The Rise of McLuhanism, The Loss of Innis-sense: Rethinking the Origins of the Toronto School of Communication

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ABSTRACT *This article compares why McLuhan's work in communications has been the source of much acclaim whereas that of Innis has attracted attention only recently. It argues that the disparate responses to the contributions of these two theorists are rooted not only in the extent to which their writings were available, but also in their differing communication practices. The latter account for why Innis' studies of media were initially ignored and why McLuhan was able to develop a considerable following, in part by drawing on Innis as a precursor; this resulted in a distorted view of Innis' ideas that has persisted to this day. As a corrective, the article challenges McLuhan's claims that Innis viewed media as a form of staple and that he sought to understand how various knowledge specialities could be unified. Finally, it makes the case that the Innis/McLuhan tandem should be decoupled, to make better sense of a "de-McLuhanised" Innis on the one hand, and the McLuhanist-centred Toronto School on the other.*

KEYWORDS *Toronto School; Transformation theory; Media theory; Cultural studies; Innis; McLuhan*

RESUMÉ *Cet article compare les devenirs respectifs des travaux de McLuhan et d'Innis et explique pourquoi, alors que les premiers ont été très vite reconnus, les seconds n'ont attiré l'attention que récemment. Il soutient que les réponses disparates à leurs contributions proviennent non seulement de la relative disponibilité de leurs écrits, mais aussi des pratiques de communication différentes de leurs auteurs. Ceci explique pourquoi les travaux d'Innis sur les media ont d'abord été ignorés, alors que ceux de McLuhan jouissaient d'une forte popularité, partiellement due à sa façon de mettre à profit les travaux précurseurs d'Innis ; ceci a résulté en une perspective distordue des idées de ce dernier, qui a persisté jusqu'à nos jours. Afin de corriger cette distorsion, cet article conteste les propositions de McLuhan selon lesquelles Innis aurait considéré les media comme une forme de produits de première nécessité, et qu'il aurait tenté de comprendre comment divers savoirs spécialisés pouvaient être unifiés. Enfin, le présent article défend la thèse selon laquelle le tandem Innis/McLuhan (supposément au cœur de « l'École de Toronto en Communication ») devrait être découplé. Ceci permettrait, d'une part, de mieux rendre compte de travaux d'Innis, sans la médiation de McLuhan, et, d'autre part de l'École de Toronto, alors exclusivement centrée sur McLuhan.*

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MOTS CLÉS   *École de Toronto, théorie de la transformation, théories sur les médias, études culturelles, Innis, McLuhan*

> You are familiar with academic timidity and respectability. You are taking your academic life in your hands when you write about Innis and McLuhan. You must be a fearless character. I have never found anybody who was really interested in anything who was also afraid to take the consequences of disapproval. Was it Hercule Poirot who, when asked "What is truth?", replied: "Eet ees whatever upsets zee applecart."
> —Marshall McLuhan to James W. Carey, March 25, 1974,
> in *Molinaro, McLuhan, & Toye,* 1987, pp. 491–492

Innis, McLuhan, and the study of communications in the 1950s

Innis and McLuhan were at opposite ends of the academic spectrum at the midpoint of the twentieth century—as least as far as status and reputation were concerned. Yet within a decade and a half, McLuhan's fame and notoriety had arguably surpassed anything that Innis had every enjoyed. Indeed, during the 1950s, Innis' reputation had suffered as a result of his venture into the field of communications late in his career. To be sure, a number of his major works in economic history had been republished in the 1950s and had been well received. But the texts he published on communications before his death in 1952 were largely greeted with indifference, if not hostility. This state of affairs did not continue. Largely by virtue of the endorsement given to his communication work by the rising star, McLuhan, Innis gained recognition as a pioneer figure in communication studies. But this reputation was largely bound up with his connection to McLuhan in what has been characterized as the core of a Toronto School of Communication. By the same token, it was his connection to Innis, at least in part, that had allowed McLuhan to emerge from the shadows of academe to become a major intellectual and public figure.

By the time of his death in November 1952, Innis had amassed an impressive body of work related to communication, including a number of chapters from *Political Economy in the Modern State* (1946a), *Empire and Communications* (1950), *The Bias of Communication* (1951), *The Strategy of Culture* (1952a), as well as some reviews and essays related to the history of media. He had also produced a 1,400-page manuscript—with very limited circulation—entitled *History of Communications*. At this point in time, McLuhan had written relatively little on the subject of communication. He had focused on literary criticism, and his text on popular culture, *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), hardly made a splash, selling only a few hundred copies. Yet by the end of the 1950s it was McLuhan rather than Innis who was recognized as a major force in the field of communications, who was the centre of an emergent network in the field. Although McLuhan had not produced full-scale monographs and essay collections as Innis had, he had been able to establish himself as an expert on media, in part by invoking Innis as point of reference for his work. Rather than simply referring to Innis' work on communications per se, he made a point of emphasizing that Innis' work on communication was an *extension* of his earlier writing on staples and economic history, which still represented considerable symbolic and intellectual capital. In effect, by

stressing the continuity between the "early" and the "later" Innis, McLuhan was coming to the defence of Innis against those who had difficulty coming to terms with Innis' shift from the study of economic history to communications.

