Temporality as Bergsonian Critique in the Advertising and Visual Art of Bertram Brooker

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ABSTRACT This article explores time concepts derived from Henri Bergson as adapted by Canadian marketing theorist and visual artist Bertram Brooker (1888–1955) in articles and textbooks published during the 1920s and early 1930s. Inspired by Bergson’s critique of the Western metaphysical tradition, Brooker proposed innovative, participatory advertising strategies based on the French philosopher’s non-rational conception of time and the co-evolution of bodies and media. The author argues that the Toronto artist-advertiser’s descriptions of radio as offering the possibility of an interactive and synesthetic alternative to conventional print-based forms of advertising indirectly influenced Harold Innis’ redemptive gloss on the latent dialogism of radio. A critique of Brooker’s and Innis’ respective articulations of “oral” media as foreshadowing the contemporary economy of televisual “flow” is also posited.

KEYWORDS Advertising; Toronto School/Transformation history; Media theory; Orality/Oral culture; Philosophy

Introduction

The multidisciplinary production of the Canadian artist, author, and advertising executive Bertram Brooker (1888–1955) is marked by a persistent obsession with time. Previous commentators have detected the influence of Henri Bergson on Brooker’s advertising writings and visual art (see Lauder, 2006, 2010, 2012; Luff, 1991; Zemans, 2006).
The artist-advertiser’s celebration of “becoming” and “flux” in his marketing texts of the 1920s, in particular, is visualized by his abstract canvases, the first to be exhibited in a solo exhibition in Canada, and innovative graphic designs. His work of that decade is thereby aligned with the earlier Bergsonian modernisms of Futurist and Vorticist artists (see Antliff, 1993). Yet the present article constitutes the first scholarly paper to frame Brooker’s engagement with Bergson’s non-rational temporality as a critical project.

Brooker’s harnessing of Bergsonian temporality to articulate a sophisticated critique of modernity was all the more unusual given his status as one of the pre-eminent innovators in North American advertising circles in the 1920s. Not that his application of Bergsonian concepts to problems in advertising was not, in this context at least, itself remarkably out of the ordinary. Perhaps only the futurist graphic designs executed by Fortunato Depero (1892–1960) for mass-market publications such as Movie Makers, Vanity Fair, and Vogue, during his sojourn in New York from 1928 to 1930, constitute a comparable appropriation of Bergson in North American popular culture. But whereas Depero’s designs celebrated the flux of the machine age, Brooker urged fellow admen to adopt Bergson’s insights as part of a thorough re-evaluation of modernist values and beliefs embraced by the advertising profession, including progress, efficiency, and rationalization.

The critical orientation of Brooker’s appropriation of Bergson is closer to aspects of the post–World War I cultural criticism of Canadian-born artist and author Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957), which drew on Bergson’s critique of the spatial models informing classical metaphysics and modern science even while reversing the terms of the French philosopher’s arguments to articulate a renovation of spatial perception. Brooker was already familiar with Lewis’ monumental Time and Western Man in the year of its publication (Brooker, 1927, pp. 6–7). Gregory Betts (2013) has recently proposed parallels between Brooker’s “vortex of art, media, and advertising” and Lewis’ discourse on technology and mass culture (p. 217). Lauder (2012) earlier noted that Time and Western Man influenced Harold Innis’ discourse on time and modernity, with which Brooker’s critical project likewise shares much in common (see also Watson, 2006). The resonance between articulations of time found in the work of Brooker, Lewis, and later Innis speaks to the common currency of Bergsonian rhetoric in what Paul Tiessen (1993) has termed the “pre-McLuhan body Canadian media theory” of the 1920s through the 1940s. Similarly, Janine Marchessault (2005) and Darroch and Marchessault (2009) have argued that Bergson’s thought played a formative—albeit largely overlooked—role in the development of Toronto School communication theory. Through his astonishingly early and critical engagement with Bergsonian time concepts across a broad spectrum of discourses and media, Brooker occupies a key position in this configuration. Yet this temporal dimension of the artist-advertiser’s work, and its critical orientation, have largely eluded appraisal until now.

Through frequent contributions to the high-profile American trade papers Printers’ Ink and Advertising and Selling, and, from 1924 through 1927, as editor and publisher of Canada’s premier advertising journal, Marketing and Business Management (to which he also made frequent contributions as an author from 1921 until at least 1931), Brooker
established an international reputation as an outspoken critic of then-dominant behaviourist and quantitative approaches to marketing (see Johnston, 2001). In place of the statistical instruments and mechanistic models promoted by peers, Brooker urged fellow marketers to take the literary production of Chekhov, Dickens, and Shakespeare as their model. “Dickens,” he wrote, “analyzed the consumer demand of his day and adjusted his production accordingly. ‘People like deep-dyed villains,’ he said to himself, and straightaway produced Quip” (Marketing, 1921, p. 332). Brooker’s unapologetically literary approach to advertising drew fierce criticism from leading American advertisers of the day: his pointed exchanges with Earnest Elmo Calkins, Charles S. Knapp, and William E. Cameron in the pages of Printers’ Ink substantiate the claim of one observer in 1951 that the Canadian artist-advertiser’s intuitive approach to copy “was strongly felt in international advertising” (Betts, 2005, p. 231). While the literary and aesthetic bias of Brooker’s writings on advertising topics has received broad acknowledgment, the extent to which his critique of American models also drew on the philosophy of Bergson has yet to receive adequate scholarly attention.

Selections of Brooker’s articles from Marketing and Printers’ Ink were collected and revised in two volumes published by McGraw-Hill under the nom de plume Richard Surrey (one of several pseudonyms employed by the chameleonic artist-advertiser): Layout Technique in Advertising (Surrey, 1929b) and Copy Technique in Advertising (Surrey, 1930a). Richard Cavell (2002) has characterized these textbooks as comprising “an artistic credo” (p. 15). However, it was Betts (2005) who first recognized that Layout Technique is primarily concerned with spatial concerns of the type studied by Cavell, whereas Copy Technique “organized its arguments around conceptions of time” (p. 247). This conceptual division of labour foreshadows the space/time dualism that structures the late communications writings of Harold Innis. Adam Lauder (2012) has explored the possibility that Brooker may have served as an indirect influence on Innis. Yet, though Lauder briefly discussed the shared commitment to cultural continuity and the “oral tradition” disclosed by the writings of Brooker and later Innis, the bulk of his analysis is devoted to an investigation of the possibility that the artist-advertiser’s visualizations (in the form of innovative charts and maps) may have contributed to the political economist’s early interest in the formative influence of geography on the development of a “staples” economy in Canada as well as his subsequent theorization of (neo-)colonial “monopolies of space.”

Through original readings of articles published in Marketing and Printers’ Ink during the 1920s and early 1930s and other primary sources, this article proposes that Brooker’s commercial writings and visual art alike mounted a critique of modernist space that cleared a path for Innis’ late “plea for time.” Paradoxically, the humanistic rhetoric of time deployed by both figures reveals striking parallels with the contemporary televisual paradigm critiqued, among others, by Richard Dienst (1994). Building on this recognition, the present article also traces some unintended consequences of the defence of time and the “oral tradition” articulated by Brooker and later Innis.

