THE WORD ENTRANCES: VIRTUAL REALITIES IN DEWDNEY'S *LOG ENTRIES*

Christian Bök

Entry: 26/05/91

Log Entries by Christopher Dewdney is a fragmented series of excerpts that constitutes exploratory sorties into the world of the word, the *logos*, each entrance the record of a journey through a frontier of referential uncertainty. Stan Dragland in his "Afterword" points out that "'Log Entries' ... record[s] details of an unfamiliar universe whose rules appear to change from entry to entry" (199), and indeed the text implies that such referential uncertainty stems from a neurolinguistic solipsism, in which the relationship between a sign and its referent is destabilized, not only because a signifier can be detached from its signified and thus refer to any other signifier, but also because the referent itself is shown through language to be a perceptual mirage that changes too fast for language to map its parameters. Allen Hepburn in "The Dream of Self" argues that Dewdney uses his poetry to "document the solipsism of consciousness" (32), the notion that reality is merely a dream constructed by the mind, which is itself part of the dream that it parodoxically constructs. *Log Entries* explores this solipsism by parodying a traditional genre of objective documentation, the scientific report undertaken during a field expedition: the text documents consciousness perceiving reality as a side-effect of consciousness, and in doing so the text becomes part of such a side-effect; the text performs an interrogation of its own ability to document objectively, and in doing so the text records the futility of its own recording. The text ultimately calls into question the whole project of objective interpretation.

Entry: 27/05/91

Log Entries functions within a long tradition of epistemological

enquiries that explore the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived. John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* argues that all knowledge is the empirical product of perceptual data, not of innate ideas (102), and he goes on to observe that routine observations can cause habituated judgements that may in turn condition future perceptions: "This in many cases, by settled habit, in things whereof we have frequent experience, is performed so constantly, and so quick, that we take that for the Perception of our Sensation, which is an *Idea* formed by our Judgement" (146). George Berkeley in *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* extends this empiricist argument to its logical extreme and suggests that "*esse* is *percipi*" (24), that reality cannot be reliably proven to exist without a concomitant perception of reality: "the very *existence* of an unthinking being consists in *being perceived*" (66), a process in which admittedly "words are . . . apt to impose on the understanding" (20). Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception* elaborates upon these points by defining perception as "a re-creation . . . of the world at every moment" (207), and in *The Primacy of Perception* he defines perception as "a nascent *logos*" (25). Dewdney in "Parasite Maintenance" alludes intertextually to this epistemological tradition in order to argue that perception is not transparent since "[t]he section of the brain which presents reality to consciousness is insidiously distorted" (84), particularly by the interpretive cortex, a neural zone not only "devoted to the interpretation of present experience in light of past experience" (84), but also "modified by the speech centre, to which it refers for concept materialization" (84): "language controls not just the way we think, but the way we *are*" (80). Neurolinguistic architecture conditions any perceptual experience to such a degree that, as Dewdney in "Opium 2" observes, "[p]erception is mostly inference" (9): the filtering of reality by language is essentially perception by proxy.

Gregory Bateson in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* perceives that "perception is not by any means a process of mere passive receptivity" (292), but influences reality recursively so that perceptions affect other perceptions—a thesis implicitly explicated by Hepburn, who indicates that "Dewdney assumes a phenomenological *via media* between object and subject . . . , neither of which seems entirely autonomous" (35-36) since the relationship between the two positions is perceived as a feedback mechanism in which language conditions a reality that in turn conditions language. The very

distinction between the exteriority of the world and the interiority of the mind is completely destabilized within this framework since the two regions interpenetrate each other so that the mind within the world is simultaneously a world within the mind. The very term "reality" must at this point be placed under erasure for the simple reason that if perception does indeed misrepresent reality, then the mind can never perceive reality as anything more than a misrepresentation, a phenomenon always already distorted, for to perceive a distortion of reality is merely to replace this distortion with another perception of reality—albeit a seemingly corrected perception, but one whose status as an undistorted original must be immediately rendered suspect to the perceiving mind: to deconstruct one illusion is to construct another that must be in turn deconstructed. Jean Baudrillard in *Simulations* ultimately concludes that "*it is now impossible to isolate the process of the real,* or to prove the real" (41) since "[t]he very definition of the real has become: *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction*" for "[t]he real is not only what can be reproduced, *but that which always already reproduced*" (146). *Log Entries* operates upon the principle that, if the senses are deceptive, then all knowledge built upon empirical evidence may be nothing more than a fragile web of illusions, and the text in fact playfully explores the implications of such neurolinguistic solipsism—a solipsism that reaches its greatest degree of conceptual sophistication in the contemporary theories of quantum mechanics.

