935 lecture, "to reconcile surrealism as a method of creating a collective myth with the much more general movement involving the liberation of man..."31 In the Fluxus aesthetic, though, the quotidian remained unadorned — out of uniform, as it were — rather than being put to the service of the revolution. In terms of many of the Fluxus artists one sees cultural opposition enacted in a distinctly noninstrumental manner. The use of chance, games and gags were ways of destabilizing static aesthetic forms, to let go of a transcendental signified.32

Andreas Huyssen has suggested that this strategy was, for the sixties, the only radical possibility left open.\textsuperscript{32} Drawing attention to the difference between the heroic vanguardism of the earlier era and the post-war avant-garde, Huyssen says: "Fluxus actually resisted commodification quite consciously, but in retrospect, the absence of a political radicalism rooted in reality can be said to have been both an aesthetic weakness and a sign of political insight at a time when the left cultural politics of the 1920s no longer offered any solutions."\textsuperscript{34}

Fusing his earlier training as an economist\textsuperscript{35} with his ‘dropped-out’ artist’s lifestyle, Filliou propelled a thoughtful, humorous discussion of art-as-leisure to problematize the economy of post-industrial capitalism. Poetical economy was intended as the strategy whereby a new economic model would be elaborated. He says, "What escape[s] the normal economic circuit, I will analyze in Poetical Economy."\textsuperscript{36} In this sense, art is intended to interfere with the claim that any purely economic model provides an adequate understanding of the underlying structures governing social organization. "Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political."\textsuperscript{37} In this new world, leisure, liberated from alienation and financial greed, would be rehabilitated, infused with a poetic sense. His \textit{Permanent Creation Toolbox} (1969) shows art production could play a leading role, owing to the suitability of the tools it provides: ‘innocence’ and ‘imagination’ (Figure 7).

\textsuperscript{32} "Back to the Future: Fluxus in Context," \textit{In the Spirit of Fluxus} 145.
\textsuperscript{34} "Back to the Future...," \textit{In the Spirit of Fluxus} 145.
\textsuperscript{35} Filliou received an MA in economics from UCLA in 1951. He was then hired by the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency to work in Korea. The programme he worked for, referred to as "the Nathan Report," was published by UNKRA in 1954 as \textit{An Economic Programme for Korean Reconstruction}. It was after working for UNKRA that Filliou left his practice as an economist. Thus there is a way that his lived experience also enacts the transition from political to poetical economy.
\textsuperscript{36} Filliou, \textit{Teaching & Learning} 77.
\textsuperscript{37} Jacques Attali, \textit{Noise: The Political Economy of Music} (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1985) 6. Attali’s reading of music as sign of late capital and its projected evolution provides an interesting variation on this intersection of the aesthetic with the realm of political economy.
As with the assertion that one could create an economy that is poetical, Filliou's art frequently formed a commentary on the forced incompatibility between 'work' and 'play'. In his video *Porta Filliou* (1977), one sees him in conversation, informally describing his work for a Canadian audience, explaining, "Meanwhile I am thinking about workers without whom there is no poetry and I am looking for and I am doing research to find out what aspect [of] poetry, which is futile, could be useful to them." He asserted himself against this cleavage, for example in an assemblage of wood slats from 1970, across which he scrawled "I hate work which is not play" [Figure 8]. While taking on a rather carefree guise, the term *poetical economy* acts as a complete rejection of the values inherent in political economy, of Adam Smith's influential claim that 'world-wide commerce would free men from political tyranny'. Inverting the serious thought of Smith, JS Mill and even Marx, it casually demands a complete restructuring of the accepted basis of our social organization. Filliou's ludic commentary played off of a commonly felt sentiment: Regis Debray, describing the escalation toward the May crisis, writes: "At Censier [an annex of the Sorbonne where many debates took place during May] it was decided to 'abolish the economy'." "Obviously", he continues, "since the hour had come for its enthronement in all the control centres — political, cultural, administrative and ideological."  

Another project in which Filliou continued to invoke 'play' was with his proposal to instigate an annual celebration for 'the birthday of art'. On the invitation that announces one of the major *Art's Birthday* events (at the State Gallery in Aachen on Jan.17, 1973), Filliou says, by way of explanation,

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38 The transcript of this videotape was published as "The Propositions and Principles of Robert Filliou," *Centerfold* 2.2-3 (1978).
"1,000,010 years ago, art was life, 1,000,010 years from now it will again be." The announcement reveals Filliou's desire: "A beautiful day we hope: school vacation for girls and boys, paid holiday for the workers, museums and galleries filled with flowers, banners and lanterns all over town, bands playing, people dancing, fireworks...." The message of the celebration: that creatively enacting leisure time (in the guise of art that was compellingly not art) is a form of cultural, social liberation. What Art's Birthday also stressed was that while the creativity of spontaneous play was an admirable goal, the established system of art production was far from capable of providing it, and alternatives had to be enacted.

Artistic interest in reinvesting the quotidian with a playful and poetical current bears, I would argue, an interesting relation to the concurrently shifting terrain of criticism toward analyses of cultural practice, leisure time and the everyday. In France, there was a noteworthy flourishing of leisure studies that attempted to come to terms with the social impact of technological progress. Emphasizing the stress on leisure in the French student uprising of 1968, one author comments: "The revolt against the 'manipulation' of the consumer society, and particularly of leisure, has been a common theme of Western students' movements; but in France the students' questioning has overflowed into a national debate, fed by speeches, clubs and newspaper articles." Describing the new left in Britain in the sixties, Alf Louvre says, "New kinds of radical synthesis were offered, emphasizing, among other things, the political

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40 The story of "art's birthday" is recounted in Filliou's poem "Whispered Art History", which was recently republished in a limited edition as Robert Filliou: whispered ART HISTORY (Sauve, France: Clémence Hiver, 1995). This nineties edition, with the poem printed on one long, accordion-folded sheet, enclosed by gold-leaf covers, attests to a dedicated re-materialization of the art object.
significance of matters previously thought peripheral to the cause. The nuances of everyday life, lifestyle, language and taste were no longer to be seen merely as private or individual quirks, but as symptomatic, as telling indices of more general values and allegiances." David Harris, in a book suggestively titled *From Class Struggle to the Politics of Pleasure*, alludes to a wariness regarding this departure in Marxist writing from political-economic determinants when he writes (referring to the influence of the French post/structural scene): "With the new flexibility in 'reading' the text, the search for (linguistic) pleasure rather than ideological enlightenment comes to the fore as a political force too, with consequences which become clear. These developments seemed to undermine the old concepts of ideology, the 'real' and the 'phenomenal'..."  

From this vantage point the dialogue between 'work' and 'play' doesn't seem particularly dangerous, but these unassuming words were articulated within a social moment that saw them pulse with ideological resonance. Filliou's engaging artistic propositions, generated by an increasing disaffection with consumer society, took part in the intellectual, political and artistic discourse that was to culminate in May '68. The events that took place in France (and elsewhere) during 1968, by no means accurately characterized as a mere 'student revolt', were a social and political crisis. At the beginning of May the student protests, sparked by the closing of the Sorbonne and the arrest of several students, quickly escalated into massive demonstrations, barricades, clashes with police, arrests and the occupation of schools and faculties. The student initiatives were supported by the population at large — by May 25, in a single day, about ten million people were on strike in France. The crisis affected every level of society — the buses, trains, banks, postal service, department

stores and hospitals had ceased functioning — and, for a short time, the modern state machine was brought to a complete standstill.

The revolutionary milieu that exploded May had begun as a demonstration of students' widespread disillusionment and discontent — rejection of the anachronistic Gaullist regime, contemporary boredom, alienation in both work and leisure, spreading unemployment among youth and inadequate university facilities. The Events of May 68 had also erupted, though, within the political and cultural heritage of a country in which 'revolution' had long since been a weighty signifier. The French Revolution and its aftermath, in its violent transformation of the social order and its supporting infrastructure, still serves as the current definition of the modern revolution. Filiou's interest in 'play', articulated in ideas such as poetical economy, la Fête Permanente, 'work' as 'play', or the Toolbox for Permanent Creation, was deeply and consciously engaged with this symbolic field. The history of revolution has something to say, for instance, to the inconsistency of his translation between the Eternal Network and La Fête Permanente; to his recognition that 'réseau' would simply not convey the oppositional connotation inherent in the French usage of 'la fête'. Marx and writers after him had elaborated on the possibilities of radical social transformation through the concept of 'permanent revolution'. The concept relied on Hegel's observation that the French Revolution had introduced an era of increasing instability, a period of 'becoming'. The traditional Marxist perspective thus demanded constant anticipation of a revolutionary moment. Once commenced, the revolutionary situation itself was said to hold the conditions for continued radicalization. For Marx the revolution would take place in relation to the system of production and the economic order that had put them into place.

The new subject of history, the proletariat, would seize the revolutionary situation in order to reclaim the reins of control. In his well-known 1928 essay, *Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky had stressed that the revolutionary process would unfold unevenly, with interdependent gains made in diverse social and disciplinary fields. His commitment to the global aspect of the gradually unfolding revolutionary process was a direct contradiction of Stalin’s claim of “socialism in one country”. It had inspired the organization of the Fourth International, in which Breton was involved, and attests to the hope Trotsky invested in the continued organization of the proletariat. As Trotsky claimed: “Thus, the Socialist Revolution becomes a Permanent Revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our planet.”

From the point of view of the 1960s, the revolutions in China, Cuba and Latin America became the sign of a reinvigorated interest in Trotsky; they were seen by some as consistent with the doctrine of Permanent Revolution. From a Trotskyist point of view, May '68 also marked a profound turning point, in that the massive revolutionary upsurge was unprovoked, and signified a long-awaited, if temporary, alliance between revolutionary theory and mass struggle.

Other adherents of the New Left, however, were disenchanted with the economic basis, the championing of the proletariat, and the attention to global revolution advocated by classical Marxism. The brutal violence of the Stalinist regime had become increasingly visible after 1956, and would reach a horrible climax in the Prague Spring of 1968. For many, the application of orthodox Communism had proven too ugly to remain a viable hope for organizing social

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48 See, for instance, Perry Anderson’s optimistic discussion of May '68 in his *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976). He also attaches various global upsurges subsequent to 1968 as proof of increasing working class insurgency.
transformation. Key Western Marxists recognized the critical function of culture in shaping the role of theory and practice in advanced capitalism.45 Filliou's alignment comes in alongside these revaluations; with thinkers interested in rewriting Marx through aesthetic, philosophical and cultural aspects. Trotsky, as well, had recognized art as a crucial and important aspect of society, but he had remained clear that its value would be determined by its relation to the revolutionary cause. In the 1938 manifesto "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art" written by André Breton and Diego Rivera in collaboration with Trotsky, the call for avant-garde art to work explicitly with the political avant-garde is also adamantly asserted.50 As Serge Guilbaut has pointed out, the urgent tone of their manifesto reflects the tension of the political climate in the years leading up to the war.51 One sees how, three decades later, Filliou's decision to maintain the French term La Fête Permanente plays with this dynamic field of reference. It is not la révolution en permanence but rather la fête en permanence; the ambition toward giving oneself up to the cause of the ongoing Revolution has been displaced by a desiring of the anarchic and festive disorder signified by 'la Fête'. Oriented toward an aesthetic and intellectual audience while referring obliquely to the proletariat, Filliou's declaration of la Fête Permanente in 1968 becomes the legacy of Breton's own revolutionary vision.

During the post-war period in Europe play had been reconceptualized by many writers as a vital and definitive realm in the formation of culture.52 It

45 For two valuable accounts of Western Marxism, see Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism and Martin Jay, Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

50 Trotsky's writings circulated through the pages of the American intellectual avant-garde magazine Partisan Review. For more on this, see Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1983), chapter one.

51 Guilbaut, How New York 32.

was in terms of 1968, though, that ‘play’ acquired a new significance. As the slogans which covered Paris that year indicate, play was taken up as a symbol which was, in itself, revolutionary; envisioning liberating leisure time and pleasure were the stakes held out against the status quo [Figure 9]. The protest in France, rather than articulating a coherent programme shared by all participants, had been formed by the temporary coalition of groups with diverse ideological leanings. As one author describes, "It was the sudden mass mobilization which developed at different times and by different degrees in the universities that obscured ideological diversities and made the pre-existing leftist groups merge temporarily in the student movement, obscuring rather than stressing their particular ideologies within the flexible bonds of the predominant libertarian utopia ...."52 Play provided one basis of radical discourse around which divergent visions of social change would temporarily coalesce. The retrieval of the historical reference, La Fête, drew the border between Authority and those who would be liberated - it was to be the ephemeral victory of the oppressed voice. René Vienet, in his account of the May Events, sets the stage: "The Festival gave true holidays to people who had known only work days and leaves of absence. ... People strolled, dreamed, learned how to live. Desires began to become, little by little, reality."54 One of the documents published by the ‘Council for Maintaining the Occupations’ 55 testifies to the ideological allegiance which play unavoidably displayed: "All the bureaucrats tell us demagogically that the working class is grown up, in order to hide the fact that it is enchained. ... They counterpose their lying seriousness to "the

54 René Vienet, Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement (New York, Autonomedia, 1992) 77.
55 This "Report on the Occupation of the Sorbonne" is published as one of the May '68 Documents of the Situationist International in Ed. Ken Knabb Situationist International Anthology (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1989) 348.
festival" in the Sorbonne, but it was precisely this festiveness that bore within itself the only thing that is serious: the radical critique of prevailing conditions."

In his analysis of the conditions of everyday life, the French Marxist intellectual Henri Lefebvre considered the resurrection of Festival a means by which to oppose increasing alienation.\textsuperscript{56} Lefebvre's theoretical work (spanning the 1920s through to the 1970s) was a significant component of new left social theory as it developed in France. Formulating a seminal critique of the alienation inherent not only in working conditions but in everyday modern life, his revision of traditional Marxism held great appeal. There are significant parallels with the theories of the Situationist International, with whom Lefebvre continued a dialogue between 1958 and 1963. \textsuperscript{57} In 1968 Lefebvre, then a professor at Nanterre, was in the centre of the nascent student uprising. Many of those involved in the early agitation, the mouvement de 22 mars, were his students, and he allowed his classroom to be used as an organizing forum.\textsuperscript{58} As Lefebvre saw it, the spontaneity of a festival was capable of liberating the social realm: "The revolutions of the past were, indeed, festivals — cruel, yes, but then is there not always something cruel, wild and violent in festivals?" He calls upon a future revolution where "the antithesis between the quotidian and the Festival — whether of labour or of leisure — will no longer be a basis of society."\textsuperscript{55}

An article from Le Monde June 1, 1968 shows the way poetry was also used as a rallying cry: "The time was favourable to poets: insurrection, liberation, a call to creation to change and magnify reality. At the dawn of the revolt, the walls of the Latin Quarter spoke a Surrealist language - 'All power to

\textsuperscript{56} Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life, volume 1. 1947 (London: Verso, 1991) 201 - 207. In this chapter Lefebvre discusses the admirable integration of peasant celebrations into practices of everyday life in ancient and modern rural settings. For more on the festival, see also Lefebvre Everyday Life in the Modern World 36, 37.

\textsuperscript{57} Michel Trebitsch, "Introduction" Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life.

