INNIS AND THE NEWS

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Abstract

Long neglected internationally, the media scholarship of Canadian economic historian and political economist Harold Adams Innis (1894-1952) has in recent years been taken up, largely without attribution or acknowledgment, by writers focusing on media as a key factor in social/political/cultural evolution, by dependency theorists (media or cultural imperialism writers), and (ironically) by postmodernists/poststructuralists. This article first provides an overview of Innis's two main fields, his staples thesis of Canadian economic development, and media thesis as it concerns world history. This section also relates the media thesis to contemporary media and dependency theories and postmodernist discourses. The second focus of the article is on Innis's critical analysis of press systems. The discussion not only integrates his staples and media theses, but also extrapolates Innis's analysis to the present to show the deep concerns he would express regarding the present-mindedness of contemporary media and culture. Throughout there is an emphasis on Innis's materialist understanding of culture and social relations.

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43 javnost–the public Vol.13 (2006), No. 3, pp. 43 - 56

In Canadian media studies, Harold Adams Innis (1894-1952) is no forgotten man. Arguably, he remains the country's most esteemed scholar. Less famous certainly than his compatriot and self-avowed "disciple," Marshall McLuhan, Innis – subject of a new, magisterial biography (Watson 2006) – has remained for forty years a continuing subject in Canada of scholarly analyses, interpretation, and speculation (Heyer 2003, 85-100). Outside Canada, however, Innis is seldom read or acknowledged (Berland 1999, 282), the American media theorist James W. Carey (1934-2006) being the most notable and prolific exception to that rule.

One might well ask, therefore, whether the enthusiasms of Canadian media scholars are perhaps unduly *biased* (a favourite Innisian term), on account of their self-identification with Innis's nationality, or whether Innis's lack of contemporary recognition internationally is perhaps due to the fact that he resided in a country at the margins. (Would John Kenneth Galbraith, like Innis an economist of Scottish ancestry, born in close proximity to Innis, have attained international acclaim had he chosen a teaching position at, say, the University of Toronto instead of Harvard and advised Canadian Prime Ministers rather than American Presidents?). To be considered, too, is the fact that Innis was a *political* economist, always mindful of asymmetries in the distribution of communicatory and other power – a theme noticeably absent from, and seemingly objectionable to, mainstream American media scholarship (Babe 2006a). Issues like these could be topics for endless speculation, but here I propose instead to turn to Innis's scholarship itself, and ponder whether his contribution deserves contemporary international recognition.

In the first main section I provide an overview of Innis's work, and at the conclusion suggest three major areas in which he was an innovator, whose positions were taken up years if not decades later by others, often without acknowledgment. In the second main section I address in greater detail one aspect of Innis's seminal work – his analysis of the press.

Overview of Innis's Life and Work

Life[1]

Innis was born in a small agricultural community in southwestern Ontario in 1894. For primary education he attended a one room school. He graduated from high school in 1912. At McMaster, then a Baptist university in Toronto, he specialised in history and political economy, and encountered philosophy professor, James Ten Broecke, who used to ask, *"Why do we attend to the things to which we attend?"* – a question Innis ruminated on for the rest of his life (Innis 1971, xvii). Upon graduating in 1916, he enlisted in the armed services. He was injured at Vimy Ridge in July 1917, and after a time recuperating in England returned home, by his own account, "a psychological casualty." During his convalescence he completed a M.A. thesis, "The Returned Soldier."

Innis took up doctoral studies at the University of Chicago. His PhD thesis (1920) on the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway was published in 1923. In 1920 he joined the faculty of the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, where he served as Chair from 1937 until his death in 1952, and as Dean of the Graduate School (1947 to 1952). By all accounts Innis was a select member of the inner circle governing the University (Drummond and Kaplan 1983, 81-107). Innis was appointed to three Royal Commissions and elected president of both the Royal Society of Canada and the American Economics Association. He

lectured overseas and received honorary degrees from several universities. Always sceptical of concentrations of power and eager to lash out at abuses of privilege, at the end of his life Innis, in a sense, returned to the "margin" (Havelock 1982, 25) to explore themes and issues taking him well beyond the security of his previous work on Canadian economic history, breaking new interdisciplinary ground in media/communication studies.[2]

Work[3]

Innis's major post-dissertation scholarship comprised two distinct, but interrelated stages: his staples thesis of Canadian economic development, and his media thesis.

