Harold Innis’ “Crisis in Public Opinion”: Performance, Retrieval, and the Politics of Knowledge

William J. Buxton & Risa Dickens
Concordia University

Abstract: On May 12, 1943, Harold Innis delivered a speech entitled “The Crisis in Public Opinion” at the annual luncheon of the Canadian National Newspapers and Periodicals Association, held in Toronto. The address has survived in transcript form in the Innis Papers collection at the University of Toronto Archives. Our paper can best be seen as a companion piece to the edited transcription of Innis’ original speech, which follows in this issue of the Canadian Journal of Communication. Emphasizing the performative nature of the speech, we contextualize “The Crisis of Public Opinion” by examining the correspondence leading up to and following the speech. We argue that Innis’ views on the “crisis of public opinion” in the print media indicate that he understood this particular issue as part of a broader public crisis related to the decline of political and juridical institutions and to shifts in power and influence. His commentary on media in Canada was bound up with his effort to promote collective engagement as a corrective to the biases in power that he had detected. The 1943 speech is thus significant not simply as a “missing link” between Innis’ writings on Canada and his later work on communication theory; it is a clear and compelling distillation of the engagement, enactment, and performance that were the abiding features of his work as an intellectual.


William J. Buxton is a Professor of Communication Studies at Concordia University. Risa Dickens is an MA student in Media Studies at Concordia University, a contributing editor to Worn Fashion Journal, and editor in chief of Open.touchbasic.com.

©2006 Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation

325
les médias au Canada se rattachent à son effort de promouvoir un engagement collectif dont le but serait de minimiser les déséquilibres de pouvoir qu’il avait observés. Ainsi, le discours de 1943 n’est pas seulement significatif à titre de « chaînon manquant » dans les écrits d’Innis sur le Canada et, plus tard, sur la théorie en communication; il est aussi une distillation claire et attrante de l’engagement, de la motivation et de la performance qui étaient des traits constants de son travail d’intellectuel.

“My bias is with the oral tradition . . .”
— Harold Innis (1951a, p. 190)

“A whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar.”
— Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953, p. 222)

Introduction
It is commonly known that in his later years Innis became a strong advocate of oral communication, which he linked to the community-building properties of time-binding media. What has largely gone unexamined, however, is the nature of Innis’ own extensive practice as an orator. To be sure, some have commented on how Innis’ written work was somewhat akin to speech; by virtue of its fragmented style, it invited the reader to make connections between the various parts of the text, thereby creating a form of dialogue between Innis and his readership (Stamps, 1995). However, little attention has been given to Innis’ own oral communications, through which he sought to intervene in both the academic world and public life. This involved not only the formal presentation of papers at scholarly events, but also the delivery of invited speeches and talks to various social groupings. Indeed, a number of his publications, particularly those that appeared in the last decade of his life, had originally been oral presentations. These include those based on endowed lectures (1949b, 1950a, 1950b, 1951b, 1952a), on presentations at scholarly meetings (1944b, 1947, 1951a, 1951c, 1995c), on papers read to members of civic and religious groups (1995a, 1995d), on commencement addresses (1944a, 1946c), on invited talks (1949a, 1951d, 1952b), and on a presidential address (1946a). Other talks he gave were never published or were only published posthumously (1995e). While many of these works have been examined at great length, they have for the most part been treated exclusively as written texts, with their oral origins largely ignored. To proceed in this manner, however, is not only to sever these works from their original contexts, but also to overlook their essential performative nature. As oral performances, they were time-bound as well as indexically situated within particular interactive milieux. And as such, they were directed to particular audiences (of which Innis presumably had some knowledge and expectations). The speeches, moreover, were rhetorical acts; Innis wished not only to press particular claims upon those whom he addressed, but also to bring them around to particular ways of understanding the world. Finally, there was very likely some degree of give-and-take between Innis and his audiences, not
to mention the spreading of his views through word of mouth, resulting in possible secondary effects.

