Of Walking Shoes, Boats, Golf Carts, Bicycles, and a Slow Technoculture:

A Technography of Movement and Embodied Media on Protection Island, BC

Technics and civilization as a whole are the result of human choices and aptitudes and strivings, deliberate as well as unconscious, often irrational when apparently they are most objective and scientific…The machine itself makes no demands and holds out no promises: it is the human spirit that makes demands and keeps promises ~Lewis Mumford, 1934, p. 6.

Picture 1: Nanaimo’s floating dock by the Protection Connection terminal,

The long, narrow, winding floating dock on the Nanaimo1 harbour is a nightmare for parents of a toddler who just learned to walk. Make that run, actually. Autumn seems especially invigorated by the possibility of precipitating into the murky dockside water surrounding her left and right. Her short legs and wobbly feet look as if they are moving so fast that her baby bum seems to be holding her upper body behind her as she goes. We have to wait for the ferry for another fifteen or twenty minutes and my back feels already fatigued, constantly having to bend down to pick her up every time she falls and then immediately starts crawling randomly between people’s feet.

In the meantime April seems to be making good use of time. Pacing the floating waiting room—a converted 50 foot shuttle boat—back and forth like a galley mouse, she seems to be laying her eyes on the smallest details of everything in her sight, punctually snapping pictures with our ageing digital camera. More
and more people are walking to the terminal as minutes go by; standing, gathering, conversing outside the waiting room until the number of passengers-to-be seems large enough to prompt the islanders to sneak inside and wait by the door in an informal line. Islanders don’t mind the tourists but nothing unnerves them as much as being bumped off a first-come-first-serve ferry overcrowded by outsiders and having to wait for the next one. Next in the list of their annoyances is that of having to show up early to avoid the dreaded bump-off. The sunny day and balmy temperature have titillated out of their hotel and guest rooms a few more tourists than usual for a midweek day and both we and islanders are aware of the impending danger.

We learned how to spot tourists—even local ones from Nanaimo and the rest of Vancouver Island and coastal British Columbia—from commuting islanders a long time ago: tourists carry nothing with them except for the occasional camera and handbag. For islanders instead the “Protection Connection”—the name of the half-mile long ferry route—is their driveway home. There are no other ways to get to the 400-some-acre island, unless you drive your own aluminum boat or paddle your kayak, but very few do so regularly. This means that everything that gets out of the trunk of their cars—parked usually in the nearby mall’s lot—has to roll across the busy harbour intersection, down the occasionally steep floating dock, and onto either the twenty-eight foot, thirty-four walk-on passenger-only MV Island Mist or MV Island Queen. There are no shops on the island. No schools, no fuel services, no official places of religious worship, no public services other than a volunteer-run fire station. Aside from the friendly and colourful Dinghy Dock Pub—which touts itself as being Canada’s only floating pub—all food, drink (with the exception of takeaway suds from the pub), and everyday conveniences have to make their way over to the island by floating on the Protection Connection as well. Trash bags, instead, have to go the opposite way toward Nanaimo, as there is no garbage collection on the island. Despite the fact that the 300 or so year-round residents of Protection take care of most of their refuse by composting, reusing, or by simply reducing what they bring over, stuff has to travel back and forth alongside their bodies. In short, you don’t need to be a seasoned ethnographer to tell the beer crowd from the rest.

As the Island Mist docks and immediately lets off-board half a dozen riders April grabs Autumn by her right hand, pulls her closer, and picks her up. I hurry to collapse the baby stroller and stow everything
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neatly on top of it for easy carrying onto the boat, carefully holding to the diaper bag strap and our field notebook with my right thumb and index finger. As skipper Russ² helps the first passenger over onto the boat and down the first of three narrow metal steps he warns everybody to mind the wet paint: “The blue part only, folks!” Yet islanders seem to be more focused on strutting bags, boxes, backpacks, duffel bags, loose items, and whatever else they are carrying over without losing their place in line, while another batch of first-time tourists busy themselves with re-interpreting how they came to the sudden realization that the floating waiting room they had been sitting on is not, indeed, the ferry itself. Their confusion gives way to excitement in some and to nervous laughter in others as they realize that the Island Mist is half the size of the crowded-enough waiting room, and that, to boot, another five or six islanders have just appeared out of thin air at the very sight of the boat docking. Ah, the timeless art of commuting!

