

# ***A Second Way to Read McLuhan's Footnotes to Innis***

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Background** *Marshall McLuhan claimed his work was a footnote to Harold A. Innis. His claims have been used to argue that McLuhan and Innis offer a coherent system of thought, with a systematic methodology and common set of basic assumptions and presuppositions. This article questions that species of argument and looks to deepen our understanding of the McLuhan-Innis relationship.*

**Analysis** *McLuhan is read as an analogist, and his footnotes (plural) are interpreted as deliberate violations of normative patterns of academic use in the satiric tradition of Thomas Nashe and the Scriblerus Club.*

**Conclusion and implications** *McLuhan is repositioned apropos of Innis, figures conventionally associated with the Toronto School of Communication Theory and historians who address themselves to the theme of orality and literacy. This article also invites a reconsideration of McLuhan in relation to the digital era, his contributions to epistemology and understanding media.*

**Keywords** *McLuhan; Innis; Analogy; Media ecology; Toronto School*

## **RÉSUMÉ**

**Contexte** *Marshall McLuhan a dit que son œuvre n'était qu'une note en bas de page par rapport à celle de Harold A. Innis. Certains commentateurs ont utilisé ce propos pour soutenir que McLuhan et Innis ensemble présentent un système de pensée cohérent ayant une méthodologie systématique et des suppositions et présuppositions de base communes. L'article met cet argument en question tout en cherchant à approfondir notre compréhension du rapport McLuhan / Innis.*

**Analyse** *On perçoit communément McLuhan comme étant un analogiste et on interprète ses notes en bas de page (au pluriel) comme étant des violations délibérées des normes académiques dans la tradition satirique d'un Thomas Nashe ou d'un Scriblerus Club.*

**Conclusion et implications** *Cet article repositionne McLuhan par rapport à Innis, ces deux figures traditionnellement associées à l'École de communication de Toronto et aux historiens de l'oral et l'écrit. Cet article propose en outre une reconsidération de McLuhan par rapport à l'ère numérique et à ses contributions en épistémologie et en analyse des médias.*

**Mots clés** *McLuhan; Innis; Analogie; Écologie des médias; École de Toronto*

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We are in position of being able to use any insights whatever. Any kind of knowledge is grist to an analogist.  
(McLuhan, 1949, n.p.)

[The] object is not to spin or project analogies but to use them to illicit dialogue, to stimulate social organs and areas remote from our own. The analogies may be smoke, but they are to be smoke signals also.  
(McLuhan, 1951, n.p.)

### **A brief introduction to footnotes**

Footnotes split or double a text, and they invite, if not necessitate, participation with and/or the consideration of the gap and inter-relation(s) between two texts: body and footnote. The resultant split or doubling of the text created by a footnote (potentially) affords the audience/readers significant space(s) for participation and involvement. This is certainly the case with Marshall McLuhan's two oft-cited claims that his work was a "footnote" to Harold Innis. McLuhan's (1962c) first claim is made in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, and the second, two years later, in McLuhan's (2005) introduction to Innis' *Bias of Communication*. McLuhan's footnotes to Innis appear to have not only have afforded his critics and commentators scope for participation but also created enough "space" for wild hallucination.

In the wake of McLuhan's claims apropos Innis, Tom Wolfe (2000) claimed that McLuhan was scrupulous about crediting scholars who had influenced him, and this, he argues, explains his footnote to Innis.<sup>1</sup> Robert Logan (2000) went so far as to claim that McLuhan's footnote(s) can be read as evidence that McLuhan and Innis offer a coherent system of thought—the Toronto School—with a systematic methodology and common set of basic assumptions and presuppositions. What is of interest here is that both Wolfe and Logan affect the closure of the "gap" in similar ways; their "literary archaeology" is in accord with the patterns of "the visual critic ... always looking for connections instead of resonance" (McLuhan 1968, n.p.). McLuhan's footnotes (plural) are read as a singular instance, and that footnote (singular) is interpreted in accord with how footnotes are defined by the first edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* of 1906, formally known as the *Manual of Style: Being a Compilation of the Typographical Rules in Force at the University of Chicago Press, to Which Are Appended Specimens of Type in Use*, or simply *Manual of Style* (1906). The *Manual of Style* formalized the elements of footnoting and relegated the device's role to aiding readers search out and read an author's source material. Subsequently, footnotes came to be seen as indicating a pattern of debt and/or a direct pattern of influence and connection; footnotes were regarded as accessories to the body or an "original" text, and were considered less important. Footnotes, however, have not always been thought of in this way.

Footnotes are, in one sense, as old as manuscripts themselves.<sup>2</sup> It was not uncommon for an ancient scribe (as a member of a living, interpretative community) to surround a text with marginalia, glosses, and/or annotations. Marginalia served as a rich repository of commentary that added to and modified the "original" body copy. The

practice of footnoting was continued, albeit in a modified fashion, in the Gutenberg era. The first footnote from the Gutenberg press dates from 1481 (Connors, 1998). By the sixteenth century, after the technical challenges of setting the presses had well and truly been overcome, the use of glosses, commentaries, and notes had “become a whole discourse world unto itself” (Connors, 1998, p. 9). By the seventeenth century, Athanasius Kircher was using footnotes to build numerous documents into his speculative treatises on ancient Egypt and China (Grafton, 1997). And by the nineteenth century, Edward Gibbon had transformed the use of footnotes into a high form of literary artistry (Grafton, 1997).