Given that Innis’ public presentations were almost never recorded and that other documentation about them is hard to come by, the task of analyzing them within their contexts is exceedingly difficult. However, a previously unpublished speech Innis gave in 1943 entitled “The Crisis in Public Opinion” (1943c) provides a unique opportunity for an examination of Innis’ practice as an orator. Not only do we have a clear sense of when and where the speech was given, as well as its audience, but contextual material on the talk is also available. The presence of these items makes it possible to examine the text not simply as a written work, but as an oral performance. To this end, we seek to demonstrate how Innis endeavoured to connect those present with the critical journalistic tradition, thereby providing his audience with insights into how they might better contribute to the restoration of democracy through the registering of public opinion.

Our analysis in some sense goes against the grain of much Innis commentary, which often begins with various global characterizations of Innis’ work (for example, time-and-space bias, monopolies of communication, staple commodities) and then proceeds to illustrate how these are at work in his writings. By contrast, we begin with a relatively small intervention, seeking to show the thought and intent that was sedimented within it, and then tracing linkages between this work and other contributions made by Innis during the same period.

By stressing the performative aspects of the speech, we call into question prevailing conceptions of the trajectory of Innis’ thought. Since there is ample evidence that Innis had abiding practical concerns (Salter & Dahl, 1999; Watson, 2005), one can use the speech as a point of departure for re-framing the way in which the development of Innis’ work is characterized. Rather than seeking to explain how he moved from one object of research (staples and Canadian economic history) to another (media and the global history of communications), one can explore how his ongoing intellectual practice took him in different directions as geo-political circumstances—and his own reaction to them—shifted over time. His later communication work could arguably be best understood as an effort to challenge particular conceptions of civilizational change (such as that developed by Toynbee and Kroeber), while finding common cause with those offered by others (such as Sorokin and the Annales School) (Buxton, 2004). Innis’ 1943 speech, with its call for critical engagement in the public interest, could be seen as a rehearsal for a more wide-ranging intervention into debates about the course of civilization. By the same token, the speech itself was continuous with some of Innis’ earlier preoccupations. While it contained some distant echoes of his earlier staples work, its more proximate points of reference were his writings of the previous decade on nationalism (Innis, 1935a, 1995b), intelligence (1934b, 1935b, 1936), and the universities (1943b). In what follows, we examine how Innis’ longstanding concerns about the interplay between knowledge-producers and public life were embodied in his 1943 address.
The background to Innis’ speech
On May 12, 1943, Harold Innis delivered an address entitled “The Crisis in Public Opinion” at the annual luncheon of the Canadian National Newspapers and Periodicals Association, held at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. The members of this organization (around one hundred and fifty of whom were in attendance at the luncheon) represented a variety of print media, including magazines, farm papers, and business newspapers, as well as financial, trade, industrial, and professional publications. An invitation to address this group had been extended to Innis by the association’s executive director, I. D. Carson. He likely assumed that Innis would be interested in speaking to members of the association, since they played a key role in the formation of public opinion and were deeply concerned with both wartime problems and postwar activities. The executive body of the association was of the view that by virtue of his expertise, Innis could help its members to better understand the problems facing Canada in the postwar period and provide them with insights into how they might formulate their editorial and economic policy (Carson, 1943a).

The invitation to address this group evidently struck a chord with Innis. As the notes that he sketched in the margins of the letter of invitation reveal, Innis’ interest in giving the talk flowed from his concern with what he perceived to be a marked decline in public life, a decline that was very much rooted in the transformation that had taken place in newspapers during the previous hundred years. In his formal acceptance of the invitation, Innis announced that the topic of his address would be the “Crisis in Public Opinion” (Innis, 1943d). In linking the crisis of public opinion to the decline of the Canadian print media, Innis was, to use current parlance, “thinking globally and acting locally.” By bringing what he perceived to be an emergent alternative minority into dialogue with some of its nineteenth-century counterparts, Innis sought to help the periodical and specialist press in Canada better imagine itself as a community capable of exercising collective agency. In a letter written to Innis a week after his speech, Carson expressed appreciation for the contribution he had made to the success of the luncheon. He also noted that a number of the members of the association had asked if it would be possible to have the speech’s highlights circulated to the association’s members, as well as to prominent figures in the commercial and industrial community and to those with an interest in the periodical press. To this end, Carson sent Innis a stenographic record of the speech and requested that he make any revisions to it that he thought necessary. Once the association had the revised typescript in hand, it would look into the possibility of reproducing the address. It was evident, nevertheless, that the association’s Public Relations Committee hoped that Innis might consider toning down his remarks somewhat by eliminating any references that might give the impression to other media groups that the association was bent on criticizing its competitors in the publication field. Evidently, the committee was concerned that if a transcript of the speech in its original form were to be made available, it could potentially create tensions
between the association and other media bodies (Carson, 1943b). It is not known if Innis complied with this request.