**Brooker and Bergson: A literature review**

The first to observe a Bergsonian inflection in Brooker’s art was Joyce Zemans (1989). However, Zemans’ perception of “Bergsonian flow” (p. 30) in canvases by the artist-
advertiser such as *Endless Dawn* (1927) was little more than a footnote to her carefully researched rebuttal to Dennis Reid’s (1973) influential but problematic portrait of Brooker as Theosophist in the mould of Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and Fred Housser (1889–1936). Through ground-breaking analyses of Brooker’s unpublished papers and early drawings preserved today in the archives of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Ontario, Zemans succeeded in shifting focus away from Brooker’s purported mysticism onto his early development of a personal philosophy, which he termed “Ultimatism” (p. 19). This belief system was an unlikely fusion of Nietzsche, Herbert Spencer, the South African author Olive Schreiner (1862–1920), and the visionary British theatre practitioner Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966). Applying Ultimatism as a lens, Zemans reinterpreted the “mystical” experience reported by Brooker, while visiting Dwight on Lake of Bays in the summer of 1923, as reinforcing his prior belief in the artist’s mission of spiritual leadership. Unlike Harris and Housser, he did not feel the need to formalize this conviction by embracing Theosophical dogma.

While Zemans’ paper added invaluable new information about the sources of Brooker’s art and personal philosophy, its characterization of his eclectic belief system as constituting a form of Neoplatonic monism—an interpretation first put forward by Victoria Evans (1986) in an analysis of the artist-advertiser’s syndicated 7 Arts column—was less fruitful. Although Brooker’s sources were certainly diverse, even including mystical and higher-dimensional literature, his syncretic fusion of heterogeneous discourses was far from the hermetic idealism posited by Zemans (and subsequently elaborated by Ann Davis, 1992, and Betts, 2005, 2009, 2013). Rather, as Carole Luff (1991) was the first to systematically explore, the overall tenor of Brooker’s Weltanschauung is appropriately characterized as a fusion of Bergson and the Bergsonian Christianity of John Middleton Murry (1889–1957) with the sensorial mysticism of William Blake (1757–1827) and Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke (1837–1902). Unlike Theosophists such as Harris and Housser, with whom Brooker nonetheless continues to be grouped by many commentators, these thinkers firmly grounded their speculations on spirituality and consciousness in the thickness of the body. Betts (2013) has recently emphasized the specifically evolutionary dimension of Bucke’s thought as an influence on Brooker and other “Cosmic Canadians,” an interpretation that can be seen as complementing the exploration of Bergsonian concepts of “creative evolution” (pp. 88–89) put forward here. Luff (1991) uncovered concrete evidence of Brooker’s Bergsonian concerns through diligent analysis of the artist’s markings in his personal copies of Bergson’s principal works. Her lengthy quotations of underlined passages in *Creative Evolution* are especially valuable today in light of the disappearance of this key text in the Bergsonian œuvre from Brooker’s library, held by the University of Manitoba.

Lauder’s (2010) research has deepened the connections between Brooker and Bergson unearthed by Zemans and Luff by performing close readings of Bergsonian tropes found in the artist’s advertising writings. References to Bergson appear in Brooker’s advertising texts beginning in February 1924. This chronology contradicts Betts’ (2009) contention that “Brooker was not directly influenced by Henri Bergson … but was certainly sympathetic to Bergson’s followers such as Alfred North Whitehead
and Murry” (p. xlviii).1 (Betts [2013] has more recently shown signs of revising this opinion, however.) The artist-advertiser’s earliest discussion of the French philosopher addresses Bergson’s “idea of the ‘fluidity’ of thought” as articulated in the influential essay “Laughter” (Surrey, 1924a, p. 3). Although Brooker’s direct references to Bergson in his published writings are admittedly few, Bergsonian concepts and vocabulary—“flux,” “becomingness,” “crystallization,” “multiplicity,” “stream”—pervade his writings of the 1920s (see Surrey, 1924a; 1926a; 1929b; Spane, 1928). This Bergsonian inflection subsequently reappears with greater emphasis in the artist-advertiser’s voluminous notes for the late, unpublished manuscript The Brave Voices (c. 1954), suggesting a deepening interest in the philosopher through time.

Advertising a new “time-image”: The politics of flow
Changing concepts of time are central to the critical project articulated by Brooker’s advertising writings of the 1920s. More than two decades prior to the impassioned “plea for time” advanced by Harold Innis in the face of an aggressively monopolistic American culture industry founded on the “spatial bias” of print media and statistics, Brooker’s articles for Marketing and Printers’ Ink criticized the static cast of mind perpetuated by the behaviourist psychology and statistical techniques then fashionable in American advertising circles. Brooker was critical of what he termed the “eye-mindedness” (Anonymous, 1925, p. 353) of these tendencies, which were epitomized by the work of John B. Watson for the New York firm of Walter J. Thompson (Johnston, 2001). Brooker’s writings encouraged fellow admen to substitute a Bergsonian picture of “advertising [as being] in a constant state of becoming” (Surrey, 1926a, p. 115, emphasis in the original) for the rigidities of behaviourist models and the fixed boundaries of the printed page. To this end, Brooker marshalled Bergson’s (1907/1998) opposition of duration, conceived as qualitative multiplicity, to the linear, “spatialized time” (p. 363) produced by positivistic science in order to critique the hierarchical organization of the typical Fordist corporation and its assembly-line production methods and schedules:

People are interested in life, not in ‘products.’ … [Y]ou can step out of your business into the stream of their lives and take a personal interest in their safety, their health, their education, their amusement. These, you will note, are not ‘products.’ They are activities! They are not dead things put up in cartons at so much a dozen. They are living states of mind or activities of the body. (Surrey, 1926c, p. 191)

Brooker’s efforts to “visualize events—not things in advertising” (Spane, 1929a, p. 161), also harnessed literary techniques for “getting ‘moments’ rather than pictures on paper” (Surrey, 1930a, p. 136), derived from his close reading of texts by Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923), Walter de la Mare (1873–1956), Ford Maddox Ford (1873–1939), and other, mostly British former contributors to the pre–World War I Bergsonian little magazines edited by John Middleton Murry, Rhythm (1911–1913) and The Blue Review (1913) (see also Lauder, 2010). The Bergsonian perspective that Brooker gleaned from these writers is evident, for instance, in his analysis of an advertisement for Hoover vacuums in Layout Technique in Advertising (Figure 1), in which he likened the curving line of the electric cord encircling the product featured at the centre of the image in
terms that evoke the “vortex,” which Bergson (1998) believed to be the ultimate unit of matter: “Something has happened to this circle” (p. 8), wrote Brooker. “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” (Surrey, 1929b, p. 176, emphasis in the original).

Figure 1: The Hoover Company, “Positive Agitation,” 1929

Source: Surrey, 1929b, p. 177
Brooker’s analysis of the Hoover ad also echoed Bergson’s 1889 dissertation, published in English translation in 1913 as Time and Free Will, which critiqued the tendency in Western metaphysics and science to represent time in spatial terms. “In place of a heterogeneous duration whose moments permeate one another,” wrote Bergson (2001), “we thus get a homogeneous time whose moments are strung on a spatial line” (p. 237).