This approach was evident in McLuhan's review of Innis' *Changing Concepts of Time*, a book that had been posthumously published (1952b). He noted that "there [was] a good deal of confusion" among Innis' colleagues about "why he, [Innis] an economic historian, switched over to the study of culture and communications." Building on W. T. Easterbrook's claim that Innis' transition from the study of staples to the study of media occurred because of his interest in the workings of the price mechanism, McLuhan argued that "pricing is so very much an affair of information and communication that it is natural for a student of prices to shift attention from the flow of goods to the flow of information." To be sure, McLuhan readily acknowledged that Innis' "ability to communicate with his readers seemed to desert him" when he addressed "the problem of communication." This was not due to the failure of his "rhetorical and expository power," but could be attributed to the "great difficulty" of the subject with which he was grappling. Because Innis now sought to understand the "total social process of which economics is a preferentially treated aspect[,]" he was obliged to abandon his "earlier linear prose" in favour of "a technique commensurate with his multi-faceted vision of the social process." According to McLuhan, this accounted for Innis' use of "discontinuous 'shots' or statements juxtaposed in a kind of rhetorical or prose *montage.*" In his own display of rhetoric, McLuhan not only sought to confer credibility on Innis' communication writings by linking them to his earlier work on staples, but also came to the defence of Innis' prose style by arguing that it was appropriate because of the subject matter in question (1953, pp. 44–46).

McLuhan's claim that Innis' work on communications rested on the foundations of his pioneering research on staples was evident in an application that he wrote with Edmund Carpenter for a $50,000 grant from the Behavioural Sciences Division of the Ford Foundation in support of a two-year research project. In the proposal, entitled "Changing Patterns of Language and Behavior and the New Media of Communication," McLuhan invoked the work of both Edward Sapir and Innis as foundational for the proposed project. In May 1953, McLuhan and Carpenter learned that their proposal had been successful; they were awarded a total of $44,250 over two years (Marchand, 1990). When the weekly seminar (forming the core of the seminar) began in the fall of 1953, it was agreed that Innis' writings on communication would be the main topic of discussion.[1]

Throughout the 1950s, after the Ford Foundation project had been accepted, McLuhan shifted his attention from English to media and culture, frequently invoking Innis as one of his major points of reference (Carpenter & McLuhan, 1956; McLuhan 1954a, 1960a). He not only began to publish his work on communications in distinguished humanities journals, but also took part in a myriad of seminars and conferences exploring the meaning and significance of the media. These included a Seminar on Research in Educational Broadcasting sponsored by the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB), held at Ohio State University December 9-13, 1957 (Tyler, 1959); an invited lecture to General Electric executives at the GE Conference

Center in Croton-on-the-Hudson, New York, in 1959; a keynote address at the annual meeting of the NAEB held in Omaha in 1958; participation in the first Congress of Cultural Leaders, which took place in Washington, D.C., in 1959; and, a seminar on professional education sponsored by the Department of Audio Visual Instruction (DAVI) in Cincinnati in 1960 (Gerbner, 1960; Marchand, 1990). Hence, by the end of the decade, McLuhan was becoming recognized as a leading authority on media issues, not only in the academy, but also in business and government circles.

In stark contrast, apart from the interest shown by McLuhan, Innis' substantial body of work in communications failed to attract much attention. To be sure, there was a flurry of reviews of his published work on communication in the early 1950s—most of which were written by his colleagues in economic history. While some of them were positive, many of them expressed bewilderment if not hostility. However, judging by the articles that appeared in academic journals during this period, Innis' work on communications was almost totally ignored.[2] The exception to this indifference was McLuhan and a pair of researchers, Dallas Smythe and George Gerbner, working at the Institute for Communication Research at the University of Illinois. While Gerbner (1958, 1960) referred to Innis in passing, Smythe (1954) engaged with Innis' texts in some detail.[3] However, it was largely McLuhan who had cornered the market on Innis' writings on communication. Since there were so few other commentators on this body of work, McLuhan's reading of Innis—fashioned through a series of writings running from the early 1950s to the early 1970s—largely held sway.[4] These writings included not only his insightful 1953 assessment of "the later Innis," but also his highly influential introductions to the republished editions of *The Bias of Communication* (1964) and *Empire and Communications* (1972). The question then arises as to why Innis' rigorous work in communications failed to inspire a much broader following in the 1950s, whereas McLuhan's more aphoristic approach—invoking Innis as a point of reference—attracted legions of acolytes. What follows is an attempt to answer this question.

The neglect of Innis, the rise of McLuhan

Arguably, the lack of attention given to Innis' work on communications in the aftermath of his death in 1952 was linked to his material being unavailable. Once *The Bias of Communication* and *Empire and Communications* were out of print, they were not republished. Moreover, the broader œuvre of Innis' communication writings—which he produced throughout the 1940s—was quite inaccessible, largely as a result of the decisions made by a special executors' committee that considered which of Innis' unpublished works were of publishable quality (and which of his published works ought to be republished). The committee gave priority to republishing a number of Innis' writings in economic history, which meant that "a good deal of Innis's writings in the latter years of his life [were] not included" (Clark, 1956, p. v). As a result of the committee's decisions, neither Innis' monumental *History of Communications* nor his other earlier writings in communication were made readily available to the public (Buxton, 2001).

