

*from* "THE BOOK AS MACHINE"

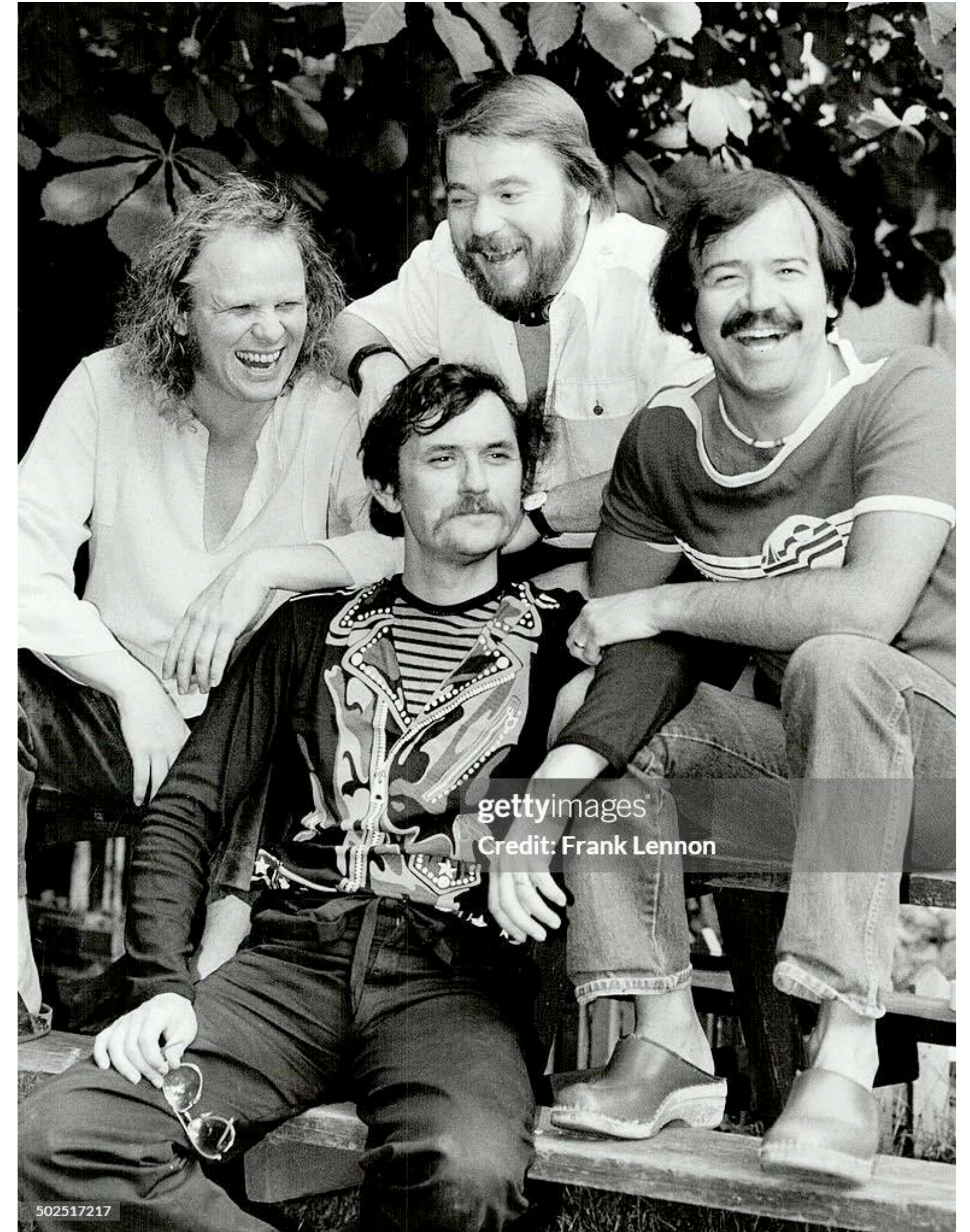
Steve McCaffery and bpNichol

1992

Steve McCaffery and bpNichol

The Toronto Research Group (TRG)