As I wait for April and Autumn to make their way onboard, I lift the stroller well over my head so as not to bang onto anyone’s face. This is not an easy manoeuvre; as I step down onto the boat I need to carefully lower the stroller to fit under the canopy but not low enough to prevent me from glancing nervously at my footing; a type of scrupulous monitoring which I must do if I want to manage stepping over other passengers’ feet, while having to settle for only gingerly bumping against their knees. I finally find a seat next to April, observing numerous others over the next few minutes repeat a similar sequence of struggling steps directed toward multiple different directions on the boat, each passenger causing the space between our bodies to shrink as one more butt finds a seating space on the thin cushion. Twenty-four eager bodies deprived of six dollars for the trip across the busy harbour have found seating room on the 10a.m. Island Mist.
Angus (1993, p. 14) suggests that the twentieth century “may be described as the twilight of humanist civilization.” Much of the current disembodied theory and research on technoculture—with its fascination on new technologies, like the cyborgian, biotic, and digital—would seem to corroborate his impression. Yet, a simpler conceptualization seems more appropriate to us. From our interactionist approach we view technoculture as the emergent social organization arising out of the multiplicative diachronic effects of bodies extending beyond themselves through tools (Hall, 1959; McLuhan, 1964, 1967). We believe that fundamentally, there are no epistemological differences between technics (i.e. devices, tools) such as a wireless digital phone and an old ship’s horn: both are ways of knowing the lived world and making it meaningful by modifying it. Further, both extend the human ear and both need to be concretely used by live reflexive embodied selves and physically engaged through appropriate techniques (i.e. abstract and practical manners of use and know-how). The single situated encounter between technic and techniques is the technological act. In this sense technology is an object-directed reflexive act (Mead, 1938) and technoculture a joint act (Blumer 1969): the complex emergent outcome of what people and technics do together over time and place.
Our study of technoculture on Protection Island draws great inspiration from Marshall McLuhan. Both McLuhan’s (e.g. 1967) analytical attention to technics as extensions of the senses, as well as his writing strategy—including probes, aphorisms, caricatures, images, and his penchant for humanistic prose—inspire our view of technography as a research strategy and art of representation. Recovering McLuhan’s unconventional, anti-realist, anti-linear, impressionistic, provocative style, with its penchant for blurring multiple genres, for provoking thought and evoking sensation, and for condensing grand and local narratives into montage is aimed at making our ethnography performative, sensuous, and experimental. In doing so we abandon realist pretensions and embrace the idea and ideal that writing—as typographic technique—and the written word—as a technic—are inseparable components of the study of technoculture.

Our vision of technography goes beyond McLuhan, however. By paying attention to transportation media—what Cooley (1894) called material communication media, or what one might call embodied media—we hope to motivate reflection on the centrality of the body in technoculture. In this endeavour we draw upon a variety of diverse sources. From Innis (1951, 1972) and Mumford (e.g. 1934) we draw inspiration for an ecology of technology of communication (also see Lum, 2005). From Carey (1989) we borrow the idea of the repeated communicative encounter between human and cultural medium as ritual. We loan from Altheide and Snow (1976) the idea of media logic, and following Couch (Couch, Maines, and Chen, 1996) we pay attention to the role technology plays in structuring social relationship processes.

Utilizing a variety of data-collection techniques including participant observation, field interviewing, introspection, and the recording and digital processing of photographic images we characterize the present study—part of an ongoing, multi-year fieldwork study on coastal BC’s regional culture and technoculture—as an embodied (Monaghan, 2006), sensuous (Stoller, 1997), visual (Pink, 2001), reflexive (Denzin, 1997), poetic (Richardson, 1997) ethnography, portrayed through a layered (Rambo Ronai, 1995), impressionist, composite text which includes in-the-flesh reflection, narratives, and occasional fictive sketches employed to compress fieldwork time and evoke meaning (Ellis, 2004). Our analytical focus is on the concept of material communication media (Cooley 1894), or embodied media, as we prefer to refer to them to highlight their physical properties and relevance for corporeal movement across space.
Water, Water Everywhere

Imagine your body, pulled violently into motion:
a lacerating change of pace, of rhythm, of habit of movement.

Sudden acceleration
yanked forward pulled backwards
an impression of horizontal collapse.

Now fathom deceleration.

In it the body continues to push itself through space
As if by inertia,
only to gradually subside
to the novel ebb.

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"Would you like to borrow a wheelbarrow?" The host asked.

We had spent a relaxing two nights at her B&B. Now our bags were parked near her front door.

It was time to catch the ferry and head home.

Did she want something moved? I wondered to myself.

Dirt?

Sand from the beach?

Then I remembered. This was the land of “pirates, beachcombers and happy people.”

Here on Protection Island most people get around on foot or on bikes, or golf carts.

Her offer was the equivalent of calling us a taxi.

But the ferry dock was just a half-mile away.