Werner Heisenberg in *The Physical Principles of the Quantum Theory* postulates his "uncertainty principle" (20), according to which an observer can drastically affect the outcome of a quantum event merely by observing it, and he suggests that all unobserved, quantum events paradoxically exist within a condition of existential indeterminacy, a condition that physicists whimsically call a "qwiff" (Wolf 170), a state in which a particle can be both existent and non-existent simultaneously, until an observer intrudes and causes the wavefunction to collapse in favour of one extreme or the other. Erwin Schrödinger in "The Present Situation in Quantum Mechanics" attempts to refute this theory by showing the way in which it implies that a cat, until observed, can be both alive and dead simultaneously (157), but in making this refutation he succeeds only in raising the possibility that the interference of an observer may in fact register at the macroscopic level: reality may be nothing more than the outcome of perception, and to perceive reality may

be to manipulate it. The very possibility that reality relies upon observation in order to exist suggests that no reality independent of observation can be proven to exist since to attempt such a proof is to interfere with reality as an observer; moreover, the explanations that the mind uses to explain reality may in fact reveal less about reality than they do about explanations that the mind uses to explain reality. This ontological dilemma has incited a debate between two sets of physicists, "objectivists" and "projectivists," the former believing that scientific paradigms describe a reality independent of its own description, the latter believing that scientific paradigms describe a reality determined in part by its own description: the objectivists believe that the territory precedes the map, while the projectivists believe that the map precedes the territory.

Log Entries is a projectivist document, in that it repeatedly conflates this distinction between map and territory, sign and referent, particularly when the text reports that "[t]he map had been torn so that the tear intersected theiyr route right where we found it (the route and the tear)" (*Paleozoic* [52]): the ambiguous word "it" refers simultaneously to both the representation and the thing represented so that the reader cannot know for certain whether the territory verifies the truth of the map or whether the map verifies the truth of the territory, and as a result the map becomes as provisional as "the epidermal covering on the teeth /. . . / [that] can be written on by ball point pen / before it shrivels" (*Paleozoic* [48]). Dewdney in "Coelacanth" suggests that reality is "[a] map / with / no / corresponding / geographical / landmarks" (15-20), a thesis that calls to mind not only Bateson, who writes that "the mental world is only maps of maps of maps, ad infinitum" (460-461), but also Baudrillard, who writes that "the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it" for "[h]enceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory" since "it is the map that engenders the territory" (2). This philosophical *theorein* finds its technological *praxis* in the field of artifical intelligence, where contemporary scientists are attempting to construct "virtual realities" (Benedikt 4), isolation chambers in which the senses of a subject are artificially stimulated, ideally through direct, neocortical contact, so as to create an orchestrated simulation so internally consistent that, for all intents and purposes, the subject functions within a private cosmos indistinguishable from the "real" reality.

Virtual reality is in fact the operating principle of interactive

videogames and flight simulators, and this new technology provides the basis for such futuristic devices as the "holodecks" in *Star Trek*, devices for constructing artificial experiences that respond to the responses of their participants. William Gibson in *Neuromancer* coins the term "cyberspace" (51) to describe the private realm of virtual reality, "a consensual hallucination" (51), usually produced by the integration of neural circuitry with electronic circuitry, and Gibson warns that the progressive development of such neuro-technologies must inevitably foment paranoid speculations about the ontological status of this present reality, since it too may be nothing more than an orchestrated simulation, a narrative that the mind either tells itself or is told to tell itself. Baudrillard observes that "[s]imulation is no longer . . . a referential being or a substance" for "[i]t is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (2), an existential plane thrown into, what Jacques Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena* might call, a state of *différance* (129), a state in which perceived reality is never present to itself, but is always already a supplementary representation of itself continually realized through reference to other supplementary representations of itself. *Log Entries* reports, for example, that "(between) the shadow/ and our eyes/ lies/ the virtual image" (*Alter* 68), and between this virtual image and our eyes must presumably lie still another virtual image so that reality becomes an endless series of realizations about realizations, what Edgar Allan Poe might call "a dream within a dream" (11). Dewdney in *The Immaculate Perception* points out that "[e]xistence in any mode other than the virtual would expose the inherent paradox upon which the whole show is based" (13), and this fact means that, now more than ever, modern sciences must contend with a philosophical riddle recently paraphrased in all its banality by a popular commercial for video technology: "Is it live or is it Memorex?"

