Cats That Grin: Exploring the Logics of Curious Cats,

From Wonderland to the Internet

Bonnie Tulloch, University of British Columbia

In his book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), Marshall McLuhan comments on the prophetic nature of art. "Art as radar," he observes, "acts as 'an early alarm system,' as it were, enabling us to discover social and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them" (xi). According to McLuhan, art allows us to "anticipate future social and technological developments, by a generation and more" (xi). Thus, in our attempts to make sense of the logics governing today's world, it is important to consider the insight art holds as a lens through which to contextualize some of the social and technological developments taking place. Adopting McLuhan's view, this paper explores the intertextual connections between the art-form of children's nonsense literature and Internet memes. Specifically, it focuses on the ways that nonsensical cats of children's literature, such as those found in the pages of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, and Dr. Seuss, can inform our understanding of the sense-making practices underlying people's engagement with nonsensical cats online, as found in the famous Internet meme: LOLCats. Exploring the correlations between these non-digital and digital texts not only allows us to see how Internet memes function as "(post)modern folklore" (Shifman 15), but also how they reflect some of the "deep social and cultural structures" we find in children's literature (Shifman 15). The logic of Carroll's Cheshire cat, Lear's Pussycat, and Seuss's Cat in the Hat, I argue, have important insights to teach us when it comes to interpreting the logic of "LOLs" and the logic of "lulz" underlying people's engagement with Internet memes online (Miltner).

Works Cited

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man*. 2nd ed., The New American

Library, 1964.

Miltner, Kate M. "'There's no place for lulz on LOLCats': The Role of Genre, Gender, and

Group Identity in the Interpretation and Enjoyment of an Internet Meme." *First Monday*,

vol. 19, no. 8, 2014.

Shifman, Limor. *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press, 2014.