

INTERFACE: THE CORRESPONDENCE OF PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU  
AND H. MARSHALL MCLUHAN (1968-1980)

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Interface: The Correspondence of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and H. Marshall McLuhan  
(1968-1980)

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This study explores the relationship of Canadian prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and seminal media theorist Marshall McLuhan through an examination of their correspondence, which has never been studied as a discrete entity. The two men were at the forefront of discussions about critical issues of globalization, especially the political uses of media, at a time when globalization was not yet a recognized keyword in the literature. All this is reflected in the correspondence.

There were almost 100 items, housed at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa, many of which have appeared in pieces in books written about either man; many of McLuhan's are in a 1987 collection of his letters, published by Oxford University Press. Mainly, I searched through primary and secondary documents, though I did contact several of McLuhan's children, spoke with a few people who knew either or both men and paid a visit to LAC. The letters form the second chapter of this dissertation, an intersection between Part I, which introduces them and my interest in them, and Part III, in which I take readers through the correspondence. Part IV is primarily a description of the personal journey through issues of globalization, multiculturalism and borders that ties it all together.

The relationship between these two intellects was warm and nuanced. Trudeau “spoke of McLuhan with great reverence” and, for McLuhan, Trudeau was “an image of the age, a phenomenon of media, a rare combination of training, practice, intuition, vision; a figure of undoubted fascination, a charismatic who manifested the Canadian dualities and ambiguities.”<sup>1</sup> Both were experts at media manipulation and recognized that in the other. McLuhan was teaching the world about the global village at the same time as Trudeau was helping Canada find its place and meanings in it. Even a cursory glance at the news today shows how much their work is still relevant and needs to be built upon.

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<sup>1</sup> Private email to me from B.W. Powe, February 9, 2017.

## Acknowledgements

My thanks go first to the professors on my dissertation committee, the patient and inspirational teachers Alexander L. Hinton, Yale Ferguson and Robert Snyder of Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey, and B.W. Powe of York University in Toronto, Ontario.

I thank the official gatekeepers of the Trudeau and McLuhan papers – Marc Lalonde, Senator Thomas Axworthy and Michael McLuhan – for allowing me access to the correspondence, and the staff of Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, especially Catherine Butler, Genevieve Couture and Robert Fisher, for their outstanding efforts in helping me find the material I needed.

I am fortunate to have friends and family who have supported me emotionally and materially during the many years it took to finish. My gratitude is boundless. Love beyond words to my mother, husband, daughters and their husbands and children.

My late father taught me that one can learn something from everyone. I would not be who I am today without two groupings of individuals, all public servants, who cared for and nurtured me from a very young age: the staff of the public library in Oshawa, Ontario, where I grew up, and my teachers in Oshawa's public school system, from kindergarten through grade 13. I still remember most of their names. A couple became lifelong friends.

I became attracted to Trudeau and McLuhan while in high school – partly Zeitgeist, partly because of two teachers, to whom this work is dedicated with love: Murray Leslie and the late R. David McKinley.

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## Part I: A Canadian Interval in the Global Village

The identity process of which you speak so often is one that cannot be ignored by government. I am very much aware of the sometimes search and sometimes struggle for new images in which many communities of our society are engaging. What I lack is an intuitive process to forecast for me the likeliest form of a satisfactory nature which these new images will assume. Can you help me?

Pierre Elliott Trudeau to Marshall McLuhan, November 25, 1968<sup>1</sup>

This is a story of two Canadian men, Marshall McLuhan and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, learning about and shaping their nation and the global village<sup>2</sup> as public intellectuals in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. They had separate paths, but they had intersections, including a growing personal relationship lasting a dozen years, from McLuhan's first letter to Trudeau in April 1968 to McLuhan's death in December 1980. Trudeau, Canada's first international political star, was on the rise during this period; McLuhan, the father of media studies, was already becoming yesterday's news. Their correspondence, with commentary, never before studied as a discrete subject nor

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<sup>1</sup> This is the only time I have seen Trudeau ask so bluntly for help from McLuhan. Asking for help from anyone was uncharacteristic, as shown, for example, in this anecdote comparing Trudeau to his predecessor, Lester "Mike" Pearson: "'Mike always made you feel you were needed even if this was far from the case. Pierre makes you feel he doesn't give a shit even though he may need you badly. He just can't bring himself to say 'Help me,' though if the phrase passed his lips a hundred people would rush to his aid'." McCall, *My Life as a Dame*, 301.

<sup>2</sup> "global village" n. the world considered as a single community brought together by high technology and international communications; also in extended use. A term coined by the Canadian author (Herbert) Marshall McLuhan (1911–80).

[1948 W. Lewis *Amer. & Cosmic Man* ii. 16 The earth has become one big village.]

1959 M. McLuhan *Let.* 16 May (1987) 254 The tribe is a unit, which, extending the bounds of the family to include the whole society, becomes the only way of organizing society when it exists in a kind of Global Village pattern. It is important to understand that the Global Village pattern is caused by the instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/79019?redirectedFrom=global+village#eid3012153>.

published in its entirety, is the core of the cultural history I present.<sup>3</sup> The current Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, was born during the period covered by the correspondence.

Trudeau wrote clearly, which McLuhan clearly did not. Rulers and politicians have always had advisors helping them communicate with others, but the Trudeau-McLuhan relationship was the first time a politician was getting advice that so presciently, albeit sometimes almost unintelligibly, took into account the globalizing digitalizing world.

They inspired me. They understood, as I have always understood, that globalism goes far beyond economics, that corporations may run the world but individual human beings live it, and that the most exciting, if often volatile, points in that global village are in the resonating intervals.

Trudeau becomes the senior figure in the story, not only because he lived longer and remained involved with global affairs after his time in office, but because his struggles for a united Canada and his considerations of nationalism and Quebec have intriguing parallels in the constant struggles of a globalizing world (and a still restless Quebec). Trudeau's fight for Canadian federalism over Quebec nationalism developed because

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<sup>3</sup> All the letters are the versions held by Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa. When there are differences in punctuation or spelling between the originals and the letters as they appear in the 1987 *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, edited by Matie Molinaro, Corinne McLuhan and William Towe, and referred throughout this paper as the Molinaro collection, I use the original. I know of, or have seen, about four dozen pieces of correspondence from McLuhan to Trudeau and about three dozen from Trudeau to McLuhan, all from LAC. A note in Molinaro (350) says LAC holds 42 letters from McLuhan to Trudeau and 44 from Trudeau to McLuhan. There is no published collection of Trudeau's letters. The form of the letters has been standardized for this dissertation; paragraph indentation, line spacing and so on in the originals differ.



Trudeau knew that the distinction often drawn by nationalists between “good” nationalism (mine) and “bad” nationalism (yours) did not stand up to serious analysis. Nationalism in all its manifestations stood for ethnic homogeneity and cultural conformity. Modern, progressive societies were nourished by ethnic plurality and cultural hybridity. Concluding a 1961 essay entitled “L’aliénation nationaliste,” Trudeau wrote “Open the frontiers, this people is dying of asphyxiation.”<sup>4</sup>

Several years into their relationship, McLuhan wrote to the prime minister that

A great complication occurs in the matter of your image as it must be presented simultaneously to French and English. Our media totally ignore this fact. The obligations which you have to the French electorate seem to be much at odds with the forming of an image for effective relatedness to the Wasp world. Neither on radio, TV, nor in the press is there ever the slightest hint that this problem exists. You are obliged to perform a balancing act on the high wire for two conflicting publics. It is very important that these publics should see each other at the same time that they are watching you, for their responses to you and to one another are totally diverse.<sup>5</sup>

Although both men have been referred to as “citizen of the world,”<sup>6</sup> I think

Trudeau was the more thoughtfully engaged global citizen, politically and culturally.

McLuhan was by all accounts, including his own, a reluctant inhabitant of the twentieth century, almost never watching the very medium, television, that he explained so well,<sup>7</sup> and viewing the global village as a place of retribalization and terror. He wrote “Globes make my head spin. By the time I locate the place, they’ve changed the boundaries.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cook, *The Teeth of Time*, 32.

<sup>5</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, February 12, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> This is used of McLuhan (Molinaro, *Letters*, ix) and of Trudeau, quoting him as a youth, as the title of the first volume of the John English biography.

<sup>7</sup> Trudeau was not known to watch much television either.

<sup>8</sup> McLuhan and Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village*, frontispiece.

McLuhan wrote that the medium is the message.<sup>9</sup> Something that is medium is somewhere in the middle, mediating. That median, that interface, that gap where something new can be created or understood, where understanding of the other becomes a possibility, where education happens, enthralls me. McLuhan later changed his message to “the medium is the message,” the title of his 1967 book with Quentin Fiore. Like so much of his work, he was partly serious here and partly punning and could almost never be pinned down to one meaning for anything, which contributed greatly to people not taking him seriously. I have massaged the letters to release their messages, but my passion for them is in the fact of their very existence. Other readers will find their own meanings and new questions resonating in the juxtapositions.

Trudeau, a constitutional lawyer, economist and enthusiastic global traveler<sup>10</sup> enticed by politics and discomfited by the very media realities he learned to master, was prime minister of Canada almost continually from 1968 to 1984.<sup>11</sup> University of Toronto professor Marshall McLuhan coined “global village” and gave birth to media studies, while extolling neither the citizens of that village nor the new media shaping them. Attention must be paid to the intersecting of these two extraordinary men. Canada’s 150<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations are in full swing, Trudeau’s centenary is only two years away, and I believe my work has historical and cultural value to enrich those moments.

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<sup>9</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> According to his wife, however, “The Canadians, I soon found, don’t really like their prime minister traveling despite the fact that internationally Pierre has put Canada on the map.” M. Trudeau, *Beyond Reason*, 154.

<sup>11</sup> His Liberal party was defeated in the 1979 federal election, but won the election of 1980 less than a year later.

Others have written the biographies of both men, the influences on them, and their ideas. I am the first to specifically puzzle out the interaction between them, especially on topics such as Canada's place in the world, multiculturalism and the management of new media. In the course of evaluating the Trudeau-McLuhan relationship, I look at the ways they were global citizens, how they thought of Canada as part of a global village, and where Quebec nationalism fits into that picture. Were their discussions of foreign policy ever any more substantial than McLuhan volunteering his opinions of world leaders?<sup>12</sup> More important, in what ways did McLuhan give Trudeau the help he was asked to give?

Given my focus on the letters, I have not structured this dissertation completely traditionally. Aside from the bibliography, there are only four chapters: this introduction, the letters themselves, annotated, my explication of the letters and a conclusion. Although I have some training in feminist methodology, my dissertation is shaped more by my work as a journalist and my deep interest in history, focused through my studies in global affairs.

My work advances the existing story of Trudeau and McLuhan by focusing on the two friends as influential figures at a particular time in Canadian history, when the global village was in the early stages of becoming something more than alternate wording for "multinational corporation" and Canada was figuring out how to become a multicultural country with its own constitution, while still threatened by Quebec separatism. As author Robertson Davies wrote, "The Canadians knew themselves to be strangers in their own

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<sup>12</sup> For example, a July 6, 1973, letter to Trudeau included an unpublished piece about President Richard Nixon ("Mr. Nixon and the Dropout Strategy") and a February 24, 1977, letter discussed President Jimmy Carter.

land, without being at home anywhere else.”<sup>13</sup> Canada is not only a middle power, it is often a middle land – the Upper Canada Preserved medal, struck to honor patriots of the War of 1812, depicts a Canadian beaver being protected by a British lion against an American eagle.<sup>14</sup> More recently, commenting on both the then-pending 2016 U.S. presidential election and the UK vote on whether to remain part of the European Union, one journalist wrote that “...in between the two riled colossuses of the English world, there is genteel Canada, probably striking some kind of yoga pose, possibly about to be overrun by fleeing Brits and Yanks.”<sup>15</sup>

This is a story of borders, although the word itself never appears in the correspondence, and, although this dissertation is not a news report, it is informed by current events. The political usefulness of geographically logical borders, using such natural phenomena as rivers or mountain ranges to mark them out, has always had limited value, as

Boundaries and frontiers are more a function of political will and capabilities – and one’s conception of political space – than of geography. Mountains, rivers, deserts and jungles do offer some protection and deter expansion, but the likes of Alexander the Great and the Aztecs were able to establish their empires across them.<sup>16</sup>

Borders are essentially imaginary, albeit constructed, whether those used to delineate political jurisdictions or those used to isolate and manipulate ethnicities, including, today, through the sale of citizenship and passports in an enormous perversion

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<sup>13</sup> Davies, *World of Wonders*, 260.