\textsuperscript{58} See the chapter on Lefebvre in Arthur Hirsh, The French New Left - An Intellectual History from Sartre to Gorz (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

\textsuperscript{55} Lefebvre, Everyday Life 36.
the imagination!' 'Take your desires for realities!' There was a way in which the festive overflow of words - the thousands of silkscreened posters and graffiti slogans which marred Paris streets were to symbolize the failure of 1968: it had never really amounted to the Revolution. The Situationists had foreseen that all language held the danger of recuperation, that revolutionary slogans could be absorbed by spectacularized society: "Words forged by revolutionary critique are like partisans' weapons: abandoned on the battlefield, they fall into the hands of the counterrevolution and like prisoners of war are subjected to forced labour." Regis Debray, in his bleak commentary on the outcome of the May Events 'on the occasion of the 10th anniversary', condemns the logic of revolutionaries whose radicality was so easily absorbed by dominant power structures. As he says: "The bourgeois republic celebrated its birth, the storming of the Bastille; one day it will celebrate its rebirth, the word-storm of 1968." Debray voiced his disdain for those French intellectuals who had seen May 1968 as the embodiment of a significant cultural shift. His stress on "the word" recalls, specifically, Michel de Certeau's account of May as the liberation of the symbolic realm, twisting the liberatory connotation of his claim "En mai dernier, on a pris la parole comme on a pris la Bastille en 1789." When conceived in relation to classical Marxian accounts of the revolutionary process, mere language is ineffectual. Gianni Statera comments "Students, intellectuals, and young workers did become masters - masters of this fragile antisociety. They never became the masters of their own society." Admitting bitter regret, he

60 There was an abundance of words. As one author put it, citing the occupation of the Beaux-Arts printmaking facilities and the introduction of silkscreen technology as causes, "Ni lors de la Révolution française, ni en 1830 ou en 1848, ni pendant la Commune, ni en 1917 en Russie (-), des événements populaires n'ont ainsi été simultanément consacrés par un boulversement graphique." Laurent Gervereau, La Propagande par l'Affiche (Paris: Editions Syros - Alternatives, 1991) 139.
61 Knabb, Situationist International Anthology, 173.
63 For a longer discussion of Debray's revolutionary involvement in Latin America as well as his reaction to de Certeau and May 1968 see Keith Reader, Régis Debray - A Critical Introduction (London: Pluto Press, 1995).
continues, saying, "they were only the masters of those walls which in Paris they aggressively marked with graffitti, imaginative slogans, drawings, as if the walls were the supporting structures of the established system."\(^\text{64}\)

De Certeau’s phrase, though, should perhaps not be so easily dismissed, as it harbours a definitive allusion to the stream of radicalized Freudian thought then flooding French intellectual circles. The public lectures and published writings of Jacques Lacan, in which structural linguistics was applied to the Freudian theory of the unconscious, had set the groundwork for an interrogation of the constitutive role of language in structuring thought and experience. It implicitly affirmed the contestatory position of the May rebellion.\(^\text{65}\) To seize speech -- "prise la parole" -- in the sense which de Certeau intended, was not only to recognize that French students were enacting a contestation against established forms of authority, it also recognized their protest as a psychoanalytic affirmation of subjects who had momentarily shattered the regime of the symbolic order and become truly speaking subjects. As one psychoanalytic essay on the Events of May recounted, "The students are attacking the stereotypes of a discourse in which the subject is spoken to rather than speaks; these stereotypes are nurtured by a particular style of teaching and by the very information media which surround the speaking subject from early childhood."\(^\text{66}\) Lacan was one among several French intellectuals who heralded the "structural revolution" which hit Paris around 1966; his work has been aligned with those who claimed "language" as a structural system capable of providing a scientific approach to the domain of the human sciences.\(^\text{67}\)

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\(^{64}\) Statera, Death of a Utopia 131.

\(^{65}\) Several key structuralist texts including Lacan's Ecrits were published between 1965 and 1967. For more on Lacan and French psychoanalysis see Lacan in Contexts David Macey (London: Verso, 1988).


\(^{67}\) The structuralist alignment with empiricism, as with its radical anti-humanism, were met with widespread criticism in French intellectual circles. For accounts of structuralism see Peter Caws,
Filliou also supported the student uprising in May 68. For him 'words' were a site of battle; there was to be a Revolution, but it wasn't something to come at hastily. It might take five billion years. Expressing a deeply felt skepticism over the machinery of political process, he comments in PortaFilliou "At times I say I wish that Marx had been a poet rather than a philosopher, sociologist and economist because if he had been a poet nobody would have made a religion out of it..."

Filliou dedicated The Principles of Poetic Economy to the French nineteenth century visionary Charles Fourier. While marginalized for failing to provide a workable economic theory by the Marxists of the past century, the utopian socialism of Fourier has been retrieved, during this one, as a symbol of anti-bourgeois, non-utilitarian and anti-capitalist values. Fourier became interesting to those writers who wanted to conjoin Marx and Freud; to attach the alienation inherent in capitalism to the repression of sexual desire engendered in bourgeois social relations. In the sixties Fourier's engagement with play was recognized by popular figures such as Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse as important to their own politics of liberation. Marcuse argued in his 1967 lecture "The End of Utopia" that socialism had not drawn sufficient attention to those vital human needs which existed outside of the realm

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68 In the introduction to Teaching & Learning he writes: "My share of the multi-book was done directly on tape during the winter of 1967. [He then adds notes 1968,69,70], (-) Since then there have been the barricades. I feel no need to change or add to my text, tho'. The student's unrest was already mine, their revolution my revolution." (12) He notes later in the text (81,82) that he helped the students in Nice with their activities at the Universite Populaire.

69 Freud reached Marxist thought in France relatively late. In the writings of the Frankfurt School, for instance, he had been present since the 1930s. This fertile cross-germination is traced in Joel Whitebook, Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory (Mass: MIT Press, 1995).

of productive labour. It is in his reference to "the aesthetic-erotic dimension" inadequately addressed by Marxism that Marcuse introduces Fourier, commenting:

It is no accident that Fourier is becoming topical again among the avant-garde left-wing intelligentsia. As Marx and Engels themselves acknowledged, Fourier was the only one to have made clear this qualitative difference between free and unfree society. And he did not shrink back in fear, as Marx still did, from speaking of a possible society in which work becomes play, a society in which even socially necessary labour can be organized in harmony with the liberated, genuine needs of man.\(^{71}\)

It was Fourier, whom many thought mad, who declared that "a beneficial increase in the passionate intensity of the earth would gradually transform the briny seas into a tangy lemonade flavour".\(^{72}\) In the post-war period André Breton became a champion of Fourier, discovering in him a precursor to some of surrealism's central ideas; locating him as an important creator of new thought and popularizing his ideas in France. Notice what Breton celebrates in his poetic address to Fourier, written in 1947 (Ode à Fourier):

But what has forever caused socialist thought for me really to break cover Is that you felt the need to differentiate the comma at least in quadruple form And to transfer the treble clef from the second to the first line in musical notation Because it's the whole world that must not only be overturned but prodded everywhere in its conventions

The return to Fourier, for Breton as for many post-war thinkers, is the marker of intense questioning regarding the affinity between avant-garde art and radical political visions. Indeed, Breton's discovery of Fourier occurred just as some of the former surrealists broke away from him. Breton had, they criticized, "lately revealed a mystical and religious streak and rehabilitated the notion of the sacred."\(^{75}\)

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\(^{75}\) Roger Vailland, as quoted in Lewis, The Politics of Surrealism, 165.
Following Breton's interest in discussing the work of Fourier which lay outside the realm of political economy, many French authors concerned with the formal and experimental aspects of language had also returned to this utopian socialist during the late sixties and early seventies. From Barthes' point of view the value of Fourier was his writing, that is, a non-instrumental enactment capable of envisioning all possibility. He identified Fourier as a logothete - an inventor of language. Rather than politics, Barthes thinks, "Fourierest invention is a fact of writing, a deploying of the signifier." For Filliou as well, the fascination with Fourier had little to do with organizing one of his phalansteries - it was about undoing the multiple linguistic, psychic and social constraints which prevent us from even imagining one.

Filliou's work owed much to Fourier, aiming, as he did, for a thoughtful re-establishment of the importance of play and the pursuit of pleasure. Along with Fourier, he rejected formalized academic discourse, and imagined, in his art, a society based on vital and fulfilling human relationships rather than labour and production. In a video entitled Grâce à Fourier, made in Montreal in 1979, Filliou explicitly aligns his art with Fourier and his passionate writings on cosmological harmony. In several ways, the video -- a high-tech format unscripted, unedited and unpolished -- takes a strange shape. It is a moment layered in histories. The concluding scenario shows Filliou, sitting down, reviewing the Fourier video which he had created a year before. He is oriented away from our gaze, viewing and commenting on his own return to an eccentric nineteenth century utopist. Taking place in the creative cell of an artist-run centre in Montreal, Canada at the end of the nineteen-seventies, the video enacts a surprising retrieval of the history of utopian socialism in France, and, by

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74 Two examples are Michel Butor, La Rose des vents, 32 Rhumbs pour Charles Fourier (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) and Roland Barthes, Sade Fourier Loyola (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971).
75 Barthes, 88.
extension, to those aspects of May '68 which had seen Fourier as a sign of "la contestation globale".

Some of the artworks Filliou produced concurrently with concepts such as poetical economy take up an overt exploration of poetic language as a possible form of opposition to human misfortune, to the misery of contemporary life. It was the poetic gesture that held the possibility of renewing the individual and social spheres. I am referring, for example, to a 1979 piece: A Poem a Day... (keeps the madness, keeps the longing, keeps the madness, the remorse, the grief - away) [Figure 10]. Poems, words, letters were part of the problem, and speech alone would not constitute sufficient opposition - but language could be re-inscribed and, potentially, point heavenward. One sees his strong alignment here, with the logic of contestation of 1968. Filliou's vision is reminiscent of Norman O. Brown's radical rewriting of Freudian theory, which also evokes a critical and irreplaceable function for poetry. Claiming that poetry, art and the imagination hold "the real revolutionary power to change the world", Brown says, "The next generation needs to be told that the real fight is not the political fight, but to put an end to politics. ... From politics to poetry."76

There are a few works in which Filliou's interrogation of accepted language becomes evident, contributing something to the poetical of poetical economy. Sémantique Générale, a piece done in 1962 in which each large, black letter of the alphabet is accompanied by a series of related words and found objects, resembles a simple, visual dictionary [Figure 11]. The title, "general semantics", as well as the format of the work - based on the alphabet's coherent and systematic framework - suggest that a series of familiar words are being associated with the alphabet, so as to reinforce the relationship between 'word' and 'thing' — basic semantics, intended perhaps for children who are

76 Norman O. Brown, "A Reply to Herbert Marcuse" Commentary 43.3 (March 1967) 83-84.
learning to read. Rather than a useful reference, however, the work is constructed so as to rupture the process of easy linguistic association. Many of the words which Filliou has chosen are abstract — 'idée', 'amour', 'oh', 'vie' — and they evade the tidiness of a simple dictionary definition, whether it be in visual or linguistic form. Furthermore, the found objects presumably intended to correspond to the 'given' alphabet often don't seem related. A lollipop, for example (une 'sucette' or un 'bonbon'), appears beside N, with the words 'nudisme, narcisse, Nimes, nez and Nohain'. Refusing the conventional logic taught to school-age children, 'General Semantics' attempts to recognize an alternative value in creative association.

In a later work from 1973 Filliou discards the Latin alphabet altogether, proposing an alternative set [Figure 12]. The new grouping of letters is comprised of pastel stick people drawn in 26 different colours. The title, La Couleur des Langues, which accompanies this series of little, diversely coloured, human figures, brings together linguistic and colour diversity within a single system of communication. While it does present a cohesion in the shape of each letter (and a rather obvious metaphor), this new code is definitely not offering a more efficient interpretation of language - in fact, the possibility of reading, of systematic differentiation is absurdly difficult. In a submission to Source Magazine a year later, Filliou sent a greeting to North America written in the New Alphabet. The message begins "to all the members of the eternal network in Canada and the United State [sic]... send waves of greeting to members of the Eternal Network all over the world. No proof of reaching and benefiting is necessary..." [Figure 13]. Although the key to decode the message - a set of cards with the 'old' and 'new' letters - was meant to be printed beside it, a small note was sent to the editor (Ken Friedman) which said "reproduce in black and white the alphabet and message" [Figure 14]. While the message is
not entirely impossible to read - it is conveyed by the tiny handwriting in each word - the stick figure language acts as a critique of representational codes. Filliou's gesture, providing a New Alphabet which negates its own utility, perpetually resists interpretive closure.

When Deleuze and Guattari spoke of the Events of May they insisted on considering them at a molecular, micropolitical level. This is because at a macropolitical level - the level at which the newspapers and representative politicians function - their resonance, and the changes they effected, were utterly invisible.77 "There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus and the overcoding machine: things that are attributed to a 'change in values,' the youth, women, the mad etc."78 In conversation with Foucault, Deleuze speaks of his own political involvement in terms of theoretical action: "Representation no longer exists; there's only action - theoretical and practical action which serve as relays and form networks."79 Deleuze and Foucault saw these networks as the linking of multiple micropolitical skirmishes. Later in the conversation he continues, saying "And these movements are linked to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat to the extent that they fight against the controls and constraints which serve the same system of power."80

There is a scene in Teaching & Learning as Performing Arts where Robert and Marianne Filliou are shown upside down, leaving "a little video note" to their great great grandchildren. He says at one point, "shall we have a little laugh together? ha ha ha...." Filliou, in typical Fluxus fashion, often used his work to

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77 Referring to May '68 they say "those who evaluated things in macropolitical terms understood nothing of the event because something unaccountable was escaping. The politicians, the parties, the unions, many leftists, were utterly vexed: they kept repeating over and over again that conditions were not ripe." A Thousand Plateaus, 216
78 A Thousand Plateaus, 216.
79 "Intellectuals and Power - A Conversation between Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault" Language, Counter-Memory, Practice (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972) 207.
80 Intellectuals and Power, 216.
make his audience laugh. I finish with France here, having a little laugh, for what does all this play inspire but laughter? Deleuze insisted that laughter was located on the horizon of counterculture, a vital aspect of nomadic thought: "Laughter - and not meaning." This laughter has a keen edge, though. It is illuminated by Martin Jay's comment, in his discussion of the poststructuralist response to Western Marxism: "Manic explosions of laughter rather than the tortured anguish of an Adorno or Sartre are their response to the frustration of utopian hopes." The writings of Deleuze (like those of Guy Debord), pose an unsettling conclusion, though, in that the last word was one of evident despair. The playful spirit which Filliou brought to Canada during the seventies was weighted down, too, by its attempt to articulate a viable commentary on possible directions for social transformation. His own antagonism to 'arborescence' would periodically find him at the Western Front, searching for an elsewhere in which the fête would be a network echoing ha ha ha.

