

Communication Codes and Critical Editing:
Recognizing Materiality in the Work of bpNichol

by

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Abstract

Studying the diverse, experimental, and unconventional work—particularly poetry—of Canadian writer bpNichol requires a better understanding of the material characteristics he used to give his writing unique significance. Nichol's poems call for a plurality of new analytical methods, since traditional editorial and critical approaches often overlook the importance of materiality. This thesis presents three different approaches to critically considering Nichol's work and highlighting its material aspects: comparing Nichol's poetry to Dada aesthetics, examining multiple versions of individual poems using genetic criticism, and looking at the changes and similarities between print and digital material characteristics from the even wider perspective of media archaeology. Additionally, the benefits of a digital edition are argued in relation to all three editorial approaches, as digital presentation augments the focus on the materiality that is so integral to reading Nichol.

List of Abbreviations Used¹

EMiC	Editing Modernism in Canada
IBM.....	International Business Machines Corporation
CTRL S	Control S (a computer keyboard shortcut that requires the control key and s key to be pressed simultaneously)
CAT	Catalog (computer command)
GOSUB	Go to subroutine (computer command)
K	Kilobytes
CPU	Central processing unit
MHz	Megahertz
SPSS(font)	Statistical Product and Service Solutions (font)
HTML	HyperText Markup Language
CSS	Cascading Style Sheets (a computer language)

¹ In order of appearance

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Canadian writer bpNichol (1944-1988) was in constant communication with the world. He spoke out and acted out through poems, prose, essays, comics, editing, and constant literary production. He wrote award winning-fiction, created rhymes for children's books, punched out typewriter poem images, organized multiple small presses, and penned episodes of *Fraggle Rock*. The thought of selectively editing such a massive output of writing is overwhelming but necessary if Nichol and his works are to live on for future generations. Michael Ondaatje states that, "no other writer of our time and place was so diverse [and] attempted so much," and, from this statement, it becomes clear that a critical edition should demonstrate the constantly dynamic results and undeniable success of Nichol's attempts (*An H in the Heart* 232). This thesis examines just one branch of Nichol's entwined and interrelated works and proposes a central theme of materiality that informs three different yet related editing approaches.

Materiality encompasses such qualities as a connection between the manufacturing process and the finished product, the treatment of the text as a book object, the deconstruction of language into its raw components, and attention to bibliographic codes, which include typography, spacing, and paper specifications. As Johanna Drucker states in "Intimations of Immateriality," "[t]extual studies have brought attention to the way various aspects of materiality (type, format, paper, book structure) participate in the production of meaning" (152). When studying materiality's role in the meaning of Nichol's texts, 'evolving' might be an apt qualifier to add, since Nichol's focus on the physicality of text supported his quest for evolving systems of communication, evolving textual objects, and literature that kept up with evolving media.

Evolving systems of communication provides common ground for Nichol and the Dadaists—an avant-garde group that influenced his aesthetic principles and artistic philosophies. Nichol experimented with how slight alterations to the bibliographic properties of a text can create new communicative methods and meanings. He did this by evolving textual objects through multiple versions—a process that is best analysed using an editing approach that takes versions of a single text into account. When versions cross over from one medium to another (for example, print to digital), studying Nichol’s writing requires yet another perspective—one that considers new relationships between past and present in media history. Thus I will take three different editorial approaches—one per chapter—to see how Nichol’s works can be critically considered with these three elements in mind: Dada,¹ versions, and media history. These elements can be made editorial by finding aspects of the Dada movement in Nichol’s work, by applying genetic criticism to an examination of his writing, and by introducing media archaeology to discussions of his print and digital publications. Keeping bibliographic codes at the forefront of my editorial rationale will maintain materiality as the unifying ingredient in all three of these studies of Nichol’s work. In order to keep the scope of these studies under control, I primarily focus on concrete, visual, and sound poetry—the most material-dependent genres in which Nichol was active. In other words, collectively, the ensuing chapters argue for a new approach to editing Nichol’s non-traditional poetry that is congruent with his creative and editorial practice, thus allowing the theorization and production of a critical edition to become an extension of the creative work. My

¹ While some scholars, such as Alan Young (*Dada and After*), use the term ‘Dadaism’ to describe the Dada movement, and others, such as Willy Verkauf (*Dada: Monograph of a Movement*), use ‘Dada’ and ‘Dadaism’ interchangeably, I will consistently use the more popular term ‘Dada’ to refer to the movement and ‘Dadaists’ to refer to those artists involved in Dada.

arguments are supported by plans and prototypes for a digital critical edition (created through Editing Modernism in Canada), which applies the three editorial approaches mentioned above to a website containing a selection of Nichol's concrete, visual, and sound poems.

Although Nichol is typically read as a postmodernist who resurrected certain aspects of avant-garde modernism such as cubism, in the next chapter I will expand the study of his works by drawing upon Dada scholarship to illuminate how Nichol's work reflects the Dada movement. Cubism is often associated with Nichol's use and reshaping of language as units of sound and shape, because his reinvention of letters and words prompts many comparisons between his writing and Gertrude Stein's, especially since Nichol wrote essays of his own analysing Stein's work. The connection between Nichol and Stein receives attention in both Stephen Scobie's *bpNichol: What History Teaches* and Frank Davey's recent biographical account *aka bpNichol: a preliminary biography*. Both books also mention a connection to Dada, but Scobie only indirectly connects Nichol to Dada through Hugo Ball's sound poetry, fitting Nichol into a tradition of sound poetry initiated by Ball and mentioning Nichol's homages to Ball: "Dada Lama" and "Beast (for Hugo Ball)." Davey mentions Dada as an influence for Nichol but lumps it into a list of other early twentieth-century influences including Stein. Again, the only poems given any attention are those that directly reference Ball. Even Scobie's essay "I Dreamed I Saw Hugo Ball: bpNichol, Dada, and Sound Poetry" does not intertwine the narratives of Dada and Nichol's creative oeuvre as much as it could. The paper keeps Nichol's work and the history of sound poetry, beginning with Ball's *Cabaret Voltaire*, separated into two distinct sections, and the focus on sound poetry implies that there is

not a similarly strong connection between Nichol's visual work, or at the very least it frames Ball as the primary influence. I argue for a much wider range of formal similarities between Nichol's creative practice and the works of many Dadaists who paid attention to the materiality of text. Due to the importance of material characteristics—in other words, bibliographic codes—to concrete poetry, I make concrete and visual poems the focus of my chapter on Nichol and Dada, but I do acknowledge the appearance of Dada tropes and methods in all the genres in which Nichol dabbled and I use a much greater repertoire of Dadaists than just Ball to support my comparisons. I conduct a selective survey of Nichol's concrete, visual, and sound poetry that represents Dada aesthetics through his use of intermedia, word processors, and other unconventional textual-visual forms. These artistic techniques highlight the materiality and methods of production of texts—qualities that are central to the cut-up techniques and machine-oriented works of Dadaist artists. These qualities, which are employed by Nichol, are propagated in Dada theoretical writings such as Hugo Ball's *Dada Manifesto*, Kurt Schwitters' *Merz*, and Enrico Prampolini's *The Aesthetic of the Machine*.

Nichol's attention to the materiality of communication systems, central to the likenesses his works share with Dada, translates from version to version and across media—translations that comprise my third and fourth chapters respectively. In the third chapter, I argue that Nichol's enthusiastic use of ever-evolving print technology, along with his frequent repurposing of his own work, is best suited to an editorial rationale that does not focus on an author's final intentions. Instead, I propose the framework of genetic criticism and editing, which studies and presents multiple versions of a single text in order to highlight the process involved in the text's production and reproduction, thereby

revealing the author's intentions for textual evolution. This approach underscores the materiality of Nichol's poems, which transition from version to version, propelled by technological advances and changes in bibliographic codes. In this chapter I reconcile genetic criticism (which typically concerns itself with pre-publication manuscripts) with a bibliographical orientation, which connects the text to publication processes and sociological influences, such as those of editors, printers, the literary market, and the reading public. Edited collections of Nichol's works, such as Darren Wershler-Henry and Lori Emerson's *The Alphabet Game: a bpNichol Reader* and George Bowering and Michael Ondaatje's *An H in the Heart: A Reader* do well to acknowledge original publication information and even some publication history, but they do ultimately select one version of a concrete or visual poem for the reader without acknowledging that other versions exist due to differences in bibliographic code. Also, a new version may even be created in critical editions because the bibliographic codes of the edition are adopted by Nichol's poems, changing the significance since Nichol used these physical attributes of the texts as signifiers in the first place.

In the fourth chapter, I explore how Nichol's computer poem collection, *First Screening* (1984), extends the idea of the textual significance of bibliographic details to the textual significance of media. Studying media development and its relation to other histories, such as literary history, calls for the incorporation of media archaeology. The concept of media archaeology as a means of understanding present and future media by re-examining the media of the past is discussed by Jussi Parikka, who elaborates on how media history should not be viewed linearly with the most recent media developments seen as a final result towards which all previous media progressed. Other scholars focus

especially on digital media, with Johanna Drucker leading the discussion on how the move from print to digital media is not synonymous with a progression from materiality to immateriality. I use the scholarship of these theorists and others to address the materiality of digital media and its tenuous dependency on ever-changing computing platforms, as well as the layers of materiality that a digital environment adds to concrete poetry. I also include Nichol's concrete poetry collection *Still Water* in this chapter, arguing that reintroducing this work to today's readers in a digital format will make it more accessible while maintaining its interactive nature. Digital repositories such as *An Online Archive for bpNichol* provide an environment that can preserve the materiality of texts by maintaining visual bibliographic codes in digital images that reproduce the texts on screen, but they do not preserve the tactile material characteristics. In the fourth chapter I propose a way to translate the tactile characteristic of physical interaction between the reader and the text to digital media, using *Still Water* and its unconventional bibliographic properties as my prototype.

Before I delve into my own propositions for editorial approaches to Nichol's works, it is important to review previous critical treatment of Nichol's writing by other editors. Gary Geddes includes Nichol in his anthologies *20th-Century Poetry & Poetics* (1973) and *15 Canadian Poets x 3* (2001). *20th-Century Poetry & Poetics* contains three Nichol poems: "The End of the Affair," "Blues," and an excerpt from "Eyes" (449-451). These poems are the last three in the poetry section of the anthology and fall under the "Concrete Poetry" section along with selections from Emmett Williams, d s h, and Ian Hamilton Finlay. There are no Dadaists included in the anthology and one author to whom Nichol does dedicate poetic inspiration, Earle Birney, is placed far away in the

anthology with no implied connections. Concrete poetry is the only sub-genre of poetry to receive its own section and there is no introduction to the concrete movement, just author biographies at the end of the book like there are for all the other poets included in the anthology. Based on the pieces selected to represent Nichol and the other concrete poets, Geddes has a limited view of concrete poetry, only including pieces that represent unconventional play with words through word placement that alludes to images—the classic concrete double-visual of a picture made from words. Geddes’ lack of attention to versions is fair, considering that “The End of the Affair” had only appeared in the almost identical 1967 and 1969 editions *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer* so far and “Blues” (a poem that has currently been adapted into at least thirty different manuscript and published versions) had only appeared in two distinct versions—that of the aforementioned editions of *Konfessions* and that of two earlier concrete anthologies (*concrete poetry britain canada united states* and *Concrete Poetry: A World View*)². However, by the time Geddes assembled *15 Canadian Poets x 3*, “Blues” had appeared with multiple fonts, spacing, and contexts. The one selected by Geddes most resembles the version of the poem that appeared in Mary Ellen Solt and Willis Barnstone’s *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1971)—in which the editors credit the poem’s first-ever publication in *concrete poetry britain canada united states* (1966) and attribute the typography to Hansjörg Mayer—but Geddes gives no indication that this is the origin of the version he uses or that any other versions exist. While his introduction to Nichol

² While I can state with certainty that there are little to no bibliographic variations between the 1967 and 1969 editions of *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer* since the 1969 edition is an exact reprinting of the first edition, I can only be certain that the typography for “Blues” is the same in *concrete poetry britain canada united states* and *Concrete Poetry: A World View* based on a textual note provided in the latter anthology. I have not been able to obtain a copy of the first anthology and, therefore it is quite possible that the production methods and physical characteristics of *concrete poetry britain canada united states* create bibliographic characteristics for “Blues” that differ from all subsequent publications of the poem.

praises the poet's visual manipulation of the page, the rest of the Nichol selections included in the anthology conform to the overall bibliographic conventions for the book, assimilating to standard font size, style, and margins. While Geddes includes some of Nichol's comics, prose, and excerpts from his long poem *The Martyrology* in this later anthology, he seems to do so mainly to show Nichol's diversity but not to situate him in relation to any sort of avant-garde aesthetics or emphasize Nichol's attention to materiality throughout all of his work.

In Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris' two-volume anthology *Poems for the Millennium: The University of California Book of Modern & Postmodern Poetry*, the poems are not organized exclusively by author but grouped into sections based on artistic movements and aesthetic themes, with some authors appearing in multiple sections. Nichol only appears in one section, "Some Language Poets," despite there also being sections for "Concrete Poetry," "Some Oral Poets," and "Toward a Cyberpoetics"—a section that would definitely suit Nichol's *First Screening* computer poems and the print works from which they evolved. To represent Nichol's works, the editors have chosen multiple excerpts from *The Martyrology* 7, which although a long poem contains elements of visual and sound poetry. Rothenberg and Joris apply the term 'Language Poets' synonymously to the group who named themselves L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets. According to Rothenberg and Joris, this literary group from the 1970s and 1980s "forced attention from a dominant form of experiential & expressive writing ... to another, also ongoing range of experiment (in which language became itself the thing in question)" (volume 2, 662). While it is a refreshing change to see Nichol labelled not as a concrete poet but as a Language Poet—a classification that arguably describes his poetic goals

more accurately—the editors’ intentions of highlighting how language can be used as more than just a “vehicle of content” excludes bibliographic possibilities for subverting language expectations (volume 2, 662). Rothenberg and Joris quote Michael Davidson’s description of Language Poetry. Davidson states that the movement “explicitly focused attention on the material of language itself” as a reaction to “expressivism;” however, he lists examples of changes to syntax and narrative style—such as “a deliberate flattening of tonal register and extensive use of non-sequitur”—as methods for creating a focus on language material in Language Poetry, rather than manipulations of the actual physical material of poetry—such as the page and type (663). In fact, all of the anthologies that I have mentioned above exclude bibliographic criticism, which would draw attention to the texts’ original physical characteristics such as the font size of “Blues,” the paper size of “The End of the Affair,” or the margins in *The Martyrology* 7. This exclusion is primarily due to the anthologies’ codex forms, in which all texts are subjected to the same bibliographic limitations of page size, available fonts, and printing budget.

Considering limitations has been a major part of writing the following pages. What limitations do we face when reproducing and reintroducing Nichol’s works? What limitations do these works face when being arranged into an edition? And is it enough to simply recognize these limitations? Since I am focusing on concrete poetry I will refer to Nichol’s description for his first concrete experiment—the foundation of a piece titled “Popular Song” (see Fig. 1 below). He said this piece was “a conscious decision to play” (*Selected Writings* 12). And that’s what he did—he played with a single word: warbled. He played with its syllables, its sound, its shape. He played with space, font style, and how type was imprinted on the page (with printing and facsimile processes). He played

with the very stuff of words and the very stuff of text in its physical form, all the while testing limitations and pushing the boundaries of what readers would interpret as communicative signs, as language. This thesis is a conscious decision to play: to find logic in the absurdity of Dada to help explain Nichol's motives, to give every margin significance in a genetic narrative, to explore the similarities between an Apple computer and a cardboard box, to test the communicative limits of online media, and to argue for the importance of stuff—not metaphor and symbolism, but the visual, aural, tangible fabric of language and literature.

warbled
WARbled
warBLED
warbled

Fig.1 “Popular Song” as printed in *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer*, 1973

Chapter 2: Resisting and Repurposing Language—Materiality in Dada and Nichol

I wasn't quite sure what exactly they'd done, but the sense was that if some guys could get up there and kick out the jams why shouldn't I do it?—Nichol on the Dadaists in a 1978 interview with Ken Norris —*Meanwhile: The Critical Writings of bpNichol* (238-39)

Generally seen by scholars as a precursor to Surrealism and an anti-movement with anarchist tendencies that resisted definition, Dada was created and practiced by numerous writers, painters, and performers from various European cities (and even New York), with each regional Dada movement framing its art in a different reactionary or deconstructive narrative. These various groups of artists constituted the avant-garde artistic movement known as Dada, which lasted for about one decade of the early twentieth century (roughly 1916-1924). The Dadaists themselves had a hard time agreeing on the details of the movement. When did it begin? Did it ever end? Who invented the word Dada and what does it mean? Should it mean anything at all? And should Dada even be considered a movement? However, there are certain trends—mainly paradoxes of complementary dichotomies—that can be observed in all Dada art. Through a focus on rethinking sign systems and embracing chance and chaos, Dada aimed to be at once more than any other artistic philosophy and not a philosophy at all; it was everything and nothing; it was creative and destructive. Nichol continuously tested the functions of sign systems, whether those systems were letters, numbers, symbols, white space, the physical characteristics of media, or signification methods of his own creation. In this chapter I will argue for the influence of Dada, along with formal similarities to the movement, in Nichol's works, suggesting an editing approach to his texts that situates them in relation to the early twentieth-century avant-garde. Of course, the Dadaists constitute just one of many avant-garde influences that preceded Nichol in the early- to

mid-twentieth century and existed alongside his work in later decades. Nichol authored multiple essays that explore the significance contained within Stein's repurposing of words into vignettes of sound, rhythm, and tone. Stein's return to raw sound was carried on in Dada, and the Dadaist inclination for challenging the concept of art objects with invisibility was carried on by John Cage and his famous re-conceptions of music—such as the piece *4'33"*, which requires musicians to sit silently for the duration of four minutes and thirty-three seconds and let the sounds of the environment create the performance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Language (or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E) Poets continued to challenge the definition of literary art in the 1970s and 1980s by rejecting expression and first-person narrative voice as the requisite ingredients of poetry and focusing on words as poetic objects. While all of these groups and individuals contributed to the development of the subgenres in which Nichol was prolific, I will cite poetry by Nichol that specifically represents Dada aesthetics through his use of intermedia, word processors, and other unconventional textual-visual forms. These Dada artistic techniques highlight the materiality and methods of production of texts—qualities that are propagated in Dada theoretical writings by avant-garde artists such as Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball, Kurt Schwitters, and Enrico Prampolini. These primary Dada texts will be supplemented by the historical research published by William S. Rubin, Lucy R. Lippard and John D. Erickson, as well as statements made by Dada scholars Arthur Cohen and Rudolf E. Kuenzli. The insight provided by these scholars will help to locate where Nichol fits in the uncertain world of Dada and its contradictions.

