

Abstract

During the late 1940's and early 1950's a Canadian scholar working at the University of Toronto wrote most prolifically upon the subject of human communications. Ever since that period, the writings of Dr. Harold Adams Innis continue to be interpreted by contemporary scholars. In an era that is constantly quite literally being re-defined by newer communication technologies, we often search for some understanding or predictability of the enormous changes and challenges to our Western society wrought by rapid innovations to communications. Dr. Innis is considered by some to have been at the forefront in illustrating the impact of changing modes of communication upon ancient societies as well as the modern epoch. This research paper will illustrate how Dr. Innis influenced our understanding of communications.

While developing a research paper for an undergraduate class in distance and open learning I became aware of the works of Dr. Harold Adams Innis. In contrast to the often-cryptic prose of his former graduate student, Marshall McLuhan, I found Innis' work illuminated certain theories regarding concepts of communication. It was as if the works of these two remarkable scholars needed each other to be more understandable. While Dr. Innis took his rightful

place among Canada's more famous historians, he never really gained the broader public acclaim Dr. McLuhan experienced.

At this point, I take the reader to 1994 when the impact of newer communication technologies gained momentum in the communication industry and to a somewhat lesser extent, education. What we experienced at the time is now recognized more widely as a paradigm shift. Scholars, students, the high-technology industry, and to a lesser extent, the investment industry searched for clues to answer the constantly changing questions occurring with expanding new possibilities on an almost daily basis. The era mocked many of our efforts to rationalize or organize what we experienced into any simplistic formula or over-arching theory. It took a few years to gain a collective understanding of communication innovations: we were involved with nothing less than a revolution. Indeed, we may just be beginning to grasp a basic understanding of the importance of newer communication technologies. History teaches us that once revolutions gain some sort of critical mass, they cannot contain themselves, much less be contained.

Much lip service was paid to this idea of a revolution in communications, and Marshall McLuhan, as an unintended darling of North American pop culture and the intelligentsia, was the de facto 'Guru' and spokesman for this revolution. (Duffy, 1969) How many people fully absorbed his message would seem to be an open question and McLuhan's fame and standing gradually diminished until he died. I often wondered if Dr. McLuhan's work was understood in his own time. He may have been cursed with the dilemma of speaking and writing in an era that experienced a revolution on different fronts, as Western culture openly challenging its own values, icons, and ideas. A large and youthful audience readily listened to, and often re-iterated these revolutionary concepts without submitting them to the critical analysis they deserved, and upon maturation, these former acolytes discarded the dated concepts as though changing fashions for a new season.

Perhaps it would not be too unkind to say that Marshall McLuhan was captured within his era's particular medium, that is to say, the electronic medium (Duffy, 1969). While Dr. McLuhan wrote eloquently and prolifically, he gained much wider exposure within the constraints of electronic images via television. Media personalities of all types quoted McLuhan. But because much of McLuhan's work dwelled within and upon the impact of electric

communications, much of his work became trapped within the time and space of his own era, a sobering reminder to any scholar who might seek a measure of immortality. McLuhan did say that even a light bulb changed the way people lived and learned as it allowed for night reading, but it was the growing influence of television that held his attention as well as that of the public eye.

What do we then make of Dr. Innis' work? How did he contribute to communications theory, and what made him different from anyone else, including McLuhan? Subtle differences emerge between McLuhan and Innis in explaining communications theory, yet their separate work ultimately strengthens each other's arguments. One of Innis' most profound contributions concerned the theory of administrating empires and religion, or as Innis termed it, attempts to control time and space. Differing from Emmanuel Kant's work which tied everything to a time and a place, Innis theorized that in many matters of communications, history repeatedly illustrated that communications were largely efforts to control time and space. Time in the sense of a reliable calendar, and space being an area of land or water between separate points. The most modern application of communications technology to control space is the Global Positioning System. Developed for the military, the GPS is a prime example of an enabling tool developed to assist an individual to control space.

Arguably, the military itself is the ultimate state-sponsored entity designed to control, or even terminate, human time and space. Innis, a Gunner with the Canadian Expedition Overseas during World War I, would likely understand and appreciate this latest military communication technology.

The rapid speed that trains travel caused Sir Sanford Fleming to develop a universal system of time zones that allowed for an accurate system for predicting arrivals and departures. This system of time zones is still in use and illustrates the modern-day merging of human attempts to control time and space. Sir Fleming's system also gives an early example of the secularization and commercialization of Western society's attempts to control time. Moreover, Sir Fleming's innovation in reckoning time illustrates another example in the shift from religion controlling time to that of commerce.

