Like McLuhan’s legacy in popular culture, that of Neuromancer and Videodrome, together with the larger oeuvres of their creators, can be gauged, in a very limited and qualified way, in the traces they leave in subsequent texts, statements, performances, and other cultural artifacts.

Within even just Canadian popular cultural production, several texts adapt and propagate the McLuhanesque Frankenpheme of technology in concretely identifiable ways. This chapter surveys some of these adaptations to suggest the propagation of the McLuhanesque Frankenpheme of technology in Canadian literature.

One relatively early but underappreciated site of such propagation predates both Gibson and Cronenberg but grafts science fiction concerns with technology to McLuhan’s media ecology. Phyllis Gotlieb (1926–2009) was a Toronto-based science fiction writer who studied at the University of Toronto during McLuhan’s tenure there and who produced a sizeable and diverse oeuvre of novels, poetry, short fiction, and radio dramas, several of which featured Frankensteinian characters and tropes (e.g., her 1976 novel O Master Caliban! and her 1998–2002 trilogy, Flesh and Gold). Gotlieb’s 1975 poem, “ms & mr frankenstein,” appeared in The Canadian Forum in 1975. The poem recounts an absurd, surreal narrative, told by the “ms frankenstein” of the title, in which she and her partner, “Scarpino,” use salvaged waste and discarded materials to build a giant anthropomorphic sculpture—“25 foot high and every inch a junkman” ([1975] 1978, 242).
When the persona christens the figure with a “bottle of Old Bubble” (242), it comes to life, mouths infantile syllables, shouts “COSMOS I COME!” (243), and flies away.

Of particular interest are the many media materials listed among the technological castaway consumer goods that go into this figure, like “paperclips,” “typewriter keys,” “paperweights,” “gum erasers,” “broken staplers,” and “last year’s calendars” (241–42). The figure incorporates materials drawn from domains of modern social relations that are both called *communication*: “bicyclespokes,” “smashed headlights,” and “speedometers” on one hand evoke the older sense of communication as transportation, while on the other the “typewriter keys” and “broken staplers” conjure communication as representation and meaning making. The figure rehearses the *Frankenstein* skeleton story of technological backfire when it says things other than what the persona expects to hear and when it surprises them by flying away, in the process “taking along / Scarp’s wig & false teeth my fillings” (243): in other words, their creature’s departure deprives the persona and her partner of their own technological prostheses. In closing the poem, the persona wonders ambiguously about what may yet come of the figure’s departure “TO THE UNIVERSE”; she wonders “just what kind of garbage they’re gonna be sending us,” presumably in retaliation. The figure becomes a kind of rocket: one that “zapped out the roof on a pillar of fire” and is then mistaken by neighbours for lightning (243). These details play archly on their source story. The poem’s image of the monster mistaken for lightning likens it to the medium of Victor Frankenstein’s initial inspiration, the electrical effects that first led him to pursue galvanism. And with a further amplification of Gotlieb’s Frankensteinian thematization of media here, the poem’s persona ironically notes newspapers mistaking the figure’s spectacular flight for either a comet—or a bomb (244).

Turning from work more contemporary with McLuhan’s own time at the University of Toronto to work that emerged amidst his mid-1990s revival, we find McLuhan’s Frankenphemes of technology quite prominently articulated in Christopher Dewdney’s 1993 book *The Secular Grail* and his 1998 book *Last Flesh*: collections of essays, aphorisms, and short nonfiction prose that feature a consistent interest in artificial intelligence (1993, 124, 133), technology (1993, 17, 187), the constructed character of subjectivity and cognition (1993, 50–51, 140), and haunting and the uncanny (1993, 86–87, 125, 184–85). “SOFTWARE IS / THE GHOST I / N THE
“Technology Implies Belligerence” declares one aphorism in *The Secular Grail* (1993, 184). *Last Flesh* makes more explicit Dewdney’s conceptual and stylistic debts to McLuhan; the later book, published after the Web’s advent, in the middle of the dot-com boom, often cites McLuhan (1998, 97) and reads very much like his writing, in its juxtapositions of observations on everyday life made freshly strange—as if turned inside-out—together with futurist extrapolations of the effects of new media and technology—from networked computing to cloning and nanotechnology—on a vaguely defined, collective “us”:

The wave of technology that is almost upon us will not be just another manifestation of “progress” to be incorporated into society. It will alter the very basis of what it means to be human. . . . A devil’s bargain with corporations is necessary in order to secure the vital private funding to finance research facilities that will eventually launch the posthuman era. . . . But make no mistake: posthuman technology will ultimately transform its corporate host, governments and all other extant forms of social organization. . . . The inequalities that will arise from the uneven distribution of extreme technologies will have to be controlled or else we will descend into chaos. (1998, 57–58)

This excerpt from an early section on “Transhuman technology” exemplifies the book’s McLuhanesque style and its reproduction of McLuhan’s Frankensteinian discourse of “technology”: the “devil’s bargain” that Dewdney argues is needed to advance technological development; the involvement of corporate business (in the manner of not only McLuhan, here, but also Gibson and Cronenberg); the figuring of technology as a cause of unintended and potentially catastrophic consequences, often linked to the machinations of corporate forces (1998, 181)—and yet also (as in Shelley’s original novel) as a harbinger of more-human-than-human transcendence. Dewdney’s last chapter extends and extrapolates from the work of Hans Moravec—one of the first theorists of up- and downloadable consciousness, of technologically separating subjectivity from the body—to speculate fantasticaly and phantasmically on commodified and licensed cognition and memory and on corporate and otherwise collectivized redefinitions of consciousness and identity. Tellingly, Dewdney was a fellow with the University of Toronto’s McLuhan Institute during the writing and publication of this book. (We will encounter another illustrative sample of Dewdney’s work in chapter 8.)
The image of technologically transferable subjectivity, first suggested by Moravec and taken up by McLuhan, has its own rich tradition of representations in popular culture, from the esoteric nineteenth-century European fictions surveyed by Friedrich Kittler in Gramophone, Film, Typewriter ([1986] 1999), to the Max Headroom franchise of the mid-1980s; from James Whale’s 1931 Frankenstein film, which attributes the creature’s evil to Frankenstein’s inadvertent transplant of a “criminal brain” into its body, to the films of Cronenberg and John Mighton’s 1990 play Possible Worlds, which Robert Lepage adapted to film in 2000. This image has been given a Frankensteinian twist, and sometimes an accompanying McLuhan-esque twist as well, in Canadian cultural production, Videodrome’s Brian O’Blivion being the prime example.