Footnotes and their use also appear to have been a preoccupation of Thomas Nashe, the figure McLuhan uses in his doctoral work to focus his study of the trivium and the history of education. Nashe, in his varied attacks on Gabriel Harvey, used footnotes and patterns of academic citation as parodic asides and digressions in his dialogues (Connors, 1998). A similar spirit appears to inform the use of footnotes by members of the Scriblerus Club in the eighteenth century. The Scriblerians, which included the Menippean satirists Jonathan Swift (1958) and Alexander Pope (2014), frequently mocked the pedantry and folly of the works of the learned in and through the inclusion of extensive parodies of footnotes and the scholarly contests they encoded. In short, Nashe and the Scriblerians used footnotes to “take the piss” and satirize their readers directly.

From the mid-to-late twentieth century, so-called postmodern writers invited a reconsideration of footnotes and marginal glosses by using them in ways that flouted the conventions of academics and scholars and the regimentation of various style manuals (including the *Chicago Manual of Style* of 1906 and later editions). The arrival of hyper-textual affordances, for example, Memex, NLS, and Hypercard, went further, making it unnecessary to have been exposed to postmodern literary practices to be inclined (or connaturally informed) toward rethinking the role and function of footnotes. The World Wide Web (WWW) went even further still by creating an environment for reading experiences akin to T.S. Eliot's (1919) vision of a “simultaneous order”; all art and literature, along with McLuhan's outputs, were assumed by and remade as the “content” of an (organic) digital, intelligent, conversationally searchable, multilinear and polylingual, and neurological and genetic “archive.” The WWW has also made “augmented reality” apps and games, such as Pokémon GO, possible, which have made entire cities (e.g., Toronto) and their constitutive parts (e.g., Bloor Street) a “footnote” to the game experience.

Today, and perhaps for the first time ever, there is an audience for works such as Anthony Grafton's (1997) *The Footnote: A Curious History* and Chuck Zerby's (2002) *The Devils Details: A History of Footnotes*. The experiential matrix of digital life has made it relatively easy to (re-)consider McLuhan's footnotes in a variety of (new) ways. We might, for example, re-read McLuhan's footnotes as a component part of an epyllion, or little epic structure, particularly given that the epyllion informs and provides the ordering principle for *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (McLuhan, 1962c) and the relation(s) of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* to *Understanding Media* (McLuhan, 1964; see Chrystall, 2011). McLuhan's (1962c) *The Gutenberg Galaxy* might, then, be recast as a subplot to the

main plot provided by Innis' work. Subsequently, the McLuhan-Innis relationship might also be recast as one of creative, dynamic, and ongoing (mutual) transformation, as opposed to a merely static and lineal pattern of acknowledgement of debts and/or influences.

It is also viable to read McLuhan's footnotes as digressions and as an integral part of his artistry. McLuhan (1971c, 1976a) claimed his work was satiric, and frequently in the Menippean mode. In his correspondence with Edward T. Hall, McLuhan (1962b) appears to indicate his intention to satirize his audience(s) directly, which is, perhaps, the defining feature of Menippean satire: "why I wrote *The Gutenberg Galaxy* was in order that they might discover from whence they have derived their assumptions about the other media" (n.p.). Eric McLuhan (1982) has since identified "digression" as a Menippean topic and/or tactic. We might also consider McLuhan's footnotes as a Menippean signature (McLuhan, 1982, and/or nod in the direction of Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and James Joyce<sup>3</sup>—figures who also participated in the Menippean tradition McLuhan appears to have laboured to acquire and align himself with.

In addition to making it relatively easy (if not also necessary) to reconsider McLuhan's footnotes in a variety of (new) ways, the experiential matrix of digital life appears to have also made it largely untenable to think and talk about footnotes solely in the mode and manner of the *Chicago Manual of Style* of 1906. Put bluntly, it has become clear that many of McLuhan's critics and commentators were constitutionally incapable of considering footnotes in ways that went beyond their style guides. They could not ask the fundamental question: "what is a footnote?" Nor, it seems, could they consider the relation(s) between a footnote and a gloss. In addition to calling his work a footnote to Innis, McLuhan (1962c) states in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, "the present volume ... might be regarded as a gloss on a single text of Harold Innis" (p. 216). Are they—a footnote and a gloss—the same, similar, or different? Do McLuhan's dual claims act to modify the meaning attributable to McLuhan's footnote(s)? To date, these apparently trivial and/or minor issues and details have been substantially "glossed" over by many critics and commentators who, today, appear frozen in postures not dissimilar to McLuhan's assessment of Lewis Mumford. Mumford, as McLuhan (1962b) occasionally presents him, is "a wonderful example of ablation or printed-numbness, [who] manages to write well and voluminously on literary assumptions, without ever noticing literary technology" (n.p.).<sup>4</sup> Perhaps even McLuhan's students (and, in some instances, his collaborators) were/are not immune to the operation(s) of the media as an invisible cloak (McLuhan, 1964), and ought to have paid closer attention to how (and from where) he derived his insight(s)?