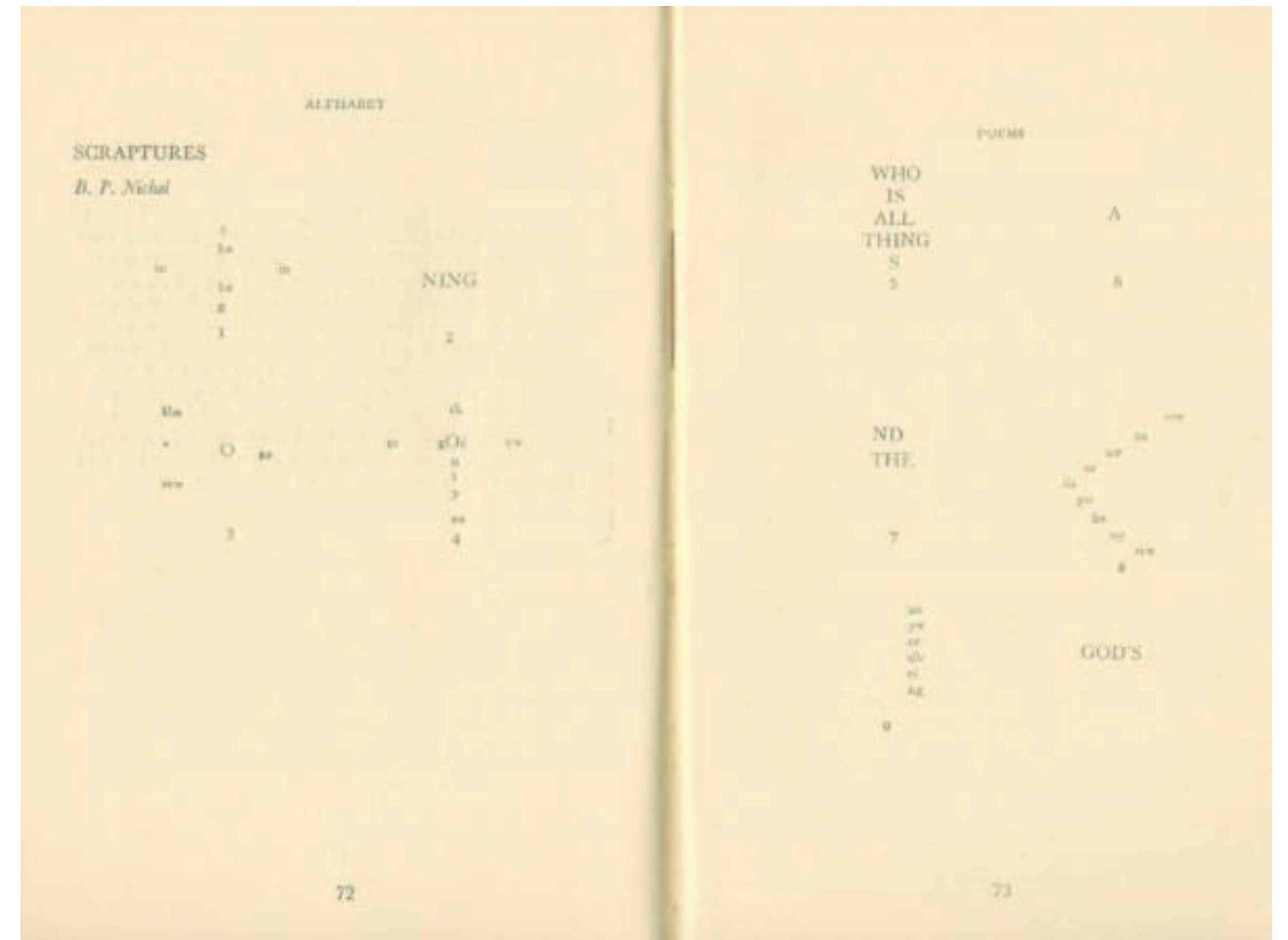