Toronto writer Nalo Hopkinson has adapted this image in her short story “A Habit of Waste” ([1996] 2007), in which the protagonist has purchased a new body differently racialized than her prior one and has an uncanny encounter with a stranger inhabiting her previous body: “Here was someone wearing my old cast-off. She must have been in a bad accident: too bad for the body to be salvaged. If she couldn’t afford cloning, the doctors would have just downloaded her brain into any donated discard. Mine, for instance” (363). This image of transferable consciousness partakes of the story’s broader theme of waste and repurposing, applied not only—although most dramatically—to embodied subjectivity, but also to more quotidian concerns like sourcing local foods. Hopkinson also connects the transferable consciousness trope to critical race, class, and gender politics. The protagonist has traded her prior black body for her current white body: “My parents had been beside themselves when they found out I’d switched bodies. . . . ‘But Cyn-Cyn, that ain’t even look like you!’” (365). The protagonist wonders if she can afford “another switch. It’s a rich people’s thing” (365). And the plot culminates in a narrowly averted sexual assault. Such intersectional political considerations are too often omitted from narratives and theorizations of posthuman subjectivity (like those by McLuhan and Dewdney); Hopkinson’s construction of narrative around these “latitudes of the ex-colonised” (362) brings refreshing contextual complexity to this image and more generally to print fiction adaptations of the Frankensteinian discourse of technology, as in her celebrated debut novel, Brown Girl in the Ring ([1998] 2012).
In this novel, it’s not the brain but the heart of a murdered protagonist that takes unexpected control of the antagonist’s body into which it’s been transplanted. The story envisions a walled and decaying future Toronto, in which poor, racialized inhabitants struggle to overcome a gangster, Rudy Sheldon, who runs a downtown abandoned by municipal government. Sheldon lives in the otherwise vacant CN Tower and is tasked by the provincial government to harvest a human heart for the ailing premier. Premier Uttley has refused a transplant from “the Porcine Organ Harvest Program,” which a minor character describes in the book’s opening scene as having “revolutionized human transplant technology” ([1998] 2012, 2); the premier argues that pig heart transplants are “immoral” and holds out for a human donor, as part of a complex political scheme to reinstate a human volunteer donor program. Ironically, her insistence leads her assistant to turn to organized crime to procure a human heart by the decidedly less ethical means of murder. The dystopian depiction of the abandoned CN Tower—an iconic image of Canadian technological nationalism (Kroker 1984, 9)—together with the plot about organ trafficking conjures the cultural spectres of both Frankenstein and McLuhan in the book’s opening scenes. In particular, the trope of “revolutionary technology” to describe xenotransplantation condenses McLuhan’s discourse of technology with Frankenstein’s “skeleton story” to form the premise of this surreal, Afro-Futurist novel’s plot.

Surreal in a different way—but, like Hopkinson’s work, critically postcolonial—is Larissa Lai’s novel Salt Fish Girl (2002). This novel’s surrealism is partly structural: it juxtaposes two stories, one set in nineteenth-century China, the other in a near-future Canadian west coast imagined, à la Gibson, as a corporatized dystopia in which migrant and racialized women—“the Sonias”—are cloned and genetically engineered to provide cheap, expendable labour for capitalist production. Late in the novel, as the two historically distant narratives begin to converge, the protagonist Miranda coerces a confession out of the markedly Frankensteinian “mad scientist” character, Flowers:

“You don’t know,” said the doctor, “what monstrosities might have come of those births. . . . It was too dangerous.”

“But what you did to make me, to make us, was not? I should cut your heart out and eat it.”

“I’m a scientist, Evie. Whereas those Sonias . . . not human . . .”

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The blade nicked his skin and he began to bleed. Sweat poured down his forehead.

“Please, Evie,” he said. “Didn’t I save you?”

“I wish you hadn’t.”


This climactic scene in Lai’s novel is reminiscent of Cronenberg’s plotting, in its late presentation of a confessional explanation by a mad scientist father figure. Miranda’s apprehension of “a free society of their own kind” comprises a postcolonial variation on Victor Frankenstein’s envisioning of “a race of devils”; Flowers’s rationalization of the extermination of the Sonias echoes Victor’s destruction of the creature’s “bride”; and the more generalized, rhetorical linking of birth and monstrosity also hearkens back to Shelley’s text. Elsewhere in the novel, Lai makes the intertextual link explicit, as Evie recounts her escape from the workers’ bunker: “I crossed a glacier to throw them off the scent. Just like *Frankenstein*, you ever read that one? I spent a night on the glacier and came out of the mountains in the morning” (159).