Staples Thesis. Running through Innis's writings is the theme that cultures, including thought systems and modes of social organisation, affect and are affected by the material environment. Innis first applied this principle to his history of Canadian economic development where he identified three features as paramount – Canada's trading dependence on other countries; her geography, particularly the inland water systems and the pre-Cambrian shield; and the unique character of her natural resources or "staples." Innis saw technological developments, particularly in the fields of transportation and communication (roads, canals, shipping, railroads, telegraph, postal systems), as interacting with geography and staples to disrupt established patterns of social interaction. According to Innis, the rise to predominance of each new staple (first fish, then fur, followed by lumber, wheat and mining), in combination with technological change, produced a period of crisis. Groups controlling the new staple and the associated technology ascended to power, whereas the influence of the group associated with the old staple and the old technology waned. Innis was ever-mindful of centre-periphery relations, and argued that the export of staples to imperial centres caused a truncated ("biased") development in the colony.

Innis's first staples book, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930), revolutionised the writing of Canadian economic history by making cultural factors central to economic development and highlighting disparate power relations in international trade. It was followed by *The Cod Fisheries* (1940/1954). Although Innis did not complete a book on the timber trade, he did publish several papers centring on forest products, including lumber, pulp and paper, and journalism (Innis 1937; 1946; 1949; 1956, 242-251; 1971, 156-189; 1972, 141-170). According to Innis's historiography, timber supplanted fur as a key staple for export. Like fur "it was adapted ... to the cheap water transportation of the St. Lawrence." It contrasted to fur, however, in terms of weight, bulk and value (Innis 1956, 242). Whereas the manufacture of fur products, such as hats, was undertaken largely in Europe, timber's bulk and weight meant that manufacture "took place close to its source" (Innis 1956, 243). Canada consequently exported square lumber instead of raw timber to the United States, and her trade realigned from Britain to the USA. We will pursue further Innis's analysis of the lumber trade in the next major section.

Media Thesis. In the final decade of his life Innis shifted from staples in Canadian economic development to communication media in world history. His media writings are concentrated in two books *Empire and Communications* (1950)

and *The Bias of Communication* (1951). Both volumes are comprised mostly of essays or speeches from previous years, and both have enjoyed many reprintings and several editions. In this article I refer to the 1972 and 1971 editions respectively, both containing introductions by Marshall McLuhan. In summary, Innis claimed: "Western civilization has been profoundly influenced by communication and … marked changes in communication have had important implications," particularly with regard to "the character of knowledge" (Innis 1971, 3, 4). Innis proposed that over time "a monopoly of knowledge [associated with a given medium of communication] is built up to the point that equilibrium is disturbed" (Innis 1971, 3-4), whereupon new media, aligned with other power interests, challenge the vested interests. "Inventions in communication," he proposed, "compel realignments in the monopoly or the oligopoly of knowledge" (Innis 1971, 4). In support of this media thesis Innis presented details from the civilizations of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Middle East, and from 18th century England and modern North America.

For Innis the physical properties of a medium help explain the nature of the concomitant monopoly of knowledge. In particular, a medium's weight or mass, its durability, its tractability, and its capacity for storing and transmitting messages facilitate either control of society through time or over space, but seldom both (Innis 1971, 33). Media that are intractable, difficult to transport, durable, and possessing limited capacity, he termed *time-biased* or *time-binding* as they tend to support *time-bound cultures*, characterised by Innis as emphasising continuity, ceremonial, communitarian, hierarchical, traditional, religious, and geographically confined. Media that are easy to use and transport, that are not durable, that have abundant capacity, and that are easy to work with, he called *space-biased* or *space-binding;* they support *space-bound cultures*, which are secular, present-minded, individualistic, intent on territorial expansion and administration of vast territories (Innis 1971, 33-64).