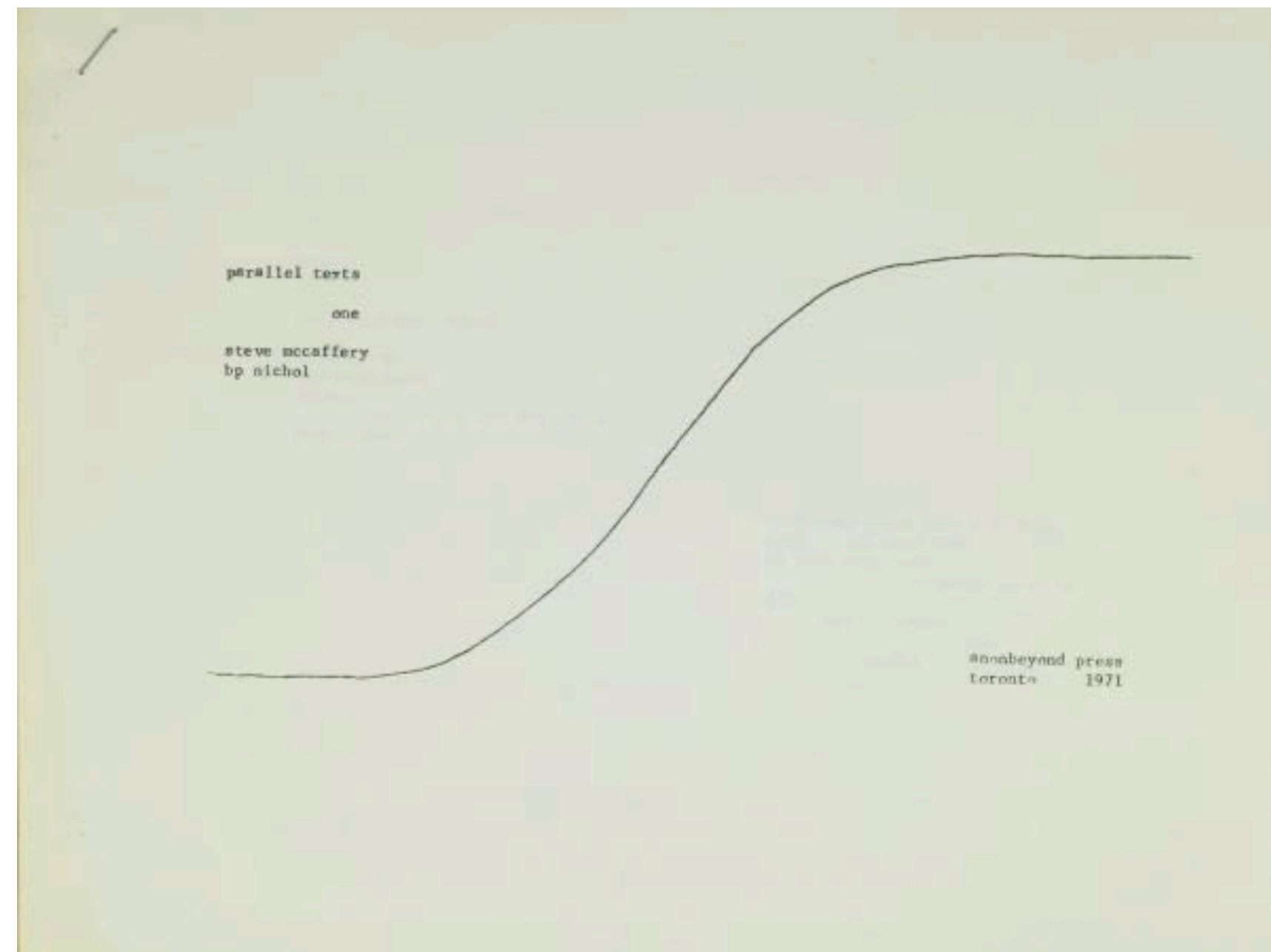
Founded 1973