While *Frankenstein* is a prominent intertext in *Salt Fish Girl*, McLuhan is not, although his ideas of ascendant corporatism, the communicative capacity of things not conventionally seen as media, and technology as manufactured monstrosity at large in a violent global village are all at work in the novel’s deep theoretical background. For one instance that condenses these kinds of media ecology ideas, the Sonias turn their shoe manufacture tools into a subversive messaging medium: “They had been producing moulds for the soles of a special edition cross-trainer they dubbed ‘sabots.’ Some told the stories of individual Sonias’ lives, some were inscribed with factory workers’ poems” (249). The Sonias make the shoe an extension not just “of the foot” (McLuhan and Fiore [1967] 2001, 31–32)—but, somewhat synaesthetically, of the eye too. And the naming of the coded shoes as “sabots” evokes the spectre of Luddism, of the sabotage of manufacturing as a form of resistance to industrialization and technocracy.

Lai’s more recent book of poetry, *Automaton Biographies* (2009), deals more directly in the McLuhanesque problematic of the technological construction of subjectivity. *Automaton Biographies* consists of four long poems, or as the briefest of prefaces suggests, “four eyes,” a pun on the technological prosthesis of eyeglasses and a foreshadowing of the four different personae that speak these poems. The first poem, “rachel,” is an
acknowledged adaptation of Ridley Scott’s film *Blade Runner* (1982), itself an adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel about rebellious human-made androids, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Lai 2009, 165). Lai also quotes Donna Haraway’s influential “Cyborg Manifesto” as an epigraph to the poem: “There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic” (quoted in Lai 2009, 11). “rachel” complements Scott’s film, which focalizes its plot through the point of view of the cop Deckard as he hunts a group of rogue android “replicants,” by refocalizing the story through the perspective of Rachel, a kind of “company showroom” replicant who has not rebelled and who becomes romantically involved with Deckard. The poem integrates samples of film dialogue, reimagines key scenes from Rachel’s viewpoint, and fleshes out a fuller, more conflicted personality than what was scripted for her in the film:

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i rank my anger
rail against this solitude
was a princess with perfect clothes
beloved daughter of a new elysium
our flawless manufacture
had shed earth’s dirt
imperfection’s disease toil filth. (30)
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Images of “manufacture,” mechanism, doubling, and technology juxtapose images of childbirth and biblical creation (18, 20) to render the poem an extended interrogation of the boundary between the organic and technological, the authentic and artificial: “my wires heat on semiconductor technology” (39). Lai conducts this interrogation with evocations of *Frankenstein* that are both implicit—filtered through their prior adaptation by Dick and Scott—and intertextually explicit. With reference to a “replicant”—a nominally organic if corporately cultivated creature—Lai’s electric and electronic images, as in the “battery,” “wires,” and “superconductor” of the above-quoted lines, both evoke the discourse and technics of electricity around which so much of *Frankenstein’s* modern mythology has been organized and at the same time seem anachronistic, even obsolete, with reference to futuristic bioengineering. Lai’s poem thus encodes into its persona’s very vocabulary a tension between old and new technologies, a tension common to both Shelley’s novel and McLuhan’s theory as well.
Lai also encapsulates the fundamentally Frankensteinian “skeleton story” of technological backlash in one of Rachel’s late reflections in the poem: “faith in wiring / we illegitimate offspring / our father’s lawful / monsters to turn or not to turn” (39).

Rachel’s reference to “contagion” (24, 30) and her description of one of the fugitive replicants as a “dangerous twin” and “devil” (33) likewise echo the language of contagion in Shelley’s novel, and more specifically the fearful fantasy of Victor Frankenstein that his work may produce a “race of devils.” Lai also recontextualizes a specific clause spoken by the creature in Shelley’s novel, in which he tries to assure Walton that he “will not be the instrument of future mischief”; compare Lai’s stanza: “i mourn purity / in guilt in fear / my perfect construction’s / the instrument of” (31).

The imagery of “rachel” draws in many of the specific technologies that—via Frankenstein and McLuhan—have figured largely in the modern demonization of technology in general: nuclear weaponry (33); guns (22, 26, 28); electronic media (19), including computers (13, 18); as well as capital and industrial production (13, 14, 17, 25).

Lai does not openly cite McLuhan as she cites other sources like Haraway. Lai does, however, wield the McLuhanesque Frankenpheme of technology to powerful aesthetic effect. In addition, as a long poem adaptation of a Hollywood film based on a novel (and a novel based on Frankenstein’s “modern myth,” of course), “rachel” carries on the peculiarly McLuhanesque practice of articulating questions about the nexus of technology and identity in experimental, media-mixing, and genre-bending forms, rather than in the more straightforward expository prose of journalism and scholarship.

In this context of Canadian literary and media experimentalism, Lai’s long poem neatly complements Margaret Atwood’s 1966 long poem Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein, a chapbook on which she collaborated with Charles Pachter, who illustrated the text; Speeches was published in an extremely limited edition of only fifteen copies. As Lai’s “rachel” gives a new voice to the creature, so Speeches gives a new voice to the creator: Atwood’s poem retells Shelley’s story mainly from the perspective of Victor Frankenstein, with occasional interjections from his creature, all in condensed poetic language. As “rachel” represents a genre- and media-traversing form of adaptation, so does Speeches, juxtaposing Atwood’s poems with Pachter’s original prints. Like Lai’s poem, Atwood’s
foregrounds McLuhanesque images of media and power; one image of the “sparkling monster” describes “his mane electric” and “his clawed feet / kindling shaggy fires” (1966, 18). Atwood also emphasizes the Arctic setting of Shelley’s story, recontextualizing it according to the early Canadian postcolonial concerns with landscape and identity that informed her landmark literary study *Survival* (1972) and related, nationally focused criticism of the period by McLuhan and Northrop Frye, among others. To this emphasis on northern landscape she brings a recognizably Canadian concern with communication media, though with no explicit use of the word *technology*. As the doctor chases the monster over “this vacant winter / plain,” he recounts, “I scratch huge rescue messages / on the solid / snow” (15). These images and themes converge in the final poem: as the doctor faces “the creature, his arctic hackles / bristling,” the latter “glows” and then says, “You sliced me loose // and said it was / Creation” (20).