A medium predominant in a society at any given time, Innis maintained, is by definition controlled by that society's elite. Time-bound societies are controlled by elites who exert control by means of "time;" i.e., they are "custodians" of time, and invoke tradition, sacred texts, natural (or divine) laws, and make appeals to the collectivity as an organic whole. Space-bound societies, by contrast, are controlled by secular elites exercising influence over "space;" these are the "administrators" or the military who frame and enforce secular laws, who engage in and control markets and the price system, who advertise, and who educate for the exigencies of ever-changing job markets.

Any given medium of communication, Innis believed, favours either control over space or through time, but seldom both. In ancient Egypt, for example, hieroglyphics carved in stone favoured a priesthood ruling time-bound society, whereas papyrus benefited the scribal class and encouraged mathematics and science. Likewise, in the modern period, newspapers – being light, disposable, and published daily – support changes in fashion, current affairs, marketing, and administration over a wide area, and hence empower business leaders and regional/national governments.

The arrival of new media, according to Innis, engenders a struggle for ascendancy, not only among groups of people, but among types of knowledge. He viewed as powerful those who inculcate in people's minds one or another conception of time, and one or another conception of space – even to the point that these

become the common sense of an era. Society's conceptions of time, and of space, Innis believed, form the base upon which the relative significance and meaning of the day's events are constructed. Specifically, Innis proposed at least three markedly different conceptions of time: social or organic (cyclical) time; differentiated or punctuated linear time, and undifferentiated mechanical time.

The organic, cyclical conception of time particularly characterises oral cultures. Knowledge in oral society is handed down through poetry, song, story, and myth from generation to generation. Such knowledge is meant to apply to all times. In such societies there is "a time to be born and a time to die; … a time to plant and a time to reap." Likewise stone inscriptions endure for centuries, and in societies relying on this medium, knowledge changes but slowly. According to Innis, time-bound cultures and time-binding media can support an array of practical knowledge. He wrote: "The discovery of periodicity in the heavens [in Babylon] enormously strengthened the position of religion in its control over time and continuity" (Innis 1971, 99). Innis was particularly enamoured with the oral dialectic as practised in ancient Greece, as transcribed in Plato's dialogues.

More tractable (easy to use) forms of writing – parchment and paper, for example – helped modify the cyclical conception of time. These newer media facilitate the inscription of many more messages than the carving of stone, and that in turn leads to a much larger proportion of messages concerning temporal (or fleeting) matters, as opposed to enduring ones. The medium used, in brief, "selects" the time horizon of messages, thereby helping endow a society with its characteristic conception of time. The Romans, who used parchment, posited a unique day (the founding of Rome) as being of extraordinary importance, thereby fostering the belief that time is comprised not just of cycles but also of sequences of single, sometimes extraordinary, moments (Innis 1971, 69). This conception, Innis added, "contribute[d] to the growth of Roman law notably in contracts" (Innis 1971, 69) and differed markedly from mythic or cyclical time as eternal recurrence.

As the emphasis on unique events increased and that on recurrences diminished, time came to be conceived as an unstoppable sequence punctuated by distinct moments – what philosopher George Grant has termed "time as history" (Grant 1969). This conception continued for many years, but eventually gave rise to time as undifferentiated sequence. According to Innis, commerce requires that time be understood as a "ceaseless flow of mechanical time" (Innis 1971, 74); the length of contracts, the number of hours worked, the interest accruing, and the rents due are all based on durations of time irrespective of differentiated "moments" that might take place within the specified intervals.

Space, too, for Innis is polysemous. For people in time-bound cultures space is where the community lives, where its roots are, and how it maintains its connections with the past, and where its future will unfold. Land is to be cared for as a *gift* (Hyde 1979) that has been inherited and that will be passed on. In space-bound cultures, however, land is viewed quite differently. There the desire is to conquer new territories, create larger markets and organise land into efficient configurations (factories, assembly lines, territorial divisions of labour, and so on). The "wilderness" is to be tamed and the land's utility extracted. Space, like time, becomes a commodity in space-biased cultures.

