

# CENTRE FOR SENSORY STUDIES

## MULTISENSORY MUSEOLOGY LECTURE SERIES

### The Explorations of Edmund Snow Carpenter: Anthropology Upside Down

Richard Cavell

Thursday, 24 October 2024

1:00-2:40 PM EST, [Webinar Registration Link](#)

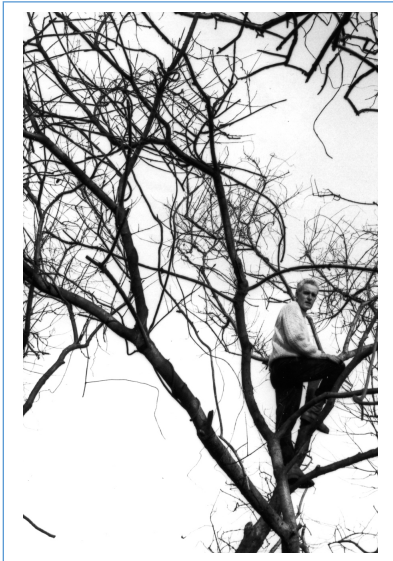


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Edmund Snow Carpenter has been marginal to the history of anthropology and yet central to multisensory museology. A colleague of Marshall McLuhan in the 1950s, Carpenter co-edited with McLuhan the journal *Explorations* and was thus the co-founder of media studies as we know it today. After a decade at the University of Toronto, Carpenter moved to California, where his career took on an increasingly anthropological focus, accompanied by an increasing criticism of the discipline. The nub of this critique was anthropology's insensitivity to the multiplicity of sensorial engagements and cultural articulations outside the visual domain. Carpenter addressed these disciplinary shortcomings in several increasingly polemical texts, as well as in two museum exhibitions. The first of these was the "Witnesses" room in the Menil Collection, Houston Texas, where he sought to complexify the spatial dictates of contemporary museum display through a juxtapositional model for display which he associated with Surrealism. The second of these was the career-defining *Upside Down: Les Arctiques*, produced for the Musée Branly, Paris, in 2008 (and staged 3 years later at the Menil). In this exhibition of paleo-Arctic artifacts, Carpenter sought to turn anthropology upside down by undermining the visual context of display with a broad range of sensorial interactions.

Richard Cavell's teaching, research and supervisions are in media theory. Working broadly in the wake of his University of Toronto mentor, Marshall McLuhan, Cavell has published three books on McLuhan and maintains the website [spectresofmcluhan.arts.ubc.ca](http://spectresofmcluhan.arts.ubc.ca). Experimenting with critical performativity, he has published *Marinetti Dines with the High Command* (2014) and *SpeechSong: The Gould / Schoenberg Dialogues* (2020). In 2023, *SpeechSong* was presented as a video installation at the West Den Hague Cultural Centre in The Netherlands, part of their exhibition devoted to Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel Escher Bach*. Forthcoming books include *Mediatic Shakespeare* (UTP 2025) and *The Explorations of Edmund Snow Carpenter: Anthropology Upside Down* (MQUP 2024). In 2026, the Communication University of China Press (Beijing) will publish in translation my first book, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (UTP 2002).