Dada Is Dead. Dada Is Idiotic¹

In his book *Dada and Surrealist Art*, William S. Rubin introduces Dada as a reaction to World War I violence and situates it as an attempt to replace adult corruption with a return to childlike innocence and playfulness. While Rubin does outline the communist associations and political agenda of the German Dadaists, he argues that, overall, “Dada never had a consistent set of principles and was never coherently organized; even less did it stand for a particular style in art” (10). Similarly, Nichol does not show a particular preference for genre or style—with his abundant creative output including everything from spiritual line poetry and love verses, to cartoon narratives, to an epic long poem with concrete elements (*The Martyrology*), to the highly material concrete poetry that I focus on in these chapters—but he does display a consistent curiosity for language and stretching the limits of communication. Rubin suggests that Dada art is often wrongly depicted as a negative movement because “its common denominator was the aim of subverting modern bourgeois society,” when, really, the tone of Dada was not so much destructive as regenerative, with “Dadaists everywhere call[ing] for a *tabula rasa*” (10). In her book *Dadas on Art*, Lucy Lippard elaborates on the Dadaists’ infatuation with a blank slate, saying that they also held an “attraction to the hermetic and the invisible,” and that their art often took the form of “‘dematerializations’ of the art object with a possibly reformatory end in view” (11). She cites examples of these dematerializations such as Francis Picabia’s exhibition of blank canvases and his performance art of drawing on blackboards while someone followed with an eraser, as well as a ballet by Picabia and Erik Satie that was indefinitely cancelled and Marcel

¹ All subheadings in this chapter are quotes from Tristan Tzara’s *Seven Dada Manifestoes (The Dada Painters and Poets)*.

Duchamp's "readymade" artwork that titled everyday objects as art (11). Nichol also knew how to use invisibility and dematerialization to reform existing ideas of art and literature, and his fascination with the physicality of the page informed his works along these lines. In *Truth: A Book of Fiction*, there are multiple poems titled "Studies in the Book Machine": one poem is nine pages long with the words "nine pages" spread out one letter per page, another is a two-page sequence that precedes the inner title information with the numeral "1" on the first of the two pages and "(page)" on the second (*Truth* 1-2, 28-36). In addition to other "Book Machine" studies there are pieces such as "Studies in Contradictory Information," which consists of two facing pages that are void of content except for the words "Two Blank Pages" at the top left, and "Unsigned: A Book of the Unwritten," which has a third section titled "Unsigned" comprised of six blank pages (blank save for their page numbers and the section title) (*Truth* 58-59, 165-170). These pieces of non-content are not as irrational as they may seem, but rather Nichol's endeavours to redefine the book as a physical object in its own right—one that does not need to contain narrative in the form of words in order to have significance and be considered a book. Readers can still infer a beginning, middle, and end from the collection of blank pages, but they must detect this narrative arc based on the bibliographic clues (the placement of the title, page numbers, and the fact that the numbered pages come to an end followed by an unnumbered page) instead of depending on words to relay the structure of the book. Nichol attempts to reform the medium of the book and the reader's expectation of the book, as well as his application of the page as a unit of composition and significance beyond its conventional function as a container for text.

In his essay “The Semiotics of Dada Poetry,” Rudolf E. Kuenzli justifies the irrationality of Dada with an outlook shared by many academics, explaining how Dadaists wished to challenge existing “cultural system[s]” that they felt to be problematic, and that they furthered their rejection of norms through “the displacement, deconstruction of the cultural sign system, and its replacement, the production of ‘new’ signs” (53-54). This displacement was achieved using “contradictions, nonsensical combinations, and above all willful idiocy” (58). Nichol achieves a semiotic upset decades later when he begins to create stand-alone pieces out of what he describes in a note to Emmett Williams as “syllabic and sub-syllabic messages” (Nichol qtd. in Williams). These messages include visual arrangements of individual letters, and sketches that feature letters as the subject matter in otherwise commonplace landscapes. These experiments reflect the deconstructive nature of Dada by using the smallest units of language and displacing textual codes in the context of visual art. Nichol also frequently played with the limitations of the page. In Michael Ondaatje’s film about Nichol’s work, called *The Sons of Captain Poetry*, Nichol explains his belief that, “if you’re going to actually have a poetry which is visual, that is print and is put on a page, then why not actually utilize the page as the unit of composition and utilize visuality as its main feature” (Ondaatje). This attention to materiality in literature is similarly emphasized in Dadaist writing. In his essay on Dadaist aesthetics titled “The Typographic Revolution,” Arthur Cohen discusses how Dadaists challenged the way in which conventions for the placement of print on the page shape the readers’ encounters with words. He believes the Dadaists “oblige a reconception of ... the pictorial ideogram which was once the alphabet and is now twenty six beautiful and exotic shapes”—a

vision of the alphabet similar to Nichol's sub-syllabic messages (88). Lippard explains how Dadaist Raoul Hausmann experimented with phonetic poems and representing the aural nuances of sound poetry in print by using typographic variation and changes in font size (Lippard 57). Nichol similarly used unconventional typographic methods for his deconstructed messages and attempted to combine both aural and visual communication systems in concrete works such as "Blues," his famous arrangement of the word 'love,' which, as he explains, creates long diagonals of e's and o's reminiscent of a blues moan (*Meanwhile* 361) (see Fig. 1, Appendix A).

A drastic reconception of sign systems is the focus of founding Dadaist Tristan Tzara's polemic "Dada Manifesto 1918." After setting Dada in opposition to traditional art production, to cultural norms, to economics, and to all other 'isms,' Tzara says, "Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of deconstruction to be accomplished. We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness" (Lippard 19). While Nichol does not share the same disgust for his contemporary society that Tzara does, he does voice a similar request for extinction and regeneration. In Nichol's book *ABC: The Aleph Beth Book*, he declares "Poetry being at a dead end poetry is dead. Having accepted this fact we are free to live the poem. ... The poem will live again when we accept finally the fact of the poem's death" (*ABC*). Like Tzara, Nichol rejoices in a clean slate. He both tears away our traditional concepts of language by drawing attention to the arbitrary use of letters and also attempts to construct new perceptions of language by repurposing letters in unexpected ways. In "H (an alphabet)" from *Alphabet Ilphabet*, he replaces all letters with variations of his favourite, H, forming an alphabet that is familiar yet destructive in its erasure (or more

aply, overwriting) of all other letters (see Fig. 2, Appendix A). Similarly, Nichol rejects typical word usage, and even the typical roles of words and their components, turning letters into subjects and objects in his poem “Trans-Continental,” in which he writes series of lines such as “an h moves past an m / an i becomes an r” (*The Alphabet Game* 243). Furthermore, Nichol’s 1970 work *Still Water*, a collection of concrete poems printed on twenty-eight unnumbered cards in a box, resists the same conventional arbitrary order of the book that Tzara challenged with his “static poem,” which, according to Rubin, “consisted of a group of words printed on placards placed on a row of chairs; with each raising and lowering of the curtain their order was rearranged” (73). Tzara’s static poem criticizes the communication systems that are unquestioningly accepted by the public—especially since similarly accepted contemporary systems of communication and governance had led to a world war. In keeping with Tzara and the other Dadaists, Nichol prompts reconsideration of reading actions with texts that escape book form and invite reordering.

The Thought Is Made in the Mouth

Another way by which Dada insisted on the reconsideration of communicative actions was the return to primal and childlike sound. The most apparent connection between Nichol and Dada lies in the use of sound and the legacy of Hugo Ball, the Dadaist responsible for the Cabaret Voltaire and the development of sound poetry. Cabaret Voltaire was a venue for live performance in Zurich, Switzerland, offering a forum for experimental and subversive musical, dramatic, and poetic acts, as well as lectures and “Dada pranks” (Rubin 63). Held in a hall attached to a restaurant, Cabaret Voltaire debuted on February 5th, 1916, and immediately drew large crowds (63). Ball

used the Cabaret Voltaire to share what he termed “Lautgedicht,” or “the pure phonetic, or sound poem” (64). One of Ball’s most well-known sound poems also appeared in print in the *Dada Almanach* under the title “Karawane” (see Fig. 3, Appendix A). The piece was supposed to represent a caravan of elephants in a way that was not descriptive but in which the words became the elephants, with the repetition of such ‘words’ as “bung” and “ba-umf.” Kuenzli points out that Ball was using onomatopoeia and rhythm in his attempt to re-create a pure adamic language that resisted social influences, one “in which the essence of objects is rendered in sounds” (Kuenzli 67). In “Dada Lama,” a six-part poem that he dedicates “to the memory of Hugo Ball,” Nichol uses both the visual and aural characteristics of poetry to capture an essence (see Fig. 4, Appendix A). The letters are carefully arranged in patterns of line lengths and lower and upper cases, but the poem gains its real effect from being read aloud, since it does not contain any words but is instead composed of groupings of letters that create a progression of chant-like noises and attempt to capture the sounds of religious contemplation in print. Nichol mentions the presence of chant rhythms in concrete poetry in his critical writing “Passwords: The bissett Papers.” He states, “what has from the first distinguished much canadian & american concrete ... from the rest of the world movement has been a fascination with the primitive by this i mean a fascination with chant” (*Meanwhile* 46). For Ball, primal sounds are objects and, unlike words, they are not removed from an object by “the necessary falsification” of language (Kuenzli 67). Even though he uses words, Nichol achieves Ball’s vision of sounds as objects in his sound poem “Beast (for Hugo Ball),” a piece he recorded for the audio cassette *bp* in 1971.² “Beast” begins and ends with

² A digital audio recording of “Beast (for Hugo Ball)” can be found at <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Nichol.php>

Nichol's melodic account that he "dreamed he saw Hugo Ball," but is built up in the middle with a warning not to come like lambs to slaughter ("Beast"). Nichol chants "bleeding" relentlessly like an actual gushing open wound, he pants through repetitions of the word "breathing," cries "slaughter" with a breaking voice, and recurrently hurls the word "animal" like a primal scream ("Beast"). This homage to Ball embodies the essence of its contents in the arrangement and vocalization of words, making language a very direct and visceral communication system, just as Ball and other Dadaists imagined it should be.

Another Ball specialty was the simultaneous poem, a type of performance he did with fellow Dadaists that involved reciting three different monologues at the same time. Nichol created similar overlapping sound poetry arrangements with The Four Horsemen, a group he formed with Steve McCaffery, Paul Dutton, and Rafael Barreto-Rivera. In his work with The Four Horsemen, Nichol shifted his focus from the materiality of letters to the materiality of sound. In the sound poetry scores that Nichol drew up for the group, grids were marked with a row for each group member and columns filled with onomatopoeia and doodles of mouths, noses, and kazoos (see Fig. 5, Appendix A). When discussing sound poetry with Ondaatje, Nichol states that his goal was "liberating the sound, completely, just throwing it out into the space" (Ondaatje). Again this aim seems very similar to Ball's quest for adamic language. According to Kuenzli, Ball's quest was in keeping with the common Dada desire to return to "primal chaos" (Kuenzli 69). In his "Dada Manifesto," Ball explains the function of his poetry and performances: "It will serve to show how articulated language comes into being. I let the vowels fool around. I let the vowels quite simply occur, as a cat miaows" (221). While this statement, like

Nichol's idea of throwing sound out into space, does imply a certain chaos, it also suggests that language—sounds, vowels, syllables—is a creature in and of itself with its own agency. Ball concludes the manifesto by proclaiming that “Dada is the heart of words,” and “each thing has its word, but the word has become a thing by itself” (221). By getting down to the raw components of language, Dada gives language the power to act as more than just a placeholder for meaning.

Just as Ball praised raw sound, Enrico Prampolini, a Futurist artist who played an important role in furthering Dada in Italy, praised the invention of mechanical noisemakers that create “new musical sounds inspired by noise,” a concept very similar to both the Dadaists' and Nichol's experiments with sound poetry (Lippard 117). Nichol also reflects some of Prampolini's ideas, which appear in the manifesto “Aesthetic of the Machine,” in his visual poetry. Nichol describes a large portion of his concrete poems as typewriter pomes or “ideopomes,” pieces that are constructed around the capabilities and limitations of the typewriter. Nichol first pounded out one of his best-known poems, “The End of the Affair” (see Fig. 6, Appendix A), in the late 1960s on a Royal Portable typewriter, which he notes was “breathing hard too with all those g's & 8's” (*Selected Writing* 14). This detail recalls the mechanical noise that Prampolini attributes to “the overpowering lyricism of machines” (Lippard 117). Nichol then recreated the same poem on his IBM Selectric in 1980 (*Selected Writing*), making sure to note the change of means of production directly underneath the poem. In fact, this note is not so much a footnote, but part of the poem itself, making the material circumstances of the poem's creation inseparable from the creative work. Similarly, Nichol's collection *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer* (1967) includes a poem titled “The Evening's Ritual,” which is

a diagonally slanted stanza that repeats a single line of text with the first word shifted to the last place in the line with each repetition. This little visual poem reappears as “Letter” in Nichol’s computer-poetry collection *First Screening* (1984). This time it is an animated sequence that presents one line of the poem at a time, creating the shifting effect with a rhythmic mechanical movement akin to a jolting conveyor belt. This evolution of Nichol’s poems through various forms of print and digital word processors corresponds with Prampolini’s desire to “conside[r] the Machine and Mechanical elements as new symbols of aesthetic inspiration,” and fits with the Dadaists’ call for new methods of signification (Lippard 116).

Dada; Every Object, All Objects

In an interview with Nicette Jukelevics in 1974, Nichol answered Jukelevics’ question about what in particular in Dada influenced his work with the following response:

I remember what impressed me most at the time was Kurt Schwitters’ ‘W’ poem. ... The poem was the letter W, and that blew my head really. ... And when I thought about it, I realized that there was tremendous power in that simple letter, and that was very exciting. So that sort of opened up the idea. (*Meanwhile* 133)

The ideas that opened up from Nichol’s encounter with Hanover artist Schwitters’ “W” poem have certainly been numerous and a major focal point of his work. Multiple collaborations that Nichol did with silk-screen artist Barbara Caruso involved a series of portraits of a single letter (H in *Love Affair*) or a group of letters (A,B,C,D in *Unit of Four*). The letter A gets its own narrative series in *Aleph Unit*, while each letter of the alphabet becomes a kaleidoscopic statement in *ABC: The Aleph Beth Book*, and a lowercase i garnished with an extra dot atop of its usual one gets a poem to itself in *Still*

Water. In 1920, Schwitters wrote about his approach to writing in *Merz*, mentioning his appreciation for the individual units of language and their potential for absurdity:

Elements of poetry are letters, syllables, words, sentences.
Poetry arises from the interaction of these elements.
Meaning is important only if it is employed as one such
factor. I play off sense against nonsense. I prefer nonsense
but that is a purely personal matter. I feel sorry for
nonsense, because up to now it has so seldom been
artistically molded, that is why I love nonsense. (Lippard
102)

In his book *Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art*, John Erickson argues that, while “the Dada poem overtly announces the rejection of mimesis,” it “does not merely *represent* nonsense” (88). Instead, he proposes that, “in destroying referentiality (or ‘meaning’), the Dada poet effectively and openly sets aside the very obstacle that lies between the reader and the significance of a poem” (88). Nichol makes it clear that his concrete poems depicting single letters or groups of letters are meant to eliminate the hindering expectation that letters must be interpreted as signifiers of meaning, must be ordered and read to reveal significance. Instead, his exploration of the alphabet presents letters in such a way (giving them their own pages with titles) that they establish their own significance. They look out at the reader with no assumption that they are mediating a signified message interfering with their communication. In the author’s statement appended to his collection *bp*, Nichol says that, “there are no barriers in art” and “where there are barriers the art is made small by them” (*Meanwhile* 18). Nichol’s feelings toward a preference of raw material over metaphor and emotion are also articulated in his *Selected Organs: Parts of an Autobiography* when he describes the “barriers [...] between him and some imagined other” as “The metaphors. The similes. The symbolisms” (*An H in the Heart* 88). At this point in his writing career, Nichol indicates that these poetic devices are not

sufficient systems for the communication he needs to achieve, and that he wishes to employ the material aspects of language in his writing instead.