Innis had grave misgivings with regard to what he perceived to be an uninter-

rupted flow since the late nineteenth century of increasingly space-biased media. Whereas he interpreted much of the course of human history as time- and space-binding media oscillating with one another in influence and hence achieving a certain *balance,* in the modern era, he believed, media have become ever-increasingly space-biased. He termed the " present-mindedness" of our day an "obsession," and exclaimed that "the balance between time and space has been seriously disturbed with disastrous consequences to Western civilization" (Innis 1971, 76).[4]

Although Innis has been characterised as being a technological or media determinist, this is incorrect. Innis always took pains to use words such as "emphasise" and "implies" when referring to media bias.

Innis's Prescience and Legacy. Innis is a founder of *communication and history,* that is the practice of placing media of communication at the centre of historical analysis. Innis certainly inspired Marshall McLuhan in this regard, and together they gave rise a still burgeoning literature (Angus 1997; Altschull 1990; Beniger 1986; Deibert 1997; Eisenstein 1979; Ong 1982; Crowley and Heyer 2003). Innis founded "media theory" (Heyer 2003, 52), insisting that the means of communication affects society's shared/contested system of meanings. There in fact exists a voluminous literature on the "social construction of reality," "symbolic interactionism," and "the sociology of knowledge," all contending that reality is not objectively given but is a product of the interaction of the knower and the known in the context of social consensus. One of Innis's major contributions to this literature was his claim that the means whereby signs, symbols and messages are diffused and exchanged have a significant bearing on this cultural ecology, and in broadly predictable ways.

A second mode of media analysis that can be traced to Innis is *dependency theory,* or media imperialism. James Carey declared unambiguously that Innis "founded the modern studies that now exist under the banner of media imperialism," adding "but his sense of the complexity of that relationship was considerably more subtle than that of most contemporary scholars" (Carey 1981, 80). Control of media for many present-day political economists is basic to the possession and exercise of power. Innis again inspired a vast literature (for example, Schiller 1969, 1976; Smythe 1981; Barnet and Müller 1974). Through his construct, "monopoly of knowledge," furthermore, Innis arguably foreshadowed the Chomsky-Herman propaganda model.

Third, Innis presaged certain aspects of *postmodernism/poststructuralism* (Charron 1999; Wernick 1999): he saw space binding media as more thoroughly commodifying life, for example, and in the process eroding hitherto enduring meanings and distinctions. According to Innis, mechanical means of diffusing information put into question the reliability of that information. He mused: "As modern developments in communication have made for greater realism they have made for greater possibilities of delusion" (Innis 1971, 82), a sentiment worthy of several postmodern writers (Baudrillard 1981, for instance). Poststructuralist Mark Poster, whether inadvertently or not, based his typology of the "modes of information" upon Innis (Babe and Comor 2006). Due to a superfluity of information in what is often now termed the Information Age, moreover, there is a lessening in the value of information,[5] a sentiment Innis again shared with many postmodern writers.[6]

However, whereas present day postmodernists like Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Mark Poster view the devaluation of discourse as liberating because

it reduces the power of privileged groups hitherto controlling thought, Innis saw this as a tragedy, presaging the end of Western civilization. Innis, with his abiding faith in reason and his quest for truth through oral debate, in these respects was the very antithesis of postmodernism. Moreover, as Jody Berland remarks, unlike postmodernists who emphasise representations and interpretations, Innis contextualised these interpretations and representations as they come into play with the various media of transportation and communication and monoplies of knowledge (Berland 1999, 290). She concludes: "Innis reveals the limits and inadequacies of analyzing power in terms of representation" (Berland 1999, 290).

Innis and the Press

Paper as a Medium of Communication

Innis declared that "we can conveniently divide the history of the West into the writing and the printing periods" (Innis 1971, 7). The former comprised the use of such media as clay tablets, papyrus, and paper prior to the onset of printing. The latter, specialised in the use of paper, was likewise differentiated – by changes in the technologies of paper manufacture (wood pulp replacing rags in the second half of the nineteenth century) and advances in various printing technologies (Innis 1971, 7-8).