In addition to *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein*, Atwood’s poems and other writings feature numerous such representations of technology as manufactured monstrosity. “Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written” juxtaposes images of gendered violence with reflections on the limits and complicities of media technologies: “Elsewhere, this poem must be written / as if you are already dead” ([1981] 1990, 411). Atwood’s 1968 poem “It Is Dangerous to Read Newspapers” tersely and potently articulates the monstrosity of the media in its very title, which anticipates the closing lines. “It is dangerous to read newspapers,” Atwood concludes. “Each time I hit a key / on my electric typewriter, / speaking of peaceful trees // another village explodes” ([1968] 1987, 59).

As Kroker observes, Atwood’s oeuvre, from early on, was characterized by “searing reflections on the ‘anxiety structures’ at the heart of technological society” (1984, 8). As a Toronto writer who emerged in the 1960s, Atwood became acquainted with McLuhan’s work early in her career. She acknowledges that her very first (and as yet still unpublished) attempt at a novel was influenced by the collage style of McLuhan’s *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), which she describes as “a piece of genius” (2011). She has also defended *Survival’s* eschewal of McLuhan’s theories (for which it was criticized, although not by Kroker, for whom her work and McLuhan’s both belong to the Canadian tradition of thinking on technology) on the grounds that her work differed in focus from his: she jests that she “would
have liked to have been Marshall McLuhan—it seemed a ton o’ fun—but he had the job pretty much cornered” (quoted in Cavell 2002, 296n52).

Referring to Atwood’s early reading of The Mechanical Bride, Cavell observes that “one is not hard-pressed to find mechanical brides”—meaning both signature Atwood protagonists and McLuhan’s influence—“in a number of her literary works.” He points in particular to The Handmaid’s Tale, in which the redemption of the protagonist, Offred, “comes via the orality of the tape recording” (296n52). In addition, The Handmaid’s Tale (1985) offers, as its fictional premises for the transformation of North American society into the misogynist dystopia of Gilead, two instances of technologies turned monstrous: the onset of ecological catastrophe that harms humans’ reproductive capacity; and the freezing of women’s financial savings and assets, an expropriation of wealth made possible by computerized banking technology.

Atwood’s more recent dystopian fiction—the MaddAddam trilogy of Oryx and Crake (2003), The Year of the Flood (2009), and MaddAddam (2013)—also exhibits the influences of both McLuhan and Shelley in its representations of monstrous technology. In creating its postapocalyptic vision of a violent “global village” in which elite haves and impoverished have-nots are all wiped out by a human-made plague, the trilogy extrapolates from several present-day symptoms of globalization as catastrophe: tempestuous climate change; slavery and human trafficking; the increasing blurring of the social and technological line between the real and the virtual; inexorable and ubiquitous privatization and militarization; and the annexation of biological science by corporate capital.

Introducing us to the trilogy’s dystopian future, Oryx and Crake centres on the story of Snowman, formerly known as Jimmy, who believes that he is the sole human survivor of a pandemic apocalypse and who takes it upon himself to look after the emergent society of the “Crakers,” a posthuman species created by Crake, a mad scientist character, whom Jimmy had befriended in the period before the catastrophic pandemic. The Year of the Flood focuses on the stories of Toby and Ren, women who belong to a technophobic, neo-Luddite, Christian environmentalist sect called the God’s Gardeners, another group of survivors of the pandemic, or the “Waterless Flood,” as they call it (2009, 6). MaddAddam continues the story of Toby and Ren and fills out the story of Zeb, a street fighter and saboteur who has worked with both the God’s Gardeners and Crake’s
coterie of biogeneticists, the MaddAddam collective. Unlike Frankenstein, none of the novels focalizes its narrative through the perspective of the mad scientist character, Crake, himself; instead, he looms in the stories told by the other focalizing protagonists (more like the creature in Mary Shelley’s novel does).

Frankensteinian images of technology construct a stark contrast between the first volume’s narrative focalizer, Jimmy, who has a hyper-mediatized, consumerist perspective, and that of the second and third volumes, Toby, who belongs to the technophobic God’s Gardeners. In the first volume, the emphasis falls on the highly sophisticated technology, especially media technology and biotechnology, in which its protagonist is immersed, while the second instead emphasizes oral tradition and the Gardeners’ demonization of all technology, from writing to genetic engineering. The third volume partially returns the focus to scenes and images of advanced technology, its plot moving between the bunkered world of the God’s Gardeners and the technologically advanced but morally benighted wider world ruled by corporate capital that existed prior to the pandemic. This volume ultimately reveals, through Toby’s account of Zeb, that the God’s Gardeners are less dogmatic about technology than their preachings claim, given their leaders’ own covert use of media technologies to spy on their enemies (2013, 331).