But there is also some evidence that the speech was well received by at least one person in attendance, who did not seem to take offence to Innis’ criticisms of the mainstream press. In the fall of 1943, Innis received a letter from K. D. Ewart, the advertising manager of The Country Guide. As an officer of the Periodical Press Association, Ewart noted that he had been present at Innis’ address and had found it to be very interesting. He also requested that Innis send him a copy of the speech so that he could not only go over it carefully, but also pass it on to R. D. Colquette, chief editor of The Country Guide. The letter to Innis was accompanied by the current issue of the magazine, along with a booklet on Western Canada written by Ewart and published by The Country Guide. He felt that some of the facts it contained might be of interest to Innis, even though it was designed for those working in the world of business and advertising (Ewart, 1943a). Innis evidently complied with Ewart’s request for a copy of the speech, which in turn found its way into the hands of Colquette (Ewart, 1943b).

Beyond being sent to the editorial staff of The Country Guide—and to Lou Golden, who worked in the editorial department of The Globe and Mail (Golden, 1943)—it is not known whether copies of Innis’ speech ever received any degree of circulation. But it may be that Innis’ address, despite its critical tone, contributed to the development of the sense of community and efficacy within the Canadian Newspapers and Periodicals Association that was evident in the chapter of the Massey Commission that drew on its thoughtful and confident submission (Canada, 1951).

The meaning of the speech that Innis delivered (which has survived in transcript form) cannot be derived from the written text alone. It can best be understood as a performance, through which Innis sought to find common cause with a group of interlocutors with whom he closely identified. The address could be seen as an effort by Innis to help provide the foundation for the collective agency of those present and, indirectly, of those that this group represented. This might seem puzzling at first, given Innis’ well-known antipathy toward the “space-binding” tendencies of the print media. Given that those attending his talk came from the upper echelons of the press and periodicals in Canada, would it not have been more appropriate for Innis to have politely declined the invitation? Innis’ enthusiasm for speaking to this group could be explained by the fact that he never treated the print media as a monolithic entity. This belies the notion that he was some sort of technological determinist who felt that print induced causal effects by virtue of its inherent properties; he was always at pains to emphasize that the print media were composed of various institutions, each of which had its own concerns and interests. He made a distinction, for instance, between early newspapers and books, arguing that while the former had a tendency to integrate communities, the latter had destabilizing effects (Buxton, 1998). A similar distinction underpinned the analysis that he provided in his 1943 speech. In this case, the (largely unstated) dominant media were the daily press, which in his view had aided and
abetted the propaganda efforts of state institutions since the days of Northcliffe in Britain, and the “yellow journalism” of Pulitzer and others in the United States. Innis suggests that the same pattern could be detected in Canada, where the liberal press had largely lost its former political anchorage and was no longer in a position to effectively register public opinion; it was now solidly in support of the Liberal government in power. At the same time, the conservative press was not sufficiently prepared to serve in an opposition role. Indeed, as Innis was quick to emphasize, the Canadian political system had pretty much broken down. Power had become concentrated in a small group within the Cabinet and civil servants had begun to speak with more authority than ministers. This “breakdown of anonymity” in the civil service had made for power without responsibility. Mirroring this shift in power, the parliamentary opposition had lost its vigour, and pressure groups—controlling large blocs of voters organized along various lines of interest—were now able to control the political process. Similarly, the Senate, which had largely become “a pasture for old warhorses,” was essentially irrelevant; the Supreme Court had “been weakened through division of tasks with the Privy Council”; and the calibre of the members of the House of Commons had markedly declined. (See also Innis, 1943a.) Hence, the task of registering public opinion had fallen to the weekly and periodical press, a group for which Innis evidently had a good deal of respect. Indeed, there is some evidence that Innis not only identified with this segment of the print media, but also had developed close ties with it. Certainly, by virtue of his marriage to Mary Quayle (a noted book author and writer for popular magazines and journals of opinion), Innis would likely have developed more than a passing familiarity with the periodical press. In terms of his own publishing work, Innis was a frequent contributor to journals of opinion such as the University of Toronto Quarterly, The Dalhousie Review, and the Canadian Forum. He was also one of the driving forces behind the establishment in 1935 of the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, which, according to Innis, was to play the role of a dialogical forum for the exchange of scholarly ideas. He noted:

Conferences arranged for discussion in the social sciences, and not including the large majority arranged definitely for the prostitution of social science to an avowed objective, are faced with innumerable handicaps. The emphasis has been to an increasing extent on publication as a medium of discussion—the CANADIAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE being a case in point. (Innis, 1935b, p. 285)

Moreover, during the 1930s, Innis served as the Canadian editor for the joint Canadian-American series funded by the Carnegie Institute for International Peace, under the general editorship of James Shotwell of Columbia University. While Innis’ publishing activities were mostly academic in nature, on a number of occasions he was involved in partisan initiatives on behalf of dissident and marginal groups. Innis’ practice as “publicist” (in the original meaning of the word) was evident in his participation in the Nova Scotia Royal Commission of 1934, as
orchestrated by the media-savvy premier (and close friend of Innis), Angus L. MacDonald. Innis not only helped MacDonald to monitor the press coverage of the Commission’s final report (which advocated more autonomy for Nova Scotia in its economic planning), but also wrote a companion report, which was quite explicitly designed to sway public opinion (Innis, 1934a). Innis also opened up a Western front in his efforts to help develop alternative publics: he came to closely identify with the co-operative wheat-growers movement in the Prairies, and he took it upon himself to edit the diary of Alexander McPhail, whose leadership in the co-operative movement Innis held in high esteem (Innis, 1940).

Innis did not continue his direct involvement with dissenting campaigns into the 1940s. But he continued his support of media outlets and media practitioners that he considered to be independently minded. These included W. A. McLeod (director of publicity for the Canadian Wheat Pool), George Ferguson of the Winnipeg Free Press (who eventually was to leave the newspaper in 1948 in a dispute with the publisher over editorial policy), and a former student, Ronald A. McEachern (who had become editor-in-chief of the Financial Post in the summer of 1942).

While the 1943 speech gives the impression that Innis was singling out the periodical press as a corrective force, other evidence from the same period suggests that he was also supportive of other media initiatives that he thought were contributing to the collective good. In particular, he was quite favourably disposed toward certain tendencies within radio broadcasting. A few months before his speech in Toronto, Innis was asked by R. B. Inch of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to join a committee whose purpose was to meet occasionally to discuss a series on postwar reconstruction that the CBC would soon be broadcasting (Inch, 1943a). Evidently, Innis accepted the offer and provided commentary on the series, which he judged to be “pioneering” (Inch, 1943b). Around the same time, D. J. MacDonald, President of St. Francis Xavier University, informed Innis that the university would be opening a 1000-watt radio station, with the call number CJFX. Its main purpose was to be “educational,” particularly through assisting the work of the university’s extension program (MacDonald, 1943). Innis wrote back immediately and was enthusiastic in his praise of CJFX:

I am writing to congratulate you on the opening of your new radio station. It is most encouraging to learn that in times when lights have been going out in the educational world a new light is being trimmed and brightened. The work which has been developed from the centre of St. Francis Xavier University will be enormously strengthened to the advantage of the University and Nova Scotia. (Innis, 1943e, p. 1)

Innis’ response to MacDonald’s request belies the largely unquestioned claim that he reflexively linked radio to space bias and nationalism. For instance, in his recent biography of Innis, Heyer notes that media such as radio and television, according to Innis, “exacerbate the spatial bias inherent in print by extending the influence of metropolitan centres of power. In the guise of providing greater access and democratizing knowledge, they tend to perpetuate modes of
domination . . .” (Heyer, 2003, p. 67). However, it is clear from Innis’ correspondence just prior to his 1943 speech that he did not view radio as a homogenous medium; he was of the view that radio broadcasting could play an important role in both reconstruction and educational reform.