<sup>14</sup> Benn, [http://www.napoleon-series.org/military/Warof1812/2007/Issue6/c\\_benn.html](http://www.napoleon-series.org/military/Warof1812/2007/Issue6/c_benn.html) .

<sup>15</sup> Wherry, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/wherry-trudeau-brexite-trump-1.3651482>

<sup>16</sup> Ferguson and Mansbach, *Politics*, 384.

of what is meant by both nationality and globalization. “For all the talk of an interconnected, ‘flat’ world, being born with a bad passport is still a great misfortune...to the wealthy, this is particularly insulting...[the] pitch to these people is this: In the modern world, borders are still very much erect – but they can be flattened, for a price.”<sup>17</sup>

This is a story of the interpretations generated when borders meet, creating friction, or when they approach each other and meaning is created in the space, the interval, holding them with some kind of creative force. “All boundaries are areas of maximal abrasion and change,” McLuhan wrote. “The interval or gap constitutes the resonant or musical bond in the material universe. This is where the action is.”<sup>18</sup> This is a story about using media culturally and politically.

It is not even certain how and where the two men met or first became aware of each other.<sup>19</sup> A handwritten notation in a July 3, 1968, letter from Trudeau to McLuhan refers to a very brief encounter in June 1964 in Charlottetown. McLuhan is not mentioned in Trudeau’s memoirs.<sup>20</sup> According to one writer,

Trudeau’s capers, from the girls he kissed to the clothes he wore, were always calculated for effect. He was always careful of the reporters to whom he gave interviews. One of the first experts he consulted when he ran for the leadership was communication specialist Marshall McLuhan.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Abrahamian, *The Cosmopolites*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> McLuhan and Nevitt, *Take Today*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ricci (*Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, 100) writes that McLuhan first became aware of Trudeau in the 1950s. In correspondence with me, Ricci said his source was English’s *Citizen of the World* (257), but I think he misread English, as the Trudeau archives has a photocopy from the November 21, 1965, New York World Journal Tribune, of Tom Wolfe’s “What if He is Right,” a profile of McLuhan later republished in Wolfe’s *The Pump House Gang*.

<sup>20</sup> Neither are others known to be friends, such as Max and Monique Nemni, who are writing Trudeau’s intellectual biography.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart, *Shrug*, 7.

This suggests the initial outreach came from Trudeau, or possibly intermediary James Davey, the British-born physicist who was a member of Trudeau's inner circle of advisors, but the correspondence suggests otherwise.

Their relationship was sparked shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and took off between then and the assassination of Robert Kennedy, a two-month period coinciding with Trudeau's ascension to the prime minister's office. Students were openly protesting all over the Western world and the Vietnam War was escalating. At the same time, the use of media to best advantage became a boom industry – it had been only a few years since Daniel Boorstin had coined and demonstrated the insidious uses of the “pseudo-event,”<sup>22</sup> insights which have skyrocketed in relevance in the years since.

Canada, so proud of the global impression it had made by marking its centennial with the 1967 World's Fair, Expo '67, began to legislate in favor of multiculturalism. This was an attempt to become more accommodating to the “other” than the prior notion of a Canadian mosaic that had been infiltrating the public consciousness for a decade,<sup>23</sup> culminating in 1965 with the publication of sociologist John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic* and giving the larger world a new model to contrast with the U.S. melting pot. For many Canadians, myself included, the centennial and some years on either side of it was a time not only of celebration and pride, but also of a belief, or maybe a willed belief, that Canada's time had come, that she would finally find a big place on the big world stage.

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<sup>22</sup> Boorstin, *The Image*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> In his October 17, 1968, letter to Trudeau, McLuhan referred to student power groups in high schools and colleges as “a Canadian mosaic.”

Always a place that had defined itself, even before it was a country, in relation to the United States, usually in some kind of dysfunctional sibling rivalry, Canada was ready to lead -- or at least most of the country, still generally known as English Canada, believed itself ready. Quebec had (and often through not-so-benign neglect was allowed to have) its own concerns. Sometimes those concerns overlapped, other times there was friction, sometimes the meeting point resonated.

In its initial phases, Canadian multiculturalism on a practical level was largely a matter of local festivals and celebrations at which people sampled foods from various ethnic groups or watched folk dancers in ethnic costumes. Within a couple of decades, it had become a more sophisticated tapestry of understanding and visibility which by now has reshaped the country. Similarly, although “global village” is today part of our vocabulary (some might even call it a cliché), it was “novel and puzzling” when McLuhan first used it.<sup>24</sup>

In my work, I examine the interaction between Trudeau and McLuhan, including the elusive issue of their possible influence on each other. Trudeau may not have taken a lot of ideas from McLuhan – it can be argued more than one way – but it was important to Trudeau to be exposed to them and certainly it was important to McLuhan to pass them along. Trudeau was not merely being polite when he thanked McLuhan for sending him his books and said he looked forward to reading them; “Blessed with an exceptional memory, he read omnivorously and with a ferocious, head-down tenacity.”<sup>25</sup> Listening to

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<sup>24</sup> Léon Surette, referring to the use of the term in McLuhan’s 1961 seminar class [McLuhan100 Then Now Next: International Conference, Toronto, ON, November 7-10, 2011].

<sup>25</sup> Gwyn, *The Northern Magus*, 32.

others, and questioning them, was apparently very typical of Trudeau, a characteristic I think did not come through to the general public.<sup>26</sup> And even before his contact with McLuhan, he was aware of the technological and scientific revolution taking place and he recognized that any nation which did not join in would become a new kind of “banana republic.”

Trudeau’s ideas were unique, not in themselves but in their context. Few countries have been ruled by Philosopher Kings; most muddle along with the shadows on Plato’s wall. The last country in which anyone would expect to find a Philosopher King actually in power is Canada. Our intellectual history is almost barren of original ideas.<sup>27</sup>

The public inclusion of McLuhan’s work in Trudeau’s was also likely influenced by which advisors Trudeau had at any given time. His first cohort included several intellectuals and a number of his speeches early in his first term included references to McLuhan or his work.

In an April 1969 magazine interview, for example, the prime minister spoke in perfect McLuhanese of the younger generation’s penchant for “dropping out” and cited directly McLuhan’s idea about the sophistication of that generation in comparison with his own:

Marshall McLuhan has helped us all to realize a lot of things in this area; how a child of three or four learns things on television which we learned when we were only 18 or 19. I’m not thinking necessarily of events, I’m thinking of images. They see pictures of fighting and dying. They are aware of wars abroad and great events happening everywhere in the world.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> According to Patrick Gossage, one of Trudeau’s press secretaries, “There are lots of books by Trudeau cabinet ministers, and they were all just amazed at how he ran cabinet meetings and got the best out of everybody and listened – how decisions were made as a team rather than one man imposing his will.” <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/now-that-justin-trudeau-is-going-to-be-pm-will-he-channel-his-dad-1.3283734>

<sup>27</sup> Gwyn, *The Northern Magus*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Trudeau, *Conversations with Canadians*, 11.



Canada's ability to make and keep the peace between warring factions still loomed high in the public imagination, because it hadn't been too long since Lester Pearson won the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize -- and global recognition -- for his work on the Suez crisis.<sup>29</sup> During Canada's year of centennial glory, Pearson was prime minister – his justice minister, who had already introduced legislation to decriminalize homosexuality, a border in its own way, was Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

I have been fascinated by Trudeau and McLuhan since high school. The Trudeau-McLuhan correspondence has been background music in some studies, not looked at as the resonant creative interval it is. “The ‘missing link’ created far more interest than all the chains and explanations of being.”<sup>30</sup>

Their story is enriched by bringing their letters together, because of the meanings that grow when disparate ideas are brought into creative friction at their point of meeting.<sup>31</sup> McLuhan advised Trudeau on whatever struck his fancy, including media, politics and religion. He wrote, “My forte is structural analysis of new problems and environments that, unawares to us, re-program our sensory lives. In effect, I am saying that it is now possible to by-pass what used to be called ‘fate’ by anticipating the effects of new man-made environments.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Lester Bowles Pearson (1897-1972), prime minister of Canada from 1963 to 1968.

<sup>30</sup> McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 114.

<sup>31</sup> This is one interpretation of McLuhan's “resonant interval.”

<sup>32</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, December 2, 1968.

Sometimes he was almost obsequious, often he was the teacher; sometimes he felt free to complain, sometimes in a passive-aggressive way. His July 30, 1975, letter to Trudeau did all three: apologized for taking up the prime minister's time, taught about individualism and capital punishment and, before referring to some attached jokes,<sup>33</sup> noted that, "One of the strange things I have discovered about my own work is that Westerners in general resent having the effects of any technology brought to their attention... The person who is blamed for this, is the person who points it out to them."

Sometimes McLuhan's letters don't take into account the brilliance of the student – surely Trudeau did not need McLuhan to tell him of his own Scottish ancestry, on the basis that "The fur-traders, who are mostly Scots, intermarried with the French very freely."<sup>34</sup>

McLuhan chided the new prime minister for taking time off in the months after he was first elected, writing that "The time is long overdue for you to be back in circulation and to be in the Canadian living room as a 'gap-bridger,' the unifying image of our society that you became during the election."<sup>35</sup>

Just the glow of the prime minister's celebrity was a draw for the always star-struck professor. McLuhan was not a sophisticate like the prime minister and not as interested in international affairs, although he wanted very much to be an adviser to world leaders even if the bulk of that advice was a restating of material published years earlier. During the height of his popularity in the 1960s, he was sought out by politicians

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<sup>33</sup> I have not seen them.

<sup>34</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, May 29, 1969.

<sup>35</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, October 17, 1968.

and business leaders from many countries, but I am not convinced McLuhan ever internalized aspects of the wider world in the same way as Trudeau, who emerged from his global travels "...like Ulysses, as part of all he'd met. Few modern statesmen have come to office knowing so much about the world. Trudeau hadn't just been nearly everywhere; he understood how societies worked."<sup>36</sup>

The global village was McLuhan's plaything and he did travel (for example, to international conferences such as the annual Delos symposium and, at least in 1969, to the Bilderberg conference<sup>37</sup>), but his wife, Corinne, and the University of Toronto were his home. In the main, all his work was applicable globally, rather than being specific to Canada – but it wasn't always understandable.