As noted, Innis' major published works on communications did not attract very much attention. This could largely be explained by the fact that the aim of these writings was to broaden and enrich the field of economic history—Innis' primary academic point of reference. To this end, he shared the progress of his new ideas with his inter-

national community of economic historians, which had taken shape by the mid-1940s. The reaction of these colleagues to Innis' shift toward communications ranged from mild support and bemused tolerance to outright rejection, with most expressing at least some degree of puzzlement about the new direction Innis was taking. But for the most part, Innis was not able to convince his colleagues that the field of economic history could be improved if it gave more attention to communications. This meant that, apart from McLuhan—and to some extent the researchers at the University of Illinois—Innis did not have advocates willing to draw attention to his communications writings.

Innis' focus on economic history as the point of reference for his communications work was symptomatic of his lack of interest in developing communications as a field in its own right. Although he did address communication issues in his later writing, he did not demonstrate an interest in laying the foundations for a new area of inquiry. He never appeared to have given any thought to communication becoming a field of study, let alone a department. Rather, this was an endeavour he pursued himself—in the form of history of communication or civilization—*within* economic history. He hoped that it would serve as a corrective to monopolies of knowledge as found in the works of Arnold Toynbee and others. In particular, he sought to emphasize time horizons and culture in his work that could then serve as an exemplar for others, such as Tom Easterbrook and Hugh Aitken, to carry on. In contrast, McLuhan was only too eager to develop communications as a new field, and he devoted considerable energy to making this happen.

McLuhan's body of work on communications was no match for that of Innis at the beginning of the 1950s, but by the end of the decade he had been able to carve out a place for himself as one of the leading figures in the emergent field. Unlike Innis, whose point of reference was narrowly defined as that of economic history, McLuhan's orientation was much more interdisciplinary in nature. Indeed, the core of his own research efforts was the coterie of scholars from a broad range of backgrounds who took part in the Ford Foundation–sponsored program on the new media of communication. Particularly crucial in this respect for McLuhan's publication efforts was the journal *Explorations*—edited by his colleague Edmund Carpenter—which came to form the hub of the University of Toronto–based program. McLuhan not only published frequently in the journal but was able to draw on the material published there by his colleagues to develop his own ideas. More broadly, McLuhan moved well beyond publishing for English specialists, directing his work to humanities scholars in general, as well as to those working in fields such as education and audiovisual studies as well as the corporate world. In doing so, he was able to attract the attention of influential decision-makers—such as Harry J. Skornia, president of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB), and Herbert E. Krugman, manager of corporate public opinion research at the General Electric Company. Figures such as these were able to open doors for McLuhan within the educational broadcasting community and the corporate world, respectively.

The limitations of McLuhan's reading of Innis

That Innis and McLuhan are often mentioned in the same breath is no accident; it is

a consequence of McLuhan's long-term efforts to lend credibility to his own work on communications. Indeed, it was only by virtue of McLuhan's reputation that Innis' work on communications was republished in the 1960s and 1970s. That these writings were heavily inflected by McLuhan's interpretation is evident in the introduction McLuhan provided to the reprinted edition of Innis' *Bias of Communication* (McLuhan, 1964a**).** In this case, McLuhan built on his earlier commentary on Innis, emphasizing how media could be seen as a new form of staples and how technology had a determinant effect on culture as well as psychic transformation. As McLuhan notes:

> I suggest that Innis made the … transition from the history of staples to the history of the media of communication quite naturally. Media are major resources like economic staples. In fact, without railways, the staples of wheat and lumber can scarcely be said to exist. Without the press and the magazine, wood pulp could not exist as a staple either. (p. xv)

This statement embodied McLuhan's strategy of building on Innis' considerable reputation as a staples theorist in order to lend credibility to his own approach— premised on how media technologies exerted effects by virtue of their inherent properties. While this allowed McLuhan to help resurrect Innis as a pioneering figure in media studies, it came at the expense of leaving his own imprimatur indelibly on the Innisian legacy to communication research. The result has been the common tendency to view the two thinkers as an amalgam, as the core of what has come to be called the Toronto School of Communication. Increasingly, Innis has been viewed as some sort of precursor to McLuhan, if not a junior partner in the tandem. As Marchand (1990) writes—reflecting on McLuhan's claim that his *Gutenberg Galaxy* was merely a footnote to Innis—"if Innis is read in the future it will be as a footnote to McLuhan and not vice-versa" (p. 115). Although it is fruitless to speculate on who is the footnote to whom, it is still a worthwhile exercise to reflect on the extent to which McLuhan's reading of Innis—one that has underpinned the way in which Innis has been read generally— has been both biased and selective. The lack of space does not permit pursuing this analysis in great detail. I will, however, briefly explore three pertinent issues that were bound up together: 1) McLuhan's reliance on a relatively narrow range of Innis' writings, 2) how McLuhan's assumptions about "media as staple" affected his interpretation of Innis, and 3) McLuhan's contention that Innis could provide a foundation for his own efforts to find the communicative common ground for diverse fields of knowledge and expertise.

