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The New American Vortex: Explorations of McLuhan.

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We shall not cease from exploration.

ABSTRACT

To encounter and digest the oeuvre of H. Marshall McLuhan on his own terms, this study deploys a strategy not dissimilar to that of Poe's sailor who survived his descent into the maelstrom by studying the action of the vortex and catching hold of a recurring form. Here, McLuhan's career-spanning concern with "communication" may be seen as just such a recurrence — his concern with communication is evident at every turn of his effort to update the Great English Vortex of 1914 and develop a second vortex in mid-century America. Having taken hold of this central concern, this study uses the procedure he developed to expose the "theory of communication" of any figure in the arts and sciences, and applies it to McLuhan himself.

In this process of folding McLuhan in on himself, five loosely chronological chapters are used to reveal the four historical "phases" of his career, and to show that McLuhan cannot properly be understood apart from:

1. The great tradition of Ciceronian humanism and the Ciceronian ideal — the *doctus orator* — a figure in whom eloquence and wisdom coalesce.
2. The programme of the figures frequently referred to as the Men of 1914: James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis.

In the final analysis, McLuhan is shown as having updated and transformed both — the Ciceronian ideal and the programme of the Men of 1914 — to become something of a singularity in the midst of what he saw as an Electric Renaissance: a paramodern (neither modernist nor post-modernist) *doctus orator*.

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In the H. Marshall McLuhan Collection there is a note from the archivist that reads:

A careful study of the McLuhan papers will reveal that they are not just collections of biographical data. They are blue prints for heightening awareness and encouragement for increasing intellectual development. They are records of how the fires in young minds were set.

The note resides in the last folder of the 225th of 228 boxes that make up the collection. Having started with box one, by the time I encountered it I was in a position to concur. The H. Marshall McLuhan Collection is more than a “blue print,” it is an invitation for exploration, an education, and it set in motion an intellectual adventure.

For the opportunity to encounter McLuhan and to conduct this study, I would like to thank and acknowledge, firstly, Scott Eastham, my primary supervisor. Without his patience and faith, and without his editorial acumen, scholarly advice, and provision of intellectual stimulation, this study would not have been conducted. Secondly, I would also like to thank Peter Lineham, my secondary supervisor, for his support, counsel, and lending an ear, and Massey University for financial support. Very special thanks must also go to the artist–scientist–educator, Bob Dobbs, for his generosity with his time and for being both “guide” and dialogue partner. In many respects, Dobbs is for this study what Joyce was for McLuhan during his study of Nashe. Special thanks must also go to John Tiffin, for introducing me to McLuhan; Mark Stahlman, for the motivation to ground this study in work at the archives; Mark Federman, for trying to create a milieu out of nothing at the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto; Michael and Carol Edmunds, for their hospitality, friendship, and for

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