‘We Try to Humanize the Technology’
—Ann Quin’s *Tripticks*, Cybernetics and Literary Modernism[1]—

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Abstract

本論文はアン・クイン（Ann Quin）の第四作目の小説『トリップティックス（*Tripticks*）』（1972）を、サイバネティックスの文脈から論じるものである。この作品は、主人公が元妻とその愛人に追われながらアメリカを移動する様子や道中で振り返られる彼の半生を、様々な媒体からの引用をコラージュのように貼り合わせながら描いていく。拡散する個の統合を主題とするこの小説は、ノニア・ウィリアムス・コートリング（Nonia Williams Korteling）も指摘するように、個が散り散になった世界で「中心の核」を探求するモダニズム作品として読むことができる。マーシャル・マクルーハン（Marshall McLuhan）のメディア論が示すように、モダニズム文学が取り組んだ分断と統合という主題はサイバネティックスにおいても重要な論点のひとつであった。本稿は作品におけるモダニズムの要素が当時のサイバネティックスの議論と呼応したものであることを示し、この小説が機械と人間の統合体つまりサイボーグである主人公を描きながら、サイバネティックスとモダニズムの繋がりを示唆するものであることを論じる。

Key Words: Ann Quin, post-war literature, modernism, cybernetics, Marshall McLuhan

Centring on the trip of a man who is being chased by his ex-wife and her lover across the United States, Ann Quin’s fourth novel, *Tripticks* (1972), illuminates post-war American culture at that time. Written with the cut-up technique of William Burroughs, the first-person text traces the narrator-protagonist’s travel to escape from the pursuers by combining a number of references concerning American pop culture (‘Batman’), historical monuments (‘the Alamo’ in Texas) and political situations (‘the Panthers’) (8, 89, 12). The novel is said to ‘[derive] from [the author’s] travels around America and from her extreme dislike of New York’ (Mackrell 612). Owing to the success of her first novel, *Berg* (1964), Quin was awarded ‘a D. H. Lawrence Scholarship from the University of New Mexico and a Harkness Fellowship to spend time living and writing in America’. She went to the United States in 1965, staying first in New York and then moving to New Mexico (Williams Korteling 32, 119).

Critics have viewed the novel as a satire on post-war American culture. Judith Mackrell mentions that it 'satirize[s] . . . some aspect of American culture: its materialism; its uncritical acceptance of fashionable ideas and jargon; its crass notion of psychology; and the loss of individual contact and humanity within a mass-produced ideology' (Mackrell 613). The novel satirically describes frivolity seen in consumer culture, randomly rearranging a number of quotations from advertisements and magazine articles circulated in mass culture. Because of this feature, Evenson and Howard recognise the work as being 'on the cusp of postmodernist celebration' (Evenson and Howard 71).

However, as Nonia Williams Korteling so importantly suggests, the novel is not merely a satire of consumerism. While Quin's work seems to play with superficiality as a postmodernist novel, it also retains a modernist attitude of seeking the 'depth' or the core pattern of the world: '*Tripticks* successfully exposes the magic lost in the assumption that everything . . . can be packaged up and sold', and yet it 'simultaneously insist[s] on the continuing need for the search for authenticity, for the real' (Williams Korteling 175, 215). As Steven Connor states, 'modernism saw a work heroically making sense of flux and chaos, and guaranteeing the powers of art as a last outpost of order in a world in which religion was expiring, science had thrown in its lot with war and commerce, and politics was being taken over by the mob'. Meanwhile, 'postmodernism began to think that the very flux that modernists saw as a threat might actually be an energizing force. . . . Rather than representing a threat to be tamed, the multiple becomes a promise or horizon to which art must try to live up' (Connor 68–69). Quin's protagonist, who plays with superficial fragments as a post-modernist, also desperately searches for the mystical core like a modernist, and 'this paradox . . . reveals the book's late modernist angst, placing it in a limbo between modernist and postmodernist concerns' (Williams Korteling 176). The novel is hence regarded as an in-between work of modernism and postmodernism.

Building on this convincing argument, I will read *Tripticks* as a modernist text that shows some signs of postmodernism. A crucial context for my reading of this modernist novel is cybernetics, a field of study that started to grow in social importance around the time when Quin's works were published. Among scholars of cybernetics, a particularly important figure is Marshall McLuhan, a media theorist who connects the cybernetic network system to a modernist mystic idea of the transcendental order. Significantly, he sees an affinity between cybernetic society with the electric network and the modernist view of the world of unity, and Quin's fourth novel enacts this association by describing a protagonist with a cyborg body.