As Philip Marchand, one of McLuhan's biographers, wrote of his own observations working for a year helping organize the McLuhan archives in Ottawa,

No one who is fond of McLuhan can be happy reading certain letters that he wrote on controversial topics to men who held political or academic power. No matter how close to his heart the issue was – and no matter how urgent and valid his protest – McLuhan often seemed compelled, in these letters, to haul out an involved and barely comprehensible (because McLuhan was too impatient to include logical links or otherwise fully to explain himself) discussion of figure versus ground, acoustic versus visual space, North Americans going out to be alone, or some other characteristic theme. One can see the eyes of the recipient rolling upwards at the sight of these paragraphs.<sup>38</sup>

Trudeau's responses to McLuhan were gracious, albeit usually much briefer than the letters to which he was responding. Marchand noted that

McLuhan rarely used this correspondence to lobby Trudeau on specific issues, which was certainly wise. Rather, in McLuhan's parlance, he tried to draw

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<sup>36</sup> Gwyn, *The Northern Magus*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, May 29, 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Marchand, "Some comments on the McLuhan Papers," 68.

attention to the hidden “ground” of the “figure” constituted by certain specific issues... Trudeau’s replies to McLuhan’s letters are both respectful and thoughtful, but obviously those of a man living in a different mental universe.<sup>39</sup>

When considering the two men, one must look at not only the figures themselves but the ground they came from and were seen against. “Figure” and “ground” were among the concepts McLuhan played with for years and there are frequent references to them in the letters. Canada itself, he wrote, in the twentieth century played “the role of hidden *ground* [ital. in orig.] for big powers.”<sup>40</sup> For him,

‘Figure’ was visual, conceptual, the ascribed cause of a thing. ‘Ground’ was acoustic, perceptual, the perceived effect of a thing. Ground was a medium as McLuhan had always studied a medium – when he had noted the relationship between, say, print and nationalism. It was the environment, it was the source of all real change.<sup>41</sup>

McLuhan connects this to his thoughts about left hemisphere/right hemisphere theory about the brain, increasingly popular at the time, writing

For thirty years at least, I have been using the two hemisphere [sic] approach under the names of the written and the oral, the visual and the acoustic, the hot and the cool, the medium and the message, figure and ground, and so on. Now it turns out that medicine has been building a great beach-head for this approach with its new understanding of the two hemispheres of the brain.

... My work has been a dialogue between the two hemispheres in which the characteristics of the right hemisphere are given so much recognition that I have been unintelligible to the left hemisphere people.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>40</sup> McLuhan, 1977, 227.

<sup>41</sup> Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 260.

<sup>42</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, September 3, 1976.

McLuhan saw “medium” not as television, radio and so on, but as the environment or ground for figure.<sup>43</sup>

There are excellent biographies of both men who, at least on the surface, seemed to have nothing in common but their Canadian citizenship, devotion to their mothers (though McLuhan preferred to keep his at a distance), prankishness, Catholicism (which they approached quite differently), an interest in psychology, a disdain for the mob<sup>44</sup> and great rapport with young people, even if apparently quite a difference in their skills as a father. The Coupland biography is very effective in discussing and demonstrating graphically how McLuhan’s ideas smashed against each other, sometimes to no productive effect, other times producing something new or thought-provoking. McLuhan described his own *The Medium is the Massage* as “a collide-oscope of interfaced situations”<sup>45</sup> and he himself has been described as “a natural-born interfacier” with a hypertextual mind.<sup>46</sup>

I try to always keep in mind that, although Trudeau lived long enough to be part of the global personally-wired world, McLuhan, who predicted much of what has come to pass in and from that wired world, did not.<sup>47</sup> They communicated by letters (often

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<sup>43</sup> Eric McLuhan, [McLuhan100 Then Now Next: International Conference, Toronto, ON, November 7-10, 2011].

<sup>44</sup> Gwyn, *The Northern Magus*, 117.

<sup>45</sup> McLuhan and Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Derrick de Kerckove, [McLuhan100 Then Now Next: International Conference, Toronto, ON, November 7-10, 2011].

<sup>47</sup> Fishko, Sara. “The Medium is the Message at 50.” <http://www.onthemedial.org/story/medium-message-50/>. Fishko also gives McLuhan credit for the use of “surfing” as a description of Internet use, though hedging and saying that is not what he was applying the term to at the time.

dictated),<sup>48</sup> phone and personal visits, a much slower pace than would be the case today, given they did not have email. I've found no evidence that either was computer-literate.<sup>49</sup> On the contrary, McLuhan, in the years before he died, showed little interest "in exploring the implications of the latest advances – not even that great technological wonder of the seventies, the microchip computer. For him, electronic technology was largely broadcasting – instantaneous, global communications."<sup>50</sup> McLuhan typed many of his own letters. Trudeau used a fountain pen for the notes he made on the letters I've seen, and for his signature. If weeks or months go by between letters, that doesn't indicate a lack of interest or amity.

With some of their letters – for example, the August 2, 1972, letter from McLuhan to Trudeau -- one can feel the indentations of the typewriting on the paper. I ran my fingers across them over and over again. And I too use a fountain pen.

Joseph Philippe Pierre Yves Elliott Trudeau was born in Montreal on October 18, 1919, the middle child and first son of Charles Trudeau and Grace Elliott. He married Margaret Sinclair in 1971 and they had three sons before divorcing in 1984. Trudeau subsequently had a daughter through his relationship with Deborah Coyne. He died on September 28, 2000.

Although the focus of my work is not the domestic life of either man, I cannot existentially halve them. Their lives did not proceed that way. Trudeau and his future wife, Margaret Sinclair, set their wedding date while he was already dealing with the

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<sup>48</sup> McLuhan seems to have handwritten all his letters until around 1959. Molinaro, *Letters*, 253 footnote 1.

<sup>49</sup> I note that Gwyn (50) wrote that "almost everyone likens Trudeau's mind to a computer: capacious, inexhaustible, and precise."

<sup>50</sup> Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 264.

1970 October Crisis, arguably the most controversial period of his lengthy time as prime minister. Trudeau seems to have been a much better father than McLuhan, but his marriage ended very badly and publicly. The very image of Pierre and Margaret became a media circus that put Canada on the global stage, from their wedding through their marriage through the separation and divorce.

Trudeau's political passions were federalism, which itself is a negotiation of rights and duties across boundaries, civil rights (despite his still controversial 1970 imposition of the War Measures Act) and the recognition of a wider world beyond Quebec and beyond Canada. His goal of a Canadian Bill of Rights and Constitution was single-minded, once he was dedicated to it; initially, while in the Pearson cabinet, he was against the government taking on the issue.<sup>51</sup> His active Catholicism, which ultimately became liberal, may have also widened his outlook. I believe his worldview, based on a strong social consciousness, became genuinely global, even though those closest to him throughout his life tended to come from the white Canadian establishment into which he was born.

There were regular family vacations to the United States, especially to Old Orchard Beach in Maine, a regular haunt of wealthy Québécois. Hugh MacLennan didn't publish his influential novel *Two Solitudes*, some of which takes place in Old Orchard Beach, until 1945, but, as has been much-documented, Trudeau's family was itself an interface of the two solitudes, French and Anglo.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 228.

<sup>52</sup> This is the standard way of defining the solitudes, though those of Scottish descent, like Trudeau, might argue over their inclusion as "Anglo."

Part of what made Trudeau special was his exceptional command of English. Exchange programs between high school students in Quebec and other parts of Canada were popular in the 1960s and here was a leader who embodied those programs' goals of understanding across the nation's founding cultures and beyond.

In 1968, with the exception of Trudeau and Paul Martin Sr., attempts at French by candidates for the Liberal leadership were an embarrassment, not least because nobody seemed to care how badly he spoke.<sup>53</sup>

That indifference did not last long. Among most of the candidates for the Liberal leadership in 2013, French was far from perfect but it was not embarrassing.<sup>54</sup> That change had its roots in the early years of the Trudeau government. Almost by stealth the capacity to speak French became a step up the ladder of power, whether in the cabinet, the courts or the ranks of the public service.<sup>55</sup>

Trudeau was highly competitive, though mainly in activities, like wilderness canoeing, that pitted individual against individual or against nature, and extremely fit and healthy most of his life. Trudeau's lifelong passion for experiencing the natural world led him to work on environmental issues, which gave him an involvement in the global commons. McLuhan's environmental interests appear to be site-specific – for example, protesting against Toronto's Spadina Expressway. Even here there is an interface, as one of McLuhan's fellow protesters was urban planning activist Jane Jacobs, a friend of Trudeau (Jacobs said Canadian identity was a matter of good common sense that made Canadians respond "to what Marshall McLuhan calls 'the early warning system.' You can see what goes wrong in the U.S. and not repeat their worst follies").<sup>56</sup> At times,

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<sup>53</sup> Martin's son, Paul Martin Jr., also a Liberal, was prime minister from December 2003 to February 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Trudeau's eldest son, Justin, won the 2013 fight to head the Liberal party.

<sup>55</sup> Gray, John. "The 2 Trudeaus, and the lesson of 1968," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/the-2-trudeaus-and-the-lesson-of-1968-1.1371425> .

<sup>56</sup> McCall, *My Life as a Dame*, 116.



Trudeau spoke of the environment as something that must be confronted by countries working together in the global village.<sup>57</sup>

Trudeau's father died suddenly of a heart attack when Trudeau was young, leaving him as the man of the house. He lived with his mother until he became prime minister. He had a parochial Catholic education through his college years, during which he received his law degree at the Université de Montréal. That education reflected the narrowness and prejudices of the time, including antisemitism, and Trudeau absorbed all this with little apparent trouble. His further education outside Canada, beginning at Harvard, began to broaden him, as did his travels. At the London School of Economics, for example, Trudeau came under the influence of Harold Laski, who was a Jew.

In all likelihood, the notion of multiculturalism Trudeau later came to espouse in Canada actually had its roots in these first real experiences outside the country. The Montreal of his childhood was hardly monocultural, yet he had lived it as such, where everyone who was other – the English, the immigrants, the Jews – was the enemy. Now the boundaries between “us” and “them” were dissolving; it was in this sense that he truly became a “citizen of the world.”<sup>58</sup>

Although he lived a privileged life, which to some degree made him unable to relate to “ordinary” individuals for the rest of his life, when he traveled he did not travel in privilege (except of course that he always had that money to fall back on and did not really have to get a job). “Mean lives, the condition, after all, of much of the electorate, were not in his idiom. This is not to say that he didn't care, but that, on his part, it had to be an effort of will.”<sup>59</sup> This perception of Trudeau as an elitist dogged him for his entire

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<sup>57</sup> Trudeau, *Conversation with Canadians*, 128.

<sup>58</sup> Ricci, *Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, 84.

<sup>59</sup> Richler, *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!*, 158.

political career. Trudeau began to overcome his privileged and parochial past by adopting Emmanuel Mounier's philosophy of personalism during his time in Paris in 1946-47, after his graduation from Harvard. Personalism

was a sort of spiritual existentialism, asserting the primacy of the individual and of free will but balancing these with the demands of social conscience and social responsibility. For Trudeau, the philosophy became – perhaps a bit conveniently – a means of both holding on to his past and of remaking it...<sup>60</sup>

Herbert Marshall McLuhan was born in Edmonton on July 21, 1911, the elder son of Herbert McLuhan and Elsie Hall. On August 4, 1939, he married Texan Corinne Lewis in St. Louis; McLuhan had been teaching at the Jesuit Saint Louis University for two years. He and Corinne had six children. He died in Toronto on December 31, 1980, 15 months after a massive stroke left him unable to speak, read or write. From childhood, McLuhan had health problems, but viewed them as a sign of weakness and tried to ignore them. For almost eight years he tried to ignore the blackouts and dizziness that culminated in surgery from a benign brain tumor in 1967; it took him three years to recover.<sup>61</sup>

His life story, including his marriage and his background, is a study in a North America where one could still move around quite freely (there were, however, passport difficulties in getting him and Corinne back from England after World War II broke out and, in 1943, he defended his dissertation *in absentia*<sup>62</sup>). During his graduate education at

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<sup>60</sup> Ricci, *Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, 82.

