

# *raisonnE* as interactive archive and virtual research environment

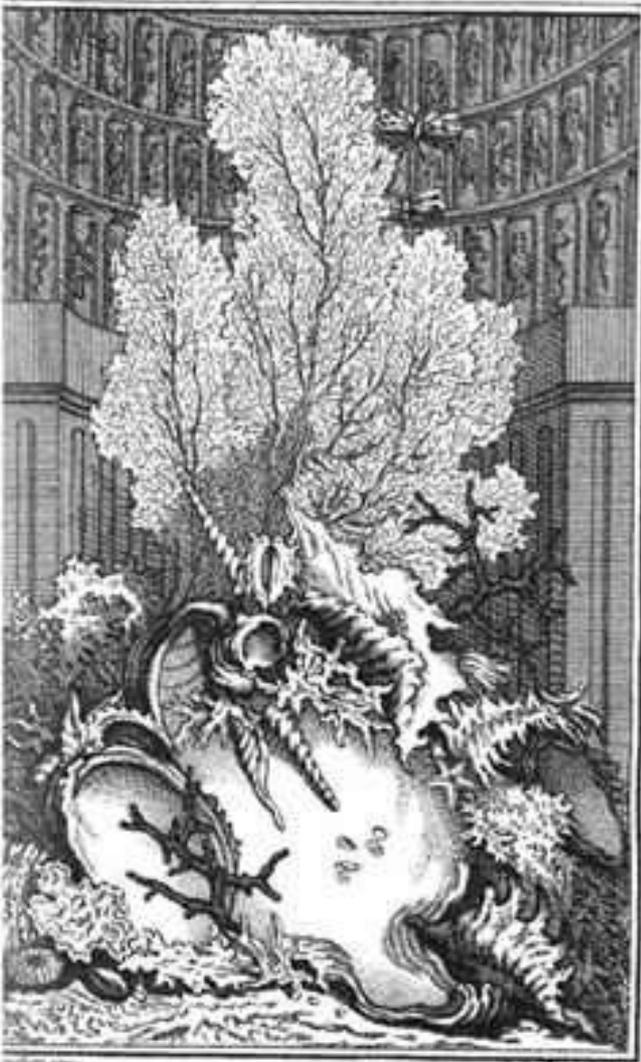


**Adam Lauder**

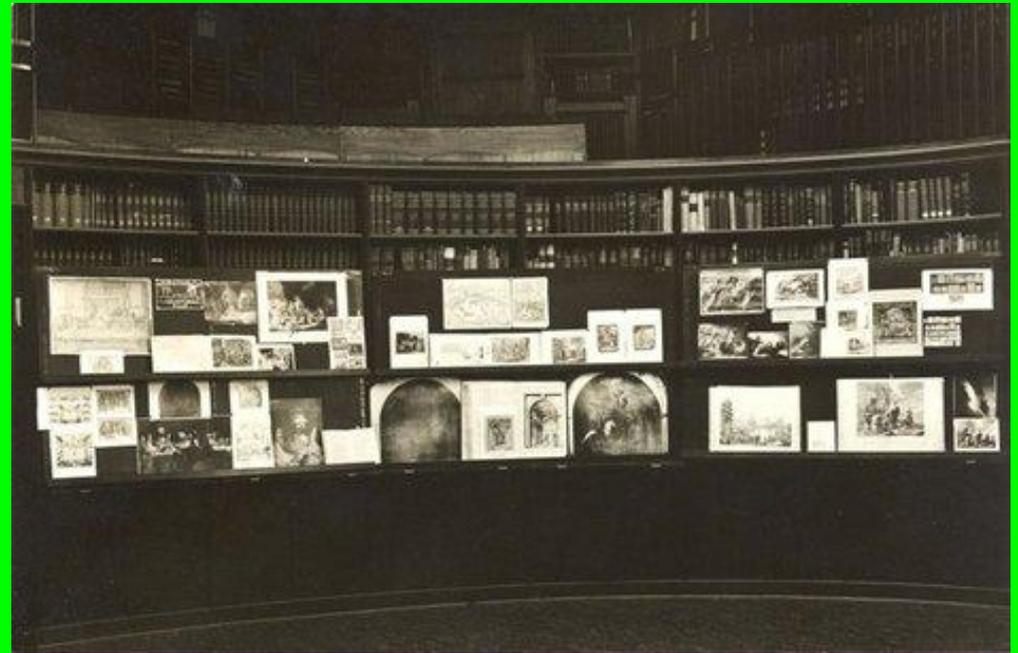
**W.P. Scott Chair for Research in e-Librarianship**