These reflections on footnotes are of immediate relevance here because this article seeks to address and (re-)encounter McLuhan's claims that his work was a footnote to Innis. The goal is to make a small contribution in the direction of deepening our understanding(s) of the McLuhan↔Innis relationship. Strangely, there is still ample opportunity to make such a contribution because the relationship between this "oddly" paired couple "is [still] not well documented" (Cohen, 1993, n.p.; see also Onufrijchuk, 1993). The reason for this deficit in scholarship is well beyond the scope of this article. However, if brief speculation can be admitted, it appears to be because

these thinkers—McLuhan and Innis—are implicated in the “theoretical identity” of the “Toronto School” (Trybulec, 2013). William Buxton and Thierry Bardini (2012b) noted that:

Innis and McLuhan were increasingly being treated by media scholars as a tandem—as the cofounders of the so-called Toronto School of Communication (Toronto School). Yet more often than not, Innis had become the footnote to McLuhan—a rather dim and fuzzy background to McLuhan’s luminescent foreground. (n.p.)

Attempts to define the “Toronto School”—which might also be described as a fictive entity and/or “invisible theoretical construct, charting an imagined network of intellectuals and their ideas” (Blondheim & Watson, 2007, p. 22) that was forged in order to realize a variety of strategic ends (see de Kerchove, 1989; Theall, 1986)—appears to have occluded close reading and consideration of fundamental differences between the pair. Subsequently, this article addresses the question of the relation(s) between the pair—McLuhan and Innis—and looks to do so by taking up the challenges posed by Elena Lamberti (2004) and Donald Theall (1995). According to Lamberti (2004), McLuhan Studies needs to “move ... from the literal (what McLuhan said) to the structural (how he said what he said) and try to carry out a different exegesis that, in time, may recompose the cosmogony and reassemble the fragments” (p. 63). Theall (1995) claims we need to pay “attention to how he [McLuhan] derived his insights and by what means he propagated them” (p. xvi) by attending to what McLuhan actually said and how he said it. The value in taking this approach is that it also enables this article to move from the particular—the McLuhan↔Innis relationship—and engage with wider issues/questions about methodology and epistemology.

### **Prologue to McLuhan’s first footnote**

Before directly engaging with McLuhan’s (1962c) first footnote we need, firstly, to briefly consider the prologue of *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. A prologue, similar to a footnote, also works to split or double a text, creating an interface and space for participation and involvement. And it is here that McLuhan establishes a way to interpret his footnotes in and through structuring and positioning his work in relation to four individuals named on the first page of the prologue: Albert B. Lord, Milman Parry, Patrick Cruttwell, and Harry Levin. Here, we will examine the McLuhan↔Lord/Parry and McLuhan↔Cruttwell inter-relations (at least as they are constructed in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*) because they are (structurally) analogous to the McLuhan-Innis relationship and can, therefore, be leveraged to shed light on the meaning(s) of McLuhan’s footnotes.

In the first line of the prologue of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan (1962c) sets up a relationship that is analogous to a footnote: “the present volume is in many respects complementary to *The Singer of Tales* by Albert B. Lord” (p. 1). A complementary relation, much in the manner of a footnote, indicates a double-ness, a split or paired relation. However, the term gestures in the direction of a mutual transformation of the elements set in a complementary relation (and is, in this respect, quite unlike the understanding of a footnotes outlined in the *Chicago Manual of Style* of 1906. The ac-

tion of providing the complement is to combine elements in such a way as to enhance and/or emphasize the distinct qualities of each one. However, in contrast to a “conventional” understanding of the footnote, a “complementary” relationship also suggests that it is the addition that has priority (at least when considered proximally), because the transforming action brings the “original” or first element to some kind of maturity or fullness.

McLuhan (1962c) fleshes out what he means by “complementary” on the first page: “Professor Lord’s book, like the studies of Milman Parry, is quite natural and appropriate to our electric age, as *The Gutenberg Galaxy* may help to explain” (p. 1). Here, the work of Lord (and Parry) is presented as an effect and/or symptom of the electric age. This is made explicit later on the same page:

That such a study of the divergent nature of oral and written social organization has not been carried out by historians long ago is rather hard to explain. Perhaps the reason for the omission is simply that the job *could only be done* when the two conflicting forms of written and oral experience were once again co-existent as they are today. (p. 1, emphasis added)

McLuhan (1962c) drives the point home in the first part or “book” of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*:

That print increasingly hypnotized the Western world is *nowadays the theme of all historians of art and science alike, because we no longer live under the spell of the isolated visual sense*. We have not yet begun to ask under what new spell we exist. In place of spell it may be more acceptable to say “assumptions” or “parameters” or “frame of reference.” (p. 183, emphasis added)

McLuhan (1962c) claims the reason why Lord’s and Parry’s work is “natural,” “appropriate,” “could only have been done,” and the “theme of all historians of art and science alike” is because “we are experiencing the same confusions and indecisions which they had felt when living simultaneously in two contrasted forms of society and experience” (p. 1). In other words, McLuhan presents the work of Lord (as with all the historians of art and science that address themselves to this theme, including Innis) as having been obsolesced by the new environment/electric surround (c.f. McLuhan, 1961; McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988).

The relationship McLuhan establishes between his work and that of Lord/Parry is not, however, solely one of difference—of an effect and an explanation. A reader will come to discover in the second part (or book) of the *Galaxy*, “The *Galaxy Reconfigured*,” that McLuhan (1962c) also claims an affinity between his project and that of Lord’s by indicating that his project too is an effect:

And, as usual, when some previously opaque area becomes translucent, it is because we have moved into another phase from which we can contemplate the contours of the preceding situation with ease and clarity. It is this fact that makes it feasible to write *The Gutenberg Galaxy* at all. (p. 275)

If we admit McLuhan’s other texts are able to shed light on what he means here, then it is reasonably clear that the “phase” McLuhan is alluding to (but not naming directly) is the hybrid union of the computer, that “finally awakened the mind to detachment

from its modes of codifying and signifying” (McLuhan, 1954a, n.p.), and the “proscenium arch” (McLuhan & Watson, 1970, p. 12) created by Sputnik in 1957 and Telstar 1 in 1962. The work of Lord (and Parry) is, then, to the electric environment what McLuhan’s (1962c) *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is to “another phase” of the electric situation.

