

# ‘raisonnE’ : back to the *future*

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## SLIDE 1

- tendency to think of post-print situation as an unfamiliar and intimidating Brave New World ;
- instead, I will suggest that we look *back to the future* for insights into the current state of catalogues raisonnés (or, as I’ve dubbed the electronic heir to the catalogue raisonné, “**raisonnE**”), by studying the participatory structure and context of 18<sup>th</sup>-c. French catalogues raisonnés and associated reference formats ;
- a bit of context : exploratory project funded by York University Libraries (Toronto) > as much an exploration of librarianship as of cats. rais.

## SLIDE 2

- but first, travelling less far back in history, information art and personal information behaviours of IB& as inspiration ;
- “piling” replaces *filing* as the raisonnE abandons the hierarchical, genre- or format-based organization of traditional catalogues raisonnés in favour of “flat” structure of the Internet as well as 1968 NETCO “Portfolio of Piles” (piles as a metaphor and model for organizational systems) ;
- departure from convention immediately obvious from project landing page, where the artist’s use of clouds—here re-envisioned by IB&raisonnE collaborator Victor Romao, breaks with the “grid” of conventional print layout (and even most web pages) ;
- IB& – formerly Iain Baxter (added an ampersand to his name in 2005), a.k.a. N.E. Thing Co. – has been an innovator in information art since 1966 ;
- participated in landmark 1970 MoMA exhibition *Information* by contributing artworks remotely in real time from Vancouver via Telex and telecopier ;

- in turn, IB&'s art is inspired by **Marshall McLuhan** ;
- probably many of you are familiar with McLuhan's theories of progress in reverse  
> we are going backwards, to non-hierarchical, non-linear world of participation ;
- McLuhan's theories license the *IB&raisonnE*'s exploration of Edme-Francois Gersaint's pre-modern publications as basic of e-publication model

### SLIDE 3

- new Routledge publication, *History of Participatory Media 1750-2000*, places contemporary social media within a historical continuum stretching back to 18<sup>th</sup>-c. & time of Gersaint ;
- this approach counters unhelpful rhetoric of newness and potentially costly hype about the supposedly new characteristics of social media / generational divide ("Google generation") ;
- the sales catalogues of Geraint displayed many features which we associate with contemporary mobile and social technologies: 1) respect for original order ; 2) participatory structure that facilitated creative and scholarly reuse and re-organization (what Graham Larkin has dubbed Gersaint's respect of the "liberty of the compiler") >> sales catalogues designed to be cut up and physically re-ordered by collector ;
- status of many 18<sup>th</sup>-c. catalogues raisonnés as sales catalogues also underlines the ongoing commodification of reference formats that the generative interplay between scholarly and commercial platforms >> playful commentary on this commercial condition in "research recruitment poster" for *IB&raisonnE* designed by IB& and myself (that also resonates with "corporate" persona of BAXTER&, as former President of the conceptual enterprise and legally-incorporated business, NETCO) ; finally, this serves as a reminder that commercial formats can generate "interpassivity" (instead of interactivity) viz. asymmetrical relationships between producer / consumer ;
- *IB&raisonnE* very much a project for the educational context

SLIDE 4

- inspired by Gersaint, the *raisonnE* develops organically in response to the expressed needs of scholars (rather than by following a pre-determined plan), and aims to incorporate emerging scholarship on IB& in real time ;
- pursues a variety of participatory strategies, including site visits with the artist, interviews, conversations, a cyclical, action research-based development plan
- interactive elements : blog, videos, audio interviews, creative interventions, under development : online gaming environment & learning zone ;
- In CONCLUSION, under electronic conditions, the catalogue raisonné is transformed into a “raisonnE” : an interactive learning zone and action research network reminiscent of the participatory, scholarly and amateur networks of 18<sup>th</sup>-century connoisseurs

SLIDE 5

- read more in forthcoming issue of *Art Documentation*
- Thank you!
- Questions?