We walked.
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We walked as we had been doing since we arrived a couple of days earlier along gravel lanes past signs that said “Beware of Cat” and “Quilts for Sale” feeling like kids with permission to play in the middle of the street without watching for cars.

(Adapted from Pucci, 2005).

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Rarely can your body accelerate without the use of technics. You can run, but not as swiftly as a jet, as softly as a bullet train, as aggressively as a race car. In a world made of air routes, rail tracks, raceways, your body can move so fast as to obliterate sense of place (Auge, 1995) and space (Harvey, 1989). This is the era of speed (Virilio, 1977).

**But can you slow down just as fast?**

**And if you think you can, what will it take?**

**And where will you go?**

**Can any technics slow your body down as effectively as they can speed it up?**

Can you still move, after you’ve slowed down? **Or do you need to STOP?**

Or can you simply repeat a routine, over AND over?

**RE-LIVE A HABIT. AND CREATE A NEW RHYTHM? AND A NEW PLACE?**

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“So much life in her! How old is she?”—asks one of my fellow passengers. “She’s thirteen months old, and yeah, we feed her coffee, not milk!”—I joke, as the Island Mist sputters off. “She really wants to walk”—my wife comments on Autumn’s impatient squirming and contortions—“thank goodness this is only a ten-minute trip.” Ten minutes feel like a life time on this old retrofitted life vessel shipped a few years ago all the way from Vancouver. The Island Mist is so slow that it would literally take the same amount of time if you were to walk over to Protection. I wonder how she managed to make her journey across the Strait of Georgia, over to Nanaimo; it must have taken her twice or thrice the two hours it takes larger vessels. She sounds like she’s coughing as she smoothly veers left and right, gliding across the busy harbour—a unique contrast, yet a fitting match, of old age and timeless grace.

There is something about her slow speed something uniquely meaningful. No more than a couple of minutes into the journey and the shuffling and scuffling of Nanaimo’s pace seems to have already receded in the distant back, submerged by the placid water boosting us afloat. There is something else that has suddenly gone missing behind the noise of Autumn’s babbling and our fellow passengers’ chit-chatting: cars’ noise is no longer filling the air. Ocean water, like snow in a way, has the power of suffocating distant sound, of retracting the ears, while at the same time magnifying the sonorous impact of our vessel wading through the mellow waves. The only uncoordinated noise here is that of human voices. The cooks, waiters, and waitresses of the Dinghy Dock Pub have found a corner to sit together and talk about the coming day at
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work. The tourists in the back have engaged the Island Mist’s engine in a battle for sound supremacy. A couple of the locals are staring in the distance, and three more are leaning into each other as if whispering. The others seem to be content breathing ocean air.

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Your *BODY* won’t travel far through “TRADITIONAL” media of *COMMUNICATION*. It can’t. *MASS MEDIA* of the old and new variety mediate *BETWEEN* *BODIES* by standing in between them, by *CARRYING SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS* of their minds, souls, and physiques. *DISEMBODIED MEDIA*. Not meant to carry bodies, but to compensate for their *ABSENCE*. For their *ABSENCE*.

*EMBODIED MEDIA*. Yet they do not stand in between bodies, they shuffle *BACK* and *FORTH*—*TO* and *FROM*. *TECHNICS* of transportation too *MEDIATE*. Bringing *BODIES* with them, on them. Not meant to carry symbols but *PRESENT BODIES*. From one body of *LAND*, a land of bodies, to another.

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Airplanes, automobiles, boats, bicycles, trains are technics of movement, technics which acquire meaning through their use in situations where disembodied media just won’t work. The techniques required to use them vary, depending on the context of use, the intentions of their users, and the qualities of the technics themselves. Once in use, over time, the technological interaction between technics and techniques functions as a symbolic and material technocultural logic that “contribute[s] to the definitions of situations in social life” (Altheide, 2003, p. 658).

You need an embodied medium, the Protection Connection, to bring your body over to Protection Island. Nothing else but your own boat will work for this job. You need its service, but you also end up getting its logic, its qualities, its iconic essence to make and experience Protection Island. You need to sail at
five miles an hour to decelerate, to suddenly slow your body, and truly live the rhythms of the island: the rhythms that the boat contributes to shaping; the sense that she extends; the technoculture she shapes; the aesthetic essence she shares with it.

If on this route you can tell a tourist from a local by how much their bodies are carrying, on any route you can tell a true skipper from a mere pilot by how they carry their body. A true skipper doesn’t just drive a boat; a true skipper embodies its spirit, and the spirit of the people she carries, in a beautiful symbiosis of technic and technique, of body and machine.