As Mark Antliff (1993) and Mary Ann Gillies (1996) have explored, Bergson’s writings were embraced by artists on both sides of the Atlantic, who responded enthusiastically to the philosopher’s call to reclaim the “multiplicity without quantity” characteristic of inner experience, which the relentless pressures of rationalization typical of modern social life force the individual to repress (Bergson, 2001, p. 122). Yet the influence of Bergson on the arts in Canada has only recently begun to be explored (see Messenger, 2004; Slaney, 2010). Zemans’ (1989) decision to situate Brooker’s visual art within broader Bergsonian currents in Anglo-American modernism was therefore remarkably prescient. Her 1989 study noted that early paintings, such as Endless Dawn, place humanity “on the periphery of discovery and eternal ‘becomingness’ in a Bergsonian flow” (p. 37). However, Brooker’s harnessing of Bergsonian temporality to articulate a critical position within commercial communications systems is not as readily accommodated to existing models of interpretation, particularly given his North American milieu.

In article after article, Brooker urged fellow copywriters to adopt a participatory framework modelled on the aesthetics of empathy articulated by Bergson and followers, which involved writing “from the market toward the factory” (Surrey, 1926e, p. 336). Moreover, he described the fluid contours of that market in terms that explicitly recall Bergson’s (2001) characterization of duration as “pure heterogeneity” (p. 104): “[T]he Coast of demand isn’t straight at all. It takes on a sort of shape. [The] selling process is disturbed by slack and heavy seasons, and by curious peaks and valleys” (Surrey, 1926e, p. 337). The heterochronic representation of time that emerges from an earlier article on Einstein’s theory of relativity as applied to advertising can be seen as responding to this “zigzagging coastline of Demand” with a distinctly Bergsonian strategy of “more timeliness of appeal” (Spane, 1929b; Surrey, 1926e, p. 336):

Time is relative. A man decides to buy a sack of flour now; but if now means anything, it means exactly now, and by the time he has got out of his chair to start for the grocery store ... half a dozen nows are past and gone. (Aker, 1921, p. 381, emphasis in the original)

Perhaps Brooker’s most graphic representation of the “radical multiplicity of Time” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 78) formulated by Bergson is found in a series of advertisements for the national daily the Globe, published in Marketing during the summer and fall of 1929, in which the artist-advertiser employs stylized images of clock faces (drawn in his distinctive hand) to convey to potential advertisers the relative advantages of the morning paper as a medium for reaching consumers:

Morning paper readers are the leaders of their communities throughout Ontario. The Globe, reaching prospects at breakfast, when they are rested and receptive, and before buying impulses have been translated into or-
ders, secures for its advertisers the freshest possible response. (The Globe, 1929, p. 119)

The image in this series that most forcefully conveys a Bergsonian sensibility (Figure 2) features an accumulation of superimposed clock faces that display a diversity of numbering systems (both Roman and Arabic numerals): a dizzying assemblage evocative of the qualitative multiplicity described by Bergson.

**Figure 2: The Globe, “Globe readers are leaders,” 1929. Advertisement designed by Brooker.**

Brooker’s invocation of timeliness of appeal in this series of ads, though singular in its appropriation of the critical temporality of Bergson to bring into representation the philosopher’s descriptions of heterochrony within a commercial context, can nonetheless be situated within a broader push for calendar reform by the business community. For instance, a 1926 article for *Marketing* authored by American inventor and entrepreneur George Eastman endorsed a made-in-Canada proposal for a 13-month cal-
endar, which would have standardized the length of months in the interests of reducing accounting problems posed by temporal variation. “It … becomes increasingly important that the periods of time, which form the bases for all records, should be invariable,” wrote Eastman (p. 33). Though the pressures of economization motivating Eastman’s article are in stark contrast to the critical orientation of Brooker’s deployment of temporality, it is significant that both writers seized on the plasticity of time itself as a regulating force in business.

Ironically, Brooker’s Bergsonian representation of time in his designs for the Globe ad series suggests analogies with Richard’s Dienst’s (1994) Deleuzian critique of broadcast television as predicated on a flow that “designates a movement of multiplicity within a single channel […and] potential movement between separate channels” (p. 27). Recalling McLuhan’s dictum that the medium is the message, Dienst locates the power of the televisual apparatus not in its symbolic content but, rather, in the “new production of time” effected by sheer circulation (p. 60). Dienst equates this flow of televisual data with the circulation of capital: “[T]elevision’s basic economic vocation,” he writes, “lies in the transformation of material images into units of value through new frameworks of circulation” (p. 59). There is an unintended resonance between Dienst’s analysis and Brooker’s earlier comments on advertising’s “evolution toward more marked timeliness of appeal” in an article comparing advertisements published by Marketing in 1929 with examples featured in the same magazine 10 years earlier (Spane, 1929b, p. 359). Brooker observes a growth in what he terms “winter appeal,” a change reflecting not only a greater sensitivity to the changing needs of consumers under different weather conditions, but, more profoundly, advertising’s active role in “lengthening … the Christmas season” (p. 360). This elasticity of time wrought by media, and its potentially lucrative effects, was something that Brooker sought to exploit through a tactical deployment of Bergsonian “rhythm” in advertising copy. For instance, a 1924 article by Brooker for the influential American trade paper Printers’ Ink proposed rhythm as a device for “injecting speed into copy”:

   The secret of writing that can quickly be read is that it must flow. A flow implies a rhythm, a rhythm implies a beat, a beat implies music, according to the scientists, is the deep-rooted aboriginal language to which all the first ears in the universe were tuned. … Copy must flow! (Surrey, 1924c, p. 94)

Brooker harnessed rhythm—a synonym for qualitative multiplicity in Bergsonian literature—to transform the advertisement into “a little bit of time in its pure state,” as Gilles Deleuze (2007), also writing under the influence of Bergson but quoting Proust, dubbed the “time-image” of post-war cinema. Brooker’s rhythmic argot is consistent with the Bergsonian vocabulary deployed by the primarily British painters associated with John Middleton Murry and his little magazine Rhythm—a group that appropriately styled themselves “Rhythmists” (Antliff, 1993, p. 69). Betts (2009, p. xlviii) has noted that Murry was a primary influence on Brooker’s thought from at least the early 1920s (though he glosses over the strong Bergsonian inflection of Murry’s writings). Sounding very much like Brooker in the above-quoted passage from Printers’ Ink, Bergson scholar Mark Antliff quotes Murry from the pages of Rhythm in 1911 as arguing that “the élan vital constitutes ‘the essential music of the world,’ and
the ‘rhythms’ fundamental to our own individual élan become a painting’s ‘essential harmonies of line and colour’ by means of intuition” (Antliff, 1993, p. 81). Analogies between Brooker’s harnessing of techniques derived from his close reading of Murry and other former Rhythmists in an effort to temporalize print advertising, and the “direct image of time” (Dienst, p. 155) generated by television described by Dienst in dialogue with Deleuze’s writings on cinema, are properly situated within the Canadian artist-advertiser’s engagement with the time-based media of film and radio.