Paper was first manufactured from textiles by the Chinese beginning about 105 AD (Innis 1971, 124). According to Innis, the Chinese pictograph required "extraordinary skill to serve as a medium of communication for a great diversity of spoken languages" (Innis 1971, 18). This complexity, in turn, "emphasised the importance of a learned class, the limited influence of public opinion, and the persistence of political and religious institutions" (Innis 1971, 18). Compared to oral communication, however, the inherent space bias of writing became evident at an early stage (Innis 1971, 139, 18). According to Innis, Chinese script, understood throughout the empire, "bridged enormous gaps" attributable to marked variations in oral dialects, and hence was an important factor in territorial unification. Innis added, however, that "the emphasis on space concepts in imperial organisation implied a neglect of time concepts and inability to solve dynastic problems" (Innis 1971, 125).

According to Innis, the manufacture of paper in the Middle East began in 751 (Innis 1971, 126). In Europe, however, several more centuries lapsed before paper began to replace parchment. Compared to parchment, paper is relatively space-binding and Innis linked its manufacture in Europe, beginning about 1275, with the onset of the commercial revolution (Innis 1971, 128, 136, 52): "Paper facilitated the growth of credit in the use of documents for insurance and bills of exchange; with Arabic numerals it enormously enhanced the efficiency of commerce" (Innis 1971, 128). As the use of paper spread, "monopolies of knowledge" enjoyed by the monasteries succumbed to those of the copyist guilds (Innis 1971, 53). Innis detailed technological steps toward improved quality of paper (Innis 1971, 128-9), adding that "the long apprenticeship and training necessary for paper-makers meant that skilled labour had a monopoly" (Innis 1971, 129).

Innis detailed too factors explaining the differing time-space biases of parchment vs. paper: a scribe using parchment could produce only two to four pages a day, and required from ten months to over a year to copy a Bible (Innis 1971, 138). By contrast, paper was much less costly for transmitting thought, and hence facilitated

the diffusion (and authorship) of variegated works (Innis 1971, 137, 19). Paper increased the importance of the vernacular, again eroding the Church's monopoly of knowledge which was based not only on parchment (Innis 1971, 50) but also on Latin (Innis 1971, 130). The rise of vernacular literatures in turn, "hastened and was hastened by the growth of nationalism" (Innis 1971, 136). Slowly paper replaced parchment even in the universities, churches and monasteries (Innis 1971, 137).

Paper became even more significant as a medium of communication, however, with the invention of the printing press. This took place in Germany where copyists' control was limited (Innis 1971, 23, 53). Presses required substantial capital investment, resulting in significant economies of scale, which in turn escalated demand for manuscripts and the quest for new markets. Again there was an increase in the types of books published, including an "extension to the production of the classics in Greek, the use of more compact type for smaller portable volumes in italic, and the emphasis on the vernacular." Innis concludes: "An enormous increase in production and variety of books and incessant search for markets hastened the rise of the publisher, an emphasis on commerce at the expense of the printer, and a neglect of craftsmanship" (Innis 1971, 23). He added, "By the end of the sixteenth century the flexibility of the alphabet and printing had contributed to the growth of diverse vernacular literatures and had provided a basis for divisive nationalism in Europe" (Innis 1971, 55).

The Forestry Staple

As noted previously, Innis viewed staples as linking, albeit asymmetrically, imperial centres and colonial margins. Of greatest relevance for this article was his analysis of the forestry staple, which provides the most obvious connection between the staples and media theses.

By Innis's account, lumber supplanted fur as a key staple for Canadian export. Paper is of course a major product of timber and in eastern Canada a large number of lumber companies began manufacturing pulp and paper in the 1800s. Due to high fixed investment, paper manufacture was characterised by significant economies of scale, resulting in a concentrated industry with few production centres (Innis 1956, 136-7).