If the power of disembodied media resides in their formats (Altheide, 1985), the power of embodied media resides in their weight. Not their physical weight, but their symbolic weight. Disembodied and embodied
media differ in respect to the need of bodily co-presence. Whereas disembodied media may at best carry weightless representations of the body, embodied media must carry weighty bodies—where the former deal in “semioscapes” (symbols moving across spaces) the latter deal with “ethnoscapes” (people moving across spaces) (Appadurai, 1996).

Embodied media further differ alongside a continuum ranging from heavy to light—hijacking here with a good deal of modifications, McLuhan’s (1964) notorious distinction between hot and cool media and Innis’s (1951) distinction between heavy/durable and light/dispensable media, as well as the notion of time and space-bias. The technology of heavy embodied media is marked by a low ratio of space over time. The technology of heavy embodied media, in other words, is one of slow speed. Note that it is not about the technic alone, but about the technique with which the technic is used. You can ride a bicycle at 5 miles an hour, and you can race it at 40 miles an hour. The repeated use of heavy embodied technologies gives rise to a slow technoculture. With the slow pace, a technoculture opens itself up to a sensitized consciousness for slow processes, like co-presence, dialogue, and participation. Protection Island’s ecology features mostly heavy embodied media and some light embodied media used heavily.
Picture 7: The MV Island Queen anchored at the Dinghy Dock.

From the water Protection Island looks much flatter than it is. Engulfed by trees, seemingly stowed at the feet of the Coastal Mountains far on the mainland in the background, Protection shrouds the Nanaimo Harbour leaving little but sufficient space for large yachts, cruise boats, and a larger ferry to sneak in. I divert by eyes from the harbour to get a glimpse of the nearing dock. We’re close. I glance at April in excitement: we are nearing the Dinghy Dock. “Ok, let’s get ready, Autumn”—she utters just as excitedly at our ever impatient daughter. I grab a firm hold of our stuff, as if I had ever let my grip loose for a second, just as everybody else is leaning forward the see how close we are.

“I wonder…”—I say to April loud enough for the people seated immediately to us to hear me—“…if the people that work at the pub mind having to catch the boat.” “You know”—interjects this 40 year old white woman wearing a Dinghy Dock Pub T-shirt—“I gotta tell you, before I first started working here I asked myself that too. And I thought, well, what’s the difference between driving to work and catching a boat to work? Then, a couple of months into it, I realized how much I loved it. This is not like driving, or even catching a bus. You can breath fresh air, smell the ocean, do nothing for ten minutes but sit and look around you, or take it easy and talk with a friend. You can’t do that in traffic.” “Hehe, listen to you Carry”—another woman in her thirties, also wearing a Pub T-shirt, jumps in—“I bet you that the real reason why you keep this job is that you get to take it easy and have a beer or three when you get off work and you have to wait forty minutes for the next ferry!” Laughter around us breaks out. What I also wonder, though I choose to keep this to myself, is how many islanders have ever made a cell phone call home upon docking to say “We docked. I’m coming home…” People do that when planes land, or when trains enter stations. In my four years of coming here off and on I have never seen anyone on a phone or a digital device on the boat.

It is, here,
Almost as if
People didn’t wish
They were
Somewhere else.

April and I hold back, waiting for everybody to step off the boat. Ever seen how bodies explode off of a subway train when the doors open? Ever noticed how feet jump when the “fasten seat belt” sign goes off
with a loud “bling!” as a jet lands? Ever been caught, jammed against the back doors of a bus as riders negotiate the unspoken rule of who gets off and who gets on first? Not on this boat. Not here.

“You got it?”—asks skipper Russ stretching out his arm to help me. “Yep, no problem”—I reply, nodding to thank. “Alright folks, I’ll see you later. Remember:
The boat leaves
Ten minutes
    Past the hour
    Every hour
Till ten o’clock.”

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Picture 8: A composite picture of “The Circle”—the area adjacent to the Dinghy Dock on Protection Island.

This is “the circle.”

Where islanders come and go:
bicycles, tricycles, golf carts, wheelbarrows, and the occasional car wait

faithfully for their companions.

There are a couple of handy vans too one is parked here today.

The other is busy working somewhere on the island.
Utility companies reckon it’s cheaper to keep them here alone than to barge them over in moment of need. They too dread to break movement routines—it seems.