My reading of *Tripticks* is summarised as follows. The protagonist tries to weave a text by integrating fragmental phrases into an organic whole. Uniting fragments into a whole organism is a necessary procedure for him, not only as a narrator but also as a cyborg. He is a cyborg and

incorporates mechanical parts into his body; similarly, as the narrator of this first-person text, he integrates words and phrases circulated in American society into a story about himself. Or, he tries to establish his identity as a cyborg organism by composing an organic text, a unity of fragmented words. Some of the quotations come from articles and advertisements about technology that is used to modify a human body. By rearranging these words, he illustrates his life so far, as well as the travel involved in escaping his ex-wife and her partner, so as to show who he is. In the storyline, he fails to weave a personal story and achieve *true* unity because the transcendental order forces him to be impersonal as a part of the system. This failure reveals the problem that both modernism and cybernetics confront: the indifferent nature of the order that does not allow individuals to modify it. Meanwhile, the novel itself betrays this conclusion and suggests that it might be possible to undermine the stability of the system. As I will illustrate, McLuhan's theory raises the issue about restriction and openness in the networking system, and similarly Quin's novel casts light on this matter about an organic system. While exposing a limit or danger of the modernist idea of the whole, the novel suggests another possible way to approach the notion of organic unity. First, with specific focus on McLuhan's 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, I will show that his theory, which is constructed under the influence of literary modernism and the New Criticism, suggests two possibilities about society with the electric network: while the network might function as a system for control and deprive people of their autonomy, the repressive system could possibly be disturbed if people are able to give feedback to and interfere with the system. Then I will analyse Quin's work, arguing that the collage-like novel is a modernist text that echoes McLuhan's view on the world with the electric networking system.

1. Cybernetics, Marshall McLuhan and Literary Modernism

As Williams Korteling points out, 'a range of presciently coincident and relevant secondary texts' to Quin's novel, including Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore's *The Medium is the Massage* (1967), 'are all concerned with similar questions to those being asked by *Tripticks*: of the relationship between the individual and the system as well as of the changing relationship between surface and depth' (Williams Korteling 177). '[T]he relationship between the individual and the system' is a crucial topic for cybernetics that has been a field of conflict between control and anticontrol. Cyberneticians declare themselves as '*anticontrol*', aiming 'to build machines and construct systems that could adapt performatively to whatever happened to come their way' (Pickering 31–32). However, the electric network might be used as a system for control in which 'human beings . . . [are] reduced to the level of effectors for a supposedly higher nervous organism' (Wiener 1950 16). Constructed under the influence of modernism and the New Criticism, McLuhan's media theory raises this issue of control and anticontrol. Showing

parallelism between the electric networking system and the modernist idea of the transcendental order, his theory reveals the danger that the system may control individuals. However, by incorporating the idea of close reading, his theory also suggests the possibility for each individual to interfere with the system.

The term 'cybernetics', which was coined by an American mathematician, Norbert Wiener, denotes '[t]he field of study concerned with communication and control systems in living organisms and machines' ('Cybernetics, N.'). The general idea of cybernetics is as follows: in light of information theory, living animals and machines are comparable and connectable. To make an action, both humans and machines manipulate information in a similar way; therefore, they can be treated equally and also be connected to each other. This connectability between human and machine leads to the notion of society as an organic whole: 'In both [the animal and the machine], their *performed* action on the outer world, and not merely their *intended* action, is reported back to the central regulatory apparatus', and 'just as individual physical responses may be seen from this point of view, so may the organic responses of society itself' (Wiener 1954 27). Owing to the spread of communication machines, people are united in the electric network, and society constructed on such a vast network system functions like one organism, such as a human with a brain or a machine with an electronic circuit.

A similar idea is suggested by McLuhan, a communications theorist involved in the study of cybernetics. He compares a vast network of electricity to a human brain:

> It is a principal aspect of the electric age that it establishes a global network that has much of the character of our central nervous system. Our central nervous system is not merely an electric network, but it constitutes a single unified field of experience. As biologists point out, the brain is the interacting place where all kinds of impressions and experiences can be exchanged and translated, enabling us to *react to the world as a whole*. Naturally, when electric technology comes into play, the utmost variety and extent of operations in industry and society quickly assume a unified posture. (McLuhan *Understanding* 380)

With a vast electric network, the society becomes an organic whole. Crucially for McLuhan, the network reunites what is broken into pieces in '[m]echanization . . . achieved by fragmentation'. According to him, 'this [electric] organic unity . . . is quite the opposite of organization in a mechanized society', and '[a]utomation [on which cybernation is based] is not an extension of the mechanical principles of fragmentation and separation of operations'. With 'the electric speed-up and exact synchronizing of information', things once fragmented in the earlier stage of mechanisation are united or integrated into this organism (McLuhan *Understanding* 380–81).