**York University, Toronto CANADA**

# *back to the future*



*CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ  
De Coquilles, Insectes, Reptiles &c.  
Avec quelques Observations  
sur ces Curiosités.*



# *N.E. Thing Co. Ltd.:*



*engaging  
business  
models*

# INFORMATION

N.E. THING CO. LTD.

1419 Riverside Drive North Vancouver B.C. Canada

Date

1969

Project

N.E. THING CO. LTD. LOGO. by ALLAN FLEMING

Number

1.

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN

N. E. THING COMPANY LIMITED

The symbol-omnigraphic could only be designed for the N. E. THING CO. It is, in a way, a manufactured found object — one more form amid thousands of forms. It asks you to participate in the Company's future, in any way you see fit. You can fill it in. You can tell the Company what to see, or do, or have. And since the N. E. THING CO. has only a small number of ways in which to present its symbol to you, the Company will depend upon the environment to duplicate the symbol. Every time you see the dotted leaders on a form — one form — you will think of the N. E. THING CO.

Designed by  
ALLAN FLEMING

Le "symbole-omnigraphic" ne pouvait être dessiné que pour la N. E. THING CO. D'une certaine façon, c'est un objet trouvé manufacturé, une forme parmi des milliers d'autres formes, qui vous demande de participer à son avenir à l'avant de la Compagnie. Vous pouvez le remplir. Vous pouvez dire à la Compagnie quoi voir, quoi faire, ou quoi avoir. Comme la N. E. THING CO. ne dispose que de peu de façons de vous présenter son symbole, la Compagnie compte sur l'environnement pour reproduire le symbole. Chaque fois que vous voyez des lignes pointillées sur un formulaire, quel qu'il soit, vous pensez à la N. E. THING CO.

Conçu par  
ALLAN FLEMING

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN

Description

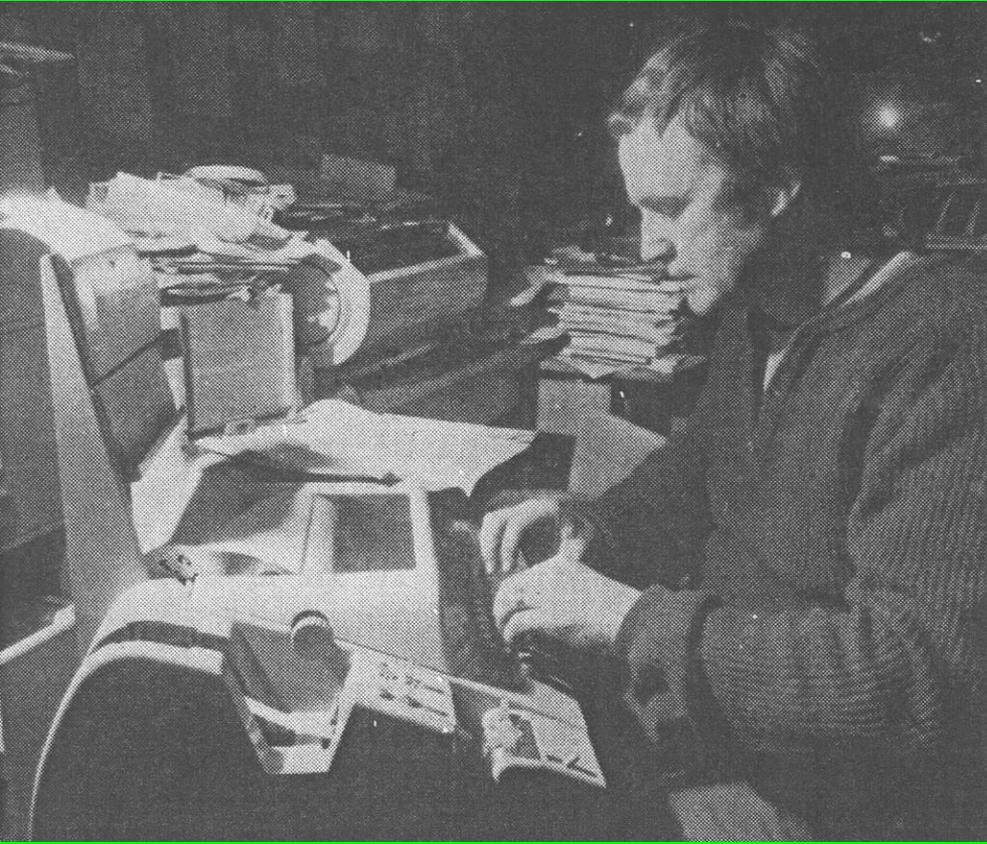
Canadian, internationally ~~known~~ REKNOWN DESIGNER ALLAN FLEMING ASSIGNED THIS UNIQUE LOGO FOR THE N.E. THING CO. LTD.

