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"Time-Savers: Bertram Brooker and the Politics of Time and Material Culture"

Adam Lauder

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TIME-SAVERS: BERTRAM BROOKER AND THE POLITICS OF TIME AND MATERIAL CULTURE

ADAM LAUDER

Résumé

Les écrits et les oeuvres en art visuel tardifs de Bertram Brooker (1888-1955) représentent un pont inédit entre le discours du moderniste anglais Wyndham Lewis sur l'espace-temps et la **Toronto School of Communication**. *La production multidisciplinaire de cet artiste et publicitaire qui s'étend des années 1930 jusqu'au milieu des années 1950 revisite en effet son intérêt plus ancien pour les concepts bergsoniens de durée et de flux, tel qu'il avait exprimé en des tableaux abstraits et des articles durant les années 1920 pour le magazine* **Marketing**. *Ses illustrations pour* **The Canadian Forum** *et son manuscrit non-publié intitulé* **The Brave Voice** *(ca. 1953-55) révèlent une conscience nouvelle des limites du paradigme bergsonien ainsi qu'une reconnaissance très vive de son potentiel critique face à la modernité aux lendemains du crash boursier de 1929.*

Abstract

The late writings and visual art of Bertram Brooker (1888-1955) represent an overlooked bridge between the space-time discourse of British modernist Wyndham Lewis and the Toronto School of Communication. The Canadian artist-advertiser's multidisciplinary production of the 1930s through the mid-1950s revisits his earlier thematization of Bergsonian concepts of duration and "flux" in abstract canvases and articles for Marketing magazine of the 1920s. Yet his illustrations for The Canadian Forum and the unpublished manuscript The Brave Voices (ca. 1953-55) reveal a fresh awareness of the limits of the Bergsonian paradigm as well as a deepening recognition of its implications as a critique of modernity following the stock market crash of 1929.

Introduction

The art and advertising of Bertram Brooker (1888-1955) stands at the head of a distinctively Canadian discourse on the "politics of time" and material culture (see Antliff). Even prior to purchasing the Toronto-based Marketing magazine in November 1924, Brooker had initiated a critical dialogue with dominant advertising culture in the pages of the leading American trade paper, *Printers' Ink*, that built upon the arguments of Henri Bergson. Drawing on the French philosopher's popular texts "Laughter" and *Creative Evolution*, Brooker pitted the "flux" of Bergson's non-rational conception of temporality as *durée* against the static, spatial bias of American "reason-why" copy and its behaviourist construction of consumer subjectivity (see Surrey, "Making Orders"; Surrey, "Are Statistics"; Spane, "Make Advertising"; Johnston; Luff; Lauder, "It's Alive!"). In retrospect, this dualistic framework can be recognized as having set the stage for Canadian political economist Harold Innis's subsequent "plea for time" in the face of what he viewed as a neo-imperialistic American culture industry in the 1950s. Brooker's innovative advertising writings and cubo-futurist visual art and graphic designs of the 1920s celebrated qualitative "becoming" in a fashion recalling the earlier Bergsonian modernisms of European Futurist, Vorticist, and Rhythmist movements, but adapted to the struggle for Canadian cultural and economic sovereignty (c.f. Brooker, "How American"; see also Dyer, "Why We Buy"; Love, "C.N.R.").

This article examines a related but as of yet largely overlooked dimension of the Toronto artist-advertiser's writings and visual art: namely their harnessing of Bergsonian constructions of temporality to critique the institutions and instruments of modernity, particularly the media of communication. Clearing a path for the analyses of space subsequently articulated by Toronto School theorists including Innis and Marshall McLuhan, Brooker's post-1929 graphic designs, visual art, and writings revisit his earlier valorization of flux to explore the limits of media and modernization. Some of the strategies developed by the artist-advertiser to mount this critical project resonate with the earlier experiments of the Canadian-born British artist-author Wyndham Lewis. However, in stark contrast to the ultra-conservative political trajectory Lewis pursued during the same period, the 1930s saw Brooker increasingly seize upon the socialist potential of Bergsonian temporality as a meditation on the plight of those left behind by technological progress amidst the deprivations of the Great Depression. Subsequently, in the 1940s and 1950s, Brooker's writings revisited Bergson's theories, but in a speculative vein that reveals a deepening awareness of the dangers implied by unchecked spatial ambitions.

This article performs the first close reading of specific artifacts of material culture produced by Brooker during the 1930s, notably illustrations published in the socialist magazine *The Canadian Forum*, as well as the late unpublished manuscript, *The Brave Voices* (ca. 1953-55)—a magisterial *summa* of his Bergsonian insights on media and modernity. This assessment of Brooker's meditations on the shifting politics of time and material culture spanning the Depression years through the postwar period will also provide an opportunity to test Gregory Betts's recent characterization of Brooker as a "Canadian Vorticist" (see *Avant-garde* 215-16).

Biography

Brooker was a British-born multimedia modernist whose diverse achievements negotiated avant-garde developments in Europe and the growing influence of the American culture industry from a distinctly Canadian position of marginality. After emigrating with his family to Portage la Prairie, Manitoba in 1905, the future artist-advertiser worked as a timekeeper for the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway prior to opening a cinema with his brother in nearby Neepawa. This experience as a movie house operator likely acted as a catalyst for the scenarios he penned in 1912-13 that were adapted into a series of silent films by the Brooklyn-based Vitagraph Company of America, starring Maurice Costello as the eponymous sleuth Lambert Chase (see Lauder, "It's Alive!" 96, 104n93). Brooker's early participation in film culture likely contributed to his later exploration of time-based forms in his texts and visual art. In parallel with this activity as a screenwriter, Brooker undertook work as a journalist and commercial artist for a variety of prairie papers, eventually becoming Promotion Manager for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. He also wrote a regular humour and traffic column for the latter publication, "Gasograms by Honk," whose free-ranging musings on art and current events anticipated the studied scattershot quality of McLuhan's analyses.

In 1921, Brooker moved to Toronto to work as a regular contributor to the advertising trade paper *Marketing and Business Management*, which he later purchased. In 1923, *Marketing* published Brooker's first monograph, Subconscious Selling. This recently rediscovered title applied techniques of "autosuggestion" developed by the French pharmacist Émile Coué—progenitor of the popular mantra "Day by day, in every way, I'm getting better and better" (Brooks 28)—to practical problems in salesmanship (see Lauder, "Bertram Brooker's Practice-based Advertising Theory"). The text is significant, in part, for its adaptation of Bergsonian concepts and vocabulary to its presentation of Couéist psychology for a non-specialist audience. This Bergsonian inflection set the stage for Brooker's full-fledged writings on Bergson for *Marketing* and other journals later in the decade. As editor and publisher of *Marketing* from 1924 until the close of 1927,

Brooker explored a Bergsonian "metaphysics of media" (Crocker), experimenting with synesthetic alternatives to established print conventions that also responded to the radio craze thæat swept Canadian consumers beginning in 1922 (see Weir). Brooker's multimodal media investigations in the pages of *Marketing* identify him as a key precursor of the auditory paradigm enshrined in Toronto School communications theory. In 1927, Brooker was the subject of Canada's first solo exhibition of abstract art—likewise inspired by auditory concerns (see Williams)—sponsored by Group of Seven members Arthur Lismer and Lawren Harris at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto (see Reid).