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Picture 9: Composite picture: mailboxes and the bulletin board on Pirates Lane, and Autumn playing on the road

We’re taking pictures today. It’s hard to pass for a local, as much as we would like to. To top it off, we’re standing right by the mailboxes with no seeming intention of looking for mail. “Hello”—greets us an older man carrying a handful of bills and junk mail, smiling as he subtly limps towards us. “Good morning”—we reply, almost in unison. “Hi there little one, what’s your name?”—he asks Autumn, slowly bending down on his knees, slightly above her eye level. “Ha”—she knowingly replies, as just as knowingly I glance at April, wordlessly communicating a sense of achievement. As company to an “open person” (Goffman, 1963) we have become well aware of how our baby is turning out to be an ethnographer’s dream: no potential informant will walk by without acknowledging her bubbly presence. In the city we mostly get hurried smiles. Here, people stop.

“Say: my name is Autumn”—I suggest to her, without much success; she seems by far more keen on collecting maple leaves in the middle of the road than chewing fat with strangers. April and I aren’t, though.
“Good day for a walk, eh?”—April says to the man. “Lovely day indeed. Nothing like walking on the island on a morning like this.” “Do you do a lot of walking these days?”—I inquire, eager to initiate yet another field “interview.” “That’s why I moved here fifteen years ago!”—rebuts the man, adding: “I used to live on Gabriola Island. You can actually kind of see my old house from here if you step a bit this way.” “I love Gabriola!”—exclaims April. “Well, I used to love it too”—the man says—“but there are roads everywhere there. And they’ve kept building more and more over the years. The ferry lets out a good pair of dozens of car every hour, and you just can’t walk in the middle of the road like you can here.” “I bet your old property value has at least quadrupled since you’ve moved”—I suggest. “If not more than that”—the man continues—“So many people have moved to Gabriola. People come to Protection all the time hunting for a house too. You see a lot of Americans who sail up from the coast during the summer. They anchor their boat in the harbour, paddle to the pub, and fall in love with the idea of living on a small island and wanna move here. So they go to town and call a realtor. They come back with the poor guy. They get off the ferry, and right away he buys them a beer at the pub and tells them what a fairy tale land this is. Then they follow the steps up the hill for the first time, walk here to the circle, and they realize that our roads aren’t paved, that we really do get around in golf carts, bicycles, and by foot. And all of a sudden it dawns on them! They stare at the circle and go: ‘Oh, look at that, there really are no cars! I’ll be damned!’” April and I giggle in agreement, the old man smiles and continues: “And right there and then you can see the realtor going: ‘oh shit, here we go again.’ Because he knows what they’re gonna ask next” “How do you bring your stuff home?”—I jump in. “You got it. That one, and: ‘what do you do with your trash?’ It’s unbelievable. It’s almost like after taking a passenger-only ferry, and after not having seen a bridge, they still expect that somewhere, somehow, there are cars, cabs, friendly chauffeurs, and delivery trucks. Like it’s some Disneyland for wanna-be, part-time tree huggers, like we planted these trees here to make it look pretty, or like we pretend to have nothing but a foot-passenger ferry while actually we have a big ferry terminal for deliveries and quick access way in the back!”

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Media logic
“CONTRIBUTE[S] TO THE DEFINITIONS OF SITUATIONS IN SOCIAL LIFE”


Each medium

“IS DISTINGUISHED BY ITS OWN TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL LOGIC REQUIRED FOR PRESENTING EVENTS [and bodies] IN A PARTICULAR MANNER”

(Altheide, 1985, p. 61; our addition).

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Flash forward: Two days later:

“You know that thing that David Altheide says about media logic and different media having their own unique time/space logic?”—April suddenly blurts out at me, as I’m having a cup of soup late in the evening in our kitchen—“well, remember what that nice older man said to us when we were chatting at the circle?” A light bulb flashes. I perk up. “Looks like you’re thinking what I’m thinking, Phillip?” “Let’s get a piece of a paper and a pen, quick!”

Technics shape the definition of time, space. \[\rightarrow\] Time, space mould the shape of technics.

Technics carve a social ecology. \[\rightarrow\] Each social ecology carves its own technics.

Technics work as bodily extensions/retractions. \[\rightarrow\] Bodies extend/retract through unique techniques.

In every social configuration of temporal and social patterns people will distinguish the desired technics and techniques from the undesired technics and techniques, on the basis of the values and meanings they have attributed to technology, and on the basis of the meanings their technoculture has helped shape. Much like technics and techniques shape time and space, unique times and spaces shape their own technics and techniques.