Innis' views on Time

The measurement of time was often the exclusive province of religious authority, and Innis went to great lengths to describe this association. In many cases astronomy and philosophy could only be practiced within a religious institution, making them subject to that institution's checks and controls. A

religion's credibility to deliver the reward of an after-life might be measured against its ability to reckon time in a more earthly setting. Planting and harvest, feasts and holy days were instrumental in forming the basis of religious authority. A religion's ability to predict seasons, solar and lunar eclipses, and the length of days or nights likely caused some semblance of awe in ancient peoples. A religion that could not organize and schedule some sort of rudimentary structure in a society could not ensure the success of agriculture, something essential for founding a civilization. Without agriculture a band or tribe would not be stationary long enough to build anything lasting or establish enough wealth to provide for administrators or scholars. Many of the world's first temples were structures built in alignment with different stars, planets, and constellations which formed the basis for marking seasons. A calendar developed and events could be coordinated. Innis claimed that these efforts were all examples of attempts to control time. And through the experiences of Galileo, we can see how jealously religion will protect their exclusive control. A few examples of this phenomena is the fact that elements of Judaism still observe their own calendar. The Orthodox Church still reckons time with the Julian calendar as do the Mohammedan observe their own calendar. All these religious groups may interact with each other and the world temporal with the Latin-inspired Gregorian calendar, but each jealously guard

their own system of time and the religious holidays observed within each of their own particular calendars. Also important to the continuation of any society, religious or secular, is the education of their young. Literacy in language must be continually and consciously fostered if anything of a particular culture is to survive. Historically, some sects of Christianity pushed the concept of literacy from the concept of religious instruction into a secular public forum, ultimately creating the systems we have in place today.

Innis' views on Space

An accompanying theory on the concept of controlling time Innis posited the theory that human societies attempt to control space. A tribal land or those of a local king had to be defended and administered and this meant that a ruler's will had to be imposed upon areas beyond his immediate line of sight, a notion that required a degree of delegated authority. The coordination of a monarch's army required the communication of complicated and abstract ideas. Taxes had to be assessed and exacted in order to feed and cloth some sort of standing force, which in turn had to assert a ruler's authority over an extended space. Borders had to be defended and frontiers policed all requiring constant and secure communications between a ruler and his agents (Innis, 1950).

The hallmark event of a civilization was the effective coordination of a monarch's temporal authority over space with a religious body's administration over matters regarding concepts of time (Innis, 1950). People might enjoy a plurality of religions and deities, but none could survive or function with a variety of calendars. Some vehicle for reckoning time had to exist along with a general recognition and acceptance of its authority and accuracy. Innis claimed that the first instance where the above prerequisites were met took place in the Upper Valley of the Nile. Much later in the Industrial Age, the demands of coordinated shift work would see commercial and secular entities make a series of inroads into the various state and religious bodies attempts to control time.

McLuhan's era

In his later years Innis often considered text and images while McLuhan devoted a large part of his life to understanding and explaining electronic communications and media (Duffy, 1969). However, due to the time and space in which McLuhan lived and worked public attention and concern was largely focussed on radio, and increasingly television. At the time, large state or corporate entities controlled media, not the freewheeling, unregulated internet-era, upon which we now embark. McLuhan responded to the concerns of his

own era. I doubt if McLuhan awoke one day and decided to become a "media guru". In the post-war era most people were not fully conscious of any particular media other than newspapers, as radio was well accepted and television was a medium only recently beginning to develop its potential as a news and information service.

During the 1960's through to end of the 1970's, television became the principle form of information for many people. Noam Chomsky's valuable work on interpreting media had not reached its full impact, and people largely looked at electronic news media less critically. Radio news tended to be compressed and fact-driven, as did television. The drift to radio and televised editorial and panel style discussions was slow and pernicious. It was much easier to control public debate by choosing what was being discussed in public forums, and what positions the participants would take on these issues. If a participant did voice views outside of the private or public sponsors concerns, it was unlikely that they would be invited back, or even filmed in the first place (Chomsky, 1998). One of the first examples of the power of televised images to influence public outcomes was the famed Nixon versus Kennedy debate (McLuhan, 1964). The irony being that Nixon already demonstrated his understanding of the power of televised images to influence political outcomes when he brought

the issues surrounding his family's dog 'Checkers' onscreen to counter charges of fiscal improprieties against him. Images have the power to convey many ideas in an instant. However, images tend to be taken at 'face value', and seldom invite the critical debate almost inherently surrounding speech or text. Indeed in an era before televised images, noted 19th century economic historian J. E. Thorold Rogers stated "... a cheap investment [is] to be made in popular delusions. I know no safer speculation" (Innis, 1952). Whether the public has developed the visual literacy necessary for television is an idea that is still being debated.