Exports of paper to the United States had a large impact on the development of the American newspaper industry. Newspapers in the American commercial centres had developed prior to 1812 in response to the needs of business, the first daily journal in the USA being *The Pennsylvania Packet and General Advertiser* (1784), joined the following year in New York by the *Daily Advertiser* (Innis 1971, 158). They ran "a large number of small advertisements," often legal notifications, and enjoyed circulation only in the hundreds. These "broadsheets" endeavoured to conserve paper by reducing font sizes and trimming their physical dimensions (Innis 1971, 158). According to Innis, however, by the 1830s, increases in supplies of wood pulp dramatically reduced the price of newsprint (Innis 1972, 161) which, accompanied by technological advances in printing, gave rise to "a new type of paper," namely the penny presses, focused on mass circulation, on sensational news, and sustained by advertising directed toward "consumers" (Innis 1971, 160). For Innis, supply usually precedes demand, and in this instance, expansion of the pulp and paper industry fostered a growth in news organisations, hastened the development of the telegraph to relay the news, spawned growth in advertising, and contributed to a

revolution in marketing (Innis 1972, 161). Innis noted that in St. Louis newspapers between 1875 and 1925 reduced space allocated to news from 55.3 to 26.7 per cent, with a concomitant increase in the space devoted to advertising. For Innis news for the "cheap papers" was little more than "a device for advertising the paper as an advertising medium" (Innis 1971, 162). "Freedom of the press," as guaranteed by the US Constitution, Innis observed ironically, narrowed the "marketplace of ideas" as the industry began, of necessity, to accommodate the interests of its advertisers, even while itself growing into large, oligopolistic enterprises (Innis 1971, 139; 1972, 167; 2004, 11).

Innis's coupling of freedom of the press with the growth of monopolies on the face of it seems strange and so warrants further scrutiny. Innis had several things in mind here. First, freedom of the press according to Innis's interpretation meant, in part, freedom of press owners to do as they chose – even to combine into the monopolistic Associated Press news system and to enter into restrictive covenants with Western Union telegraph; in other words, freedoms enjoyed by press systems included, for a time, the freedom to engage in monopolistic business practices. Second, press freedom, coupled with large economies of scale, served to reduce the number of smaller, independent voices while simultaneously inducing the large presses to seek out the lowest common denominator in terms of readers (Innis 2004, 80-3). As Innis explained, "Hearst resorted to new devices to increase circulation, ranging from larger headlines to sensationalism in the Spanish-American war, large salaries to attract staff from Pulitzer, features, and comic strips" (Innis 1971, 179). Third, to increase circulation, and thereby increase the utility of newspapers to advertisers, prices charged readers were lowered, with advertising making up the shortfall. This meant in turn that advertisers came to exert significant (monopolistic) control over editorial content. Muck-raking in the financial field disappeared from the pages of the daily press, according to Innis, as advertisers were concerned, rather, "with constant emphasis on prosperity. … In the words of Chesterton, a journalist became one who wrote on the backs of advertisements" (Innis 1971, 187, 186). Fourth, newspapers attained the freedom to "own" the news. "News became a vendible commodity" (Innis 1971, 143). The establishment of a property right in the news strengthened the Associated Press's news monopoly. Finally, and most importantly in Innis's view, the press helped promote a space-biased monopoly of knowledge, to the neglect of time (duration):

> *The type of news essential to an increase in circulation, to an increase in advertising, and to an increase in the sale of news was necessarily that which catered to excitement. A prevailing interest in orgies and excitement was harnessed in the interests of trade* (Innis 1971, 77-8).
>
> *[Newspaper] bias culminated in an obsession with the immediate. Journalism, in the words of Henry James, became a criticism of the moment at the moment* (Innis 1971, 187).
>
> *In the United States the dominance of the newspaper led to large-scale development of monopolies of communication in terms of space and implied a neglect of problems of time (Innis 1972, 170).*
>
> *Time has been cut into pieces the length of a day's newspaper* (Innis 1995, 388).

Media and Public Opinion

Innis wrote: "Inventions in communication compel realignments in the monopoly or the oligopoly of knowledge" (Innis 1971, 4). He quoted David Hume on the continuing endeavour and necessity of those possessing the means of force to capture public opinion: "And this maxim," wrote Hume, "extends to the most despotic and the most military governments as well as to the most free and popular" (Innis 1971, 4). To this Innis added, "The relation of monopolies of knowledge to organized force is evident in the political and military histories of civilization … The success of organized force is dependent on an effective combination of the oral tradition and the vernacular in public opinion with technology and science" (Innis 1971, 4, 5). In bringing together technology and science on the one hand, with the art and practice of controlling public opinion on the other, Innis coupled control over the technologies of armaments with control over the means of communication. Both classes of technology are essential to power.