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Protection Islanders’ relationship with (some might say romantic attitude toward) modern (and postmodern) technology is not uncommon amongst Canadians (and arguably amongst many islanders of the world). As Kroker (1984) has suggested Canadian identities have taken shape as articulations of a difficult relationship with technology. Technics like the Canadian Pacific Railways (Innis, 1971) may have provided Canadians with a common symbolic landscape, a common national ground, but the diversity of the land itself and the technologies used to bridge space have required Canadians to cope with a difficult synthesis of complex and contradictory dispositions toward technology, as well as a contradictory technoculture. The system of ferry transportation present in coastal British Columbia, dominated by the semi-privatized crown corporation British Columbia Ferries, reflects well this ambivalence. Ferries make it possible for West Coast Canadians to think of their space as a common region, yet at the same the ferries fragment a seemingly homogeneous space into a multitude of distinct localities: each one seemingly more particular and more local than the other. Further, ferries make it possible for people to travel, just as they make it possible for them to hide away. Ferries indeed exert centrifugal and centripetal (Innis, 1972) at the same time, isolating and de-isolating. In short, ferries extend and retract bodies across ocean water; both, boats and water itself, are the very core of coastal BC’s technoculture.

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Islands are both s/e/p/a/r/a/t/e/d

and c-o-n-n-e-c-t-e-d

by ferries.

British Columbia’s boats are the floating public squares of this unique society.

Like the squares
like the churches
Of Europe’s cities
Like they mediate
Past and present

the ferries of British Columbia
Mediate
Remote, isolated,
interconnected
Spaces
Embodying the dialogue
Made of movement in
movement
That makes a multitude of rock one
And one rock
A multitude
of pebbles
surrounded by water,
water everywhere.

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Picture 10: A golf cart parked by the roadside on Pirates Lane

A golf cart hums by. The driver smiles. We wave hello. A few minutes later another one zips by. “Good morning”—we holler. Golf carts have no windows; they make it possible to greet passers-by. Then a small pick-up truck nears slowly. Then slows down, even more, at our sight. “Hi”—we’re greeted, as the driver leans out of the open passenger-side window. We return the greeting, feeling something interested just happened. It’s not just about the technics, it’s also about the techniques. It’s not about machines. It’s about
technoculture. That’s why they don’t have giant billboards by the road side here; they have bulletin boards with messages written in small font.

“All media”—stated McLuhan (1962, p. 13)—“from the phonetic alphabet to the computer, are extensions of man that cause deep and lasting changes in him and transform his environment.” McLuhan’s idea, as suggestive as it was, was only partially correct. Technics are meaningless without practical techniques employed to use them. Technoculture—the emergent symbolic and material outcome of the interaction amongst techniques and users—is but the complex product of social relationships between people and their extensions. An ethnographic approach shows precisely how technoculture is not only a matter of technics alone, but is instead the complex emergent outcome of technics, the techniques that people use to dealing with them, and the broader ecological situation in which such use, and the outcomes of such use, occurs. Technology is always and inevitably technoculture, a complex of social relations (see Couch, 1995).

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“You can’t bring much gasoline on the island. So after a while you get sick and tired of having your automobile here”—another newly-made friend of Autumn’s explains to us, as we stand in the middle of the road, chatting. “With most golf carts, you don’t need much fuel, and especially with all the newer ones all you need to do is recharge the battery”—she continues—“it’s less emissions, less hassle, less maintenance. And then there are some people who don’t like golf carts either. They get around by walking, or on their bikes.”

“How do you carry stuff around?”—April pretends to curiously wonder, though she is well aware of the answer. “Most people who walk push wheelbarrows.”—the middle-aged lady responds in a giddy tone—“Actually my husband just made a couple of them last week. And if you ride your bike you can either attach a basket in front, drag a bike trailer, or you can get one of those tricycles that have a mini trunk on the back wheel axle. You can carry a lot of stuff that way. If you haven’t been to Mud Bay yet you should go, you’ll see a lot of those parked everywhere.
“THE MACHINE ITSELF IS A PRODUCT AND AN INSTRUMENT OF LIFE”

(Mumford, 1938, p. 413)
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Picture 12: Composite picture: Carrying garbage for self and neighbours toward the ferry.

Cars have gears
First
Second
Third
Fourth
Fifth
Second
Third

| Golf carts |
| Bicycles |
| Feet |
| Have one gear |
| One pace |
| One rhythm |
| One gear |
| One pace |
| One rhythm |

Cars have their logic—you need to go fast until you really can’t help stopping. You just need to go.

When you walk
When you ride your cart
Your bike
You CAN
Stop.
It is as if
There is no INERTIA
to PULL YOUR BODY.
It is as if
You GET to PUSH.