Brooker's prolific writings for *Marketing* and the American business journal *Printers' Ink* were revised and compiled in two influential volumes issued by McGraw-Hill: *Layout Technique in Advertising* (1929) and *Copy Technique in Advertising* (1930) (see Cavell; Willmott). Following a period of freelance work, Brooker returned to the advertising world in 1930, accepting a position with the prestigious firm of J.J. Gibbons as head of the first media and research department in Canada (Johnston 210). Brooker then moved to MacLaren Advertising in 1934, where he retired as vice-president in the year of his death.

The resoundingly negative response to Brooker's pioneering 1927 exhibition likely encouraged his turn away from abstraction and generally lower public profile of later years. Nonetheless he continued to exhibit and publish throughout the 1930s and 1940s, being awarded with the first Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1937 (then named the Lord Tweedsmuir Award) for his novel *Think of the Earth*. Despite perceptions of diminished radicalism, unexhibited canvases and unpublished manuscripts from Brooker's archives and estate attest to a relentless spirit of experimentation and inquiry. Yet, though a respected member of Toronto's advertising, art, and literary communities, since his death in 1955 the overall trajectory of Brooker's multidisciplinary achievements and broader contributions to Canadian culture remained elusive until recent, revisionist studies.

"Service Products" and the Ambivalent Politics of Time-Saving

Electric power, equally available in the farmhouse and the Executive Suite, permits any place to be a centre, and does not require large aggregations. This reverse pattern appeared quite early in electrical 'labour-saving' devices, whether toaster or washing machine or vacuum cleaner. Instead of saving work, these devices permit everybody to do his own work. What the nineteenth century had delegated to servants and housemaids we now do for ourselves. This principle applies in toto in the electric age.

In the above passage from *Understanding Media,* Marshall McLuhan draws attention to the ambivalent legacy of technologies marketed as labour-sav-ing devices; for example, an unintended consequence of products such as the vacuum cleaner is the transformation of leisure-seeking consumers into harried self-service providers (36). Despite embracing James Joyce's participatory dictum, "my consumers, are they not also my producers?" (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* 205), as a model for his own theorization of reader reception as a process of creative "making," McLuhan was markedly less optimistic in his comments on "service products"—technologies intended to replace human labour that, as Jonathan Gershuny observes, paradoxically contributed to a "self-service economy" (81; see also Webster 51). This contradiction instantiates an abiding paradox in Toronto School communication theory, which simultaneously valorizes time as a dialogical counter to the alleged spatial bias of the American culture industries (see Comor; Zhao), but criticizes the effects of time-saving technologies and time-binding media such as radio for contributing to everything from the Great Depression and World War II to the post-war rise of an oppressive service economy. In some ways, these tensions anticipate recent critiques of the creative economy (see Boltanski and Ève Chiapelo), thereby complicating representations of McLuhan in particular as a naïve proselytizer of an exploitive cognitive capitalism.

Brooker's marketing texts and graphic designs articulate a similarly ambivalent discourse on time-based media and time-saving technologies, as both potential instruments of social redemption and "destroyers" of established social patterns. This anticipatory quality of Brooker's *oeuvre* is partly explained by a shared encounter with Bergson (see Cavell; Marchessault, *Marshall McLuhan*; Darroch

and Marchessault). Clearing a path for McLuhan's commentary on time-savers more than 30 years later, Brooker's analysis of an advertisement for Hoover vacuum cleaners (Fig. 1) in his 1929 McGraw-Hill textbook, *Layout Technique in Advertising*, singles out the iconic labour-saver as bringing into representation a Bergsonian "world made up of 'events,' rather than of objects" (174). Discussing the composition of the Hoover ad, in which a vacuum is encircled by its cord with numeric bullets distributed to suggest a clock face, Booker comments: "[S]*omething has happened* to this circle. It is broken, and leads into a *series* of curves which are extremely active. They are going somewhere and doing something. In other words, these curves are 'events' rather than 'forms'" (176). This analysis follows on the heels of an unlikely commentary on Albert Einstein and Oswald Spengler as the heralds of a new conception of the "world-as-history" (174). Such seemingly tangential excursions into philosophy and physics are commonplace in Brooker's writings, whose astonishing transdisciplinarity anticipates the media experiments of McLuhan and Edward Carpenter's Explorations group of the 1950s (see Darroch and Marchessault).

The optimistic rhetoric of Brooker's Bergsonian reading of the Hoover ad parallels his comments in a March, 1929 piece for *Marketing*, "Visualize Events—Not Things in Advertising Copy." Similarly drawing on the physics of Einstein and employing a Bergsonian vocabulary of "flux," "stream" and "vortex," Brooker defines the successful advertisement as the projection of "the universe as a flux of energy" (161). Unsurprisingly, Brooker's own graphic designs and abstract paintings (the first to be shown in a solo exhibition in Canada) employ a geometric vocabulary that, in the words of Joyce Zemans, communicates qualities of "rhythmic biomorphic energy and flow" redolent of Bergson's *durée* (30). A representative series of ads designed by Brooker for the national daily *The Globe* ran in the fall of 1928. Echoing his gloss on the Hoover ad in *Layout Technique*, Brooker employs stylized clock faces in tandem with geometric motifs to represent the product as "a happening" (Spane, "Visualize Events" 162).

Brooker's exploration of Futurist principles of dynamism, energy, and flux in his writings, graphic designs, and visual art of the 1920s was abruptly cut short by the stock market crash of October, 1929. A meeting in the summer of that year with the Winnipeg artist Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald (1890-1956) is usually cited as the impetus for the subsequent sea change in Brooker's art practice, which saw him switch to a realist style reminiscent of the Precisionism of the American Charles Sheeler. However, it is likely that the pressures affecting Brooker's production were as much economic as aesthetic, the artist-advertiser having returned to full-time employment in 1930 after working for several years as a freelancer.