Brooker was an early participant in film culture through his authorship of scenarios that were adapted into photoplays by the Brooklyn-based Vitagraph Company of America in 1912-13. An article by Brooker published by The Photoplay Author in 1913, “The Censorship of Photoplays,” documents the artist-advertiser’s dual roles during this period as both film scenarist and commentator (Bartholdy, 1913). As Lauder (2010) has noted, The Adventure of the Thumbprint (1912) incorporated advances in close-up cinematography and editing techniques comparable to D. W. Griffith’s earlier and better-known The Lonedale Operator (1911). But the Vitagraph film responded to the emphasis on forensic detail found in Brooker’s scenario that may have grown out of the Canadian’s familiarity with Bergson’s conceptualization of perception as “attention to life” (Bergson, 1988, p. 173; see also Brooker, 1912).

Film proved an enduring influence on Brooker’s approach to media. For instance, in a 1925 article, “Invite the Prospect to ‘Act’ in an Advertising Drama,” Brooker drew on a booklet issued by the Palmer Institute of Authorship dealing with the writing of photoplays to argue that the copywriter should build up a “dramatic setting [so] that the prospect feels himself to be an actor in a play in which you have invited him to play a part” (Surrey, 1926f, p. 370). Brooker’s recourse to the film/mind analogies of Bergson to articulate a participatory renovation of print advertising is remarkably consistent with Dienst’s (1994) turn to Deleuze’s neo-Bergsonian writings in support of his analysis of televisual flow as “socialized time” (p. 61), wherein the consumer adds value to the medium through sheer expenditure of time.

Deleuze’s (2007) two-volume study of cinema revisits Bergson’s well-known critique of the film apparatus in Creative Evolution as instituting a falsely spatializing reconstitution of mobility. Deleuze posits the latent possibility of a properly Bergsonian cinema reconceptualized as an unmediated projection of duration. Dienst (1994), in turn, draws on Deleuze’s revisionist reading of Bergson to posit televisual circulation as Bergsonian flow. Brooker’s advertising writings similarly suggest a revisionist reading (or, what’s more likely, a creative misreading) of Bergson’s film/mind analogies in Creative Evolution. These analogies were subsequently taken up by another early film theorist, Hugo Münsterberg (1863–1916), whose text The Photoplay (1916) specifically addresses the innovations of Vitagraph artists in the area of close-up cinematography, of which The Adventure of the Thumbprint is an important and early example (Münsterberg, 2002; see also Carroll, 1988).²

Although Bergson’s (1998) influential description of “the cinematographical character of our knowledge” (p. 306) was intended as a critique of the instrumentalizing effects of language and technology, Brooker’s writings seized on the liberating potential of what Federico Luisetti (2008) has termed the French philosopher’s “ontology of
technical creativity” (p. 87). In particular, the Canadian artist-advertiser capitalized on Bergson’s film/mind analogies to articulate an interactive advertising paradigm in which the consumer—and, by extension, industry as a whole—is conceived as imbricated in an ongoing process of creative evolution predicated on the generative entanglement of bodies and media. Brooker’s Bergsonian paradigm thereby reveals striking parallels with Dienst’s analysis of televsual circulation as the production of “social time-power” (61), in which value is produced through the participatory surplus value extracted from audience segments, subsequently resold to advertisers.

The new man: Advertising as creative evolution

A 1926 article by Brooker for Printers’ Ink, “Are Statistics More Convincing Than Words or Pictures?” explicitly analyzes advertising in terms of the evolutionary paradigm advanced by Bergson in Creative Evolution. “Advertising is alive! 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” (Surrey, 1926a, p. 115). Brooker’s language in this article is indicative of the neo-vitalist rhetoric deployed by the artist-advertiser to sketch an organicist alternative to the assembly-line logic, and schedules, of dominant advertising based on the non-rational models of Bergson and German Lebensphilosophie. In one of his 7 Arts columns, Brooker (1929b) cited Hermann Keyserling and Oswald Spengler as the founders of a “new philosophy” which regards society as “a plant-like organism which grows, branches out, blossoms, decays and dies” (n.p.). This perspective closely matches Brooker’s vitalistic forecast of the post-Fordist organization in another context:

If advertising is to be anything more than … a lot of chopped-up language stuck into a hole in layout it must correspond with something that is growing within the entire organization. It must be the surface blossoming, as it were, of the inner growth. It should have the same rhythm as your whole selling and distributive plan. (Surrey, 1926e, p. 336, emphasis in the original)

The explosive force characteristic of Brooker’s early abstract paintings adapted this neo-vitalist paradigm into a formal strategy. The radiating, tube-like forms of Sounds Assembling (1928), for instance, recall Bergson’s (1998) metaphor for creative evolution as “a centre from which worlds shoot out like rockets in a fire-works display” (p. 248). The Bergsonian thrust of the evolutionary rhetoric propagated by Brooker’s art and advertising texts of the 1920s would have been complementary to the evolutionary discourse inspired by Bucke’s 1901 Cosmic Consciousness, then widely circulating in the Toronto arts community (see Betts, 2013).

Brooker’s 1926 analysis of Creative Evolution also establishes a basis for interpreting the artist-advertiser’s vitalistic characterizations of the businessman as the “new man.” This motif echoes Bergson’s (1998) earlier discussion of the “man or superman,” which he posited as the eventual outcome of creative evolution (p. 266). Unsurprisingly, in Brooker’s (1931b) Bergsonian forecast, the businessman of the future “won’t be a business man, in the strict sense, He will be an artist!” (p. 44). Brooker’s introductory essay to the 1929 Yearbook of the Arts similarly invokes the figure of the artist as the archetype for a coming “society of creators” resembling Bergson’s speculations in Creative
Evolution (although “When We Awake!”—which was marketed to an arts audience—strategically suppresses references to commerce) (Deleuze, 1988, p. 111).

A striking visual representation of the consumer or businessman as exemplar of Bergson’s (1998) evolutionary thesis that “the body is changing form at every moment” (p. 302) is found in a 1925 cartoon. The image was penned by Brooker to accompany an article for Marketing by Charles W. Stokes (1925) on the relative strength of the five senses as potential channels for advertising and the role of cultural factors in favouring optical media (Figure 3). Brooker’s bug-eyed bust of an imagined future reader visualizes the evolutionary impact of media bias in decidedly comic terms. The caption reads: “Our tame cartoonist predicts what the race will look like a few generations hence if eye-mindedness is carried much further” (Anonymous, 1925, p. 353).