The idea of the organic whole is one of the key notions for McLuhan's theory. He believes that the new media at that time should revive people's sense of the whole. His famous assertion, '"the medium is a message"', means that the medium changes the behaviour of people and shapes the society they live in: 'it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action' (McLuhan *Understanding* 9). According to him, new media in the post-war period changed the way people receive information from passive reception to active participation. Television at the time, for instance, offered unclear images at low-resolution; therefore, in order to understand what it showed, the audience needed to '[reconfigure] the dots into an abstract work of art' (McLuhan *Understanding* 341). From such practices, people of the electric age learn to unite the fragments into an organic picture, and those individuals with the skill of combining fragments compose a society of unity. McLuhan calls such a media of low-resolution 'cool' and evaluates it higher than a 'hot' one of high-resolution (the film, for instance) (McLuhan *Understanding* 24).

As these examples show, McLuhan's theory stands on a belief in the existence of the whole organism that integrates all the fragments into itself. Interestingly and significantly, the inspirational source of his notion that a number of fragments form the whole picture is literary modernism and the New Criticism. Learning the New Criticism from I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis at the University of Cambridge in the 1930s, McLuhan started his academic career as a literary scholar, and what he studied as a specialist of literature became a basis of his media theory. In *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media* (2013), Jessica Pressman points out that '[m]odernist literature and art translated the instantaneous and simultaneous affect of technological innovations (such as radio, the telegraph, and airplanes) into artistic expressions, including Cubist art, Gertrude Stein's "continuous present", and cinematic montage', and 'McLuhan posits modernism as a period of media revolution, the origin of our modern media age. He built his theory of media upon this understanding of modernism' (Pressman 33–34).

Under the influence of modernism, McLuhan constructed his media theory, asserting that the electric network provides a remedy for fragmentation. For him, the electric networking system, which resists fragmentation in modernisation, should be an embodiment of the transcendental order or the traditional unity that was imagined by literary modernists. In the age of capitalism, '[p]eople and things are dislodged from their authentic positions and thrown into new relations in an increasingly liquefying society' and '[h]eterogeneous values lose their "aura" and are arbitrarily juxtaposed or combined with each other on newly formed common planes' (Tajiri 77). To reunite those fragments 'dislodged from their authentic positions', modernists turned to the transcendental order, into which fragments are incorporated under a certain order. Influenced by the modernist idea, McLuhan constructed his theory, believing that the cybernetic society should

realise the organic system that modernists explored.

In McLuhan's theory, as Richard Wasson states, 'media may be judged aesthetically and politically by the same methods developed by Eliot, Leavis and the New Critics—by their ability to draw things together with great pressure and intensity' (Wasson 576). In an essay, 'Poetic vs. Rhetorical Exegesis: The Case for Leavis against Richards and Empson' (1944), McLuhan highly evaluates Eliot's idea that 'self-contained' poems are integrated into 'the entire literature' and together construct 'a single emergent work of art, having a dramatic principle of its own' (McLuhan 'Poetic' 268, 272). In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), Eliot proposes his 'Impersonal theory of poetry', declaring that each piece of art should contribute to the formation of 'an ideal order' that 'persist[s] after the supervention of novelty' with 'the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole . . . readjusted' (Eliot 18, 15). Although he refers to a possible change in the organism after accepting a new piece of art ('for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered'), his argument seems to incline towards emphasising the totalitarian aspect of the organic unity (Eliot 15). What this essay affirms is 'that great works of art do not stand on their own, but instead participate in a kind of continuum, almost a chain of being', and this whole mass of pieces of art, for Eliot, is 'even more than harmonious union of parts—a single, irreducible intelligence' (Morrison 52). Like modernists who believe in the transcendental or traditional order that connects each individual, McLuhan recognises the new electric system as an aid to reuniting fragmented parts. This makes him attend to media and art forms that reflect the idea that fragments can be reunited into an organic whole. For instance, he refers to Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch* (1959) and praises the cut-up technique, which originated in the avant-garde scenes in the early twentieth century, as an art that fits the electric age (McLuhan *Understanding* 250). For the media theorist, this literary technique of cutting and rearranging texts reflects the significant idea of the age that saw the birth of the electric networking system.