Erickson explains that differences in ideas of system are what caused many Dadaists to not see eye to eye. For example, French Dadaist-Surrealist André Breton believed in the implementation of system and the creation of a cohesive art movement—something that Tzara viewed as a barrier. Erickson even goes so far as to suggest a difference between the Dadaists (who aimed for a more systematic movement) and the Dadas (who followed Tzara’s more anarchic ideals (63-64). Even though I do not differentiate between these two terms in this chapter, Erickson’s argument brings up the question of where Nichol fits in his spectrum of Dada and Dadaists. The answer can be found in *The Sons of Captain Poetry*, when Nichol speaks about the use of systems in literature and communication:

my concern is to somehow teach what I see as the validity of having as many perceptual systems available to you as possible; that this is the only way to really survive in a world in which the insistence on one level of meaning has become paramount. . . .The only survival technique in such a world is to become a master of as many systems of perceptions as possible so that you can move with freedom through all systems of perception. (Ondaatje)

This statement endorses systems, but a plurality of constantly evolving ones, not a single authoritative system to characterize an artistic movement. Additionally, in one of his notebooks from 1963, Nichol writes down some of his thoughts concerning poetry, rhythm, and form. He considers how traditional forms, such as the sonnet, restrict “emotional responses” to “the rhythmic pattern possible in this stylized form” (Untitled Notebook). He goes on to suggest that his contemporary world requires more than a limited range of “stylized emotional responses,” and demands that writers “must

eliminate completely the old ideas of rhythmic pattern and perhaps the whole idea of pattern” (Untitled Notebook). Nichol then clarifies that this call for the eradication of pattern “does not mean a [D]adaist destructiveness but merely destructiveness in order to start anew or to rebuild on an earlier and stronger foundation” (Untitled Notebook). This last excerpt from his notebook may seem to counteract my argument connecting Dada and Nichol, but a quotation written out a few pages later amongst other bits and pieces of theories and creative inspiration is attributed to Hugo Ball in 1916. Nichol’s transcription of Ball’s words states that, “what we call DADA is ... a play with shabby remnants, a death-sentence on posturing morality and fulsomeness” (Ball qtd. in Untitled Notebook). The inclusion of this quotation in Nichol’s personal writing indicates that he wishes to resist using communication systems to pursue traditional literary goals such as didactic messages, and instead break these systems down to their basic elements (the shabby remnants of conventional signifiers), take the pieces (letters, sounds, and markings), and build countless new systems (concrete, visual, and sound poetry experiments). This desire places him in the middle of the Dada spectrum, somewhere in between anarchy and a systematic movement. Nichol does not wish to do away with systems of language and notation, but rather see them overhauled and reinvented until there is a great enough plurality of communicative codes.

Like Ball, Nichol strives to pluralize communicative systems by reducing them to their smallest units and repurposing those elements. In a 1968 interview with George Bowering, Nichol describes the creative process of concrete poetry as “working with visual rhythms” and “taking language and dealing with the smallest particle of information, say the letter” (*Meanwhile* 38). This treatment of language is very similar to

Ball's quest for skimming language down to its raw ingredients, such as individual sounds. "Sub-syllabic" sounds were just one of the ways in which Nichol utilized letters, breaking them free of their sole usage as a notational system to create common signifiers (words) and using them instead as representations of sound, geometric shapes, and characters or objects with self-contained significance (Nichol qtd. in Williams). In "Eyes" (see Fig. 7, Appendix A), Nichol creates tessellating patterns out of letters, and in *Alphabet Ilphabet* he rebuilds the alphabet twice over using just two letter shapes (see Fig. 2, Appendix A). In the sound-poetry score "My Other Use: To Hear," he replaces traditional notation with sketches of lips, noses, and kazoos that stand in as words, notes, and sounds (see Fig. 5, Appendix A). Not only does he deconstruct and reinvent patterns of language and systems of communication and notation, but he also restructures the relationship between signifier and signified, using letters in the subject and object positions of many of his line poems and then giving them an added materiality by using them in his concrete work as both abstract signifiers (like nouns) and visual components in textual landscapes. Just as Ball claimed that, "the word has become a thing in itself," Nichol's concrete poetry gives the letter its own identity and significance without insisting on combining letters to form words as part of a communicative system.

Dada's an Awl. All Is Dada

A likeness to Dada in Nichol's writing is not exclusive to his concrete poetry. Dadaist elements can even be seen in the children's poetry books that he authored. In his book *Giants, Moosequakes & Other Disasters*, he plays with sound poetry and primitive sounds to create rhythmic lines of nonsense syllables. He also draws attention to letters, breaking down language to its smallest units in such poems as "The Months with No E."

Similarly, it is easy to draw Dada connections in Nichol's more traditional line poetry. In "Song for Saint Ein," he conjures Dadaist ideas about deconstructing the systems of language in order to resist the cultural codes that have corrupted the world: "somewhere i exist separate from this page / this cage of sounds & signs" (*Zygal* 15). There are also much more obvious Dada references such as "Portrait of David," a pamphlet-sized publication with a photocopy image of a face and various gibberish questions composed of the words "David" and "Dada" printed in black marker. Nichol, along with Steve McCaffery, even channelled the Dadaist spirit by writing a manifesto for their Toronto Research Group in 1972-73, proclaiming that writing and action are inseparable (McCaffery 23). However, it is Nichol's concrete poetry that really brings materiality to the forefront and engages the reader in Dada concepts that depend on this materiality, such as machine aesthetics and production methods, text as object, and the deconstruction of systems of communication including the alphabet, the limitations of the page, and bibliographic codes.

Materiality manifested itself throughout Dada, but it became particularly apparent in two genres popularized by Dada artists: photomontage and collage. Rubin explains the function of photomontage as follows: "In its pure form, photomontage entirely eliminated any need to paint or draw; the mass media could provide all the material. One could attack the bourgeoisie with distortions of it own communications imagery" (83-84). Remixing communications imagery was also a phenomenon of the collage, for which both Max Ernst and Kurt Schwitters were well known. Ernst (a Dadaist from Cologne) changed the common perception of collages by not using glue, but simply unifying collections of images with seemingly irrelevant titles. Rubin states that Ernst's "definition

of collage [was] a superimposition of *images*” (95). Some of Nichol’s collections could be considered collages in this sense, even though they are not cut and pasted together. For example, *Letters Home*—which was included as part of *bp*, along with the flip book *Wild Thing: for the Troggs*, the record *Borders*, and the line poetry book *Journeying and the Returns*—is an envelope filled with what he called “15 concrete pome objects” (*GrOnk* 6/7 [back cover]). These objects consist of different inks and fonts on papers of a variety of sizes, textures, and colours. The poems range from a purple craft paper square with a concrete piece about orgies printed in multi-coloured ink, to a glossy white rectangle with a barely distinguishable off-white bottle formed by the repetition of the word ‘milk,’ to a reflective silver cut-out of the initials ‘bp,’ to a “kinetic” version of the “Cold Mountain” flipbook with instructions to burn it. This grab bag of visual poetry provides a mélange of content and sensual stimulation for the reader. The poems are highly visual, and their lack of conformation to a book or canvas makes them tactile as well. The material characteristics and literary content of the poems offer plenty of opportunity for juxtaposition, and sorting through the individual pieces creates a superimposition of images and text in the reader’s mind, as the poems each demand their own space but also create an accretion of content that can all be considered as a holistic piece under the title *Letters Home*. The layering and scrambling of text and markings in works such as *Lament: A Sound Poem* (see Fig. 8, Appendix A), *White Sound*, and the *Scaptures* series also function as superimpositions, making them self-contained collages that exist within the two-dimensional field of the page. Similarly, Nichol often wrote or typed on top of existing printed materials, thereby creating a superimposition of purposes for the physical paper object. For example, he published “Water Poem #3” on the back of match books

(which jwcurry's "Notes toward a beeplography" states contained thirty matches each [268]) and "A Vision in the U of T Stacks" on library cataloguing forms with the main content consisting of blank paper inked with library administrative stamps. The bpNichol fonds at Simon Fraser University contains an unpublished piece made from a condition form for cataloguing books on which he circled certain words and spelled out "Christ in the U of T Library" using black marker. Furthermore, the simultaneous poetry of Nichol and the Four Horsemen, like that of Ball and friends, is an aural version of collage, where narratives and arrangements of noise and words coexist and layer upon one another.

Schwitters created collages as part of a movement he called Merz because he did not agree with some of the anti-art aspects of Dada, so he decided to establish, as Rubin describes it, his own "personal form of Dada," complete with the 1923 publication of the *Merz* review (99). Rubin talks of Schwitters' Merz collages as "ensembles" and explains that the term Merz came from the second syllable of the German word 'Kommerz,' which ended up becoming a prominent focal point in a collage in which Schwitters used an ad for Kommerz-und privat-bank (99-100). Schwitters' use of ads reflects the purpose of the photomontage—creating art to challenge mainstream standards by employing found objects and texts from mainstream culture. Nichol also uses the concept of found text in some of his poetry, such as the poem group "Three Months in New York City: The Actual Life of Language 1" (from the collection *Art Facts*), which is composed of snippets of headlines from the *New York Daily News* in 1978 (*The Alphabet Game* 293-306). "Puzzle," which is a rearrangement of words from an 1873 advertisement in *GRIP* (*Selected Writing* 126), and "BUIK: Glasgow Dialectics," which is a two-person sound poetry score composed of, as Nichol writes, "vocabulary derived from graffiti found in

Glasgow and from poems by Ian Hamilton Finlay and Tom Leonard,” are other examples of poetry created from repurposed texts. These existing texts have been pieced together to form content that challenges their original context, as is the case with turning advertisements and news headlines into avant-garde poetry, or that mixes unlikely genres in a montage of textual material, as is the case with combining contemporary poetry (that of Finlay and Leonard) with another form of subversive writing (graffiti).

Nichol’s talent for montage is also present in his editing work for his self-published series *GrOnk*. Operating in conjunction with Nichol’s other project *Ganglia*, which became more of a publishing outfit under which various works by both Nichol and his contemporaries were distributed, *GrOnk* was more of a periodical that featured a variety of short works by numerous authors in each issue. *GrOnk* often featured the kind of experimental and artistic typography that was popular in Dada periodicals and publications, along with mixed and matched paper types in loosely stapled booklets that frequently had inserts. This factor, also like Dada periodicals, gave the publication a collage sensibility. Nichol acted as editor for a few concrete collections as well, including *The Cosmic Chef: An Evening of Concrete*, in which he furthered the collage element (despite the more consistent bibliographic features of the publication) by not including the authors’ names with their contributions but simply listing authors with corresponding page numbers in the textual apparatus at the end instead. This method of arrangement created juxtapositions that clashed but also flowed without barrier of authorial attribution in order to create one large compilation of concrete out of many incongruous pieces.

Dada Is the Chameleon of Rapid, Interested Change

I want to maintain this element of collage and freedom from metadata (such as bibliographic citations) in my digital edition of Nichol's Dadaist works, thereby allowing the reader to order a narrative through visual perception rather than one-sided communication from editor to reader. I accomplish this presentation by creating chapter "maps" for my edition in which excerpts and sections of six individual works are shown in a grid (see Fig. 1, Appendix B). Each poem gets the same amount of space in the collage (a perfect square with consistent dimensions) and upon first inspection of the chapter map, the reader will perceive six different but equally-sized textual images. These images are only partials of the full poem (which in turn may only be one part of a larger text) since only the amount of image that can fit in the constraints of the square are initially visible. This format may take visual excerpts of poems out of context, but it creates visually inferred relations among the poem excerpts, allowing the reader to draw connections among bordering squares in the map. When the edition is live online, readers will then be able to hover their cursors over the squares on the map to reveal pop-ups of the poems in full and metadata indicating title and publication information (see Fig. 2, Appendix B). There will also be links leading to full-length works for poems or poem sections that originate from a larger series. The digital medium of my edition allows the reader to experience the poems on two different communicative levels: one with juxtaposition and no imposition of metadata, and one which focuses on making a single piece of poetry comprehensible and contextualized. Not only does a digital edition make it possible for two different editing arrangements to be simultaneous and co-existing—thereby doubling the systems of communication with the reader (something Nichol strove

for)—but it also allows the selected poems to maintain their individual material characteristics and bibliographic codes, at least on a visual level. In a textual edition, the format of a book and the restrictions placed on that format by economic factors would require assimilating all works to the same paper size and colour, as well as losing physical elements of the book objects such as staples and binding, which can be captured using a camera or scanner for digital image reproductions. While my Dadaist edition gives the reader the choice of viewing a collection of poems without paratext, in order to present the material in manageable amounts, it does group poems by theme, thus imposing an element of classification (which attributes the metadata of category to each poem). I have grouped poems into chapters based on Dada principles, such as deconstruction, raw language, found objects, and machine aesthetics. Poems from the same series appear in different groupings and some poems even appear in multiple chapters, furthering the overlap feeling of a collage and Nichol’s notion of a plurality of perceptions in communication systems. A rethinking of communication and a restructuring of language from the smallest and rawest elements (the “shabby remnants”) upwards is the crux of Dada’s influence on Nichol. The material nature of Nichol’s concrete poetry offers potential for thinking of the letter as an object and the page as a unit of communication; therefore, a selection of Nichol’s concrete chosen to augment its Dadaist connections and a Dadaist approach to presenting this selection should not be overlooked. For texts that thrive on deconstructive logic demonstrated with nonsense and absurdity, a Dada-centric edition is as logical as it gets.

Chapter 3: Mapping Materiality with Genetic Criticism

A sudden slice changes the whole plate, it does so suddenly.

Act so that there is no use in a centre. – Gertrude Stein, “Breakfast” and “Rooms,” *Tender Buttons* (26, 43)

Nichol’s visual poems (alternately called typewriter poems, concrete poetry, and ideopomes), along with his notation of sound poetry performances and his cross-genre poetry drawings, are not only experiments with Dadaist notions of raw language and anti-literature but also prime examples of texts that require a textual apparatus that is more representative of bibliographic codes than traditional end or foot notes, redefining criticism to address more than the linguistic aspects of the text. In “What is Critical Editing?” from *The Textual Condition*, Jerome J. McGann distinguishes between the linguistic and bibliographic components of texts. McGann explains the interaction of these two components as follows: “a great many writers, and all poets, appreciate the symbolic and signifying dimensions of the physical medium through which (or rather *as* which) the linguistic text is embodied” (“Critical Editing” 56). With these physical media in mind, critical analyses of Nichol’s avant-garde poetry should better reflect the production of the texts, whether these processes are linked to Dadaist machine aesthetics or the destruction and subsequent re-creation of language. One way in which traditional critical editions neglect the importance of materiality and production processes in literature is the separation of annotations and editorial apparatuses from the primary text. With texts like Nichol’s that deconstruct and re-create language, it is helpful to see how the texts themselves have been reconceptualised and repurposed from draft to publication to republication, and it is integral to the reader’s understanding that the visually material nature of the works be preserved by making the annotations equally visual. By implementing these changes, the critical edition can become a direct extension of the

creative work, as opposed to a format in which the text and the textual apparatus are completely different species. Further, a revised editing approach to Nichol's concrete poetry that is based upon the principles of genetic criticism and editing, an approach which studies and presents multiple versions of a single text in order to highlight the process involved in the text's production and reproduction, will reveal the driving evolutionary movement that is seen in the metamorphoses of his works. Additionally, Nichol's enthusiastic use of ever-evolving print technology, along with his frequent repurposing of his own work, is best suited to an editorial rationale that does not focus on an author's final intentions but rather highlights the authorial process, which can be made visible by examining all the variations of a handful of texts. In this chapter, I will address the question of how to represent Nichol's creative evolution by editorial means, and in doing so I will work to reconcile genetic criticism (which typically concerns itself with pre-publication manuscripts) with a bibliographical orientation, which draws attention to the physical characteristics of a text including those features attributed to printing processes and publication specifications. This reconciliation will require me to examine the relationship between a selection of Nichol's concrete poetry and an apparatus that tracks the genetic evolution of these poems. My arguments in this chapter are supplemented by references to a critical-edition proof of concept that I created for an in-class textual editing project and the genetic-editing component of my digital-edition prototype. The poems examined here are prime examples of texts that Nichol adapted and reprinted with varying material characteristics; therefore, materiality will be the main consideration throughout my genetic analysis.

What Makes and Modifies Concrete Poetry

To support this approach, I will first provide context for the study of bibliographic codes and then examine the nature and theory of concrete poetry in general, as well as Nichol's individual treatment of the genre. In *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age: Theory and Practice*, Peter L. Shillingsburg outlines five different editorial orientations that can be applied to various textual editing theories and critical approaches. These orientations "either reveal where the editor has located 'authority' or where he will locate it" (16). After discussing orientations that focus on historical authenticity, aesthetic principles, the author's biography, and social contexts, Shillingsburg explains the bibliographic orientation, which "enlarges the definition of text to include all aspects of the physical forms upon which the linguistic text is written" (23). According to him, these physical forms include

the texture of the paper, the type font, the style and expense of binding, the color, the indications on the book of the type of marketing undertaken, the price, the width of margins—in short, all aspects of the physical object that is the book that bear clues to its origins and destinations and social and literary pretensions. (24)

For example, by studying this thesis bibliographically, the physical characteristics indicate that it is an academic text (based on spacing and margins) created in a word-processing program (owing to the font) and not intended for commercial sale or mass production (because it is printed with no marketing features on uneconomical letter-sized paper with double-spacing). Similarly, examining the same features in Nichol's concrete poetry not only informs readers as to how the texts were produced and what their intended functions were, but also reveals that Nichol used these material aspects of the book as part of his message—one that demands that readers consider the book for its

identity as an object rather than just its literary status. Shillingsburg argues that the bibliographic orientation is difficult to apply strictly and without exception in editorial practice because it “does not admit to any parts of the text or of the physical medium to be considered nonsignificant and therefore emendable,” but he does believe that “the insights of this orientation are frequently alluded to in proposals for digital image reproductions in electronic archives” (23-24). Digital editions contained in electronic repositories or online have the ability to preserve bibliographic characteristics better than print editions because scanned images retain the visual physical aspects of the texts without the assimilation that is required by formatting individually published pieces for a collection or anthology. Since a bibliographic orientation does not allow any textual features to be overlooked, genetic analyses that adhere to a bibliographic orientation must avoid creating eclectic texts, which are texts produced by collating features from all existing versions and emended to produce a copy text that includes the “best” of these features. Eclectic texts are highly impractical for concrete poetry because there is no clear way of deciding which margin width or font size is the “best” since each of these material characteristics is dependent and intrinsically linked to individual versions, their media, and the contexts of their production. The only way in which the copy-texts (the text presented as the reading text in the main body of the edition) of my textual editing project were edited is either in regards to resizing of the entire image (treating the page as a unit) or the removal of another editor’s notes in cases where the sources are anthologies.