Other Scholars' influence on Innis

At this point the works of Dr. Innis shed the most light on the ongoing tensions between vernacular speech and text or print. During a lecture honouring the memory of Josiah Charles Stamp, First Baron Stamp of Shortlands, Dr. Innis spoke of the individuals who helped him form his own thinking. Baron Stamp was once responsible for investigating the problems of marketing grain in Canada, and Dr. Innis considered the Stamp Report to be an important document in the history of marketing. Innis also paid tribute to the works of one of the founders of the London School of Economics, Graham Wallas,

whose work, he felt, was most influential in Baron Stamp's thinking, and ultimately found expression in *The Stamp Report*, a national grain marketing research document for the Government of Canada (Innis, 1952).

In his lecture on Baron Stamp, Innis related how Wallas' largely neglected later publications had concentrated on the problem of efficiency in creative thought. Wallas emphasized the enduring importance of an oral tradition in an era where mechanized forms of communication tended to overwhelm speech. Professor Innis further pointed out that even Wallas recognized that this mechanized communication, in his day the printing press, makes it very difficult to even recognize that we possessed an oral tradition both in fact and in law. Innis, in a lecture, which is one of the oral tradition's surviving forms, credited Graham Wallas with illustrating the ongoing struggle between speech and print. (Innis, 1952).

Perhaps we did not realize that we had an oral tradition until a form of mechanized communication competed with it, and Innis claims that we could not examine this oral tradition without an appraisal of the mechanized one (Innis, 1952). At this point the reader may see modern comparisons emerging

now that we look back on a century of electronic communications, a vastly more competitive and pervasive form of communication than that of print. As did Innis, Dr. McLuhan repeatedly pointed out that each new medium is influenced, and to some degree shaped, by the media which precedes it. McLuhan also said that: "Nothing is inevitable provided that we are willing to pay attention." I believe that Harold Innis was the first to pay attention to the varying forms of communication and their broader impact upon civilization.

Innis view of the uses of Communication to influence Time and Space in Early River Civilizations

Innis' earlier work concentrated upon economic history, and some of these seminal works examined the subject of communications, or more precisely how trade and a nations trade and economic history were influenced by methods of communication. His book "The Cod Fisheries", an exhaustive work, resonates with the themes of the time and distance involved in crossing the Atlantic, and the effects of this time and distance upon communications between Europe and Atlantic North America, and in consequence, future human settlements. When reading his following works one gains a sense of Dr. Innis being increasingly drawn into the concept of communications to explain the various dynamics of

economic history. And as such, he was well grounded in his research when he published "Empire and Communications" in 1950.

Innis documents how the Egyptians, in order to coordinate agriculture, trade, and communications with the floods of the Nile, used astronomy to reconcile the lunar calendar with the solar year. The Egyptian ecclesiastical authorities used this more accurate calendar in combination with the Pharaoh to regulate society and coordinate and combine the labour of their subjects. This event marked the imposition of Osiris and Ra, the respective gods of the Nile and the Sun, on largely agrarian peoples of Upper Egypt. The wishes of Osiris and Ra were exercised in human form by the words and actions of the priests and the Pharaoh. The calendar, divinely inspired, became a matter of royal authority, and a written language soon emerged which the Greeks described as Hieroglyphics, a Greek word which means sacred engraved writing (Innis, 1950). As writing evolved from semiotics to phonetics the monarchy was able to write increasingly complex laws and dictates, thus, writing helped consolidate royal authority until the Pharaohs could effectively subvert the priests authority and gain for themselves the status of gods. Ultimately all arable land came under the authority of the Pharaoh. After years of consolidating royal authority Innis speculated that irregularities in the sidereal

year meant that a day was gained each year and these difficulties with the calendar ultimately allowed the priests to re-assert their knowledge and authority. In the course of a few years the priests successfully subverted the Pharaoh from the status of individual godhead to the Son of Ra. Again the Sun became law, but this law was interpreted by the word, which could only be issued through the king, on the advice of his priests of course. In the earliest times these words could only be written on stone, a rather inflexible medium, but almost indestructible and not easily given to manifold interpretations. Innis claims this successful centralization of gods, by creating a functional duality of priests with the monarchy, favoured the growth of political ideas (Innis, 1950).

A more contemporary calendar was created and imposed upon Egypt by the clergy of Helkiopolis. As Egypt's priests gained power Egypt became a defacto oligarchy. As royal power shifted from a single king to the royal family more change emerged. Egypt became more like a feudal society with local administrators consisting of local clergy and royal officials. Equally important, papyrus increasingly became the predominant medium for print. Although papyrus had been used since the first dynasty it did not supplant stone as a medium because power was centralized and permanence was preferable to transportability. As power became more decentralized the need

for administrative communications became more pronounced and hieroglyphics written on papyrus filled this need. Egyptian writing became less of a religious activity. Now its writers work began to more closely resemble that of a scribe, and they implemented innovations which changed older sacred symbols to speed the writing process. As a form of shorthand that was unrecognizable from the older sacred symbols emerged, a more fluid form of script became the predominant written language (Innis, 1950).