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82 Jay, Marxism and Totality. 512.
83 Debord committed suicide in October 1994 and Deleuze, a year later, in November 1995.
chapter three

The Western Front: A Modest Home in the Global Village

Networks are created not just to communicate but also to gain position, to outcommunicate.... The power to exclude people from networks often turns out to be crucial to their operation. Mapping human interconnections reveals informal, shadow power structures as important as their visible and formal counterparts.1

Whispered Art History — Twenty Years at the Western Front (1993), the first book dedicated explicitly to an historical chronology of the Western Front, makes repeated reference to the life and work of Robert Filliou. As Willard Holmes has pointed out in a review of the book, the presence of Filliou in this history is conspicuous:

Whispered Art History pays great homage to Robert Filliou, the French Fluxus artist, as the spiritual father of the Front, ingenuously remarking at one point that during his first visit he 'affirmed and acquainted the Western Front with some social principles.' But what of Uncle Bill Burroughs, formerly of Marrakech and the Gran Luxe, and his social principles?"2

The title, Whispered Art History, is an allusion to a poem of the same name written by Filliou in 1963. Opening the cover, the frontispiece shows a photo of Filliou lighting a birthday cake, to celebrate his idea of the Birthday of Art. In the foreword written by Keith Wallace Filliou is mentioned several times, and his name reappears repeatedly in the chronology which makes up the main body of the text. Thus, the critical tone taken by Holmes is noteworthy, for it points to the bias of current historical writing on the Western Front.3

2Willard Holmes, "Archives Aren't Life" Vancouver Review (Summer 1993) 5.
3Whispered Art History is the most comprehensive history of the Western Front that has been published. It includes essays which examine the intermedial history of the centre, including accounts of the video, music, poetry and performance divisions. The long chronology of events in the book indicates the diversity and sheer volume of activity undertaken at the Front, although many of the events are insufficiently and flippantly described and so, leave the uninitiated with many
examines how Filliou arrived at his current position as "spiritual father" of the Western Front. This demands a return to the moment of their initial contact — the summer of 1973 — for it is to this past that Whispered Art History nostalgically returns.

This chapter, working from the previous one, continues to examine Robert Filliou's dedication to reinscribing leisure and advocating play. There remains the problematic of Filliou's marriage of two terms — La Fête Permanente and the Eternal Network — which harbours the desire to have two signs signify as one. This shifting identification between "play" and "network" is also useful in attempting to map recent Canadian art. It is the English half of his translation — the network— which fed Filliou's popularity in North America, but the French component — la fête — in which the particular inflection most vividly resides. At the Western Front in particular network consciousness was a central aspect of the alternativeness, novelty and activity taking place around 1973. Various strands developed by originary Front members including Michael Morris, Vincent Trasov, Kate Craig, Eric Metcalfe, Glenn Lewis and Hank Bull, began to hold together at a certain moment as the coherent, if precarious, entity of "network". The complex field of aesthetic production encompassed by the Western Front's idea of "network consciousness" incorporated previously developed network materials — McLuhan's Global Village, Filliou's Eternal
Network, Burroughs' subliminal — absorbing their diverse and even contradictory strategies to fuel their own particular countercultural trajectory. Network consciousness became the legitimating motive propelling projects at the Western Front; it circulated on a mythic level, and as such, it was capable of cohering the diversity of their intermedial art practice. In its trajectory, the consciousness smoothed over the formal and social aspirations between, and even forged alliances with, practices such as performance art, video art, mail art, telecommunications art, as well as experiments in countercultural communitarian living — all of which were integral to the Western Front's ambition as intermedial art centre. It is hard to locate; one sees the "consciousness" outside of a stable or identifiable form; a whisper reverberating through the various aesthetic experiments at the Front.

What I want to set out first, if in a vague and preliminary way, is the operative logic supporting network consciousness. The Western Front artists went far afield in order to demonstrate their rejection of conventional modes of representation. They weren't the only ones to throw "art" out the window as it were, but the artists in Canada — at the Western Front, at Arton's and at Art Metropole in particular — worked harder than anyone else at the time to realize a network which could represent their collective artistic endeavours. I would like to stress just how deeply engaged their chosen form of artistic production — the network — was with the dominant logic of late twentieth century reality. During the past several decades the increasing complexity of social, economic and political organization has necessitated a matching growth of networked systems capable of maintaining an infrastructure to accommodate the steady flow of information. Instead of unidirectional progress or the posing of centre and periphery, these models invoke a language of decentralization, cellular nodes and multi-linked connections. It isn't that networks have never existed, because
of course, postal systems, roads, canals, railways, as well as the casual and more formalized communication channels between people, are networks with long and intricate histories. What has reshaped living conditions during the past few decades though, is the sudden reconfiguration of the entire planet (and beyond) in a murky labyrinthine cloak of high-tech grids. Whereas modern industrial growth in the nineteenth century relied on a physical infrastructure of roads and railways, in the twentieth these have been overshadowed by the electronic and digital networks of radio, telephone, television, computer and satellite communications. As I mentioned in chapter one, under the Liberal government of Trudeau Canada was positioned as a forerunner of these new technologies; at the edge of the communications frontier. Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian media guru, contributed to media culture by bringing to public attention the significant social transformation brought about as a result of the global electronic environment. What McLuhan's mythic profusions fail to identify, however, are the many players involved in this transformation; those who have built the networks which govern the organization of contemporary postindustrial society. The communications technologies which have emerged, rather than simply serving the dissemination of entertainment, education or culture, are also the technical apparatus of a highly convulsive and tenuously sustained global economy of control. I am working to situate the frenetic, decadent and bohemian work at the Western Front into this profusion of network logic. It is through juxtaposition that their utopian dissent can be seen to flicker briefly across the historical record.

Filliou has been loosely located, but not precisely articulated, in the interstices between art and media culture which mark that rebellious,

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5 I am indebted to G.J. Mulgan, Communication and Control: Networks and the New Economies of Communication (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) for this reading of "network".
vanguardist era of North American artistic practice. One sees this for example in Karen Knights’ Whispered Art History essay: “The Front was also outward looking, connecting with artists world-wide, through what Robert Filliou called the Eternal Network. Conceived during a time of technological utopianism within the alternative media community, the collective members committed themselves to the mastering of new technologies within a wide range of artistic disciplines.” It will at first seem strange that Filliou, whose work was fully invested in a rejection of the rationalized efficiency of the information age, came to occupy a respected position amidst aesthetic practices deeply imbricated in these futuristic media and communications technologies. What the influence of Filliou’s ideas point toward, though, are the ways in which the local network consciousness continuously evaded the dominant technological imperative. The Western Front’s appropriation of the networked format of the media apparatus was loaded with a subversive—not celebratory—imaginary. As one overview states, it was in many ways a transitional era: “In the seventies, both in Canada and internationally, there is tremendous political and social upheaval. Residual faith in ‘technological redemption à la Buckminster Fuller’ buckles under the Vietnam war.” Showing a gradual detachment from the aims of Intermedia the decade before, one begins to see the ways in which the aesthetic strategies motivating the network consciousness were deeply ironic; slyly reinventing the machine of technological progress which runs Western culture. As Roy Kiyooka, one of the important artists of the era, points out, artistic engagement in technology became increasingly ambivalent: “In the early seventies, Intermedia was winding down, falling apart literally, because people who were at the

heart of it began dispersing. The need for a collective media space seemed no longer to be there." Filliou was one of the artists who entered the local scene post-Intermedia, calling for a network which he envisioned as a global formation capable of exceeding spatial, technological and conceptual disparities. He envisioned a network as a means of displacing the mediocre, innocuous social role assigned to art in a modernized and highly technologized era.

Correspondence art was one of the most vital and productive manifestations of the defiantly alternative network. During the early years of the Front correspondence art was an important way of being connected; for residents of the Western Front getting and sending mail were part of the daily routine. The vast network of artists who participated in mail art had in fact come to know about the Canadian art scene as a result of this global interchange. Filliou explained, with respect to his visits here: "I came to Canada, after corresponding for several years, in 1973 to see for myself - to Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver". Filliou had come to Canada during that summer after an artist in residency project at Something Else Press in Vermont. His stop-over at the Western Front, before returning to France from a trip to the United States, belongs to the international range of influences which would touch this distant outpost as a result of its member's committed efforts to establish an artist's network with mail. Filliou, landing in the city just a few months after the Western Front had opened its doors, provided an excellent audience for the Front's emerging identity. He made a long term personal investment in the Canadian art scene, visiting several artist-run centres across the country a number of times during the 1970s. As one might expect, the relations he cultivated with each

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8 "Personal Perspectives" Vancouver:Art and Artists 261.
9 Keith Wallace "Introduction" Whispered Art History 3.
10 Filliou, "Robert Filliou In Conversation with Allan Kaprow" Vanguard 6.9 (December, 1977) 19.
11 Filliou sustained particularly close contact with Clive Robertson in Calgary and with Richard Martel in Quebec. Clive Robertson has described this contact in his essay "Meeting a Mentor in the
locale reflect the dominant concerns of their respective centres; those articulated between Filiou and the Western Front were permeated with the decadence and wilderness of the West Coast lifestyle.

Looking back at 1973, Filiou's introduction of the term Eternal Network was terribly useful to the cultural objectives of the Western Front. The Eternal Network, as Filiou would use it, could be constantly enacted and slowly realized and so, gradually invigorate and empower the field of artistic production and then culture as a whole. Filiou had promulgated the concept from the moment he first arrived in Canada: his visit that summer was, as he made clear, intended as "research on the eternal network." He cultivated interest in the term by sending out an announcement entitled "research on the eternal network" from Halifax in July, and talked about it when he arrived out West a few weeks later [Figure 15]. The concept of the Eternal Network was subsequently disseminated through various subcultural circles when it was published in File Megazine [sic] that September, and through its appearance at the Aktionen der Avantgarde exhibition in Berlin a month later. He is implicated in the act of naming — for members of the Western Front the term played out a ritual of inauguration, celebration and identification.

The concept of the Eternal Network had first emerged out of the Fluxus outpost called La Cédille qui Sourit which Filiou had set up in the south of France in 1965 with co-Fluxus artist George Brecht. Filiou continued to work with the Eternal Network, and is, even in recent accounts, credited as one of the strategists of the network idea. La Cédille, true to the buffoonery and art-

Making of Porta Filiou" in Robert Filiou: From Political to Poetical Economy exhibition catalogue. For more on Martel's interest in Filiou see Inter 38 (Winter, 1988). Recently, Richard Martel has organized the production of a CD in celebration of the Birthday of Art, Art's Birthday CD Recording. Le Lieu, 1996.

12 "The Telephone Issue" Voicespoundence audio magazine (VSP-02 Fall 1976).

as-life pose which characterized much Fluxus activity, was a mail-order
distribution centre and joke shop for the artists' network [Figure 16]. They
sold hand made artist multiples, small circulation magazines, and material for gags
and jokes. The set-up was unreliable and unbusinesslike. Filliou says at one point
"The Cédille was always shut, opening only upon request of visitors to our
homes." News about the shop spread through the scene as notes and
documents were compiled in 1967 and published by Something Else Press as
Games at the Cedilla or the Cedilla takes off. La Cédille lasted for three years,
and the poster announcing its closure marked the first appearance of the
Eternal Network, declaring "La Cédille qui Sourit tourne encore la page, et
puisque la Fête est Permanente, annonce la réalisation prochaine de The Eternal
Network" [Figure 17]. The announcement tells something of what was intended,
as it enacts a transformation: from a tiny shop, physical objects and economic
responsibility to a vaguely defined concept, a few ideas to ponder and eternity
to work them out. As well as a concession to their having gone bankrupt,
Brecht and Filliou's declaration of the Eternal Network at the closing of their
shop in 1968 was intended to promote a telepathic continuation of their actual
Fluxus art distribution. The network model which Filliou carried to the Western
Front thus held within it allusions to a metaphysical realm. In its "eternal"
manifestation his network could escape the labourious burden of the corporal
body and flee the finitude of time. Through his subsequent development of the
Eternal Network, Filliou would represent an impossible model of collective
practice to Fluxus and its inheritors.

14 Notes, mailing lists, price lists, correspondence etc. from La Cédille qui Sourit can be found at
Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart. See, in particular, Filliou's initial letter to Brecht, entitled
"Partnership Piece", proposing the setup of the shop. The Archiv Sohm is an excellent resource for
Fluxus, Action and related art activities which took place in Europe through the sixties.
15 Filliou, Teaching & Learning 198.
The network was also intended, from its development out of La Cedille in 1968, to support playful interventions. This had been asserted in the dual signification of the term, encompassing both network and festival. Recounting the final adventures of La Cedille Filliou says, “we had developed the concept of the Fête Permanente, or Eternal Network as we chose to translate it into English...”\textsuperscript{16} Clearly, the concept was intended to perpetuate an anti-authoritarian, anti-professional stance. One sees this, for example, in a suggestion Filliou makes for the promotion of the network through the daily papers. “The EVERLASTING NETWORK is looking for experienced good-for-nothing for doing nothing.”\textsuperscript{17} The network is thus non-utilitarian, a service intended to connect all those who didn’t want to do anything. In his Halifax announcement the Eternal Network was directly articulated as a displacement of the avant-garde: "nowadays the Eternal Network is a more useful concept than the Avant-garde". By distancing itself from the avant-garde, the network Filliou announced became a construct abutted against the aggressive and embattled terrain of art-world recognition. He attempted to keep the network outside the circuit of conventional art circulation, saying "The Eternal Network is the way we have to create, to be creative outside or without the advice or opinion or concern even at times of the media, or the art establishment."\textsuperscript{18} Strategic on his part, if people bought into it, the new term evaded historical comparisons and direct competition; it was the glue of a potentially universal network consciousness. Filliou had set the Eternal Network out as a postulate; it couldn’t hold material form other than as the enactment of interested adherents.

The aesthetic dominant in the formative years of the Western Front had been fashioned, in a significant way, by the Fluxus movement with which Filliou

\textsuperscript{16} Filliou, Teaching & Learning 203.
\textsuperscript{17} Filliou, Teaching & Learning 203.
had been so vitally involved. As a result of contacts established in various ways during the sixties, a gradual penetration of Fluxus attitudes and strategies had been carried into the local scene. Michael Morris, who was one of the founding members of the Front and had an active role in shaping its early activities, had first encountered Fluxus at art school in Britain in 1965 and continued from that point on to foster connections with various members.\textsuperscript{19} From 1970 local artists were involved in New York artist Ray Johnson's mail-art list, which disseminated Fluxus into various North American subcultural circles. As well, Fluxus books printed by Something Else Press were circulating in downtown Vancouver, and news about Fluxus was regularly passed on to local artists through the mail art scene in general.\textsuperscript{20} By the early seventies, Fluxus artists such as Jackson Mac Low, Geoffrey Hendricks and Ken Friedman had come to visit Vancouver, speaking about their work and cultivating Fluxian attitudes.\textsuperscript{21} What is relevant here specifically is addressing the way in which Fluxus provided a largely unacknowledged, but nevertheless influential, underlying modus operandi which served the growth and function of network consciousness as it was understood in Vancouver. It was this embedded Fluxian logic which had also made the Fronters receptive to Filliou's ideas when he arrived in Vancouver in 1973.