<sup>61</sup> Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan*, 226-230 (also, McLuhan refers to this surgery in a December 2, 1968, letter to Trudeau).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 114. It is also worth remembering how very recent is the entire system of formal international border controls: "Opening borders to allow unfettered freedom of international movement has intuitive plausibility for anyone with cosmopolitan sympathies, and while it may seem far fetched, it would be no more than a reversion to the global migration regime that existed before the institutional obstacles of

Cambridge, McLuhan traveled a lot and he and Corinne also traveled on their honeymoon but, in comparison to Trudeau, his travels were conventional and do not seem to have had much influence on his ideas (he was also a decade older than Trudeau, which may have meant they were also traveling under conditions that were different). He was teaching at Fordham University in New York City and living in Bronxville, New York, when Trudeau became prime minister.

During his undergraduate years at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, McLuhan began reading the works of writer and Catholic convert G. K. Chesterton,<sup>63</sup> whose enormous influence helped lead him to his own religious conversion while at Cambridge. McLuhan became a Catholic and he was an active conservative Catholic for the rest of his life, attending mass daily. He was an early “closet” follower of French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,<sup>64</sup> also an influence on Trudeau, and, also like Trudeau, was influenced by the work of French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain.<sup>65</sup> Margaret

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passports, visas, work permits and frontier controls were instituted in the early twentieth century.” Seglow, “Immigration Justice and Borders,” 235.

<sup>63</sup> Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936), whose aphoristic writing style and use of humor may have influenced McLuhan’s writing style.

<sup>64</sup> Those who have cited his influence include Jean-Francois Vallee, [McLuhan100 Then Now Next: International Conference, Toronto, ON, November 7-10, 2011] and Tom Wolfe in <http://www.marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/>. Teilhard is considered controversial because of his views on basic Catholic teachings and his development of the theory of the noosphere, “a stage or sphere of evolutionary development characterized by (the emergence or dominance of) consciousness, the mind, and interpersonal relationships, postulated as following the stage of the establishment of human life.” <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/128215?redirectedFrom=noosphere#eid> According to B.W. Powe (private email to me, March 8, 2017), “The noosphere and individual rights (as distinguished from market capitalism) came together in Trudeau’s mind to make the global village that is Canada.”

<sup>65</sup> Trudeau to McLuhan, July 25, 1977.

Trudeau was also a convert, though not by choice. I wonder whether she and McLuhan ever discussed it or whether the prime minister ever suggested that they do.

How much Canadian economic theorist Harold Innis influenced McLuhan and whether McLuhan expressed enough gratitude remains a contentious subject among McLuhan scholars. Certainly, McLuhan acknowledged Innis' understanding of interfaces, writing

Harold Innis, the Canadian pioneer historian of economics and communication, imaginatively used the interface, or borderline situation, to present a new world of economic and cultural change by studying the interplay between man's artifacts and the environments created by old and new technologies.<sup>66</sup>

McLuhan also never stopped thinking as someone from western Canada and took it upon himself as a Westerner to advise Trudeau on the subject; the western provinces presented many problems to the prime minister during his time in office. About one of the less serious issues, McLuhan wrote,

Last night's Toronto Star mentioned your having some doubts about the Canadian West and its strange attachment to the Mounties and the monarchy. As a Westerner, I can help to illuminate this matter. The West has always been on the defensive, if only because it is relatively uninhabited territory. Both the Mountie and the monarchy are figures, as it were, without a ground. They are lonely and isolated images, dedication without a cause.<sup>67</sup>

But it was Canada as a whole, and Quebec in particular, that engaged McLuhan from the beginning of his relationship with Trudeau, theorizing in his very first letter that

French Canada never had a 19<sup>th</sup> century. May this not be increasingly a basis for its great advantage over English Canada? Never having had the intense specialism of a mechanized consumer economy, French Canada retains its bonds with oral cultures and their total field approach. The all-at-oneness of electric data is not only organic and inclusive but reshapes the entire imaginative lives of highly literate communities. The TV generation, for example, is almost oriental in its

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<sup>66</sup> McLuhan, 1977, 233.

<sup>67</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, July 10, 1973.

involvement in the inner rather than the outer life. This means, naturally, a total loss of goal orientation in the old sense. The outer space programs thus in many ways represent 18<sup>th</sup>-century rather than 20<sup>th</sup>-century orientations.<sup>68</sup>

Four years later, he wrote that

I consider that Canada has become a world Utopia, as it were, by chance. Our unique situation seems to me to be that we are the only country in the world without an “identity.” We have two identities which in effect polarize one another and create a very important pattern of complementarity. It is a complementarity of a special kind, deriving on the one hand from a great land power (France) and, on the other hand, a great sea power (England). Canada, in a most eminent way, embraces both of these cultural forms of land and sea.<sup>69</sup>

There are about 800,000 pieces of paper in the McLuhan archives in Ottawa, 100,000 pages of that being letters.<sup>70</sup> Ideas are often reused, as is usually true of anyone’s correspondence and as is true of McLuhan’s work in general. McLuhan kept extensive clippings files and I’ve noted some interesting juxtapositions which I’m sure were not lost on him, given his own writings on the strange interfaces of stories on any given page of a newspaper. His files contain a political cartoon of Trudeau as a rather sinister Peter Pan<sup>71</sup> from the April 8, 1968, edition of the *Toronto Telegram*; on the back of the cartoon is a photo of Coretta King and her children by the side of her husband’s coffin. One needs to pay attention to the whole picture.

Whether through ego or playfulness, hunger to stand out or sheer forgetfulness, McLuhan’s ideas often seemed to contradict each other. Manuel Castells called him “the

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<sup>68</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, April 16, 1968.

<sup>69</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, August 2, 1972. McLuhan first mentioned to Trudeau in a December 2, 1968, letter his idea that Canada lacks a national identity.

<sup>70</sup> Molinaro, *Letters*, viii. Also, Trudeau took an active and critical role in keeping McLuhan’s papers in Canada, a fact I have seen cited in a number of books. Robert Fisher at LAC told me archival information confirming this would be in the Trudeau fonds.

<sup>71</sup> Intriguingly, on June 3, McLuhan wrote Trudeau that, “Radio created Hitler as a delinquent Peter Pan...”

great visionary who revolutionized thinking in communications in spite of his unrestrained use of hyperbole.”<sup>72</sup> Relevant key concepts include global village, the medium is the message, figure/ground, hot/cool, tribal, interface,<sup>73</sup> probe and resonant interval. Our contemporary “mash-up” is another way to say “interface.” McLuhan, approaching Trudeau with ways he might engage on television with high school and university students, wrote

They are not looking for “feed-back” but “feed-forward.” It would be inevitable that as soon as they began to discuss their problems there would begin a resonance with many problems of your own. It would be perfectly natural for you to illustrate and to discuss their problems while briefing them on yours. They in turn could comment on yours, setting up a natural interface between areas of community life on one hand, and government on the other. Such an encounter via TV has never occurred before.<sup>74</sup>

The probe became McLuhan’s basic *modus operandi*. When he used “the medium is the message” in his 1961-62 seminar class, he was testing out the ideas for both *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and, likely, *Understanding Media*, and was at that point using the phrase as a probe.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 357.

<sup>73</sup> Interface, as a noun: **2.** *transf.* and *fig.*

**a.** A means or place of interaction between two systems, organizations, etc.; a meeting-point or common ground between two parties, systems, or disciplines; also, interaction, liaison, dialogue.

1962 M. McLuhan *Gutenberg Galaxy* 141 (*heading*) The interface of the Renaissance was the meeting of medieval pluralism and modern homogeneity and mechanism.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/9774#eid262959>.

Interface, as a verb: **2.** *intr.* To come into interaction *with*.

1967 M. McLuhan & Q. Fiore *Medium is Massage* 88 A strange bond often exists among antisocial types in their power to see environments as they really are. This need to interface, to confront environments with a certain anti-social power, is manifest in the famous story ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/97748?rskey=79tIJm&result=2#eid>.

<sup>74</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, October 17, 1968.

<sup>75</sup> Léon Surette, [McLuhan100 Then Now Next: International Conference, Toronto, ON, November 7-10, 2011].

McLuhan often used the line, “You don’t like my ideas? I have others.”<sup>76</sup> But even if it is too much to expect McLuhan to be original from letter to letter or even book to book, he is extremely farsighted (one must not lose sight of the fact he has been dead since 1980, before the age of even the personal computer).<sup>77</sup> And one must always keep in mind that his work is not science, not a conceptual analysis but a perceptual method.<sup>78</sup>

McLuhan, first writing to Trudeau four days before he was sworn in as prime minister, passed on some of his core ideas about Canada, Quebec and the media, adding that he was happy Trudeau had become Liberal leader. By November 25, the conversation had evolved to the point where Trudeau wrote to McLuhan asking for help.

Asking for that help, which dealt specifically with understanding the multiple kinds of identities coming to the fore in Canada at the time, was practical for developing multiculturalism but showed, at base, the prime minister’s desire to keep Canada whole. The fight for Canada, for Canadian federalism, across the softer boundaries of group identities but most especially across the real boundaries of Quebec and its culture, was the fight of Trudeau’s adult life, after his very privileged, parochial, Catholic Quebec upbringing. At a private gathering in Toronto in November, 1970, Trudeau

...remarked that national unity was not divinely ordained and that the country might break up someday. But the federation was far better for French Canadians than separation would be. He said that in the past he had sometimes played an intellectual game in which Quebec separated, so that people would see how much

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<sup>76</sup> According to Antonio Casilli, [McLuhan100 Then Now Next: International Conference, Toronto, ON, November 7-10, 2011] the first public use was in November 1955 at Columbia University.

<sup>77</sup> McLuhan was not above playing with his cutting-edge image, however, telling Tom Wolfe in a 1970 TV-Ontario interview that “I’ve always been very careful never to predict anything that had not already happened. The future is not what it used to be.” <http://www.marshallmcluhanspeaks.com>.

<sup>78</sup> Derrick de Kerckhove, [McLuhan100 Then Now Next: International Conference, Toronto, ON, November 7-10, 2011].

better off they had been in Confederation; but now that he was a politician with responsibilities for the people, he no longer played this game.<sup>79</sup>

Trudeau opposed the vision of Canada as the “community of communities” espoused by federal Progressive Conservative leader Joe Clark during the 1979 federal election campaign, but may have come to change his mind. Certainly, he viewed Canada as part of a global community so that, should Quebec separate and the country fall apart, it would be “a crime against the history of mankind.”<sup>80</sup> For Trudeau,

...the appeal of federalism [was] that it based itself not on ethnicity and emotionalism but on practicality and the common good. Trudeau may have come to this stance by way of the cauldron of his own crises of identity, but the reason he stuck with it was because it made sense. And if he had patched it together via Harvard and Harold Laski and China and the Khyber Pass, it was, in the end, a very Canadian stance.<sup>81</sup>

McLuhan was often ambivalent about his native land and adopted hometown. Tucked into the McLuhan files is a pamphlet for Sensory City '74, the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference on Visual Literacy, held in Toronto in early May, 1974.<sup>82</sup> A poem in it reads

Toronto is a city  
At the edge of  
American history...  
It is almost Tolkien's Rivendell  
Safe from the ragings  
Of the archaic darkness  
Of Sauron and the Ring Wraiths.<sup>83</sup>

For some Canadians, national identity was entwined with Trudeau:

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<sup>79</sup> Cook, *The Teeth of Time*, 114.

<sup>80</sup> English, *Just Watch Me*, 332. This is often referenced as “a crime against humanity.”

<sup>81</sup> Ricci, *Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, 179.

<sup>82</sup> The conference opened with a showing of the movie *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, a work set against the cultural frictions of Montreal's French, Jewish and English communities.

<sup>83</sup> “At the Edge of History,” William Irwin Thompson.