Technological advance in the means of communication, according to Innis, assisted military power in controlling space both through "a narrowing of the range from which material is distributed and a widening of the range of reception, so that large numbers receive, but are unable to make any direct response" (Innis 2004, 89). For Innis, resistance against propagandistic pressure requires reinvigoration of oral dialogue and scholarship, both of which have waned under the barrage of mechanised communication. Mechanised knowledge is space biased, and obscures questions pertaining to duration and continuity. "Success in the industrialized newspaper," Innis wrote, "depends on constant repetition, inconspicuous infiltration, increasing appeal to the subconscious mind, and the employment of tactics of attrition in moulding public opinion" (Innis 1952/2004, 79). Scholarship, for Innis, in contrast, retains a concern for time, but since questions concerning duration and meaning inevitably challenge the authority and policies of the military, of governmental administrators and of business leaders – think of the antitheses, for example between market forces and environmental well-being(Babe 2006b) – there is a concerted effort on the part of space-biased authorities to suppress or subvert true scholarship: "Force is no longer concerned with [the scholar's] protection and is actively engaged in schemes for his destruction" (Innis 1971, 31). Witness the selective funding of university programs and the infiltration of corporations into the classroom.

Innis exclaimed,

> *Enormous improvements in communication have made understanding more difficult. Even science, mathematics, and music as the last refuge of the Western mind have come under the spell of the mechanized vernacular. Commercialism has required the creation of new monopolies in language and new difficulties in understanding* (Innis 1971, 31).

And again,

> *As modern developments in communication have made for greater realism they have made for greater possibilities of delusion. … We are under the spell of Whitehead's fallacy of misplaced concreteness. The shell and pea game of the county fair has been magnified and elevated to a universal level* (Innis 1971, 82).

Innis's historical, critical analyses of press systems set in relief concerns of our day. His insights and historical parallels are worth recounting as we contemplate contemporary issues such as embedded journalism, media concentrations, "infotainment," advertiser influence, simulacra and pseudo-environments, public relations, the media-military-industrial nexus, and war-related propaganda. In a way, it is comforting to read Innis today, and understand that these issues, in one form or another, have long characterised press systems, that we are not necessarily in the midst of a grand deterioration in our news; rather, in a sense, it is just more of the same. Indeed, Innis's history and commentary may well serve to increase our critical stance toward media generally, and press systems in particular, which is certainly a healthy occurrence in the midst of so much media attention afforded the "war on terror."

Notes:

1. Portions of this section are based on the Innis chapter of Babe (2000). Innis is subject to two biographies: Creighton (1957), and Watson (2006). Innis also prepared an incomplete and unpublished autobiography addressing his life until 1922.

2. Innis's biographer, John Watson describes this stage of Innis's scholarship as one of "intellectual isolation," explaining: "Given the radically new departure implicit in this final phase, it is not surprising that not one of Innis's economic-history colleagues followed him in his jump to the application of this methodology to altogether different domains of study. … [Moreover] this loneliness [was] unmitigated, for to join in the discussions of other scholars already active in these new areas of his personal concern would have entailed a prior acceptance of paradigms forged in the metropole. This in turn would have implied abandonment of the belief in a novel hinterland perspective" (Watson 2006, 15).

3. Portions of this section are derived from Babe 2000.

4. Andrew Wernick explains Innis's position in these terms: "Western culture was beset by a communication bias that chronically favoured synchronous over diachronic linkage, so that an omnipresent present overwhelmed the past and precluded contact with the future" (Wernick 1999, 265).

5. Innis wrote: "The printing press and the radio have enormously increased the difficulties of thought; ... freedom of the press and freedom of speech have been possible [i.e. have been tolerated] largely because they have permitted the production of words on an unprecedented scale and have made them powerless" (Innis 1946, vii).

6. Many postmodernists agree that the over abundance of messages, often contradictory, diminishes the value of each one, and on that account they urge that we abandon all search for truth and rather celebrate difference. Poster 1990; Webster 1994).

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