In effect, Innis viewed certain tendencies in radio as complementary to the contributions of the weekly and periodical press. He saw the latter as a community of interests that could, through their actions, serve as a corrective to centralizing tendencies and the emergent monopolies of knowledge. However, in order for this group to be in a position to take on a more oppositional role, it needed to have a better understanding of itself as a body that could effectively register public opinion. To this end, in the first part of his speech, Innis sought to introduce the leading members of the weekly and periodical press to various dissenting editors and public-spirited journalists from the nineteenth century. Innis was thus performing a time-binding exercise. By impressing upon this group the links to their forebears, he would help its members take a more active role in registering public opinion, thereby helping to correct the distortions in the Canadian political system that had become entrenched during World War II.

Innis’ commentary on nineteenth- and twentieth-century journalism in the speech must be understood against the backdrop of his contemporaneous writing on the same subject matter. In addition to writing a number of reviews of books on advertising, newspapers, and the newspaper industry (1941a, 1941b, 1942), he published an article entitled “The Newspaper in Economic Development” in the *Journal of Economic History* (1946b). In it, he emphasized how dominant patterns in newspaper production—largely relating to technology and power—began to take form in the nineteenth century, culminating in the new journalism of the twentieth century that he saw as characteristic of both the United States and Great Britain. He also examined in broad-ranging terms the role that newspapers had come to play in the modern economy.

In some sense, his speech on the crisis in public opinion could be seen as the counterpoint to the article he wrote the preceding year. However, rather than dwelling on the role played by newspapers in shaping economic life with particular reference to their emergent monopoly tendencies and their intersection with technological development, he highlighted those tendencies that stood in opposition to these broader trends. In line with Innis’ abiding liberalism, he emphasized how individual figures contributed to the development of a free and open press. This meant giving attention to those whose work was motivated by the spirit of reform, such as Albany Fonblanque, C. P. Scott, Leigh Hunt, and Sydney Smith. These writers, in Innis’ view, contributed to the process of democratic change in aristocratic England by pointing out, with their sharp wit and elegant prose, inequalities in the system and gaps in government logic, as well as possible solutions to the problems the country faced. By the same token, he wished to draw attention to journals such as *The Examiner*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and the *Quarterly Review*, which he saw as having helped to bring about major reforms and change the whole political character of England.
In contrast to his article of the previous year, his speech presented *The Times* in a much more positive light, noting how its long-time editor, John Thaddeus Delane, resolutely defended the principle of press independence in the face of pressure exerted by the British monarchy. And unlike his article—which was largely critical of nineteenth-century developments in United States journalism—Innis’ speech called attention to the important contributions made by two American editor/journalists, namely Charles Dana and Horace Greeley. He saw them as representative of the “crusading spirit” one finds everywhere in the journalism of this period, before the advent of “new journalism” and the rise of Hearst’s and Northcliffe’s powerful amalgamations to dominance in the newspaper field. The *New York Tribune*, founded by Greeley in 1841, was very much in line with the journalistic engagement that Innis so much admired:

The Tribune was multifaceted, devoting space to politics, social reform, literary and intellectual endeavors, and news. It was very much Greeley’s personal vehicle. An egalitarian and idealist, Greeley espoused a variety of causes. He popularized the communitarian ideas of Fourier, and invested in a Fourier utopian community at Red Bank, New Jersey. He advocated the homestead principle of distributing free government land to settlers, attacked the exploitation of wage labor, denounced monopolies, and opposed capital punishment. (Horace Greeley, n.d.)