N. E. THING COMPANY LIMITED  
1419 Riverside Drive  
North Vancouver B.C.

Seal



# **McLuhan:** *prophet of participation*



# INFORMATION

N.E. THING CO. LTD.

1419 Riverside Drive North Vancouver B.C. Canada

Date

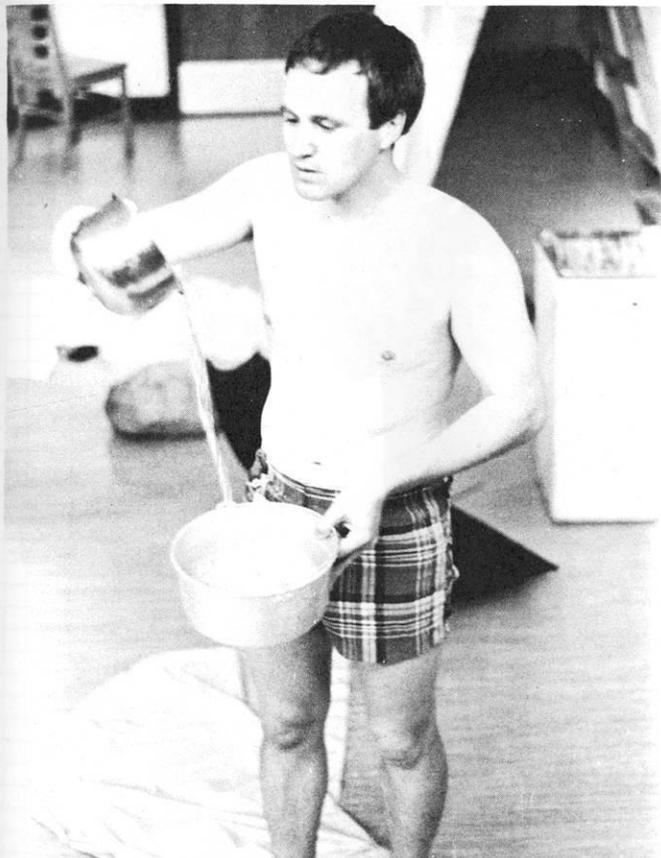
1964

Project

PERFORMING SWIMMING ON DRY LAND.

Number

1



PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN

Description

Co-PRESIDENT OF N.E. THING CO. PERFORMING ACT OF SWIMMING ON LAND. ALSO USED AS TECHNIQUE FOR TEACHING NON-VERBAL ART CLASSES.

