McLuhan zoomed in on bad code. He did a bad code primer. It was seminal, Rosette Stone grade. When Douglas Coupland wrote the posse “helped to codify and articulate the genesis of Media Theory that would explode in 1962.” Coupland was writing about the Gutenberg Galaxy. The Galaxy is by McLuhan, but it owes much - good bones - to Walter Ong’s Ramis hunt.

The Galaxy opens with a man clutching a map. Then he starts cutting at it. The man is King Lear. The map is his kingdom. Lear’s foul seed Goneril and Regan watch. Goneril and Regan are the evil brand sisters, breakout creatures from the then new media, visual literacy. Ever saccharin, ever on message Goneril and Regan are the flattest of the flat merchants. They are über bad code. Like the Bard’s script, the Galaxy tracks the sisters and the code. It follows them as they battle Cordelia and Edgar and all the dimensionally amplified. We know how it ends: a hollowed out man on a gory, bloodied stage.
King Lear is a presentation of the new strategy of culture and pow-
er as it affects the state, the family, and the individual psyche:

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
Give me the map there. Know we have divided
In three our kingdom;

In *King Lear*, as in other plays. Shakespeare shows an utter clair-
voyance concerning the social and personal consequences of de-
nudation and stripping of attributes and functions for the sake of
speed, precision, and increased power. His insights appear so rich-
ly in his lines that it is very difficult to select among them. But with
the very opening words of Goneril's aria we are deep in them:

I love you more than words can wield the matter;
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty:
The stripping of the very human senses themselves will be one
of the -themes of this play. The separation of sight from the other
senses has already been stressed in Lear's expression of his "dark-
er purpose" and his resort to the mere visual map. But whereas
Goneril is ready to strip off sight as an expression of devotion, Re-

... I profess Myself an enemy to an other joys
Which the most precious square of sense professes,
Regan will strip off all the human senses so long as she possesses
Lear's love.
The allusion to "the most precious square of sense" shows Shake-
peare doing an almost scholastic demonstration of the need for
a ratio and interplay among the senses as the very constitution of
rationality.
The stripping of the senses and the interruption of their interplay
in tactile synthesis may well have been one of the effects of the
Gutenberg technology. This process of separation and reduction of
functions had certainly reached a critical point by the early sev-
enteenth century when *King Lear* appeared. But to determine how
far such a revolution in the human sense life could have proceed-
d from Gutenberg technology calls for a somewhat different ap-
proach from merely sampling the sensibility of a great play of the
critical period. *King Lear* is a kind of medieval sermon-exemplum or
inductive reasoning to display the madness and misery of the new
Renaissance life of action. Shakespeare explains minutely that the
very principle of action is the splitting up of social operations and of
the private-sense life into specialized segments. The resulting frenzy
to discover a new over-all interplay of forces ensures a furious ac-
tivation of all components and persons affected by the new stress.

*King Lear* is a kind of elaborate case history of people translating
themselves out of a world of roles into the new world of jobs. This
is a process of stripping and denudation which does not occur in-
stantly except in artistic vision. But Shakespeare saw that it had
happened in his time. He was not talking about the future. However,
the older world of roles had lingered on as a ghost just as after a
century of electricity the West still feels the presence of the older
values of literacy and privacy and separateness. Kent, Edgar, and
Cordelia are "out of phase" in the language of W. B. Yeats.

"Strike flat the thick rotundity of the world" cries Lear as a curse
to snap "the most precious square of sense." And the striking flat,
the isolation of the visual is the great achievement of Gutenberg and
the Mercator projection.

But McLuhan and Ong thought it might be
different this time around. Change the ending.
A whole someone might walk out, a thing less
flat. They imagined new electronic technologies
-digital communication mediums - might integrate
ear and eye. Dimensional tableaus would usher
artists better able to map and peer. Then good
things could happen. There could be new
platforms and better sighted selves. That's what
the corner media lab and its scrapped progeny
the Media Box was after. But players need tools.
Need ever changing costumes and props. And
a traveling road show needs a base station to
launch. NEED SUPPORT. Can't do it alone.
Sometimes it's there and works. Some times not.
In the end it didn't work out for the media lab.
There are other maps out there, not just a bard’s storyboard: maps to navigate a bad code terrain, and maps to ride out a face-off with the FLAT. There’s something from a British art critic-historian. Walter Ong had his say. And new kit has cropped up from the digerati. Claire Bishop is the art historian. Her “Artificial Hells” is ace source material on the social turn in the arts as sinkhole. It’s a must have saccharine biopsy textbook. Walter Ong wrote about the bugs that clutch creatives, what holds them back as cartographers. He mapped the map-makers or at least the ones that mattered. And then there are the programmers. But they don’t call it bad code. They call the bugs Code Smell.

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But since participatory art is not only a social activity but also a symbolic one, both embedded in the world and at one remove from it, the positivist social sciences are ultimately less useful in this regard than the abstract reflections of political philosophy. Without finding a more nuanced language to address the artistic status of this work, we risk discussing these practices solely in positivist terms, that is, by focusing on demonstrable impact. One of the aims of this book, then, is to emphasize the aesthetic in the sense of *aisthesis*: an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality. It should be clear by now that I am trying to argue for a more complicated understanding of delegated performance than that offered by a Marxist framework of reification or a contemporary critical discourse rooted in positivist pragmatics and injunctions to social amelioration (as discussed in Chapter 1), all of which reduce these works to standard-issue questions of political correctness.