Fig. 1. The Hoover Company, "Positive Agitation," in *Layout Technique*, 1929.
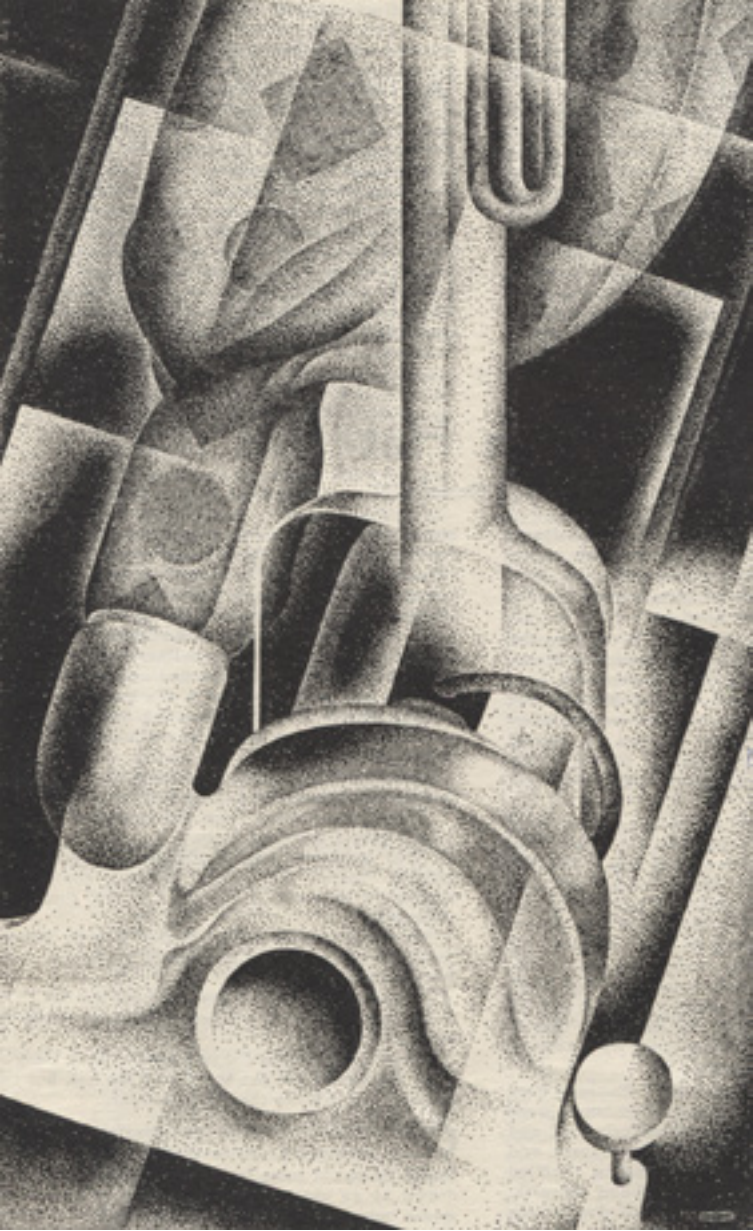
Dennis Reid notes that as the 1930s progressed, Brooker revisited abstraction, but in a more restrained, Cubist style. However, two drawings published in *The Canadian Forum* in July and November 1936 stand out from Brooker's relatively placid production of that turbulent decade: *Vacuum Cleaner* (1936) and *Lawn Mower* (1936) (Figs. 2 & 3)—though formally similar to the contemporaneous canvases *Blue Nude* (1937) and *Entombment* (1937)—are distinguished by their fusion of consumer products and geometric abstraction, a strategy recalling Brooker's advertisements for *The Globe* nearly a decade earlier. Yet these are not advertisements; in their use of unconventional perspective, they match Charles Hill's description of domestic still-life works by Brooker from the same years, such as *Ski Poles* (1936): "The arbitrary perspective projects the objects forward," states Hill, "creating a vertical as well as horizontal progression" (94). However, unlike *Ski Poles*, *Vacuum Cleaner* and *Lawn Mower* do not depict the "typically Canadian subject matter" of winter sport (94). The drawings' inclusion in the pages of the *The Canadian Forum*—which Hill characterizes as the "mouthpiece for the League for Social Reconstruction and the C.C.F. (Commonwealth Cooperative Federation, forerunner of the New Democratic Party)" and a forum for the discussion of Marxist topics—is, on a first reading, all the more puzzling. What are these drawings, seemingly glorifying the products of the very capitalist system habitually criticized by *Forum* contributors, doing rubbing shoulders with articles on Soviet Russia and the Spanish Civil War?
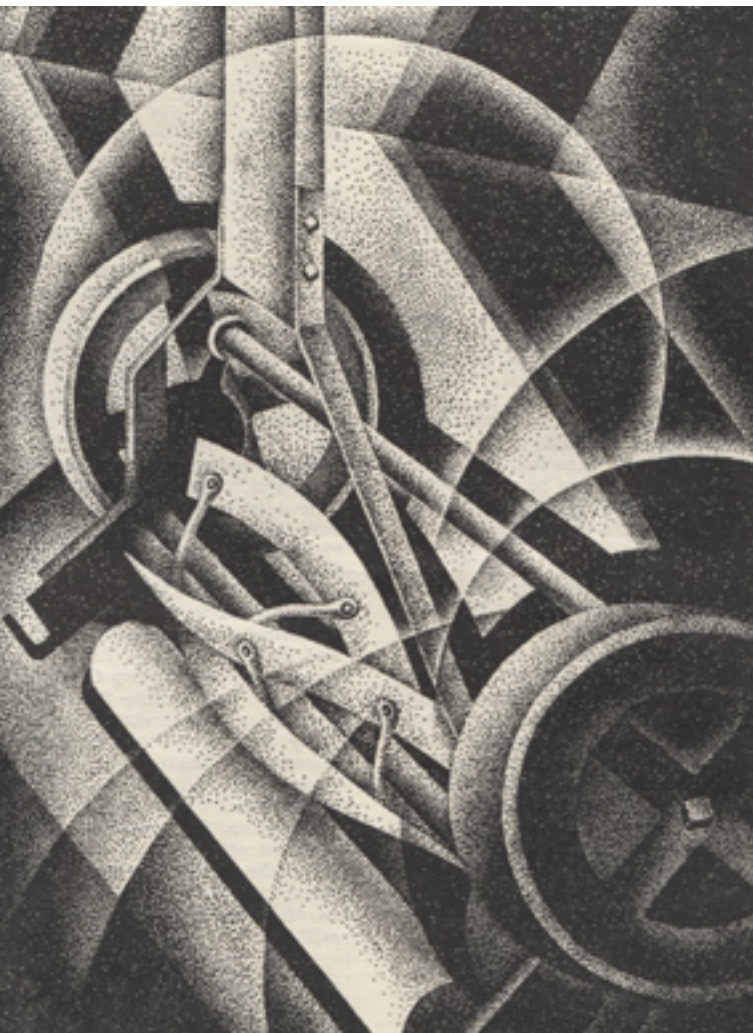
Despite the "surprise" with which Hill greets Brooker's socially committed stance of the 1930s—seeing it as an aberration in a career otherwise devoted to "individual aesthetic expression" (15, 16)—Anna Hudson's dissertation places Brooker squarely within a "socially-conscious modern movement of painting in Canada" ("Art and Social Progress" 33).

Fig. 2. (top) Bertram Brooker, "Vacuum Cleaner," in *The Canadian Forum*, July 1936.

Fig. 3. (bottom) Bertram Brooker, "Lawn Mower," in *The Canadian Forum*, November 1936.

Yet, while firmly locating Brooker within a milieu that included such known socialists as Paraskeva Clark, Hudson has more recently admitted that, "[m]y attempts to read social consciousness into Canadian painting of the 1930s and 1940s ended in frustration: what, after all, is political or propagandistic about works like Bertram Brooker's *Still Life with Bag No. 3* […]?" ("Time and Image" 56). Where Hudson's recent scholarship proposes to wrest a progressive agenda from Brooker's work by situating his exploration of time and space within a discourse on "scientific humanism" (ibid. 58), I argue that the artist's social consciousness emerges, rather, from his Bergsonian critique of scientific progress and modernization.