The first volume’s plot of unfettered technological experimentation yielding both monsters and catastrophe constitutes an extensive adaptation of Frankenstein’s skeleton story; this novel also invokes Frankenstein twice. In one postapocalyptic scene, Snowman asks (like the creature), “Where’s my Bride of Frankenstein?” (2013, 169). And, in a flashback to preapocalyptic days, Snowman recalls poring over archival footage and photos and recognizing one photo as a riot scene “from a movie remake of Frankenstein” (257). The second volume has no explicit Frankenstein references but emphasizes the manufactured monstrosity of technology in general—not merely the biotechnologies that bring about the pandemic but also technologies of representation: “Beware of words. Be careful what you write. Leave no trails” (6). Explicit Frankenstein references return in the third volume, mainly in the slang prefix “Franken” applied to genetically engineered entities, from “Frankenbacon” (2013, 19), or genetically modified pig meat, to “Frankenpeople” (19), in reference to the Crakers.
Of the three volumes, *Oryx and Crake* relates most extensively to both Shelley and McLuhan: to the former because of its Frankensteinian plot and open intertextual acknowledgements; to the latter because of its intensive use of media in character development; and to both, in the Frankensteinian of technology it thereby produces. In addition to its adaptation of *Frankenstein’s* skeleton story of manufactured monsters and ensuing mayhem, however, *Oryx and Crake* also adapts *The Last Man*, Shelley’s other seminal science fiction novel, first published in 1826. *The Last Man* is set in an imagined future world of the year 2097, when the sole survivor of a pandemic plague, one Lionel Verney, is left, like Snowman, to record a posthuman future for a nonexistent posterity: “I will write and leave in this most ancient city, this ‘world’s sole monument,’ a record of these things. I will leave a monument of the existence of Verney, the Last Man” (Shelley [1826] 1996, 364).

The doubling of Shelley’s stories in Atwood’s plot reflects a doubling pattern that permeates its other narrative strategies. The main characters have double names: Snowman had been Jimmy; Crake had been Glenn (an allusion to Glenn Gould, the pianist who was greatly influenced by McLuhan [2003, 70]); Oryx—like Frankenstein’s creature—“didn’t have a name” (90). “Snowman” is the deliberately decontextualized nickname with which Jimmy presents himself to the Crakers, in a globally warmed world where snow no longer exists. The nickname conjures monstrosity (the “abominable” snowman) and also adapts, for character development, the snowy setting of *Frankenstein’s* Arctic frame narrative. What for Shelley was a representative site of modernity—nautical circumpolar exploration—becomes for Atwood one of a myriad relics of lost language that construct Snowman’s sense of subjectivity. And crucial to characterizing this subjectivity is a doubling in the narrative point of view, which is always third-person but focalized only through Snowman.

Snowman’s intertextual identity and the schizoid narrative voice provide keys to the protagonist’s character development, and so to the way this novel weaves a critique of new media into its Frankensteinian plot. Snowman focalizes a narrative viewpoint fraught with tropes of “dead” and new media and other McLuhan allusions. This focalization develops Snowman, and other main characters, as textual constructions, subjective palimpsests and pastiches of multiple media and references. A character who in his life before the pandemic worked, not insignificantly, in advertising,
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“the promotionals” (2003, 245), Snowman sees himself as a decaying web of quotations and media forms: his “head is becoming one big stash of obsolete fridge magnets” (148), which “tell a lot about a person” (347); he carries a “burning scrapbook” in his head (10), and imagines that, like Frankenstein’s Walton, he could “keep a diary” and “emulate the captains of ships” (40); he sees his own thoughts in a cartoonish “voice balloon” (290); his mind “replays” memories (68) like “old films” (283).

Through Snowman’s thoroughly mediatized perspective, the other characters become similar media constructions: his father is a “pastiche,” his mother a “Polaroid” (2003, 49); Crake belongs to an intellectual elite with “brains like search engines” (81), and he describes his bioengineering work in the language of computing: for example, installing, programming, and “editing” genetic features (303). As for Oryx, whom Snowman first sees on a porn website, he is later able “to piece her together from the slivers of her he’d gathered and hoarded” (114). The gestures of collecting—scrapbooks, fridge magnets, and website pictures—indicate how diverse and serialized media practices both mobilize a decadent consumerist culture and render it ecologically unsustainable; in addition, the different media tropes used to develop different characters underscore the differences of power among them. Crake’s tropes of computing figure his rise to a leadership role in the biotech industry that centres Atwood’s future socio-economic order. Oryx develops through the photographic and film media that introduce her as a pornographic object: “being in a movie . . . was doing what you were told” (139). Snowman partakes of multiple media forms, but develops with more emphasis on tropes of film and writing than on newer media: calling himself a “word person” (67), he feels acutely his difference from those with “brains like search engines” and instead indulges in “unproductive random scanning” (207).

It is in the context of old and new media generally (and Frankenstein texts specifically) that Snowman becomes aware of his programming by Crake to become a kind of shepherd for the posthuman Crakers: “Why am I on this earth?” he asks. “How come I’m alone?” (2003, 169). Snowman’s immersion in new media fixes him as their consumer, whereas Crake learns to program and edit genetic sequences, to hack computer networks (85–86), and to “program” receptive subjects like Snowman. Snowman’s serialized consumption of media, drugs, and sex turn him into a pathological kind of Everyman, the symptomatic consumer-subject

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of corporate capitalism not unlike that which Max Renn becomes in *Videodrome*: susceptible and subjugated to ubiquitous, “interactive” media programming. Snowman reflects how he used to “go to a movie . . . to convince himself he was part of a group” and, as the plot concludes, describes watching the end of the world “like a movie” (342) until there is “nothing more to watch” (344). Virtually addicted to print shibboleths and hardcore websites alike, Jimmy becomes deadened to affect by the simulacral ubiquity of media and, also like *Videodrome*’s Renn, becomes a killer, taking at least five lives during the plague panic, including Crake’s. The similarity or even identity that, Atwood suggests, inheres between the typical postmodern consumer and the typical serial killer echoes not only Cronenberg, but also Mark Seltzer’s (1993) theorization of serial killers as impersonators or mimics of human subjectivity (rather than as fully realized subjects themselves) and the broader “sociopathology of commerce” thesis of Joel Bakan, as presented in the film *The Corporation* (Achbar and Abbot 2003)—which itself also quotes *Frankenstein*, as I’ve analyzed elsewhere (McCutcheon 2011). *Oryx and Crake* implicates both a McLuhanesque nostalgia for print and a deregulated digital mediascape in its Frankensteinian critique of “human society” as “a sort of monster” (2003, 243).