In addition to the modernist idea of the transcendental order, McLuhan adopted the strategy of close reading into his theory of wholeness. Close reading was established by the New Criticism as a means of exploring modernist experimental texts. Modernist literary experiments '[make] reading and comprehension difficult and [require] high levels of reader interaction'; this led to the birth of the strategy, which allows the reader to focus on a text itself so as to fully explore it (Pressman 52). Regarding the technique as a means of 'draw[ing] things together', McLuhan sees it as a principal practice in the age of new cool media. Close reading is a crucial method with which people combine fragments and recognise the whole organism. For instance, McLuhan considers that television audiences need to actively engage in the completion of a picture by connecting dots on the screen. In a society with the electric network, each individual should learn

the skill of close reading so as to process information and contribute to achieving wholeness.

By adopting the ideas of the transcendental order and close reading, McLuhan's theory suggests two incompatible possibilities about the electric network. On the one hand, it implies that the electric networking system might result in controlling each individual. The modernists' aim for wholeness sometimes leads to their affinity with fascism. Similarly, incorporating the modernist idea of the whole, his theory seems to underestimate, or possibly reject, the agency and freedom of each individual. According to his logic, '[f]eedback or dialogue between the mechanism and its environment brings a further weaving of individual machines into a galaxy of such machines throughout the entire plant' (McLuhan *Understanding* 387). Feedback from each individual seems to be needed so as to consolidate the unity rather than to bring some change into the system. Wasson points out as follows:

> Man becomes an object of the machine. Though McLuhan claims that the mechanics of the new media bring about much greater involvement of the human sensorium than the old, the response is nevertheless mechanical. Looking at T.V., the eye and the brain are required to bring a series of changing dots together in a total pattern. In that process, which involves neither reason, nor will, nor much directed energy, the future is determined. McLuhan's myth emphasizes the mechanical operation of the spirit and there is no genuine provision for human choice in the movement into the future. (Wasson 578)

His aim for the whole organism might thus lead to the rejection of individual freedom and the possibility of altering the network. His theory, based on the idea that the 'medium is the message', has been criticised as technological determinism, and in the backdrop of the determinist view is the modernist idea of the transcendental order. Wasson links the totalitarian tendency of McLuhan's theory with that of the modernist 'aesthetic which ignores the actual effects of political power on people' (Wasson 579). As I discussed in my earlier essay, I do not think that modernists merely cling to the transcendental order while ignoring everyday politics (Nishino). Nevertheless, it is true that the transcendental order has an indifferent nature and does not allow individuals to interfere with it.

On the other hand, however, by adopting the New Criticism's strategy of close reading, McLuhan's theory retains subversive potential in itself. Organic unity could entail 'openness to possibility, rather than a closed determination to achieve some preconceived object' (Pickering 32). For some New Critics, '[r]ather than seeking to explain what a text means, to provide one "true" meaning or utilitarian purpose for a work, close reading reveals complexity and multiplicity', and hence '[t]he New Critical close readings often rise to the level of creative acts

themselves' (Pressman 14). While this reading method could help to preserve organic unity by encouraging the reader to perceive it, it could also allow the reader to be creative and produce different interpretations of the text. What people see in a text cannot be completely controlled—this fact might possibly threaten the order of the supposed system. As Pressman states, 'McLuhan distinguishes between hot and cool media based on the level of participation', and, in comparison to the hot variety, 'cool media (the telephone, cartoons, oral speech, and, perhaps counterintuitively, television) require high levels of participation from users' (Pressman 51). For him, like modernist art, new cool media require people to focus closely on the object and participate in the creation of meaning. Through active participation, people could possibly affect the organic system.

As McLuhan's theory implies, the electronic organism cannot completely reject the possibility of causing restriction, and yet this can also be said about the possibility of alteration. As for literature, the reader cannot create their own interpretations independently of the text; however, it is still possible to read the text from different perspectives. As mentioned above, Eliot, a modernist writer who foregrounds the organic unity of literary tradition, cannot ignore the possible alteration of the order, and this alteration might function as a subversive interaction from a new piece of art. Likewise, while individuals might easily lose their autonomy in the electric networking system, they could possibly interact with and change it through their feedback. In my view, Quin's novel suggests these two possibilities—constraint and openness—in the system of organic unity. While its storyline insists on the aspect of control by the order, the process of producing the novel implies the potential changeability of the organic whole.