It is the nomadic sensibility that these artists cultivated which I see informing the work at the Western Front; a world-view carefully cultivated by many of the movement's early practitioners.\textsuperscript{22} It is instructive to pursue the

\textsuperscript{20} Kate Craig, Personal interview (November 26, 1993).
\textsuperscript{21} The Morris/Trasov Archive (housed in the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, University of British Columbia), for instance, holds many Fluxus-related documents.
\textsuperscript{22} In a list of the "twelve criteria of Fluxus" one is called "globalism", explained in the following manner "In the 1960s, the concept of internationalism was expressive.... Today, globalism is a more precise expression. It's not simply that boundaries don't count, but that in the most important issues, there are no boundaries." Ursula Krinzinger, ed. Fluxus Subjectiv exhibition catalogue (Vienna: Galerie Krinzinger, 1990)
traces of this sensibility because, while sublimated into the field of activity specific to the Front, its exposure draws attention to the larger field of socio-political affiliations consonant with this world-view. Earlier on, I drew attention to the interest which Fluxus artists had in everyday life, suggesting that it was one of the few oppositional strategies still open to the neo-avant-garde of the sixties. I want to return briefly to the Fluxian quotidian now, to reconsider the way in which it also furthered what I see as a nomadic sensibility. This sensibility became apparent in Fluxus practice from the first Festivals in 1962, through the performative paradigm which its participants pursued. George Brecht's 'Event Cards', for example, were developed and used in many Fluxus performances during the sixties, and they offer some insight into this paradigm. The participant would be provided with a vague outline of what the 'Event' ought to entail; and would be encouraged to respond according to circumstance [Figure 18]. The austere phrases, providing neither detail nor clear instruction, were intended to be performed by the reader, in either mind or body. As with the "Delivery" event, the relation of a subject to any given situation is fractured by possibility, allowing the gesture to be opened to interrogation. By advancing a commentary on the instability and contextual determinants involved in the act of interpretation, the cards demonstrate a surprising willingness to undo conventional Western attitudes which define the self as a stable, and singular, identity. The 'Event' cards also retained a careful adherence to quotidian objects, encouraging a re-evaluation of the actions which constitute everyday experience. Acting them out required a consideration of the wide range of action which just a few words potentially suggest -- pointing to language as the mediation between a potential range of action and its realization in concrete gesture.
The performative paradigm that Brecht's work illustrates does not assume that language is a system which constitutes our notion of 'reality'. Rather, Fluxus works repeatedly attempted to refute any stable anchors which securely define the real. Unlike contemporaneous writers informed by structural theory, their actions cannot accurately be seen as an attempt to inscribe an alternative communicative code or to establish a critical space within the 'prison-house' of language.\footnote{22 I take the phrase from the Fredric Jameson \textit{The Prison-House of Language - A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism} (New Jersey: Princeton, 1972), but I am referring for example to contemporaneous sound poets such as \textit{The Four Horsemen}, with which there are also interesting alignments to Fluxus. \textit{Six Filious} (Milwaukee:Membrane Press, 1978), incorporating the work of Robert Filliou, Dick Higgins, Steve McCaffery, bp Nichol, Diter Rot and George Brecht is a good example.} For Fluxus artists language was conceived of as an unconvincing attempt to contain the continuous flux of lived experience. Fluxus historian David Doris has elaborated on the influence of Zen philosophy in Fluxus, arguing that for certain practitioners language is "something of a hindrance to genuine understanding".\footnote{24 Doris, "The Big Problem of Naming Little Things" in "Zen Vaudeville" 26-33.} He goes on to suggest that from this point of view "language must by necessity be employed as a tool, but in such a way that it will create the conditions in which it is no longer useful, a void in which its own absence can be filled by unmediated perception and action."\footnote{25 Doris, "Zen Vaudeville" 30.} The performative gesture of Fluxus recognized a commitment to action over its regulation in language or any other form — to act is to be in the moment. Unlike structuralist adherents, Fluxus artists did not grasp for tools of analysis; the confident empirical eye, like the hand which was guided by it, was definitively and forcefully suspended into the parameters of a purposely unintelligible, unquantifiable moment. The "no-mind" of Fluxus was a socio-political choice which effectively eschewed the sweeping horror of recent history as well as the concerted acceleration into \textit{The Future}, remaining alive in the effervescent pulse of its own incommensurable moment.

\textit{22}
As Rick Fields has pointed out in his history of Buddhism in the United States, by the late fifties Zen had achieved the status of a fad. Quoting an observer, he says "Zen is invoked to substantiate the validity of the latest theories in psychology, psychotherapy, philosophy, semantics, mysticism, free-thinking, and what-have-you. It is the magic password at smart cocktail parties and bohemian get-togethers alike." 26 Many Fluxus artists, including Filliou, were seriously interested in the philosophical tenets of Buddhism. While their initial interest was undoubtedly sparked as a result of the 'Zen fad', their commitment was in many cases often substantial, progressing through a decade or more and significantly influencing their production. 27 In Doris’ discussion of the relations between Fluxus and Zen, he shows the ways in which Fluxus artworks not only disrupt language usage but how they often interrogate what constitutes our notion of a "stable self". He argues that "Fluxus, like Zen, presents an understanding of the self as nomad - decentred, responsive, in flux - a reinterpretation which stands in conflict with the subjectivizing notions implicit in the Beats..." He continues, "Denying the primacy of the individual as an ultimate interiority which stands in opposition to nature, Fluxus works reconstitute the self in the deterritorialized space where the body perpetually confronts, and is confronted by, the world." 28 The willingness one sees in Brecht’s Events to toy with communicative codes and disrupt conventional expectations of performance describe the destabilizing aspirations of the Fluxus sensibility.

During the sixties Fluxus artists devised a distribution system open to the transportation of their marginal, and multiple, selves. They cultivated contact across distance, and through the use of small press, multiples, traveling

26 How the Swans Came to the Lake - A Narrative History of Buddhism in America (Boston: Shambala, 1992) 205.
27 This is particularly true of George Brecht and Robert Filliou, both of whom continued to study and practice Buddhism well after the enthusiasm of the initial "Zen fad" had dissipated.
28 Doris, "Zen Vaudeville" 14.
performance festivals and mail art exchanges, they configured a vital network of marginal art. The austere, humourous aesthetic which characterizes Fluxus artworks participated in, and deepened, their engagement with 'flux' rather than 'stasis'. Filiou and Brecht's Flux Shop, then, was just one articulation of the nomadic sensibility in action.

The constellation of informed contacts made through what came to be known as the correspondence-art network had put Canadian artists in touch with others all over the world. "Mail artists" prided themselves on the highly coded, personal, interactive and ephemeral character of their work. Presupposing that dominant communications systems, by regulating exchange on both a symbolic and material level, were a powerful means of control an alternative network was instituted. This complex web of international relations let loose an alternative information flow, replete with norms of aesthetic, lifestyle and language that had little to do with the specificity of local concerns or with the "real time" of lived experience. At once obscure and significant, during the heyday of mail art about 10,000 people are thought to have been involved internationally (1964-84). Fluxus artists made up a sort of core in terms of the scene. Jean-Marc Poinsot, in one of the key anthologies of the era, Mail Art: Communication, Distance, Concept (1971), defended the motives underlying these virtual networks by claiming "This type of artistic production demonstrates how even on a symbolic level, aesthetic activity can be engaged in economic and political problems without going into ideology and setting up revolutionary programs." His comment shows the alignment mail art had with the countercultural current of social opposition which developed during the sixties; an alignment to which I will return in the following chapter.

29 Poinsot's introductory catalogue essay was reprinted in English in Correspondence Art - Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity. Eds. Crane and Stofflet (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1984) 53-64.
In Canada the correspondence scene was at its peak in the early 1970s, thriving on the fluid, playful, rhizomatic transmission of ideas through the postal system. Through the use of alternate personae these exchanges constantly deconstructed the parameters of stable identity formation. Assuming not merely names, but identities — "Marcel Idea" "Flakey Rosehips" "Count Fanzini" — the network became a surrogate family. The correspondence art scene was constituted by its ironic appropriations from media culture, enacting the continuous exchange of imaginary subjects in a low cost collage format. Through mail art, the expression of trans-national decentred mythologies, the artists at the Front developed a sense of community which floated distinctly apart from their immediate geographic locale. Image Bank, the mail art organization set up by Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov in 1970, had provided a valuable resource when the Western Front began. Set up as a service for the correspondence network, Image Bank had provided mailing lists and image requests in a monthly mail-out; a "bank" for the deposit and withdrawal of images; and an ongoing archival resource for events relevant to its participants. Their project was dynamic and ambitious — today the Morris/Trasov archive boasts more than 10,000 accumulated images from the period. When he returned to the West Coast in 1970, Glenn Lewis began the New York Corres Sponge Dance School of Vancouver, continuing the network that Ray Johnson had begun in New York. Lewis' Great Wall of 1984, a collection of artists' ephemera from around the network preserved in transparent

30 Various accounts elaborate on Canada's spirited and prolific contributions to the mail art scene, particularly between 1968 and 1974. Standard references include "Correspondence Art" by Thomas Albright and "Mail Art Canada" by Anna Banana, both of which are published in Eds. Crane and Stofflet, Correspondence Art : Source Book; "Performance Notes from the Western Front" Eds. Peggy Gale and A.A. Bronson, Performance by Artists; John Bentley Mays, "The Snakes in the Garden - The Self and the City in Contemporary Canadian Art" Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada [Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983] 157-192.

31 An engaging and well-informed chronology of the Image Bank projects and archive has been written by Scott Watson. See his essay in Hand of the Spirit 5-28.
boxes and displayed at the National Research Library in Ottawa, remains as testament to the humour and attention invested in these network activities [Figure 19]. Kate Craig and Eric Metcalfe, in their alternative identities as Dr. and Lady Brute, inhabited the parodic fiction of Brutopia as a means of addressing the banal and sleazy underbelly of middle class North American culture [Figures 20,21]. Locally, the call to network consciousness was used as a means of acknowledging and affirming the widespread enthusiasm that the practice of mail art had stimulated.

The most ambitious articulation of this ongoing activity was the organization of "the Decca Dance", which was scheduled to take place in Hollywood, the mainline generator of bourgeois values and cultural mythologies. The event was crucial as it was the largest gathering yet of the members of the network. It had been formally initiated late in 1973 when Michael Morris sent a letter out to 'the friends' of Image Bank inviting them to The Hollywood Decca Dance. The Western Front artists were dedicated and exuberant participants, spending that entire autumn preparing for the event. The evening, a mock Academy Awards ceremony, allowed network artists to parade the personae they had developed in and out of the mail. It attracted a huge turnout and the event was considered an important point of network consolidation. This fête was a public acknowledgement for the artists on the network who had invested so much of their labour and imagination in creating a witty and highly mediated nomadic sensibility.

The most dazzling and elegant of the alternate identities on parade at the Decca Dance was Mr. Peanut. He is exemplary of the ways in which the Front's network, as a form of "consciousness," systematically destabilized the categories

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32 For more on this see Return to Brutopia.
33 Letter beginning "Dear Friends,..." Morris/Trasov Archive, "Image Bank Correspondence" folder, crate C57.
of private and public identity. The personality had been adopted in 1970 by Vincent Trasov. Arrayed in a smooth peanut shell, black leotard, top hat, monocle and cane, his image effectively assumed the glamorous, dandyesque sophistication of a decadent era [Figure 22]. Mr. Peanut was the perfect media icon; he never spoke and was always poised and ready for the camera. As was true in the case of many of the personae adopted by mail artists, "Mr. Peanut" was not merely a costume, but rather a personality of accumulation, appraisal and meticulous deliberation which had evolved over a lengthy period of time. The Decca Dance was one of many events which he attended; Trasov, in the guise of Mr. Peanut, made public appearances, did live performances and, the year following the Decca Dance, would run for Mayor of Vancouver.34 His identity was a process - the continuous incorporation of signifiers proliferating through image culture. "Mr. Peanut" was mirrored over and over again both inside and outside of the network scene. His image reappeared across glass jars, cutlery, hand-made clay tiles, magazine promotions, cut-outs and artist's sketches.35 In the service of Mr. Peanut, Trasov assiduously collected and catalogued these representations, filing them in the Image Bank. His efforts exemplify the intensity with which artists of the time would experiment with the concept of identity; refracting their fantasized subjects through the surface of media culture.

The ambitions of Mr. Peanut, though, have to be considered according to the terms by which the Front had posed its own particular engagement with

34 Trasov's experiences are chronicled in the video My Five Years in a Nutshell (Vancouver: Western Front Productions, 1978). 35 minutes.
35 In terms of studying mainstream "Mr. Peanut" ephemera, there is a small, independently produced booklet by R.L. Chapman called Planter's Peanuts Collectibles (Montana: self-published, 1970?) which depicts many of the historical Planters peanut objects. See also Jan Lindenberger, Planters Peanut Collectibles 1906-1961 (Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer, 1995) and Planters Peanut Collectibles since 1961 (Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer, 1995), which further document the multiple appearances of Mr. Peanut.
technology. In Vancouver in 1973, the articulation of network consciousness had to struggle for a distinction and visibility which could reach beyond the legendary history of the Intermedia Society. The excited engagement with technology which had characterized Intermedia and lent it a high public profile was a position with which the Fronters had to contend. One sees that in some ways the techno-utopianism espoused by figures such as Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller were carried into the early seventies and helped to fuel the enthusiasm that built network consciousness. During the sixties McLuhan had been hailed as the techno-visionary of media culture; his was the first human voice to describe the sensory and experiential effects of the complex upheaval brought about by the vast new terrain of speed and information. A typical McLuhanism, for its brevity and catchiness, was the declaration that electronic technology had made the world into a "global village". In a vivid, aphoristic style, McLuhan described the implosion of the planet and its subsequent return to the social organization of a preliterate, tribal village as a result of the high speed, high image technologies being transmitted around the globe. I quoted one such phrase at the opening of chapter one. In Understanding Media McLuhan, describing mass media as the extension of the human nervous system, announced the onset of a new shared humanity, claiming "in the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin." He envisaged the new reliance on computers as the onset of a global human language, commenting at one point, "the computer in short promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity." According to McLuhan it was the new sensory

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37 Understanding Media - The Extensions of Man 1964 (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994) 47.

38 Understanding Media, 80.
environment brought on by technologized information systems that would enable humanity to rediscover a preliterate, tribal, awareness, thus giving rise to the electronic culture of the global village.\textsuperscript{35}

In these instances one sees that the McLuhanist rhetoric surrounding the Global Village is steeped in a mythic valorization of technological consciousness. By describing media culture as a crisis of individual sensory and bodily effects, McLuhan's rhetoric effectively transcends any critical understanding of the social and economic differentials within which media culture is configured. From the perspective of the 1990s, McLuhan's claim to a "global village" appears well situated within colonialist discourse; the imposition of a "universal language" which carries within it the values and norms of Euro-American technological rationality.\textsuperscript{40} But a few decades ago, as technology and media-based artists integrated truisms like the arrival of "a Global Village" into their creative practice, they saw in McLuhan's claims only a means of positioning themselves as messengers of a new planetary reality.\textsuperscript{41} Operating as if the world was a village transcended the constraints of locale or of artistic non-recognition because it posed the creative use of technology as ripe with truly liberatory global potential. In the seventies artists at the Western Front continued to reflect McLuhan's optimistic claims but -- as is the case with their take on the global village --they would resurface with an erratic and secretive nuance.

Artists had begun to experiment during the sixties with telecommunications equipment such as, for example, telefax, satellite transmissions, slowscan video, live telecast and computer-mediated communication links. Access to these

\textsuperscript{41} McLuhan is one of the cultural heroes which Martha Rosler effectively debunks in her article "Video:Shedding the Utopian Moment" \textit{Block 11} (1985/86) 38.
electronic networks seduced the artist into a collective dream of sorts, offering the possibility of building a truly accessible system of information exchange for artists all around the world. In an essay published at the Western Front in 1984 entitled "Art and Telematics - Towards a Network Consciousness" Roy Ascott articulates what seems to have been a commonly held belief:

Computer-mediated networks, in my view, offer the possibility of a kind of planetary conviviality and creativity which no other means of communication has been able to achieve. One reason may be that networking puts you, in a sense, out of body, linking your mind in a kind of timeless sea.  