Getting to know the "unknown Innis"

In discussing Innis' work, McLuhan relied primarily on *Empire and Communications* (1950), *The Bias of Communication* (1951a), and, to a lesser extent, *Changing Concepts of Time* (1952b). However, McLuhan failed to engage with Innis' *Political Economy in the Modern State* (1946a), mirroring the judgment of the publication committee not to re-issue a number of Innis' non-economic-history essays found in this volume. Had he done so, he might have seen Innis' contributions in a different light, as this collection from Innis' "scattered and relatively inaccessible articles published since 1933" in the area of political economy brought together essays on media history, higher educa-

tion, culture, and political science as well as economic history. They demonstrate that Innis' concept of communication could not be reduced to a form of media staple, but could be viewed more as an interactive process, inherently connected to the growth of civilization, the emergence of universities, and the advent of new forms of public. To be sure, Innis was quite attentive to the importance of the technological properties of media, but he repeatedly emphasized the extent to which other factors were constitutive of the communication process. For instance, as he noted in relation to newspapers, "[t]he impact of technological change in the press varied not only with major revolutions in printing, paper making, news collection, and distribution of newspapers, but also with the character of the organization by which the processes were performed" (p. 15). In examining the performance of these properties, Innis stressed the importance of "non-staple" aspects of the press, such as the control of the press by the printer (and later, the publisher), the influence exercised by the journalist and the editor, and the "building up of good will," which made advertising, "expansion of news on the front page," and the "development of the head line possible." Media, as discussed here, go well beyond the "economic staples," which McLuhan claimed to be the centrepiece of Innis' work in the history of communications. They also had little in common with McLuhan's assumption that the most important aspect of media staples was how they affected human senses and consciousness by virtue of their material properties. If anything, Innis suggested that the essential features of the newspapers were derived primarily from social and cultural processes rather than from media staples per se.

Innis' expansive view of media was even more evident in his massive document *History of Communications*. While the work was not published in a conventional form, microfiche versions of the manuscript were made available to a number of libraries in North America.[5] Had McLuhan given it attention (a copy was deposited in the University of Toronto library), he might have become more aware that Innis gave "particular attention to the relationship between printing and monopolies of knowledge and power as they shifted and developed over time" (Buxton, 2001, p. 223.). Unlike McLuhan's Eurocentric account of the emergence of the "Gutenberg Age"—attendant on the development of print technology—Innis' depiction of communication history, focusing on how the production and use of paper spread from Asia to the West over the course of a millennium, was much more balanced. And in his lengthy accounts of paper production, Innis does not confine himself to paper's staple-like properties in relation to human senses, but rather provides detailed analyses of the division of labour in the production process, the political context, class relations, and the implications of the specific products that were made from paper, including playing cards, maps, pamphlets, and religious works. Yet as far as McLuhan was concerned, Innis shared his view that the workings of media staples could be examined in very general terms. McLuhan (1954b) maintained, for instance, that "print has been knocked off its pedestal by other media" (p. 123).

Finally, in his efforts to develop his own vision of the theory and practice of communication, McLuhan claimed that Innis shared his point of view. In "moving towards [the] harmonizing of the arts and the sciences," McLuhan argued, the work of Innis had great relevance to "the study of communication theory and practice." According

to McLuhan (1953), "such study seems inevitably to hold the key to the unification of the proliferating specialisms of modern knowledge. In this study, the physicist can profitably confer with the student of poetry or philosophy. And the physicist can profitably confer with the student of poetry or philosophy" (pp. 393–394). In effect, McLuhan was suggesting that Innis' work was foundational for his own project of using the study of communication to find common ground among persons having widely varying interests and expertise.[6] Yet it is quite contestable that Innis shared this vision. Unlike what one finds in Innis' notion of a "monopoly of knowledge," the element of power is noticeably absent from McLuhan's conception of the theory and practice of communication, which involves making explicit the shared discourse of various knowledge interests. However, for Innis, power differences were fundamental; it was only through concerted political struggles directed from the margins to the centre that change could occur. This is in line with James Carey's (2007) observation that McLuhan's

> understanding of the oral tradition (an understanding quite at odds with Innis) is deeply informed by a liturgical sense of chant and memory rather than of discussion and debate. The preliterate world for which he yearned was a liturgical one rather than a political one. (p. 83)

What emerges from the examination of Innis' largely neglected writings on communication is a conception of his work in the area that is quite at odds with the narrow "media as staple" account as portrayed by McLuhan. While Innis certainly gives a good deal of attention to the material properties of communication technologies, he is much more interested in the broader institutional framework of which media were a part, with particular reference to both individual initiative and social relations.