*The Year of the Flood* (2009) extends this Frankensteinian premise of Atwood’s fictional future—that technology, cultivated by humankind to grow monstrously autonomous, in turn renders human society equally monstrous. As told in the lore of “God’s Gardeners,” humankind’s Promethean embrace of technology represents one step in the species’ long and ongoing biblical Fall: “the Fall of Man was multidimensional . . . they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology” (2009, 188).

Throughout *The Year of the Flood*, less extensive and more incidental references to technology are nevertheless laced with the dread and danger with which the God’s Gardeners’ lore imbue it. The Gardeners regard with caution verging on terror all media technologies and practices that leave traces or store data—indeed, all fixed forms of representation: “It seemed so dangerous, all that permanent writing your enemies could find—you couldn’t just wipe it away, not like a slate” (216). The Gardeners’ apprehension of technology as catastrophic danger also extends to nano- and biotechnologies. The protagonist Toby worries of the activist Gardener Zeb: “Maybe he’d been black-marketing some proprietary item, such as
a nanotechnology or gene splice. That could be fatal if you were caught” (119). Here, the lethality of being “caught” with nanotechnology is that of capital punishment under laws that protect corporations and their property, not the public, but the detail foreshadows the “waterless flood” of the story’s title, which is what the Gardeners call the humanity-killing pandemic: as is recounted otherwise in Oryx and Crake, the pandemic is caused by a biological weapon that is crafted under proprietary conditions in a corporate compound, and then distributed informally, and globally, by Crake’s followers.

The story’s focalization through perspectives of members of an environmentalist Christian sect, with echoes of Luddite and Mennonite traditions, enables some especially vivid and resonant images to build the novel’s satire on neoliberal corporate rule, consumer capitalism, and ecological devastation. One early exchange between a Gardener elder and a newcomer depicts the corporate pharmaceutical and nutrition supplement industries as a massive Frankensteinian experiment: “Those Corporation pills are the food of the dead, my dear. Not our kind of dead, the bad kind. The dead who are still alive. We must teach the children to avoid these pills” (105). Atwood does a particularly deft job of imagining an environmentalist theology that reconciles biblical teaching with modern science, in the face of ecological breakdown, via the sermons of Adam One, the sect’s leader, who interprets biblical texts for modern times (which are of course also end times) with the creative latitude and critical rigour of Hebrew midrash tradition. Of the first of “the two floods”—the first being that recounted in Genesis, the second being the looming global pandemic—Adam One pointedly uses the discourse of science in describing “Man” as an “experiment”: “God . . . knew something had gone very wrong with his last experiment, Man, but that it was too late for him to fix it” (90). The Year of the Flood both extends and complements the thematic and satirical concerns of its prequel; in contrast to the target-market consumer subjectivity of Oryx and Crake’s narrator, Year’s focalization through the perspectives of members of a group disenfranchised and demonized by the power centres of global capital and advanced technology enables it to articulate a far more categorical and explicit demonization, in turn, of technology in its own right—which here is the right always arrogated by capital.

The questions of whether a consumer society is made monstrous by technology, and whether technology is inherently monstrous itself, also
come up insistently in the science fiction of Toronto writer Peter Watts. Trained as a marine biologist, Watts has developed an oeuvre of hard science fiction—technically and theoretically knowledgeable, but also violent and nihilistic. The Rifters trilogy—Starfish (1999), Maelstrom (2001), and Behemoth (2004)—is set in the mid-twenty-first century and concerns the tense operations and apocalyptic implications of a geothermal energy project based on the floor of the Pacific Ocean. The Firefall series—which consists of Blindsight (2006) and Echopraxia (2014)—is set in the very late twenty-first century; after an array of unknown satellites surrounds Earth only to burn up in its atmosphere, the spacecraft Theseus carries a specialized crew to the outer solar system to investigate a signal suspected to be linked to the “firefall” of alien satellites. Both series focus on protagonists who are spectacular cyborgs, featuring the cyberpunk imagery of bodily incorporated digital technology; moreover, Watt’s protagonists are gradually revealed, in plot structures reminiscent of Cronenberg’s, to be not only factitious but “programmed” constructs. Both series also figure technology as manufactured and monstrous, in diverse ways. The Rifters trilogy’s second novel, Maelstrom (2001), derives its title from the novel’s depiction of a chaotic, mid-twenty-first-century Internet. The first Firefall novel, Blindsight (2006), shows most explicitly Watts’s use of the McLuhanesque Frankenpheme of technology.

The protagonist of the Rifters trilogy, Lenie Clarke, is a cyborg in that a mechanical gill has replaced one lung; this and other bodily modifications allow her, like the other “Rifter” workers, to labour in the deep ocean, outside air-pressurized human habitats. As Maelstrom unfolds, Lenie discovers that she has also been neurologically programmed: her memories of past trauma turn out to have been implanted, via the molecular-level manipulation of her very synapses by her employer, the energy-producing Grid Authority. She comes to this realization after leaving a trail of retaliatory destruction in her eastward trek from the Pacific coast, across North America, to seek revenge on the Grid Authority for its mismanagement of the deep sea power station: at the conclusion of the first novel, Starfish, the Authority defers executive operating decisions to a “head cheese” (1999, 65), a crude artificial intelligence that summarily ends station operations by destroying it, in the process unleashing earthquakes and microbial plagues all along the west coast. Maelstrom, then, reads much like the story of Frankenstein’s creature, as Clarke wreaks widespread, violent destruction.
on any and all she deems responsible for her undersea abandonment, before arriving at a peripatetic knowledge of herself and her origins.