The technological optimism articulated by Roy Ascott recalls the climate of excited experimentation between art and technology which had characterized the Intermedia scene. Some artists had enacted what they saw as their new social role: through low level setups a constructive network would be built as an alternative to the electronic space developed by, and in the service of, multinational firms and the military. Iain and Ingrid Baxter, for instance, the founders of the N.E.Thing Co., began experimenting with telex machines in the late sixties. Information and invitations to connect with the N.E.Thing Co were broadly transmitted across corporate channels. Citing what they called "an aesthetic of distance", Nancy Shaw argues that the Baxters saw in communications media a means to investigate landscape, "a means through which the Company could traverse time and space, inserting its presence in territories that it would otherwise be excluded from." Their imaginative and witty projects remained as vital models for later communications investigations. A second local model which attempted to integrate art into technological networks was the Matrix International Video Conference which was held in

43 For more information about The N.E. Thing Co. see You are now in the middle of a N.E. Thing Landscape ex. cat. (Vancouver: UBC Fine Arts Gallery, 1993).
44 Nancy Shaw, "Siting the Band: The Expanded Landscapes of the N.E. Thing Co." You are now in the middle 33.
Vancouver in 1973. Organized by Michael Goldberg and Trisha Hardman, this event brought together community-based producers from all over the country, and continent. The videos brought to Vancouver were copied by the conference organizers and were made available locally and through the mail.

In the mid-seventies, the use of FM radio to engage a network of regular listeners also sprung from a belief in grasping and making creative use of new communications links. The HP Radio Show, co-produced by Hank Bull and Patrick Ready, was a live program aired on Vancouver Co-Op Radio from 1976 to 1984. The show was spontaneous and exuberant, experimenting with deconstructive strategies like the Burroughs/Gysin cut-up method, on air. They attempted to reinvest the medium with a sense of wonder, making creative proclamations such as "when you break open the sentence the future leaks out." Bull, in an account of the radio show's formation, draws upon Filliou to legitimize and reinforce his efforts. As Bull explains, "the concept for the HP Radio Show was Filliou's 'Games at the Cedilla'" and "an idea of his about a network". Bull and Ready also credit the Western Front for their initial experiments in radio, referring to the "Lux Radio" plays which were a formative part of Front activities. Bull has said that the radio plays produced and performed at the Western Front were an essential element of the early years. Indeed, during the first five years the Front was in operation more than twelve plays were produced by the loosely formed group the "Lux Radio Players". The writing and production of the plays were done collaboratively at group meetings, and the radio plays were then produced, rehearsed and performed in

45 My information on the history of "HP" and the Western Front radio plays has been taken from Patrick Ready, with additional footnotes by Hank Bull. "The Story of the HP Radio Show," Radio Rethink (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1992) 47-59.
46 "Performance notes from the Western Front" Performance by Artists 283.
front of a live audience in "The Lux Radio Theatre"; the grand hall and main performance space in the Western Front Lodge.

The radio plays typically unfold around farcical narratives, steeped in private reference and a characteristically jocular tone, as in The Clear Cut Case, which was written and performed in late 1974. While Filliou's concept of the Eternal Network does materialize in the play for an instant — as the name of the insurance company who has requested the initial investigation — the narrative has little to do with any specific aspect of its original meaning. The script of the play is in fact filled with arcane references such as this, alluding to a collective artistic practice in which performers and audience speak a private and impenetrable language. The storyline follows "the Soni Twin hermaphroodetective" on a case which involves solving the mysterious disappearance of the ship called The Lure of the Sea. Interpretation of the play's narrative depends on a reading of the recurrent construct of "the borderline", as the ship is thought to have disappeared in the border between the real and the subliminal. The Soni twin is "a specialist in crimes around the borderline", called to investigate "borderline criminals", for, as the Soni twin explains:

Any crime committed at an edge, a surface, an interface, is a borderline crime....
Borderline criminals, you see, restrict their activities
To the thin edges between land and sea,
The reflection and reality,
And the image and what it seems to be.

Even outside The Clear Cut Case the "borderline" is a recurrent term in the Western Front idiom. It acts as an indicator of the Front's technological orientation, putting a subtle sway on their configuration of network consciousness. At the Front subliminal tactics were used to penetrate the uneasy gaps -- the borderlines -- which lent glamour and artifice to media
culture. Their use of the term *subliminal* referenced communications technology; even in its development through William Burroughs' cosmology the Subliminal Kid had been the one that could use the recording equipment. Technologically located, appropriation of Burroughs's subliminal carried with it a clearly criminal intention, as in this section from his book *Soft Machine*:

-- To put it another way IBM machine controls thought feeling and apparent sensory impressions—Subliminal lark—These officers don't even know what buttons to push—Whatever you feed into the machine on subliminal level the machine will process—So we feed in 'dismantle thyself'...We fold writers of all time in together and record radio programs, movie sound tracks, TV and juke box songs all the words of the world stirring around in a cement mixer and pour in the resistance message "Calling partisans of all nation—Cut word lines—Shift linguals—Free doorways—Vibrate 'tourists'—Word falling—Photo falling—Break through in Grey Room." (153)

This message speaks of dismantling and disrupting machinery at all levels. From within the scene, Morris/Trasov's Image Bank was described as a method of network invasion: "This is art on a macro-scale, a global subversion of the Art Establishment, not by politics or power tactics but by anticipation of futures and a realization that only habit gains control, and the entrance to a person's mind--to a network culture--lies through habit." 48

One sees that the invitation, by collaging the set of The Clear Cut Case with an audience of smiling and glamourous radio city girls, situates the drama of the Lure of the Sea into the long past glory days of live broadcast radio events [Figure 23]. There is a trajectory of utopian retrieval here, in the seizure of the radio format for the specific needs and interests of the Western Front crowd. But it stops short of completion, since although we see that Lux Radio seizes the format of the radio play, The Clear Cut Case was never actually transmitted via

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47 The Subliminal Kid was based on Burroughs' friend Ian Sommerville, a mathematician who took care of his tape recorders, electronics and photography. Barry Miles, William Burroughs - El Hombre Invisible (London: Virgin, 1992) 103.

radio broadcast. Almost none of the Lux Radio plays, in fact, were written explicitly for broadcast transmission. The destruction of the media-corporate-military complex which Burroughs, and subsequently the Front, advocate through the concept of the subliminal is pointedly distinct from the techno-utopian liberation promised in the McLuhanist universe.

As a reference inextricably enmeshed in the private language of the Western Front, Filliou's *Eternal Network* becomes an unwitting agent of their criminal imagination. In the following chapter, by way of expanding on the implications of network consciousness, I take the Front out of the framework of the technological in order to gaze at it in the mirror of media culture. A less conspicuous aspect of the network consciousness, and one which I also trace, was the bohemian flow which gushed through the Western Front's slick and mediatized corridors.
chapter four

Aboard the Sequestered Font

Class consciousness gives way as a generative principle to... consciousness. And it is at this juncture that New Left and beat-hip bohemianism join hands.¹

Many of the artists on the network, particularly those at the Western Front, constructed a practice which was not so much enamoured of technology as it was parasitically affixed to the proliferation of images in media culture. Images drawn from media sources thus differentiated their alignment with Filiou, flooding their nomadic sensibility and bohemian ethos with a shock wave of homoerotically charged collage and cut-and-pasted kitsch. Their work always played off the media, drawing attention away from the discourse of political economy and projecting it into the arena of symbolic exchange. Network consciousness bears witness to a crucial transformation in the realm of sixties and seventies culture resonating, as it does, with the effects of a media-apparatus and its imposition of new communicative codes.

Fredric Jameson, in his historicization of the sixties in terms of what he calls "the adventures of the sign", is bleak about the onset of this new cultural moment; a moment in which the arts generate a textuality of floating signifiers detached from any corresponding referent. He writes into the social environment within which network consciousness was spun, saying, "The break-up of the sign in mid-air determines a fall back into a now absolutely fragmented and anarchic social reality; the broken pieces of language (the pure signifiers) now falling again into the world, as so many more pieces of material junk among

all the other rusting and super annuated apparatuses and buildings that litter the commodity landscape..."² Network consciousness, operating parallel to the mainstream circuit, was the mobility in this terrain of the ruptured sign. Those at the Western Front rejoiced in this apparent rupture; their operation took place between the sign of mass-produced culture and its consumable referent in the material world.

This is the terrain into which a figure such as "Mr. Peanut" must be situated. I want to pursue this placement by studying, in some detail, a cut-out advertisement taken from the Canadian women's magazine, McCall's, in 1971. It is one among the hundreds of peanut images in the Morris/Trasov Archive [Figure 24]. An unaltered advertisement, cut from a then-current magazine and carefully stored in the Mr. Peanut files of Image Bank, is an important illustration of the Front's fanciful engagement with media culture. The scenario shows a confident and powerful Mr. Peanut, standing at ease among the rich collection of goods scattered around his feet. While one of his hands rests atop a majestic globe, his authoritative and powerful figure leans casually toward a suitcase overflowing with dollar bills. Scattered around this poised figure are two other suitcases, a briefcase and a movie camera. The suitcases suggest Mr. Peanut's access to global mobility, while the briefcase identifies him as having the influence of a well-to-do corporate traveller. While set on the ground, the camera is unambiguously directed at Mr. Peanut, effecting closure and redirecting our gaze back onto the body of the central figure. The movie camera glamourizes the figure, doubling and projecting, adding an aura of spectacularization to the scene. The scenario is 'explained' in the small, unobtrusive text on the right hand side of the image, which invites participation in

the Mr. Peanut Sweepstakes. The caption, much more conspicuously visible to the eye, however, sways the reading of the image away from the vagaries of chance: With Planters, you'll have the whole world eating out of your hand. Image and caption combine to convince the viewer that peanuts offer authority and privilege. There are, however, no unadorned peanuts shown in this scene. According to the drama of the advertisement, it appears that Mr. Peanut is most likely to enjoy the luxurious lifestyle preferred. It is evidently a life of ease and privilege.

The archives of network consciousness are crowded with such victories. The Mr. Peanut collection is a proud recovery of the images which permeated the everyday life of these artists. AA Bronson explains their rationale, commenting "It no longer seems necessary, as it did in the sixties, to deny our culture; why turn to the east for exoticism when the most exotic of cultural forms are here in our midst? Hence: the beauty pageant, the nightclub act, the election campaign; the media stunt." With each image collected, the influence and majesty of Mr. Peanut was augmented; as it was transmitted on the circuit of the network it was recontextualized, setting into play a new site for the projection of their private fantasies. Michael Morris, speaking about Image Bank's base in popular culture and mass media imagery, stresses that the images were always 'found' rather than made; cut from their original context. He says, "All of us have access to visual information generated by media, the images that spill out all over nonstop belong to everyone. There can be no copyright on what effects the imagination." The network was a conscious attempt to impose a new context on the incessant proliferation of images. Morris says, at another point, "We don't manipulate the images that much except by cutting them out of

4as quoted in Tomas Albright "Correspondence Art" Crane and Stofflet, eds., Correspondence Art 223.
this original context…. It's a matter of recycling it with our sensibility as the reference point."  

As corporate trademark and advertising campaign Mr. Peanut was ever a mobile sign, fully detached from a mimetic reliance on nature and alive only in the two dimensional artefactual framework of image culture. Trasov's dedication to literally embodying this imaginary world demonstrates a fascination with trademark logos like that of Robert Fones' theory of "anthropomorphiks". In 1971 Fones, a London, Ontario writer and artist, published a poetic ode to consumer culture, describing his "anthropomorphick" as an abstract, suspended image with mesmerizing power. Referring to trademark logos such as Mr. Peanut, Can-D-Man and the Michelin Man as animistic, he argued "Logos, in the religious sense, animates the universe; pantheism, animism - the history and phenomenon of the logos predates the little man logo of modern advertising." In one of Fones' collages, these icons of popular culture animate a wilderness landscape, willingly closing the border between natural and corporate kingdoms [Figure 25]. An artist dressing up as an anthropomorphik appropriated Western culture's technological imagination, celebrating its fluid visibility and evasion of reliable signification. There was a witty and entertaining aspect to the appropriation which succinctly disavowed the dryness of conservative consumer culture, as in the photo sequence which shows Mr. Peanut's torrid affair with Granada Gazelle [Figure 26]. What takes place on the network is ultimately a contest in the realm of the sign; when Trasov assumed the identity of Mr. Peanut he had also adopted the wealth of connotations promised by corporate advertising claims. Sliding into power through symbolic exchange, never merely a part of the

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5 "Business as Usual at the Western Front" Avalanche summer 1973: n.p.
enterprise in the manner of a manipulated consumer, Trasov was always poised to let the whole world eat out of his hand.

Planters Peanuts had been a successful manufacturing company since the early part of the century, and by 1970, when Trasov took up the top hat, there were thousands of peanut products in packets, jars and cans distributed all across the United States and Canada, on which the Mr. Peanut logo was emblazoned. The product diversified as the company expanded; by the early 1990s Mr. Peanut was used to sell a variety of roasted, salted and chocolate-covered peanuts, as well as mixed nuts, Cheez Curls, Cheez Balls and Honey-Roasted Pecans. Peanut production calls to mind Baudrillard's discussion of the "industrial simulacrum". The Planters Peanuts Company, begun in 1906, had very much been an actor in the growing industrial economy of the United States. In keeping with the era of modern industrialization, a company such as Planters aimed, through its manufacturing process, to sustain the production of a uniform, undifferentiated and reliable product, with the aim of fulfilling a growing customer demand. Baudrillard, in his 1976 book Symbolic Exchange and Death, stresses the sameness of the factory product, saying "The relation between them is not that of the original to its counterfeit, or its analogue, or its reflection; it is a relationship of equivalence, of indifference. In the series, objects are transformed indefinitely into simulacra of one another and, with objects, so are the people who produce them." Rather than attempting to deny the pervasiveness of industrial simulacra and to produce an art free from the efficiency and monotony of the industrial economy, artists such as Trasov attempted to profit from the very expansiveness of its operation. This

intervention necessarily avoided engagement with the commodity itself - one hardly knows if Trasov has ever eaten a peanut - rather, the gesture was semiotic. Playing in the realm of the sign Trasov could bear witness to the indefinite reproduction of "his own" image in the serial repetition of consumer culture.

The figure of Mr. Peanut, ever smiling and elegant, has always floated indifferently atop the vicissitudes of the most powerful engines of the postindustrial economy. When the trademark had first been put into circulation in 1916 it served the interests of a small but successful company jointly owned by two Italian-American immigrants. In 1960, Standard Brands Incorporated, an international food conglomerate, acquired the Planters Nut and Chocolate Company for $25,000,000 cash. Rather than repackaging the peanuts in a manner which would publically identify this change of ownership, the product brand name "Mr. Peanut" was left fully intact. From 1961 on Planters Peanuts were marketed and distributed through Standard Brand channels alongside Fleischman's yeast, Sanborn coffee, Blue Bonnet Margarine and Tender Leaf Tea. By 1970 Standard Brands Inc., profiting from the acquisition of Planters, boasted net sales of over a billion dollars.