If this anti-triumphalist stance is more opaque in visual works such as Brooker's illustrations for *The Canadian Forum*, Gregory Betts has lucidly demonstrated that the artist's coeval works of short fiction draw attention to the social consequences of rapid modernization: "his characters," writes Betts, "are distinctly ill-suited to handle the unique pressures of modernity" ("Introduction" xxx). "Mrs. Hungerford's Milk," published in a 1934 issue of *The Canadian Forum* between articles on Marxism and the state of the labour movement, narrates the plight of farmer Joe Snell, who refuses to bow to the pressures of "keeping up to date" by upgrading his farm equipment (138). This poignant allegory of technological dependency may have been an oblique response to an earlier *Forum* article by the Winnipeg Journalist Leonard Hungerford. In "The Consumer Listens In," Hungerford reported on a meeting of parliament early in the premiership of R.B. Bennett:

I was the consumer and I was listening in. For three hours I listened and watched. I became convinced that I'd pay more for good fruit and for first-class butter, suspicious that I'd pay more for good clothes and good shoes, and was made to entertain the surmise that perhaps I'd have more money with which to pay more. And as for the farmer.… I decided to hurry home to ask **Alice in Wonderland** *about the farmer. (93)*

Hungerford's adoption of the consumer's perspective as a political lens undoubtedly would have been have resonant for Brooker, whose writings on advertising topics were among the first in North America to articulate themes that would later cohere in the "Consumer's Movement" of the 1930s (see Bartels 52, 59). Brooker's advertising texts of the 1920s exhorted the copywriter to adopt a participatory tone that would recast the manipulative valence of the conventional sales pitch as participatory interaction. However, as Betts's gloss on Brooker's short fiction suggests, by the following decade the theme of consumption had assumed a more politically ambivalent cast in the artist's writings. The new truck that Joe Snell's brother urges him to purchase in "Mrs. Hungerford's Milk" is as much a symbol of the protagonist's failure to adapt to the pressures of modernity as a potential agent of "technological revolution" (Betts, "Introduction" xxix). A similarly conflicted picture of the legacies of modernization and of the Bergsonian politics of "creativity" promulgated by his advertising texts of the 1920s emerges from Brooker's poem "The Destroyer," penned on the eve of the Depression, an excerpt of which is reproduced below:

what have I to do with creating

I am come back only to destroy
(qtd. in Betts, Avant-garde *120).*

When viewed within the transformed perspective on the commodity that emerges from Betts's reading of Brooker's Depression-era short fiction, the artist's illustrations of consumer goods for *The Canadian Forum* assume radically new meanings as critical appropriations of material culture that comment on the unintended social effects of technological progress. I argue that this strategy suggests analogies with the tactics developed earlier by British Vorticist artists.

Fig. 4. (top) Bertram Brooker, *The Romance of Trade Marks,* ca. 1912-1915. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.8 cm. Courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Fig. 5. (bottom) Bertram Brooker, *Reznor*, ca. 1912-1915. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.7 cm. Courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.
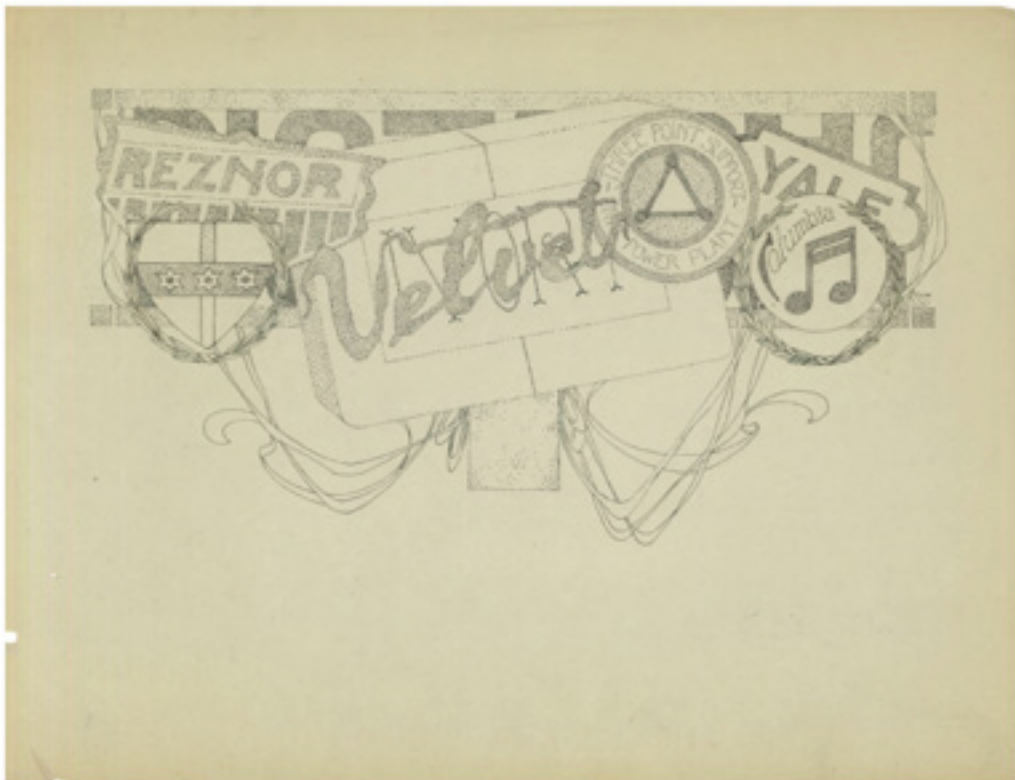
The bold typography and sensational language of the Vorticist little magazine *Blast* (1914-15) seized upon the potential of advertising to function as what Andrew Wernick (qtd. in Reynolds) terms "rhetorical form" (240). Building on the earlier promotional strategies of Italian Futurists such as F.T. Marinetti, but appropriating the products of British mass culture, *Blast* staged a "visual text" targeting the pretensions of the Royal Academy as well as the social disengagement of foreign avant-gardes (Tuma 403; see also Reynolds 244). Rather than critiquing the institution of advertising *per se*, the Vorticists positioned the artist as "a creature of the media" (Klein 137).

While Wyndham Lewis, the ringmaster of this media circus, would develop into a notorious critic of advertising and other ideological instruments of liberal democracy in the wake of the devastation wrought by World War I (see Rosenquist 61), Tuma underlines that, "*Blast* marks a moment—important to recover now that the situation has changed so—when it did not occur to avant-gardists to pit their work against popular culture" (403). An allied vision of a utopian merger of art and advertising emerges from early drawings by Brooker dating from the same period as *Blast*. Executed during his years in Neepawa, Manitoba (Zemans 18), ink drawings such as *The Romance of Trademarks* (ca. 1912-15) and *Reznor* (ca. 1912-15) (Figs. 4 & 5) harness the artist's growing command of graphic design—acquired through his work as an illustrator for newspapers in Neepawa, Regina and Winnipeg—to collage commercial trademarks into intricate avant-garde compositions. While Betts dubs the related drawing, *Decadent* (ca. 1912-15), a "visual poem" (*Avant-garde* 132), Brooker's explorations of advertising as an aesthetic medium are clearly linked to a contemporaneous body of drawings and watercolours likewise housed today in the archives of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Ontario, including *The Cult of Ugliness*, which Zemans reads as responding to press coverage of the Chicago installation of the 1913 Armory Show (18).