Figure 3: Cartoon by Brooker, Marketing, 1925

Source: Anonymous, 1925, p. 353
A more abstract representation of creative evolution is found in Brooker’s 1929 canvas *Evolution*. The artist-advertiser’s inclusion of a simplified representation of a pipe organ in that composition situates his decomposition of the body into a series of vectors—likely signifying the “divergent directions” (Bergson, 1998, p. 99) of the *élan vital*—against the same backdrop of sensory adaptation to non-visual stimuli as his earlier cartoon for *Marketing*. Both images reveal parallels with his coeval exploration of synesthetic strategies in texts for *Marketing* that attempted to revamp print media by capitalizing on the radio craze of the 1920s (Lauder, 2012). Yet the musical allusions of these works likely also reflect Bergson’s repeated invocation of “melody” as a metaphor for the (qualitative and evolutionary) continuity and multiplicity of duration:

> I shall perceive [a recollection of the past with the image of the present] one in the other, each permeating the other and organizing themselves like the notes of a tune, so as to form what we shall call a continuous or qualitative multiplicity with no resemblance to number. I shall thus get the image of pure duration. (Bergson, 2001, p. 105)

As in Bergson’s paradigm, music is inseparable in Brooker’s writings and visual art from temporality conceived as qualitative virtuality.

Music was a major influence on Brooker’s advertising writings and visual art of the 1920s, as several commentators have observed. In his 1956 memorial to Brooker published in *Canadian Art* magazine, Thomas R. Lee (1956) quoted the artist-advertiser’s widow, Rill, as stating, “Music inspired more than three-quarters of his work … I called him the frustrated musician” (p. 288). Dennis Reid’s 1973 exhibition catalogue furthered this line of interpretation by underlining Brooker’s avowed ambition to paint “expressions of musical feeling” (p. 12). Reid argues convincingly that Brooker’s abstract paintings are “literal translations of musical ‘shape’ ” (p. 12). However, his yoking of musical correspondences explored by the artist-advertiser to the procrustean theories of Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky—to whom Brooker almost never alludes in his voluminous writings, and whose emphatically planar compositions contrast sharply with the cubo-futurist volumes and deep space characteristic of the Canadian’s own musically themed canvases—was less productive.

Glenn Williams (2000) delivers the most detailed and convincing account of Brooker’s experiments in “musical visualization” (p. 113). He notes that although the artist never learned to play an instrument, he was a talented vocalist—joining the prestigious Mendelssohn Choir following his relocation from Winnipeg to Toronto in 1921. A charcoal portrait of Brooker drawn by Group of Seven member Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), reproduced by Dennis Reid (1973), appropriately satirizes the multivalent energies of the amateur musician by portraying him singing all four parts of a quartet.

Joyce Zemans (1989) was the first to connect Brooker’s synesthetic explorations with the experiments in “visual music” pursued by Thomas Wilfred (1889–1968), inventor of the Clavilux, or colour organ: a modified keyboard that projects shifting compositions of coloured light. Connections between Wilfred and Brooker were subsequently elaborated by Williams (2000), who noted that Brooker made personal contact with the American inventor. Repudiating Kandinsky’s rigid correspondences
between specific colours and musical tones, Williams persuasively argued that Brooker recognized in Wilfred’s light projections an open-ended approach closer to his own artistic goals.

The synesthetic concerns discussed by Williams and Zemans were also central to Brooker’s time-based innovations in advertising. A series of articles penned following the artist-advertiser’s sale of *Marketing* to W.A. Lydiatt at the close of 1927 investigated the possibility that “ink and paper [could] stimulate the palate or … cause the mind to ‘auditionize’ unheard sounds in the same way that it ‘visualizes’ unseen sights” (Ting, 1929, p. 212). Lauder (2012) has argued that Brooker’s exploration of the potential for print media to simulate auditory effects under conditions of intensified competition for advertising dollars generated by the new medium of radio suggests analogies with the musical allusions of his contemporary abstract paintings, such as *Abstraction—Music* (c. 1927), *Chorale (Bach)* (c. 1927), and *Toccata* (c. 1927). This reading resonates with Judith Zilczer’s (1987) claim that “[d]uring the 1920s, the advent of commercial radio broadcasting provided modern painters with another readily accessible source of musical inspiration” (p. 104). It is probable that the multicolour backdrops of Brooker’s early abstract canvases, which are formally reminiscent of Wilfred’s visual-music projections, visualize the same radiophonic environments explored by the artist-advertiser in his coeval marketing texts (albeit the “scenic space” suggested by their dimensional forms is more akin to the cubic set designs of Edward Gordon Craig) (Zemans, 1989; see also Surrey, 1930b).

Brooker’s speculations in the pages of *Marketing* on the synesthetic capacity of diverse technologies to form what we would now recognize as a “complete media system” ( Kittler, 2004, p. 245) anticipated McLuhan’s neo-Aquinian representations of the media of communication as constituting a prosthetic *sensus communis*, or “common sense” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 60). A more nearly contemporaneous echo of the musical turn in Brooker’s Bergsonian experiments (and one that influenced McLuhan’s articulation of “orality”) is found in Harold Innis’ exploration of the dialogical potential of radio to act as an antidote to the visual bias of the newspaper (see Comor, 2003; Zhao, 2007). “The disastrous effect of the monopoly of communication based on the eye,” wrote Innis (2008) in *The Bias of Communication*, “hastened the development of a competitive type of communication based on the ear, in the radio and in the linking of sound to the cinema and to television” (p. 106). Indeed, for both Brooker and Innis, radio promised nothing less than “the emergence of a new civilization” (p. 34).

Like Brooker before him, Innis’ (2008) appeal to the dialogism of radio was situated within a discourse on the coordinated interaction of the senses that set the stage for McLuhan’s subsequent (and better-known) comments on media and the sensormium: “The separation and separate treatment of the senses of sight and touch,” wrote Innis, “have produced both subjective disunity and external disunity” (p. 90). Coinciding with Brooker’s antidote to the “eye-mindedness” of conventional print
media vis-à-vis the artist-advertiser’s exploration of compensatory techniques of simulated synesthesia, “Innis’s ... vision of a successful community,” according to Judith Stamps (1995), “called for a multiplicity of media” (p. 138). Such a democratic strategy would, in Innis’ formulation, militate against the monopolization of sensory life by any one medium or bias.

Innis’ (2008) impassioned “plea for time” in the face of an American strategy of cultural imperialism founded on the rigidity of newspaper journalism and statistics in *The Bias of Communication* stemmed from his avowed identification with the “oral tradition” (p. 190) of Classical Greece. This oral turn in the late writings of the communications scholar echoed Brooker’s earlier appeal to dialogue and “folk words” as potential counters to American-style advertising (see Surrey, 1925). In the work of both thinkers then, time and orality figure as instruments of cultural resistance. For instance, the opposition between the “orality” of England and the spatial bias of North American print culture advanced by Innis complements Brooker’s frequent invocation of “tone of voice” as a quality of successful copywriting and his characterization of British advertisements as more “emotional” than American counterparts (which he described as “mathematical”). Brooker supported these claims by pointing to the influence of oral culture on Shakespeare and even amateur etymological studies of Old English and Old Norse (Innis, 2008; Spane, 1923b; see also Surrey, 1923c, 1924b, 1927, 1928, 1930a).