Differing forms of communicative practice

By virtue of their differing visions of the theory and practice of communications, Innis and McLuhan also practised communication differently, which had significant implications for their respective abilities to develop communities of like-minded followers. It is common knowledge that toward the end of his life, Innis (1951a) revealed a consistent bias for the oral tradition. As he noted in the preface to *Empire and Communications*,

> [A]ll written works, including this one, have dangerous implications to the vitality of an oral tradition and to the health of civilization, particularly if they thwart the interest of a people in culture. 'It is written but I say unto you' is a powerful directive to Western civilization. (p. 190)

However, this was more than a scholarly proclivity for Innis. Following the publication of *The Cod Fisheries* (1940), most of Innis' publications were transcriptions of what had been various kinds of oral presentations (Buxton & Dickens, 2006). This perhaps explains why his later writings on communication initially failed to generate much interest; they could best be seen as a written trace of what had been part of an interaction with a particular audience, whether members of the Royal Society of Canada or the Collège de France or those who gathered to hear him present the Beit lectures or the Stamp lecture. Although his propensity for oral presentations made for possible conscious-raising in a variety of disconnected milieux, these talks never really

added up to the formation of a network of like-minded interlocutors. Moreover, they have left us with a bewildering trace of written texts whose original rhetorical oral form can only be guessed at. To be sure, Innis' massive *History of Communications* manuscript was not directly derived from his oral presentations. But by virtue of its size and inaccessibility, it was destined to be neither published nor circulated. Its very limited availability meant that it has done little to contribute to our understanding of communication. In any event, it was not clear that Innis wished to have the work published; he seemed to suggest that it would serve rather as a repository for his pedagogical activities—the textual substrate for his teaching dialogues. With the large influx of demobilized soldiers into the University of Toronto in the post-war period, he gave considerable attention to finding materials that could be used for his courses. As he noted in the preface to *Political Economy in the Modern State*,

> This volume has been designed to bring together widely scattered and relatively inaccessible articles published since 1933 for the convenient use of students, particularly the large numbers of students from the armed forces. (Innis, 1946a, p. vii)

McLuhan, on the other hand, was much more interested in developing networks based on the use of written texts. While he is well known for his critique of book culture and the Gutenberg Age, he was quite aware of written works' capacity to bind space and to create and foster the building of communities. It has been recognized that conversation was very important to McLuhan. But these oral exchanges were, more often than not, grounded in textuality. And as Douglas Coupland (2009) notes, McLuhan may have had "a sort of low-grade disinhibitory condition" (p. 138), which meant that he believed that if he presented a monologue to someone or to other persons, that this constituted a conversation. Ironically, McLuhan's written correspondence was likely more dialogical than was his oral communication. This becomes quite evident when one examines the impressive collection of his letters that appeared (Molinaro, McLuhan, & Toye, 1987). McLuhan used letters to develop ever widening—and increasingly intersecting—circles of friends and colleagues who shared his values, priorities, and concerns. He was continually seeking to expand his circle and to this end wrote to people (more often than not the rich, famous, or powerful) with whom he thought there might be an affinity. These ranged from Buckminster Fuller to Ann Landers to Pierre Trudeau.

He also used his letters as a platform for his emergent ideas. Indeed, on many occasions he would write basically the same letter and send it to different persons at various intervals. On a few occasions, he institutionalized this practice, such as in his "network" project of the early 1950s and his "dew-line" project of the late 1960s. This propensity to engage in letter-writing of this kind was arguably linked to his moral projects, such as combatting the decline of masculinity, the rise in homosexuality, the furtive activity of secret societies such as the Masons, and rampant secularism. As he noted in a 1946 letter to Father Clement McNaspy of Assumption College,

> [We] must confront the secular in its most confident manifestations [and] to shock it into awareness of its confusion, its illiteracy, and the terrifying drift of its logic. … The job must be conducted on every front—from every phase

of the press, book-rackets, music, cinema, education, economics. … These can serve to educate a huge public, both Catholic and non-Catholic, to resist the swift obliteration of the person which is going on. (Molinaro, McLuhan & Toye, 1987, p. 180)

In 1951, as he divulged in a letter to Walter Ong, "For the past year I have been exploring the relations between the Secret Societies and the arts. A grisly business. I don't know what you know, but I know there isn't a living artist or critic of repute who is not playing their game. I mean their rituals and doctrines as basis of artistic organization" (1987, p. 237).

Innis, by way of comparison, did not use letters at all in this way. Rather than using letter-writing to establish networks, he was content to correspond within networks that had already been institutionally defined by membership in a particular organization (such as the Canadian Social Science Research Council or the Economic History Association). Although he was a prodigious correspondent, most of Innis' letters appear to have been dashed off in a hurry, with little thought given to their place in the formation of a broader network. They were mostly hand-written on highly perishable legal pads without any copies being kept. They were primarily administrative and strategic in nature, but could be quite personal and gossipy if Innis was on intimate terms with his correspondent. He rarely wrote down his ideas in any detail in his letters, evidently preferring to discuss his thoughts with his interlocutors.