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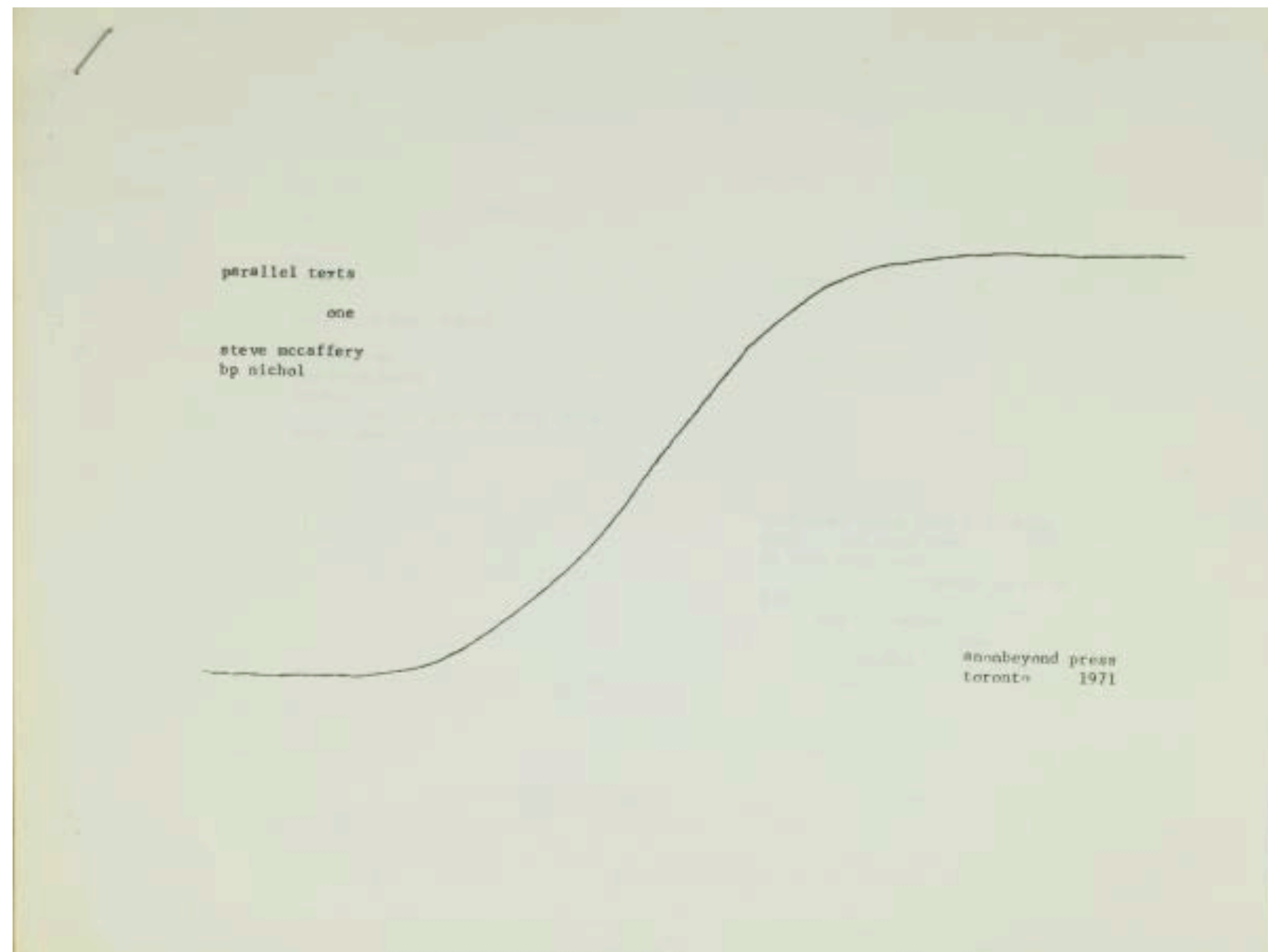
experimental poetics