Most other characters in the Rifters and Firefall series exhibit similarly monstrous technological modifications. The Rifters antagonist Achilles Desjardins depends on digital data delivered via “optical inlays” that “projected the same images onto line-of-sight whether or not his eyelids were in the way” (2001, “Cascade”); he has also been deliberately infected with a retrovirus nicknamed “Guilt Trip” that controls his sociopathic tendencies. *Blindsight*'s characters are all cyborgs or assemblages, reminiscent of Gibson’s cyberpunk characters. “Jigsaw,” “topology” (2006, 279), and figures of fragmentation and reassembly (315) recur as words to describe identity and subjectivity. Like Lenie in *Maelstrom*, the narrator of *Blindsight*, Keeton, gradually awakens to an alarming apprehension of the artificial nature of consciousness—not only his own, but that of the human species. Faced by a form of life that the *Theseus* crew nickname “scramblers,” a radically unknowable alien life form that has superior spacefaring technology but no consciousness—“intellect but no insight, agendas but no awareness” (323)—Keeton concludes that human sentience is an evolutionary aberration, and subjectivity a superfluous illusion: “the homunculus behind your eyes . . . that arrogant subroutine that thinks of itself as the person, mistakes correlation for causality” (301). Informed not by poststructuralism but by neuroscience, Watts arrives at something very like subject theory, in *Blindsight*'s contemplation of the Cartesian *cogito* as an effect mistaking itself for a cause. “Am I nothing but sparking chemistry?” Keeton asks himself (313), echoing *Frankenstein*'s suggestive image of the “spark of being” (Shelley [1831] 2000, 60). The zombie images that appear throughout the book to describe creatures lacking consciousness become ironic, in their ultimate applicability to creatures possessing it.

Alongside images of automatons, “constructs,” avatars, robots, AI, mosaics, biomechanics, the undead, and impersonators, Watts emphatically uses characteristically Frankensteinian pairings of zombie and vampire images in order to describe, by turns, the crew members, the alien life forms they encounter, and the human race in general. Keeton opens the novel’s narration by recounting a childhood memory in which kids called him “zombie” because of brain surgery that had altered his personality: “I think you did die,” said my best and only friend. . . . ‘And you’re some whole other kid that just, just grew back out of what was left” (2006, 16).
The *Theseus* crew spends the majority of its space travel time in a cybernetically controlled dormancy that’s repeatedly called being “undead” (22). Keeton describes the *Theseus* crew as “four optimized hybrids somewhere past the threshold of mere humanity, one extinct predator who’d opted to command us instead of eating us alive” (117). The last reference is to the mission commander, who is a “vampire”: in Watts’s fictional world, an alternate-anthropology subplot posits a race of humanoid, quasi-cannibal predators who feed on “baseline” humans—in other words, vampires. In a further Frankensteinian twist, this race of vampires has been reconstituted and rehabilitated from the novel’s fictional antiquity by scientific means. As the narrator puts it, with a touch of Frankensteinian foreshadowing, to reintroduce a lost race of super-human apex predators to the general populace was “to resurrect our own nightmares in order to serve us” (59).

As a “hybrid” collective of cyborgs, zombies, and vampires, then, the *Theseus* crew comprises a microcosm of Watts’s fictional world, which like Gibson’s extrapolates an advanced neoliberal ruling order of corporate governance. Towards the end of the novel, a rigorous discussion two crew members have about consciousness and mimicry of consciousness turns to global capital: “If impersonating something increases fitness, then nature will select good impersonators over bad ones. . . . Interesting to note how many sociopaths show up in the world’s upper echelons, hmm?” This passage alludes (like *Oryx and Crake*’s characterization of Snowman) to Bakan’s thesis on the sociopathology of commerce (Achbar and Abbot 2003) and to vulgar social Darwinism, as the crew hypothesizes, first, that natural selection privileges impersonators for their adaptability; then, that people in power need not impersonate but rather act as models for others to impersonate; and finally, that the “ruthlessness and bottom-line self-interest” of the corporate elite may be leading it to abandon or adapt beyond sentience (via technology, not evolution), in order to more effectively increase market share and profits. “Eventually,” concludes Cunningham, “there aren’t any real people left. Just robots pretending to give a shit” (2006, 311). This theoretical discussion draws together the images of cyborgs, zombies, and vampires that characterize the crew and projects them more broadly onto capital and its globalized reproduction.

Watts’s extensive scientific learning furnishes his novels with a vocabulary of terms, arguments, and experiments that persistently and perspicaciously interrogate the fragile boundary between the organic and
technological, natural and artificial. “Are scramblers even alive?” Keeton asks his shipmate, a technologically augmented biologist named Cunningham. “Maybe they’re just biomechanical machines.” Cunningham replies: “That’s what life is, Keeton. . . . Get your head out of the Twentieth Century” (2006, 250–51). While Blindsight mechanizes the human, Maelstrom animates the digital. The title refers to the name the novel’s characters use to refer to the Internet in the mid-twenty-first century: “maelstrom,” a cybernetic jungle teeming turbulently with digital artificial life (2001, “Cascade”). Overrun with rudimentarily self-aware viruses and other variously benign and malevolent software and subroutines, the “maelstrom” also constantly teeters on the edge of collapse between the Scylla of chaotic social complexity and the Charybdis of overburdened infrastructure resources:

The Net. Not such an arrogant label, back when one was all they had.