Perhaps, the McLuhan ↔ Lord/Parry inter-relation might be more rapidly apprehended if it is presented in terms of a four-part analogical relationship. Using the conventional A:B::C:D notation:

(A) Lord: (B) Electric environment :: (C) McLuhan/*Gutenberg Galaxy* :  
(D) “Another phase”

AND

(A) Lord: (C) McLuhan/*Gutenberg Galaxy* :: (B) Electric environment  
(D) “Another phase”

The matrix of analogical relations invites comparison and consideration based on resemblances (Phelan, 1973). There are same/similar relations between the two projects beyond the fact that McLuhan makes heavy use of Lord’s work at the level of content. Causal relations are outlined. Both works are effects of the media environment. Lord’s work is an effect of an earlier environment and McLuhan’s an effect of a later environment. There are also significant differences. Lord’s work, at least as McLuhan presents it, is an unconscious effect. McLuhan’s work, by contrast, is presented as being conscious of its status as effect (most probably of a later, post-Sputnik/Telstar media environment).

Advancing the argument necessitates turning our attention to McLuhan’s somewhat mysterious inclusion of Patrick Cruttwell. Cruttwell’s legacy, unlike that of Lord and/or Parry, has not fared well. Yet, McLuhan (1962c) cites this (apparently minor) figure on both the first and penultimate pages of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, and he loudly echoes Cruttwell’s (1960) claims, made in relation to Elizabethan poets, when he is talking about Lord’s work.

According to McLuhan (1962c), Cruttwell “devoted an entire study (*The Shakespearean Moment*) to the artistic strategies born of the Elizabethan experience of living in a divided world that was dissolving and resolving at the same time” (p. 1). Cruttwell (1960) himself is perhaps the best guide to the “two types of mind” (p. 252) he is dealing with via the scheme he provides in his book:

	A	B
1.	Puritan	Anglo-Catholicism
2.	New Science	Traditional medieval theology
3.	Renaissance classicism	Native popular art
4.	Iconoclasm (i.e., hatred of the sensuous, especially in spiritual matters)	Sensuousness, allowed to permeate all things
5.	Austerity (i.e., hatred of courtliness and magnificence)	Courtly splendor

6.	Insularity: distrust of Continental influence, especially baroque and Catholic, and tendency to look on the English as a new Chosen People.	Attempt to preserve what remained of the medieval Continental unity
7.	Parliamentary sympathies, tendencies towards egalitarianism	Monarchist sympathies, hierarchical view of society
8.	Optimism: belief in progress	Pessimism: skepticism about possibility of human improvement
9.	Introspectiveness, alienation from the dramatic attitude	Dramatic and tragic sense
10.	Cambridge	Oxford

Source: Cruttwell, 1960 (p. 252)

McLuhan (1962c) uses Cruttwell to characterize the environment shared by the author and reader. The electric age is presented as analogous to the Elizabethan period on account of both periods being “poised” in-between: “we too, live at such a moment of interplay” (p. 1). Again, it is perhaps instructive to render these analogical relations in four parts:

(A) Cruttwell: (B) C17th :: (C) McLuhan : (D) C20th

AND

(A) Cruttwell : (C) McLuhan :: (B) C17th : (D) C20th

McLuhan’s (1962c) use of Cruttwell invites consideration of the similarities and differences between Cruttwell’s extended study of artists and artistic strategies and two types of mind and his own *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. The similarities are relatively simple and obvious. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* literally wore its concern with two-ness and interplay on its sleeve; the original cover art sported two interlocking Gs: a smaller “G,” in reverse, inside the curvature of the larger “G.” In addition to serving as a graphical analogue of Cruttwell’s concerns, the two Gs evoke the action of a/the vortex, the design evokes and references the gyroscopic epistemology of Wyndham Lewis and also William Butler Yeats’ double gyres (Carey, 1967) as it renders “the oscillation of two simultaneous and complementary cones or spirals, constituting the synchronic worlds of birth and death” and the “contrapuntal interplay [between two sets of figure/ground relations] in a resonating structure whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere” (Etrog & McLuhan, 1987, p. 125) as two-dimensional iconic image. And if McLuhan (1962c) was not explicit enough about the similarities between the *Galaxy* and Cruttwell’s *Shakespearean Moment* in the prologue, he begins the *Galaxy* proper: “When King Lear proposes ‘our darker purpose’” (p. 11).