language theory, interdisciplinary writing practices

# Steve McCaffery and bpNichol

## The Toronto Research Group (TRG)



### Pome Poem B.P. Nichol (1972)

What is a poem is inside of your body body body body  
What is a poem is inside of your head inside your head inside your head  
inside your head

Oh What is a poem is inside of your fingers fingers fingers fingers  
What is a poem is inside of your toes inside your toes inside your toes  
inside your toes

Oh What is a poem is inside of your belly belly belly belly  
What is a poem is inside of your heart inside your heart inside your heart  
inside your heart

Oh What is a poem is inside of your eyes eyes eyes eyes  
What is a poem is inside of your nose inside your nose inside your nose  
inside your nose

Oh What is a poem is inside of your ears ears ears ears  
What is a poem is inside of your mouth inside your mouth inside your mouth  
inside your mouth

Oh What is a poem is inside of your voice voice voice voice  
What is a poem is inside your body  
inside your head  
inside your fingers  
inside your toes  
inside your belly  
inside your hear  
inside your eyes  
inside your nose  
inside your ears  
inside your lips  
inside your voice

Oh What is a poem is inside of your body body body body  
What is a poem is inside of your happy happy happy happy  
What is a poem is inside of your woe inside your woe inside your woe  
inside your woe

Oh What is a poem is inside of your loving loving loving loving  
What is a poem is inside of your breathing breathing breathing breathing  
breathing breathing breathing breathing  
breathing breathing breathing breathing  
breathing breathing breathing breathing  
breathing breathing breathing breathing  
breathing breathing breathing breathing

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Materiality of language

Poetry = form of intellectual research

The Book as an Active Medium

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Materiality of language

~~Book = passive object that contains words~~

Poetry = form of intellectual research

The Book as an Active Medium

Book = machine that engages the reader in constructing meaning

Book = machine that engages the reader in constructing meaning

Book = n *from* "THE BOOK AS MACHINE" meaning  
Steve McCaffery and bpNichol

*It would be a mistake to suppose that the trend towards the oral and acoustic means that the book is becoming obsolete. It means rather that the book, as it loses its monopoly as a cultural form, will acquire new roles.*

*—Marshall McLuhan*

## The Book as Machine

By machine we mean the book's capacity and method for storing information by arresting, in the relatively immutable form of the printed word, the flow of speech conveying that information. The book's mechanism is activated when the reader picks it up, opens the covers and starts reading it.

# The Book as Machine

## 1) The Book and its physical form

The mechanical structure of the book guides and influences the way language is read and interpreted.

# The Book as Machine

## 1) The Book and its physical form

Lateral flow of line

Vertical columnar build-up of lines on page

Linear movement organized through depth (page upon Page)

# The Book as Machine

## 1) The Book and its physical form

Lateral flow of line

Vertical columnar build-up of lines on page

Linear movement organized through depth (page upon Page)