This concept of writing by hand developed along with secular writing. Politics began to be manifest in print outside of the older priest/king axiom. Broadened literacy made social mobility possible, and the exhausting forms of labour at the time could be avoided by learning to write. This newer form of communication created the climate for greater change, and religious reform allowed for the extension of the afterlife to the masses. Eventually religious rights and property rights became codified into law. Stone writing remained the language of the pyramids, but the public embraced a newer form of communication with scripted papyrus. However, writing required a long apprenticeship and it followed that reading required a great deal of instruction. In a fashion repeated throughout history, power eventually was re-centralized by including the scribes in the upper classes of generals, priests, and the

nobility (Innis, 1950). Innis asserted that the Egyptian experience was an early example of knowledge reforming itself into a monopoly resisting change.

The natural tendency of the Nile to flood its banks required Egypt's farmers to organize themselves at some level to insure survival. The priesthood monopolized knowledge of astronomy and exploited this knowledge in conjunction with the local king to create social order through absolute authority, metaphysical as well as temporal. Although communicating ideas with a less cumbersome form of script by painting on the lighter medium of papyrus enabled change, knowledge and power effectively re-trenched and re-centralized itself with the priests and the monarchy. The old Egyptian monarchy, whose priests used their calendar to predict the floods of the Nile and asserted itself over concepts of time and space by erecting the still visible pyramid, remained more or less intact. The Pharaohs and priests willingly re-tied themselves to the older form of communication, writing on stone. The priests and kings recognized the origin of their authority and easy duplication or re-interpretation of words did not serve their long-term interests, the retention of power. Religious and state written communications had to be re-monopolized in order to preserve the monarchy and religious caste's place at the head of Egypt's social order (Innis, 1950).

The Sumerians represent another great empire centered on a river. The Euphrates was regulated from the earliest times and a calendar was not as critical to their development as a civilization. Writing evolved from a system for keeping records of property, exacting taxes, and matters of royal administration. The Sumerians' unique cuneiform writing style was made possible by the medium on which it was developed, the clay found throughout the Euphrates valley. The Sumerians used a reed stylus to inscribe impressions upon clay tablets; these impressions possessed a triangular indent, which varied with the degree of weight delivered through the stylus. These clay tablets proved to be too easily copied or forged for reliable communications from the monarch, so the clay tablets were fired to allow for greater integrity and preservation. Ready-made rolls were carved to allow for the rapid and a reliable impression of a multitude of clay tablets, a kind of early prototype of the printing press (Innis, 1950).

The weight of these engraved tablets became their principle drawback, and consequently their medium of communications restricted the size of their empire to the distance traveled by the boats on the Euphrates or the early

Sumerian chariot drawn by four asses. When the larger Asian horse was crossed with the much faster and lighter African horse, an animal emerged that could be ridden. This meant that a single rider, a much swifter means of travel, could deliver communications greater distances, a partial conquest over space. The introduction of parchment required a new utensil for writing, and the three dimensional symbols of the cuneiform were modified to allow for easier reproduction on parchment, which of necessity, lost its three dimensional depth as the stylus on clay was replaced with a brush on parchment. Only royal, religious, and legal seals were left in the earlier forms of inscription (Innis, 1950). The dual developments of a single horseman with easily transported parchment made for faster communications; an event not lost on nations that possessed the ambitions of empire.

The Sumerians stable city state society allowed for the accumulation of sufficient wealth to draw successive waves of invaders and among the first were the Babylonians, but later tribes were predominantly Semitic in origin. Most of these invaders adapted the Sumerian cuneiform to their own language, and the original form of cuneiform remained intelligible only to the Sumerian priests. The various invaders created a situation similar to that in Egypt: they mutated the original form of written communications to more closely reflect

their spoken word, often unrelated to the original Sumerian language. Script became a means to more closely symbolize sounds of the spoken word, and as such, ideas emerged. This emergence of ideas began to flow not from the priests, but from agents of commerce, and a different group gained a means of wider communication. At first the kings and landholders of Sumeria had adopted the cuneiform to flesh out their mathematical, tax, and property title communications amongst each other; later invaders adopted their writing for their own needs, which were chiefly commercial. It was from this tradition that secular writing emerged in the lands around the Euphrates, first in Babylon, and later with the Phoenicians. It followed that the script of these two nations would, by conquest and by contact, have a lasting impact upon the Hebrews (Innis, 1950). The fact that Judaism still exists despite all efforts to eradicate it is as much a testament to the enduring legacy of their own distinct script and calendar as it is to their remarkable faith which is wrapped indivisibly into these aforementioned concepts of communication.