The astonishing and sudden victory of Trudeau, with his historically unprecedented – for Canada, anyway – understanding of politics as public spectacle, and his savvy suturing of persona with policy, is at least partly accounted for by the shift in the national imagination made possible by 1967. Distinctive as he was, and remains, his arrival was also perfectly timed. As Larry Zolf noted in 1984, “Trudeau was our permanent Expo.”<sup>84</sup>

Neither McLuhan nor Trudeau worked at one job or even one single-minded career during their lifetimes, but lived roles utilizing a variety of skills. This change in customary expectations of work-life came as no surprise to McLuhan, who said in a 1972 lecture that

The work ethic, insofar as it meant private goal-orientation, is not practical and disappeared some time ago. Related to this situation is change in the job. The job will no longer hold up against the simultaneous jostling and the interfacing of simultaneous information. What is taking the place of the job is role-playing. When you are moonlighting and starlighting, that is role-playing; and most people are doing this to some degree or another. The job-holder drops out as the consultant drops in.<sup>85</sup>

He took up the subject directly with the prime minister a couple of years later, writing that

The split between work and residence which came with industrial specialism and division of labour is ending swiftly with the new electronic environment of software information. The return to human scale and human involvement is getting spectacular play in the Thatcher episode, but it has also invaded the entire range of young peoples’ attitudes and interests. Women’s Lib belongs very much in the shift from specialist job-holding to multiple role-playing.<sup>86</sup>

These role changes were very much a global phenomenon, which McLuhan had pointed out to Trudeau years earlier:

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<sup>84</sup> Pevere and Dymond, *Mondo Canuck*, 221. Trudeau is the only politician given his own chapter in this pop history, because the authors consider him “the greatest media star” Canada ever produced (220).

<sup>85</sup> McLuhan and Staines, *Understanding Me*, 189.

<sup>86</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, February 14, 1975.

Electric telecommunications create multitudes of tribally structured mini-states. These now begin to appear inside all the older maxi-states whether of business or politics. The unions and universities are mini-states, so are the police, the armed services, all media and all branches of business and government bureaucracies. The hierarchy of the organization chart is finished. Job specialism leads to role-playing in the global theatre.<sup>87</sup>

As years go by, the correspondence becomes increasingly marked up and copied – I don't know whether that is a sign of increased bureaucracy or deepening privacy. I have come across frequent references to the notion that, privately, Trudeau and McLuhan were good friends, but the correspondence does include some political advice about putting a bit of distance between them.

The relationship was encouraged, and initially mediated by, Davey, who had been instrumental in convincing Trudeau to run for the Liberal party leadership<sup>88</sup> and was himself very attracted to McLuhan's ideas, which was not always good for the government. "Between 1968 and 1972, Davey was the architect both of Trudeau's ill-fated attempt to govern by reason, and by computers..."<sup>89</sup> It seems to have taken a year for Davey's role as intermediary to come out in the open, so that McLuhan would write to him directly, and it was a role not without complications. In an April 23, 1969, memo to Marc Lalonde, Trudeau's principal secretary at the time, to arrange that Trudeau and McLuhan meet in Ottawa, Davey wrote, "I believe that Dr. McLuhan can be a source of valuable insights but, because he is a somewhat overpowering personality, the problem will be to find if any arrangements with him can be effective, and, if so, which."

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<sup>87</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, January 24, 1969.

<sup>88</sup> Cook, *The Teeth of Time*, 54.

<sup>89</sup> Gwyn, *The Northern Magus*, 84.

On July 8, 1969, Davey sent a memo to Trudeau, discussing a dinner the prime minister was hosting at his official residence the following night, centered on McLuhan, but I've seen no follow-up letter from him about this. Davey was the original go-between in arranging the event and any correspondence or journals he left behind would be worth examining.

Some of the issues Davey initially thought McLuhan might shed light on, during a proposed series of special seminars for government and political leaders, were

- 1) Priorities. What are they? How are they established. [sic] Does consensus form part of establishing priorities?
- 2) What is the role of a political party in today's electric age? The old and very slow ways of feeding information through the channels of local associations, provincial and national associations and M.P.s, etc., don't seem to me to have much continued relevance. How do we short-circuit this process but still maintain a "political party"?
- 3) What does Dr. McLuhan think about pluralistic societies or two-language societies?
- 4) What about the role of Canada versus the U.S. and Canada versus the world?
- 5) What is the future role for the United Nations?
- 6) Dr. McLuhan made some comments about the inadequacy of present education in the T.V. age. Does he have any solution to advocate?<sup>90</sup>

But the seminar series never materialized – the correspondence indicates that was due to a number of objections on McLuhan's part -- and so, despite his continuing opinion that Trudeau could benefit from contact with the professor, Davey wrote to the prime minister earlier in a December 13, 1968, memo that "...Dr. McLuhan may be too

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<sup>90</sup> Memo, Davey to Stanbury, October 22, 1968.

hard to handle if the contact is too frequent and too close. What would be helpful would be occasional correspondence and a lunch once or twice a year...”

McLuhan was brought in as a media specialist, of course, and gave freely of his advice on the subject over the years:

The men of the press can work only with people who have fixed points of view and definite goals, policies and objectives. Such fixed positions and attitudes are, of course, irrelevant to the electronic age. Our world substitutes mosaics for points of view and probes for targets.<sup>91</sup>

“Understanding the proper use of the media and controlling one’s exposure to it are, however, quite distinct as you will appreciate.”<sup>92</sup>

“Your Grey Cup kick-off was, of course, a media triumph. This is audience participation and image-making at its best.”<sup>93</sup>

Your very cool dealings with our very hot medium the press, naturally produces intense interface or friction. The press has to have hot quotes and sharp points of view. Real news is bad news. Since the press lives on advertising, and all advertising is good news, it takes a lot of bad news to sell all this good news. Even the good news of the gospel can only be sold by hellfire. Vatican II made a very big mistake in this matter as in other matters.<sup>94</sup>

Religion was part of their discussion from the start. McLuhan, in his first letter to Trudeau, wrote

I have always felt that one of Canada’s greatest assets was its being a kind of “backwater”. Never having been totally involved in current trends it has been able to enjoy a flexibility that is now rare. The rigidity of commitments of all powers [orig. “Powers”] that were great in the 19<sup>th</sup> century confronts them with anarchy as they attempt to readjust to the total field awareness demanded by the speed of electric information. The de-Romanization of the Catholic Church is only one instance of the decentralizing effects of electric information on older

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<sup>91</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, April 16, 1968.

<sup>92</sup> Trudeau to McLuhan, November 25, 1968.

<sup>93</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, December 2, 1968.

<sup>94</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, January 24, 1969.

bureaucracies. By the same token the liturgical revival is that kind of involvement and participation that goes with the simultaneity and coexistence of electronic experience.<sup>95</sup>

The following year, McLuhan connected thoughts on the Church to thoughts on principles of organization, which take up more of his theoretical interest over the years and which are of practical interest to the prime minister as he figured out how best to organize his office and government. McLuhan wrote,

In his new book 'The Age of Discontinuity' (Harper & Row, 1969), my friend Peter Drucker presents a magnificent inventory of problems in current decisionmaking. He hasn't [sic] a clue as to why these problems have arisen but he cries out for a new theory of organization. He indicates that every organization in the world whether in the home or the school, the business or the political or the religious, has broken down today regardless of ideology [sic] or geography. On page 223 he focuses these problems onto the concept of the new 'ministate'. Every centralist organization large or small is now broken up into mini-states; even the Catholic individual, as he relates to the Mystical Body, regards himself as a mini-state.<sup>96</sup>

One of McLuhan's more well-known notions about Trudeau had to do with the idea of "mask," and he referred to it more than once in his writings to and about the prime minister.

The very cool corporate mask that is your major political asset goes naturally with processing of problems in dialogue rather than in the production of packages answers. That is why I urge you to go on the air with small groups and to trade problems with them rather than seeking answers or stating mere points of view. ... You are the only political image of our time able to use the T.V. medium [sic] without being forced to become a tribal buffoon or cartoon like De Gaulle. All the other political figures of the Western world are merely faded photographs on the T.V. medium.<sup>97</sup>

...Note how [President] Richard Nixon has ineptly tried to mitigate his crude and harsh image of liaison with various figures in the world of entertainment. He is

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<sup>95</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, April 16, 1968.

<sup>96</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, January 24, 1969.

<sup>97</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, January 24, 1969.

quite unable to combine these qualities in himself in the way that you have done. To the Wasp world the light-hearted approach to power represents aristocratic insouciance and security. The entertainer is a figure which they themselves have crowned. He is permitted to hurt them by his humour, for that is the mask of his power and relevance alike.<sup>98</sup>

One of Trudeau's critics takes McLuhan's interpretation of his mask -- wrongly, I think -- as an understanding that, beginning with Trudeau's run for the Liberal leadership, he was deliberately falsifying his public image. "The inflation of his intellectual and physical attributes in the leadership process -- in which he was on the whole a willing participant -- was the final factor in turning Trudeau into a charismatic figure."<sup>99</sup>

Because Canada is unique on the world stage in never having had a national identity, McLuhan writes,

...In an age when all homogenous nations are losing their identity images through rapid technological change, Canada alone can "keep its cool." We have never been committed to a single course or goal. This is now our greatest asset.<sup>100</sup>

The parallel is to be found in the recent need of the business world to switch from private enterprise to tribal conglomerates on the pattern of medieval dynastic marriages, another massive example of decentralism foisted upon us by electric speeds.<sup>101</sup>

Today, we live in an age where it is often a luxury to not be hooked in, to go off the grid, which gives both Trudeau's way of life and McLuhan's fears a kind of prescience:

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<sup>98</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, February 12, 1973.

<sup>99</sup> Clarkson and McCall, *Trudeau and Our Times*, 112.

<sup>100</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, December 2, 1968. In one copy, this sentence has been underlined and has a question mark. In the Molinaro collection (359), "now" has been inserted before "our."

<sup>101</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, December 2, 1968.

...the future of travel, I'm reliably told, lies in "black-hole resorts," which charge high prices precisely because you can't get online in their rooms.

...Even half a century ago, Marshall McLuhan, who came closer than most to seeing what was coming, warned, "When things come at you very fast, naturally you lose touch with yourself."<sup>102</sup>

Thinking about globalization in terms of communications and transportation, I begin to try to hold two ideas on my head at the same time, the same way I puzzle over light being both wave and particle. When I'm on a plane, leafing through the airline's magazine, and see a drawing of the company's routes across the U.S. or the world, I'm both amazed at the short distances and aware that, even when the lines are drawn straight, the real flights must take into account the curvature of the planet. Time-space compression makes us think of globalization as connecting nations, groups and individuals in straight and increasingly short and speedy lines, and yet we know the earth is in fact a globe and its shape determines forces or nature we can't change. Humans still have to move in real time and space and are constrained by circumstances (economics, violence, laws backed by police or military enforcement) in ways that, for example, information, wheat and durable goods may not be. Geographic proximity is one of the three main reasons accounting for where people move when they move.<sup>103</sup>

Even in this globalizing world, Canada still very tied to its geography, as is every other nation-state, each in its own way. But global communications technology can provide synthesis.

The question of identifying national borders on the internet is complicated by the fact that there is no clear agreement as to what 'national borders' are...A traditional view of the national border suggests itself as a starting point. In this

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<sup>102</sup> Iyer, "The Joy of Quiet," 2012.