The term cyberspace lasted a bit longer—but space implies great empty vistas, a luminous galaxy of icons and avatars, a hallucinogenic dreamworld in 48-bit color. No sense of the meatgrinder in cyberspace. No hint of pestilence or predation, creatures with split-second lifespans tearing endlessly at each others’ throats. Cyber-space was a wistful fantasy-word, like hobbit or biodiversity. . . . If you could watch the fornication and predation and speciation without going grand mal from the rate-of-change, you knew there was only one word that really fit: Maelstrom. (“Cascade”)

Watts explicitly contrasts this digital “meatgrinder” against Gibson’s “cyberspace,” which is invoked as a quaint shibboleth, a nostalgic image of networked computing as a “wistful fantasy-word” in contrast to the stormy digital wilderness of Watts’s fictional future. His hyper-Darwinian image of the near-future Internet comments satirically on the competition, adaptation, and survivalism of our present-day digital ecology, while speculating with signature scientific rigour on the Internet’s technological development, particularly as a breeding ground for digitally based artificial life; like Watts’s other novels, Maelstrom provides detailed notes and references: endnotes 25 through 30 document scientific sources for his extrapolation of the Net as “maelstrom.” Furthermore, the image of the maelstrom is one of McLuhan’s favourite tropes (as we saw in chapter 4):
McLuhan took the image from Poe’s story “A Descent into the Maelstrom” to describe the postwar mediascape.

*Blindsight* also uses the word “maelstrom” to describe not the Internet, but, more literally, the turbulent and toxic storm of magnetic and radioactive forces that the *Theseus* “descends into” so it can approach and communicate with the alien craft (2006, 118). But the same kind of hostility which Watts attributes to the digital communications of his imagined midcentury world obtains for communication per se in *Blindsight*: at the novel’s climax, the *Theseus* crew come to comprehend that the rapid “scramblers” have all along been treating the humans’ communications as a hostile stimulus, a viral attack that provokes counterattack as the only response. To the scramblers, the humans’ earnest attempts at meaningful communication only ever “mean” evidence of advanced technology and therefore hostility. The *Theseus* crew’s attempts at outreach and understanding thus ironically exemplify the very threat that the crew has been led to see in the scramblers themselves, as an alien life form capable of traversing interstellar space and targeting planets bearing life: the threat constituted by advanced technology in and of itself.

“Technology implies belligerence” (44): this “mantra” recurs, verbatim and with variations, throughout the novel, an axiomatic hermeneutic of suspicion for understanding extraterrestrial life, advanced by a school of thought Keeton calls “the Historians” (80–81). “What is Human history,” Keeton reflects, “if not an ongoing succession of greater technologies grinding lesser ones beneath their boots?” (79). This pessimistic caricature of history condenses and channels ideas drawn from Orwell, Darwin, the *Grundrisse* of Marx, and McLuhan’s model of history as a series of different media ages punctuated by epoch-defining technological revolutions. Amidst *Blindsight*’s pervasive extrapolations of advanced technology and theorizations of technological advance, the novel draws together a vast constellation of not only scientific but cultural, historical, and political references: to the Luddite revolts (181); to McLuhan’s “global village” (141); to the aforementioned *uploadable consciousness* trope, illustrated here in a virtual-reality retirement community called “Heaven”; to zombie economics and the global corporate elite as a kind of hybrid, zombie-vampire class (311–12); and even to the ancient Hebrew legend of the Golem, here a name given to a biological weapon that accelerates bone growth (292). Taken together with the plot—in which terrestrials and extraterrestrials,
however incommensurate their fundamentals of being, both respond in ironic kind to advanced technology as hostile stimulus—this constellation of references renders the novel’s nihilistic mantra legible as a variation on McLuhan’s maxim. For Watts, “Technology implies belligerence” comes to mean something like “the medium is the message,” or, closer still, like “every technology necessitates a new war” (McLuhan and Fiore 1968, 98). Not merely uninterested in but physiologically incapable of comprehending the content of the humans’ benign communication, the scramblers act only on its apparently baleful form.

_Blindsight_ thus essays an extended inquiry into the nature of sentience and humanity, in the socio-historical context of technological development and the speculative context of complicated encounter among “baseline” humans, “optimized hybrids,” and radically “other” forms of life. Like Watts’s other novels, _Blindsight_ spectacularly foregrounds the ubiquitous, mutual interpenetration of human subjectivities and technological innovations; but _Blindsight_ goes further than his other novels in theorizing and interrogating the posthuman implications of this interpenetration, which repeatedly yields the historically and culturally conjoined images of zombie and vampire, robot and cyborg, as figures of the epistemological horizon to which such interrogation leads, a horizon that remains still very much a Frankenstein barrier.

After Gibson and Cronenberg, Atwood and Watts have furnished the most extensive, explicit, and globally grounded articulations of McLuhan’s Frankenpheme of technology in Canadian literature, and in Canadian science fiction literature specifically. Dominick Grace’s reading of common plot points in Gibson and Cronenberg extends equally well to the Atwood and Watts works discussed here:

> Pell-mell forward action, sinister organizations, double agents, protagonists lacking crucial information until near the end of the story, complex plotting, elliptical narrative style, moral ambivalence, obscure or irreconcilable plot elements; all figure strongly in the work of both Cronenberg and Gibson, as does a focus on characters well-removed from the corridors of power (Grace 2003, para. 5)

Grace’s summary also illuminates, more by flashes than by a steady light, how _Frankenstein’s_ “skeleton story” of technological hubris furnishes the foundational armature on which these plot points get arranged. And to this
summary must also then be added the prominent representation of media as environments, which all four authors, as well as the others discussed here, depict as monstrous technologies, implying belligerence.

Gibson’s “cyberspace” and Cronenberg’s Videodrome have thus joined McLuhan’s media theory in becoming cultural and conceptual touchstones for a discourse of technology that continues to weave through representations of technology and new media to this day. The next chapter turns from literary texts to other media, to sound and image, tracking McLuhan’s Frankensteinian discourse of technology into the scene of Canadian electronic dance music production and performance.