Mobile media allows for the survival and expansion of ideas

The Hebrews left Egyptian captivity with new sense of respect for the power and sanctity of the written word, an eventuality with ramifications for their culture as well as our own. Their view of the world and their place in the cosmos now began with the word. All God's wisdom was captured in the written word. Writing allowed for the preservation and enrichment of Jewish culture. All activities were modulated by the word, and images or even representations of images were proscribed (Innis, 1950, Saul, 1993). As sculpture was the most effective medium for competing pagan religions, Yahweh's Commandment delivered to the people by Moses proclaimed: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth' (Exodus xx. 4). On this divinely inspired development Innis wrote, "The written letter replaced the graven image as an object of worship" (Innis, 1950).

A strong monotheistic faith largely unfettered by time and place evolved. The observation of the Sabbath coupled with a litany of religious occasions allowed for a religion that could survive with its peoples' covenant with time unrestricted by place, space or distance. Such a people and religion could now endure conquest, colonization, enslavement, and even captivity in foreign lands. Jehovah's chosen people took from these dominant cultural elements

which strengthened their own, and, as such, they took a universal concept of God and nationalized it in order to protect their religion and themselves. In turn, their concept of God was strengthened and deepened by the fact that this was a largely unseen God. A God that allowed for no representative sculptures or icons could resist destruction indefinitely, as long as people believed, a system of beliefs that required and encouraged broader literacy. Partly in consequence of this, a theocracy evolved which differed from others in that it openly distrusted kingship. The king's authority came from God but was subject to recall by the people; all were to strive to be righteous, rulers, priests and the laity. It took the efforts of later prophets, namely Ezekiel and Jeremiah, to re-subordinate the political state to that of their religion, and Judaism could be successfully practiced anywhere, thus ensuring its survival (Innis, 1950).

Much later the early Christians would ensure the survival of their beliefs by writing the four gospels in Greek on parchment compiled with the Hebrews' portable and easily referred codex, creating a Christian Byblos or Bible. This allowed for much wider dissemination and gave early Christianity a valuable edge in its competition with other religions. Innis wrote that Judaism and the early Christians depended on Aramaic as a vernacular language with Hebrew

largely confined to religious scripture and the priestly caste. With an Old Testament that was largely indecipherable, and an occupying Latin speaking force that was already hostile to Israel's religion, it proved beneficial to the early Christians that Judaism had already been assimilated into the Hellenistic world in Egypt where Judaic scriptures were already translated into Greek. And so the single religion, which differed only on a point of doctrine, became two separate entities when the Christians abandoned Jerusalem and Antioch after Titus destroyed the Temple. At this point the orthodox Talmudic Rabbinism was effectively severed from Hellenistic-influenced Judaism (Innis, 1950). Thus the two strains of a similar monotheistic religion with common origins were able to develop and survive in relative isolation from each other. The Jews fostered their faith by keeping sacred the written word within their Talmud and keeping their covenant with time their own calendar enabling religious holidays and the Sabbath to be unerringly observed. Indeed, what form of Christianity might have survived to present day if Saul had not committed Christ's parables to print? It is most noteworthy that Christ, much as Socrates, never wrote anything as far as we may know. Moreover, Christ would say "It is written, but I say unto you". An interesting point illustrating tensions between print and the vernacular.

Innis views historical tensions between spoken and written words

In "Empire and Communications" Dr. Innis analyzes how writing began to unravel traditional Greek civilization by subverting its oral traditions with writing's much more rigid form of communication. He documents how in 470 B.C. Athens was largely illiterate, but in a mere forty years Herodotus found it more convenient to turn his work into print, an event that would imply that reading had become more common. Naturally, we in modern times are indebted to Herodotus for committing his observations to print, but imagine what this may have signaled in his own era. Divisions in the Greek language began to re-emerge as history, law, and religion retreated from a wider oral quasi-national forum into the individual city-states and the various regional dialects. Innis claims that as the Ionic form of Greek succeeded in suppressing the Doric form, the Greeks sought a uniform manner of writing. The Ionic form of writing in turn was replaced by one of its own dialects: Attic became the dominant language for writing (Innis, 1950). Something still larger was going on in Greek society, and Innis, with his critical eye for the particular events of history, found support in the works of his predecessors to warrant many of his claims.

The relative isolation of the Greek peninsula and islands from the rest of the ancient world fostered the development of an independent society that enjoyed relative safety from large land-born armies. Even if Greece's northern boundaries were attacked, the plethora of southern peninsula and island city-states insured cultural survival and integrity borne by a long oral tradition. The oral tradition of Greece first achieved its greatest lasting contribution to our Western society in Athens; it was in Athens that the concept of democracy was first born (Innis, 1950).

This hallmark event would have been unimaginable if Greek intellectual thought was restricted to priests and scribes. The recitation of poetry, history, and law depended upon a rich oral tradition, and it was in Athens that a *voice* was given to the demos, the Greek word for people. Ideas could be introduced, disseminated and discussed with an eye to the greater public good. It is hard for us in our latter day, text dependent society to imagine a truly oral society, but without a strong and vibrant oral tradition it is unlikely that the early Greeks would have developed democracy. And the import of democracy in Athens is difficult to overestimate: it meant that for the first time in recorded history law began to replace force (Innis, 1950.) With the use of argument, laws could be initiated, changed or modified, and nullified. All this depended

on lively and inclusive debate, which in turn, was given form and strengthened by an enduring oral tradition. By its very nature these debates engaged an individual's memory, which in turn aided in developing a collective consciousness.