Innis' approach to letter-writing had significant implications for the role that he played as a contributor to organizational development and as a builder of academic fields. Once a particular initiative was in place—such as the Rockefeller Foundation–sponsored Economic History Committee in 1940—Innis dutifully performed his duties as a committee member, taking part in correspondence as a means to advance the cause of economic history. To this end, Innis used the members of the committee as sounding boards for his emergent ideas about communication, with a view to broadening the scope of economic history to include greater attention given to culture and time horizons (Innis, 1944). While Innis had some short-term success in persuading economic historians to expand their horizons somewhat by addressing cultural and communication factors in their research (Easterbrook, 1960), this residue was incorporated into the emergent field of economic history, rather than providing the basis for an autonomous field of communication.

McLuhan, on the other hand, was much better disposed to develop communications as a field. His willingness to use textuality to build communities and his concern to develop innovative institutional forms made it possible for him to receive external support to put together an experimental seminar. This was quite in line with the intent of the Ford Foundation to challenge conventional university structures and to develop new prototypes. Most importantly, it was on the basis of the Ford Foundation Seminar and its aftermath that McLuhan was able to establish a reputation as one of the leading authorities on media by the late 1950s. By virtue of his growing prominence in the nascent field of communication, McLuhan was able to meet Harry J. Skornia, president of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters. Impressed by McLuhan, Skornia commissioned McLuhan to help develop a syllabus for a course on the study

of media for 11th-grade students (Marchand, 1990). Drawing on some of his new ideas about the relationship between media and the senses, and backed up by research he conducted with colleagues at the University of Toronto, McLuhan completed his report for the NAEB, which was published in late 1960 (McLuhan, 1960b). While the report received a lukewarm reception from the NAEB executive—who felt that it was well beyond the grasp of its intended audience—it provided the foundation for *Understanding Media*, which appeared in 1964 (Marchand, 1990). Coupled with *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), which had been published two years earlier, McLuhan's highly acclaimed examination of the role of media in society cemented his reputation as one of the leading commentators on communication. McLuhan's insights had not escaped the attention of two Californians—Gerald Feigen and Howard Gossage—working together in the field of business consulting who specialized in what was called "genius scouting." On the lookout for talent whose ideas would be of interest to the corporate world, the two figures arranged for a meeting with McLuhan in Toronto. This led to an agreement whereby Feigen and Gossage's consulting firm—Generalists Incorporated—would represent McLuhan to corporate and media clients, with a view to arranging speaking engagements and consulting work (Gordon, 1997) Beginning in 1965, highlighted by a special "McLuhan festival" held in the offices of Gossage's firm in San Francisco, the two "genius scouts" orchestrated a concerted campaign to put the Toronto scholar on the corporate and mainstream-media map. This not only resulted in a sharp rise in the number of McLuhan's speaking engagements, but also a dramatic increase in the size of his speaker's fee. He was also able to land a few contracts as a consultant (Marchand, 1990). Gossage and Feigen had successfully brought McLuhan into the world of celebrity culture, as shaped by the interests of corporations and media conglomerates. It should be emphasized that Innis never went through a metamorphosis of this kind. If anything, repulsed by the commercialization of culture and the growing influence of corporate interests, he increasingly began to see the university as a time-binding refuge that could serve as a corrective to the space-binding imperatives of a market economy.

The medium is the mensonge: McLuhan and celebrity culture

In any event, by virtue of his new status as a corporate and media celebrity, McLuhan's communications scholarship moved in a new direction and took on a different complexion. This was most evident in his involvement with an initiative in collaboration with Quentin Fiore and Jerome Agel that began shortly after the "discovery" of him by Gossage and Feigen. Reflecting McLuhan's growing fame, Agel, a New York–based journalist and publisher, informed McLuhan that he was preparing a "profusely illustrated" profile of him to appear in *Books*[7] and asked him if he would be interested in developing a children's book out of *Understanding Media* (Schnapp, 2012). Shortly thereafter, McLuhan met with Agel along with the latter's collaborator and neighbour, Fiore, to discuss the possibility of working together to produce a book for young people based on *Understanding Media* and *Gutenberg Galaxy*. This led to an arrangement for the three to be co-authors of a text along these lines to be published by Bantam Books, which eventually appeared as *The Medium Is the Massage* (1967), (Schnapp, 2012). While this book is often mentioned in passing as one of McLuhan's many publications,

commentators have largely failed to consider the full implications of McLuhan's involvement in the project for his communications theory and practice.

A closer examination of the backdrop to *The Medium Is the Massage* reveals that the title of co-author does not at all do justice to McLuhan's contribution to the work. Consistent with his entry into celebrity culture, as orchestrated by Feigen and Gossage, the role that McLuhan played in the production of *The Medium Is the Massage* could be better likened to that of a "cast member" (to invoke the discourse used by the Disney empire as a way of defining itself as primarily an entertainment industry). Specifically, the role assigned to McLuhan was that of the celebrity-guru professor, whose aphoristic ideas could be fashioned into short and punchy texts in jolting fonts accompanied by provocative imagery. While Fiore shared the title of co-author of the work with McLuhan, his actual contribution was of a much different order. As Schnapp points out, he not only assembled the visual materials and edited McLuhan's text, but also transformed Agel's rather ill-formed notions of graphic design into "a pop typographic synthesis of the first order" (Schnapp, 2012, p. 67). And where did Agel himself fit into this triadic division of labour? He is listed as having "produced" the book, a designation that had not been commonly used before (though it had been deployed by Agel and a few others beginning in the 1950s). Mirroring the way the term had been used in the film industry, it involved conceiving of a book project in an entrepreneurial fashion, putting together a team of collaborators, overseeing its production, and packaging it to be released and distributed by a major publisher.