Entry: 29/05/91

Log Entries is informed by such an ontological question, in that the text records the surreal observations of a fragmented subject attempting to deal with the referential uncertainty of perceived reality. Steve McCaffery in "Strata and Strategy" describes the format of the text as follows:

> 'Log Entries' is possibly Dewdney's most complex single piece to date challenging the reader to experience the text as particle and

> feedback. The piece comprises prose passages, extremely frag-
> mented, un-hinged from context and drifting as verbal particles
> across the top surface of each page. Page itself must function
> as the ocular instrument for observing this incessant linguis-
> tic flow, whose points of origin and of destination are equally
> obscured. Below each prose fragment and placed in obvious
> iconic disjunction are corresponding poems 'of explanation.' (195)

Dewdney in the *Rubicon* interview describes *Log Entries* as a set of "infra-books" (97), a set of books within books, a set of fragmentary entries accompanied by a set of fragmentary marginalia, and this reliance upon the fragment, the excerpt, dramatizes the way in which perception randomly samples the entire continuum of potential experience. *Log Entries* describes a man who has mastered "perceptual simultaneity" (*Alter* 64), "monitoring the exact source & cause of every phenomenon presented to his perceptions" (*Alter* 64); however, Dewdney in *The Immaculate Perception* implies that such a feat is impossible: "[b]ecause of equipment limitations, perception is confined to a selective sample of a more extensive continuum" (17). Everything cannot be monitored at once: experience is a concatenation of disparate points of perceptual attention, a concatenation whose disjunctions are subsequently synthesized by the mind.

McCaffery observes that "'Log Entries' takes on a particular quality as a zone of perceptibility placed before the reader" (196), and indeed the poem acts as a metaphorical model of perceptual experience: the entries often begin in midsentence and then end in midsentence without any apparent, transitional coherency, and such fragmentation dramatizes the way in which interlexical breaks, between words, between sentences, may represent nothing more than arbitrary scissions in the entire continuum of possible textuality; for all writing, all reading, is in fact an act of sampling, an act of citation, the excerpts of which are arranged by the mind into a pattern of syntagmatic cohesion. *Log Entries* attempts to record this perceptual process and in doing so becomes the object of this perceptual process: each upper entry provides a fragmentary report of a fragmentary reality, while each lower entry provides a fragmentary report of a fragmentary report; the reader must in turn confront the entire text as a reality to be reported. The text dramatizes the fact that any attempt to synthesize sensory experience only produces other lacunae, other caesurae, that must be in turn synthesized: perception, like writing, is a fundamental act of (dis)continuous

(mis)reading. The text in fact tries to make coherent its principles of textual incoherency by resorting to the discourse of quantum mechanics in order to compare syntactical construction with electromagnetic phenomena, phenomena in which words are implicitly equated with wavicles, quantum entities that demonstrate the characteristics of either particles or waves, depending upon the perspective of the observer.

Log Entries first relates words to particles by implying that words exemplify an atomistic structure, in which "each word has a negative or positive end, according to the placement of the consonants (positive) and vowels (negative)" (*Paleozoic* [58]) so that "the total value of a word as negative, positive, or neutral, depends upon the proportions of negative and positive elements" (*Paleozoic* [58]). This elaborate conceit implies that the internal cohesiveness of a text is presumably subject to the electromagnetic character of the textual components, either their mutual attraction or their mutual repulsion—opposite charges attract; identical charges repulse. The text actually brings inimical particles into direct contact: like lightning, "the Poem always seeks the shortest distance between two points" (*Paleozoic* [55]), and the linguistic volatility produced by this reaction means that "[o]ne has to be careful about choice of conductors, never stand in an open field away from trees or other high objects" (*Paleozoic* [55]); after all, such a syntactical process represents a kind of electrical storm, in which "[m]eaning is the return stroke" (*Immaculate* 68). The text, however, points out that words are not simply discrete particles, but are also interacting waveforms. The text first relates words to waves by stating that "the vowels are spaces for / ... / the onsonants to resonate in" (*Paleozoic* [58]) so that, consequently, a word becomes a series of mutually sustained vibrations, a series of relational gaps, none independent, all interdependent: for example, the consonant "c" in the above word "consonant" may be absent, but the letter nevertheless resonates because its implied presence is sustained by the encoded field of relations among the other letters. *Log Entries* goes on to indicate that a "new word" can appear in the "standing wave pattern" produced by the "vibrations" of two other surrounding words (*Radiant* 56), and this phenomenon suggests that a word is actually a series of interference patterns produced by a series of interference patterns among other words. Dewdney in "Think Pool" (another poem structured as a series of log entries) observes that "[t]here are

words that are standing waves between the words" (*Alter* 39), and "[t]here are poems that are the standing waves between real poems" (39), "[s]tanding waves fabricated by words vibrating with the resonance memory gives them" (39). Dewdney in fact provides a kind of quantum definition of *différance.*

Dewdney in "Parasite Maintenance" explains this relationship between particle (as discrete entity) and wave (as relational function) by using the terms "kernel" and "halo" to describe the bipartite structure of words: "[t]he kernel is the hard inner core ... which exists taxonomically only, the halo is the aura of ... connotations ... which surround the word" (78). Dewdney in *Rubicon* extends this explanation:

> [A]n interference syntax is set up between two discrete words on a page, two discrete entities, and ... between them they'll set up standing waves of interference between their meanings. Conventional syntax is a net that we usually put between those words, but there are unconventional standing waves between those two discrete entities, and sometimes I'm interested in these other possibilities. (109)

Words, to Dewdney, have a "paradigmatic halo" (*Rubicon* 109) that resembles, what he elsewhere calls, the "associational areola" (Immaculate 71), a connotative field whose interaction with other connotative fields causes the perceiving individual to experience "hypercognitive sequences" (*Immaculate* 72), synaesthetic responses that transcend habituated perceptions, making tenable, for example, an analogy between dragonflies and "the idea of stained glass windows hunting in the Carboniferous swamps" (*Paleozoic* [52]). Peter O'Brien in *Rubicon* observes that in *Log Entries* "work seems to get lost, the words disappear" (109), through a process of negation that creates a "multitude of possibilities" (109) since every reader creates "different associations, different words that [they] fill in the spaces with" (109): every reading becomes a subjective experience that re-enacts the subjective experience of perception. O'Brien describes this associative process as a "quantum jump" (109), the translation of a subatomic particle from one point to another without any apparent crossing of the intervening distance—an apt metaphor for poetic inspiration. Dewdney strives to establish unexpected relationships among words, and ironically enough he explains this process by using an elaborate conceit

that actually performs this process, equating the recombinant properties of quanta with the recombinant properties of texts.

Log Entries also tries to explain itself with hermetic footnotes apparently unrelated to their antecedent context, the most startling footnote of which is perhaps the image of "[a]n octopus on the rink at half time" (*Alter* 70), an image apparently derived from a childhood memory of hockey games. Dewdney in *Rubicon* explains:

> They used to throw octopi onto the ice at Maple Leaf Gardens. Here you are just seven years old and you're just piecing together reality, and the camera would pan the ice and there would be these flattened octopi, and I happen to have really liked octopi . . . , so I was intrigued by this conjunction. . . . For me it wasn't an expression of anger or disgust, which it was, of course, for those people who threw them. It was just that octopi had a tendency to gravitate toward the ice at half-time! So that's a kind of . . . stubborn holding of . . . primal perceptions. (112)

Dewdney suggests that perception privileges the logic of correlation over the logic of causality: causality is in fact a correlative imperative, the wilful perception of repeated correlations through time. Dewdney claims to defamiliarize such perceptual correlation by "making a mutation in the text which will induce this response that is not normally . . . visible—it has to be within the reader" (109). Dewdney suggests that any structural correlations between disparate phenomena are not actually immanent within such phenomena, but are projected onto such phenomena by the perceiving subject: the perceiver in effect determines the provisional structure of the reality perceived by always (mis)interpreting a very narrow band of perceptual awareness. *Log Entries* reports that, in the case of humans, "[y]ou'd be surprised at how minimal and infrequent the clues were they used for situation 'keying'" (*Radiant* 52).

Entry 03/06/91

Log Entries presents a documentary enigma, in that the identity of its male chronicler, if in fact he is a single person, appears to be fragmented, schizophrenic, playing various roles interchangeably: the chronicler appears to be both a time traveller and a space traveller, both a performer *of* an experiment and a performer *in* an experiment, both an individual will and a collective will, both a human and an alien. *Log Entries* dramatizes the way in which

coherent identity is itself part of the perceptual mirage since, as
Dewdney in *The Immaculate Perception* observes, consciousness is
"a self-regulating illusion tantamount to virtual existence" (13), a
kind of dream whose "very *substance* . . . breaks down under
scrutiny" (79): the self is always already divided from itself due to
its ability to perceive itself as other than itself. *Log Entries* not only
literalizes this continual subdivision of the self into its separate
intangibilities, but also emphasizes that, just as "the radar's echo
'in-forms' the radar" (*Fovea* 43), so also is the perceiving mind a
feedback mechanism, affecting reality while being in turn affected
by it. *Log Entries* imitates this feedback structure t(r)opologically:
for example, the chronicler reports that "[m]y left hand developed
an independent urge to shake my right hand in a brief and friend-
ly manner" (*Paleozoic* [52]), resulting perhaps in the "fashioning [of]
crude loopholes with our bare hands" (*Radiant* 54); elsewhere, the
chronicler describes a radar screen, in which "resistors coil and
grope blindly / for each other's leads" (*Fovea* 39), "[h]oping by some
chance / to complete a circuit of themselves / that they may dis-
solve into function" (*Fovea* 39). Moreover, such recursion manifests
itself as a structural principle in the entry that begins elliptically
with "the illusion of ascending, it seems, was maintained by con-
stantly dwindling" (*Fovea* 42), an entry that later ends elliptically
with "resisting intention a priori, the illusion of ascending, it seems,
was maintained. . . ." (*Fovea* 42), the entire entry of course suggesting
its own infinite process of cyclical repetition.