See



N. E. THING COMPANY LIMITED

Trade Mark ©

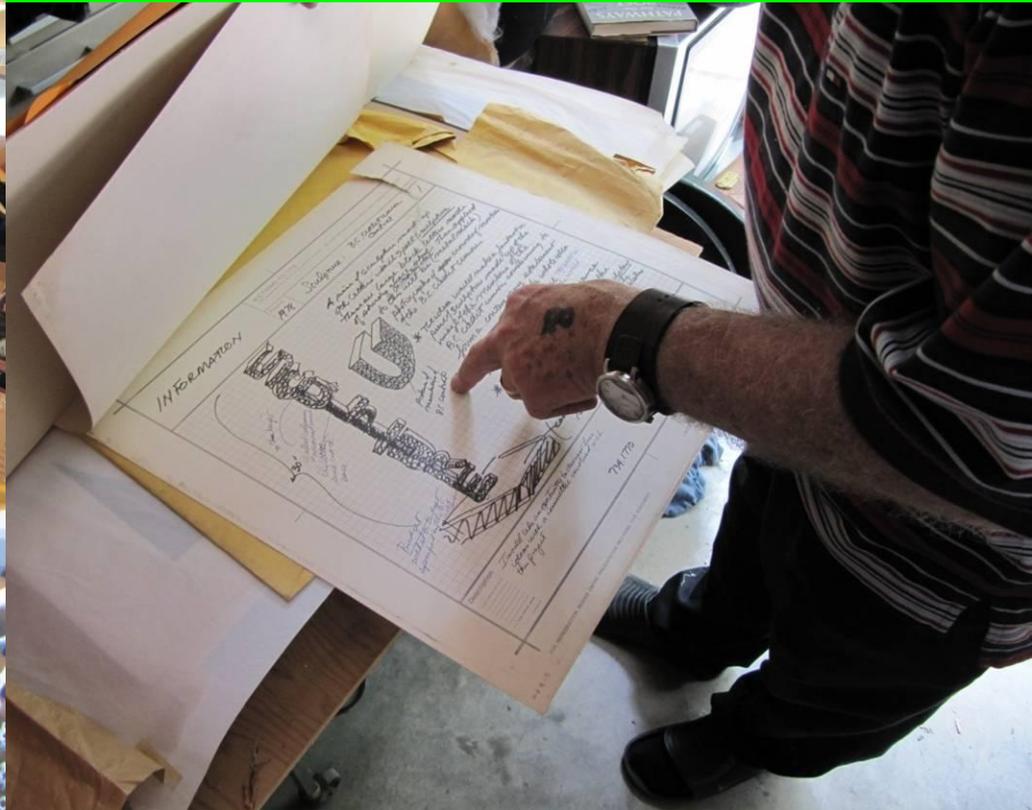
# ***dialogic development***







# *non-intrusive methods*



# IAIN BAXTER & campground & ...

## campground & ...

- 1 Visitor Centre
- 2 General Store
- 3 Gallery
- 4 Gift Shop
- 5 Equipment Shop
- 6 Camera Shop

**P** Pool Area

**T** Tennis Courts

 Restrooms/Shower

 Campsites

 Artistsites



# IAIN BAXTER & raisonnE...



<http://www.andraisonne.blogspot.com/>



***Thank you!***

***Questions?***

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# *raisonnE* as interactive archive and virtual research environment

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The *IAINBAXTER&raisonnE* is an prototype electronic collection and virtual exhibition and research environment devoted to the life's work of Canadian conceptual artist IAIN BAXTER& that seeks to expand and transform the catalogue raisonné format into a collaborative scholarly communications and learning zone. (In case you're wondering if you heard right: yes, the artist's name contains an ampersand—the “and” symbol. As you can see from the BAXTER& work featured in this slide, *Pile of Ands*, the ampersand—a connector symbol that suggests values of interconnectedness and collaboration—has come to take pride of place in the artist's recent work.) Developed in partnership with IAIN BAXTER& and Louise Chance Baxter and in collaboration with