In the same spirit, Innis makes positive mention of a number of clearly maverick figures, such as Goldwin Smith, Oscar Wilde, and Laurence Oliphant, whose work spanned the old and new worlds, and whose independent spirit Innis evidently very much admired. These transatlantic figures wrote powerfully just as “the old journalism was deteriorating.” The decline was not simply one of editorial standards—the change that was of concern to Innis was in the opinions and thoughts possible in a fractured and threatened political climate, held in the simplifying thrall of the new, centralized press. Innis examined how the practice of “yellow journalism,” as developed by Pulitzer, Hearst, and others, spread from the United States to Britain. Quite appropriately (given the makeup of his audience), Innis’ address concludes with a discussion of how the “problem of public opinion and the press” was particularly acute within Canada.

**Implications of the address**

Given the speech’s obscurity (it has never before been mentioned or even cited by Innis scholars) and relative brevity, one could easily conclude that it is of little significance for our understanding of the development of Innis’ thought. However, by virtue of its content, its line of argument, and its striking performative aspects, it perhaps can help explain how and why Innis made the transition from his early work in Canadian economic development to his final explorations of media history on a global scale.

The conventional view, as represented by Donald Creighton (1957) and others (Heyer, 2003; Salter, 1981; Wernick, 1986), is that Innis’ twilight ventures into global media history were simply an extension of his earlier “staples history” of Canadian economic history (Buxton, 1997). While this narrative has a certain
degree of plausibility, it rests more on speculation than it does on evidence. In particular, it fails to provide any textual basis for its claims about how Innis’ later explorations in global media history were linked to his earlier examinations of Canadian political and economic development as rooted in the exploitation of staple commodities. Indeed, virtually all accounts of Innis’ examination of media history have confined themselves to his commentary on developments outside of Canada, and they have largely failed to address any connection there might be between Innis’ views on Canadian public life and global communication history.

The claim that Innis’ later work on communications derives from his earlier work on staples rests on an unstated premise about Innis’ intellectual approach that needs to be challenged. By placing the putative object of Innis’ analysis (i.e., staples) as the driving force behind his work, one is objectifying Innis himself. He becomes little more than a vehicle for the transmission of material reality—whether it takes the form of furs, fishes, or forests (or by extension, papyrus, books, or newspapers)—to public awareness. Under such an approach, Innis’ own values and concerns are largely effaced, and we have little idea of how his thoughts and ideas were connected to the world that he confronted. We suggest that rather than starting with the objects of Innis’ research, it would make more sense to begin with Innis’ own subjectivity in relation to the reality in which he found himself. This involves exploring Innis’ reflections on Western civilization, with particular reference to its embodiment in Canada. To be sure, the staple economy must be accorded a central role in the development of his thought. But it becomes more of a pretext than an object. Staples were not determinants in and of themselves; they were bound up with and reciprocally related to collective efforts to create a civilizational infrastructure on the upper tier of the North American continent.

In his early writings, Innis was preoccupied with how social-scientific knowledge could be brought to bear in helping Canada emerge from its colonial status (Watson, 1981). However, by the time Innis gave his 1943 speech, he had begun to grapple more directly with how issues related to Canadian nationhood related to broader civilizational trends. In particular, he had become quite concerned about the shifting nature of public opinion. As he noted in a letter to Arthur Cole just over a month before his 1943 speech, Innis had developed “a personal interest in public opinion—particularly the existence of broad plateaus of public opinion and the sharp breaks which occur in it from time to time—a sort of psychological or cultural approach” (Innis, quoted in Neill, 1972, p. 93). According to Innis, the conditions of freedom of thought are endangered by monopoly of knowledge formations and centralized communication. The question Innis implicitly asks his audience to think about in “The Crisis in Public Opinion” is “how do we design a knowledge-building, opinion-registering system that will compensate for bias?” The speech, quite arguably, represented Innis’ effort to bring this emergent “psychological or cultural approach” to bear in addressing what he perceived to be the “crisis in public opinion” in long-term historical perspective. It was likely animated by what Robin Neill terms Innis’ search for values:
What were the conditions under which the priorities of public opinion changed, or failed to change, and how were economic and political institutions organized in relation to the change in values? How do these institutions face up to the demands of time and space? (Neill, 1972, p. 96)