Brooker’s high-profile speculations on the dialogical qualities of speech, the “secondary orality” of radio, and synesthetic potential of print media as counters to the spatial bias of statistics and conventional publishing models may have influenced Innis’ subsequent communications writings. This hypothesis somewhat troubles Jonathan Sterne’s (2011) critique of the purported theological foundations of the concept of “orality” in Toronto School theory by underlining the currency which this notion carried in contemporaneous advertising discourse and Bergsonian modernisms (Ong, 1982).

**Dualist media: Brooker, Innis, and the search for “balance”**

“Are Statistics More Convincing Than Words or Pictures?”—Brooker’s most sustained exploration of a specific text by Bergson—is also key to understanding the artist-advertiser’s strategic reworking of “Bergsonian dualisms” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 21) in his writings and visual art of the 1920s as well as their possible influence on Innis. As Johnston (2001) notes, Brooker (1925) was an early advocate of statistical techniques among marketing professionals in Canada: “We ought to have in Canada more statistics of the kind that would reduce all sorts of economic wastes,” he argued in 1925 (p. 117). Yet Brooker’s (1928) advertising texts simultaneously mounted a critique of quantitative instruments that pitted Bergson’s conception of temporality as qualitative multiplicity against the linear, “visual” bias of American “reason-why” copy (p. 178). The seeming incompatibility of Brooker’s advocacy of statistics and the qualitative orientation of his Bergsonian musings on time and multiplicity should not be mistaken for a contradiction in terms. Rather, the dualistic character of Brooker’s marketing thought is consistent with what Deleuze (1988) described as the “two indissolubly
linked aspects of memory” (p. 51) in Bergson's system. Bergson (2001) himself formulated this dualism thus:

[O]ur perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas occur under two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, ever changing, and inexpressible, because language cannot get hold of it without arresting its mobility or fit it into its common-place forms without making it into public property. (p. 129)

The Janus face of Bergsonian memory sets in motion the famous series of dualisms that structure the French thinker's writings: “matter and memory, perception and recollection, objective and subjective” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 53). As Deleuze cautioned in Bergsonism, these dualisms can be highly misleading: being properly conceived as defining a coexistence—rather than a strict opposition or mutual exclusivity—of elements.

This enduring state of virtual coexistence is brought into lucid representation by the philosopher's metaphor of the “cone.” In Bergson's famous diagram (Figure 4), a cone representing the totality of memory as it is contracted in the appeal of the present is bisected by a series of sections, or strata, which, according to Deleuze (1988), demarcate the actualization of pure recollection in the act of perception:

Each level in effect contains the totality of our past, but in a more or less contracted state. ... The appeal to recollection is this jump by which I place myself in the virtual, in the past, in a particular region of the past, at a particular level of contraction. ... The appeal of the present is such that [recollected images] no longer have the ineffectiveness, the impassivity that characterized them as pure recollections; they become recollection-images, capable of being 'recalled.' They are actualized or embodied. (pp. 62–63)

**Figure 4: Bergson's diagram of the cone of memory**

![Figure 4: Bergson's diagram of the cone of memory](Source: Bergson, 1988, p. 211)
Brooker’s advertising writings transform the dynamics of Bergsonian memory—wherein a recollected image or sensation is reactivated by the sensory appeal of present perception—into a formula for effective selling. This reworking of Bergsonian mnemotechnics is evident, for instance, in the artist-advertiser’s 1926 discussion of Marcel Proust’s celebrated representation of involuntary memory in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*):

Marcel Proust, in the first volume of his interminable autobiography, tells of a certain, special, childish sorrow which he experienced as a boy whenever he was sent upstairs to bed alone. It caused him a real pang not to have his mother accompany him and give him a final goodnight kiss when he was warmly tucked in beneath the covers. And he says that this sadness was somehow linked with the smell of varnish on the staircase, which, on such occasions, he had to climb alone. In later years the smell of varnish would almost invariably recall that old childish pang, bringing back complete memories of the house, the staircase, his chilly room, and the lonely darkness after he had blown out his candle.

It is not enough, then, if you are wanting to arouse an emotional impression, merely to appeal to the senses, which can be done by a precise description of a smell or a taste or a color. You must appeal to the senses through some ‘association’ which is common to the majority of your prospects and which recalls some previous sense impression in their experience that can be related to the ‘image’ of your product. (Surrey, 1926d, pp. 303–312, emphasis in the original)

Suggesting analogies with Deleuze’s (1988) gloss on the mechanics of Bergsonian memory, in Brooker’s comments above, recollection “can only be said to be actualized when it has become image” (p. 66). The condition of possibility for this translation is the establishment of a “circuit with the present” (p. 66, emphasis in the original). Brooker’s schematization of just such a circuit in “Copy as dead as a Fencepost or Alive as a Tree” (Surrey, 1926b) is remarkably consistent with the contours of Bergson’s diagram of the cone (Figure 5). Brooker represents the categories of knowledge harnessed by the successful advertisement as sections of a “projectile,” whose coordinated functioning recalls the “virtual coexistence” of levels of actualization in Bergson’s conic representation of memory: “The vertical lines,” Brooker explains in a caption, “suggest the final unification in the finished copy of numerous ideas derived from each stratum of knowledge. This unification gives advertising the force of a projectile and enables it to puncture the prospect’s consciousness” (Surrey, 1926b, p. 157, my emphasis). As in Bergson’s conical figure, the “circuit with the present” delineated by the “vertical lines” of Brooker’s diagram is contracted in the appeal of present perception, but embodied here by the advertisement. Brooker elsewhere describes this “turn” toward the present as a process of “downhill-flowing” that resonates with Bergson’s articulation of “the incline that matter descends” (Surrey, 1924a, p. 3) in *Creative Evolution* (see also Bergson, 1998).
A similarly Bergsonian construction of memory as the movement of “the past to the present, from recollection to perception” emerges from an earlier article by Brooker, in which a Coca-Cola advertisement functions in a manner corresponding to the “recollection-image” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 63) that actualizes memory:

[T]he effect is not only to bring the name Coca Cola to the attention of people in the newspaper or other mediums used, it reaches into the future and tends to be recalled the next time the consumer happens to find himself in a place where Coca Cola is served. (Spane, 1924, p. 140)

Brooker’s reworking of Bergson’s (1998) recollection-image in the passage above also calls to mind the French philosopher’s critique of what he termed the “cinematographical method” of Western metaphysics, as enforcing a “snapshot view” (p. 302) of the incessant flux of experience that substitutes a “practical method” (p. 306) for executing actions for the virtual capacities of memory. In the same discussion, Bergson
repeatedly likens the practical bent of human intelligence to the tailor’s (or film editor’s) “cut”: “Each being cuts up the material world according to the lines that its action must follow” (1998, p. 367). Significantly, Brooker employs an identical vocabulary of “cuts” or “slices” in his gloss on the dualist implications of Creative Evolution in “Are Statistics More Convincing Than Words or Pictures?”:

The human mind is so constituted that it cannot comprehend the absolute nor apprehend things-in-themselves, but only the relations that exist between one thing and another. ... It is, indeed, the faculty of the mind to select from the enormous flux of phenomena passing before a given eye at a given moment, only those aspects of it, or those relations, which enable the organism to adjust itself to impinging conditions. ... The conscious mental activity of most humans is largely concentrated upon the immediate and practical problems and relations of daily life. Thus, although the average mind easily understands a broad concept as ‘people’ or ‘humanity’ or ‘manhood’ or ‘womanhood,’ these are, at best, only blurred impressions, the subconscious accumulation of thousands of memories. (Surrey, 1926a, pp. 116–117, emphasis in the original)

In Brooker’s dualist approach to advertising, statistics are properly understood (as he stated with characteristic enthusiasm), as “Slices of the absolute!” (Surrey, 1926a, p. 116). This recognition informs Brooker’s (1930) critique of the crude application of statistical instruments performed by “mass” advertising in “Here Lies John Mass, Average Man.” Characteristically framing his argument in evolutionary terms, Brooker posited an astonishingly early version of niche marketing informed by Bergson’s theory of creative evolution as an ongoing process of virtual adaptation:

Mass appeal is splitting up because the mass itself is splitting up. ... The desires and demands of the differentiated public grows yearly more diverse and idiosyncratic. ... Classes cut across classes. Buying habits within any one class are less and less dependable. (pp. 27–28)

In Brooker’s Bergsonian understanding of marketing, then, statistics give only a provisional snapshot of an ever-evolving social reality—discrete “classes” of consumers constituting coexisting “strata” within a virtual mass.6

But Brooker’s Marketing texts did not set out to overturn the spatial paradigm promoted by preceding marketing theorists such as H.L. Hollingworth (1880–1956)—mostly associationist psychologists by training, who attempted to quantify and rank the relative attention-compelling properties of geometric figures through psychometric techniques (see Bartels, 1962). Rather, his articles articulated a classic Bergsonian formulation of the “false problem” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 17). In true dualist fashion, texts such as “Rhythmic Headings? No!” carefully distinguish between advertising strategies best-suited to address the spatial orientation of the faculty of attention and the temporal appeal of memory (thereby avoiding an outright rejection of either option): “Rhythm in slogans—yes! Because their aim is to influence memory. Rhythm in headings—no! Because their aim is to arrest attention. And the sonorous word and the downward swing of most prose rhythms have a tendency to lull one to sleep” (Surrey, 1929a, p. 40).7
Although numerous texts by Brooker seized on the potential of temporality to counter the visual bias of American advertising, his critical project of the 1920s overall is more accurately characterized then as a rebalancing of the spatial and temporal dimensions of communication commensurate with the corrective approach articulated earlier by Bergson in Creative Evolution. Brooker championed a restoration of qualitative experience as the necessary complement of (quantitative and spatial) scientific instruments and models, rather than the one-sided celebration of flux and multiplicity espoused by Futurist and Vorticist artists.

In a similar spirit, early canvases by Brooker such as The Finite Wrestling with the Infinite (1927) visualize the virtual coexistence of matter and memory—represented by the artist as an entanglement of fluid, ribbon-like forms and crystalline masses—in a fashion consonant with the dual orientation of the Bergsonian “cone”:

[M]emory, laden with the whole of the past, responds to the appeal of the present state by two simultaneous movements, one of translation, by which it moves in its entirety to meet experience, thus contracting more or less, though without dividing, with a view to action; the other of rotation upon itself, by which it turns toward the situation of the moment, presenting to it that side of itself which may prove to be the most useful. (Bergson, 1988, pp. 168-169)

The Bergsonian dualisms structuring Brooker’s art and advertising theories suggest analogies with the late communications writings of Harold Innis (2008), which take as their subject the “two dimensions of political organizations” (p. xliii): continuity through time and expansion across space. This dualistic framework was fundamental to the Toronto School theorist’s descriptions of media bias: “The relative emphasis on time or space,” he argued, “will imply a bias of significance to the culture in which it is imbedded” (p. 33). Like Brooker before him, Innis (2008) militated for a new “balance” (p. 64) between competing pressures of space and time in the face of an increasingly aggressive American cultural industry characterized, in his view, by a relentless spatial bias (see also Innis, 2004). American advertising was generating “a one-day world” (Innis, 2008, p. 79) of rapid forgetting, according to Innis. These comments paraphrase the spatial critique advanced by Wyndham Lewis in Time and Western Man (1993), which, as previously noted, also served as a touchstone for Brooker from 1927. Although Lewis famously critiqued Bergson and his followers in that text, it nonetheless served as a significant, albeit highly ambivalent, source of information about Bergsonian spatial critique and the French philosopher’s discourse on the coevolution of bodies, concepts, and technical media for Brooker, Innis, and others in the Canadian scene from the late 1920s through the early 1950s. Indeed, it is possible that Innis arrived at his concept of “bias” through Lewis’s second-hand presentation of Bergson (1998), who framed his own dualist approach to space-time problems in identical terms.

The allied representations of time and orality as alternatives to the imperial ambitions inscribed in conventional print media found in the work of Brooker and Innis must be rigorously distinguished from Benedict Anderson’s (1991) celebrated discussion of the temporal effects of the newspaper. Anderson argues that the newspaper
was integral to orchestrating the communal experience of “simultaneity” (p. 24) that was the precondition of modern nationhood. For Anderson, the daily ceremony of mass newspaper consumption epitomizes the newfound awareness of a “secular, historically clocked, imagined community” (p. 35, my emphasis) under modernity. “[E]ach communicant,” writes Anderson, “is well aware that that ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (p. 35). Anderson’s argument that print tends to generate a shared perception of what Walter Benjamin earlier dubbed “empty, homogeneous time” may be likened to the conclusions on spatial bias drawn by James Carey (2009) in his study of the telegraph.

Carey argues that telegraphy levelled price differentials between regional markets that had traditionally stimulated commodity speculation. This disruption effectively displaced the horizon of capitalist accumulation from space (arbitrage) to time (futures), a dimensional shift that in turn generated new demands for standardized time to sustain coordinated and centralized systems of transportation and trade. Like the “clocked” time reinforced by the newspaper in Anderson’s narrative, the projection of uniform temporality onto the geographic coordinates of standard time zones produced “a continuation of space in another dimension,” according to Carey (2009, p. 175).

While Brooker and Innis were certainly attentive to the type of spatializing pressures subsequently described by Anderson and Carey, the Canadian thinkers were engaged in a common quest for a residual “orality” with which to counter this colonization of time by the imperial centre. In stark contrast to Anderson’s analysis of the newspaper as a marker of “simultaneity,” the multiple clock faces of Brooker’s *Globe* ad, discussed above, communicate a heterochronic experience of time that resists the homogenizing pressures of the dominant print culture through an evocation of Bergsonian flux. Similarly, the oral turn in later Innis signals an effort to counteract the growing dominance of a spatial *mentalité* with the polyvocal qualities of dialogue. This divergence from American communication theory may partly reflect contrasting conceptions of nationhood. Canada is consistently represented in the work of Brooker and Innis alike as a pluralistic patchwork of regions (or markets), perpetually divided by language and geography. In the work of both writers, this cultural fragmentation is harnessed as a bulwark against the threat of American cultural and economic hegemony (see Brooker, 1929a; Innis, 2004; Marketing, 1922, 1925, 1926, 1927). The latent polyvocal and heterochronic potential of media is viewed by Brooker and Innis alike as a potential resource for safeguarding the multiplicitous character of Canadian confederation.