Perhaps Socrates's book *Phaedrus* lends us an interpretation to the mixed reception given the growth of text by Greek society. In one of the book's passages used later by Innis, Socrates reports a conversation between Thoth, the Egyptian god that invented letters, and the god Amon. Amon argues that:

"this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you will give your disciples not truth but only the semblance of truth: they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing: they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality."

Socrates continues:

I cannot but help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting: for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question, they preserve a solemn silence, and the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer." (Innis, 1950)

Innis felt that the spread of writing destroyed a civilization based on the oral tradition, but in large part, this oral tradition has survived throughout Western history. Innis also claimed that this latent oral tradition helped us to survive being imprisoned by ancient writings, thus helping to save the spirit and soul of Western civilization when in crisis (Innis, 1950). The challenge for contemporary scholars is to determine what impact the shift from the separate mediums of print and television into a combined entity on the Internet will have for societies.

Innis also argued that Plato and Aristotle wrote their works after Greek oral tradition had suffered a major disruption in Athens culminating with the death of Socrates. Robbed of the vitality of their own oral traditions, Plato and Aristotle had to turn to other cultures for a written tradition. The Greeks took the Phoenician alphabet and over time a twenty-four-letter alphabet began to emerge. The Greeks, in representing their own vowels, used Semitic characters representing consonants. Consonants carried the same weight as vowels, so the Greeks represented them in each written word. This allowed the expression of nuance and subtlety in Greek writing which in turn enabled a form of text that allowed for greater "elasticity" in representing Greek speech, thus a written language that was more responsive and more closely associated with Greek

thought developed. However this new and arguably more efficient form of communication was not without major drawbacks to Greek civilization. "The spread of writing contributed to the collapse of Greek civilization by widening the gap between the city-states" (Innis, 1950). Insights such as this led Dr. Innis to claim that any innovation in communication carries with it a natural tendency to imitate the previous form of communication that it is replacing. In his book "Empire and Communications", Innis describes how this played itself out by separating Greek civilization into the naturally authoritarian nature of a martial Sparta, and the democratic tendencies of Athenian individualism.

This polarization in communications had a detrimental and lasting impact upon Greek civilization, and as Innis noted: "The deeply rooted division between Ionian and Dorian Greeks was reinforced by geography, dialect, and cultural development." As a consequence of the Peloponnesian wars, Athens fell into a long decline, and victorious Sparta, also weakened, fell to the Thebans. Thebes alone could not defend the entire city-state structure of the Greeks, and Phillip of Macedonia fostered further divisions among Greek city-states with calculated propaganda (Innis, 1950).

Whereas most empires were of necessity involved with international intrigue, Greece was involved with individual development, and as such gained the most, and in turn, gave the most to Western civilization. These two separate tendencies caused Innis to reflect that "Civilization was concerned with the absorption of the two strands." Innis felt that the oral tradition of the Greeks coupled with the flexibility of their alphabet allowed them to separate concepts of political empire, and its preoccupation with space, from the concept of ecclesiastical empire and its preoccupation with time. He noted that the Greeks had successfully separated time from religion, and space from empire, and had for the first time "...reduced them to the rational proportions of the city-state" (Innis, 1950). No longer could a complex system of writings be the sole preserve of monarchies and priests, and absolute authority would forever be compromised. Easy public uniformity could no longer be so easily assured, and as such, empires and other large political organizations suffered enduring problems with trying to impose absolute authority. With the use of a more flexible Greek alphabet, nations now had a means of preserving their own sense of time and place, and were not as easily absorbed by the ambitions of others. The concept of rationalism was preserved and fostered, and with this the West's approach to culture and history underwent a sea change (Innis, 1950).

The Greek alphabet was introduced to Rome by way of its Greek colonies in Sicily and the Italian mainland and the Etruscans used Greek to further develop their own script. The Etruscans also introduced the more humanistic Greek gods to Rome. These Greek gods were allowed equal status to the statues of the old Roman animal gods. Local Roman cults grew around these New Greek gods in order to propagate and protect them. These gods with human forms were seen as more *of* the people, and more responsive *to* the people, and quickly gained acceptability among the *plebs*. Until Cicero's time laws and precedents were largely retained in the memory of men, and almost all transactions involving property were scrupulously witnessed, to *testify* carried a far greater personal responsibility in Roman times than our own. Contract law developed and verbal contracts took on the weight of obligation as well as duty, and as a result, civil law was strengthened (Innis, 1950).