Several writers, preeminently Betts, have suggested a Vorticist influence on Brooker's multimedia production. Brooker's direct references to Lewis confirm the Canadian artist's familiarity with the movement's chief spokesperson by the time that the latter's anti-advertising polemic *Time and Western Man* appeared in 1927 ("Blake"; "Prophets Wanted"). An earlier point of contact is not out of the question; Blast had Canadian

distribution through Bell & Cockburn, the Toronto agent of publisher John Lane (see Lauder, "It's Alive!" 102n35). Whether or not *The Romance of Trademarks* and *Reznor* reveal a direct Vorticist influence, they deploy strategies reminiscent of avant-garde little magazines to engage in a proto-Pop discourse on the rapprochement of high and low cultural forms paralleling Vorticist artists' coeval valorization of material culture as "the real national art" (Tuma 405). Brooker's *Blast*-like manifesto, "The Decay of Art" (ca. 1912-15), gives literary expression to the integration of material culture and avant-gardism visualized in these drawings in a fashion recalling Vorticism's strategic inhabitation of popular culture:

> *Commercialism is developing the minds of thousands who were once serfs, and creating a new race, such as Mr. H.G. Wells anticipates will be the strength and stay of the New Republic. Commercialism is linking art with life, and giving every man an occupation worth living for. (n. pag.)*

Brooker's Vorticist-like embrace of commercial culture in this early text looks forward to McLuhan's critique of the high-cultural pretensions of the 1951 Massey Report in *Counterblast*: his homage to Lewis's irreverent fusion of popular and avant-garde forms in *Blast* (see also Stanners).

The optimistic embrace of advertising that characterizes Brooker's Neepawa drawings has evaporated from his illustrations for *The Canadian Forum* of two decades later. Encountered within the context of the journal's solemn tone of social criticism, the drawings' residual qualities of Bergsonian dynamism now read as sarcasm. In a dialectical move recalling Lewis's harnessing of Bergson's dualism to stage oppositional dramas that Paul Edwards interprets as allegories of "dynamism […] blocked by the sheer recalcitrance of matter" (43), Brooker's *Canadian Forum* illustrations express a socially motivated comic turn. As early as February 1924, Brooker had explored Bergson's theorization of the comic as the mechanistic complement to the *élan vital* in "Laughter" as a possible resource to advertisers (see Surrey, "Making Orders"). Yet the biting social critique of advertising and the limits of technological progress and its claims of time-saving to which Brooker yokes Bergsonian comedy in his *Canadian Forum* illustrations is completely foreign to the celebration of vitalist temporality that dominated his commercial designs and

marketing texts of the 1920s. If Brooker's appeals to Bergson during the boom years of the 1920s are representative of the "qualitative time" identified by Harry Harootunian as a widespread interwar reaction to the industrial schedules of modernity (479-80), his *Canadian Forum* illustrations explore the critical possibilities of the French philosopher's conceptualization of the comic as embodying the material limits of creative evolution.

The implosion of vitalist temporality visualized by the Bergsonian comedy of Brooker's *Canadian Forum* interventions resembles the winnowing horizon of expectation that confronts characters like Joe Snell in his short fiction of the same period. Much as the new truck that Snell refuses to purchase simultaneously symbolizes the advertising industry's hollow rhetoric of organic temporality and the rewards of modernization denied those unable to afford the price, Brooker's *Vacuum Cleaner* and *Lawn Mower* embody both the limits of progress and advertising's false aura of vitality.

Brooker's questioning of the modernist ideology of progress is even more overt in his 1939 painting *The Recluse* (Fig. 6), in which the defiant gaze of a vagabond confronts the viewer. The drab clothing of the gaunt figure contrasts sharply with the iconography of progress and electric palette of the background: a receding line of telephone poles, whose cruciform outlines conjure the salvational drama of Golgotha, that seems to represent all the benefits of modernity that have been denied the social outcast. It is significant that Brooker has chosen telephone wires—symbols of the same nexus of empire and communications of which his own work in advertising was an increasingly integral component in Canada—to visualize the limits of modernity, thereby implicating this late painting within the same discourse on advertising, modernity, and time as the artist's lesser-known, but no less poignant, illustrations for *The Canadian Forum*.

Fig. 6. Bertram Brooker, *The Recluse*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 61 x 45.7 cm. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Walter Klinkhoff, 1978.3. Photo courtesy MMFA.

The shift in Brooker's perspective on commerce and technology, from the optimism of his early Neepawa drawings to the relative pessimism of *Vacuum Cleaner, Lawn Mower*, and *The Recluse,* to some extent parallels the fluctuating trajectory of Lewis's relationship to advertising during the same period. Although Betts downplays the disparity, Rosenquist notes the contradictory character of the pre- and post-war Vorticist, observing that, "the two Lewises are difficult to reconcile" (34). If the early Lewis of *Blast* held out hope that the inspired leadership of the avant-garde artist could stimulate social transformation through a strategic redeployment of advertising and other popular forms, by 1919 the artist-author had begun to reverse this position (see Foshay). In *The Caliph's Design* Lewis chastised the post-war output of fellow modernists, including Picasso, for degenerating into a mere "reflection of fashion" (Rosenquist 43). This theme was subsequently taken up at greater length in *Time and Western Man*, in which the target of the British artist-author's critique of mass culture shifted from fashion to advertising.

Brooker's writings of the 1930s document the Canadian's reception of Lewis's contributions to the post-war debate on high and low culture as a conflict of "time versus space," in which advertising and fashion are identified as symptoms of a Bergsonian "time cult" threatening the classical foundations of Western culture (Rosenquist 54). The plot of Brooker's 1936 potboiler, *The Tangled Miracle*, reprises this Lewisian attitude of media skepticism. As Betts has noted, Brooker's foray into detective fiction explores newspapers' manipulation of a gullible public ("'The Destroyer'" 138, 159–62). The work of Brooker and Lewis thus traces a common path from what Rosenquist has dubbed a pre-war "high modernism involved in marketing itself" (7) to a more critical stance with respect to the effects of mass media on behaviours and perception.

Despite these affinities, Brooker's writings and visual art of the 1930s reflect an ongoing commitment to the very Bergsonian theory so vehemently repudiated by the later Lewis. Yet Brooker's deployment of Bergsonian tropes of temporality during the 1930s was tempered by a newfound attention to the deeper critical dimensions of the French philosopher's paradigm that was likely sharpened by the Canadian's reading of Lewis. Somewhat paradoxically, the artist's exposure to the hardships of the Depression years encouraged a commitment to social justice, reflected in his contributions to *The Canadian Forum*, that was antithetical to Lewis's growing elitism and flirtation with fascist politics during the same period.