    Log Entries in fact claims that, "[according to] certain super-
stitions, hell appeared to be a neural feedback-masturbation system
of descending orders" (*Paleozoic* [50]), a system in which:

> Primary reactions were the first step in inevitable design.
> Satan was a fake, he knew it. The whole concept was a part
> of its workings. Knowledge was gained only by the reduc-
> tion of an idea to its basic, immobile parts. (*Paleozoic* [50])

This description of hell appears to refer to this reality, in that this
reality is, according to science, a deterministic universe, in which
reason is deductive, and incarnate evil is a fiction integrated into
the fiction of reality, with everything operating inside a universal
order that may in fact be the product of neural feedback. The text
suggests not only that this reality may be nothing more than a su-
perstition within another reality, but also that the ontological

status of this reality cannot be adequately determined by deductive reasoning since such reasoning must be based upon empirical evidence that is itself questioned by deductive reasoning. All measurements, for example, are rendered unreliable because they are presumably integrated into the illusion: the chronicler reports not only that "[w]e went out into the rowboat every day to drop more equipment and any metal refuse we had" (*Paleozoic* [46]), but also that "[w]e tried to put them roughly in the same place as before, however, the only reference point . . . was a sand spit [that] probably changed position every day anyway" (*Paleozoic* [46]); moreover, the chronicler reports that "[w]e then affixed the rulers to a hellmutt that kept them at a constant distance from our eyes so that the measurements would be consistent through repeated readings" (Paleozoic [48]), but "[w]e soon began to notice that . . . the individual bands of the spectrum in the halos changed in width each day" (*Paleozoic* [48]). The text demonstrates implicitly that scientific controls become unreliable in a universe of perceptual fluctuations, all of which are subject to both relativity and uncertainty: "[i]t was completely impossible to systematically reason if we had awakened from our dreams on a collective or individual basis" (*Paleozoic* [52]).

Log Entries depicts a reality affected by observation and actually documents attempts made by its chronicler to exert perceptual control over the mirage: the chronicler reports that "although I maintained a very strong 'idea' of the windshield, the occasional snowflake would still be forced through the glass (we were travelling at about 40 m.p.h)" (*Paleozoic* [54]). The text also reports that "you spot a tornado the tornado immediately becomes conscious of you & will begin to move towards you until you look away & stop thinking or visualizing it in your mind" (*Alter* 71). Dewdney in *Rubicon* explains this last image by saying:

> I think what I was getting at in that poem was . . . a recent development in cosmological theory, that is to say the anthropocentric theory—that we create the universe by looking at it . . . , that the universe exists so that we can study it. . . . I was indicating a paranoid framework which gave the tornado both consciousness and telepathic powers. By looking at the tornado one formed a mental image . . . which the tornado homed in on almost narcissistically . . . , almost as if the tornado were a device for seeking out and destroying . . . human consciousness by having in its mechanism, its mode of operation, a simple feedback circuit which

would respond to recognition of its form within the conscious-
ness of an onlooker who happened to be unfortunate enough to
be looking at it, to happen to glance at it, thus starting an irre-
versible process inextricably linked to the very nature of human
consciousness. (105)

Log Entries uses this motif of recursion to suggest that sensory
feedback is a specular structure, that the perception of reality in-
duces a condition of narcissism: reality is in fact perceived in a
way that reflects the mind of the perceiver.

Log Entries claims that reality is a "handfed illusion" (*Alter* 68),
"[v]irtually what we had / (had) expected" (*Alter* 68), a perceptual
milieu in which the seeker presumably discovers only what is sought:
"[w]e had a good idea of what we would find before we got here"
(*Alter* 63). Dewdney in "Alter Sublime" argues that reality is "the mind
eating itself" (43-44), the mind seeing only "the febrile narcissus /
of [its] after-image" (11), and indeed the chronicler dramatizes this
perceptual narcissism by pointing out that "[i]f there are two people
in the same room with [a] portrait both . . . observe that the portrait
is staring at them (each, themselves)" (*Alter* 68) even though the male
artist has drawn the portrait so that it actually stares at himself:
"[t]his is the virtual stare, a rainbow of solipsism stretched between
all those who are encompassed within the illusion. . . . The fixed
eyes of the idol in the mandatory witnessing of its own two-dimen-
sionality" (*Alter* 68). The ambiguity of the word "idol" (which in this
context may refer to either the person or the portrait) raises the
possibility of a recursive paradox: the portrait may not be the means
by which people see themselves; instead, people may be the means by
which the portrait sees itself—the proverbial problem of recursive
causality. Such structures of both recursion and feedback are tautologi-
cal principles that blur not only the temporal distinction between
cause and effect, but also the topological distinction between inside
and outside. This breakdown between exteriority and interiority is
dramatized in the log entry that describes a surreal act of fellatio, in
which the penis of the chronicler is inserted into the mouth of a
snake, whose tongue is likewise inserted into the penis of the
chronicler (*Fovea* 41); both the snake and the man are simultaneously
penetrating and penetrated, and this erotic interpenetration, this
bizarre *ourobouros*, is a topological contortion that describes metaphori-
cally the narcissistic relationship between perceiver and perceived:
the mind is within a reality within the mind. *Log Entries* appears to