After several centuries of warfare Rome finally prevailed against the various maritime Greek city-states and their sundry colonies, but Rome's eventual success caused Horace to comment that "Captive Greece took captive her proud conqueror". Indeed, Latin literature was founded by the arrival in Rome

of Livius Adronicus, in 272 BC. Livius Adronicus was the first Greek to write Latin and translated the Odyssey from Greek to Latin. In 249 BC a choir of virgins sang a Greek choral lyric to a Roman audience for the first time. Returning Roman soldiers had grown fond of the Greek tragedies and comedies, and in 240 BC Livius introduced these as well as dramas for the public's enjoyment during Roman festivals. Cato was concerned with the unchecked advancement of Greek literature on Roman society and his polemics are credited with helping to develop Latin into a language more suited to the creation and administration of empire. But Greek thought and culture had already seeped into the people's consciousness and Greek rhetoric was used to advance the democratic cause, quite possibly causing or giving voice to a series of slave revolts (Innis, 1950).

The strongest evidence of an enduring Greek culture within the Roman Empire lies not in Rome, but to its East. In part in an effort to escape constant Roman political intrigue, as well as the plethora of pagan cults, Constantine the Great centered his empire in Constantinople. Born in Britain of a pagan Roman general and a Christian British mother, Constantine quite possibly recognized Rome's continuing ability to absorb and overthrow any usurper. That Rome depended on her distant armies to defend against the many tribes surrounding,

and ostensibly within the confines of her empire, in turn shows how weak the capital and surrounding country-side were from attack. Too many local legions did not lend themselves to Rome's external safety, or perhaps more to the point, Rome's internal stability. Rome required some distance from its more ambitious generals. Rome could fight well on a single front, especially one of its own choosing, but the fact that they became increasingly dependent upon foreign tribes and mercenaries illustrates how over-extended Rome's borders had become.

By establishing his empire's capital on Asia-Minor's side of the Bosphorus, Constantine exploited an already existing division in Rome's empire: the linguistic division between the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world and the remnants of the Latin-influenced Roman Empire. This point of linguistic division may be used for further evidence of Innis' theory about the inherent political and cultural bias of communication (Innis, 1951). One of Constantine's efforts to foster uniformity in the newer Christian religion was the Council of Nicea, and all Bishops were invited to attend. It was held in Asia Minor near the coast of the Adriatic, and perhaps in censure or perhaps by proscription, no Roman Bishop is on record as attending. This act of omission may have been the first concrete step in a division of Constantine's

ecclesiastical empire, perhaps proving once again that religion is the collective politicization of individual spirituality.

The division of the empire into a Latin province in the West with the larger predominantly Greek speaking component remaining in the East heralded an era of increasing instability. Centuries later, the former Roman Empire's division of space developed into a division of time with separate Gregorian and Julian calendars. Various nations asserted themselves in Western Europe from Rome's former provinces. In the lands of Northern Europe, increased hostility was brought to bear upon the rigidity of written Roman law when dealing with the region's tribes and clans spoken vernacular law. An oral tradition that coincided with, but developing in isolation from, Greek traditions refused to be completely dominated by Rome's newfound culture (Innis, 1950).

As Rome's empire began to recede, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon oral traditions of law began to re-emerge unhindered, and a new Anglo-Norse language used the Latin alphabet, later borrowing whatever words it required from the Franco-Norse dialect of Norman conquerors. Ironically it is Muslim traders that are credited with re-introducing original Greek literature into Western Society.

Reinterpretation of the original Greek scripture spawned a greater diversity in religious thought, ultimately fuelling a religious reformation. The monasteries, which did much to preserve and spread Roman religion, law, and language, fell out of favour in Northern Europe, an area with little or no history of Roman occupation. In short, Europe's monasteries' did that which they were founded to do, and as Innis pointed out, this was one more example of the inherently defensive nature of knowledge monopolies (Innis, 1951).

Within England English Common Law again began to develop and asserted itself wherever English was spoken. English Common Law carried forth both by a large maritime trade and by force of arms created a new and still larger empire than that of the Greeks and Romans combined. Much as the Empire of Portugal was assisted in expanding partly due to the development of Latitude in navigating unfamiliar waters, so to were the British empowered by the development of Longitude. That the British Royal Navy maintained supremacy due in part to their navigation skills aided the expansion and development of their empire. An empire that began to unravel before its climax aided by the efforts American pamphleteers and French intrigue, yet another example of an empires' vulnerability to a literate public sharing ideas given a wider distribution by the power of the press (Innis, 1950). We may look at the

development of longitude as an early example of a more contemporary phenomenon, that is the merging of time with space. Longitude was possible due to the use of an elaborate system of clocks coupled with the reckoning of distance.