an international, interdisciplinary and multi-lingual team of scholars, including Paris-based curator and writer Rose Marie Barrientos, Montréal-based curator Vincent Bonin, Paris-based professor, curator and writer Christophe Domino, Virginia Commonwealth University-based scholar Dennis Durham and Paris-based doctoral candidate Isabelle Hermann as well as York University Libraries, the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art (ccca.ca), with significant supporting contributions by Windsor-based visual artist and graphic designer Victor Romao, musician and sound engineer Chris Blaise and artist Laura Shintani-Houston, the prototype *raisonnE* breaks with the linear, hierarchical and static structures of traditional catalogues raisonné by adding content in direct response to the evolving creative, research and teaching needs of a diverse constituency of artists, scholars and students currently researching IAIN BAXTER& and/or the historical transformation of catalogues raisonné, collections and collecting behaviours. In turn, through a variety of qualitative and some quantitative mechanisms, the *raisonnE* aims to document and evaluate its own emergence in real time through continuous cycles of reflection, planning and action compatible with the principles of action research. This emphasis on reflective practice is made possible, I should underline from start, by my unique position with York University Libraries in Toronto, Canada, where the resource is also being hosted: as the first W.P. Scott Chair for Research in e-Librarianship—a rotating, project-based research appointment designed to facilitate innovative, librarian-initiated scholarship and project design—in addition to devoting time toward the planning, execution and evaluation of the *raisonnE*, I am free to explore contextual readings which, in turn, enrich all stages of the project’s development by suggesting alternatives to established models of information

and library science. This search for alternatives responds to the ethically-motivated work of critical information theorists such as Bernd Carsten Stahl (2008), Gary P. Radford (1998) and Ron Day (1996), who advocate positive (critical, creative, pluralistic and non-proprietary) substitutes for inherited paradigms of information, which Alistair Black has characterized as “bureaupathic” (425). The unresolved, exploratory framework of the *raisonnE* equally answers the call from Anne Beaulieu and Paul Wouters for “freedom to engage in experiment and play with new forms of research” (58). (As we shall see, this stress on play is consistent with the spirit of IAIN BAXTER&’s practice; the artist’s mantra being, “Love, Play, Wonder.”)

Responding to current models of user-driven selection in e-librarianship, the *raisonnE*’s mandate of researcher-driver acquisition breaks with traditional collection paradigms grounded in a curatorial logic of selection. With the *raisonnE*, the collection cycle is embedded, alternatively, within emerging conceptualizations of e-research and “ephemeral curating,” while also drawing upon historical models of collecting and cataloguing that privilege the co-shaping of actor and network (Latour; Pickering).

**[SLIDE 2]** Precedents for the constructivist approach of the *raisonnE*—ranging from the pre-Enlightenment *tableaux de ventes* of the eighteenth-century Parisian art dealer Gersaint (1694-1750) to the “travelling” library of twentieth-century art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929)—acknowledge the contingency of the archive upon evolving—and even competing—communities of practice and social interests. Just as the non-categorical sales catalogues of Gersaint, according to curator Graham Larkin, respected

the “liberty of the compiler” (84)<sup>1</sup> and Warburg’s performative library responded to “every progress in [the researcher’s] system of thought, every new idea about the inter-relation of facts” (thereby transforming the collection into a mobile laboratory and arena for the performative enactment of the research process (Michaux)), so too the transitional archive of the *raisonné* is constantly in motion (Saxl, 327). Above all, the *raisonné* is a virtual research environment which aims to generate reusable virtual spaces in support of evolving research projects and creative communication through new approaches to data curation and social production predicated on the “total involvement” of contributors and users (McLuhan). Yet this utilization of new media does not institute a break with the past practices of archives. On the contrary, to paraphrase Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, information technologies facilitate the instant retrieval of historical models at electronic speeds. The community-based production and performative classification characteristic of the earliest catalogues raisonné are reactivated through instant replay.

Invoking these historical prototypes serves a tactical purpose: they remind us that collaborative design methodologies and models of scholarly communication grounded in notions of “peer production” (Sommerville and Collins) and collaborative authoring are not without precedent. Recognizing the historical continuum of technologically-enabled collaborative practices clears a space for reflection within which project participants may explore critically, but also creatively, the multitude of design possibilities—new and

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<sup>111</sup> “[A]t this level the sense of order is not imposed by the overarching subject categories, but rather by formal and material contingencies—inter-compositional affinities of size, shape, style, tonality, condition, and technique” (Larkin, 100).

old—as well as technologies, “high-” and “low-level” alike, available to archival practitioners today.