In the case of *The Medium Is the Massage*, the book was produced under the aegis of Agel Publishing Company, but was actually published by Bantam Books. Agel's activities went well beyond those necessary to the production of the book itself; they were very much in line with the Disney empire's efforts to produce "synergy" by coordinating the activities of its various enterprises in order to maximize its market penetration for a particular entertainment product. For *The Medium Is the Massage*, this involved a concerted effort involving an interrelated set of initiatives in various spheres where Agel was able to operate. "Books," as Agel once said, "are really part of show business" (quoted in Schnapp, 2012, p. 42). True to his word, Agel made use of marketing tools borrowed from the film industry in his journal *Books* to conduct a year-long advertising campaign culminating in the book's publication in March 1967. Immediately, Agel swung into action on another front; he was able to arrange for a television special entitled *This Is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium Is the Massage* as part of NBC's prestigious "Experiment in Television" series. This was accompanied by quiz-like ads in the *New York Times* as well as "a long stream of mini-advertisements in *Books*," capitalizing on some of the controversy that *The Medium Is the Massage* had engendered. Finally, in the spring of 1967, *Books* featured an interview with John Simon, head of the Popular Artists and Repetoire Division of Columbia Records (an interview that addressed, among other things, similarities between book editing, film/play direction, and record production). Two months later Simon produced an LP for Columbia Records entitled *The Medium Is the Massage with Marshall McLuhan*, which was described as "The First Spoken Arts Record You Can Dance To." Mirroring the emergent division of labour that Agel envisioned for books, McLuhan, Fiore, and Agel

were listed as "authors," and Agel was also listed as "having 'conceived and co-ordi-nated' everything" (Schnapp, 2012, pp. 56-57).

Besides being closely linked to a number of complementary media ventures orchestrated by Agel, *The Medium Is the Massage* was also the prototype for a series of texts Agel coordinated, the goal of which was to make the ideas of innovative thinkers accessible to a younger audience through the circulation of mass paperbacks. These included works that drew on the ideas of Agel (1972), Buckminster Fuller (1970), Hermann Kahn (1973), Jerry Rubin (1970), Carl Sagan (1973, 1975), Stanley Kubrick (Agel, 1970), and Alan Lakein (1975). Reflecting Agel's views about books being part of show business, these texts—what Schnapp terms "inventory books"—could be viewed as paperbacks of the electric information age that "reflected the shifting boundaries between books, magazines, music, television, and film" (Schnapp, 2012, p. 26). As such, created as alternatives to traditional books that had been rejected for being out of step with the modern world, they were characterized by "fast-paced verbal-visual collages, intermedia hybrids, nonlinear 'COLLIDE-O-SCOPIC' look-arounds aimed squarely at the contemporary world of younger readers. INVENTORY BOOKS made the rhythmic sequencing, layering, and interweaving of photographic-textual material its stock and trade" (p. 27). Given their imbeddedness in popular culture, they also shared some of the preoccupations of the period, particularly the linkage of space exploration[8] with the increasing technologization of life on Earth.

As an exemplar of this tendency, *The Medium Is the Massage* juxtaposes commentary/images on the technologized body (clothing … an extension of the skin) with pronouncements on the cosmos (The stars are so big, the earth is so small) (McLuhan, Fiore, & Agel, 1967). In this sense, the book shared some of the same themes as the film *The Fantastic Voyage* (released about a year before), which examined how scientists in a miniaturized submarine, after having been injected into the bloodstream of a dying diplomat, seek to repair a clot in his brain. The film in turn inspired a novelization by Isaac Asimov (1966), which appeared months prior to the film, having the same publisher (Bantam Books) as *The Medium Is the Massage*. Mirroring how *The Fantastic Voyage* had migrated from cinema to the mass-market paperback format, *The Medium Is the Massage*, as the prototype "inventory book," signalled a shift from the electric media to the "inventory book," fully confirming Agel's views about the growing interpenetration of mass media.

And where does McLuhan figure in this? It should be quite evident that he was actually a bit player in the broader drama of the book's production. Ironically, despite his minimal involvement with the text, his fame and notoriety increased exponentially as a result of its publication. *The Medium Is the Massage* has by far been McLuhan's best-selling book (over 1,000,000 copies of it were purchased) and solidified his reputation as a media prophet. Yet this celebrity status came at a cost. There was no going back to the tweedy professor who carefully fashioned texts and presented papers at academic conferences based on meticulous research. Continuing on the path defined for him by Gossage and Feigen, McLuhan no longer merely described the emergent electric age, he performed it; his identity as a celebrity was bound up with that performance and inseparable from it. It did not matter that his contribution to *The*