The crypto-socialism of Brooker's art and writings of the 1930s was obscured by the delayed reception of his earlier celebration of flux by his chief critics, socialist politician Frank Underhill and painter Paraskeva Clark. "[T]here is not much sign," wrote Underhill in a scathing review of Brooker's 1936 *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada*, "that Canadian artists have been moved by the phenomenon of a civilization dissolving before their eyes" (27). Clark and Underhill's high-profile debate with Brooker's associate and apologist, sculptor Elizabeth Wyn Wood, in the pages of *The Canadian Forum* and *New Frontier* in 1936-37, looked back to the ideology of progress promoted by Brooker's work of the 1920s. If the pre-Crash glorification of financial boom criticized by Underhill is epitomized by a 1929 ad for *The Globe* designed by Brooker that celebrates the newspaper medium as a clear "dividing line between above-the-average and below-the-

average families" (19), subsequent works such as *Lawn Mower, The Recluse* and *Vacuum Cleaner* reveal a newfound social conscience to which both Clark and Underhill were oblivious.

Brooker's Spatial Critique

In counterpoint to the socialist turn communicated by Brooker's illustrations for *The Canadian Forum* and *The Recluse*, the artist-advertiser's writings of the 1930s mount a Bergsonian critique of the spatial "bias" of science and technology similarly directed at modernity's ideology of progress. Bergson's most comprehensive statement of this argument is found in *Creative Evolution*, in which he posits that Western philosophy and science alike substitute a "spatialized time" for the "radical becoming" of *durée* (363, 273). However, a critique of scientific systems of measure and the "homogeneous space" imposed by the Western metaphysical tradition on the qualitative multiplicity of non-rational duration is already central to the thesis of *Time and Free Will* (157, 335), Bergson's doctoral dissertation. For Bergson, clock time and the static "forms" of Platonism alike reduce the embodied experience of time as *durée* to rigid schematizations.

Brooker's personal library—preserved today with his papers at the University of Manitoba—document his close reading of Bergson (see Luff). The philosopher's conceptualization of "flux" and creative evolution as counters to the rationalist tradition fuelled the Canadian artist's experimentation with synesthetic and time-based techniques in his advertising and visual art of the 1920s. "Advertising is alive!" Brooker asserted in a 1926 *Marketing* article, "And being alive its development is in accord with those principles of 'creative evolution' which Bergson has postulated of all living things. It is in flux, it is in a constant state of becoming" ("Are Statistics" 115). Yet while Brooker's Bergsonian commitments prior to the Stock Market Crash of 1929 stemmed from a critique of the quantitative and "visual" character of American advertising, the Depression years stimulated a more sweeping reassessment of the spatializing effects of communications media and scientific method that cleared a path for the subsequent writings of his compatriot Harold Innis on the "monopolies of space" generated by print media and the emergent "information industries" (*The Bias* 128, 83).

Brooker first articulates these themes in the 1931 journal article, "Idolaters of Brevity." That text attends, in proto-Innisian fashion, to the "physical urgency of space and time" as forces shaping what it presciently describes as a media "environment" (264). Brooker argues that, "with the popularization of the daily press the idolatry of brevity began in earnest" (265). Setting the stage for Innis's arguments in "The Strategy of Culture" and other essays on newspapers of the 1940s (see Buxton), Brooker posits a direct relationship between the rise of modern journalism and a growing demand for cultural forms characterized by their compressed scale—including short stories, articles, and one-act plays. He concludes that, "[l]iterature in America, seems doomed to be brief" (266). Brooker's thesis in this article echoes elements of Wyndham Lewis's critique of popular culture in *Time and Western Man*. In an early chapter of that text, Lewis writes:

> *Advertisement also implies in a very definite sense a certain attitude to Time. And the attitude proper to it is closely related to the particular time-philosophy [...] that is at once 'timeless' in theory, and very much concerned with Time in practice. Both that conscious philosophy, and the instinctive attitude of the advertising mind towards Time, could be described as a **Time-for-Time's-sake** belief. For both, Time is the permanent fact. Time for the bergsonian or relativist is fundamentally sensation; that is what Bergson's **durée** always conceals beneath its pretentions to metaphysic. It is the glorification of the life-of-the-moment. (11)*

The impact of Lewis's arguments on the pre-McLuhan body of Canadian media theory (see Paul Tiessen) is legible in Innis's paraphrasing in *The Bias of Communication* of the British artist-author's assertion later in this same section of *Time and Western Man*: "The world in which Advertisement dwells is a one-day world" (Lewis 12; see also Innis, *The Bias* 79). Brooker makes a similar formulation in "Idolators of Brevity": "We, concerned more with the *moment* than any past people, deliberately ignore the past and pride ourselves on our 'pure reactions' to the immediate present. And since we live so fast, our reactions and their recording must be brief" (268, emphasis original). Lewis's speculations on the effects of media on perceptions of space and time were clearly influential on the Canadian artist-advertiser's

space-time discourse. Yet Brooker was quick to dismiss Lewis's rejection of the organic philosophy of Bergson and Whitehead, characterizing Lewis as "cloistered and unadventurous" in an essay published in the British journal *The Adelphi*, edited by former Bergsonist and Rhythmist John Middleton Murry ("Prophets Wanted" 193; see also Antliff).

Given his prominence within the advertising profession, it is somewhat surprising to hear Brooker echoing the former Vorticist's critique of publicity in "Prophets Wanted." Sounding very much like the Lewis of *Time and Western Man*, Brooker bemoans the "behavioristic rationalization of experience" in "an age accustomed to advertising" (184, 185). Despite these affinities, Brooker ultimately rejects Lewis's stance for its opposition to "the 'organic' philosophy of creative newness," which he associates with the writings of Murry and Whitehead (192).

Brooker's thesis in this text anticipates Innis's subsequent argument in "The Strategy of Culture"—his harried response to the 1951 Massey Report on Canadian cultural policy—that, "[o]ur poets and painters are reduced to the status of sandwich men" by the influence of American advertising (*Changing Concepts* 11). Like Brooker, Lewis directly influenced Innis's discourse on the space-time effects of media. Yet as Andrew Wernick has noted, Innis's formulation actually reversed the terms of the Vorticist's argument (see Wernick 275). While this transformation may have been a consequence of Innis's notorious habit of composing his later texts through a juxtaposition of loosely re-written quotations (see Marchand 114-15; Marchessault, *Marshall McLuhan*, 95; Watson 352–53), it is more likely evidence of a deliberate practice of reading Lewis against the grain that hearkens to Brooker's earlier non-conforming dialogue with the former Vorticist. Though echoing aspects of Lewis's critique of advertising and mass media, Brooker does so in support of a Bergsonian cosmology of flux, whereas Lewis repudiates the anti-rationalist valence of the French philosopher. Innis's later writings on media embody an allied strategy of appropriating the British artist-author's observations on the formative impact of advertising on perceptions of space and time to advance a program for reviving "oral" and temporal formsto resist the spatial bias that he attributed to the specter of American cultural imperialism.