2. Modernism and the Cybernetic Organism in *Tripticks*

Quin's fourth novel, *Tripticks*, addresses the problem of desiring the transcendental order by describing the cyborg narrator-protagonist who aims to unite fragments. The protagonist, who has 'many names [and] [m]any faces', is chased by (or possibly chasing) his ex-wife and her lover for some reason and the first-person novel narrates his journey around the United States as well as his recollection by combining a number of quotations from existing texts (7). Significantly, the narrative style that he employs echoes the essential principle for his cyborg self: fragments can be woven into one organic unity. The narrator-protagonist, having a body that can incorporate mechanical devices into itself, tries to compose an organic text by using the cut-up technique and rearranging fragmented words. In the storyline, he fails to achieve unity; the transcendental order is beyond his reach, standing against his aim to weave his own text. Meanwhile, the novel itself betrays this conclusion, implying that it is possible to interact with the order and create a story. As Carol Annand's illustrations inserted into this book indicate, an act of reading, or close reading,

can be a helpful strategy to give feedback into the apparently-unchangeable organic unity. By showing these two possibilities—restriction and interaction—that haunt the idea of one organism, Quin's work suggests that the modernist idea of wholeness is not a bygone issue for those of us living in the cybernetic society.

Written with the cut-up technique, which McLuhan regards as echoing the crucial notion of that era, *Tripticks* raises issues about the boundary between human and machine. The novel refers to a number of topics ranging from exercising machines ('a belt that sends electric shocks into his abdomen' and 'vibrator massage machines'), to plastic surgery ('she reforms herself, to customize herself, she has her face and body chopped and channelled'), to fictional automatons with supernatural or artificial intelligence ('Talking Turk' from a work of E. T. A. Hoffmann and 'Hal the computer' from *2001: A Space Odyssey*), and to contemporary media art (19–20, 163, 21, 35). Among cut-up phrases is a word by Nam June Paik, a pioneering artist who uses new media such as television and videos for his works of art: 'By using TV as a bra[,] the most intimate belonging of a human being, we try to humanize the technology' (54).[2] This is quoted from an article in *Time* reporting on 'TV as a Creative Medium', an art exhibition that featured artists including 'research protégés of Marshall McLuhan or electronics experimenters' ('Medium' 74). Composing into itself such phrases about new technologies, Quin's collage-like text reflects a social interest in cybernetics and the organic unity between human and machine.

By combining such verbal fragments, the novel illustrates the protagonist's body that is modified through technology. He is a cyborg, equipped with a number of devices such as '[a] television camera 8 inches long and an inch in diameter', 'radio transmitter as small as a cigarette lighter', 'listening device smaller than a quarter that can pick up conversation', 'tiny electronically activated camera' and 'Spikemike' (81). The protagonist also merges with a car he drives. In the novel, a car is likened to a human, whose 'motor coughed, spat and died', and vice versa: 'People are a bit like cars. They can't go on forever. Somewhere along the line, they're going to need a check-up, a few repairs, and a rest, especially if an ominous rattle seems to be developing' (12, 28). This association between car and human provides a clue to suppose what the protagonist's body is like. Soon afterwards comes a scene which shows that he 'like cars . . . can't go on forever' and so has to find a place for 'a rest'. There he mentions: 'I had the inability to drive any further. I needed food, lodgings. Above all a place I could drive right in without getting out of the car. Park in a covered parking area, place my luggage on a super-market-style dolly, and go directly to my room' (52). What is suggested here seems more than that he is figuratively associated with a car in that he needs a rest as a car needs maintenance. The phrase that he looks for 'a place [he] could drive right in without getting out of the car' gives the impression that he becomes inseparable from the vehicle he drives, and so he has to find a place to rest without

leaving the car.

Crucially, for the protagonist, those machines are exchangeable parts of his body. Later he leaves his car, stealing into a Buick that his ex-wife and her lover have owned. Here, what Evenson and Howard suggest about the protagonist—'We end up learning a great deal more about what he's wearing than about what he looks like, as if . . . what he's wearing is, in a sense, who he is'—seems right to the point of his cyborg self (Evenson and Howard 69). As a cyborg, 'what he's wearing' is more crucial than 'what he looks like'; his total appearance utterly changes owing to what he puts on, and such transformability of a body is an important feature of a cyborg. He can easily switch his appearance as though switching television programmes by just pushing some buttons. His body is actually equipped with a monitor that displays his appearance: 'White gold her hair one of my faces married (I displayed at that time a droopy Stephen Crane moustache and shiny eyes fixed on some wild interior vision)' (9).

Possessing a number of names and faces, Quin's character can put them on and off. Because of this characteristic, his identity is in a state of flux, and such superficiality might associate the novel with postmodernist literature.[3] However, as Williams Korteling suggests, the modernist protagonist shows a desire for the organic unity of these fragments (Williams Korteling 175, 215). The lack of core drives him to weave an organic text of his own so as to resist fluidity. What provides his creation with the core pattern is a sense of tradition that is based on the idea of continuous time. This is clarified when he describes how his imagination works.