It is, however, the differences that are of greater relevance. First, where Cruttwell explores artists and artistic strategies, for example, Shakespeare, McLuhan’s *Galaxy* largely addresses the media themselves. As McLuhan (1960) noted elsewhere, just prior to the publication of *Galaxy*: “it is the massive new media themselves that are



the avant-garde and which require the same type of intensive study which were formerly reserved for the arts” (p. 3). Second, while McLuhan and Cruttwell are contemporaries (born in the same year and writing at the same time), McLuhan appears to be claiming a same/similar “distance” from the electric environment as Cruttwell has from the 17th century. This difference warrants contemplation if we are to unpack McLuhan’s footnotes to Innis, because the “distance” McLuhan claims is neither strictly spatial nor temporal. Rather, the “distance” McLuhan claims finds its meaning in relation to his claims (elsewhere) about his work vis-à-vis another phase. Third, McLuhan flags his readers to the fact that he is not, strictly speaking, working in the mode of Cruttwell-the-critic. Rather, McLuhan (1962c) indicates that he has pushed past “inconvenience” (p. 3). His work is a different order and kind than Cruttwell’s. The sum of these considerations appears to be that McLuhan positions himself as occupying a position not unlike Cruttwell’s (1960) account of Shakespeare—a figure whose is “well aware that something new was emerging” (p. 39). If we also admit that McLuhan (1959a) presents the “media” themselves as operating as artists, then McLuhan is flagging that, in his own role as (serious) artist, he has “merged” with the media “rather than staying outside as ironic spectator and commentator” (p. 3). Innis’ by contrast, McLuhan (n.d.-b) would later note, arrived at his discoveries and means of communicating them by “accident” (n.p.): “without having studied modern art and poetry, he yet discovered how to arrange his insights in patterns that nearly resemble the art forms of our time” (McLuhan, 2005, p. 5).

### **Analogy (and method)**

At this juncture it is, perhaps, necessary to pause in order to offer up some notes on analogy. The fortunes of analogy, as a mode of inference and as a method of discovery, have fluctuated (Lloyd, 1966). Writing to Ezra Pound, McLuhan (1948) indicated that the North American mind “chucked out the principle of metaphor and analogy” in the 18th century and this had affected a “deep occultation of nearly all human thought for the U.S.A” (p. 207). Today, analogy (and metaphor, as a four-part analogical relationship comprised of two figure/ground relations) is back on the agenda in computer science and the field(s) of machine (deep) learning. In the humanities and social sciences, however, the principles of metaphor and analogy, particularly as a mode of analysis, remain suspect at best. Subsequently, given a) the place analogy and analogical reasoning plays in the argument so far, and that b) the use of analogy might still appear foreign to some (after centuries of disuse), it is probably necessary to pause in order to offer a few notes and some minor caveats.

Analogical analysis aims to refashion an “original disclosure” (that was or has become opaque) in a second-order reflection:

Analogy is a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference. The order among the relationships is constituted by the distinct but similar relationships of each analogue to some primary focal meaning, some prime analogue. A principle aim of all properly analogical languages is the production of some order, at the limit, some harmony to the several analogues, the similarities-in-difference, constituting the whole of reality. The order is developed by explicating the analogical relationships among

the various realities (self, others, world, God), by clarifying the relationship of each to the primary analogue, the meaning chosen as the primary focus for interpreting reality. ... That focal meaning as event will ... [provide] clues to possible ordered relationships disclosed by the event as each analogue is focused, interpreted and related through newly formed propositions the other analogues as similarities-in-difference by the primary analogue. (Tracy, 1981, p. 408)

Apprehending analogy is not, however, without its hazards, because it is a fundamentally participatory mode of perception and it belongs to the art(s) of discovery rather than the art(s) of rigour. The mode of exploring analogy must, of necessity, be imaginative and “demonstrative”: finding and making connections, “stringing together of instances” (Stafford, 1999, p. 23), and piling up evidence to create a “probable” (Stafford, 1999, p. 117) but not definitive case. The danger, according to Barbara Stafford (1999), is that following “a chain of similarities ... might lead us astray or seduce us into seeing erroneous connections” (p. 120). But, here, the dangers are worth the risks. McLuhan (1944, 1949) was an analogist (McEwen, 2011; McLuhan, 2008). His works are the product of an analogical imagination. And, as Julia Kristeva (1986) notes apropos Menippean satire, McLuhan’s works are “rich in analogy, relation, opposition, and therefore dialogism and ambivalence” (p. 56). To use analogy in an attempt to encounter McLuhan on his own terms is, therefore, entirely appropriate.

### **McLuhan as medium, Innis as content**

Prior to offering some notes on analogy, the previous section outlined two four-part analogical relationships under the pretext that they will, eventually, shed light on the McLuhan ↔ Innis relationship. The matter can now be stated quite simply. Everything that has surfaced vis-à-vis Lord/Parry and Cruttwell can be applied to McLuhan’s first footnote to Innis. When McLuhan (1962c) says that his work is a “footnote” (p. 50) to Innis in the Galaxy, he indicates a relationship that is the same/similar as his relations to Lord, Parry, Cruttwell, and Levin (although the McLuhan ↔ Levin relationship is not discussed here).

McLuhan’s relationship to Innis, at least as it exists in and is constructed by the text under consideration, becomes even clearer in light of the material on the page immediately prior to McLuhan’s (1962c) claim that his work is a footnote to Innis: “The present book is a footnote of explanation to his work” (p. 50). Page 49 features an excerpt from the *New York Times*. The “body” text, “Jesus the Helper,” is an example of the phonetic alphabet (an old medium) having been retrieved and transformed into an art form and/or pressed into service anew as a pedagogic aid. The “footnote” by the *New York Times* (a relatively new medium in 1961 and organ of the information society), provides a complement to a sparse text (that would not otherwise have a life of its own) and provides an explanation of the “Jesus the Helper” text. The relationship between older and newer media is analogous to the relationship McLuhan (1962c) creates on the following page apropos Innis. Again, the conventional notation is useful. As McLuhan (1969b) noted to Prime Minister Pierre E. Trudeau: “Strict regard to structural character enables one to avoid confusion” (p. 2).