In retrospect, we can see Brooker's writings and visual interventions of the 1930s—particularly those published in *The Canadian Forum*, which vied for space with articles on political economy by Innis and works of short fiction by his wife, Mary Quayle Innis—as anticipating, and possibly acting as an indirect influence on, the Toronto School theorist's subsequent studies of newspapers and the sensory effects of media in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1920s, Brooker had acted as a member of *The Canadian Forum*'s editorial committee, which also included University of Toronto professor Barker Fairley—an acquaintance of Wyndham Lewis—as well as two of Innis's colleagues in the Department of Political Economy (see Canadian Forum; Mastin 28). During the subsequent period when both Brooker and Innis were active contributors to the magazine, CBC radio pioneer Graham Spry served as editor; Irene Biss, a colleague and confidant of Innis's at this time and another *Forum* contributor, would later marry Spry (see Watson 191-98). Yet the arguments of Brooker's unpublished manuscript *The Brave Voices* (ca. 1953-1955) attest to his status as a true contemporary of both later Innis and his self-proclaimed heir, McLuhan. Brooker's sprawling notes for this unfinished text explore sound- and time-based alternatives to the dominant techno-scientific paradigm of Cold War society in a fashion consistent with the "sound-based paradigm" that Judith Stamps observes in the work of the Toronto School theorists (*Unthinking Modernity* 11).

The Brave Voices

Conceived as a history of "nine words that shaped the world" (its original working title), *The Brave Voices* renewed and intensified the Bergsonian themes that had fuelled Brooker's advertising writings of the 1920s. However, this engagement with the continental thinker's philosophy of flux was tempered in the later text by a critical awareness of the limitations of progress forged by the bitter lessons of the Depression and World War II. Brooker's Bergson-inspired critique of measure as a determinant of knowledge in a military-industrial complex resonates strongly with Innis and McLuhan's contemporaneous riposte to what Stamps terms

the "identity-thinking" of Western metaphysics and commodity capitalism (*Unthinking Modernity* 13): the convention of treating objects in the world as one-to-one representations of abstract categories. A passage from a lengthy draft section of *The Brave Voices* titled "Bergson" gives Brooker's perhaps most explicit formulation of this thematic:

> *If our race discovered and embraced the belief that while we have sought Truth elsewhere, the pursuit of Truth—scientific knowledge—has led us astray from the reality of energy and spirit, which we cannot measure—if we forsook the mistaken search for some sort of 'stuff' of which the world might be made, realizing that there is no 'stuff,' no solidity, no atoms or quanta—these being only measurements, not anything that is, but of something that passed—if we could discard all these measurements and limits and gaps and deficiencies and embrace the amazing fact that life is actually LOVE—we should take a new step in evolution. (n. pag.)*

Brooker's argument in this and similar passages from *The Brave Voices* echoes Bergson's critique of scientific systems of measure as inadequate for describing the "qualitative multiplicity" of subjective experience in *Time and Free Will* (Brooker's annotations to his personal copy of this text—a 1950s reprint preserved at the University of Manitoba—attest to his careful re-reading of Bergson during the composition of *The Brave Voices*). Like Bergson, Brooker avoids the trap of outright anti-positivism, seeing science instead as embodying a fundamentally practical view of matter, one powerless to grasp the essential flux of reality. "[K]nowledge of reality cannot be arrived at through science," writes Brooker in a section of *The Brave Voices* titled "Courage": "The scientific view of the world is not merely a wrong view, it is properly not a *view* at all—it is simply an elaborate collection of diagrams" (n. pag.). Employing a Bergsonian vocabulary of "cuts," "diagrams," and "moulds" to describe the rigidities of quantitative frameworks, *The Brave Voices* proposes a *musical* alternative to empirical knowledge that recalls the durational metaphor of "melody" in *Time and Free Will* (125). In contrast to the quantitative multiplicity furnished by the diagrams of geometry, Bergson opposes "the continuous or qualitative multiplicity" of music (105). Brooker deploys a similar alternative in his resurrection of

the classical Greek conception of nature as *Phusis*, which he describes as "the ever-striving upward ascent of everything in nature" (n. pag.). Brooker ascribes specifically musical qualities to *Phusis* in a section of *The Brave Voices* entitled "A Short Section from Chapter on LOVE":

> *Music is man's closest approach to creating something that moves and exalts our feelings as do the creations of Nature. Words cannot express our feelings when we listen to music. The best we can do is to say that it is sad or gay, frivolous or profound. The untranslatable flow of music, the reasons for its charm and its capacity to haunt our minds with melodies, these are as mysterious as the flow and beauty of life itself. […] The Greeks, as we have seen, gave the name Phusis to the deep spring of action which rises continually throughout Nature and works from within upward in an 'ever-striving ascent.' (n. pag.)*

Phusis serves as a material support for the critique of language that Gregory Betts has recently observed in Brooker's writings (although Betts downplays the Bergsonian foundations of the artist-advertiser's speculations in favour of a "mystical" exegesis that *The Brave Voices* explicitly disavows). Much as Bergson critiques language in *Creative Evolution* for substituting "an external thing" for the living reality of duration (159), Brooker outlines his "philosophy of the verb" in a section of *The Brave Voices* titled "Courage," as promoting a rejuvenation of language: "The verb 'doing' is the very essence of our theme. The worn old nouns have deluded us too long. To regenerate mankind, to re-vitalize morals, to set a mark for conduct, we must think in verbs, in terms of action, of day to day doing" (n. pag.). The "oral" qualities of the reconstructed language envisioned by Brooker in this section are embodied in the structural logic of *The Brave Voices* as a whole, which the artist-advertiser explicitly conceived— as he stated in a "Postscript"—as a patchwork of quotations interacting dialogically:

> *When I was writing fiction I could never create a sense of reality in the characters if I tried to invent dialogue for them, I had to be in a mood of suspension—switching my own voice off, as it were, and simply listening to what the characters would say. With this book the process is the same. As I write I am listening to a thousand voices, ancient and modern, whose words have come to me from distant ages and lands through fifty years of reading. […] In rewriting for the last time I have done my best to ignore heaps of notes—filed away, to keep my desk clear—and I sit in a sort of suspended state, making myself a receptacle, breathing in what comes uppermost in my ear from the voices of the past. (n. pag.)*

The self-conscious dialogism of *The Brave Voices* parallels the "oral" turn of Innis's later writings, which were penned almost simultaneously. The Toronto School theorist not only explored the non-linear properties of sound as a conceptual counter to the identity-thinking encouraged by conventional print media, but, through his method of composing his texts as a pastiche of quotations, Stamps claims that he "invent[ed] a quasi-oral mode of writing" (*Unthinking Modernity* 90). McLuhan would later observe that the compressed style of later Innis "saves time" ("Introduction" ix). As with Booker's critical riposte to the utopian claims of "time-saving" technologies in his illustrations for *The Canadian Forum*, the quasi-theological resonance of McLuhan's rhetoric of redemption should not be overlooked (see Sterne). While rejecting the ideology of progress typically associated with "service products," late-Brooker and late-Innis alike seized on the interactive potential of the labour-saving device as a basis for exploring dialogical alternatives to the dominant (quantitative and "spatial") media paradigm.