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Pirates Lane—the main road on the island—could not be driven fast, even if one had the technical means of doing so. “When we see people drive a bit too fast”—we were once told—“we make sure that right away we give them a good talk-to!” Hilly, while never steep, Pirates Lane and its many estuaries branch out in multiple directions like a narrow mountain creek. Its endless twists and turns, each punctuated by the sight of yet another vagabond dog seem to bring no surprises to the eye: there are coniferous trees and small driveway-less houses perched underneath them, and nothing else. There are no parking lots, no crosswalks, no stop lights, no traffic signs, no buses, and no landmarks other than a stray fisher’s boot by the roadside, an old boat turned into a flower box, and an old discarded appliance—too heavy to carry onto the boat—here and
there. The boat first and the unpaved road second have blanketed out the visual excess that entertains city flaneurs.

Every technics favours the intensification of one sense at the expense of others (McLuhan 1964, 1967). This is a place where you get bored fast. Unless you learn to move slow. If you do, just as slowly, you learn to sense things you couldn’t notice by moving fast. Because no big items can be easily brought over to Protection, your sense of sight has to adjust to the minute and almost undetectable details that dot the landscape: muddy miniature elves guarding mushrooms; hand-made wooden signs naming homes, causeways, and lanes; toy ladybugs on tree branches; sculptures of baby deer made of discarded engine parts; painted rocks; and old wood-carved toys scattered alongside the main road. These are the objects filtered through the ferry boat first and the golf cart or bicycle’s basket second; these are the details your eye can pick up if your legs are moving slowly.

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Socialization lesson to a technoculture of movement: Learn to move slowly, on this island. Day after day. You walk to the ferry. You step on the ferry, step off the ferry. Zip to your desk, to your till in the fast-paced city. Then you come back home. Step on the ferry, step off the ferry. Stroll to your yard, your doorstep. Every day. Till a habit grows. Within you. Around you. Like in a ritual. A communion of harmonious movement. Your culture (Carey, 1989). Re-learn to move with your boat, your golf cart, your bike. Learn to move on your ocean, your road. Temporal symmetry: synchronize your bodies with their bodies, your rhythm with rhythms, your ocean with their ocean.

[*****]

The logic of embodied media is exercised through reflexive techniques that structure the process of movement. This interaction is dependent on a grammar of corporeality in action, in space: a system of rules and opportunities to coordinate bodies and machines into a complex social choreography that is both sensually instrumental and creative. Grammars of movement can be profitably contrasted with disembodied media’s semiotic structures of representation. Both contribute to the definition of the situation, both allow for the senses to be extended/retracted in habitual, commonly recognized ways. Both form the “basis of
human fellowship… [and produce] the social bonds, bogus or not, that tie men together and make associated life possible” (Carey, 1989, p. 22). Yet, whereas disembodied media constitute telepresence (Couch, 1995, p. 232) movement technologies facilitate co-presence; “When communication is solely via an information technology, the social relationships are distinct from those that rest on a foundation of copresent communication” (Couch, 1995, p. 232).

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The more fieldwork we do here, the clearer is our realization that, what truly matters is not all what islanders tell us, but how they interact with us: they slow down and even stop for us. On the narrow street, just like on the narrow boat. We’ve crossed the ocean together.

[*****]

Picture 13: The Mud Bay Dock

The Mud Bay Poem:
Old aluminum boats,
Kayaks
Canoes
Bicycles
   All rest here
Waiting
Waiting
For another journey
Water,
Water everywhere
Keeps them here
Safe
Until they float
Again
With their human friends
Again
Until they come back
With them
To them

[*****]

Picture 14: Bicycles parked at Mud Bay

A hammer is an extension of a hand and an arm, much like a boat is an extension of a person's legs, trunk, and arms. A boat extends the human body by enabling it to easily move across water. Boats around this archipelago do not merely extend bodies across spaces, but they also extend bodies in space. They do that by extending and by retracting bodies away from each other. Not only do boats bridge distant spaces, but they also make those same spaces distant.

Each civilization is marked by a predominant medium of communication, according to Innis (1972). The predominant medium of Protection Island is her boats. If the force of mass media is exercised through
monopolies of knowledge, the power of boats here takes shape through the genesis of a monopoly of movement. It is a creative movement: a movement that creates a unique sense of place. Movement is to the body what knowledge is to the mind.

[*****]

“TECHNE IS THE NAME NOT ONLY FOR THE ACTIVITIES AND SKILLS OF THE CRAFTSMAN, BUT ALSO FOR THE ARTS OF THE MIND AND THE FINE ARTS. TECHNE BELONGS TO BRINGING–FORTH, TO POIESIS; IT IS SOMETHING POIETIC”

(Heidegger, 1977, p. 13).