(A) McLuhan : (B) Innis :: (C) *New York Times* : (D) "Jesus the Helper"

AND

(A) McLuhan : (C) *New York Times* :: (B) Innis : (D) "Jesus the Helper"

McLuhan's footnote to Innis is what the footnote in the *New York Times* literary supplement in 1961 is to the text "Jesus the Helper." McLuhan, as serious artist and medium, makes Innis his content and provides a "gloss" on his work ("gloss" here carrying the full weight of its etymology as both noun and verb).

To come at the matter from another angle, McLuhan is using a web of analogies to gesture at his own authorial praxis (as a serious artist), and his bid to "parallel" (Schwartz, 1968) or, more precisely, "mime" (Dobbs, 2005) the media of his day (albeit through the medium of the book). Material from the unpublished, preparatory work for *The Gutenberg Galaxy* makes this relatively explicit. Here, McLuhan (1959b) provides another "formulae" that, while not making it into the *Galaxy*, underpins and informs the analogies discussed here:

Bertrand Russell said that the great discovery of the twentieth century was the technique of the suspended judgement, that is, the technique of in-sight. The technique of insight is to reconstruct process itself.

The technique of insight is the technique of understanding media.

It is the technique of understanding the process of the world experience we now share by means of the ordinary entertainment and news services.  
(p. 6)

If we re-parse the quote using "~" to designate significant comparability (see Levin, 1971) then: "suspended judgement" ~ "insight" ~ "understanding media" ~ "process of the world experience we now share by means of the ordinary entertainment and news services." The "equation" shows that understanding is what the "media" (of the day) do. McLuhan (1959b) makes this almost explicit in the section that immediately follows:

As levels of information rise the principle of substitutability comes into play at all levels. Any raw material or fuel can be substituted by others.

Any role can be substituted for another. (p. 6)

"Under-standing," at least as McLuhan appears to use the word, is a process that entails seeing or experiencing one "thing" through though the lens or mode of another. It (the act of understanding) is inherently and fundamentally bound up with the operations of metaphor and, in this instance, entails the collision of (at least) two metaphors: media pairs. Understanding and, therefore, the subsequent awakening of "the mind to detachment from its modes of codifying and signifying" (McLuhan, 1954a, n.p.), is symptomatic, if not entirely "natural" and "appropriate," when substitutability comes to play at all levels. There is no alternative to understanding because of substitutability. Consequently, we are brought, again, back into contact with McLuhan's claims about his role as artist and that the artist of the day had merged with, or was in the process of merging, with the media (Canada's Shakespeare?). If we accept that

McLuhan lays out and invites participation in an analogical web that might serve as a propaedeutic to an encounter with the “present,” then McLuhan is not offering any private or personal “ideas” about Innis. He is merely revealing in the fashion of sprinkling iron filings, and/or exposing the “gristly roots of ideas that are in action” (O’Driscoll, 2005, p. 140). Innis, if we could imagine it was possible to consider the McLuhan-Innis relationship solely in light of McLuhan’s first footnote, effectively becomes only as important as 20 or 30 others: “The literary quotations I use in the *Galaxy* are not intended as footnotes or as part of my argument. They are there as heuristic probes. I could substitute for any one of those quotes twenty or thirty other citations” (McLuhan, 1997, p. 73, emphasis added). “There can be no ‘authority’ where the game is discovery” McLuhan (2001, p. 219) notes elsewhere. It is, therefore, not surprising that what McLuhan claims for Innis is also attributed to others. For example, McLuhan’s (1962a) claims that “*The Gutenberg Galaxy* proceeds on the assumption of ‘page 79’ of Edward T. Hall’s *The Silent Language*” (n.p.). McLuhan (1979a) called the *The Gutenberg Galaxy* a “subplot to [Elizabeth] Eisenstein’s somber narrative” (n.p.).

### McLuhan’s second footnote

McLuhan’s (2005) second claim that his work is a footnote to Innis appears in the introduction he wrote for a reissue of Innis’ *Bias of Communication* after the publication of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. On the face of it, the second footnote is a much simpler affair. McLuhan’s assessment of Innis is favourable, punctuated with criticism. McLuhan (2005) claims that: 1) Innis failed “to be true to his own methodology” (p. 13); 2) he is/was “quite capable of inaccurate observations during the running of his tests” (p. 10); 3) Innis was “misled by the ordinary consensus of his time” (p. 13); 4) Innis’ work is largely a “miscarriage of his own structural method of analysis” (p. 14); and 5) that he suffered from “technological blindness” and failed to “make structural analysis of the modalities of the visual and the audible” (pp. 14–15) and the character of electricity as extension of the central nervous system. Surface simplicity yields to the complex, because McLuhan’s first footnote simply will not go away. The two footnotes are tangled together in a way that cannot be undone.