In the words of science and technology theorist Bruno Latour, “[i]n order to exit from the postmoderns’ paralysis ... [w]e have to retrace our steps” (1993 [1991], 67). The historically-sensitive approach of the *IAINBAXTER&raisonnE* treats the futurological rhetoric of some archival and library theorists and practitioners with scepticism. In simultaneously reviewing the emerging literature of e-research and exploring past instances of networked scholarship, *raisonnE* developers abandon the modernist conception of temporality as a progressive succession of technological revolutions in favour of the “polytemporal” assemblies authorized by Latour (74). Linear innovation is rejected in favour of multi-directional exploration.

Latour’s reconfiguration of agency is compatible with reformulations of subjectivity found in the materialist writings of Friedrich Kittler and Andrew Pickering. The machinic assemblages of human and non-human agents studied by Latour, Kittler and Pickering are most powerfully conceived as a “network”: a composite of natural, discursive and social agents which constrain and actively shape the emergence of knowledge. “[A]round machines,” observes Pickering, “we act like machines” (16). I would propose that the network also emerges a powerful tool for re-conceiving archives and libraries.

The figure of the network provides a productive support for conceptualizing, and responding to, some key features of the emerging regime of e-research; for instance, the “virtual organization,” with its attendant attributes of collaboration-at-a-distance through

electronic media such as e-mail, instant messaging and video conferencing (Jankowski, 9). As such, the network serves as a material foundation for the *raisonnE* team's collaborative engagement with new trends in scholarship such as peer production, without thereby succumbing to fantasies of unprecedented and unlimited technological innovation or an unimpeded diffusion of "Big Science" techniques across all disciplines. While responding to another primary feature of e-research—namely, the new prominence of Grid computing architecture—working within a network structure does not limit exploration of new technologies to such "high-level" developments. As Beaulieu and Wouters remind us, successful e-research in the humanities and social sciences requires new amalgams of computational and *non*-computational methodologies (62).

**[SLIDE 3]** A more recent, but nonetheless historical, example of networked practice informing the development of the *raisonnE* is the "informational" infrastructure of the Vancouver-based Conceptual enterprise N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. founded by IAIN BAXTER& in 1966. The Company, which operated as a legally-incorporated business until 1978, provided a flexible umbrella under which its co-presidents—IAIN BAXTER& and his then wife Ingrid Baxter (styling themselves "visual researchers" instead of artists)—were able to simultaneously carry out projects in the worlds of art and commerce. For instance, while exhibiting Company artworks, or "products," at the Museum of Modern Art in the summer of 1970, the N.E Thing Co.—or NETCO, for short—also participated in the 1970 conferences of the Data Processing Management Association, or DPMA, in Vancouver and Seattle (seen in this slide). This strategy of corporate diversification worked for NETCO because art and business alike were re-inscribed in Company documentation as "visual sensitivity information." **[SLIDE 4]**

(All documentation of Company ventures—such as the Company logo, featured here, designed by iconic Canadian graphic designer Allan Fleming—was “tagged” under the capacious descriptor “information” and filed for future reuse in a flexible archival system without hierarchies.) Recalling the information sheets generated by N.E. Thing Co.’s visual researchers, the *raisonnE* aims to develop an infinitely extensible support for a “flat” array of interdisciplinary data.

**[SLIDE 5]** The N.E. Thing Co’s pioneering appropriation, as early as 1969, of new telecommunications media, such as Telex and Telecopier, as supports for Conceptual artworks that allowed the Company to infiltrate corporate networks with its Zen koan-like communiqués, stands as a powerful precedent for contemporary research practices of communication-at-a-distance. (Here we see, at left, NETCO Co-President IAIN BAXTER& sending a 50,000-mile transmission via Telex in 1970, an image that was reproduced in the catalogue of the landmark MoMA exhibition *INFORMATION*.) NETCO’s exploration of the potential for information and communications technologies (ICTs) to serve as art media was largely inspired by the visionary media writings of Marshall McLuhan (who we see portrayed here at right in a mural at the University of Windsor, where IAIN BAXTER& is Professor Emeritus). This genealogy foregrounds the historicity of the participational paradigm associated with Web 2.0 technologies, since McLuhan famously proclaimed, *in the 1960s*, that the “world-pool of information” “necessitates great personal involvement and participation” (*Playboy Interview*, n.p.).