indicate that such a narcissistic impulse in human perception contributes to an obsessive anthropomorphization of the perceived environment: for example, the chronicler reports that winter rivers "develop protective membranes" (*Paleozoic* [59]), that jazz music is a "daemon imprisoned in his horn" (*Alter* 67), and that a refrigerator engine utters "a sudden weak chorus of tenuous and monotonous voices" (*Radiant* 47); however, such reports are not presented as poetically rendered descriptions, but are conveyed in a scientifically objective tone—a tone apparently intended to suggest that these perceptions are indeed realistic, not fantastic. *Log Entries* demonstrates that such anthropomorphization is sustained through the use of language, what Dewdney in "Transubstantiation" might call, the "'Generation' of the Logos" (*Paleozoic* [34]): Hepburn in fact observes that, to Dewdney, "[t]he Logos . . . is perhaps nothing more than a self-animated illusion that tantalizingly promises to rescue the errant self by virtue of its supposed externality to the self" (43) since "[t]he Logos is something of a soporific, a 'divine anaesthesia' that momentarily diverts the mind lost in its own labyrinthine structures" (44)— language provides only a "two foot thread of meaning in / the Mammoth Caverns" (*Paleozoic* [58]). Dewdney implies that perception is filtered by a language that is itself perceptually distortable: after all, the word "owls" can sound like "owl-hose" (*Paleozoic* [46]), and the word "jazz bands" can sound like "jazz bends" (*Paleozoic* [49]). Dewdney suggests that even a scientific discourse cannot guarantee an objective escape from a distorted interpretation of sensory perception: such interpretation is simply a means "to construct a prison around us / surer / than any lie" (*Alter* 65).

Entry: 06/06/91

Log Entries depicts reality as a perceptual mirage, and indeed contemporary science has proposed that this mirage can be reproduced cybernetically: for example, the technological innovations in virtual reality necessarily invoke the paranoid hypothesis that this reality is itself an orchestrated simulation since the present ability to produce sensory bypass by directly interfacing neural circuitry with electronic circuitry means that perceptual experience can be remotely controlled. Dewdney in *The Immaculate Perception* addresses this possibility when explicating sensory bypass: "[t]he textured frequencies of music could be patched-in directly to the central

nervous system" (55) so that "a dancer's musculature could be choreographed into an involuntary series of exquisite, digitalized movements" (55). Dewdney in *Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night* writes that "everything is working by remote control" (31), and in "Parasite Maintenance" he suggests that the poetic process is itself accomplished through a psychic surrender to a controlling agency outside the self: "[t]he radio telescope becomes a model of the *bi-conscious* interface between 'the mind' and signals from the 'outside' that the poet receives" (77). Dewdney in "Parasite Maintenance" admits to being inspired by Jack Spicer, who defines the "outside" as something "just as far outside as Mars—. . . as far away as those galaxies that seem to be sending radio messages to us with the whole galaxy blowing up just to say something to us" (Blaser 273), a distant source of creative energy to which sensitive poets can make themselves receptive.

Robert Fones in "The Twilight of Self-Consciousness" admits to David McFadden that Spicer impresses Dewdney because the outside approaches "a religious discipline—the subversion of the ego to create a state . . . more receptive to . . . Divine Inspiration" (94-95). Dewdney, however, uses a scientific discourse to secularize this inspiration, particularly in "On Attaining Remote-Control" where he writes that the "poem is written within the jurisdiction / of remote control" (23-24): to Dewdney, the outside is not so much mystical as technical, not so much divine as distant; to Dewdney, the outside is perhaps the place from which a simulation of reality is orchestrated, not by angels, but by agents. This poetic relationship between the outside and the inside is in fact similar to a paradox of virtual reality, the relationship between the operator outside a simulator and the participant inside a simulator: to the participant experiencing virtual reality, the operator of the machine occupies a transcendent position because the reality of the operator is perceptually inaccessible to the participant, unless of course the operator chooses to end the simulation, in which case the participant may exit the machine and again experience the world outside it—a world whose status as the outside must be immediately called into question since the operator of the machine may have chosen merely to simulate the ending of the simulation, in which case the outside is again merely the inside. The outside can only be contemplated as a site whose exteriority is already implicated within its interiority: paradoxically, the outside and inside are inside and

outside each other, a topology that resembles the theoretical relationship between the perceiver and the perceived.