The sonic themes Brooker explores in *The Brave Voices* are given visual expression in the contemporaneous canvas Double Bass (ca. 1953-54) (Fig. 7), in which volutes of string instruments set in motion a genetic spiral of surrounding abstract elements. The painting's repeating scroll motif brings into representation Brooker's Bergsonian description of *Phusis* as the "ever-striving ascent" of melody.

Echoing Bergson's arguments in *Time and Free Will*, Brooker deploys the qualitative continuity of melody in *The Brave Voices* to critique the homogeneity and linearity of clock time. "Time, indeed," writes Brooker in a draft chapter titled "Manhood," "when conceived as duration in the Bergsonian sense, is eternity—not a ticked-off infinity of years ahead of us, but one huge expanded moment in which all that happens is actually *now*" (n. pag., emphasis original). Brooker's *The Swing of Time* (1954) (Fig. 8), a canvas painted in tandem with his composition of the *The Brave Voices*, resonates with Bergson's description in *Time and Free Will,* of the oscillations of a clock's pendulum as "each permeating the other and organizing themselves like the notes of a tune" (105). With its superimposition of diverse instruments employed to measure the passage of time (clock, hourglass, pendulum, sundial), arranged in a spiral composition redolent of the scroll motif structuring *Double Bass* (or the clock face of the earlier Hoover ad), *The Swing of Time* brings into visibility Bergson's musicalization of clock time in *Time and Free Will.*

Brooker's appeal to organic temporality and music in *The Brave Voices* and late canvases such as *Double Bass* and *The Swing of Time* suggests analogies with Innis's contemporaneous "plea for time" in the face of an expansionist American culture industry that he believed to be founded on the spatial bias and geographic ambitions inherent in newsprint. It is probable that Brooker's Bergsonian critique of conventional print media served as an indirect influence on the Toronto School theorist through such channels as *The Canadian Forum* and the University of Toronto, where Brooker participated in cultural activities beginning in at least 1927, including retrospectives of his work at Hart House in 1931 and 1949. Given the Canadians' shared commitment to orality and time-based forms, it is ironic that the ostensibly anti-Bergsonian writings of Wyndham Lewis served as a principal source for the later work of both Brooker and Innis.

Fig. 7. (top) Bertram Brooker, *Double Bass,* ca. 1953-54. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy Phillip Gevik.

Fig. 8. (bottom) Bertram Brooker, *Swing of Time,* 1954. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy the Art Gallery of Windsor.

Conclusion

This largely unrecognized and misunderstood socialist turn in Brooker's production of the 1930s reflects the artist-advertiser's deepening social conscience in the aftermath of the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Brooker developed these themes in following decades, culminating in his drafts of the late, unpublished manuscript *The Brave Voices*. Brooker's critical exploration of space-time perception as an extension of media "bias" during the 1930s through mid-1950s developed in parallel with the later communications work of Innis, whose theories he likely influenced, albeit indirectly. The later thought of Brooker and Innis alike drew on the anti-Bergsonian writings of Lewis, while turning the British artist-author's arguments inside-out to propose a renovation of "oral" and musical forms as a quasi-socialist counter to American cultural hegemony and the "visual" bias of commercial print media.

Echoes of Brooker's Bergson-inspired, sound- and time-based alternative to dominant manifestations of modernism and modernity can be detected in Innis's influential representations of Canada as a polyvocal community located at the resistant "margin" of a monocultural American empire—a motif subsequently transformed by McLuhan into his portrait of Canada as a "counterenvironment" (c.f. "Defrosting Canadian Culture," "Canada: The Borderline Case"). For Brooker, Innis, and McLuhan alike, Bergsonian "multiplicity"—particularly in its sonic and temporal guises (as "melody" and "duration")—suggested strategies for attending to the socially stratifying effects of media and modernization as an ecological awareness of the constitutive role of difference. Brooker's socially conscious adaptation of Bergson's media ontology suggests one source for the non-Marxist, dialectical, and materialist strains that some commentators identify in Innis's writings (c.f. Stamps, "Innis in the Canadian Dialectical Tradition"). If, as Alexander John Watson has observed, Innis increasingly distanced himself from socialist affiliations and theory as the 1930s progressed, Brooker's media interventions and commentary of the same period draw attention to enduring socialist threads in pre-McLuhan Canadian media theory.

The current inattention to Brooker's later output reflects the persistence of a late-modernist obsession with "innovation" in Canadian art historiography that has overemphasized the artist-advertiser's early (at least within the Canadian context) development of an abstract idiom (see Reid). Shifting focus onto Brooker's post-1929 reflections on the limitations of Bergsonian modernism as a media and social paradigm and parallel exploration of the deeper implications of the French philosopher's critique of "spatial" models as a constructivist thesis thus repositions the artist-advertiser as a forerunner of the Toronto School of Communication and its exploration of sensory bias. Furthermore, recovering Brooker's indirect contributions to the Toronto School contributes toward the ongoing project of documenting the broader cultural context of Canadian media theory, its sources, and legacies (c.f. Cavell; Lamberti). Like the pianist and composer Glenn Gould, Brooker emerges from this interdisciplinary reappraisal as a key participant in a network of discourses and practices focused on the co-shaping of media and sensory perception (see Cavell; Crocker; Théberge). With the notable exception of Wyndham Lewis, this network is distinguished by the particular auditory and temporal bias of its members. If Brooker and Gould come into view in this revisionist history as artists "performing" theory, Innis and McLuhan correlatively appear as "artists" whose medium is theory, or theorists appropriating the creative techniques of the artist, as McLuhan himself came to view Innis (see Marchessault, "McLuhan's Pedagogical Art"; McLuhan, "Introduction").

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Image Notes

Figure 1: The Hoover Company, "Positive Agitation," in *Layout Technique*, 1929.

Figure 2: Bertram Brooker, "Vacuum Cleaner," in *The Canadian Forum*, July 1936.

Figure 3: Bertram Brooker, "Lawn Mower," in *The Canadian Forum*, November 1936.

Figure 4: Bertram Brooker, *The Romance of Trade Marks*, ca. 1912-1915. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.8 cm. Courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 5: Bertram Brooker, *Reznor*, ca. 1912-1915. Ink on paper, 21.5 x 27.7 cm. Courtesy The Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Figure 6: Bertram Brooker, *The Recluse*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 61 x 45.7 cm. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Walter Klinkhoff, 1978.3. Photo courtesy MMFA.

Figure 7: Bertram Brooker, *Double Bass*, ca. 1953-54. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy Phillip Gevik.

Figure 8: Bertram Brooker, *Swing of Time*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy the Art Gallery of Windsor.

Notes

[1] Betts likens Brooker's analysis of the cultural effects of newspapers to McLuhan's writings; however, the work of Innis is closer to Brooker in both time and thesis (see "Introduction" xxxi-xxxii).

[2] Brooker is also known to have been an acquaintance of Helen and Northrop Frye (see Frye and Kemp *The Correspondence of Northrop Frye and Helen Kemp*; Frye and Kemp A Terrible and Glorious Life with You).

[3] "The book, in its totality, will be seen to coincide with some of the views of Shaftesbury, who wanted to banish the supernatural so that we could regard the universe as a living whole with reverence and affection. […] Nature is enough!" (Brooker, *The Brave Voices* n. pag.).