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Islands are nature’s most spectacular creation, and boats’ are islands’ most astonishing creation. Boats turn the hidden edge of the surface of the ocean at the horizon into a naked perimeter: shores and remote vessels, docks and foreign lands, more open to the gaze than the cluttered environment of the city, more subject to proximate bodily interaction than the vastness of the countryside, leave an indelible imprint upon the senses of the ocean goer. Due to the mediation of boats Islands embody a unique flow of time and space, circumscribed by its own shores, and protected by water. Islands’ circular horizons magnify human potentiality. If cities are “containers” (Mumford, 1961, p. 571) and processors of energy which radiates to multiple ends, islands—especially small islands like Protection—are un-containable despite their small size, constantly in becoming tension with the embodied means which both take energy away from, and bring energy to them. Boats, most of all, attempt to contain islands within the reach of cities’ outward movement, and yet their chief function is not that of drawing near, but instead that of pushing cities far into the rear view of islands. If the city’s function is to “convert power into form, energy into culture, dead matter into the living symbols of art, biological reproduction into social creativity” (Mumford, 1961, p. 576) island life consists of converting natural form into ecological power, technoculture into energy, social creativity into ecological conservation, and in regenerating dead matter into the cycle of life.

The technological beauty of Protection Island resides in its social and natural simplicity: its technoculture effortlessly embodies the potential of naturalizing the human environment and humanizing the
natural heritage. If by means of its storage facilities the city has become capable of transmitting a complex culture across distant generations, islands like Protection—by means of their boat-as-gateways and the dialogue such gateways ensue—are capable of conserving a delicate relation to sense of place in spite of mainlands’ efforts to colonize their spaces. Islands like Protection are to cities what place is to time, what movement is to knowledge, what ocean is to cement.

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What this ethnography has shown to us is that the true significance of technology does not lie in the potential for the proliferation of objects or the mushrooming of techniques serving nothing but new and more and more self-serving technics alone. The significance of technology lies in the gains in “socialized creation” (Mumford, 1934, p. 378) in the ratio of

**poiesis vs. destruction**

of

**engaged dialogue vs. muted self-absorption**

of

**technoculture vs. the cult of technology.**

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*Picture 15: Man and child sailing off from Mud Bay on a private boat*

*Afterthought: Methodological Reflection on Technography*
Few ethnographic studies of techniques, technics, and technoculture exist today. The key role of technography must be that of alerting us to the homely and the familiar aspects of technology, to reawaken our habituated bodies and minds to the meanings of our taken-for-granted relations with technology, and thus “to prepare a free relationship to it” (Heidegger, 1977, 3). The goal of technography ought to be that of uncovering the constructed nature of technoculture and thus revealing how technoculture itself—as collective act—may reveal the world. Why the need for technography? Liberally paraphrasing Mumford (1952, p. 81), if you cease to care about technology, there is something wrong with your sense of responsibility. But if you are unable to uncover how we should care about technology, there is something wrong with your way of knowing the world. Sensuous, engaged ethnography of technology can at last prompt us to care again about technology.

In the end, doing technography is about specifying how “social acts and social relationships are constructed and sustained” (Couch, 1995, p. 230) through technical objects and means. From our perspective technography is the study and the writing of technical structures of communication processes, both in their material and symbolic substance, and their potential for shaping social outcomes. Because technics and techniques are always contextualized in space and time and in social ecologies, technology—the process of interaction between social objects and physical objects (Blumer, 1969)—is also inevitably situated in unique social worlds. This ethnographic, ecological approach highlights the interactional dynamics of process of reproduction and function of structure, organization, and accessibility of technology (Altheide, 1995).

“There is a difference”—Mumford (1970, p. 192) writes—“between using the machine to extend human capabilities, and using it to contract, eliminate, or replace human functions.” Similarly, there is an important difference between positing technics and the techniques available for their use as extensions/retractions of the human body, and conceiving technology as the simulation or replacement of that allegedly obsolete body. Without techniques, technology is reduced to pure technics, as much as without technics humans are reduced to nothing but live corpses unable to cope with their world. Recovering the dialogue occurring between humans and their technics through technographic poiesis may in the end succeed
in restoring the balance that a disturbed view of hypermodern technology and science as self-serving
instrumental imperative has disturbed.

Notes
1. Nanaimo is a city of about 72,000 residents, on the eastern side of Vancouver Island, British
   Columbia, Canada. Vancouver Island (285 miles long, and up to 50 miles wide), the largest island off
   the Pacific Coast of the Americas, is separated by the Strait of Georgia (about 20 miles wide) from
   Vancouver. A vast archipelago of islands—one of which is Protection Island—dots the Strait.
2. All names have been changed to protect people’s confidentiality.
3. This is a suggestive rather an accurate observation: some bicycles of course have well more than one
   gear, yet the variation in speed that bicycle gears offer is still moderate compared to combustion-
   based technics.

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