Prior to the emergence of digital editions, there were plenty of instances in which concrete poets, including Nichol, had their work edited into collections and anthologies. Emmett Williams, who edited the *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* in 1967, describes

concrete poetry as the use of “semantic, visual and phonetic elements of language as raw materials” (Williams vi), while Mary Ellen Solt, who helped compile *Concrete Poetry: A World View* in 1970, agrees that the “fundamental requirement” of concrete poetry is a “concentration upon the physical material from which the poem or text is made” (Solt 7). Notably, existing variations of the bibliographic characteristics of Nichol’s poem “Blues” are not mentioned when the poem is reprinted in Solt’s anthology. For Solt, “physical material” seems to be more about the units of language (letters, spaces, and punctuation) than the physical elements that comprise the textual medium. Similarly, Williams does not seem to consider the potential significance of unused page space in concrete poetry, since he fills in the blank space around “Eyes” with excerpts from a letter from Nichol. In a 1974 interview with Nicette Jukelevics, Nichol explains that he did not necessarily consider his poetry to fall under the traditional category of concrete, but rather as poetry that “us[ed] the fact that the page is a visual field to do visual things” (*Meanwhile* 135). In the same interview he goes on to argue that page margins (or “left hand and right hand terminal points”) and how they function are very important in poetry, including concrete and visual poetry, as opposed to prose, in which margins exist “simply because you can’t have a book that runs out” (Miki 135). In the introduction to *Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book Machine*, a book in which Steve McCaffery presents the theoretical notes and essays that he and Nichol created as the Toronto Research Group, McCaffery states that the conversations between him and Nichol often focused on “a poetry that would jettison the word in favour of more current cognitive codes” (9). One code that Nichol used in his poetry was that of page limitations, making the physical properties of the page work as poetic content. For example, in *Still Water*, the poem “the blue pen i

write these poems with” is clever because it is printed neatly in black ink in the centre of a square card, as if it is one cue in a series of reminders presented to the reader. The writer’s attention to these bibliographic codes warrants the same attention in a critical edition, and genetic criticism allows the bibliographic variants of each publication to be presented to the reader for consideration.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Nichol stresses the importance of his relationship with the material aspects of the creative process when he describes the day he wrote “The End of the Affair.” He recalls how his own mood was mimicked by the “breathing” and “chanting” of his “trustworthy royal portable [typewriter]” and how he was aware of each character that he dispensed upon the page with each “whack” of a key (*Selected Writing* 14). Nichol started out referring to his concrete style of poetry as “ideopomes,” defining the term as a creative use of the capabilities and limitations offered by the medium of the typewriter (*Selected Writing* 12). He elaborated this idea by stating that, “typewriter poems can succeed by acknowledging and taking advantage of the fact that each character occupies exactly the same space as any other character” or by “working against the geometrical exactness of the typewriter” (*Selected Writing* 14). Nichol’s attention to the function of his typewriter makes the material and bibliographical conditions of the poem’s existence integral to its communication with the reader. As it happens, when the collection *Selected Writing* was compiled in 1980, a new version of “The End of the Affair” was included. Nichol created this version on his IBM Selectric, thereby changing the material conditions of the poem’s creation and the bibliographic codes of its presentation (38). The attachment to his royal portable is no longer present in his later engagement with the same set of characters that he had originally used to notate

“The End of the Affair,” but Nichol still recognizes the importance of the process behind the poem, drawing attention to the means of production in *Selected Writing* by including the note: “version executed May 6/80 adjutant face on an IBM selectric” (38). The different types lend distinct tones to the different printings of the poem, and the appearances of the two versions hint at their respective production processes even without Nichol’s note added to the 1980 version (see Fig. 6, Appendix A). In the 1967 publication of “The End of the Affair,” the non-uniform spacing and slight variations in thickness between multiples of the same letter suggest the less consistent movements of a typewriter with individual type bars, while the clean homogeneity of the 1980 variant suggests the exactness of an electric typewriter. These variances cause the 1967 version to have more ominous and angled g’s, a more hectic mid-section with the repetition of the word ‘organ,’ and a bottom arrangement of 8’s that stands out distinctly from the letters that compose the top three-quarters of the poem and challenges the adjacent g’s by commanding a disproportionate amount of space for the lanky 8’s. In comparison, the 1980 publication of “The End of the Affair” is much more demure and less confrontational with a more visually pleasing interaction between letters and numbers. Nichol’s choice of the word “executed” over “composed” in his note for the *Selected Writing* version echoes his desire to seek new forms of communication and his willingness to evolve his craft within a technological world of equally evolving means of production—including, at the time, early personal computers that used programming language to “execute” words onscreen. Another poem from *Konfessions* was republished with new production methods as part of Nichol’s computer poem collection *First Screening* in 1984, a collection that will be the focus of the next chapter. A genetic

editing orientation focuses the reader's critical analysis on this evolution from one publication of a piece to the next, demanding interpretation of the differences between each. A collection of Nichol's poems that presents each poem genetically invites the reader to infer changes in production methods, changes in what is considered aesthetically pleasing, and changes in the author's intentions for the visual tone of each piece, while also allowing the reader to apply these narratives of change to other poems in order to deduce how Nichol's works are interrelated by external influences and his own changing interests.

Genetic Narratives for Bibliographic Character(istic)s

Genetic criticism took off with French literary critics in the 1960s and 1970s, and is tied up in a much lengthier history of manuscript studies (Deppman et al. 1-2). As Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden discuss in their introduction to *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-textes*, genetic criticism "is mainly concerned with how texts are produced, just like eighteenth-century interest in "see[ing] great works in their seminal state" (2-3). However, Deppman et al. argue that, unlike early scholars of manuscript studies, "for geneticists, instead of a fixed, finished object in relation to which all previous states are considered, a given text becomes—or texts become—the contingent manifestation of a *diachronous* play of signifiers" (5). In other words, each version of one of Nichol's poems is informed by the material characteristics of all preceding versions and the significance attached to those characteristics. While genetic criticism best directs the reader's study of Nichol's poems, the standard form of annotations used for this critical orientation, which refers to spelling and word use variations in a coded list ordered by line number, does not provide adequate

representation on the subtle variances in bibliographic characteristics. With poems in which there is no traditional concept of lineation, annotations that cite by line number become insufficient. A textual apparatus that relies on the conventional notational devices of letters, numbers and punctuation is too limited when applied to works that, in Nichol's words, "begin to explore further the interior of letters" (*Selected Writing* 15), or treat letters "as syllabic and sub-syllabic messages," as is the case with pieces such as his "Eyes" or *Love Affair* series (Nichol qtd. in Williams). With today's technology it is possible to redefine the bibliographic codes of critical editions and use non-traditional forms of presentation, annotation, and criticism to better reflect the nature of modern and post-modern texts.

Genetic editing "grows out of a structuralist and poststructuralist notion of 'text' as an infinite play of signs" (Deppman et al. 2). Nichol used the signifier-signified relationship of language to play with the signification of pages, books, and even individual letters (considered in many cases as shapes) to challenge how readers expect the physical elements of text to function. In the section of *Rational Geomancy* titled "The Book as Machine," the reader can find a list of observations by Nichol and McCaffery called "Twenty-one Facts that Could Alter your Life" (63). Fact 11 states that "page becomes an active space, a meaningful element in the compositional process and the size and shape of it become significant variables" (65). For Nichol, bibliographic codes comprised more than just a body to hold textual ideas; they were body language that supplemented and expanded those ideas. Deppman et al. acknowledge that this textual body language is informative and significant to critical readers. They explain that genetic criticism's main concern is "not the existing documents but the movement of writing that

must be inferred from them,” but they also note that understanding this movement requires genetic criticism to be “deeply aware of the text’s aesthetic dimensions” (Deppman et al. 2). Since Nichol includes bibliographic codes as part of his poems’ aesthetic dimensions, the materiality of his work plays a major part in the movement of his writing. Many of his poems do not vary in content between versions, but their aesthetics change due to alterations in bibliographic code. Genetic criticism allows readers to see how Nichol repeats the same statements with significantly different body language.

While French genetic criticism is more concerned with identifying the “best text” out of all versions and using this text as the copy text for a new edition, German genetic editing does not aim to select or amalgamate versions to designate a singular authoritative text (Deppman et al. 10). The German approach to genetic editing is the approach that informs both my proof-of-concept textual edition and my digital-edition prototype of Nichol’s poems. For my proof-of-concept edition, I chose to present all printed versions of a poem as scanned images in the textual notes, with the publication in which the version appeared, as well as the date of that publication, appearing in red (see Appendix C). However, unlike the prevalent genetic approach of focusing on manuscripts, I chose to study the material aspects of multiple printed (that is, published) versions of a text. In my current research for my digital edition, a “text” can exist as multiple versions—each an individual document—including unpublished manuscripts and all published editions, reprints, and variations that occurred after initial publication. In the introduction to *Contemporary German Editorial Theory*, Hans Walter Gabler argues that “the act of publication does not bar continuation of the act(s) of writing,” and that “editing the text

means also to attend to those later acts and to present them editorially in their dynamic quality” (6). Gabler believes that “the special attention devoted in German textual scholarship to the analysis and editing of draft manuscripts has also sharpened awareness of textual processes beyond the act and moment of first publication” (6). Just as manuscripts can be read as drafts leading up to the first instance of publication, published versions of a text can be read as drafts preceding later publications in varying contexts and media with new bibliographic traits. Altering bibliographic code in later publications often depends upon the available production methods, economic conditions of production, and targeted audience. Gabler also notes that these post-publication alterations are products of both authorial intention and social and economic influences (6). For example, shrinking the font and reducing the margins of one of Nichol’s poems might result from the need to publish the poem more cost-effectively in an edition with a larger circulation. Gabler describes one feature of German scholarly editing as the “integral apparatus,” which “incorporat[es] variance into invariant context” and “go[es] beyond the notion of the apparatus as a textual and typographical adjunct to the edited text of a scholarly edition” (6-7). The annotations used in my textual and digital editions could be considered an integral apparatus because they indicate an evolutionary movement among published versions (each of which would have been considered fixed at the time of printing), and they interact with the main content to allow images to annotate other images through inferred connections.

A New Approach to Apparatus

The unconventional format for the apparatuses of my own textual and digital editions is a logical choice for visual poetry, not least because a traditional textual

apparatus cannot adequately address the finer details of the variations in material processes and bibliographic characteristics that are present in a genetic examination of Nichol's works. As Nichol himself says, "We should not be bullied by the cultural preference for 'the book' as a certifying object. Unless approached carefully, which is to say knowledgeably, the book has a tendency to homogenize our work and an essential heterogeneity can be lost" (*Meanwhile* 114). Furthermore, I do not believe that Nichol's poetry should be subjected to analysis that focuses on a linear progression of texts with the most recent version seen as the authoritative version. As Michael Ondaatje observes, Nichol's work "does not appear in blocks of art. It surrounds us" (*An H in the Heart* 232). With my proof-of-concept edition, I attempt to take Ondaatje's vision of a selection of Nichol's art as "a hub of long and varied spokes that reach[e]s everywhere" and take it to the next level by actually arranging the textual notes in a wheel-like pattern with each chosen copy-text as the central hub (231). The textual apparatus aims to reflect the text itself, highlighting the physicality of the paratext as the method by which to relay the information it represents, using the spatiality of the page to communicate the concept of movement and, as a result, evolution. The notion of the texts' evolutions continues in their new presentation as paratext, thus blurring the line between apparatus and art. My digital edition resists linear presentation and integrates apparatus with content by using a dynamic template to display scanned images of all versions of a chosen poem. The user can move from image to image by selecting thumbnails from a wheel or cycling through images using the arrow keys or 'previous' and 'next' buttons. The selected image moves to the centre of the wheel, allowing an image that had previously assumed the position of textual apparatus for the centre text to become the copy text of the edition. (A prototype

of this digital approach to genetic criticism, using a small selection of the many versions of “Blues,” can be found at <http://kat.tialt.ca/updategallery/Main/File/#> or see Fig. 1, Appendix D for screenshots.)¹ This template allows the genetic portion of my digital edition to function as a sort of version map, where the eye can move from one version to the next in an image landscape, making visual connections in all directions. The genetic narrative of the writing and production processes that can be inferred from the differences between versions can be picked up and left off at any point, thereby de-emphasizing initial intentions and end results and instead offering readers the opportunity to perceive a work from the vantage point of any one of the texts that comprise that single work. The scanned images maintain the visual bibliographic codes of the original texts, such as font, paper colour, spacing, and margins. However, they do lose other bibliographic characteristics such as paper weight and texture, context provided by format (i.e. whether the poem is printed in a book, journal, or non-codex format), and context provided by front and back matter and placement amongst other content. Annotations accompanying each image help to fill in the gaps for some of this information by indicating publication details. Not only are the annotations presented alongside the content, thereby integrating them into the body of the edition, but each image acts as an annotation to the rest, providing information about textual variants just as traditional genetic endnotes would while allowing each image to function as both copy text and textual apparatus.

The Many Shades of “Blues”

As I began to submerge myself in Nichol’s massive collection of creative production, I constantly stumbled over variants and reprints of his poem “Blues” and, with each instance of reading, discovered something new about the piece. “Blues” is a

¹ My completed digital edition will eventually be located at bpnicholproject.ca.

signature example of a hybrid of visual and sound poetry (the two main branches of concrete). In *bp Nichol and His Works*, Douglas Barbour elaborates on the beauty of “Blues” by commenting on the spacing of the letters, saying that they are “exactly far enough apart for us to fill in the missing letters. They are not there, yet they are; the words themselves appear, then, to evolve from nothing to something” (25). Jack David also picks up on the notion of evolution, explaining that “what matters to Nichol, is that the reverse of love is evol, the start of evolution, of change” (*Selected Writings* 14). “Blues” has the most extensive genetic map of drafts and published variants, with at least seven manuscript versions, three versions that were meant to be published as a series, two different typescript drafts of the version chosen for publication, six instances in which it was published in one of Nichol’s own collections (once as a cover image), at least four instances in which it was included in an anthology of concrete poetry, a manuscript version of a pop-up model based on the poem, a stanza from *The Captain Poetry Poems* that reflects “Blues” content (plus the reprints and manuscript versions of this stanza), and a whole host of republications of the poem after Nichol’s death as part of new editions of collections such as *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer*, new critical editions of Nichol’s oeuvre, and retrospective anthologies of concrete and avant-garde poetry, as well as digital adaptations including a three-dimensional interactive model. Nichol explains that he engages the reader’s voice by aligning the vowels in the poem to create “a visually derived blues moan,” recapturing the blues song “Careless Love” (*Meanwhile* 361). If the reader’s eyes and ears are to be engaged through examining genetic criticism of Nichol’s works, the textual apparatus that facilitates this examination must maintain the form of the actual text.

“Blues” is examined genetically in my proof-of-concept edition, along with “The End of the Affair,” “Popular Song,” “This is the Sentence the Wind Blew Here,” “em ty,” and “Eyes.” All of these poems continue to evolve, both by Nichol’s own hands and by the involvement of other editors and researchers, long after their initial publication. The variations that I include in the textual apparatus pose questions about the effects that slight alterations to bibliographic codes, as well as new mediums, have on concrete poetry’s communication with the reader. Does Captain Poetry lay out the message of “Blues” in his consideration of love (*The Captain Poetry Poems*)? What kind of wind is suggested by Nichol’s transformation of “This is the Sentence the Wind Blew Here” into an animated computer poem (*First Screening: Computer Poems by Nichol 1984*)? In Jack David’s editorial approach to *Selected Writings*, four poems from the collection *Still Water*, including “em ty,” are removed from their original context—one in which they are printed on one of many cards in a box, not bound to any specific order—and instead placed in a sequence, in a bound book, with a page number (*Selected Writings* 66). In the reprinting of these poems in *Selected Writings*, the pieces lose their symbolic manipulation of physical space. The role that media forms play in the message of Nichol’s poetry is something that I will examine in the following chapter. I am interested in the role of media because Nichol was conscious of any medium by which his work was presented, often creating a new version of a poem when it was published in a collection even though it had previously been printed in a periodical, anthology, or conference publication.

Interpreting Intentions

The open-ended quality and evolutionary nature of Nichol's poems is exactly why any edition of his works should avoid pursuing the critical idea of final authorial intention. The editors of *Genetic Criticism* argue that genetic literary analysis "never posits an ideal text beyond those documents but rather strives to reconstruct, from all available evidence, the chain of events in a writing process" (Deppman et al. 2). In a letter to Emmett Williams, Nichol also suggests that he did not create poems with an end goal in mind: "With concrete I tend to think of only the most recent things as mine, all the rest go into a literary limbo" (Nichol qtd. in Williams). While the non-linear organization of my textual notes avoids making an editorial judgement about Nichol's final intentions, the creation of new visual imagery through the evolution of the poems from text to paratext does indicate my subjective decision, as editor, to depict evolution as Nichol's authorial intention. McGann, who, as mentioned above, believes that all texts have both linguistic and bibliographic signification that are subject to translation and adaptation in subsequent editions, agrees that editorial decisions introduce new intentions to texts and states that "When we edit we change, and even good editing ... necessarily involves fundamental departures from 'authorial intention'" ("Critical Editing" 53). McGann's theories about the influence of socio-economic factors on book production resist the notion of authorial intention and suggest that intention is collaborative and influenced by all those who participate in the textual production process, from author, to publisher, to printer, to reader. Due to this collaboration, McGann believes "that no single editorial procedure—no single 'text' of a particular work—can be imagined or hypothesized as the 'correct' one," a theoretical position which supports avoiding *final*

authorial intentions in editions of Nichol's works, which involve such collaborators as editors, magazine publishers, and silk screen printers (62). However, McGann's complete rejection of authorial intention in general is not necessarily the best approach to Nichol's poems, even in a genetic critical analysis. As Shillingsburg points out, "[theorists] have tended to de-emphasize both the development of intention through stages, toward completion, on the one hand, and the change or contradiction of intentions, on the other" (31). Authorial intention can still play a part in genetic editions, but the evolution of intention needs to be recognized. Scholars have debated which type of intention is the most important—the end goal planned out from the beginning, known as final intention, or the initial intention that takes the form of inspiration and first ideas. Shillingsburg notes that "the author's intention to convey an idea is important to editors because they know authors often produce alternative texts in their pursuit of a single intention of that kind" (33). Nichol produced many alternative texts, often carrying an initial intention or idea through numerous evolutions and adaptations into new genres and physical forms. It seems logical to combine genetic criticism with a bibliographic orientation while still keeping authorial intention in mind when studying Nichol's works because examining the bibliographic characteristics of his texts over numerous versions offers insight into his intentions behind re-creating and re-publishing pieces. A better understanding of what the material elements of his poems say about their purpose, targeted audience, and production circumstances will help establish Nichol's intentions behind the constant evolution of his work and, consequently, the constant evolution of those intentions.