Log Entries describes the universe as a grand experiment in which the chronicler acts as an experimental subject trying to understand the conditions of the experiment—a recurrent theme in speculative fiction: for example, Gardner Dozois in his story "Solace" describes a male protagonist who wishes to punish himself by undergoing a cyberspatial simulation; the protagonist enters the isolation chamber, but before anything happens, the experiment is apparently aborted, and he is evicted unharmed from the chamber; however, he remains uncertain thereafter about whether or not the experiment is in fact cancelled, and the story ends with the protagonist subjecting himself to torturous extremes of sensation in a futile attempt to confirm that his experience of reality is indeed real. *Log Entries* appears to recount a similar, ontological dilemma confronted by an individual who also attempts to solve it through similar, sensory extremes— torturous rituals that perhaps serve uselessly to verify the reality of reality by "stripping the nerves / back to the very / source / . . . / pinpoint of pain itself" (*Paleozoic* [49]). The chronicler reports that, for therapy:

> We would . . . infuriate ourselves deliberately by repeatedly hitting our fingers with a hammer. . . . We would take drugs to make us complete amnesiacs. . . . We would shadow box by streetlamps at night and try for hours to move just a little faster than our image in the mirror. We would tie our hands and feet and attempt to pull ourselves great distances by our teeth. . . . The bruises were treated with boiling oil every night while ice was applied to the back of the neck. Our bedrooms were unendurably hot so that we would sweat profusely on our sheets of clear, sticky vinyl. (*Radiant* 54)

The chronicler reports elsewhere that "[t]hese figures exist in arenas of time / centred on extreme violence (*Alter* 44), "[t]ime exaggerated & / savoured to favour the most brutal rituals" (*Fovea* 44), rituals in which perhaps "accidents became deliberate" (*Paleozoic* [45]).

Log Entries apparently depicts a remotely controlled individual reduced existentially to the role of "an irritable slug, forced to substantiate its divinity by performing small feats" (*Alter* 67), the victim perhaps of "our humming god / [who] suffers from obesity / and tears fingers from children" (*Paleozoic* [53]). The attempt to confirm the ontological status of reality through sensory extremes

constitutes an attempt to transcend what is perceived to be a virtual reality: just as the ascetic may undergo extremes of sensory deprivation and the hedonist may undergo extremes of sensory indulgence, all to escape a false, material reality perceived to be no more than a pale imitation of a true, spiritual reality, so also does the chronicler appear to undergo similar extremes of sensation in order to transcend his own ontological condition: the chronicler, for example, professes to perceive heaven, "a world before and after speech" (*Radiant* 48), when he is first subjected to an infinite amplification of all ambient noise and is then later exposed to an infinite silencing of all such noise (*Radiant* 47-48); either extreme induces transcendence; "[t]he exact opposite of satori is exactly satori" (*Fovea* 41). The chronicler in effect experiences the same kind of sensory extremes normally attributed to visionary poets, and the text in this sense becomes a secularized allegory about poetic exploration, an allegory in which apparently incoherent excesses can provide insight into apparently coherent limits. The text, however, complicates this romantic paradigm by depicting the chronicler not only as the victim of a god, but also as the god of a victim: the chronicler is not only a performer in an experiment, but also a performer of an experiment—an individual who remotely controls while being himself remotely controlled. Eugene P. Wigner in *Symmetries and Reflections* presents a quantum paradox in which an observer observing an object influences the object, but is in turn simultaneously influenced by another observer observing the first observer observing the object (1005): within this paradigm every observer influences every other observer so that all are simultaneously controlling and controlled in a universal, feedback circuit.

Log Entries reveals that the chronicler is not simply a "mammalian receiver" (*Radiant* 49), but also one of many "agents of memory" (*Paleozoic* [45]), otherwise known as "frequency monitors in a linkage system outside of history" (*Radiant* 57), agents "completely acquainted with every aspect of evolution" (*Radiant* 53) and able to realize themselves "as the vanguard species of any phase" (*Radiant* 53). Dewdney in "From a Handbook of Remote Control" suggests that such agents, "[e]xisting in a paradox legalized by time" (90), can create virtual realities by constructing "a meticulous lie around another being" (87) so that "[p]article by particle the solid reality that composed the allegorical ground . . . is replaced by

fantasies" (87), and indeed such agents orchestrate the perceptual milieu of others—if not, of each other:

> [W]hat we see out of, is completely transmuted in a transubstan-
> tiation of actuality. The replacement of reality with fiction is
> the same process. The rug is pulled in front of your eyes off
> a facsimile of itself. Remote control alien replacement of all
> that which you call tangible. ("On Fossilization" 81).