<sup>103</sup> Langhorne, *Essentials*, 304.

conception, a national border is an imaginary boundary tied strictly to geographical territory in which a state's sovereignty may be exercised... While such a definition is well suited to discussions between national governments, determining the sovereignty of nations by their territorial borders does not account for two vital ingredients of a nation: its people and their culture. People have always made connections across national borders, but improvements in communication and transportation technologies have made such connections far easier as the 20<sup>th</sup> century comes to a close. A political or legal sense of national borders ignores, by and large, these vital connections.<sup>104</sup>

Canada is a middle/“middle power.” In the early 1900s, the technology required for new forms of popular culture, such as movies, “required either government assistance or enormous markets [so] Canadians fell increasingly under the influence of the United States.”<sup>105</sup> As Canada struggled to find its independent voice after WWII, having been fully in control of its own foreign affairs only since the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, Canadian officials stuck to the same “functional principle” they had stuck to during WWII:

...representation in the United Nations' councils only when Canada could be a major actor. In allocating supplies or feeding refugees, Canadians must have a voice; on grand strategy, they would be silent... Between the great powers, bent on monopolizing decision-making, and a host of minor countries with voices but no leverage, Canada was a “middle power” with too little influence to claim a global voice but with too great a material strength to be ignored.<sup>106</sup>

McLuhan took some delight in teasing Americans, writing

While attending the idiotic Bilderberg Conference on world unrest I spoke to George Ball of the U.S. I said: “The Canadians are a very cool crowd.” He replied: “Not according to my mail.” I asked him: “What was the cause for irritation?” He then explained his plan for taking over Canada. I replied: “Well, Mr. Ball, to be quite frank, I have not only never heard of your plan, but I have never heard of you before in my life. Why don't you all come up and live on the

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<sup>104</sup> Halvaks, “National Border,” 8.

<sup>105</sup> Brown, *Illustrated History*, 442.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 484-485.



Dew Line which you have built? All Americans could live up there without even being noticed!”<sup>107</sup>

Recently, in Dublin and Paris and Athens, friends urged me to set up “Centres for Understanding Media.” They had in mind a kind of dialogue that could be maintained among several such places with the help of a Newsletter or periodical brochure into which they could put their current problems and discoveries concerning the interplay between media and the major institutions of our time. It might be a great help to have such a Centre in Quebec, for example. If Quebec could see its patterns and role in our twentieth century against the ground of other countries facing the same separatist pressures under media impact, it might greatly relieve tension and play down the merely personal feelings.

...There is also the fact that English in this century has become a world language through the particular agency of jazz and rock. Yet the French tongue richly modifies and controls this enormous world monopoly of English (just how English became the means of processing the sounds of jazz and rock is an amazing story which has not yet been written. I have hit upon it recently).<sup>108</sup>

Writing of the other North American border, the one with Mexico -- and, increasingly, what is meant by “the border” in popular American culture, as Canada continues to lose ground, as it were -- one author writes,

...The only problem is, as Jacques Derrida says, the closer we get to the border, the harder it gets to see it. Reality blurs. Uncertainty becomes a principle.

If you focus on that blurred border, you begin to understand that Spanglish is so much more than reading between the lines...At the border, an obvious and often awkward mixing of cultures takes place that makes up the superficial idea of Spanglish. But the border also exists deep within the territory of North America, now more than ever, in its major cities; it is an imported border that is expressed through a dynamic, continuing recombination of cultures.<sup>109</sup>

That recombination of cultures still does tend to take place outside the corridors of power. A mid-2016 summit meeting of the Canadian, U.S. and Mexican leaders dealt

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<sup>107</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, May 29, 1969.

<sup>108</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, August 2, 1972.

<sup>109</sup> Morales, *Living in Spanglish*, 4.

with proposals of increased efficiency of border crossings, including data sharing, and the embedding of Canadian personnel

alongside Mexican counterparts in a U.S. customs centre to fight the illegal smuggling of contraband goods with better pre-screening for high risk cargo shipments.

...The three countries will embrace “cluster asset mapping,” to identify regions with interconnected companies, suppliers and institutions... They will also cooperate on cybersecurity...<sup>110</sup>

Generally, Americans notice Canadians only if they are momentarily perceived as a threat to security and notice Mexicans as a threat to national culture, while misperceiving them as a threat to the domestic economy and national security.

I find McLuhan’s ideas about tribalism useful in our globalizing world. He wrote

The real drama of our age, the shift from hardware services environments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the software (electric information) service environments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is as big a leap as that from primitive tribalism to literate individualism. For our Western world, this is a shift from outer orientation to an inner, oriental trip. It renders all of our institutions obsolete, as the young TV generation fully recognizes...

In these circumstances “political” action takes on the appearance of a paraplegic soccer match. It is not evident that any responsible figure in the Eastern or Western worlds has a clue to the erosion of human identity that follows upon the “software” environment. There is a corresponding release of violence to recover identity after technological innovation.<sup>111</sup> The TV kids cannot accept the identity of their parents’ generation so they will simply destroy and institutional or legal attempt to impose it upon them.

...Would not a high degree of awareness of these media effects (e.g. radio in Nigeria or in any tribal territory) enable us to set up social therapies and immunizing programs exactly comparable to medical action in the face of an endemic disease?<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> McGregor, Janyce. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/three-amigos-agreements-list-1.3658050> .

<sup>111</sup> Most of this sentence has been underlined.

<sup>112</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, June 3, 1968.

In one of their more playful discussions, on this or any other subject, Trudeau writes to McLuhan, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that “I have always found fascinating your contention that the phonetic alphabet is a de-tribalizing influence, but the more I appear in print the less I am inclined to admit publicly your conclusion that schizophrenia is a necessary consequence of literacy.”<sup>113</sup>

McLuhan, who has sent Trudeau a tam, wants to send him a matching kilt and writes, “The kilt, of course, is a mini-skirt, such as is worn by all tribal peoples. The mini-skirt is the same for men and women. Sex is not taken seriously by corporate societies. Hence the seeming nonsense of the hippies in this area.”<sup>114</sup>

Trudeau has never gone out of style, especially for me, although there has been more criticism of his politics over the years. As recently as 2014, Trudeau topped a poll which asked “Which Canadians have inspired you most over the last 150 years?”<sup>115</sup> And there has been something of a McLuhan revival in this century, albeit never free of detractors.

Minimally, his influence continues to be felt and his works cited, even when his name is not specifically invoked, and he has at least achieved cartoon immortality of a sort. In an episode of TV’s *Family Guy*, fittingly titled “A Picture is Worth 1,000 Books,” King Neptune says, “You know nothing of my work,” the same line of dialogue Woody

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<sup>113</sup> Trudeau to McLuhan, November 7, 1968.

<sup>114</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, May 29, 1969.

<sup>115</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/top-10-canadian-heroes-list-includes-pierre-trudeau-jack-layton-1.2676398>.

Allen gave McLuhan in the movie *Annie Hall* and that Coupland used for his biography.<sup>116</sup>

And, these days, I find it hard to argue with McLuhan's point, albeit overstated, that "Terror is the normal state of any oral society, for in it everything affects everything"<sup>117</sup> or that "One of the many flips of our time is that the electric information environment returns man to the condition of the most primitive prober and hunter. Privacy invasion is now one of our biggest knowledge industries."<sup>118</sup>

Trudeau's influence is also still felt, though right now I don't think it is felt globally, except through some renewed fascination because of Justin Trudeau's recent political success, shining particularly successfully on the world stage with his policy of welcoming refugees. "Trudeau" is often the only Canadian whose name Americans and other non-Canadians recognize when I mention it and McLuhan is routinely thought of, if recognized at all in similar casual moments, as American.

Post-Expo '67 optimism about Canada's greatness was premature. On the world stage, Canada is still the props guy – resource-full, very good at particular skills, indispensable backstage. McLuhan wrote that

Since the United States has become a world environment, Canada has become the anti-environment that renders the United States more acceptable and intelligible to many small countries of the world; anti-environments are indispensable for making an environment understandable.<sup>119</sup>

At best, as an academic who teaches in Poland about Canada said,

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<sup>116</sup> The episode (season 2, episode 11) first aired on April 18, 2000, but I saw the Feb. 4, 2013, rerun.

<sup>117</sup> McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 32.

<sup>118</sup> McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 24.

<sup>119</sup> McLuhan, "Canada: The Borderline Case," 227.

Canada appears to my students also as a gothic entity which has bravely faced its national ghosts that have been haunting it and which has been transforming its national identity accordingly. Still, first and foremost, my students envision Canada as a country of immigrants cherishing its multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious heritage.<sup>120</sup>

Occasionally, Canada is floated in the media as a cautionary tale – for example, in the months leading up to the failed Scottish bid for independence from the United Kingdom in 2014 and in some of the analyses immediately afterward. But in 1968, when McLuhan, the globally renowned media guru, connected to Trudeau, Canada's new political superstar, anything seemed possible.

According to Walter Stewart, whose 1971 book *Shrug: Trudeau in Power* marked one of the most thorough and penetrating early attempts at dismantling the Trudeau mystique, Trudeau learned about playing leader from no less an expert on media manipulation than Professor Marshall McLuhan. Even if the claim seems somewhat exaggerated, the affinity between the two men is not: not only were McLuhan and Trudeau frequent correspondents and dinner companions, they were definitely electronic-era soulmates. While McLuhan was one of the first communications experts to recognize that the content of the mass media was infinitely less meaningful than its form, Trudeau was one of the first Canadian politicians to make politics seem vastly less important than persona.<sup>121</sup>

McLuhan presciently described a world in which communications technologies would become so radically different that everyone everywhere would be connected to each other like villagers:

The tribe is a unit, which, extending the bounds of the family to include the whole society, becomes the only way of organizing society when it exists in a kind of Global Village pattern. It is important to understand that the Global Village pattern is caused by the instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Schwartz, Daniel. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/how-canada-is-perceived-around-the-world-1.3132343?cmp=rss&cid=news-digests-canada-and-world-evening>.

<sup>121</sup> Pevere and Dymond, *Mondo Canuck*, 223.

<sup>122</sup> Letter from McLuhan to Edward S. Morgan, May 16, 1959 (Molinaro, 252). This can be considered his first use of “global village.”

Information would be known globally and that would shape the world, which would also shape the information, an echo of Winston Churchill's "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us."<sup>123</sup> Some television viewers are accepting payment to allow TV monitoring companies to install a device on their televisions which tracks their eye movements as they watch, to help companies design more effective commercials.<sup>124</sup>

McLuhan's global villagers were meant to be better connected to each other, but to stay in place. Despite his enthusiasm for Buckminster Fuller's Spaceship Earth,<sup>125</sup> he may not have imagined the contemporary argument that "...since a large part of our lives are now spent online, our offline selves ought to enjoy the same degree of fluidity, and that global or world citizenship isn't as much of a utopian ideal as it is a technological and historical inevitability."<sup>126</sup>

McLuhan's idea that the (generation) gap is where the action is continues to have much global relevance in a world trying to understand ungoverned spaces and in the rise of violence committed by youth in those spaces and others. A couple of years earlier, he wrote

It is not evident that any responsible figure in the Eastern or Western worlds has a clue to the erosion of human identity that follows upon the "software" environment. There is a corresponding release of violence to recover identity after technological innovation.<sup>127</sup> The TV kids cannot accept the identity of their

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<sup>123</sup> <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/quotations/famous-quotations-and-stories> .

<sup>124</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/business/media/tv-viewers-tracking-tools.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/business/media/tv-viewers-tracking-tools.html?_r=0) .

<sup>125</sup> Richard Buckminster "Bucky" Fuller (1895-1983), architect and innovator, coined the term "Spaceship Earth."

<sup>126</sup> Abrahamian, *The Cosmopolites*, 115.

<sup>127</sup> Most of this sentence has been underlined.

parents' generation so they will simply destroy and institutional or legal attempt to impose it upon them.<sup>128</sup>

In a post 9/11 world of ascendant youth, in which more migrants are trying to move more places for more reasons, including environmental degradation, walls are going up along borders or being proposed or, in Europe, being reconsidered. The governing powers of Canada and the U.S. have been steadily and sometimes stealthily melting their joint border, with security operations being set up further and further into each other's country.<sup>129</sup>

Still, in March 2016, there was a moment of hope in the gap between that reality and whatever the upcoming U.S. presidential election would bring, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood beside President Barack Obama at a joint press conference and heard him say

And so, working together to find effective ways -- not to close off borders, not to pretend that somehow we can shut off trade, not to forget that we are, ourselves, nations of immigrants and that diversity is our strength -- but rather to say, yes, the world is big and we are going to help shape it, and we're going to value our openness and our diversity, and the fact that we are leaders in a global supply chain but we're going to do so in ways that make sure everybody benefits -- that's important work that we're going to have to do together.<sup>130</sup>

The candle burns at both ends and yet, for a resonating interval, the center holds.