Nichol's personal commentary on his work supports the importance of keeping authorial intention in mind when examining a text genetically and bibliographically. In a

1976 interview with Caroline Bayard and Jack David, Nichol discusses the time during which he was interested in creating visual poetry with typewriters. He states that “the structure of [his early typewriter poems] visually owes a tremendous amount to the carriage limitations,” and adds that “when [he] was into typewriter concrete, it was as much that [he] was into the typewriter as a tool of the writer—as an extension of the writer” (*Meanwhile* 170). Nichol then explains that at the time of the interview (1976) he had returned to writing mostly by hand and used the typewriter just to get an idea of how his poems would “stand the transition to print” (*Meanwhile* 171). It is not final or initial authorial intention that is key to studying Nichol’s visual poetry, but his ever-changing intentions for repurposing existing texts. How Nichol uses the typewriter, whether as an instrument for creation or a tool for preparing poems for publication, indicates his intentions for adaptations of his texts and should be considered as an integral bibliographic characteristic when analysing his work genetically. Similarly, as Nichol explains in an essay co-authored with Frank Davey, there is a considerable difference in intention when composing poems as individual pieces and composing a book of poetry (*Meanwhile* 378). He also notes that it is a completely different creative process yet again to take poems composed as individual pieces and arrange them into a book (378). Nichol argues that “to conceive of a poem as a book is to create numerous structural possibilities” because “the various texts within the book have the potential to inter-relate much the way stanzas inter-relate within a poem” (*Meanwhile* 379). He adds that when composing a book of poetry as a whole, “the various standard components of a book—its title page, half-title page, colophon, its typeface, columns, margins, gutters, signatures, paper—have the potential to participate as signs within the writing” (379). This essay

provides yet another argument for considering intentions as changing and contradictory, as well as expressed through bibliographic codes, when preparing a genetic edition of Nichol's poems. For example, Nichol first composed "Popular Song" as a stand-alone piece. It was subsequently published as part of his concrete poetry book *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer*, and then Nichol created a series of poems around "Popular Song," re-creating it as an instalment in *The Legend of the Wirdie Bird*. Original drafts of "Popular Song" were comprised of the word "warbled" typed twice and broken into the words "war" and "bled" with the use of capitalization and contrasting red and black ink. In *Konfessions*, "Popular Song" gained two more repetitions of the word "warbled," was formatted to match the rest of the poems in the book in the same black ink font, was prefaced with acknowledgements and publication information at the front of the book, and was fit into an overall context—placed between "Easter Pome" and "Homage to Edmund Bergler." The font of "Popular Song" changed again when it was reprinted in the first Canadian edition of *Konfessions*. It also gained a blank facing page and additional front matter that indicates that the poem has been grouped into a collection of "borderblur' pieces" written between 1964 and 1966 (*Konfessions* 1973). Finally, "Popular Song" gained a new context when it was renamed "The Song of the Wirdie Bird" and placed at the beginning of a series of eight poems chronicling *The Legend of the Wirdie Bird* (featured in *bjp(h)aGe: An Anthology of Visual Poetry and Collage*). Admittedly, the dates 1965-1967 on the title page indicate that not all the poems were originally intended to go together as a series, but another change of font and margins illustrates the author's intention to integrate previously completed individual poems into

a new series concept, creating a cohesive narrative with the help of consistency in bibliographic codes.

A Digital Regeneration of a Genetic Narrative

The apparatus of the genetic component of my digital edition, like that of my proof-of-concept edition, invites the reader to re-read every poem many times, and in each of its variants, in order to observe Nichol's intention to "hear something different every time" (21). In my completed digital edition, "Popular Song," "Blues," and "The End of the Affair," as well as "A Bouquet for Dace," will be presented in a genetic analysis. By designing unconventional paratext, the textual notes simultaneously allow readers to visualize a genetic analysis of Nichol's works, while also suggesting the authorial intention of evolution. Using images in place of traditional alphanumeric notation reflects the visual and material nature of Nichol's poems as well as the greater context of concrete poetry within which his pieces are located. Similarly, my plan to include variants with the same content but different material characteristics will remind readers that the sensory engagement and evolutionary qualities of Nichol's poems depend upon the manipulation of bibliographic codes. Nichol's works continue to evolve as they are rediscovered and presented anew to contemporary audiences. One example of this renewal is Jim Andrews, Geof Huth, Lionel Kearns, Marko Niemi, and Dan Waber's work with *First Screening: Computer Poems*. They took Nichol's computer poems and recreated them using software and programming language that can be read on today's computers. However, they also created new versions of these texts because they changed their method of production and the context of the reader's interaction with them. Admittedly, my digital edition will do the same by placing selections from Nichol's

books and poem objects in the context of a website, but I hope these new presentations of Nichol's work will serve to acknowledge the importance of material conditions and context in his creative process. Ultimately, any new edition of Nichol's works should illustrate that the ability to represent the importance of the physical elements of material-oriented texts within the framework of genetic criticism requires a reinvention of the textual apparatus.

Chapter 4: Digging for Materiality with Media Archaeology

What happened to the book after the newspaper? To the book after the movie? To the book after radio and television? Nobody seems to know.

– Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message* (14-15)

Media archaeology's focus on the relationship between media of the past and media of the present and future uses methodologies that do not assume that these temporal designations are fixed. In *What is Media Archaeology?* Jussi Parikka writes that “[t]he proposition of this book is that you start in the middle—from the entanglement of past and present, and accept the complexity this decision brings with it to any analysis of modern media culture” (224).¹ I could easily borrow the same proposition for this chapter. I begin my examination of bpNichol and media archaeology at Nichol's 1984 computer concrete collection, *First Screening*, and I will use this work as the point from which to explore both Nichol's previous print publications and the later translations, recreations, and critical editions of his poetry including the possibilities available with contemporary digital media. *First Screening* has already attracted the attention of media archaeologists such as Lori Emerson, and Jim Andrews, Geof Huth, Lionel Kearns, Marko Niemi, and Dan Waber. I will mention those scholars' contributions to the ever-evolving legacy of Nichol's computer poetry while discussing *First Screening* in the context of Parikka's, Siegfried Zielinski's, Johanna Drucker's, and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum's theories of media archaeology, and Jerome J. McGann's and John Slatin's writing on hypertext and hyperediting. Materiality will be a major focus in my examination of *First Screening*, as it has been in my comparison of Nichol to Dada and

¹ The citations for *What is Media Archaeology?* are numbered based on the location of the passage in the Kindle for Mac e-book version. The location is fixed and does not change with display setting preferences such as font size.

my study of genetic criticism. Variances in the material aspects of Nichol's digital poetry also encourage the further use of genetic criticism to discuss the significance of digital versions and digital media translation. The function of material characteristics throughout Nichol's works, paired with the scholarship mentioned above, will also serve as support for my argument to adapt the 1970 collection *Still Water* to digital media and analyse it from the same media archaeological perspective by which I discuss *First Screening*.

RUN FIRST SCREENING __²

Nichol created *First Screening* with Applesoft BASIC programming language and published 100 copies of it on a 5-¼-inch flexible mini disk—a flimsier, larger early version of the 3-½-inch floppy disk. To achieve the authentic *First Screening* viewing experience, you must pop the disk into an external floppy disk drive and power up an Apple IIe—the computer model on which the digital poetry was created. At this point the user is instructed to type “RUN FIRST SCREENING” and hit return, after which the disk drive grinds into action and letters and numbers begin to move across the screen. This is probably the furthest point that every user's experience could be guaranteed to be the same, since *First Screening*'s digital medium makes it an interactive text. The user can press CTRL S at any time to pause the movement on the screen and choose to resume with the press of any key, allowing infinite viewing variations and speeds. It is not as straightforward as picking up a book and having a limited amount of options for interaction. Traditionally the only option was to turn the pages and read the text, controlling the speed of reading but not much more. Readers could choose to read the pages out of order, but not without being aware of the definite sequence that is imposed

² All of the subheadings in this chapter are based on the syntax of command lines in Applesoft BASIC on an Apple IIe computer.

upon the text by its bound format and page numbers. Nichol expanded these options first in his print material with works such as *Still Water* (which could be shuffled and re-sequenced), “A Christmas Vision in the Voice of St. Nicholas” (which could be read in pieces or arranged into a coherent word picture), and “Cold Mountain” (which was issued in a “kinetic” version that instructed readers on how to burn it). Moving from a print medium to a digital medium expanded these options even more. In his article “Reading Hypertext: Order and Coherence in a New Medium,” John Slatin outlines the numerous differences between hypertext (digital and electronic text) and traditional textual forms, focusing on reading practices for each. He writes that

Reading, in hypertext, is understood as a discontinuous or non-linear process which, like thinking, is associative in nature, as opposed to the sequential process envisioned by conventional text. . . . Reading in this sense has little to do with traditional notions of beginning at the beginning and going through to the end. Instead, the reader begins at a point of his or her own choosing—a point chosen from a potentially very large number of possible starting points. The reader proceeds from there by following a series of links connecting to one another, exiting not at a point defined by the author as “The End” but rather when s/he has had enough. (158)

Additionally, the reader now has some say in the presentation of the text. For example, by typing a series of commands on the Apple IIe, the user can control how the text is presented on the screening, switching between normal (white text on black background) and inverse (black on white) appearance.

Emerson, who edited a selection of Nichol’s works titled *The Alphabet Game: A bpNichol Reader* with Darren Wershler-Henry and was the first editor for the bpNichol online archive (bpNichol.ca), runs the Media Archaeology Lab at the University of

Colorado, Boulder.³ In an interview with *The Signal: Digital Preservation*, Emerson mentions how students often find their interactions with *First Screening* to be an eye-opening introduction to interacting with command sequences. Emerson reminds readers that Nichol's computer poems are more than just words that appear onscreen; they are "a command-line interface" with much of the text existing "behind the scenes" (*The Signal*). The Media Archaeology Lab has two 5-¼-inch floppies with incomplete versions of *First Screening* on them (along with the requisite Apple IIe for viewing them). These beta-phase versions of *First Screening*, which were donated by poet Lionel Kearns, not only differ from each other and from the published version (which is available online as an emulation of the software running on an Apple IIe) in content, but also in metadata. The two disks contain different selections from the eventual *First Screening* line up (which can be viewed at www.vispo.com/bp/emulatedversion.htm), and this variation in primary text content affects the underlying layers of text that are intrinsically tied to the properties of the software. For example, typing the CAT command (or CATALOG) brings up the list of programs on the disk currently inserted in the external drive and the amount of space occupied by each program. While one disk indicates that the poems claim 013 sectors of space on the floppy, the other—which has more of the final selection of poems—requires 045 sectors of space for the *First Screening* program. Additionally, by entering the command GOSUB 500 on the latter disk brings the user to the dedication at the end of the poems, while executing the same command on the disk with fewer poems calls up the piece "Tidal Pool." The message that greets readers when the disk is first booted up and prompts them to type the RUN command claims its own 002 sectors of

³ See <http://bpnichol.ca/> and <http://mediaarchaeologylab.com/> for more information about the online archive and the Media Archaeology Lab, respectively.

space and appears as a program titled “Hello” when the CAT or LIST commands are executed. The metadata also confirms that these two floppies are not complete versions. A quick consult with the Apple IIe manual reveals that the lack of asterisk beside the list of programs recalled with the CAT command means that these programs are unlocked and open for edits from any user. *First Screening* is subject to other variables besides content and metadata. It is also dependent on the model of computer used to produce it as well as the model used to view it. Slatin advises readers that the computer must be considered “as a medium for composition and thought—not just as a presentational device and not simply as an extension of the typewriter” (153). In the case of *First Screening*, Nichol thought out the poems based on the capabilities of an Apple IIe, which was released in 1983 for \$1,400 and boasted a 64K memory and a 6502 CPU with a clock rate (running frequency) of 1.023 MHz. The model was produced for ten years before it was discontinued in 1993. Despite the Apple IIe’s low memory capacity, it could still load and run programs that were saved to floppy disks, organizing the contents of the disk for viewing.

CAT DIGITAL MATERIAL __

In his chapter on “Archive Dynamics: Software Culture and Digital Heritage,” Parikka compares the computer to an archive, a system of organization for large quantities of digital materials that may have previously been print material or could once again be output from the computer archive as print material. Parikka reminds readers “of the concreteness of the birth of archives,” noting that the archives began as a form of record-keeping in buildings such as the Atrium in Rome (2591). Nichol’s works play with this material aspect of the physicality of archives. His print collection *Still Water*,

which consists of twenty-eight cards in a box, could be considered a miniature archive for concrete vignettes, as well as a repository for records such as author name, publishing company, and copyright year. This miniature archive is contained within the material confines of a box. With a digitization of *Still Water*, just like Nichol's own *First Screening*, the archive contents become less tangible digital material, but the concrete nature of the archive remains, with the box or the building simply being replaced by a computer hard drive and monitor. Comparing a computer to an archive can promote the idea that digital content is immaterial, since, unlike a traditional archive, the contents are unreadable as they are—simply files on a storage device like a floppy disk, hard drive, or server—and only exist visually on a monitor. However, Johanna Drucker, in her essay “Intimations of Immateriality,” argues that “the ‘immaterial’ text of the electronic environment” is simply “a fixture within the popular imagination” (152). She admits that the material characteristics of typography and the identity of letters as physical shapes (a concept that is very important to the arguments of the previous chapter) are sacrificed to the purely “functional” identity of letters in electronic formats, since all letters exist as binary code in electronic documents and “any notion of essence or substance is discounted” (153). While letters are displayed on-screen with material characteristics, these physical properties exist only as sequences of code that instruct the computer as to how to display the text or image, but Drucker points out that “electronic current, hardware, and the support systems of the code are materially more complex than any pen and pencil on paper” (172). She adds that “even at a fundamental level, the nature of code is not immaterial; it functions as a temporarily fixed and infinitely mutable binary sequence which must and always does refer to place within the structure of the machine

to allow the program or protocol to operate” (172). Parikka makes a similar point, writing that “[a] digital image that you might approach and analyse through its screen content ... is for the technically tuned cultural analyst or media archaeologist a constellation of material information” (2853). Parikka then proceeds to list the various elements that comprise the visualization of a digital image, including “a pixelated bitmap, metadata of how it was created, [and] a digital watermark perhaps” (2856). This argument supports the continuing presence of materiality in Nichol’s concrete poetry. *First Screening* is made visible to readers because its code has a specified place and function within an operating system that is comprised of physical parts and depends on the spatial organizing of all electronic content. In “Editing the Interface,” Kirschenbaum suggests that, “in the long run we do electronic fiction and our critical understanding of electronic textuality no favors by romanticizing the medium through a dated discourse of play that is really only screen deep” (26). Kirschenbaum bases this suggestion on D.C. Greetham’s argument that rapid and fluid onscreen movement is the result of painstaking lines of code and methodically ordered commands (25). The argument holds true, since the illusion of a flickering breeze in *First Screening* poem “After the Storm” required repetitive PRINT commands with carefully coded display coordinates on Nichol’s part. Drucker concludes that “The ‘immaterial’ is the gap of transformation, like what used to exist for the typesetter between the reading of a line in memory and its setting into a line of lead type” (174). Similarly this gap also exists as the transformation from code to display on-screen, from Nichol’s arrangement of words in a concrete poem to what the reader’s brain perceives as a landscape, and from the material shape of letters to the sounds with which they are associated.

PRINT TRANSLATION __ LOAD BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAIL __

In 1992-93, J.B. Hohm bridged another transformation gap and performed a translation of Nichol's *First Screening*, re-writing the poems for a new decade of technology and ever-changing digital media. He refers to his recreation of the digital text as a translation, particularly because *First Screening* cannot be replicated exactly in electronic media other than Applesoft BASIC on the Apple IIe. His use of the term translation is in keeping with Nichol's idea of translation as "a creative endeavor in its own right" (as articulated in the Toronto Research Group writings with McCaffery [*Rational Geomancy* 32]), as well as McGann's suggestion that "editing, including critical editing, is more an act of translation than of reproduction" ("What is Critical Editing?" 53). Hohm attempted to reproduce the collection of poetry in Hypercard format using the HyperTalk programming language and published the finished translation on 3-½-inch floppy disks. A greater range of machines could read this version of *First Screening*, yet, at the same time, a couple of statistics about one possible computer that could be used for viewing the work—the Macintosh Powerbook 160—indicate the accelerated rate of media evolution that accompanied the increase in available options for personal computers: the Powerbook was released in 1992 and discontinued in 1994. Loading this translation of *First Screening* highlights how it is impossible for anyone working with Nichol's concrete poetry to avoid the material nature of his work. In the section titled "Fonts and Bolding" in the introduction/menu section of the disk, Hohm makes special note of typography, an element that is of paramount importance in most of Nichol's print concrete as well. Options in the menu allow users the choice between viewing *First Screening* in bold or non-bold text, and users can also choose among three

fonts: Chicago, Geneva, or Monaco. Hohm implies that users may have an even greater font selection depending on the model of computer they are using. “At the very minimum,” he writes, “your Macintosh should support Geneva, Chicago, and Monaco fonts.” He also recognizes that the typography can affect the reader’s experience with a particular poem, suggesting that “‘Poem for my Father’ works best with fixed-width fonts like Monaco, Courier, ‘Systat,’ or ‘SPSSfont.’” In fact, Hohm has used the text behind the text (commands that dictate how the program is presented) to set Monaco as a default font for “Poem for my Father” in the event that a variable-width font is chosen by the user. With his translation, Hohm must also account for material conditions related to the digital medium that *First Screening* requires. He discusses details and provides settings for visual details such as menu- and title-bars and the cursor. The fact that “The animation will run slower if you have other applications running on your Mac” is also a concern related to the material circumstances of this recreation of Nichol’s poetry. Hohm warns that those reading *First Screening* on a Macintosh Powerbook may experience pauses in the animation due to a default setting. The poems’ shift from static and tangible text to a dynamic software program increases the amount of material variables because, unlike the limited relationships between printed text and the physical components of a book, there are many elements that can affect the interaction between the program and the hardware on which it is run. The digital poems become part of a system that is influenced by the specifications of that system and the many applications sharing the system’s capabilities.