Further on in the same text Baudrillard posits the imposition of an order which has replaced that of the industrial simulacrum. Interestingly marked by European political thought, yet dedicated to the seduction of media, Baudrillard has been referred to as the French McLuhan. He describes the current era as one of "pure simulation", governed by a totalizing and shadowless "code". The

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9 This history, the story of "the Peanut King" Amadeo Obici, was told in the 1930s in "$10,000 Worth of Peanuts" Fortune (April 1938).
12 Mike Gane Baudrillard Critical and Fatal Theory (London:Routledge, 1991),3. In light of his interest in media artists it seems appropriate that when Baudrillard came to Vancouver in 1986 to visit Expo, he was a guest of the Western Front.
realm of experience as determined by the code has, in his terms, become one of "hyperreality". In the phase of the hyperreal we are incapable of locating either 'reality' or 'representation'; there is no 'real' to be reproduced, copied or represented – instead we experience a cycle of continuous and indistinguishable simulation. Computers and communication devices are the operative system which run the advertising machines of this hyperreality. I draw attention to Baudrillard as a means of alluding to the shifting structural organization induced by media culture; his theoretical work from that period shows the difficulty and struggle of formulating a critique of "the sign" of mass media which could also understand the materialist conditions described in a Marxist reading of political economy. In the hyperreal, labour becomes an adjunct to the circulation of information; everyday life is colonized by the desiring machine of consumer capitalism. Unsurprisingly, these conditions demand a new site for the artist's strategic opposition. Baudrillard comments, "[a]rt and industry can thus exchange signs: art, in order to become a reproductive machine (Andy Warhol), without ceasing to be art, since this machine is only a sign; and production, in order to lose all social purpose and thus to verify and exalt itself... in this vertigo of serial signs." Consistent with the concept of the simulacra, Mr. Peanut, it would seem, is hyperreal: he has no stable owner, no finality in terms of birth or death, and no permanent geographical location. Across the surface of upheaval, business deals and vast corporate mergers the figure of Mr. Peanut hovers, disturbingly stable. The prefabricated image lives on and on, ever evacuating the historical referents which would disturb its utter vacuity.

14 Baudrillard, "Symbolic" 147.
I would like to return for a moment to the Decca Dance, for while it was most plainly a consolidation of the vanguardist strategies of the mail art network, I also see it as an event in many ways consonant with the counter cultural attitudes of the previous two decades. The participants of the Decca Dance, and the bohemian pose of the Western Front as a whole, was in many ways a continuance of the dropped-out, rebellious lifestyle and aesthetic of beat culture. As with the beat ethos, the early Front operated within an inverted economy based on voluntary poverty, sexual nonconformity and physical mobility. While network consciousness was, on an aesthetic level, completely engaged with media culture and its mirrors, the network was enacted in a daily life at the Western Front which was continually legitimated along the lines of the alternative economy which beat culture had posed. Thus, their vanguardist ideal of making life and art interchangeable was not modelled solely from European modernist experiments, it was also carried more directly up the coast, from the bohemian enclaves south of the border. Well-known American poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Spicer, and Charles Olson - referred to as "the merchants of wonder" by local poet Warren Tallman - set sail for Vancouver, and established the earliest trading route. These poets brought an important poetic influence; while setting the course for the "New Vancouver Poetry" writers of the sixties, their presence had in fact catalyzed and shaped the sensibilities of the art scene as a whole.

The term 'Beat Generation', first used by Jack Kerouac in 1948, penetrated the referents of American popular culture during the early fifties. In quoting the phrase "Everything belongs to me because I am poor" from On the

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15 Warren Tallman, "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver During the 1960's," boundary 2, 3.1 (Fall, 1974) 57-90.
Road, Allen Ginsberg suggests he gets at the essence of the Beat Generation. The phrase conveys their willingness to posit alternative notions of wealth and to reject the conspicuous consumption which typifies American life. Indeed, the Beats consciously cultivated an artistic lifestyle on the margins of the affluent society in which they had been brought up; rather than pursue the American dream they preferred to rub shoulders with, as one author puts it, "the underprivileged, dispossessed, outcast and outlaw subculture of the African American, the jazz musician, the junkie." Their nonconformity was expressed through mobility, a renunciation of the stable monotony of the American family in their affluent, tv-watching, suburban homes. Their quest for transcendent experience quickened their pace, and their voyages of discovery found them on the road, lost in madness or experimenting with drug and alcohol induced trances. Their rejection of social mores was radical, but took a very different line of attack then the political critique of Leftist revolutionary organization.

The locus of transformation was oneself and the frenetic activity was the means of transcendance. The Beats too, had enacted a network consciousness, in its parallel, marginal and socially invisible aspect.

While the history of the beats has been written primarily in terms of its well-popularized heroes — Ginsberg, Kerouac, Burroughs — what must also be acknowledged is the shared ethos which was crucial to its operation. The beat

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18 Lisa Phillips, "Beat Culture; America Revisioned" Beat Culture 29.
19 One of the artists involved in the Vancouver scene, Bryan Mulvihill, describes the tension between these modes of opposition, adding that locally, it posed opposition between the poets and the artists. "In Chicken Bank and in Image Bank there was this thing of political silence — there were bumper stickers. There was a big falling out ... with the writing community - Tish and Stan Persky — they were very politically motivated. Now, the artist's perspective was that politics really didn't change things that quickly..." Personal interview (January 12, 1995). From a historical perspective, I find Theodore Roszak's position on the relations between the New Left and the counterculture persuasive: "We grasp the underlying unity of the counter cultural variety then, if we see beat-hip bohemianism as an effort to work out the personality structure and total lifestyle that follow from New Left social criticism." The Making of a Counter Culture 67.
artists who were able to survive the onslaught of media attention and become icons of the conspicuous alternativeness represent a much wider attitude, partaking as they did, in subcultural, socially marginal networks. As Maria Damon has pointed out in a recent article, one can't contemplate aspects of recent cultural history in terms of "great minds" versus "anonymous contributors" because, as was the case for the beats, "the great talents are often one and the same as the unsung; and they were unafraid of the abyss." Examination is thus an engagement in counterhistory; a retrieval of figures who were profoundly disaffiliated from the monumental narrative of civilization and whose ethos was fundamentally divorced from the structures of official history.

The Western Front, differing from the aspirations of the Intermedia Society before it, was not intended as a venue which encouraged large public participation. Where Intermedia had staged ambitious events in public spaces including the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Front was oriented toward servicing its own network. It is the Front's alignment with the bohemian ethos of beat culture which most readily elucidates the operation of their thriving yet socially invisible and pointedly limited network. While representing a constellation of connections all over the world, the network consciousness was, in its own way, a regulatory body which accepted contributions of a certain social position and range of interest. Rather than global or free (as the rhetoric of networks suggests), their connections were precisely delimited. The circuit of exchange was private, plugged in to a few, select, transmitters and receivers. The beat aspect of its network cultivated a distance between art production and its socio-political milieu. Kate Craig was quite conscious of this isolation, commenting in the video Art's Stars: The Decca Dance (1974), "Any of the travel I've done in the last one and a half years has to do with the Network, our own Network. My life is

20 "Victors of Catastrophe: Beat Oclusions" Beat Culture 141.
completely protected from the other world. I seldom come into contact with anyone else." Even on the network, the contact between participants was a meeting of fantasy, the shifting and unstable union of adopted personae. In the same video Eric Metcalfe says "We've developed this thing of names -- we don't know each other, it's only through weird names." As Mary Beth Knechtel's witty parody of the Front underlines, the Front was a safe haven, a means of stepping outside of society rather than attempting a direct confrontation. As her commentary indicates, their take on the Global Village was a continuance rather than an excursion from their personal global network:

Myrna heard tell of a fabulous project concocted by a group of local illusionists intent on taking flight for the subliminal in a remarkable air-ship designed and constructed by themselves. The remarkable ship (more of an ark than an aircraft) was dubbed The Sequestered Font, since it was regarded simultaneously as the source of creative life-blood by which true originality bubbled up into the community at large, and as a protected haven well-removed from the debilitating controls which society at large exerted over its individual members.21

In his recent essay on "The Beat Phenomenon," Richard Cândida Smith stresses that these ad-hoc networks of mutually supportive friends, neighbours and professional associations preferred an isolated community over the public machinery of fame and commercial success.22 Cândida Smith points out that these communities relied on inward-looking, private explorations as a means of challenging their overstructured world, commenting: "Utopian vision, we will see,

21 Mary Beth Knechtel, The Goldfish that Exploded (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1978) 54. It would be valuable to have an "insider's" account of the -- as William Wood calls it -- "oligarchic formation" of the Western Front, capable of considering the power relations between its board members, as it is through these machinations that its institutional and aesthetic positioning evolved. As Knechtel's satirical account of the Front points out, Michael Morris' role is a case in point. In the book is a long description of Michael Morris, referred to as 'The Talking Portrait’, which at one point describes: "It talked late into the evening, to itself presumably when all the Fonters [sic] had retired to bed, and it greeted them cheerfully when they came to breakfast in the morning. It assumed the role of director and arcane orade at the Font; it organized, hosted and presided at special events; it tended to monopolize conversation, for it considered its ideas two or more cuts above the ordinary; and it was by way of the Talking Portrait that the Fonters communicated with the subliminal." Goldfish, 58. And William Wood "This is Free Money?" Whispered Art History, 184.

22 This essay is one chapter in the author's compelling book on the development of modernism in California which is entitled Utopia and Dissent - Art, Poetry and Politics in California (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
projected private relations as a replacement for a perceived oppressive public order, but without any consideration of their connection." He rightly identifies (but stops short of condemning) the limits of this position, continuing "This critical omission caused utopian projects to collapse back into the repressed material of their origins. To state that a highly subjective aesthetic ideology did not escape the limits of its contradictions is not to deny its importance as a source of ferment and change."\textsuperscript{22} The Decca Dance comes into just this contradiction: the event was a huge undertaking which brought together artists who produced for the network from all over the continent. The extravaganza was attended by almost a thousand people. In spite of the organizational efforts and creative input invested, the event went unnoticed by mainstream art coverage. Incompatible with gallery circulation or the curiosity of critical investigation in the early seventies, the event didn't signify at the level of public discourse, and as a result it has all but been obliterated from history.

The evening of the Decca Dance saw a parodic, mediatized "Sphinx D'Or Award Ceremony" which was intended primarily to provide fodder for private network gossip. It was however, also billed as an event inspired by Filliou: the celebration of the 1,000,011th Birthday of Art. At the event Filliou was attributed a lofty and prestigious position, as is apparent in the tabloid souvenir which documents the evening [Figure 27]. His role is crucial to the glamorous event; it is a covert acknowledgement of a committedly bohemian heritage. The presentation of the Decca Dance saw playful intervention take the form of cool media mimicry. Rather than attempting to dissolve "the artist" or other professionalized functions back into the immediacy of everyday experience as had been attempted in the realization of "la fête", the playful opposition which these artists enacted languishes in the artificial mirror of media culture.

\textsuperscript{22}Utopia and Dissent xxiv
Organized around the promise of decadence and festive abandon, one sees that the Decca Dance was an attempt to align the intimacy of bohemian family with the banal sophistication and glamour of Hollywood culture. While referencing the spectacle of the media through their own parodic gestures, the failure of the Decca Dance to entice the "real media" was a direct reflection of these two contradictory aspirations.24

One of the few essays which attempted to publicly frame the intensity of the activities taking place at the Western Front in its early years was AA Bronson's "Pablum for the Pablum Eaters".25 Bronson, one of the members of the General Idea collective based in Toronto, describes a trajectory which is useful in pointing to the ideals and ambitions underpinning an event such as the Decca Dance. The network is altered in a critical way in this article; mediated through intertextual reference. Referring to General Idea, Ant Farm, Ray Johnson, Robert Filliou, Image Bank and the Western Front, Bronson explains that he is trying to describe "an area of art activity which is largely misunderstood". This "area", oddly circumscribed, is a quirky aggregation of aesthetic intentions, media and locales.26

Bronson refers to the network as "the Subliminal", calling on associations with dada and Fluxus, and declares that it is "a parallel development to art history." In the Subliminal we see Filliou subsumed by strategies which accept

24 Anna Banana points out that the DeccaDance was in some ways a "grand finale" for mail art, and that after the event many of the artists continued their own work independently, or with more defined goals. Anna Banana, "Mail Art Canada" Crane Correspondence Art 250. About the failure of the Decca Dance to attract media attention, Scott Watson comments "[t]his must have been sobering for a movement that felt it could tantalize, fascinate and ultimately manipulate the mass media." Hand of the Spirit 18.


26 In the early seventies there were strong links, both aesthetically and interpersonally, between the members of Image Bank and of General Idea. General Idea comments in one interview, "[C]ollaboration between Vancouver and Toronto has been... Hot and heavy.... Wet kisses, on the lips.... Image Bank in Vancouver are our chief correspondents. And, uh, they act as an Image Bank." General Idea, "The Gold-Diggers of '84: An Interview with General Idea Toronto" Avalanche spring (1973) 18. The interviewer is New York artist Willoughby Sharp.
and alter his own. The terms for network are carelessly, intentionally, conflated, so as to infer an undifferentiated origin. As Bronson writes the practices of these artists onto the Subliminal, he also assimilates them into the caustic and libidinal semantic field which had been developed by William Burroughs during the sixties. The essay opens with a quote from Nova Express: 'And he breaks out all the ugliest pictures in the image bank and puts it out on the subliminal....' 27 The Subliminal is a construct which shifts through Burroughs cut-up trilogy 28 as an invisible membrane upon which the 'Nova War' of control versus resistance is fought. As Bronson argues, the specific range of concerns which the Western Front crowd addressed are well suited to the concept of the Subliminal. The way in which images appropriated from the media were taken into the network through an organization such as Image Bank relied on a highly coded set of references to sexual identity and play. Scott Watson draws attention to the fascination these artists had with glamour, the pursuit of pleasure and sexual liberation. As he describes it "This was the world of fan clubs and zines circulated by hobbyists, cataloguers, fetishists and/or pornographers." 25

In his thesis on the network's Toronto-based magazine, File, Robert Ballantyne has argued that homosexual inscription is key to understanding much of this activity. 30 I point this out because the gay sensibility operating on the network also comprehends one of the reasons why Burroughs became a treasured part of the Front scene. By the early seventies he was popularly known as the father of the Beats, but for many of those on the network it was his constant interrogation of forms of repression, particularly the repression (thus

27 The "Image Bank", whose reference Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov adopt, is a recurrent construct posited by Burroughs in the book.
28 The Soft Machine (1961), Nova Express (1964), The Ticket that Exploded (1967)
29 Hand of the Spirit, 14.
also transgressiveness) of male homosexual desire, that provided a strategic model. As Ballantyne points out, "Putting it out on the subliminal", as Image Bank and General Idea would quote from Burroughs, became the paradigmatic formula for subversively unveiling the mobility of desire as a transgressive and contradictory object-choice." Ballantyne's argument, in situating the network into the gay politics of the seventies, is extremely valuable in addressing what was at stake behind the staged ambivalence of much of the network's imagery. Their defensive and closed posturing was the safety zone which protected them from a violently homophobic general public. At the same time, Ballantyne's argument also suggests the way in which 'straight' artists, such as Filliou, found their work appealing: because it demonstrated a willingness to destabilize accepted categories of meaning. He continues, "The gayness of its network, never quite certain and rarely openly identified, nonetheless declared itself as an affront to ideals of autonomy and fixed identities." That Filliou's model of network would become the historical anchor for the diverse and contradictory activities going on at the Western Front is indicative of the complex responses that its own members expressed toward new technologies. Filliou explains at one point that he has not attempted to

32 "Glamour," 58,59. In light of the rebellious, subversive play at work in these activities, it is perhaps surprising that the gay sensibility explored by these artists was acted out with no comparable interrogation of how other positions were systematically marginalized by hegemonic structures. The unequal status of women as producers, for example, was repeatedly re-inforced rather than questioned or improved. One need not wade too deeply, in fact, to uncover the misogynistic bias of the era. A casual post card (dated July 1972) stored in the Morris/Trasov Archive, for instance, is laden with exclusionary references. Geoff Hendricks, an artist associated with Fluxus, sent cross-Canada greetings to "all of the Image Bank" inscribed on the back of a found comic reading "if yo wasn't a gal ah'd kiss yo." (Morris/Trasov Archive, Geoffrey Hendricks Correspondence, Crate C20, 30.30) While a phrase such as this does well in acknowledging the conditions of same sex desire, it also fosters a climate openly hostile to women. Similar to the beat writers -- particularly Burroughs -- their exploration of homosexuality included a virulent rejection of heterosexual masculine norms, but with it was included a deeply pervasive fear and dislike of women. I think there is good reason to argue that Kate Craig, the only woman founder of the Western Front Lodge, should be described as a survivor of the subliminal. For more on the gay sensibility operating in the scene see Scott Watson Hand of the Spirit. Richard Cándida Smith, in his discussion of the Beats in terms of their relation to normative codes of masculinity, also brings this up in Utopia and Dissent.
introduce new technology into his consideration of the classroom, the home, or the city. A wariness is clearly conveyed. Speaking of all the "fantastic electronic discoveries" being developed, he says, "if it involves one day a change in kind rather than in degree - I fear that our talent for messing up things - after all we are the buffoon race - we may very well use these devices to enslave man, rather than to free him...". Clearly, Filliou was not a technological determinist; his ideas were not formulated around the notion that technological innovation would necessarily increase human freedom, equality or happiness.