The circuitry of McLuhan’s two footnotes means that each (potentially) acts on and continually modifies the other. The circuit sets up a dynamic, continual oscillation between same-ness (and continuity) and difference. For example, if McLuhan’s critique of Innis (above) is read in light of his first footnote, then its severity needs to be substantially downgraded. McLuhan’s *Galaxy* and Innis’ *Bias* are not contemporaneous. Innis died in 1952. There is no way that his work could “benefit” from the services (and disservices) of another phase of the media environment. Ergo, to say that he failed is, therefore, not completely dissimilar to saying that Galen failed because he did not invent or use penicillin. Yet, the first footnote also adds weight to and makes McLuhan’s criticisms of Innis in the second even more pointed and severe. The circuitry of the two footnotes also works to pull McLuhan’s career-long survey of Innis’ work into its orbit. Everything that McLuhan has to say about Innis becomes implicated and (potentially) transformed.

McLuhan (1951) first mentions Innis in a letter to his former student Hugh Kenner. Innis, he says, would be useful in his bid to rejuvenate the humanities as he is one of

the “few people ... who are highly trained in non-humanities so called ... better equipped to revise the procedures in the humanities than the Brook’s or Leavis’ or Woodhouse’s” (n.p.). Writing to Innis a couple of months later, McLuhan (1987) indicated that he has an even more expansive project in mind. His project is, subsequently, laid out in “The Later-Innis.” Here, McLuhan (1953) notes how: “communication theory and practice ... seems inevitably to hold the key of unification of proliferating specialisms of modern knowledge” (pp. 393–394). The apparent efficacy of his claims (at least at a local level) is recorded in the minutes and notes of the Centre for Culture and Technology (held at the Library and Archives Canada). After a year flailing around and getting nowhere, McLuhan (1955) notes how the work of Innis (along with Sigfried Giedion) was instrumental in terms of helping the interdisciplinary culture and communication seminar get acquainted with each other’s fields and set up common problems by providing a common language.

For all of Innis’ “faults,” outlined in McLuhan’s second footnote, McLuhan (1972b) did not stop writing about him until his death. He clearly regarded Innis as an “exceptional” figure:

Joyce assumes automatically that new technologies change people psychologically and profoundly. The only other person to have achieved or used this awareness was Harold A. Innis, a Canadian Economist and political scientist. The work of Eric Havelock in his Preface to Plato is actually a footnote to Harold Innis. Havelock and Innis were well acquainted here at the University of Toronto. (p. 1)

On more than one occasion, McLuhan (1975) credits Innis as being the “source” of his insights:

The work of Harold Innis, beginning with his *Bias Communication and Empire and Communication*, first made me directly conscious of the hidden and subliminal effects of media on man and society. (p.1)

Even if he also softened those claims:

I got into media study through the new criticism, although Harold Innis certainly gave me an extra boost in his *Bias of Communication*. Innis simply asks about all innovations — what was the human response, the satisfactions, the transformations of attitude and outlook, etc. This calls for a study of percepts rather than concepts, a matter which is very uncongenial to most people but easy for anyone trained in the new criticism. (McLuhan, 1973c, p.1)

McLuhan (1967) also credited others: “I got it [all] ... the study of the environment as a teaching machine” and “mechanism for shaping sensibility” (n.p.) from P. Wyndham Lewis.

Innis, McLuhan (n.d.-a) claimed, made a significant contribution to communication theory. He (Innis) abandoned a sender-message-receiver type approaches and turned, instead, to study participation and the effects of various media on both sender and receiver. In this respect, Innis was the “exception” to the approach of the “visual man [sic]” who likes to “assume a merely neutral transportation process between the figure and the ground, ignoring the complex changes that take place in both figure

and ground during all communication” (McLuhan, 1973a, p. 467). The contrast that McLuhan is trying to make, between Innis and the visual “man” who treats transportation as neutral is, perhaps, made a little clearer in an unpublished letter to the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications:

The communication models used for studying media in Europe and America [on account of a visual and rationalistic bias] are models for transportation only. These models ignore all the side effects and all the “service” environments created by these media. For example, to study the motor car as if it were a vehicle of transportation, would be to ignore the hidden psychic ground underlying its use, and it would also be to ignore the service environment of highways, factories, and oil companies, which constitute the real ground for the figure of the car. (McLuhan, 1976b, p. 1, underline in original text)

Innis, McLuhan argued, made no such error.<sup>5</sup> McLuhan (1969a) also claimed that Innis was one of the few academics in the 20th century to understand the nature of the university (p. 1). And, at a time when McLuhan was looking to reposition his work as being primarily “about” causality, McLuhan (1979a) portrayed Innis as a pioneer in the study of causality:

The juxtaposition of economist and classicist seems to have inspired these colleagues at the University of Toronto. Between the *Preface to Plato* and *Empire and Communications* there emerged a new world of philosophic insight into the nature of formal causality. (p. 2)

Innis is offered up as a figure working “with causality at all times” (McLuhan, 1971b, n.p.) who “began the study of media as makers of new species of behavior and organization” (McLuhan, 1971a, n.p.).

### From Innis to epistemology

The interplay between the two “footnotes” means that the McLuhan⇌Innis relationship, at least as it is constructed in the texts examined here, must be regarded as ambivalent. The ambivalence is not, however, something to be resolved. Rather, the ambivalence is intrinsic to the relationship, and it can also be read as an invitation to move from the particular—concern with the McLuhan⇌Innis relation—to a consideration of wider issues, particularly the relations between media study, writing, and epistemology.<sup>6</sup>

McLuhan (1972a) claimed that Innis, in contrast to Hegel, provided an “epistemology of experience as opposed to epistemology of knowledge” (n.p.), which provided clues as to “how and why men [sic] are changed in their inner natures by their own technologies.” McLuhan’s project is complementary to that of Innis and can also be talked about in terms of epistemology. The four-part analogies examined here position McLuhan in relation to Lord, Parry, Cruttwell, and Innis (and “Jesus the Helper” text and the *New York Times*). Arguably, the web of analogical relations can be read as showing that the work of these figures ought to be regarded as an effect and/or symptom. Subsequently, the web of analogical relations can also be read as inviting a consideration of McLuhan’s work in relation to the recent work of Don Ihde (2000; Ihde & Selinger, 2004). Ihde shows how the fore-runner of the camera operated as an “epistemological engine.”