**[SLIDE 6]** In keeping with the satirical tenor of McLuhan’s studies of new media, IAIN BAXTER&’s early adoption of ICTs has always been tempered by a heavy

dose of satire that lends his work a profound sense of play (and, at times, of McLuhanesque “inter-play”—among disparate media and environments, etc.) that anticipates recent calls for “creativity” and “play” in research in face of an impending rapprochement of “Big Science” and the humanities.

**[SLIDE 7]** Taking the McLuhan-inspired work of NETO as a springboard, *raisonnE* development is intensely dialogic in orientation (Foster, 2008), emerging through continuous conversations with the artist and other project participants, who act as advisors. (One of the goals of the *raisonnE* project in its current, prototype phase is to lay the groundwork for a more formalized, peer-review editorial structure.) Common goals are negotiated and advanced collaboratively through international email exchanges, telephone conversations and in-person visits with the artist. Some of these dialogues are, furthermore, documented in digital video format and distributed via the project blog.

**[SLIDE 8]** Non-computational formats and methods, such as artist’s renderings, also enter the *raisonnE*’s trans-computational network. (Here we see an early rendering of *raisonnE* concepts generated by IAIN BAXTER& during a phone conversation with me, which I subsequently documented and incorporated into the project’s online << *avant-propos* >> ).

To request that specific materials in the BAXTER& fonds held by the AGO be prioritized for digitization in order to facilitate the creation of private research “albums” or public, user-curated “exhibitions” of *raisonnE* contents online and other projects, potential *raisonnE* contributors are invited to register with the “e-Chair”—*that’s me*—as “designated researchers.” The publicly-accessible electronic finding aid for the IAIN

BAXTER& Fonds, prepared by the Art Gallery of Ontario's Rosamond Ivey Special Collections Archivist Amy Marshall Furness, serves as a common reference point for the e-Chair and other project stakeholders as well as researchers at large who are invited to employ it as a virtual catalogue whose contents may be "actualized" (that is, digitized and uploaded to the *raisonnE*) upon request.

The e-Chair thereby acts as a mediator between researchers and the archive. Digitized materials resulting from this dialogical interaction function, on one hand, as a third term between the institution and the researcher. **[SLIDE 9]** But, whereas archival materials held by the Art Gallery of Ontario will be digitized according to established institutional practices and in conformity with recognized standards, the artist's working archive will be documented using less intrusive, ethnographic methods and at every stage in direct collaboration with IAIN BAXTER&. The traces of this mediating activity constitute a new form of electronic publication imbricated in an ongoing process of Action Research.

The *raisonnE* also welcomes user-contributed descriptors of images in its collection as well as user-generated annotations and reflections. Other scholarly and creative contributions and interventions are also welcome, including interviews, essays and reflections. The project is currently accepting proposals; potential contributors are invited to contact the e-Chair for more information on how the *raisonnE* can facilitate their projects. Contributions in French are welcome.

**[SLIDE 10]** The many partnerships and collaborations which sustain the collaborative development of the *raisonnE* are acknowledged through an innovative

sponsorship page—in the form of a “campground,” which we see here—conceived by IAIN BAXTER& and executed by the Windsor, Ontario-based visual artist and graphic designer Victor Romao (who is also in the process of creating an online graphic novel, documenting the genesis of the *raisonnE*, in collaboration with myself and IAIN BAXTER&).

**[SLIDE 11]** In keeping with “open” philosophies which stress reuse, in its second year (2011-2012), the *raisonnE* will fund an archivist, artist, curator, librarian or scholar to re-curate or re-publish the contents of the prototype *raisonnE* (in all or in part). Compensation is negotiable. Contact me today for more information about this unique opportunity.

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