As well as his physical body, the process of imagination is also mechanised. He needs to '[step] up the visual sense', 'feel the instant new power response, . . . the new leap of power' and 'g[et] up to 83% more power potential' so as to recall an imaginal creature, 'the Unicorn' (131–32). He, who has a body that integrates a number of parts of machine into itself, produces the landscape in his mind through a mechanical process. He hence suspects that the inefficiency of his information processing might slow down his imagination, 'wonder[ing] at the time if the imagination was getting somewhat retarded simply because [his] information processing and analysis were not efficient; that a machine was needed economically and rapidly handling [his] "in-between" operations' (135). In the course of these scenes, he evidently sees himself as a machine whose imagination is raised through mechanical procedure.

However, his imaginal creation is not merely conveyed through a mechanical process. He acknowledges another element necessary for his imagination: the traditional framework for a piece of art. The imaginal Unicorn is '[a] colourful and magnetic image', a '[p]icturesque combination of Old World romance and modern progress'. The mixture of 'Old World romance and modern progress', which produces 'the best' work among his collage pieces, should be an essential condition for his creative activity (132). The same thing can be said about his weaving a

text of his own. To narrate a story by rearranging fragmented phrases, he needs something belonging to the 'Old World', a traditional form that supports his imagination. This attitude inevitably makes him a modernist who aims for 'an authentic engagement with the world which remains despite a culture which denies it' (Williams Korteling 176).

The authentic framework can pose an order to postmodernist chaos. Ceaseless change is a fundamental feature of the superficial world, where '[s]uddenly [a] face [of the First Lady on TV] became [his] X-wife's, all [his] X-wives [appear] in scene after scene, commercial after commercial' (54). These people '[are] everywhere and nowhere, neither inside nor outside, living in a perplexing world of spatial ambiguity', and '[t]he dilemma [is] of the sensitive progressive intellectual caught in the nowhere land between progressive ideals and primitive practices' (122–23). Even though the protagonist seems to enjoy this unstable situation, it makes him '[e]xhausted and dejected', with his 'psyche . . . hurt, and the pain of loss . . . sharpened by the thought of what might have been' (123). In the dizziness of the modern world, he tries to recall a sense of history:

> The past reared again. A rotating globe with raised topographic features, a large lunar hemisphere which changes phases, and swells into a series of winding terraces. . . . If I made a hole in the wall perhaps it would permit an inspection of dinosaur bones in their original positions, allowing themselves to be uncovered in high relief rather than removed. (123)

Exhausted by fluid situations, he aims for the authentic structure that revives the sense of order. Eliot, for instance, turns to tradition, into which new creation is incorporated under a certain order. Influenced by the modernist idea, McLuhan believes that the electric network should reunite individuals in the cybernetic society. Like these figures, the protagonist of *Tripticks* idealises an authentic system that should provide an organic pattern under which modern things 'flickering . . . in that chaos' can be settled down (122).

As the narrator, the protagonist needs the order because fluidity disturbs his storytelling. He finds it difficult to create an organic text just by repeating fragmented words. Without an authentic pattern or order to control these fragments, his story loses the track and cannot keep its shape. In the middle of the novel, he is utterly lost in the flow of fragmental information and confesses: 'Pursuing my first X-wife, or rather being pursued. Who was chasing who I had forgotten' (136). To achieve his aim to narrate a story and establish his cyborgian self, he needs to rearrange fragments into one organic text or self-image. Instead of indulging in the state of flux, he is eager to seek the pattern that would enable unity for his story and cyborgian identity. After recognising the uncertainty about his story or himself, he is led to several places that might possibly provide

what he seeks.

Quin's character visits three places, hoping that they can give him a clue to gain a sense of the whole. First, he drops in the 'CENTRE FOR STUDIES OF THE BODY AND THE SOUL', a facility of a New Age foundation, which makes '[a]n offer to return to the delights of the primordial olfactory and tactile nitty-gritty' (163). They provide methods for spiritual revelation, and yet the protagonist finds that they result in suppressing the individual voice and preventing fragments from uniting. In the facility, people become dazed and passive, and stop communicating: 'people talked to themselves, in a language devised for each other, delivered in papers written for each other, at conferences held for each other, supported by agencies formed for each other' (178). The protagonist says, 'The talk [of a staff member] quick, sharp, clever, a dazzling display of brilliance which indeed was remarkable, and enormously pleasurable; but it left me numb, as though I had been spayed. I was unable to respond' (175). New Age science, which he has expected to provide a solution for fragmentation, does not give him a revelational sense of unity. Rather, it enforces isolation and controls people: 'the therapists . . . watched closely . . . our reactions. Information is being collected into data banks by the Army, the Justice Department and the F. B. I.' (178).