When Filliou posited the Eternal Network he intentionally blurred the distinction between telecommunication and telepathy. The greeting he sends to the members of the Eternal Network around the world, for instance, says simply, "concentrating silently, send waves of greetings, weatherluck...". He adds a performance note, reminding the practitioner "no proof of reaching or benefiting is necessary." The premise is that interconnectivity does not necessarily have to be 'wired'; hooked up. In his use, the term "network" was a means of dismantling the well-rehearsed boundaries between body and mind, nature and culture, reality and imagination. In a thirty second performance-lecture from 1978 he says "Whatever means we use to express ourselves as artists, whether we use traditional techniques or new ones, whether we use junk or the latest technical equipment, (I use what I think is available to me,) what I think is important is the intensity with which the material...."

His trips to Canada between 1973 and 1980, encouraged as he was to utilize video as the basis of several artistic projects, demanded direct engagement with technology. Rather than wariness alone, the videos he made here often express a deep ambivalence toward

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33 Teaching and Learning 214.  
34 Teaching and Learning 214.  
36 His lecture is then cut off by a gong, and he goes on to another idea. "Robert Filliou Transcript: The 'Gong Show' Tape" Centerfold 2.4 (April, 1978)28.
television as a medium; both hope and despair. Attempting to subsume technology into a wider vision for remaking the social world, he comments at one point "It's a billion year project ('at least', says Kate) involving the use of video as an active (i.e. not passive) audience participation tool. Go on....Investigate." 37

Thomas Docherty, in his discussion of postmodernism, has identified a pivotal moment arising out of the international oppositional movements which took place in 1968. He poses this moment in terms of intellectual work, saying "In short, if a political theory had failed on the occasion of May, 1968 to produce the requisite practice, then from now on, how does one sagely ground an emancipatory cultural politics?" 38 Docherty then goes on to discuss the theoretical constraints of the "post 68" writers; those who admitted a crisis of legitimacy in terms of their cultural function. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the micropolitical and their attempt to open desire through writing positive lines of flight had come about as a direct result of May. As Guattari says in a 1972 interview, "May 68 came as a shock to Gilles and me, as to so many others: we didn't know each other, but this book [Anti-Oedipus] now, is nevertheless a result of May." 39 Their preference for multiplicity and nomadic thought had been catalyzed by the failure of 1968 to generate a means of continuous "revolutionary becoming".

I want to return to the question posed by Willard Holmes at the beginning of chapter three. An important relation is identified by Holmes in his question, as it positions Robert Filliou tensely against William Burroughs. Differences lay between these two artists, both of whom were fathers to the media generation.

37 Filliou, as quoted in Hank Bull "Preface" Robert Filliou - From Political to Poetical Economy (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, 1995) 11.
living at the Western Front in the early seventies. Their respective affiliations with Fluxus and Beat circles set them apart, as did their European/American cultural context and their sexual orientation. What they do share however is a nomadic, destabilized and deeply disaffiliated lifestyle. As such, they are well suited to the current phase of cyberculture and are (ironically) being reborn as affirmative progenitors of the new "network consciousness".\(^40\) They are both players in the cultural shift identified by "nomadic thought", and described by Thomas Docherty. With respect to the divide between Filliou and Burroughs, though, the most jagged and wrenching aspect is inscribed in their vision of the world. While Burroughs' lived in the vortex of his "Ugly Spirit" Filliou looked up at the blue sky.\(^41\) When I asked Vincent Trasov about the distinction Holmes made in his article, he said "Somehow they're polarities for me — Burroughs who talks about the break up of the system and Filliou who is talking about the creation of a system.... I think altruistically, the way Filliou does. That's what makes me able to continue."\(^42\)

\(^{40}\) "It was in the eighties that Burroughs' influence on literature began to show; the development of the new genre of science fiction known as cyberpunk would simply not have been possible without him." Miles El Hombre Invisible 17; "Time has obscured the fact that many idealistic, democratic values of early mail art were carried forth in the development of today's on-line telecommunications community." Chuck Welch, "The Mail Art - Internet Link" ed. Chuck Welch, The Eternal Network 125.

\(^{41}\) There is a section in one of the videos Filliou made in Canada called "Sky Analysis" during which one observes Filliou talking ponderously about art as "the new railroad" while looking up at the sky. Teaching & Learning as Performing Arts videotape (Western Front Productions, 1979)

\(^{42}\) interview (August 11, 1994)
The Front is dead! Long live the Front!

"[I]t is necessary to realize the extent of concerns involving the invisible network that bind the world of Dr. Brute and Alex the Holy, Marcel Idea and Miss Generality, Clara the Bag Lady and Lady Brute, the Swedish Lady and Mr. Cones, Dadaland and Dada Long Legs, A.A. Bronson and Dr. Fluxus, Ray Johnson and Susan Bunny, Anna Banana and Honey Banannas, Burn Bank and Art Rat, Brutiful Brutopia and Canadada."

— FILE Editorial 1972

"ANNPAC [Association of National Non-Profit Artist's Centres] acknowledges a decided trend among certain of its members toward institutionalization and entrenchment. With the acquisition of more hardware and tighter scheduling, there is a critical need for increased staff and larger budgets. The artist-administrator does neither of his/her split duties effectively."

— Barbara Shapiro 1978

"...ANNPAC is nothing more than an organizational shell concerned with following rules and regulations in order to ensure its administrative existence rather than supporting self-determined cultural producers and their groups such as the Minquon Panchyat."

— Nancy Shaw 1993

When the Centre Georges Pompidou opened in Paris it was seen in the public eye as an important reassertion of an authoritative French culture, the marker of a newly strengthened national optimism, and a monument to the modern era. The building, which had been constructed under the administration of president Georges Pompidou as a multi-purpose arts complex and public library, was monumental in scale and brutal in its high-tech industrial design. Attacks were launched from those in the arts criticizing the building as "an

2This quote was taken from Nancy Shaw’s letter to the ANNPAC quarterly, in which she discusses ANNPAC’s failure to redress systemic racism. "ANNPAC’s Mistaken Resolve" Parallelogramme 19/3 (Winter 1993)16.
impertinent Paris effort to win back supremacy from New York as a centre for painting and sculpture." For contemporary art to be given such a highly visible and costly venue, though, was undeniably a boon for its international profile. The exhibition space promised to enshrine the more challenging and experimental art forms that had developed in recent decades, displaying them for the curiosity of six million or more tourists each year.

Jean-Clarence Lambert, a devoted supporter of the avant-garde Paris scene of the sixties and a long-time friend of Filliou, recalls in a memoir their visit together, in 1977, to the inauguration of the Pompidou Centre. Sitting in a bar following the reception Lambert recalls, "Robert said to me all of a sudden 'Tonight, Jean-Clarence, our defeat has been achieved.'" That Filliou would see the new centre as a limiting and bureaucratized administration of culture is not surprising, positioned as he was on the disaffiliated and critical margins. In its reification of leisure activity the construction of the Pompidou in the centre of Paris symbolically enacted the stable containment of the most radical and interventionist ambitions of May 68. As one author points out, the federalist initiative responded directly to the restlessness of the cultural climate, reasoning along these lines: "If the May Events were a vital force, surprisingly benign but regrettably unfocussed, why not build the magnificent, monumental focus?" In the seventies, those who had participated in oppositional formations such as May 68 witnessed, as Andreas Huyssen has discussed, the return of the status quo and the dispersal of the cries for cultural revolution. He goes on, saying

4 The text is in French: "Après l'inauguration du Centre Pompidou par Giscard et Cie, nous sommes allés à la Coupole prendre un ou deux verres. Avec ce sourire tiré qui lui était familier, Robert me dit soudain: <Ce soir, Jean-Clarence, notre défaite est consommée>.
5 The Making of Beaubourg 4
with evident irony "Art was not reintegrated into everyday life. The imagination did not come to power. The Centre Georges Pompidou was built instead..."6

There is some resonance here with the dialogue between Filliou and the Western Front. While 1977 saw the opening of the Pompidou, 1978 was almost witness to the closure of the Western Front Lodge. Filliou would write to Trasov that year asking quite directly "But the demise of the Western Front is disturbing. What's going to happen?"7 The Front as art institution still remains open and operational today, yet, about five years after they had begun, an evidently dramatic turn of events had led Trasov to write to Filliou about "the demise", and sparked Filliou's curiousity and his pressing response.8

The inauguration of the Pompidou attests to a shift which had also destabilized avant gardist positions far and wide. Martha Rosier, in an article tellingly entitled "shedding the utopian moment", describes the withering of idealism and optimism in the American avant-garde of that time, as its artists and intellectuals witnessed the pervasive inefficacy of their efforts. Reflecting particularly on the experimental usage of video during the early seventies she concludes: "The history of the avant-gardes and their failure to make inroads into the power of either art institutions or the advancing technologies through these means suggests that these efforts cannot succeed."9 Peter Bürger's condemnation of the neo-avant-garde, which Rosier uses to fuel her own argument, also recognized the evident failure of the avant-garde in its efforts to

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7 Post card dated 26-9-1978 (Morris/Trasov Archive, Robert Filliou Correspondence, Crate C57)
The front of the post card is a photograph of Filliou, sitting naked on a log on a West Coast beach. The photo was taken by Michael Morris when Filliou first visited Babyhna in the summer of 1973. The back of the postcard reads "Robert Filliou - Father of the Eternal Network". Filliou altered the paternal role designated him by the caption, making it read "Robert Filliou - Rather of the Eternal Network".
8 Trasov's original letter has, unfortunately, been lost.
9 "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment" Block 11, 1985/86:39
achieve social transformation. His dismissal is based on a pointed disregard of the artist's own vision, stressing that "it is the status of their products, not the consciousness artists have of their activity, that defines the social effect of their works." The problematic aspect of the sixties avant-garde, as Bürger points out, is that when the "historical avant-garde against art as institution is accepted as art, the gesture of protest of the neo-avant-garde becomes inauthentic." What both Bürger and Rosler admit is that in the sixties and seventies the projected destruction of art as a separate sphere may have been accomplished - but it had taken place in the museo-gallery marketplace. As Benjamin Buchloh would later put it, "it is in the spectacle that the neo-avant-garde finds its place as the provider of a mythical semblance of radicality, and it is in the spectacle that it can imbue the repetition of its obsolete modernist strategies with the appearance of credibility."

By the end of the seventies the terms "network consciousness" "subliminal" and "eternal network" had slipped out of the vocabulary of the Western Front and references to artists' networks were talked about, instead, in terms of "the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Run Centres" (ANNPAC), or "the Living Museum". The new phrases announce the new era: a maturing field of cultural production in Canada and with it a concomitant transition in the Western Front's organization, priorities and aesthetic orientation. The formation of ANNPAC in 1976 had been founded on the notion that artist-initiated centres such as the Western Front, taking advantage of available government funding, could form a cultural network which would act as an alternative to both commercial galleries and public institutions. Its foundation and continuance during the seventies relied

10 Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde 1974 (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1984).
11 Theory of the Avant-Garde 58.
12 Theory of the Avant-Garde 53.
13 "The Primary Colours for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde" October 37 (Summer 1986) 51.
primarily on the paternalistic generosity of the Canada Council, an "arms length" federal organization. In an article published in the late 1970s, Clive Robertson examines the conditions which supported the growth of these precariously marginal, state-supported, art centres.\textsuperscript{14} He points out that a short period of economic wealth -- six years or so -- had allowed the government to fund this "marginal" art activity. Robertson suggests that the type of art which these alternative centres supported, motivated by countercultural attitudes, were often seen by the artists as a means of social agitation. The centres were probably funded, he speculates, because "their function would more likely be to de-fuse artists' anarchist dilemmas and romanticized bohemia." Jeff Wall, confronting theories of a totalized society of 'unbounded domination' (ie. Adorno-Horkheimer, Enzenberger, Debord), asserts that the disintegration of avant-garde sentiment came about as artists saw that antagonism to existent culture could be sustained without actually culminating in a revolutionary crisis.\textsuperscript{15} An artist emerging in Vancouver during the seventies, Wall attempted to retain the role of vanguard artist, arguing that the proclamation of "the death of the avant-garde" was really the ideological claim of the benevolent bureaucratic cultural institutions of the 1960s and 70s; a claim made to ensure their continued position within the 'totalizing society'. Wall's own professional position, predicated as it was on a strategic antagonism between artist and cultural institution, articulated a defiant rejection of the state-funded rebellion which ANNPAC as a structure supported. Another Canadian artist, Krysztof Wodiczko, argues that the generosity of the federal Liberal policy had in fact trapped artists in a state of "bureaucratic incapacitation".\textsuperscript{16} Rejecting the growing

\textsuperscript{14} "Survival, Replacement or Alternative?" Centerfold 3.4 (April 1979)
\textsuperscript{15} Jeff Wall "The Site of Culture Contradictions, Totality and the Avant-garde" Vanguard 12.4 (May 1983) 19.
\textsuperscript{16} Wodiczko "For the de-incapacitation of the avant-garde" Parallèlogramme 9.4 (April 1984) 23.
indistinguishability between the needs of the Canada Council and the artists it
governed, Wodiczko argues that "once again (as if nothing ever happened in
the 60s) we are living the time of a corporate/commercial and bureaucratic
incapacitation of art." 17

As a means of responding to the increasing financial and organizational
burdens which the growth of ANNPAC had forced on artists, a proposal was
put forth which, as Glenn Lewis would describe it, was "a new thrust of the
network concept" called "The Living Museum Network of Canada". 18 Conceived
of as a core group dedicated exclusively to the smooth administration of the
artist-run network, the Living Museum would allow alternative artists to continue,
unhindered, to work on their creative production. The "museum administrators"
would work to support a structure for their "living cultural heritage" (e.g. the
artists), facilitating all the financial support necessary and raising public
awareness of parallel galleries — doing, in short, all the work the artists found
necessary, but uncomfortably tedious and noncreative. The Living Museum
attests to the difficulty of the artist-run system; a system which birthed only
artistic bureaucrats or bureaucratized artists. In his article, Lewis sounds a
poignant note — a plea crying into a vacuum. While interest in the Living
Museum Network was carried on through the alternative galleries for a couple
of years, the initiative was not able to overcome the initial constraints which had
been imposed through ANNPAC. 15 The optimistic vision lacked the acuity to
identify that while the argument would find a responsive audience in fellow
artist-bureaucrats, it was a long way from making a dent in the state-funded

17 Wodiczko 25.
18 "The Value of Parallel Galleries" Parallelogramme 3.2 (Feb. 1978).
19 For a review of "The Living Museum Colloquium" held in Ontario in 1979 see Spaces by Artists -
culture industry, or being able to actually put this industry into the service of the "Eternal Network".