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<sup>128</sup> McLuhan to Trudeau, June 3, 1968.

<sup>129</sup> A recent example, in which American intrusion into Canada was marketed and supported by politicians of many stripes, involves expedited border crossings: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/border-clearance-us-passes-1.3891092>

<sup>130</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/10/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-trudeau-canada-joint-press> .

## Part II: The Letters

1968

April 16, 1968<sup>1</sup>

Hon. Pierre Trudeau  
Minister of Justice<sup>2</sup>  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Dear Pierre Trudeau:

It was a piece in the Toronto *Telegram*<sup>3</sup> by Douglas Fisher and Harry Crowe that embolded [sic] me to drop you a note. The piece was entitled Good Will for Trudeau, for a time.

The men of the press can work only with people who have fixed points of view and definite goals, policies and objectives. Such fixed positions and attitudes are, of course, irrelevant to the electronic age. Our world substitutes mosaics for points of view and probes for targets. Knowing of your acquaintance with De Tocqueville,<sup>4</sup> I can understand why you have such an easy understanding of the North American predicament in the new electronic age. The U.S.A., in particular, began with the latest technology, namely, printing from movable types [sic]. The dynmaics [sic] of that process inspired and permeated the entire industrial and social establishment that grew so rapidly and

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<sup>1</sup>The version in the Molinaro collection indicates that this was written in Bronxville, NY, where McLuhan lived during his year at Fordham University. The original was written on university stationery. McLuhan wrote almost all of his letters to Trudeau from Toronto and Trudeau answered from Ottawa, so I have left this information off most of the correspondence.

<sup>2</sup> In 1967, Trudeau appointed was justice minister by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson (b. 1897, d. 1972, Prime Minister 1963-1968).

<sup>3</sup> A daily newspaper, published from 1876 to 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Nobleman Alexis-Charles-Henri-Clerél de Tocqueville (1805-1859), French political thinker and historian.



consistently between 1776 and the present. Any “backward” country tends to enjoy the advantage of starting with the latest technology, so that in the electric age, all the countries that missed the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its mechanical orientation can now speedily adapt to electric technology without endangering any literate and mechanistic backlog of achievement, e.g. Russia, Japan, etc.

French Canada never had a 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> May this not be increasingly a basis for its great advantage over English Canada? Never having had the intense specialism of a mechanized consumer economy, French Canada retains its bonds with oral cultures and their total field approach. The all-at-onceness of electric data is not only organic and inclusive but reshapes the entire imaginative lives of highly literate communities. The TV generation, for example, is almost oriental in its involvement in the inner rather than the outer life. This means, naturally, a total loss of goal orientation in the old sense. The outer space programs thus in many ways represent 18<sup>th</sup>-century rather than 20<sup>th</sup>-century orientations.

I have always felt that one of Canada’s greatest assets was its being a kind of “backwater”. Never having been totally involved in current trends it has been able to enjoy a flexibility that is now rare. The rigidity of commitments of all Powers that were great in the 19<sup>th</sup> century confronts them with anarchy as they attempt to readjust to the total field awareness demanded by the speed of electric information. The de-Romanization of the Catholic Church is only one instance of the decentralizing effects of electric information on older bureaucracies. By the same token the liturgical revival is

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<sup>5</sup> This sentence has been underlined, presumably by Trudeau, as were “Any backward” and “tends to enjoy the advantage of starting” in the previous paragraph.

that kind of involvement and participation that goes with the simultaneity and coexistence of electronic experience.

At present I am studying the American political developments, noting the utter conflict between Policies and Images as it concerns the candidates. May not the same thing happen here as in Canada recently? The old political professionals simply exhaust and liquidate themselves by going through the old motions, making room for quite unexpected candidates at the last moment.

Like most Canadians, I am delighted that it happened that way for us and that you are to enter into this complex new role.

With most cordial wishes and prayers,

Marshall McLuhan

May 21, 1968

Dear Dr. McLuhan:

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your very kind letter of April 16<sup>th</sup>.

The Prime Minister had asked me to call you personally but, unfortunately, I was unable to reach you on the occasions I tried. The Prime Minister was most interested in your comments and, if I may add, so was I. We discussed them on several occasions and, in a recent speech to an audience of broadcasters, he mentioned number of the ideas that you had expressed to him in his letter.

I know that in more leisurely times after the present election campaign, he is looking forward to the opportunity of meeting you.

May I thank you, therefore, once again on his behalf.

Yours sincerely,

J.M. Davey

June 3, 1968

Dear Pierre Trudeau:

After seeing the Kennedy-McCarthy “debate”<sup>6</sup>, I wish that you were not going to be on TV at all. It is not a debating medium.<sup>7</sup>

Trying to formulate the chances of the American candidates for publication, I can find only one word: “somnambulism.”

It was Professor Broughton of McGill<sup>8</sup> who recently explained that somnambulism is a highly motivated state.

The real drama of our age, the shift from hardware services environments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the software (electric information) service environments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is as big a leap as that from primitive tribalism to literate individualism. For our Western world, this is a shift from outer orientation to an inner, oriental trip. It renders all of our institutions obsolete, as the young TV generation fully recognizes. (The TV generation is now 12 to 14 years of age and hasn’t reached the college plateau yet).

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<sup>6</sup> The U.S. Democratic presidential primary debate was broadcast on ABC-TV on June 1, 1968. The debaters were New York senator, Robert Francis Kennedy (1925-1968), and Minnesota senator, Eugene Joseph McCarthy (1916-2005).

<sup>7</sup> This sentence has been underlined, presumably by Trudeau. In his *Memoirs* (269), he noted that he did not debate during the 1980 election campaign.

<sup>8</sup> I think he is referring to Dr. Roger J. Broughton: <https://www.bristolwhoswho.com/bristol-whos-who-recognizes-dr-roger-j-broughton/>

In these circumstances “political” action takes on the appearance of a paraplegic soccer match. It is not evident that any responsible figure in the Eastern or Western worlds has a clue to the erosion of human identity that follows upon the “software” environment. There is a corresponding release of violence to recover identity after technological innovation.<sup>9</sup> The TV kids cannot accept the identity of their parents’ generation so they will simply destroy and institutional or legal attempt to impose it upon them. The liquidation of the feudal system with the advent of printing and gunpowder represented a very slow change from corporate to private identity, compared to the reverse of that process that we are now undergoing.

Radio created Hitler as a delinquent Peter Pan<sup>10</sup>, charged with cosmic emanation.

Would not a high degree of awareness of these media effects (e.g. radio in Nigeria or in any tribal territory) enable us to set up social therapies and immunizing programs exactly comparable to medical action in the face of an endemic disease?

Pardon me for feeling very uncomfortable in the presence of what is called “political” discussion in circumstances such as these.

Cordial good wishes for June 9.<sup>11</sup>

Marshall McLuhan

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<sup>9</sup> Most of this sentence has been underlined.

<sup>10</sup> I live in hope that I don’t need to explain who Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was. Peter Pan is a fictional character, created by British author Sir James Matthew Barrie (1860-1937).

<sup>11</sup> The first political leaders debate in a Canadian election campaign was held on June 9.

June 5, 1968

cc: Messrs Davey<sup>12</sup> and Lalonde<sup>13</sup> to note

Dear Dr. McLuhan:

The Prime Minister will be returning to Ottawa on Friday and I will be pleased to bring to his attention your letter of June 3<sup>rd</sup>.

I know that Mr. Trudeau will once again appreciate your comments and warm good wishes.

All the best,

Yours sincerely,

Mary E. Macdonald

Administrative Assistant.<sup>14</sup>

June 12, 1968

Dear Pierre Trudeau:

I was shown the video tape of the great debate in Toronto on Monday and taped a comment to be used later by CFTO<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> A handwritten note reads "Mr. Davey is handling henceforth" and is initialed, possibly by Trudeau.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Lalonde (b. 1929), served as Trudeau's first principal secretary and went on to become a member of Parliament, serving in a number of cabinet positions. He was one of Trudeau's most trusted advisors and until recently was the gatekeeper of the Trudeau archives, a position now filled by Thomas Axworthy.

<sup>14</sup> Macdonald had been secretary to former prime minister, Lester B. Pearson (Cook, *The Teeth of Time*, 71).

<sup>15</sup> CFTO in Toronto is the flagship station of CTV television network in Canada. CTV, the country's first private TV network, had been in operation only since January 1961; the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which is public, had been on the air since September 1952.

The witness box cum lectern cum pulpit spaces for the candidates was totally non-TV. I had not seen you or Stanfield<sup>16</sup> before. Stanfield's image is that of the Yankee horsetrader, as shrewd as sabbatical or hebdomadal. I gather he is a distant relative of mine. My mother's people came from the same territory. Nova Scotia is one of the most Yankee parts of North America. Boston is the cultural capital still. The other side of Stanfield is "Honest Abe" – the vote splitter.

Your own image is a corporate mask, inclusive, requiring no private nuance whatever. This is your "cool" TV power. Iconic, sculptural. A mask "puts on" an audience. At a masquerade we are not private persons.

Your book on Federalism<sup>17</sup> is at the Edmund Burke<sup>18</sup> level. My favorite quote from him is: "The first right of every man in civilized society is the right to be protected against the consequences of his own stupidity."

The cover of the June 8-14 TV Guide is a Dali masterpiece<sup>19</sup>. It manifests in detail the tactile quality of the TV image. The extension of the central nervous system<sup>20</sup> via electricity is environmentally indicated in the upper right corner by a segment of brain

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Lorne Stanfield (1914-2003), a former premier of Nova Scotia, was Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, as head of the Progressive Conservative Party, from 1967 to 1976.

<sup>17</sup> *Federalism and the French Canadians*, a selection of Trudeau's writings, published in 1967.

<sup>18</sup> Edmund Burke, political philosopher (1729-1797).

<sup>19</sup> The cover story in that issue of *TV Guide* was titled "Salvador Dali's view of television."  
<http://www.daliblog.com/DaliTV2.jpg> .

<sup>20</sup> For an example of how McLuhan's idea about the extensions of man remain relevant: "The behavior of the Millennial generation is not infrequently criticized, especially regarding their relationship to technology. But if Millennials live their lives via screens, says Lewis Black, it's because the Baby Boomer generation gave them digital technology like an unsought after acid trip: 'That generation turns around and drops on these kids something that was just as potent as LSD. That phone and the amount of apps and the amount of crap and the computer, it's the extension of the human nervous system.'"   
[http://bigthink.com/videos/lewis-black-on-the-millennials-and-the-baby-boomers?utm\\_campaign=Echobox&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Facebook#link\\_time=1457316238](http://bigthink.com/videos/lewis-black-on-the-millennials-and-the-baby-boomers?utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook#link_time=1457316238)

tissue. The two thumbs with the TV images on the nails are carefully separated to indicate the “gap” or interval constituted by touch. The age of tactility via television and radio is one of innumerable interfaces or “gaps” that replace the old connections, legal, literate and visual.

Very best wishes,

Marshall McLuhan

June 19, 1968

Dear Mr. Davey:

Just a note apropos the name “Trudeau”. It doesn’t mean only “water hole” but Tour d’eau or “water tower”, a more striking image.<sup>21</sup>

Sincerely yours,

Marshall McLuhan

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<sup>21</sup> McLuhan had asked his friend, artist René Cera (1895-1992), for help with the derivation of “Trudeau.” Cera answered on April 20, 1968, that “Off hand, purely on ordinary grounds, I would say that ‘Trudeau’ might be a deformation of Trou-d’eau or Water-hole – or again, Tour-d’eau or Water Tower. Just from memory I cannot discover any sort of clue to the exact meaning of ‘Tru’ – unless I accept ‘In|trus’ (intruse) which by ‘extension’ would give In-truding – as a possible substitute. ???”