The gains made by British commerce and militarism were reinforced in far-off lands by a broad system of public education. Conscious efforts were made to replace a variety of regional languages by governing authorities imposing English as the vernacular, thereby making administration of space less of a local concern and enabling a broader and more universal form of imperialism. That all communication carries its own cultural bias was a point little dwelled upon as evangelical Christianity stepped into what administering authorities often considered a moral vacuum. Dr. Innis' book "The Bias of Communication" makes effective arguments illustrating the inherent cultural bias within any form of human communication. Ironically, this idea of an expanded public literacy quite often lent itself to a larger debate concerning the merits and faults of imperialism, and even the merits and faults of the very religion which chose to use literacy as a means to evangelize a populace. A situation not dissimilar to what took place much earlier upon the banks of the Nile.

The first and most lasting impact of Gutenberg's printing press was the Bible, which was soon printed, in vernacular languages, allowing individuals a greater degree of freedom and independence in interpreting scripture. As local printers increasingly gave voice to local concerns, some absolute monarchies began to fall. The few monastic centres of learning that survived the reign of England's Henry VIII did so concentrating upon becoming more like universities. Universities designed originally to help the Crown administer the nation's business, much later by Royal decree and public demand, became institutions that concentrated upon the creation and dissemination of knowledge (Innis, 1951).

Centuries later Hitler would re-exploit oral communications aided by news reels, radio, and the megaphone to compete with the written propaganda of Communists. Hitler's first influence on the concept of time was declaring May 1st a paid national holiday, thereby pre-empting the atheistic Communists the sole day devoted to honouring the founding of their beliefs. Hitler used the unifying tendency of the common German vernacular to infuse a sense of belonging to the people (Innis, Christian, 1980). Hitler had possibly recognized and countered the Communists' constant division of people into class. The German masses were drawn to Hitler's spoken praises rather than to

the Communists' social moralizing. The Austrian Hitler was also seen as less foreign, and thereby preferable to the imported notions of Communist internationalism. Bismarck's diplomatic intrigue coupled with force in the creation and consolidation of a modern German state served Hitler with a ready model for his ambitions. Hitler was quite simply selling the people on something they already believed, that Germany was a world class power crippled by foreign intrigue, and the more recently arriving East European Jews. By reviving Germany's militaristic society, Hitler appeared as the protector of German-speaking people both within and without of Germany's boundaries, thus a potential dictator was successfully elected to power in the Reichstag. The presence of modern day neo-Nazis within Germany after every attempt was made to eradicate it attests to a possible ingrained cultural bias. Also, Hitler's use of the education system and the very effective use of text and images along with a combined with a sense of pageantry may have had a more enduring impact upon the children schooled during Hitler's era.

Conclusion

Harold Innis gives an exhaustive account of the various laws and consumable commodities which surrounded the subject of printing presses to the point that

he gives the individual cost of the parchment, rags, and pulpwood used in printing presses in pennies to the pound (Innis, 1952). Indeed, Innis' later works assert that communications is actually a staple of human societies, and many of his writings treat it as such. He argues that the spread of written ideas had an enormous impact on Western Civilization, and from this Innis draws parallels between the dispersion of ideas and knowledge with the availability of a medium for communication. Perhaps Marshall McLuhan restrained himself from delving too much into the history of communications because his predecessor had already done such a thorough study of it (Duffy, 1969). This in turn may have left McLuhan with the impression that he must study and write upon the impact of the electronic communications media. McLuhan tried to capture a larger dynamic within the context of his own era, and we, as well as future generations, will undoubtedly benefit from his insights.

However it is Dr. Innis who should be lauded as the principal communications theorist. Critics claim that his later work seemed rushed, a point which may be countered by the fact that he was gravely ill, and quite possibly cognizant that his own time was drawing to an end. His theories on the use of rivers for communications is still used to counter the arguments of those who postulate that North American communications naturally and historically followed

North/South lines (Innis, 1930). Innis argued the North American continent was penetrated by three great river systems. The fact that Southern Canada's system of rivers largely run on an East/West axis allowing for the development of independent trade and lines of communication proved fundamental to the establishment and history of Canada (Glazebrook, Innis, 1941).

Innis' work also documented well-established events, rather than centering on unproven theories (Duffy, 1969). His work offered a unique style that allowed for manifold interpretations. Innis' work enables us to interpret the effects of changing media upon communication. Innis' interpretation provides us with an ability to measure the possible impact upon societies experiencing changes in their manner of their methods of communications. Any resource which enables us with predictive skills is most critical at our current juncture with communication technology. By paying attention we may possibly avoid tearing down ivory towers only to re-monopolize knowledge within newly built towers constructed of silicon. His recognition of communication as an historic agent for change is the great legacy he leaves us. I feel quite strongly that until sound evidence is presented to the contrary, the scholastic contributions of Dr. Harold A. Innis will provide his works with a life well beyond any restrictions upon his own time and space.

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