An “epistemology engine” is a technology or a set of technologies that through use frequently become explicit models for describing how knowledge is produced. The most dramatic examples of “epistemology engines” influence our notions of subjectivity, directly affecting how we understand what it means to be human and to perceive things from a human perspective. They enable us to draw connections between the knowledge producing capacity of the human mind and technologies that putatively function according to similar mechanical processes. The philosophy of mind is replete with theorists modeling the brain, which even today is poorly understood, on technologies whose design is better understood. An epistemology engine is thus a special case of a more general phenomenological notion that entails the ways in which lifeworld practices form the basis for what often become scientific theories. (Ihde & Selinger, 2004, p. 21)

McLuhan not only anticipated Ihde’s discoveries—that media and/or technology operate as epistemological engines—by nearly half a century, he went further. Just how much further begins to come into view when we consider, as this article has sought to do, how McLuhan said what he said (Lamberti, 2004), the “means he propagated” (Theall, 1995, p. xvi) his insights, and when he said what he said. McLuhan achieves in and for his time—the second half of the 20th century—what Ihde only achieves with the power of hindsight.

Ihde affords something of a view from outside. His work does not account for its own status as writing or how such a privileged vantage was won, and there is no substantive engagement with the media environment of the twenty-first century—the gap between “our” time and the time of Rene Descartes and the forerunner of the camera. McLuhan, by contrast, arrested and externalized his inner drama and mode(s) of awareness in a complex of carefully ordered analogical relations (keeping in mind that McLuhan also flagged that his own work also was an effect/symptom, and that he was or had merged with the media). The analogical web that creates and sustains these relations (above) fosters (if not necessitates) reader participation and involvement. Through participation in a pattern that is played and replayed several times (at least four times), readers can (potentially) reconstruct within themselves the mental state(s) and mode(s) of apprehension coded into the matrix of those relations. Consequently, a reader is not afforded an external view of the operations of epistemology engines as per Ihde (2000; Ihde & Selinger, 2004). Rather, McLuhan’s complement to Innis takes the form of “correct geography”—the view of a sailor and/or poet in the periplum—of the media environment of his day. His techno-poetics, created and sustained by a web of analogies, can provide readers with an insider’s experience of ways and modes of knowing (and how “knowledge” resides in the ecology of media, things, and their users) that they (imaginatively) (re-) constructed and/or (re-) make within themselves.

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## Notes

1. Thomas Cooper (1988), by contrast, has documented the extent McLuhan was criticized by the intellectual community for flouting scholarly conventions and for his wayward (and often missing) patterns of citation.
2. In another sense, this claim is at best katachronistic. To put the modern footnote on a same/similar plain as very different forms of annotation across several centuries is not unproblematic. Here, however, given the structural focus of this article, it is warranted, if only to establish a beachhead for exploration.
3. James Joyce (Joyce, Henkes, Bindervoet, and Fordham, 2012) makes heavy use of footnotes in book II part II of *Finnegans Wake*. It should be remembered that the working title of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* was “The Road to Finnegans Wake.”
4. It is entirely “appropriate” to note that these observations (above) on footnotes are no less a symptom than the pre-WWW observations ostensibly critiqued here.
5. It is relevant to note that McLuhan’s account of Innis can, at times, become cloudy because of how he uses “transport” and “transportation.” The study of transportation is at the very heart of Innis’ contribution (Bonnett, 2013). McLuhan, however, uses the phrase “transport” and/or “transportation theories of communication” to refer to the use of an old hardware paradigm of transportation of data from point to point as a model of communication (e.g., Shannon Weaver and the information theorists of the day). The problem with a transport theory, as McLuhan (1973b) noted to Wimsatt is that: “Communication necessarily implies change and metamorphosis of both the sender and receiver so that the transportation [theory] of communication ... is quite useless to account for what happens” (p. 2).
6. Surfacing McLuhan’s statements about Innis naturally evokes the question was McLuhan “correct” in his assessment? Questions about “correctness” are anything but simple, even if we assume the conventional “academic” posture of adopting “matching” as a criterion for correctness and/or truth. Further, questions about “correctness” can be misleading. Perhaps a more fruitful approach is to explore how, as a “serious artist,” McLuhan was primarily concerned with transforming his audience(s)—even if it was at the expense of his reputation and how he was (and will be) perceived according to academic norms. In this new light, it becomes possible to see how McLuhan modulated his “position” apropos Innis according to medium and audience. And while McLuhan frequently got it “wrong” and/or appears inconsistent at the level of content, he was consistent at the level of effect: McLuhan pushed his audience(s) to read Innis. Subsequently, it becomes possible to say with some certainty that McLuhan was right about Innis. McLuhan’s assessment of Innis was that he deserved to be read. What McLuhan did to promote Innis’ reception transcends any singular statement he made about him.

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Chrystall, A

2020

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