By all accounts, Innis believed that current institutions had failed. However, through collective agency at the margins, fuelled by historical precedent and example, he was of the view that resuscitation could occur. In this sense, the 1943 speech offers some fascinating insights into Innis’ project. It demonstrates that his analysis of the situation was rooted in his perception that Canada was experiencing a “crisis in public opinion”—very much in line with what was taking place within Western civilization in the first half of the twentieth century. The print media were not at the centre of Innis’ analysis at all; they were simply part of a broader public crisis related to the decline of political and juridical institutions and shifts in power and influence. Hence, Innis’ commentary on media in Canada—as linked to his historical discussion of alternative journalism—was inherently bound up with his effort to promote collective engagement as a corrective to the biases in power that he had detected. Arguably, the 1943 speech is significant not simply as a possible “missing link” between Innis’ writings on Canada and his later work on communication history; it is a clear and compelling distillation of the engagement, enactment, and performance that were abiding features of his work as an intellectual.

Acknowledgments
We are grateful to Professor Ann Innis Dagg for giving us permission (on behalf of the Harold Innis estate) to publish material from the Innis Papers at the University of Toronto Archives. We are indebted to Garron Wells and her staff at the Archives for their assistance in locating items in the Innis Collection. We also wish to thank Kim Sawchuk—as well as the two anonymous CJC reviewers—for their insightful commentary on the manuscript that was originally submitted. An earlier version of this article was presented at the meetings of the Canadian Communication Association held in London, Ontario, in June 2005. We have benefited enormously from the discussion of our paper that took place at our session. Finally, William Buxton wishes to acknowledge the support provided by a standard research grant #410-2003-0929 from the SSHRC for the production of this article and for the editing of Innis’ “Crisis in Public Opinion.”

Notes
1. Decoding Innis’ rather cryptic script, one can surmise that the talk was to be about the “Crisis of Public Opinion and the Disappearance of the Freedom of the Press.” This breakdown of public opinion, as suggested by Innis’ notes, was linked to the rise of the new journalism. He also indicated that he would be referring to early journalists such as [Jean-Paul] Courier, [Albany] Fonblanque, and Sydney Smith, as well as to his favourite Canadian journalist of the previous century, Goldwin Smith (Carson, 1943a).
2. In the months in 1943 leading up to the day in May when Innis spoke to the members of the periodical press, the news of international events was regularly punctuated by crises, announcements of technological breakthroughs and developments that had significant implications for the state of
public life. University of Pennsylvania scientists were commissioned to build ENIAC, the first fully electric computer, the first application of which was to solve atomic-energy problems for the Manhattan Project. The inventors eventually left the university because of its intellectual-property policy. Roosevelt became the first American president to travel by airplane when he flew to meet Winston Churchill on January 31 in Casablanca, Morocco. The people imprisoned in the Warsaw ghetto rose up on April 19 after 300,000 of them were taken to extermination camps. The uprising lasted until four days after Innis’ speech. The nine-hundred–day Siege of Leningrad had another nine months to run. The day before Innis gave his speech in Toronto, American forces invaded the Japanese-occupied island of Attu in the Aleutians. The Japanese had previously captured the island to act as an eastern line of homeland defence. It should also be noted that the early months of 1943 marked what commentators have characterized as the “turning point” in World War II. On February 2, General Friedrich Paulus, in charge of the German sixth army, surrendered to the allied forces, leading to the collapse of his army as a fighting force. This sudden shift in fortunes likely fuelled the discussions of postwar reconstruction that were already under way in the allied countries.

3. Formerly known as The Grain Grower’s Guide, the magazine was a subsidiary company of the United Grain Growers. It was published on the first of each month in Winnipeg, circulating to “over 185,000 rural homes west of the Great Lakes” (Ewart, 1943a, p. 1).

4. The same year that Innis gave his speech on the “Crisis in Public Opinion,” Mary Quayle Innis published her first novel, Stand on a Rainbow (1943), which apparently drew on her experience in the Innis family household.

5. Given that a number of Innis’ correspondents, including McEachern and Walter Sage, thanked Innis for copies of this article in February 1943, one can surmise that he had received off-prints from the publisher around this time and wished to circulate his ideas among those whom he thought would have an interest in the subject matter.