Hohm created this translation at the Knowledge Science Institute at the University of Calgary. In an introduction that appears in the menu after running the disk, he

acknowledges the fact that what Nichol created with Applesoft BASIC cannot be replicated exactly in HyperTalk. He asks the reader whether any translation can be fully trusted. Just like translating poetry from French to English or English to Japanese, there will be limitations encountered when translating a program from one programming language to another. In this case, Nichol's poems are a program and certain rhythms, poetic devices, and subtle nuances are not translatable from Applesoft BASIC to HyperTalk, just as certain intricacies and double entendres would not transfer among languages such as French, English, and Japanese. One question posed by media archaeology is whether these languages are dead languages. Are BASIC and HyperTalk the modern-day digital equivalents of Latin and classical Greek when compared to the JavaScript language that is used to render emulations of *First Screening* online today? Parikka suggests that they are not, and that media is still developing within the lifetime of previously used programming languages and hardware. In *What is Media Archaeology?* he states that "New media might be here and slowly changing our user habits, but old media never left us. They are continuously remediated, resurfacing, finding new uses, contexts, adaptations" (209). While it is increasingly difficult to use old programming languages such as BASIC and HyperTalk, and discontinued computers are required to even view programs written in these codes, the structures of these languages have been remediated to inspire today's coding languages—such as HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. Parikka uses Berlin professor Siegfried Zielinski's writing on variantology to support this argument. Zielinski is interested in applying the geological concept of 'deep time' to media archaeology, so that media history is considered over a span of millennia and "in terms of their long-term relations" instead of "the short-term use value that is promoted

by capitalist media industries” (Parikka 3286-3288). Zielinski’s variantology “promote[s] heterogeneity of arts and media environments” and encourages “developing an alternative temporality that moves away from a hegemonic linearity that demands that we should see time and history as straight lines that work towards improvement and something better” (363). Today’s programmers can gain a clearer understanding of JavaScript commands and functions by looking at the common command terms used in Applesoft BASIC.

RUN NON-LINEAR MEDIA HISTORY __ GOSUB FIRST SCREENING __

Furthermore, examining individual features of various media supports the argument that media archaeology should not be approached in a linear fashion. For example, looking both backwards and forwards from *First Screening*, users will encounter media that are much more portable than the Apple IIe. The shift from the easily portable book, to the desktop computer, and back to the portable laptop computer indicates that media of the past are constantly informing present-day media, or, using the term that Parikka recycles from media archaeologists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, new media *remediates* old media. Today’s e-readers continue to remediate the book, just as the Macintosh Powerbook did in 1992. The concept of remediation encourages the examination of media history from the perspective of any particular media development and is another reason that media should not be studied in a strictly linear way. The infinite connections among different media become apparent when sitting in an environment such as the Media Archaeology Lab. Looking at the command sequences for Applesoft BASIC on the Apple IIe provides helpful insight into today’s more complex coding languages while also offering a connection between indexing systems in print culture and the organizational structures of digital programs. It isn’t practical to view

BASIC and the Apple IIe as the end to a long evolution of how text is displayed because it is impossible to look at the Apple IIe now without seeing it in relation to all media developments that happened at the same time and have happened since. After viewing some other digital literature programs that run on 5-1/4-inch floppies on the Apple IIe, it is clear that there are similarities between *First Screening* and other literary software created with similar programming languages. Stephen King's 1985 digital publication of *The Mist* was distributed through Angelsoft Interactive Fiction and ran on Apple II family of computers as an interactive narrative. In order to allow the reader choice in the direction of the plot, the program would not run all of its content automatically but ran content based on the user's input. An in-the-know user would be able to enter the commands that yielded the best results. Nichol attempted a little of this interactivity by hiding an animated text sequence called "Off-Screen Romance" in the code for *First Screening*. As Emerson points out on the Media Archaeology Lab blog, a user with a little inside knowledge could look at the code to find instructions at line 110 telling curious readers to reveal this bonus poem by entering the command "RUN 1748," bringing up the flickering words "FRED" and "GINGER" to dance around the screen (9 July 2013). Paul Zelevansky also created interactive digital literature in 1986 with his mixed-media narrative *The Case for the Burial of Ancestors*. The story begins in print and claims to be a translation of an ancient oral text. The myth is completed with a text titled "Swallows" on a floppy disk. After a preamble, the story presents the reader with a menu of command options that bring up various text and graphics, allowing readers to feel as if they are navigating the digital storyscape. The programming language used for the program requires all of the graphics to be comprised of a small vocabulary of

rectangular shapes. This concept is not too dissimilar to the limitations of the alphabet, which Nichol stretches to its communicative limits. Creating numerous visual ideas out of very few materials recalls a time of printing techniques that relied on woodcut blocks or moveable type that could be arranged on a composing stick. At the same time, the graphics in “Swallows” also reminds today’s users of creating patterns for print and digital media using design software with, while considerably greater, still finite selection of tools, shapes, and colours. Furthermore, the aesthetics of digital graphics from the mid-late 1980s are now often incorporated into modern day designs on the merit of their vintage appeal. Similarly, typography found in Nichol’s concrete poetry that would have depended on the limited capabilities of typewriters and early word processors is often emulated in fonts designed for today’s machines. A writer who downloads a font created to look like the typeface of a Royal Portable or an IBM Selectric is remediating previous media—working with a textual element that originated within certain limitations and bringing that element into a new media environment with a new set of limitations. The text created from this process will be viewed in light of both the connotations of the new media and the past media with which it is associated.

LIST VERSIONS __

Considering the relationships between a particular text and various media, as well as how different media add significance to a text by imposing different bibliographic characteristics, demands a genetic criticism approach. Kirschenbaum alludes to the importance of genetic criticism in media archaeology when he argues that “a bibliographical/textual approach calls upon us to emphasize precisely those aspects of electronic textuality that have thus far been neglected in the critical writing about the

medium: platform, interface, data standards, file formats, *versioning*, and so forth” [emphasis added] (27). When *First Screening* was translated from Applesoft BASIC to HyperTalk, it was published on a different size of floppy disk; it thus became viewable on a whole new range of personal computers, and the underlying layers of text behind the viewing text were transformed. The programs on the disk that execute the poems are measured in new units, and the commands that call up metadata have changed. In fact, the viewer’s ability to communicate directly with the program through simple command lines is impeded by the presence of a user menu that requires the viewer to communicate with the program by selecting options with the cursor instead. The cursor function builds up the layers of text (in this case HyperTalk coding language) between the viewing text and the initial text that was input by the author. Now the placement of the cursor in the table of contents initiates a command sequence instead of the user perusing the location of individual poems with the LIST command and manually entering a GOSUB command to jump ahead to a specific poem in the sequence. Nichol was aware of the subtleties of these layers of text and how they depended upon their medium. A text file (provided by Jim Andrews and his collaborators) of Nichol’s original *First Screening* created with Applesoft BASIC reveals that Nichol imbedded a bonus poem in the programming language.⁴ This poem cannot be run as a subroutine using the correct GOSUB command but can only be viewed as part of the code. Using the REM command as a prefix he created a poem about the biblical flood that includes word play such as “REM ark.” In the BASIC language REM indicates a line of text in the code that will not be executed as part of the program and is only visible when the code is being read in its raw form. Like HTML code today, which allows in-line commenting by enclosing comments in various

⁴ Visit <http://www.vispo.com/bp/download/FirstScreeningBybpNichol.txt> and see lines 3900-3935.

symbols and symbol combinations such as a forward slash with asterisk, REM preceded lines within code that were essentially references for the programmer. In Nichol's hidden poem, "ark" is the primary text, but "REM" couples with it to form a larger word that is a hybrid of command and content. Since REM is not a command in HyperTalk, Hohm had to include this poem as a bonus feature that is purely content, thereby losing the play on words and an integral part of the poem's identity.

Two of the poems in *First Screening* existed prior to 1984 in print form: "Letter" (as "The Evening's Ritual" in *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer*, 1967) and "After the Storm" (composed as "This is the Sentence the Wind Blew Here" in Fall 1973 and later published in *Truth: A Book of Fictions*, 1993). The print and digital versions of these two poems have the exact same content, just different formats based on the media used to present them. Hints of other print publications can be found in the content of *First Screening*, such as the rocks and waves in "Island" and "Tidal Pool," which are employed frequently in the text of Nichol's concrete novel *Extreme Positions*. In a less obvious way, hints of technique used in print publications are also present in the animated poems of *First Screening*. In part "one" of "Poem for my Father," Nichol has animated the letters in the word "TRAIN" so they disappear one letter at a time. He plays with this concept of the erasure of language in many print poems spanning a wide range of print media. In silkscreen collaborations with Barbara Caruso, such as *Love Affair* and *Unit of Four*, less and less ink is applied to the paper with each successive image as the letters fade away. In *Sharp Facts*, Nichol continues his series of *Translating Translating Apollinaire* poems by taking the original poem ("Translating Apollinaire") and reproducing it on a photocopier, then copying each subsequent reproduction until the text

is illegible and virtually non-existent. This approach to Nichol's work reveals that his use of the Dada trope of eradicating language in order to rebuild it is apparent in hand-produced print media, machine-produced print media, and manually programmed digital media. Similarly, part "two" of "Poem for my Father" replicates on the computer the movement found in Nichol's earlier print experiments with the flipbook, like his flipbook *Wild Thing: for the Troggs*. His play with sound also evolves through various media, beginning with early works like *Lament: a sound poem*, a printed piece which consists of increasingly overlapped lines of text that obscure legibility with the "noise" of excessive type. *Lament* was published in 1969 and its front matter states that the piece had previously been performed live. The dense nature of the type on the page and indistinguishable printed words suggest an oral performance that mimics white noise, a concept that Nichol returns to in a 1976 chapbook titled *White Sound*. This work does not even contain any alphanumeric characters but is composed of various ink marks that were created using machine techniques. The gray scale smudges attempt a visual representation of white noise that was created with machines that would typically be involved in printing textual materials. Eight years later, machine-generated noise is incorporated both visually and aurally in *First Screening* for the poem "Construction 1," which is composed of a flickering column of the word "TOWER" that is then replaced by a flickering column of the word "BABEL" in an inverse colour scheme. When "BABEL" is flashing up and down the screen, the Apple IIe emits an abrasive electronic buzzing sound. Notably, the undefined nature of the noise in "Construction 1," which relates it to the visual static created in the interpretations of sound mentioned above, is lost in

Hohm's translation of *First Screening* to Hypercard format because the electronic sound gains melodic properties when played on the Powerbook.

The increased capabilities of programming languages and today's computers have provided opportunity for expanding Nichol's experiments with digital poetry and animated text. In 2007, Andrews, Huth, Kearns, Niemi, and Waber launched a website that includes an emulated version of *First Screening* in Apple BASIC, a JavaScript version, a QuickTime screen capture of the emulated version, and Hohm's Hypercard version – all available for download. The collaborators situate their work with *First Screening* in the same tradition as Hohm's—one in which digital researchers attempt to exten[d] the life of [a digital work] a few more years" (Andrews et al). Niemi's JavaScript translation is much more faithful to the original movement of the text than the Hypercard version, but it runs the commands needed to execute the primary text, the bonus poem, and the hidden code poem automatically, thereby eliminating user interaction. Niemi did do his best to translate the material aspects of the original, though, not only attempting to reproduce the visualization of BASIC code onscreen but also using command lines in JavaScript that are almost identical to BASIC command lines wherever possible (see Andrews et al, JavaScript Version: "About the JavaScript version by Marko Niemi). More recently, Dan Waber and Jason Pimble created a three-dimensional visualization of "Blues" that allows users to rotate and adjust their perspectives as they wish (see <http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/waber/bp2011/>). In contrast to the translation of *First Screening* to an online medium, the three-dimensional adaptation of "Blues" also involves adding digital material characteristics—such as the program code, file size, and

necessary browser requirements—while also eliminating previous material characteristics such as the font of the original typescript.

LOAD REMEDIATION OF MATERIALITY ___

In the textual notes to Emerson and Wershler-Henry's edition of Nichol's poetry, the two editors acknowledge that material characteristics shift even in minor media translations such as the move of *Still Water* from its "5" by 5" cards" to the pages of *The Alphabet Game*, which is a standard-size paperback reader (319). While their selection of *Still Water* poems is set in the same font as the original, and the card dimensions are maintained by a border on the page, Emerson and Wershler-Henry admit that "the order of the poems excerpted here is somewhat arbitrary" and "the move to a computer typeface has created a greater degree of uniformity" (319). In my digital-edition prototype of selected Nichol works, I focus on the potential to translate some of the original material characteristics of *Still Water*, particularly those that encourage interaction between the text and the reader, to a digital medium by making the collection available online. This miniature archive of concrete poems printed on twenty-eight square cards in a box is difficult to find in its original form, and anthologies and critical editions that include excerpts from it lose key elements of the reader's relationship with the text by re-printing the excerpts in a traditional codex format. Since Nichol did not number any of the cards, *Still Water* is not subject to any particular order, nor is it confined to a one-page-at-a-time presentation since the "pages" are not bound together. These features allow the reader to step in as editor of the text, arranging and re-arranging the poems. With no available record of the original order, readers cannot even be sure that the shape and flow of the text has not already been partially determined by previous readers. While

there are cards with title, publication information, and dedication, the identities of text and paratext are blurred by such poems as “the blue pen i write these poems with,” which could be a stand-alone piece, a supplement to preceding or subsequent poems, or an author’s note about the production history of the text. Similarly, there are also three blank cards, which bear no marks to designate them as front or back matter, and which could be inserted throughout the body of the text in order to create pauses or indicate sections. The interpretation of *Still Water* not only varies with its arrangement but also differs based on whether the reader views the work as a collection of individual poems or as a holistic whole comprised of parts with individual sub-narratives. The lack of binding and the perfectly square shape of the cards allow the reader to arrange them as a scene, in a four-by-seven rectangle, a two-by-fourteen column or any one of numerous irregular shapes, with juxtapositions and connections created by placing cards edge to edge. The scene can be read top-to-bottom, left-to-right, or as one large poem that draws the eye to its various quadrants and single cells based on the weight of words, groups of words, or absence of words.

Still Water plays with the idea of media archaeology even in its print form. Considering the book as a medium, *Still Water* re-invents the book as a collection of pages that allow content to be interpreted based on the relation of each page to all the others. With *Still Water*’s remediation of the book as a series of unbound cards, the authority that the book holds as a medium that directs the reader from the beginning to the end in a linear progression is transferred to the reader who can now direct the narrative flow of the text. Nichol’s re-invention of the book as a medium also draws on pre-book media such as manuscripts, scrolls, and tablets that are all examples of text in

unbound non-codex formats. Similarly, it is useful to approach a digital remediation of *Still Water* from multiple perspectives in media history. While at the Media Archaeology Lab, I created five short programs for five different *Still Water* poems on the Apple IIe using Applesoft BASIC language. The programs were saved to a 5-1/4-inch floppy and can be recalled by typing the commands LOAD STILLWATER1 (or STILLWATER2, STILLWATER3, etc.) and RUN. Hypothetically, if all twenty-eight units of content from the twenty-eight cards of *Still Water* were created as programs in BASIC programming language and saved to a floppy disk, any user could call up the “pages” of *Still Water* in any order that they choose. This concept is a good basis for what can be done with more complex programming language today. Using JavaScript and jQuery, it is possible to shuffle the *Still Water* cards. Readers can view the cards in one order and then, with a simple click, rearrange the order and re-view the content in any one of almost infinite permutations. Unlike the programs created with Applesoft BASIC, today’s programming languages also allow all twenty-eight cards to be visualized at once and dragged and dropped into different arrangements. According to Slatin, hypertext is an interactive textual form through which, potentially, “readers [can] interact with the system to such an extent that some readers may become actively involved in the creation of an evolving hyperdocument” (159). Nichol’s work, however, creates cause to disagree with Slatin’s suggestion that non-hypertext cannot be interactive in the same way. *Still Water* is a perfect example of a text that involves the reader in the constant creation and evolution of a document, since readers can rearrange the content so that the document changes for each new reader, and each reader builds upon previous readers’ changes. The fact that

Still Water accomplishes this interactivity in print form bodes well for its success as a digitized text.