Dewdney admits to McFadden that remote control is produced by "an alien group of inhuman superintelligent people who control other unwitting victims as we all are and which is extant right now" (92), and Dewdney in "Control Data" reiterates this point by saying that "[h]uman beings are a catalyst freeing information into the cosmos in the same manner that plants free oxygen into the atmosphere, unknowingly perpetuating higher forms of intelligence" (43). Frequency monitors may be such an intelligence, and their desire for information may be satisfied by the kind of violent rituals that the chronicler performs; alternatively, such violent rituals may frustrate the desire for information, since the chronicler reports that "[t]he distortionist movement began several years ago in order to provide incorrect information for remote-control's omniscient sensors" (*Fovea* 40): absurd violence may actually be a way for the chronicler to defy authority, to create "knots / in the Radar Screens of Remote-Control" (*Fovea* 40). *Log Entries* can in fact be read as a ciphered text that does violence to itself in order to provide misinformation for a reader who aspires to textual omniscience, a reader who tries to derive a definitive meaning from the text, a meaning supposedly immanent within the text and thus independent from the perceptual interference of its reader.

Entry: 09/06/91

Log Entries documents a universe of referential uncertainty, a universe that fluctuates according to the perceptions of an apparently schizophrenic consciousness, and indeed the text operates upon the principle that perceived reality is a recursive hallucination, in which the observer manipulates reality while being in turn manipulated by it. *Log Entries* suggests that reality is not an objective phenomenon perceived without mediation by a disengaged observer; instead, reality is perceived as a kind of dream created by a perceiving mind that is itself part of the dream: the text parodies scientific documentation and calls into question the possibility of objective interpretation, since such

interpretation becomes impossible in a universe conditioned by subjective experience. *Log Entries* in fact argues that, "at first thought unbounded" (*Fovea* 42), the universe becomes "a beautiful & endless prison, the original purpose . . . hopelessly lost in the nature of that purpose" (*Fovea* 42): the text presupposes that the ontological status of a thing perceived can always be called into question, particularly in a universe where order is determined by the principles of both uncertainty and relativity, a universe where believing is seeing. *Log Entries* dramatizes a point made by Dewdney in his first "Author's Preface" where he suggests that "a man's entire experiential memory exists only unto himself, is fractionally communicable and chronologically ephemeral" (*Paleozoic* [15]): Dewdney in effect suggests that "[t]he five senses register / a vague roulette to it all" ("Coelacanth" 13-14) and that "[w]e are compulsive gamblers" ("Fovea Centralis" 8).

WORKS CITED

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind.* Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1987.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations.* Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

Benedikt, Michael K. *Cyberspace.* Cambridge: MIT, 1991.

Berkeley, George. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge.* Ed. Colin M. Turbayne. New York: Liberal Arts, 1957.

Blaser, Robin. "The Practice of Outside." *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer.* Los Angeles: Black Sparrow, 1975. 271-329.

Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and Phenonmenon.* Trans. David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973.

Dewdney, Christopher. *Alter Sublime.* Toronto: Coach House, 1980.

—. *Fovea Centralis.* Toronto: Coach House, 1975.

—. *The Immaculate Perception.* Toronto: Anansi, 1986.

—. "An Interview With Christopher Dewdney." With Peter O'Brien. *Rubicon* 5 (Summer 1985): 88-117.

—. *A Paleozoic Geology of London, Ontario.* Toronto: Coach House, 1973.

—. *Radiant Inventory.* Toronto: McCelland and Stewart, 1983.

—. *Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night*. Berkeley: The Figures, 1978.

Dozois, Gardner. "Solace." *Omni* February 1989: 48+.

Dragland, Stan. "Afterword." *Predators of the Adoration*. By Christopher Dewdney. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983. 190-206.

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace, 1984.

Heisenberg, Werner. *The Physical Principles of the Quantum Theory*. Trans. Carl Eckart and Frank C. Hoyt. New York: Cover, 1949.

Hepburn, Allen. "The Dream of Self: Perception and Consciousness in Dewdney's Poetry." *Canadian Poetry* 20 (Spring-Summer 1987): 31-50.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Peter Nidditch. New York: Oxford UP, 1975.

McCaffery, Steve. "Strata and Strategy: 'Pataphysics in the Poetry of Christopher Dewdney." *North of Intention*. Toronto / New York: Nightwood / Roof, 1986. 187-200.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan, 1962.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "A Dream Within A Dream." *The Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Killis Campbell. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962. 26-28.

Schrödinger, Erwin. "The Present Situation in Quantum Mechanics: A Translation of Schrödinger's 'Cat Paradox' Paper." *Quantum Theory and Measurement*. Trans. John D. Trimmer. Eds. John Archibald Wheeler and Wojciech Hubert Zurek. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1983. 152-167.

Wigner, Eugene P. *Symmetries and Reflections*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1967.

Wolf, Fred Alan. *Taking the Quantum Leap*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981.