After escaping the centre, the protagonist visits an Indian reservation that is supposedly located, according to Robert Buckeye, 'in a remote part of New Mexico' (Buckeye 50). The protagonist imagines dying there and feels that this would be '[m]uch better, perhaps more original say than being crushed to death in some squalid freakout'. Seeing in this image something '[r]itualistic, part of an inheritance', he feels that, owing to this sense of tradition, '[he] would perhaps go down in history after all'. However, this impression does not last long. He soon loses a sense of history, feeling that the place 'seem[s] without past or future' (185). He is 'more of an outsider [on the Indian Reservation]' and does not belong to their tradition (189). He sees a Native American man who has led him to the place as 'provocative rather than profound', judging that '[a] life of dazzling transitions . . . sometimes makes [the man] seem unstable' and 'enormous obstacles stand in the way of their becoming reality' (182). The protagonist refuses to 'underst[and] the inevitability of [his] fate through a series of rituals' and so gives up trying to join in the community (186).

Quin's character leaves the Reservation and finally arrives at a 'church, the only place [he] fe[els] where [he] could seek shelter without necessarily intruding'. There he becomes '[t]houghtful and cautious, as if [he] needed to pay attention to each element of the situation in an attempt at moment-for-moment truth[,] . . . approaching reality from an angle somewhat off-centre . . . and letting reality emerge as it really is' (191). He tries to find a *real* picture by observing fragments, as if following McLuhan's method of seeing a mosaic picture. By doing so,

he could possibly learn a way to unite fragmented pieces into a whole organism, and so the church could teach him how to integrate words into his own story.

However, also in this church, the protagonist loses words and fails to weave a story about himself. What the church shows him is not a traditional pattern that is available to him but the transcendental order to which he could only be subordinate. The following quotation is the last scene of the novel:

> The pulpit could become an extension of my voice, my skin, my dreams. . . . I opened my mouth, but no words. Only the words of others I saw, like ads, texts, psalms, from those who had attempted to persuade me into their systems. A power I did not want to possess. The Inquisition. (192)

Here, he finds it impossible to construct his own organic text from fragmented words and phrases. This is not because the church does not show the order he longs for. It does, but it is not what he has supposed it should be. On entering the system, he has no authority to compose his own text, with those words that comprise it remaining '[o]nly the words of others'. It is not him but the system with a power to make the Inquisition that controls all of these fragmented pieces. To borrow a term from Eliot, the protagonist should be 'impersonal' only to be integrated into the whole organic system. Or, as suggested in McLuhan's media theory, once connected, human and machine might be controlled by the electric networking system. As these notions imply, what decides the whole picture is not each individual but the institution. Rather than extending the protagonist's story and his presence, the pulpit integrates him into the unchangeable system. In this last scene, the novel reveals an anti-humanist aspect of the transcendental organism. It deprives individuals of freedom to interact with the system.

The story ends with that scene in which the protagonist is stuck in a dead end. Crucially, however, the novel itself refuses the control of the transcendental order. Following the narrator-protagonist's will that he '[does] not want to possess [the power]', this text that he weaves implies that it is open to the reader's interpretation via an episode about its production process. This novel has illustrations by Carol Annand, and she explains her engagement in the project as follows:

> The trouble is we [Quin and Annand] didn't start work together. The book was worked out as a literary text and I came in right at the end, after it had been agreed with the publishers. The ideal is to start together . . . so that the whole thing is built up as one. . . . I came in late

> [when] the type had been worked out and I was not allowed to break it up. The nearest I could get to an integrated book was to run small drawings along the bottom of the pages. (Burns)

In this interview, the illustrator mentions that she inserted her drawings into the semi-finished book. It might be possible to see this attempt as an interaction with an existing text that is supposed to be controlled and unchangeable in the story of the novel. She created the drawings by reading the text and put them on the spaces of some pages. The novel received her feedback and changed its shape. This fact dissolves the ending of the story, indicating a different type of possible unity.

Some might suspect those drawings to be under control and so just subordinate to the transcendental system, as the illustrator did not have freedom 'to break [the text] up'. However, as Annand confirms, her feedback actually transforms the novel, and this is not just in a visual sense: her illustrations disturb the tempo of the work. She mentions that some of her drawings 'are rather obscure and you have to look closely at them' while others 'are very clear and come off the page at you'. Therefore, the reader 'get[s] a contrast between areas of high-definition and low-definition[, and] this changes the pace of the book'. Additionally, some illustrations are 'related to separate parts of the book' and therefore so 'ambiguous' that 'it didn't matter where [she] put the drawings' (Burns). With these features that cause disruption to the organism of the existing text, the illustrations alter the rhythm of the novel and bring huge change into its structure.