The various avant-garde strategies motivating the artists at the Western Front, Scott Watson argues, having flourished in the early seventies, had ended "in confusion and disillusionment by the end of the decade".20 Discussing his decision to leave the Western Front in the late seventies, Vincent Trasov points to the increasingly rationalized framework which had come to characterize the Front's operation: "Michael [Morris] and I were answering phones, trying to keep up a good image of the Front. I'm not trying to belittle what we did at the Front, I'm just thinking that by then we realized we were going to go crazy.... It had started becoming so well known - it you wanted to continue there you had to make up your mind - if you were a gallerist you shouldn't be doing art, if you were an administrator you shouldn't be doing something else."21

In its original goals, ANNPAC had been intended to represent the needs and interests of an alternative system; to hold together that chain of parallel exhibition spaces which was explicitly antagonistic to traditional conceptions of art. Implicit in these centres was the critique of art as serving a decorative, connoisseurial function, and a rejection of those institutional structures which sustained what they identified as aesthetically, politically and personally conservative standards. As ANNPAC matured criticism was also waged from within, and the organization was forced to respond against its own sexist and heterosexist norms. The historical function of ANNPAC had been to aid in the self-determination of the artist by providing an arena for all types of experimental artistic interrogation. By the early 1990s it became apparent that the ANNPAC structure was no longer capable of accommodating the needs of its artists. As a

20 Watson, Hand of the Spirit 19.
21 Trasov. Personal interview (August 11, 1994).
result of many heated accusations of its failure to redress systemic racism, ANNPAC was disbanded in 1993.\(^22\)

In 1990 Filliou's idea of *Art's Birthday* had been implemented as an official celebration of the 104 centres across Canada that were member organizations on the ANNPAC network. The national spokesperson at that time, Clive Robertson, described "Artist's Day" (as it came to be called) as a reaffirmation of artist-run action "from the pre-ANNPAC days of collective collaboration forward - not to notions of national unity, but to manifestations of diverse artistic and social interests."\(^23\) It is interesting to see that in the decades since he visited Canada, Filliou has accrued value. In 1993 one reviewer commented "Robert Filliou's work and ideas were the catalyst for the founding of the artist-run centre movement in Canada and Quebec."\(^24\) As the utopian strains of recent Canadian art practice are for the first time being assembled into a revisionist history, Filliou again begins to surface. His name recurs in those sources which wish to reference the purest and most ideal ambitions and endeavours which upheld "network consciousness". In Canada Filliou has, in a significant way, become a metonymical replacement for artist-initiated networks. It is apparently an uneasy signal device; for while Filliou is used as an attractive historical anchor upheld against increasingly sophisticated networks of image and information control (e.g. the Internet), he is also the sign of the disconsolate and decomposing ruins of the artist-run centre formation.

Layers of drift and silt are still to be filtered through in terms of arriving at a solid history of art production in Vancouver during the 1970s. The flicker of the utopian sentiment which Filliou persistently cultivated met, for a short while,

\(^{22}\)My account is drawn from a special issue of *Parallelogramme* sub-titled "Anti-Racism in the Arts" 19.3 (Winter 1993) in which the final break-down of ANNPAC has been described by various writers.

\(^{23}\)"Two Events of Identifying Significance" *Parallelogramme* 15.4 (Spring 1990)5.

\(^{24}\) *V Tape Video Reference Guide* (Toronto: V Tape, 1993)44.
with consonant tones on the Canadian West Coast. For a moment here or there, amid the parodic and mediatized experiments which Filliou encountered at the Western Front, perhaps \textit{la fête permanente} and \textit{the eternal network} met as one sign.
THE WESTERN FRONT began a year ago with the purchase of the old Knights of Pythias Lodge Hall, a 60 year old wood frame building at 303 East 8th. Our initial goal was to provide a centre for our collective activities and a meeting place for presentation and exchange of ideas relevant to new interdisciplinary areas of creative expression. Presently we are negotiating a charter under the B.C. Society's Act as a non-profit cultural organization. The founding members are Michael Morris, Glenn Lewis, Vincent Tarasoff, Martin Bartlett, Henry Greenhow, Eric Metcalfe, Kate Metcalfe and Mo Van Nostrand. We are all active in various fields of expression: visual arts, music, media, literature, architecture, and have worked in close association for some time. This association has inspired new directions and new formats for our work.

NEW FORMATS:

Image Bank: The decision that everything must be taken account of facilitates the creation of an image bank.

IMAGE BANK is primarily a structure for setting up extending stabilizing and reinforcing correspondences, creating a network using the postal system as a means for communications. An image request directory was instigated as the form of "exchange." Requests are published quarterly in FILE magazine and annually as a complete directory. The lists establish communication and ensure the continuation of that communication through the building of image collections. The lists as a continuing device allow each correspondent access to the network.

IMAGE BANK ARCHIVES:

A reading room has been set up at the Front where members will have access to the archives which include documentation of projects and events at the Front as well as correspondence, privately printed papers, publications, slides, film and video. An extension service is being prepared which will make available programs on a subscription basis to groups and institutions.

NEW YORK CORRESP SPONGE DANCE SCHOOL OF VANCOUVER:

A cross between correspondence and choreography dealing with meetings, mailings and events. The school covers the personal, informal and social aspects of the members of The Western Front and The Eternal Network. Meetings every Thursday at The Crystal Pool—9 p.m.—all welcome.

FILE magazine:

FILE magazine is the magazine of the network published by General Idea, a group of Toronto artists. The magazine is dedicated for those to whom living is a fine art. Appearing quarterly, it is available by subscription to artists and other individuals for $2.00; businesses and institutions $5.00/year, from 241 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario.

LEOPARD REALITY / BANAL BEAUTY

The territory claimed by Dr. Brute in his intensive and collaborative research on the ongoing phenomena of kitsch and its brutalizing presents in the culture.


This work conceived by Glenn Lewis and commissioned for The National Research Library in Ottawa is the major work of The New York Corres Sponge Dance School. Members were invited to send colour slides and works of artists who had participated in the national safety deposit boxes each with a date from 1620 to 1984 forming a 365 year calendar. The work exists on a multitude of levels and could be published. In conceiving the work which had to be installed in January 1974 it was necessary to anticipate many special and unknown considerations in content and context. Thus a date in the future was fixed upon to accommodate cross referencing and other processing.

THE IMAGE BANK POSTCARD SHOW.

The most comprehensive survey of artists' use of the postcard with over 5000 examples of the genre accumulated by Image Bank as evidence of the network. The show was first exhibited at The Fine Arts Gallery, U.B.C. in October 1971 and is still being circulated across the country by The National Gallery.

HELIX. A composition for strings, flute, bass, clarinet, tuba and tape by Martin Bartlett performed by The New Music Ensemble of San Francisco Museum of Art. The San Francisco Examiner music critic Arthur Bloomfield wrote, "HELIX emerged as a really important, entertaining new piece... which always knew where it was going and got there with great poise and a supernal but graceful propulsion.

ART'S BIRTHDAY. THE HOLLYWOOD DECCA DANCE. This event will be the first to bring together an international group of artists who have been working on developing networks. Instigated by Mr. Peanut and Lowell Darling of Fat City School of Finds Art, it will take place on the 3rd of February 1974 in Hollywood, California. The event will celebrate the one million and eleventh birthday of art, a concept started by Robert Filliou ten years ago which envisions a world-wide school vacation. A paid holiday for all the workers of the world. All-round festivities and spontaneous fun-making. There will be entertainments, a dinner and the deca dance. There will be no art because 1,000,011 years art was and 1,000,011 years from now it will again be.

THE PAST YEAR.

Since taking occupancy of The Western Front last March we have become a centre on the subliminal for the Eternal Network. The following will give a brief indication of some of the highlights of the variety of situations that have been presented at The Western Front:

Robert Cumming/L.A./Network Superstar/Ace Photographer/Lure of the Sea/Training in the Arts.

Dana Archie/ACE Space Co./Notebook/Space Atlas.

Tom Dean/Beaux Arts Magazine, Montreal.

Marien Lewis/A Space, Toronto.

Robert Filliou/The Eternal Network/France.

Art Farm/House of the Century/20/20 Vision/T.V.T.V./Inflatoookbook/Houston, San Francisco.

Willooughby Sharp & Liza Bear/Avalanche Magazine and video/N.Y.C.

General Idea/FILE magazine/Toronto

Freude Bartlett/Serious Business Co./Film/S.F.

We have also participated in two important international exhibitions: TRAJECTOIRE 73, organized by the Canada Council for The Musee d'Art Contemporain, Paris, France and ACTION DER AVANT GARDE at the Berliner Kunssverein as well as Pacific Vibrations in Vancouver where, besides the evening of performance, Dr. Brute managed to claim the gallery for Brutopia by camouflaging its exterior in Leopard Skin.

THE COMING YEAR.

We have been preparing a series of important events to be presented during the next six months, three of them to be concerned with new directions in music and three to deal with communications and the visual arts. Assisted by a grant from the Canada Council's Exploration Program, this series will present the work of artists working at The Western Front and members of the network of new artistic research that has been developing over the past few years. Wednesday evening is members' night from 9 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. and people wishing more information about our activities are welcome to attend. We hope that The Western Front will provide an environment that will make a contribution to the contemporary climate of ideas.

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The International Exchange Directory is available from Talon Books, 201-1019 East Cordova, Vancouver 8.
The ubiquitous telephone and telegraph lines, a part of the Canadian landscape for years, are now one of many transmission installations.
If you are too successful, and have nostalgia for the days when you were not,
if you are unsuccessful, and hope some day success will knock at your door.
if you are too beautiful, and find men in the street are bothersome,
if you are ugly, madame, and wish you were beautiful,
if you sleep profoundly at night, and feel that it is a waste of time,
if you suffer from insomnia, and have time on your hands,
if you have teeth, and no meat,
if you have meat, and no teeth,
if you have teeth, and no meat.

then come to see the
FESTIVAL OF MISFITS

built by people who sometimes sleep soundly, sometimes don't;
sometimes are hungry; sometimes overfed; sometimes feel young,
rich and handsome, sometimes old, ugly and poor; sometimes
believe in themselves, sometimes don't; sometimes are artists,
sometimes not.
We make music which is not Music, poems that are not Poetry,
paintings that are not Painting, but
music that may fit poetry
poetry that may fit paintings
paintings that may fit . . . something,
something which gives us the chance to enjoy a happy, non-
specialized fantasy.

Try it
THE FESTIVAL OF MISFITS

Robert Filliou, one-eyed good-for-nothing Huguenot
Addi Koppke, German professional revolutionist
Gustav Metzger, escaped Jew
Robin Page, Yukon lumberjack
Benjamin Patterson, captured alive Negro
Daniel Spoerri, Rumanian adventurer
Per Olof Ultvedt, the red-faced strongman from Sweden
Ben Vauthier, God's broker
Emmett Williams, the Pole with the elephant memory

You are invited to the opening between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. on 23rd October. The Festival will continue until Thursday 8th November. Admission 2s. 6d.

In conjunction with the Festival there will be a special evening at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Dover Street at 8.15 on Wednesday, 24th October, which will include a 5.1 kilo poem by Robert Filliou, an Alphabet Symphony by Emmett Williams, a Paper Piece and The Triumph of Egg by Benjamin Patterson and a Do-it-yourself Chorale by Daniel Spoerri.
Figure 5
Dick Higgins, 1,000 Symphonies. Three segments of a seven part musical score made by machine gun, each 52.1 x 44.4 cm., 1963. Courtesy Emily Harvey Gallery.

Figure 6
"Live without dead time!" — "Enjoy without restraint!"
Figure 11
Figures 13, 14
RESOLUTION ON THE ETERNAL NETWORK

1- No lives (cited 1.12) to have been the last research mathematician to 'know all the mathematics of his time.' Minimum information on top-flight modern mathematics would require a book of at least 7,000 pages, more than any one living mathematician could comprehend.

2- We lose 'mathematician' by 'artist', 'mathematics' by 'art' (but not to replace 'volcano' by ?).

3- If it is true that information about and knowledge of all modern art research is more than any one artist could comprehend, then the concept of 'avant-garde' is obsolete. With incomplete knowledge, who can say who is in front, and who isn't?

4- I suggest that considering each artist as part of an Eternal Network is a much more useful concept. Here's a definition of the Eternal Network developed by George Brecht and myself out of a proposition (in Date Semiotics) running through my 'Druidic and Labyrinthic' Performing Arts:

   there is always someone sleeping; someone awake
   someone dreaming, someone dreaming awake
   someone eating; someone hungry
   someone fighting; someone loving
   someone talking; someone house
   someone travelling; someone staying put
   someone helping; someone hindering
   someone working; someone suffering
   someone starting; someone stopping

   THE NETWORK IS ETERNAL (everlasting)

5- How do you react to it? Do the assertion that nowadays the Eternal Network is a more useful concept than the Avant-Garde, I mean?

R. Fillion
10 July 1973

Figure 15
Figure 16
Il y a toujours quelqu'un qui fait fortune quelqu'un qui fait...

BANQUEROUTE

(nous en particulier)

La Cédille qui Sourit tourne encore la page, et puisque...

La Fête est Permanente annonce la réalisation prochaine de

THE ETERNAL NETWORK

manifestations, meanderings, méditations, microcosms, macrocosms, mixtures, meanings...

La Cédille qui Sourit, 12, Rue de May, Villefranche-s-Mer (a-m)

Figure 17
GEORGE BRECHT, WATER YAM (1963), PLASTIC BOX WITH OFFSET ON PAPER LABEL, CARDS, 5 1/8 x 7 1/8 x 1 1/8. COLLECTION WALKER ART CENTER.

Figure 18
Figure 20
THE WAGNETTES with portable radios listen in as the SONI TWINS broadcast A BORDERLINE CASE direct from LURE OF THE SEA
A LUX RADIO THEATRE presentation

Figure 23
To win your 15-day dream vacation, or any of the other great prizes, just pick up a Mr. Peanut® Sweepstakes form wherever you shop. And while you're there, be sure to stock up on nutritious Planters Nuts, too.

652 other prizes: 2-2nd prizes—Camping trailer that sleeps four. 50-3rd prizes—Super 8 Zoom Movie Camera. 100-4th prizes—2-piece matching luggage set. 500-5th prizes—Handsome travel clock. All prizes will be awarded.

Get your entry form the next time you shop.

With Planters, you'll have the whole world eating out of your hand.
In fact it was marvellous!

Figure 26
DECCA-DANCE SALUTES NETWORK

GOSSIP'S ALIVE BETWEEN GRANADA GAZELLE AND NOAH DAKOTA

COUNT FANZINI AND LOVELY ENVELOPE BEARER JUDY D'OR

Figure 27
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