Pages, Layout, Typography

**= system of interaction**

# The Book as Machine

## 2) The Role of the Reader


Active

Interacting with the books layout, design content

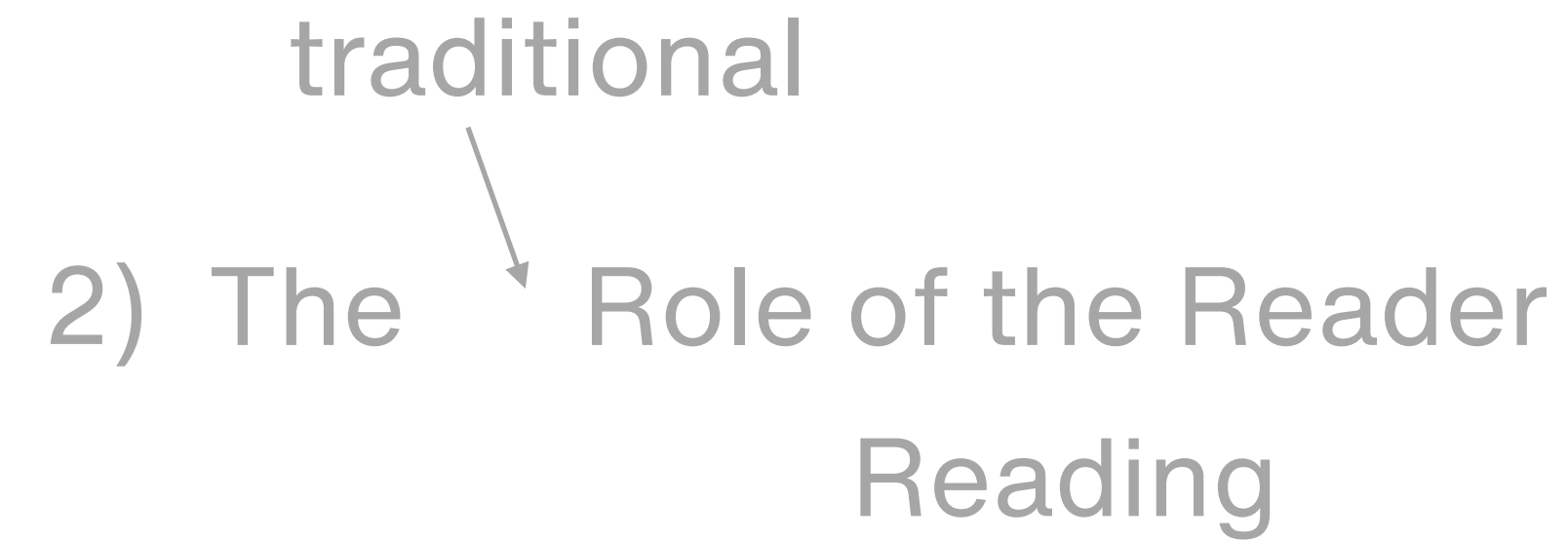
Operator of Book-Machine

# The Book as Machine

traditional

2) The  Role of the Reader  
Reading

# The Book as Machine



reading from beginning to end,  
moving from one page to the next

book = a closed system

meaning = predetermined by author

# The Book as Machine

## 3) The Future Book and its possible form

# The Book as Machine

## 3) The Future Book and its possible form

Multiple ways to navigate a book

Open ended

Non-linear

Fragmented

re-read

Skip

# The Book as Machine

## 3) The Future Book and its possible form

Multiple ways to navigate a book

Open ended

Non-linear

Meaning is not fixed

emerges from engagement with the text  
and its physical properties.

Skip

Fragmented

re-read

# The Book as Machine

## 3) The Future Book and its possible form

Open-text

~~single, fixed interpretation~~

multiple potential meanings

# The Book as Machine

## 4) Language as a Material

# The Book as Machine

## 4) Language as a Material

visual presentation of text = as important as its semantic content

# The Book as Machine

## 4) Language as a Material

Words have shape

sound

visual appearance

# The Book as Machine

## 4) Language as a Material

Words = Parts of machine

The Influence of "THE BOOK AS MACHINE"  
Steve McCaffery and bpNichol

(Canadian) avant-garde literary, experimental poetry circles ✓

experimental literature, postmodernism, and avant-garde poetics ✓ ✓

mainstream ✗

*from* "THE BOOK AS MACHINE"

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poetic, playful

metaphors!

fragmented

references & links to literature

abstract

*from* "THE BOOK AS MACHINE"

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easy for semiotic & literature experts  
(not me)