REM Let's Regroup and REMember Materiality

McGann expands the idea of hypertext to hyperediting in his book *Radiant Textuality*, clarifying that “[t]o function in a ‘hyper’ mode, an editing project must use computerization as a means to secure freedom from the analytic limits of hardcopy text” (57). One of these limitations of print material on which McGann elaborates is linear organization. He describes hypertext as “decentered text” due to the fact that, “[u]nlike a traditional edition, a hypertext is not organized to focus attention on one particular text or set of texts,” but rather “to disperse attention as broadly as possible” (70-71). *Still Water* easily adapts to a decentered orientation for my (hyper)editing project because its lack of imposed order already discourages particular focus on any one poem within the collection. McGann also notes that “the hypertext need never be ‘complete’” and that it “is theoretically open to alterations of its contents and its organizational elements at all points and at any time” (71). To apply this theory of open-ended editing to my work with *Still Water*, it is useful to keep *First Screening* in mind, since, even in its ‘published’ form, the poems existed as code on a floppy disk—a medium that, unlike type on paper, provided greater leeway for additions as readers could save new programs to the disk or overwrite the *First Screening* program. This is a freedom that does not exist with books. Similarly, digital editions can be used as archives with a freedom that is harder to achieve with print material. Parikka paraphrases Wolfgang Ernst’s views on media archaeology, saying that “archives are now remixable and regroupable” (2771). My digital concept for *Still Water* definitely fits into this definition, as it takes the miniature archive of concrete

poems contained within a box and puts them onscreen in an environment that allows the reader to shuffle and arrange the content, making new connections between poems. (To see a prototype of this digital concept, go to <http://kat.tialt.ca/> and click on Sortable copy 2.html. Click and drag to rearrange or click the shuffle button. The completed digital edition will have a zoom function that allows users to zoom in on individual squares to read the text more easily.⁵ Also see screenshots in Fig. 1-3, Appendix E.) Parikka's summary of Ernst picks up on the possibility of making connections between archival content through user participation. He states that "the archive is becoming less a stable storage place and increasingly a function of 'logistical interlinking,'" adding that "[a]rchives are suddenly not only about storing and preserving, but about transmitting" (2778). Nichol had already caught onto this idea with *First Screening* by allowing readers to call up specific lines from the archive of poems using the LIST command and play the poems or view their data in any desired order using LIST and GOSUB commands. Ultimately, the ability for readers to regroup content requires an approach that considers the content's materiality, since grouping depends upon orienting content spatially. Media archaeology reminds us that this concept of spatial organization began on the page, grew with computer operating systems, and continues with the Internet, where projects such as my edition of *Still Water* will find their place and, using Parikka's term, a whole new "constellation" of interconnected material characteristics both past and present.

⁵ The completed digital edition will eventually be located at bpnicholproject.ca.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In each of the preceding chapters I have argued for the integral role of materiality in Nichol's works and the importance of understanding this materiality in order to fully appreciate these works, while also proposing editorial approaches that provide proper critical attention to this materiality and Nichol's ever-evolving use of bibliographic codes. After arguing for the benefits of these editorial approaches I have also made a case as to why a digital (as opposed to print) edition is the best option for putting them into practice. Examining Dada and Nichol side by side revealed many formal similarities between Dada aesthetics and Nichol's works, particularly his concrete, visual, and sound poetry. The brief survey of select Dadaist works in Chapter 2 consistently returns to issues of system, especially communicative and linguistic systems, and how to challenge, subvert, and destroy these systems. When placed along the Dada spectrum of complete anarchy to the acceptance of system in order to set consistent artistic principles, Nichol falls in the middle, supporting a plurality of systems for communication and breaking down existing systems in order to repurpose them. He wanted to communicate with his reader in as many ways possible, so he broke down communication to its smallest pieces. These lowest common denominators included letters, syllables, and sounds, which Nichol often used to recapture primal or childlike expression in a fashion similar to Hugo Ball's quest for raw and adamic language in his sound poetry. In addition to using the raw materials of oral and written language to challenge the limitations of available communication systems, Nichol used the most basic elements of the text's physical form to create new systems of signification. These material elements include the book, the page, and ink, as well as their associated bibliographic codes such as margins,

organization, and font. Like the work of Dada artists such as Kurt Schwitters, Nichol's concrete poetry plays with typography in order to multiply the systems of communication enacted by a single letter, making letters and words significant objects in themselves instead of just devices for the transmission of meaning in a sign system. Finally, since the physical characteristics of Nichol's texts are so important to their multiple levels of communication, another important similarity between his work and the Dadaists' is an awareness of production methods, whether they be pen to paper, typewriter to paper, programming code to computer hard drive, or a repurposing of found objects.

Comparing Nichol to a movement that drew attention to how art is produced and how each poem, painting, and play has an identity as a constructed object is a helpful strategy for revealing the strong presence of materiality in his work. Not only does the comparison provide a precedent for Nichol's artistic approaches—lending terminology such as collage, photomontage, found objects, machine aesthetics, and raw language to an analysis of Nichol's poems—but it also offers a history of materiality in literature by which to develop arguments for Nichol's motives for making materiality the focus of his poetry. As stated above, the principal motive for focusing on materiality that can be inferred from studying materiality in Dada is the desire to challenge existing communication systems and create new ones. A digital edition of Nichol's poems translates this desire into an editorial approach, allowing multiple communication systems to function at once. In my digital-edition prototype, the collage layout allows pieces of the poems to communicate a theme through the juxtaposition of their colours, fonts, and white space. The completed edition will also make these poems visible in their entirety, as scanned reproductions so as to maintain the communicative function of their

bibliographic codes. The challenge that Nichol's works pose to the limitations of language systems has held up well amidst the progression of technology. He challenged traditional alphanumeric code systems when creating his concrete, visual, and sound poetry, and now these poems challenge machine-readable codes. In fact, Nichol's poems are particularly difficult to mark up in machine-readable codes, since these programming languages typically depend on tags that delineate lines, stanzas, and paragraphs—units of text that are rarely definable and purposely resisted in concrete poetry. Therefore, presenting Nichol's work through a Dadaist lens in a digital medium does not aim to create an edition that classifies Nichol as a Dada revivalist, nor does it claim to provide an editorial environment that accommodates all of his poetry's bibliographic significance. Rather, this editorial approach to Nichol's work aims to provide a reference from which to consider materiality in literature, and it attempts to maintain the materiality of Nichol's poems and the motives for which this materiality was employed.

In Chapter 3, genetic criticism shows that materiality is a significant and dynamic part of Nichol's poetry by tracing its presence and purpose across multiple versions of individual poems. Since the linguistic components of Nichol's concrete poetry often remain the same between versions, a genetic analysis of any of his concrete texts must accommodate the bibliographic components. Comparing the bibliographic characteristics amongst variants of a text is an ideal editorial approach for highlighting the significance that can be held in a text's physical qualities. The mixture of colour and black ink used in the version of "Blues" on the cover of *Love: a book of remembrances* indicates its function as both a decorative and summarizing piece for the collection. The green ink sets apart the word 'love,' not only providing the title for the book but also drawing attention

to “Blues” linguistic content and the letters’ ability to be read as words, as opposed to reading the letters as sounds or shapes. The poem’s placement on the front cover of a book also implies that the letters and their arrangement signify a theme that can be found within the collection. In contrast, the more square spacing of the version published in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, along with the use of all black ink and a bold font, sets the poem up to be viewed as a pattern of letters that forms a complete image, while the narrow spacing and thin font in *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer* draws the eye to the long diagonals of e’s and o’s, thus bringing out the aural elements of the poem.

As Jerome McGann points out, these differences in bibliographic codes often depend on more than just Nichol’s decisions, since the input of editors, the limitations of printing presses, and economic constraints all influence the material aspects of a text. Therefore, the focus on textual production methods, which Nichol shares with Dada, requires that sociological factors be taken into account. While traditional genetic editions mention publication history as footnotes or endnotes, it is difficult to see the effects of these publication histories because the footnotes or endnotes only indicate variations in linguistic content. In the case of Nichol’s poetry, this type of textual apparatus does not adequately relate production history to the metamorphosis of a text, since the variations in material characteristics are not apparent to the reader and, therefore, the significance of these characteristics remain hidden. As I argued in Chapter 3, Nichol’s use of bibliographic codes to communicate with the reader does suggest that there is authorial intention to translate, adapt, and evolve this communication with each version. Hence, a genetic edition that presents only one version as an authoritative text, and mentions the others merely in a list of notes that exclude bibliographic detail, does not represent the

authorial intention of evolution and change. Instead, this type of edition positions one variant as a preferred text to which all other incarnations of a work are compared as deviations. However, if a genetic edition can incorporate an apparatus that makes bibliographic differences visible to the reader, then this editorial approach serves to emphasize the role that materiality plays in the interpretation, production, sociological collaboration, and authorial intentions of a textual work. A digital edition allows this kind of apparatus, making it possible to display scanned reproductions of all versions so that material characteristics can be compared. Moreover, a digital environment resists the tendency of a critical edition to feature one text as more correct than the other versions of a work. As I prove with my digital-edition prototype, the relationship between copy-text and apparatus does not have to be fixed, and the genetic narrative can be read from any perspective and in any direction.

Furthermore, my argument in Chapter 4 is supported by a digital edition's ability to offer readers a greater variety of perspectives. Nichol wishes to change the reader's perspective of the act of reading by both challenging the limits of print media and transitioning his work to digital media. He invites reader interaction in both his print collection *Still Water* and his computer poems *First Screening*. Materiality plays a key part in the reader's ability to assume an editing role with *Still Water*, from the fact that the pages are unbound and unnumbered, to the square shape of the cards that allows them to be arranged into shapes, grids, and a single unified poem object. As Johanna Drucker points out, materiality may not initially be perceived in a digital text like *First Screening*, but the code that makes the poems appear onscreen, the space occupied by the program, and the fact that the program has a spatial location on either a floppy disk or a hard drive

are all important material aspects that allow the reader to interact with the text. A small genetic analysis of a couple of beta-versions and later translations of *First Screening* reveal that these material characteristics can change, altering the bibliographic codes of the collection and the nature of the reader's interaction with the poems. The inclusion of media archaeology in the discussion of *First Screening* also reveals how the medium itself (the model of computer, the operating system, and the programming language) is an aspect of materiality in digital literature, and one that affects both the presentation and reception of the literary work. Since media archaeology supports a media history that does not progress toward an end result that invalidates all previous media forms, it is appropriate to consider *First Screening* in the context of *Still Water* and vice versa. *First Screening* is a miniature digital archive of poetry, just like *Still Water* is a miniature print archive and can be similarly regrouped or read from any starting point. *First Screening* can also act as a model for a digital prototype of *Still Water*, as I mention when I discuss my experiment with executing *Still Water* poems in Applesoft BASIC. In this case, the commands needed to execute a single *Still Water* poem add another layer of communicative system to works that already communicate both linguistically and bibliographically. Similarly, with *First Screening*, it is important to keep media's influence on creating new systems of communication in mind—a creative process that recalls Nichol's Dadaist approach to writing. A slight change in the command language creates not only a new version of the poems onscreen, but also creates a new set of metadata to go with the poems.

While a genetic editorial approach would allow these versions to infer a narrative of Nichol's writing process, the many subtleties of multiple digital versions of a textual

work are more aptly studied in relation to a narrative of the work's media archaeology, which analyses present-day media by looking to the media of the past. As an extension, literature, which relies on media for its dissemination, can be better understood now if the previous history of the relationship between literature and media is reconstructed. Since, unlike genetic criticism, media archaeology spans a much greater time period than the history of a single poem or collection, works like *First Screening* in all their digital forms (such as BASIC, HyperTalk, and JavaScript) appear as a tiny dot on the timeline in relation to similar poetic works in print form—a medium that has a much longer history than digital collections. In an editorial approach to Nichol's concrete poetry that enlists media archaeology, looking at print forms of some of the *First Screening* poems may remind the reader of the importance of typography and spacing for the poem's visual impact on the page. The reader may also realize how font affects interpretation in a digital environment (as Hohm notes in his introduction to the Hypercard translation of *First Screening*) and how the spacing that provides significance onscreen exists as a series of coordinates in programming language. The spacing of *Still Water*, on both the cards and between cards when placed adjacent to one another, is muddled in a print critical edition, whereas a digital edition maintains each individual card's spatial characteristics and the overall collection's size and shape simultaneously, since the collection can be displayed as a grid of all twenty-eight scanned reproductions. While it is obvious that *First Screening* is not meant for a print edition, the introduction of media archaeology to Nichol's works helps justify why *Still Water* also invites a digital edition—one which maintains materiality through visible bibliographic codes and reader interaction. A digital edition also maintains a media-archaeology outlook by putting a

print collection in a digital environment where its past as a miniature archive of paper cards informs its present as an archive in the form of a digital repository of images and metadata.

While much can be said about a single Nichol collection or even poem, this thesis ultimately serves to ensure that materiality is not discounted when studying modern and postmodern poetry in general and to suggest how materiality appears in various kinds of works over various media. It also suggests how materiality can provide additional significance outside of standard sign systems, as well as evolve over multiple versions of a work. Materiality is a necessary concern in any complete and informed literary interpretation, and, in order to better represent the function of material characteristics such as bibliographic codes and media forms in poetry, a variety of editorial approaches should be considered and adjustments should be made to these approaches. While there is no magic editorial approach that can perfectly preserve all the material aspects of a literary work and that work's constituent texts, there are many more options available in a digital edition. A digital edition can offer not only convenience and wider readership but also, due to its ability to accommodate a more heterogeneous collection of texts, methods of presentation and interaction that more readily incorporate ideas of materiality.

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¹ Many of Nichol's works were self-published under his own publishing imprints GrOnk or Ganglia, often with little publishing information. For instances where city, publisher, and date were not easily apparent on the work itself, I referred to jwcurry's "Notes toward a beepiography." For the date of the GrOnk 6/7 issue I referred to Nichol's opening notes to the Ganglia Press Index. I did not include information for a published (and complete) version of *First Screening* in its original Applesoft BASIC form on 5-1/4" floppy disk because I have not been able to actually locate or view such a copy. The information I provide about *First Screening* in its complete form comes from examining the emulations by Jim Andrews et al. on the *First Screening: Computer Poems by bpNichol 1984* website.

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Appendix A

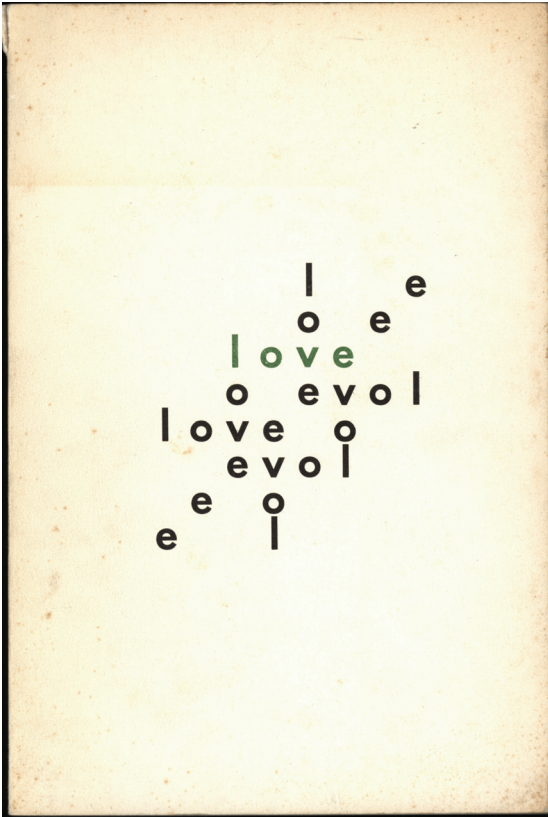


Fig.1. "Blues" from the cover of *Love: A Book of Remembrances*, 1974



Fig.2. "H (an alphabet)" from *Alphabet Iphabet*, 1978

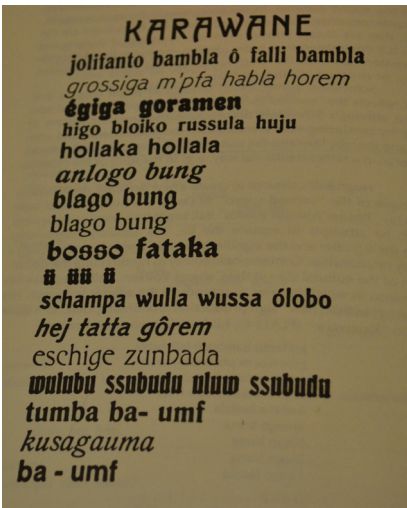


Fig.3. Hugo Ball's "Karawane" from *Dada Almanach*, 1920, reprinted in *Dada and Surrealist Art*

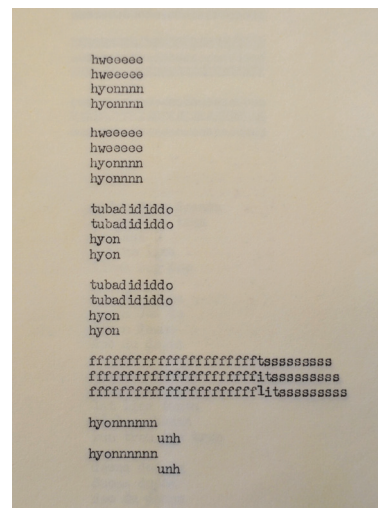


Fig.4. The first page of *Dada Lama*, Nichol's poem dedicated to the memory of Hugo Ball, 1968