Medium Is the Massage was so limited. By virtue of that book, a distinct McLuhan brand emerged, characterized by seemingly pithy statements, kaleidoscopic graphics, and largely unfathomable editing (which have all become *de rigueur* in efforts to represent McLuhan in media products). While one would like to extract a coherent vision from the text that would allow us to better understand media, the persona of McLuhan as the media analyst was absorbed into what Marchessault (2005) has characterized as "a self-made cliché, the prophet, the media guru" (p. 199). To be sure, if one examines *The Medium Is the Massage* from the standpoint of media *performance* rather than of media *analysis,* the innovative brilliance of the work shines through.[9] By rejecting an external contemplation of the media in favour of a perspective that is immersed within them, McLuhan and his collaborators reveal how both the theorist and his/her ideas about the media are massaged by an outpouring of texts, sounds, and images. The embodied version of McLuhan was virtually massaged out of the text. Yet truncated and decontextualized versions of his ideas were massaged into powerful discursive forms that further catapulted the simulacra of McLuhan into the "statusphere"[10] of public consciousness. Paradoxically, the notable absence of McLuhan from *The Medium Is the Massage* only served to strengthen his presence as an iconic guru of the media.

But in his "meteoric ascent into the electric galaxy of stardom" (Marchessault, 2005, p. 199), McLuhan left Innis gasping somewhere back in the troposphere, as the gap between them widened even further. Although both in some sense took the age of print as their point of departure, Innis chose to reject its most deleterious space-biasing tendencies in favour of an Athenian-inspired orality, based on dialogue and deliberation, and carried out in somewhat marginal institutions such as universities. McLuhan, on the other hand, constrained by the linearity of print culture, opted for the openness and flexibility that he saw in the emergent electric age. But lured by the heady prospects of not simply commenting on it, but helping to constitute it, he was unable to keep the celebrity genie in the media bottle. In striking his Mephistophelian bargains with Feigen and Gossage followed by a no-less-Faustian pact with Agel, McLuhan was able to enjoy enormous acclaim and longevity as the reigning savant of media studies. But this came at the cost of distancing himself from his Innisian roots, calling into question his periodic pronouncements on how Innis' work was foundational to his own.

This evident incommensurability between the two thinkers suggests that conventional views of Innis, which have been shaped by McLuhan's reading of him, need to be reconsidered. Such a rethinking would allow us not only to understand Innis on his own terms, but would likely lead to the conclusion that a much looser coupling of the Innis/McLuhan tandem would be in order. This re-assessment in turn raises the larger question of how one should conceive of McLuhan and Innis in relation to what has come to be called the Toronto School of Communication. If it is indeed the case that the Innis/McLuhan amalgam was largely an artifact of McLuhan's zealous efforts rather than reflective of a real commonality of purpose and substance, then it would make a good deal of sense to view Innis as a *backdrop to* rather than a *founder of* the Toronto School of Communication. One could then concentrate on making better sense of a "de-McLuhanised" Innis on the one hand, and the McLuhanist-centred Toronto School of Communication on the other.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. "Report on the Ford Seminar at Toronto University, 1953-55," August 5, 1955, Ford Foundation Archives. Comments taken from essays on Innis' communications writings by graduate students who took part in the seminar were published together in *Explorations* as "Innis and Communication" (1953).

2. This finding was based on a survey of references in academic journals listed on JSTOR for the period 1950 to 1960.

3. It may have been either or both Smythe and Gerbner who inspired James Carey to draw on Innis in the dissertation that he wrote on the economics of communication. Carey (2007) also recounts meeting McLuhan during the summer of 1960, which McLuhan spent at the University of Illinois writing what would become *Understanding Media* (1964b).

4. McLuhan's interpretation of Innis largely remained mostly unchallenged until the appearance of Carey (1967) and Kuhns (1971).

5. A two-volume version of the manuscript edited by William J. Buxton, Michael Cheney, and Paul Heyer will be published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2013.

6. The network that McLuhan had suggested to Innis in a letter of March 1951 was underpinned by this project. He also elaborated what he had in mind in a letter to Ezra Pound earlier in the year: "My idea … is to send sheets to 30-40 serious characters … and to let them retype and pass on sheet to anybody they know and/or to feed back comments, idiograms etc. Object of sheet to open up intercommunication between several fields. To open eyes and ears of people in physics, anthropology, history, etc. … to relevant developments in the arts." McLuhan to Pound, January 5, 1951, in Molinaro, McLuhan, & Toye (1987, p. 218).

7. This was "his monthly tabloid newspaper." The article would eventually appear in the September 1965 issue (Marchand, 1990, p. 176).

8. This was in line with the first *Star Trek* series, which had its debut on NBC in 1966. It had, in turn, been inspired by the New Frontier Program of the Kennedy administration.

9. This enactive dimension of *The Medium Is the Massage* became evident to me as a result of the collaborative performance of the text by Jeffrey Schnapp and Luc Courchesne at the conference Innis, McLuhan, and the Media: Path to Enlightenment or Dead End? held on April 25, 2012. By enacting the text—within a constantly shifting three-dimensional version of it—they succeeded in making the immersive and electric-age aspirations of *The Medium Is the Massage* much more explicit.

10. This term, coined by his friend and admirer Tom Wolfe, is quite apt as a description of his rapid transformation.

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