Although no definitive evidence of a first-hand meeting has emerged to date, the possibility that Brooker’s high-profile, Bergsonian theorization of communication in his advertising writings may have served as a point of departure for Innis’ space-time speculations should not be ignored. During the late 1920s and 1930s, Innis (1932, 1933, 1935) contributed articles on a variety of economic topics to *The Canadian Forum*, a magazine to which Brooker simultaneously contributed artwork, criticism, poetry, and prose (and for which he earlier served as an editorial advisor). Innis’ wife, author Mary Quayle Innis (1899–1972), was another frequent contributor during these years—as
was Innis’ colleague and confidante Irene Biss (1907–1998). Biss’ husband, CBC Radio pioneer Graham Spry (1900–1983)—a key participant in the pre-McLuhan Canadian media discourse studied by Tiessen (1993), who likewise turned to the temporal and “oral” medium of radio in an effort to counter American influence—acted as editor of the magazine for a time during the early 1930s (see Biss, 1931). Whether or not Innis was consciously aware of Brooker’s innovative media analyses (though this seems probable), the artist-advertiser’s indirect influence on Canadian intellectuals during the formative period of Innis’ early “staples” research and subsequent transition to communications topics via his study of the newspaper industry during the 1930s and 1940s (see Buxton, 1998) would have been extensive. Brooker’s omission from Innis’ extensive bibliographies is plausibly explained as the combined result of the political economist’s idiosyncratic method of “collaging” secondary sources, loosely paraphrased, and Brooker’s use of multiple pseudonyms and participation in socialist circles (that included Biss and Spry) from which Innis increasingly distanced himself during the course of the 1930s (see Hudson, 1997; Marchessault, 2005; Watson, 2006).

Growing out of a common critique of the increasing hegemony of statistics and spatial bias, Brooker and Innis were led to articulate an allied “plea for time” (see Innis, 2004, p. 91; see also Stamps, 1995). Ironically, the temporal critique of dominant media systems mounted independently by Brooker and Innis can be recognized in retrospect as contributing to, or at least foreshadowing, the televisual paradigm subsequently criticized by Dienst (1994) as a proprietary circulation of socialized time corresponding to a new “time-image” of pure flow. Sounding very much like Dienst, Innis emphasized the significance of sheer circulation as a factor in advertisers’ production of what he presciently termed “monopolies of time”: “Advertisers build up monopolies of time to an important extent through the use of news” (2004, p. 94). Such statements exhibit an almost uncanny resemblance to earlier comments by Brooker on the growing role of rhythm and memory in advertising as radiophonic counters to then-dominant print culture.

Conclusion

Brooker’s writings of the 1920s on radio and synesthesia anticipated the “sound-based paradigm” that Judith Stamps (1995, p. 11) associates with Innis’ late communications writings as well as McLuhan’s (1951) utopian vision of “orchestration” (p. 34) as a remedy for the disintegrating social effects of rationalization in The Mechanical Bride (a text, it should be recalled, published while Brooker was still actively gathering material for his unpublished manuscript, The Brave Voices). Ironically, it is precisely the conjunction of entertainment, time, and interactivity posited by Brooker as a critical project, which lies at the heart of contemporary post-Fordist economies of circulation.

Unlike Brooker’s writings of the 1920s, Innis’ (2004) late communications texts suggest a degree of skepticism with respect to the critical potential of time conceived as a new medium of circulation. “Advertising, particularly department store advertising,” he wrote in Changing Concepts of Time (sounding like Dienst four decades later), “primarily demands circulation. Circulation becomes largely dependent on the instability of news and instability becomes dangerous” (p. 117). Such comments look beyond the optimistic horizon of Innis’ earlier conceptualization of radio, which, like
Brooker’s radio-inspired experiments in synesthesia in the pages of Marketing, identified a latent dialogical potential in the new medium. Despite the greater optimism—or naïveté—of Brooker’s early media analyses, his writings of the 1930s, beginning with the 1931 essay “Idolaters of Brevity”—whose commentary on the culturally disruptive effects of newspapers foreshadowed Innis’ investigation of the “spatial condition of modernity” (Stamps, 1995, p. 77)—testify to a deepening engagement with Bergson’s theories as a critique of modernity and the bias of media. Like later Innis, Brooker’s post-1929 writings explored the limits of spatial systems in a fashion that increasingly pushed beyond the Bergsonian celebration of flux qua valorization of immediate experience that had characterized much of his writing during the 1920s. Similarly, late canvases such as Silver Log (Figure 6) revisit the Bergsonian dualisms articulated by the artist-advertiser’s early texts and graphic designs, but substitute a tragic meditation on the finitude of media and human knowledge suggestive of Innis’

Figure 6: Silver Log, oil on canvas by Bertram Brooker, 1952

Source: Courtesy Museum London
speculations during the same years. In the late writings of Brooker and Innis alike, the "politics of time" analyzed by Antliff (1993) in relation to the radical politics of the historical avant-garde returns as a contest between competing visions of advertising, culture, and the media of communication.

Notes
1. Brooker’s earliest published references to Murry are found in two articles from 1923 (Surrey, 1923a, 1923b). Brooker’s earliest reference to Whitehead probably appeared in June 1931 (Brooker, 1931a).

2. Brooker explicitly cites Münsterberg as an influence in his text Layout Technique in Advertising (Surrey, 1929b). Although Münsterberg does not mention Brooker by name, the Lambert Chase series based on his scenarios exemplifies the innovations in close-up cinematography that he discusses in relation to Vitagraph—thereby implicating Brooker and Münsterberg in a common discourse network predicated on film/mind analogies derived from Bergson.

3. This argument echoes Innis’ contention that “radio becomes a more important competitor for advertising” (Innis, 2004, p. 77).

4. Innis (2007) develops a similar argument in Empire and Communications: “The bias of paper towards an emphasis on space and its monopolies of knowledge has been checked by the development of a new medium, the radio” (p. 196).

5. In an undated letter addressed to the St. John Telegraph-Journal, Brooker described his project as “a counterblast to the art ideas imported from the United States and Europe” (Brooker, n.d., p. 1, my emphasis).

6. Compare Brooker’s comments on niche markets with Innis’ (2008) view of the fragmenting effects of media on the public sphere: “In the vast realm of fiction in the Anglo-Saxon world, the influence of the newspaper and such recent developments as the cinema and radio has been evident in the best seller and the creation of special classes of readers with little prospect of communication between them” (p. 28).

7. Brooker’s articulation of rhythm as a “memory-moulder” in this text draws on the Bergsonian criticism of Middleton Murry as well as the empathic aesthetics of Vernon Lee (1856–1935) (see also Spane, 1923a). Brooker discusses Hollingworth’s influential study of advertising in a 1926 article, “Expression of the Copy Writer or ‘Impression on the Reader?” (see Surrey, 1926h, p. 82).


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