MY OTHER USE: TO HEAR
 Sketch/ July 31/79

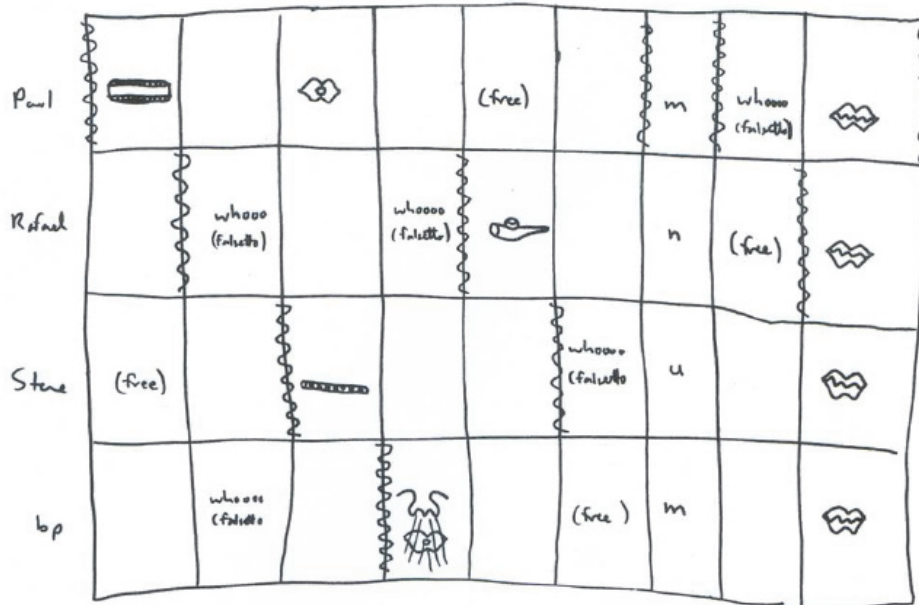


Fig.5. "My Other Use: To Hear" from *The Prose Tattoo*:
 Selected Performance Scores by The Four Horsemen, 1983

```

gg
g g
g g
g g g
organorgan g
ogranogran gg
gorangorang g
gorangorang g
g oragnoragn g
g organorgan g
g g g g
g g g
g g go
gg goi
88 goin
8 8 going
8 8 g
8 8g
8 8
8 8
8
  
```

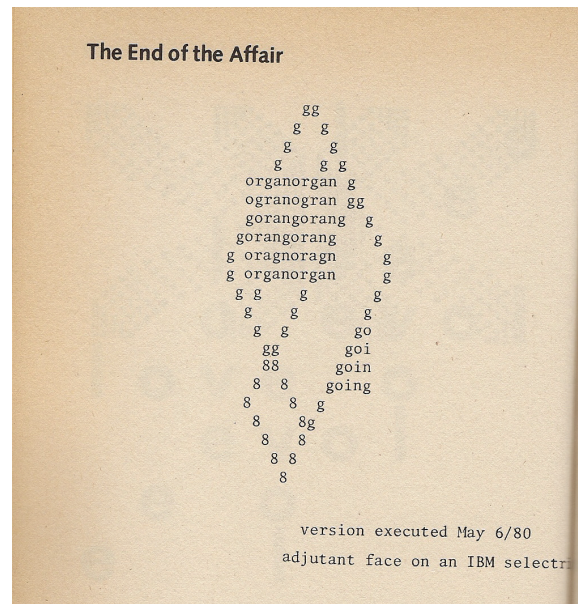


Fig.6. "The End of the Affair" from *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer*, 1973
 (left) and *Selected Writing*, 1980 (right)

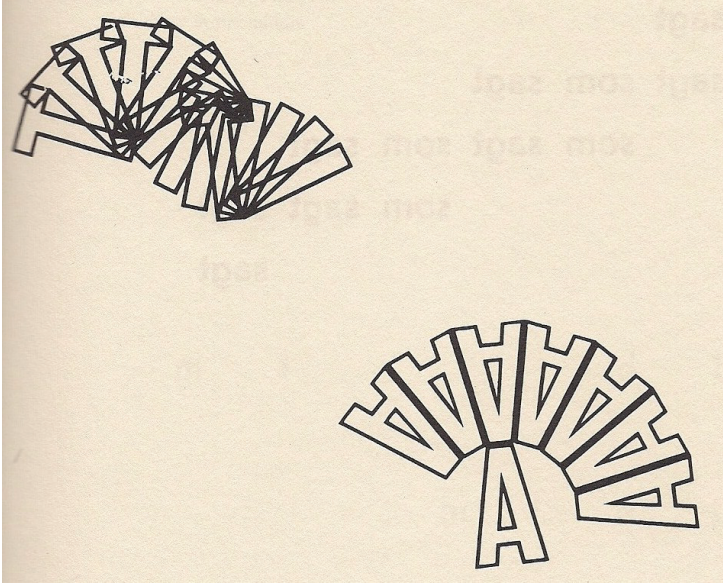


Fig.7. Two of the six poem images in “Eyes,” which was first published in Emmett Williams’ *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, 1967

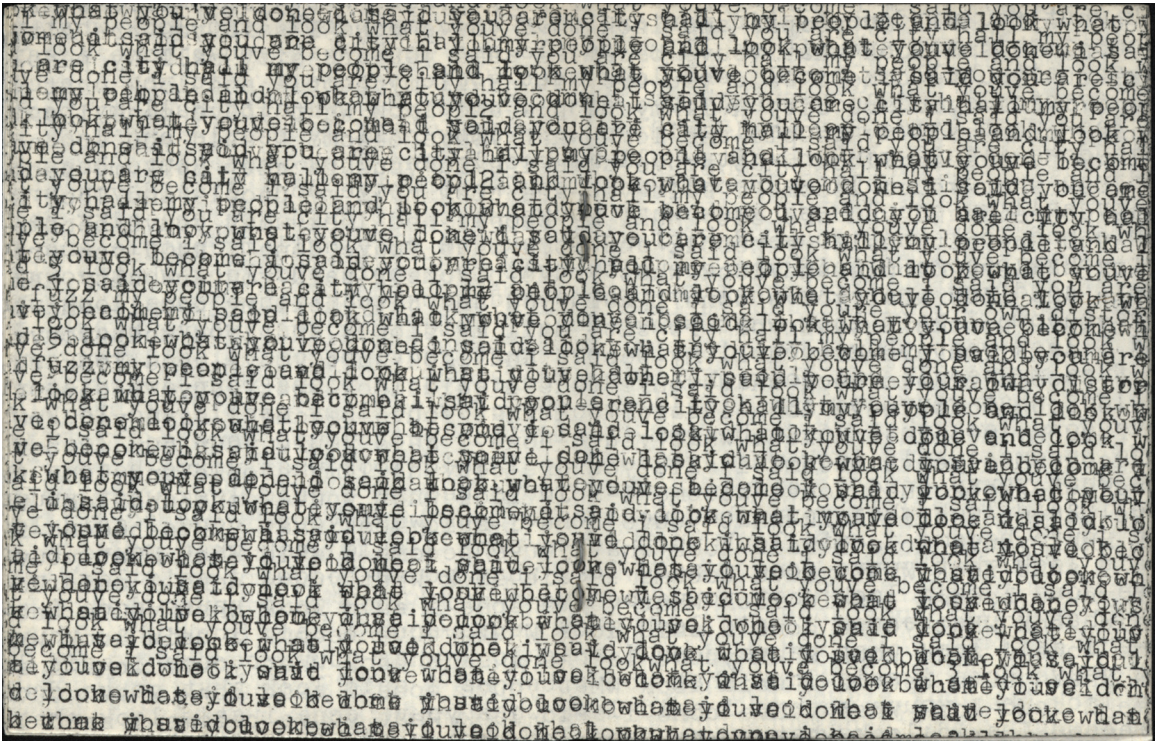


Fig.8. A page from *Lament: a sound poem*, 1969

Appendix B



Fig.1. The collage used as a “chapter map” for the section of my digital edition that features Nichol’s Dadaist works. This chapter is titled “Deconstruction” and includes excerpts from four different works.

2

TTA 4: original version

Icharrus winging up
Simon the Magician from Judea high in a tree,
everyone reaching for the sun

great towers of stone
built by the Aztecs, tearing their hearts out
to offer them, wet and beating

mountains,
cold wind, Macchu Piccu hiding in the sun
unfound for centuries

cars whizzing by, sun
thru trees passing, a dozen
new wave films, flickering
on drivers' glasses

flat on their backs in the grass
a dozen bodies slowly turning brown

sun glares off the pages, "soleil
cou coupé", rolls in my window
flat on my back on the floor
becoming aware of it
for an instant

TTA 5: re-arranging words in poem in alphabetical order

a a a,
an and aware Aztecs back backs beating becoming bodies,
brown built by by cars

centuries cold cou coupé
dozen dozen drivers' everyone, films flat flat flickering
floor for for, for from glares

glasses,
grass great, hearts hiding high Icharrus in in
in in instant

it Judea Macchu, Magician
mountains my my, new of
of off offer, on
on on on

out pages passing Piccu reaching rolls Simon
slowly soleil stone sun sun sun

sun tearing the the the, "the
the the", the their their them
thru to towers tree trees turning unfound
up wave wet whizzing
wind window winging

Fig.2. One of the six full-size images that will be available to readers by hovering their cursors over the images in the chapter map. This image is the top left one in the chapter map and is a page from *Translating Translating Apollinaire*, 1979.

Appendix C

Love: a book of remembrances, (title page), 1974

l e e
o e
love
o evol
love o
evol
e o
e l

(he considers love)

"love spelled backwards is evol is 'nature's way' (i've overworked it in a dozen noems) has

nothing to do with evil but rather evolves new themes. how impossible to overwork them.

The Captain Poetry Poems, 1971

l e
o e
love
o evol
love o
evol
e o
e l

Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer, (1967), 1973



Concrete Poetry: A World View, 1970 (from concrete poetry Britain Canada united states, 1966), typography by Hansjorg Mayer

Blues
↑
a purely visual poem that depends on a sound reference

l e e
o e
love
o evol
love o
evol
e o
e l

here I'm paraphrasing an old blues — "love, oh love, oh careless love" — to slant the reading of "evol" towards "evil" and support the visually derived blues moan

These are the opening lyrics of "Careless Love"—a traditional song of which many blues versions have been produced. It has been performed in many different arrangements with varying lyrics.

Blues
l e e
o e
love
o evol
love o
evol
e o
e l

"The Pata of Letter Feet, or, The English Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" Open Letter, 1985

Selected Writings: As Elected, 1980 (reprinted from Konfessions)

Appendix D

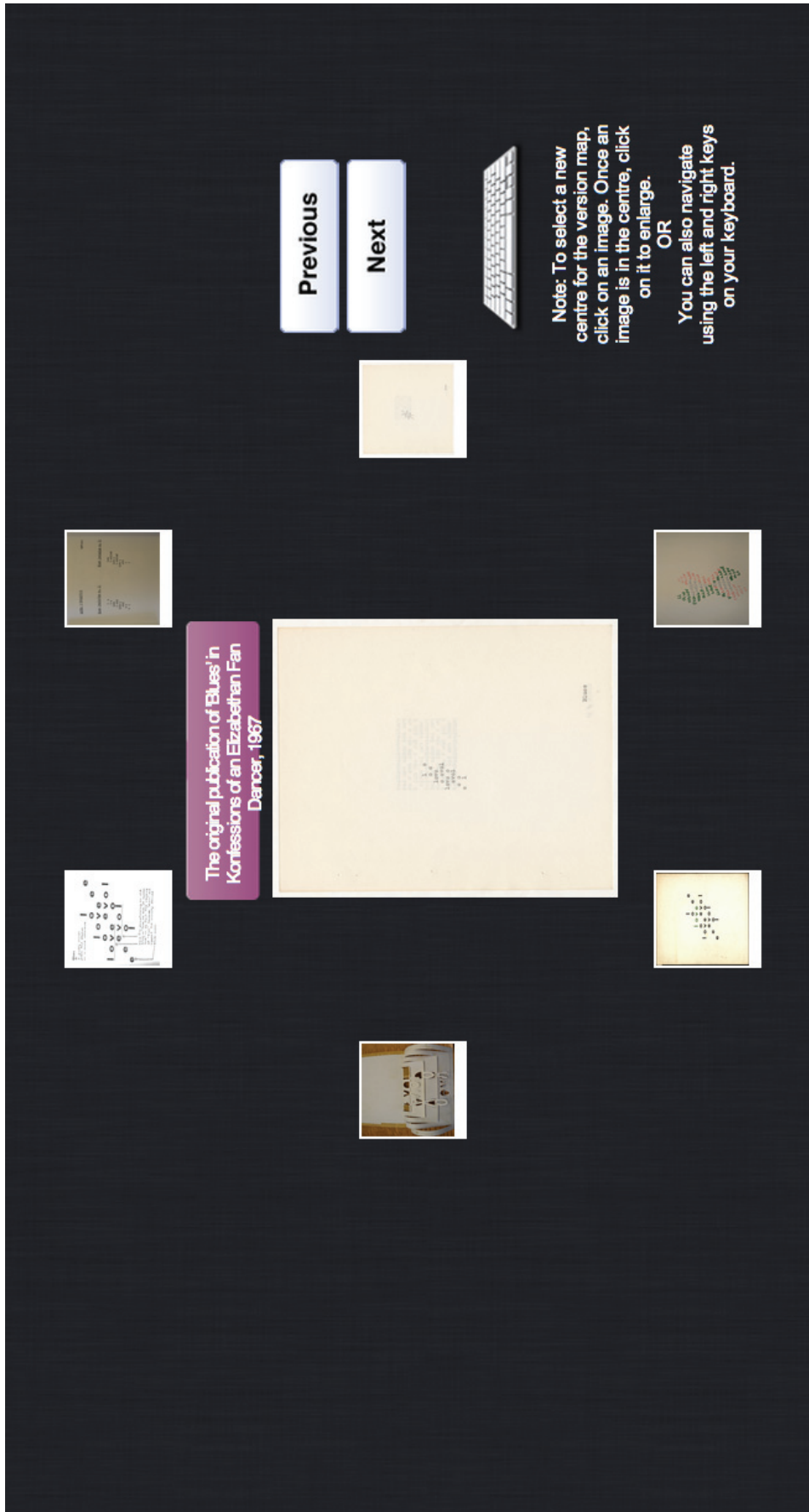


Fig.1. A screenshot of the prototype for the genetic criticism portion of my digital edition. Multiple versions of “Blues” are presented.

Appendix E

shuffle



Fig. 1. A screenshot of the prototype of the interactive adaptation of *Still Water* for my digital edition. This is a portion of the twenty-eight cards laid out in a seven-by-four grid.

shuffle



Fig.2. A screenshot showing the prototype for my interactive adaptation of *Still Water* after the shuffle function has been executed.

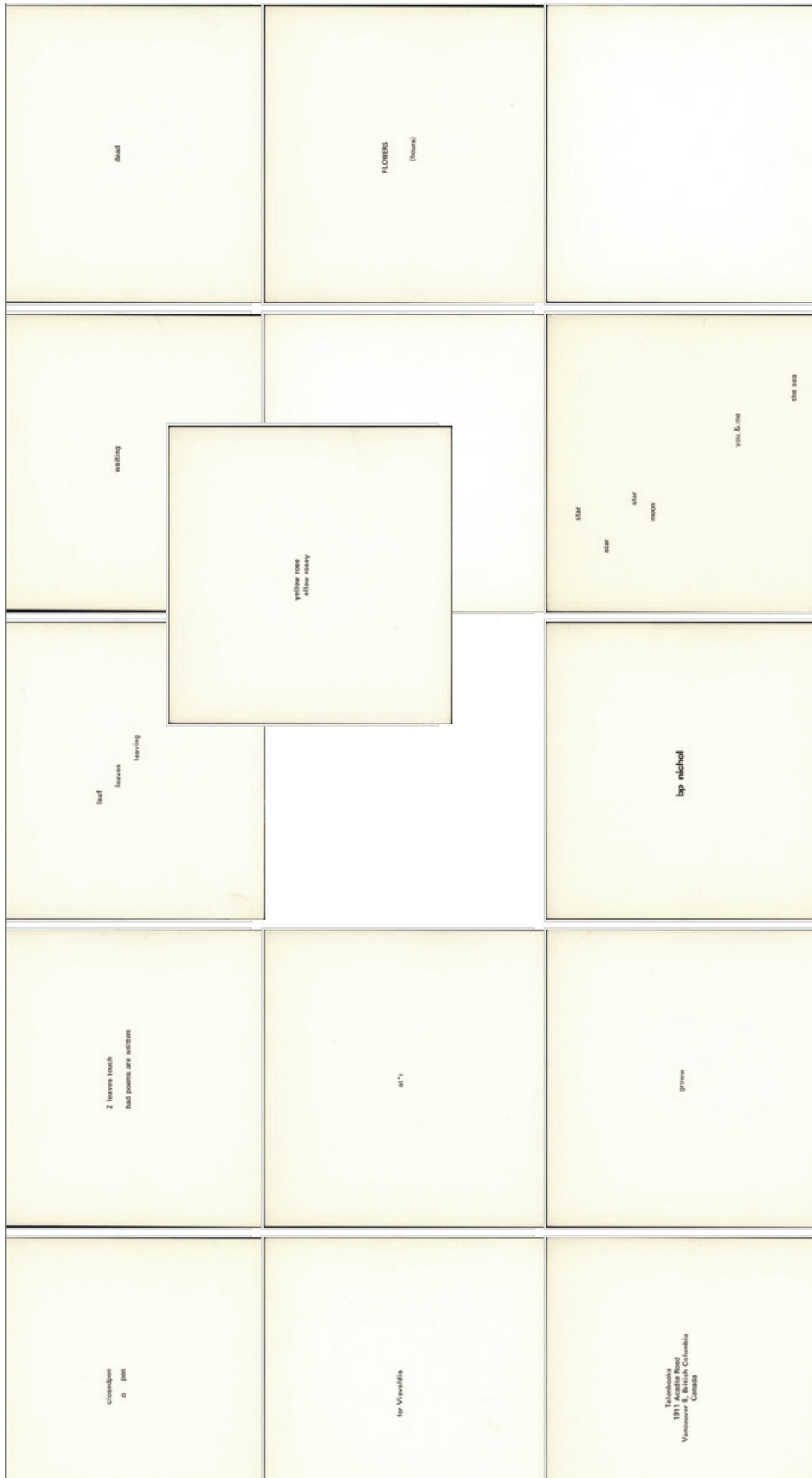


Fig.3. A screenshot of the prototype of my interactive adaptation of *Still Water* showing the drag and drop function that allows users to rearrange the grid of poems.