6. Richard Noble argues that Innis, drawing on an eighteenth-century Whig conception of freedom, “sees the individual’s liberty as an area of non-interference that is consistent with and indeed guaranteed by law” (1999, p. 32).

7. He also made mention of the French writer, Paul-Louis Courier, whose ideas were inspirational to nineteenth-century English journalists.

8. Innis’ discussion in the final chapter of The Fur Trade in Canada (1956) emphasizes the extent to which organizational and personnel factors were central to the development of this staple industry. This suggests that Innis viewed the role of the fur staple and the natural environment as contingent to, rather than determinant of, political and economic life. Hence, with its emphasis upon how the natural world did not determine human activity, but rather provided various possibilities for organized initiatives, Innis’ standpoint resonates with that of the “possibilist” approach to human geography and calls into question the standard claim that he was an environmental determinist (Buxton, 2004).

9. Cole was Librarian of the Harvard Business School and chaired the Committee on Economic History of which Innis was a member.

References


Carson, I. D., to Innis, Harold. (1943a, April 29). Letter. Harold Innis Papers, B72-0025/002 (04), University of Toronto Archives.

Carson, I. D., to Innis, Harold. (1943b, May 19). Letter. Harold Innis Papers, B72-0025/002 (04), University of Toronto Archives.


Ewart, K. D., to Innis, Harold. (1943a, October 12). Letter. Harold Innis Papers, B72-0025/003 (02), University of Toronto Archives.

Ewart, K. D., to Innis, Harold. (1943b, October 18). Letter. Harold Innis Papers, B72-0025/003 (02), University of Toronto Archives.


Greely, Horace. URL: http://www.tulane.edu/~latner/Greeley.html [June 9, 2006].


Inch, R. B., to Innis, Harold. (1943a, February 19). Letter. Harold Innis Papers, B72-0025/002 (06), University of Toronto Archives.

Inch, R. B., to Innis, Harold. (1943b, June 5). Letter. Harold Innis Papers, B72-0025/002 (06), University of Toronto Archives.


Innis, Harold. (1936). Discussion in the social sciences, *Dalhousie Review*, 15 (January), 401-413. (Revised version of a paper entitled “The Intellectual in history” read at a meeting of the summer-school session of the University of British Columbia)


Innis, Harold. (1943c). The crisis in public opinion. Harold Innis Papers, B72-0025/025 (35), University of Toronto Archives.

Innis, Harold, to Carson, I. D. (1943d, April 30). Letter. Harold Innis Papers, B72-0025/002 (04), University of Toronto Archives.

Innis, Harold, to MacDonald, D. J. (1943e, March 18). Letter. Harold Innis Papers, B72 – 0025/02 (07), University of Toronto Archives.

Innis, Harold. (1943f). A plea for the university tradition. Dalhousie Review, 24, 298-305. (Commencement address, University of New Brunswick, 1944)


Innis, Harold. (1944d). The university in the modern crisis. In Harold Innis, Political economy in the modern state (pp. 72-82). Toronto, ON: Ryerson. (Originally a commencement address, McMaster University, 1945)


Innis, Harold. (1950b). Roman law and the British empire. Fredericton, NB: University of New Brunswick. (Based on one of a series of lectures commemorating the 150th anniversary of the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, March 30, 1950)


Innis, Harold. (1951d). Technology and public opinion in the United States. In Harold Innis, *The bias of communication* (pp.156-189). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. (Revised version of a paper given at the University of Michigan, April 19, 1949)

Innis, Harold. (1952a). Great Britain, the United States and Canada. In Harold Innis, *Changing concepts of time* (pp. 109-133). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. (A revision of the twenty-first Cust Foundation Lecture, delivered at the University of Nottingham on May 21, 1948)

Innis, Harold. (1952b). The military implications of the American constitution. In Harold Innis, *Changing concepts of time* (pp. 21-45). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. (Originally read at a meeting of the Salmagundi Club, New York City, NY, on December 6, 1951)


Insert advertisement here