As a result, Quin's novel becomes more complicated, requiring the reader to follow it slowly. According to Pressman, such slowness in reading might function as a means to resist the increasing speed of society with the electric networking system. As McLuhan recognises, the high speed of electricity is an essential factor to unite the fragments all over the world: 'As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree'. In this new age, '[t]he partial and specialized character of the viewpoint, however noble, will not serve at all'. Instead, '[w]e are suddenly eager to have things and people declare their beings totally' (McLuhan *Understanding* 5–6). However, such organic wholeness is not so stable or unchangeable. Close reading slows or even halts the system for a moment and allows the reader to ponder and provide feedback to the organic whole: 'Close reading tunes out the distractions of the speeding, technological world in order to focus, concentrate, and read slowly' (Pressman 11).

While telling a story about a cyborg protagonist who is trapped into the idealised unity,

Quin's novel suggests that there is another way to approach the system: by reading the text closely, the reader can apply feedback to it. The accumulation or loop of feedback from each individual reader would build the altering organism or universe around the text. What the modernist idea of the transcendental network lacks is this open feedback system. As the episode of the illustrator exemplifies, this novel does not refuse interaction: it is possible for each individual to write their feedback into this organic text. In this way, Quin's fourth novel betrays the conclusion of the story; as an open book, it is waiting for a reaction. Or, it is expecting feedback from the reader as a subject who is living in cybernetic society.[4]

In summary, *Tripticks* explores the idea of organic unity in the age of the electric networking system. Describing the cyborg protagonist that aims for the transcendental order like literary modernists, the novel warns of the potential danger that the whole electric organism could possibly rob people of freedom and control them, as shown in the centre of new age science and the church. Meanwhile, the text also implies that it might be possible to disturb the system and resist control. The key action is close reading that enables individuals to give feedback to it. As McLuhan's theory suggests, like the transcendental order that is imagined by literary modernists, the networking system could function as a system for control. The method of close reading, on the one hand, could possibly induce people to focus on the text itself and just follow its order, helping to preserve the organic whole. However, on the other hand, close reading could open up a new interpretation, illuminating the text's 'complexity and multiplicity' (Pressman 14). Inevitably, the idea of organic unity is haunted by this dual possibility of dominance and openness. Quin's novel illustrates the conflict between them, suggesting that the issue that modernists raise still needs to be considered in the age of the electric networking system.

Notes

[1] This paper is based on a presentation given at Modernist Studies in Asia Network (MSIA) 2: Modernism and Multiple Temporalities, held at Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, 12–14 September 2019.

[2] Here, Nam June Paik is referring to 'TV Bra for Living Sculpture' (1969), one of his cooperative works with the cellist Charlotte Moorman. Each of these two artists collaborated with John Cage, 'an important teacher of Paik's who always pointed out the significance of McLuhan's theses' (Kellein 28). Cage is thought to be an artist whose works could be linked to Quin's creative writing (Williams Korteling 22).

[3] Fluidity or superficiality of the protagonist's identity based on his transformable body can be considered in the context of 'prosthesis'. As Yoshiki Tajiri mentions in *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism*, the idea of 'prosthesis' disrupts the clear distinction 'between body and

technology, inside and outside, self and other', and, because of this confusion, 'the idea of self-identity becomes unsettled by the permeation of technologies' (Tajiri 1–2).

[4] This reading implies that *Tripticks* needs the reader in order to represent the two possibilities of the organic system: restriction and alteration. Without the reader, it could not have explored this theme fully and would have underestimated the possible feedback of individuals. This means that the reader is given a crucial role in this experimental novel and also that the book presupposes the cooperation of the reader. A similar attitude can be seen in newly developed types of fiction such as gamebooks, hypertexts and video games—fictional forms that assume the involvement of the reader/player in the first place. A sign of this type of fiction is seen in a 1969 work by Quin's fellow experimental novelist, B. S. Johnson: *The Unfortunates*. This fictional work consists of 27 pamphlets contained in a box, and 25 of the pamphlets can be read in a random order while the first and last ones are fixed. Elizabeth Burgess sees this text as 'possess[ing] aspects which are connected to definitions of play and games' including 'a requirement for the reader to interact with the materiality of the text' (Burgess 15). In *The Unfortunates*, 'the reader's interactions with the text are programmed by the design of that text, while the reader, to an extent, programs *it* through his or her physical interaction' (Burgess 85). Like *Tripticks*, such novels should also raise issues about the conflict between control and agency.

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