July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1968.

By Air Mail

Please accept my sincere thanks for your two books, “Explorations”<sup>22</sup> and “Pour comprendre les média,”<sup>23</sup> which you were kind enough to inscribe for me.

I am very pleased to have these volumes for my library<sup>24</sup>.

Yours sincerely,<sup>25</sup>

July 10, 1968

Dear Dr. McLuhan:

Thank you very much for your note of June 19<sup>th</sup> concerning the origin of the name “Trudeau.” I was indeed intrigued with the idea that it meant “Water Tower”.

I have read with very great interest all your letters to the Prime Minister, particularly the one with the list of “Icons.”<sup>26</sup> As a physicist myself and someone who has been working in the computer field for the past 15 years and now finds himself

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<sup>22</sup> *Explorations in Communication*, edited with Edmund “Ted” Snow Carpenter and published in 1960 by Beacon Press, Boston. Media studies authority Carpenter (1922-2011) was a colleague of McLuhan and a collaborator.

<sup>23</sup> The French translation of McLuhan’s 1964 book, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, was published in 1968. There is a spelling mistake in the title as written in the original letter: it should read “médiat,” not “média.”

<sup>24</sup> McLuhan made a point of giving Trudeau copies of his books. Some of them – for example, *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout*, which he wrote with consultant Barrington Nevitt – assume a greater significance in their correspondence than they have in McLuhan’s legacy.

<sup>25</sup> This letter has a stamp stating that Trudeau signed the original. More important is the handwritten note at the bottom: “Ever since our brief exchange in Charlottetown June 1964, I have been hoping we might meet again.”

<sup>26</sup> I have not seen the letter about icons.



participating in the political process, I am very stimulated indeed with the ideas raised by your letters as well as by your books.

I am personally looking forward to an opportunity of meeting with you, which I hope will be soon.

Yours sincerely,

J. M. Davey.<sup>27</sup>

September 27, 1968

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

The New York Times suddenly tossed this opportunity my way to write a brief review of your book.<sup>28</sup> I hope it will not displease you. I did, of course, intend to tease the Americans.

Sincerely yours,<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Signed in ink as "Jim Davey."

<sup>28</sup> The book was *Federalism and the French Canadians*. Here, McLuhan is referring to a typed copy of the review that he sent the prime minister. The Trudeau archives include a photocopy of a December 7, 1968, Canadian Press wire story in the *Ottawa Citizen* ("McLuhan Praises PM"), discussing the review.

<sup>29</sup> There is a handwritten note on the page, from Jim Davey to Trudeau, reading "P.M. I'm not sure I understand the review, but I'm prepared to attempt a 'tease' acknowledgement should you wish me to. Jim." An answering note on the page reads "please do" and is initialed by the prime minister.

October 17, 1968

Dear Mr. Prime Minister<sup>30</sup>:

Bill Lee<sup>31</sup> happens to be here at present and is enroute [sic] to Ottawa and I take this opportunity to have him bring this letter to you directly in order to expedite matters.

Naturally, I hope you were pleased with last night's affair. This letter concerns it immediately. After you and your colleagues had left, Dick Stanbury<sup>32</sup>, Bob McCormack and myself were chatting. It occurred to us that a strategy that might encompass the entire program of "participational democracy" might be mounted as follows: the student power groups in high schools and colleges are available as a Canadian mosaic. If you could chat with the leaders of such groups on TV (four or five at a time) it would itself be participation in the highest levels of government, since these people represent one of the principal problems of government today.

The answer to their problems, as we discussed it last night, does not consist in plugging them into some existing bureaucracy, whether of high school or of college. They are not looking for "feed-back" but "feed-forward." It would be inevitable that as soon as they began to discuss their problems there would begin a resonance with many problems of your own. It would be perfectly natural for you to illustrate and to discuss their problems while briefing them on yours. They in turn could comment on yours,

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<sup>30</sup> Handwritten notes indicate that the original was sent to Marc Lalonde, with copies to Miss Macdonald, Romeo Leblanc, P. Levasseur and the PMO file.

<sup>31</sup> Bill Lee was a political consultant who became Trudeau's campaign manager after running the Liberal leadership campaign of rival Paul Hellyer. The Hellyer campaign was noted as the first to use a computer to track delegates.

<sup>32</sup> Senator Richard James Hardy Stanbury (1923-2014), president of the Liberal Party of Canada from 1968 to 1973.

setting up a natural interface between areas of community life on one hand, and government on the other. Such an encounter via TV has never occurred before.

During such discussions (and let me suggest that there be no studio audience whatever) your own natural, easy, flexible way would relax them and alert them to many features of the world in which they live, in a totally new way.

Just as the gap between culture and business has closed by virtue of an electric information environment, so the gap between politics and youth has closed. Teenagers are no longer young persons mentally or emotionally. Indeed, part of their dilemma consists in being categorized [sic] as teenagers or as youngsters. The immediate consequence of such a political education strategy would be to remove an enormous burden from the backs of educational administrators and parents alike. They, too, could enjoy the immediate sensation of participating in problems at the highest level. The merely parochial aspects of their dilemmas would vanish.

The time is long overdue for you to be back in circulation and to be in the Canadian living room as a “gap-bridger”, the unifying image of our society that you became during the election.<sup>33</sup> It is impossible to exaggerate the advantages in political education that would result. “Government of the air” would by-pass all bureaucracy yet make it possible to consider the problems of bureaucracies of all kinds. Data from government departments could be brought to bear in follow-up sessions. Perhaps it might be more effective to canvass various features of this kind of program by telephone.

I am prepared to contact the leaders of the student activists on this campus to invite you at once to appear with them on such a program. No preliminary briefing or

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<sup>33</sup> This sentence has been emphasized by some reader with two vertical lines in the left margin.

scripting of any kind would be necessary or desireable [sic]. All protocol could be tossed aside. I feel confident that the obvious obstacles to this innovation can be by-passed. This kind of political mountain-climbing could be done in spite of all the obvious road-blocks. The program would not only be a political one but an educational one so far as the C.B.C.<sup>34</sup> is concerned.

Medium-mystically yours,

Marshall McLuhan

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

OTTAWA (4),

October 21, 1968.

Dear Al:<sup>35</sup>

If the schedule for future McLuhan dinners is available, I would very much appreciate having it for the purpose of planning the Prime Minister's time.

Thanks and kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon F. Gibson<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> More typically written "CBC" (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation).

<sup>35</sup> Al O'Brien, national director, The Liberal Federation of Canada.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon Fullerton Gibson (b. 1937), special assistant to the prime minister from 1968 to 1972.

October 22, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: Senator Stanbury

Re: McLuhan Seminar

I personally found the seminar both stimulating and valuable from the insights that were provided by Dr. McLuhan. I am very much in favour of more seminars and I hope you will repeat your kindness in inviting me.

The questions I would like to explore include:

1) Priorities. What are they? How are they established. [sic] Does consensus form part of establishing priorities?

2) What is the role of a political party in today's electric age? The old and very slow ways of feeding information through the channels of local associations, provincial and national associations and M.P.s, etc., don't seem to me to have much continued relevance. How do we short-circuit this process but still maintain a "political party"?

3) What does Dr. McLuhan think about pluralistic societies or two-language societies?

4) What about the role of Canada versus the U.S. and Canada versus the world?

5) What is the future role for the United Nations?

6) Dr. McLuhan made some comments about the inadequacy of present education in the T.V. age. Does he any solution to advocate?

These are just some of the questions that come to mind now and I will continue to look for others.

J. M. Davey

November 7, 1968

Dear Professor McLuhan,

Thank you for your courtesy in sending to me your review. The assorted launching activities which seem to be an integral part of the current commercial publishing process are quickly persuading me that you are wrong – that the publication is not performance, rather that the act of publication is a performance.

I have always found fascinating your contention that the phonetic alphabet is a de-tribalizing influence, but the more I appear in print the less I am inclined to admit publicly your conclusion that schizophrenia is a necessary consequence of literacy. In any event, some of the consequences of the reappearance of my China book<sup>37</sup> have led me to wonder if I was wrong in permitting it to appear in other than ideograph form. Does that mean I have lost my equilibrium?

The proposal in your letter of October 17 concerning a television appearance with student leaders is a provocative one; I have asked that it be considered for possible inclusion in my future programme. Thank you for your suggestion.

Yours sincerely,<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Two Innocents in Red China*, co-authored with Jacques Hébert, one of a small group of close Trudeau friends who traveled together to China in 1960. Senator Hébert (1923-2007) was a co-founder of the Katimavik program early in the Trudeau era, a volunteer program for university-age Canadians, helping them learn across cultures and language barriers – a type of domestic Peace Corps (see also <http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/politics/katimavik-funding-closure-trudeau-1.3953209>). *Two Innocents* was reissued in 2012 with an introduction and afterword by Trudeau's son Alexandre (b. 1973).

<sup>38</sup> Even if written by Davey, as the September 27 notations suggest, it was stamped as having been signed by Trudeau.

November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1968

The Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, P.C.,  
Prime Minister of Canada,  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ontario.

RE: Marshall McLuhan

Dear Mr. Trudeau:

Dr. McLuhan has indicated he is not prepared to continue the Seminars on the basis originally approved without being paid a very substantial fee, which fee would be well beyond the resources of the Party.

His objection seems to be that there were too many staff people at the first Seminar and he regards them as “paid party hacks”.<sup>39</sup> I should say that the make-up of the group was agreed in advance and I felt it was important to have staff people there, representing both your office and mine, because:

- a) they would be responsible for the implementation of any ideas inspired, and
- b) it is by involving them in such stimulating discussions that we can best motivate them to do the job we want done.

Dr. McLuhan, however, is still quite anxious to continue discussions with you and probably with other Cabinet Ministers and I would not want to discourage him if you feel that such discussions can be helpful. Would you please let me know your wishes in this regard,

Yours very truly,

Dick

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<sup>39</sup> “Paid party hacks” has been underlined by pen or pencil by someone (the original was sent to Marc Lalonde and copied to Miss Macdonald and to the PMO files).

November 13, 1968

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Just a note about media strategy. In your discussion with students from the floor, shown on “The Way It Is”<sup>40</sup> last Sunday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, you could not have been in a more dangerous position media-wise.

An auditorium violates the very nature of TV, hence the disaster of the political conventions in the U.S.A. Television demands close, casual, intimate discussions. Also no notes, no script, and no debating. The discernment and conception of process prompts total avoidance of debating. The process by which the business community is switched from private goals to conglomerate intermarriage is identical with the process of decentralism and participation which all students demand of their institutions today. The same process has deprived students of their identity. The loss of identity and goals in the political and business spheres causes the same indiscriminate resort to violent struggle.

Paradoxically, the business community demands a “double standard.” While making rapid adjustments to changing technologies, it expects the educational and political establishments to remain rigidly fixed in the old patterns. This is the result of visual classification which avoids the awareness of function and process.

In my War and Peace book<sup>41</sup> I explain how technological change deprives individuals and societies of their identity images, with resulting struggle for new images. In Through the Vanishing Point (which I am taking the liberty of sending you, [sic]

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<sup>40</sup> This public affairs program was broadcast on CBC from 1967 to 1969.

<sup>41</sup> *War and Peace in the Global Village*, written with frequent collaborator Quentin Fiore and published in 1968.



Harley Parker<sup>42</sup> and I explain how many new kinds of space, psychic and social, result from technological change.

Most cordial good wishes,

November 25, 1968

Dear Professor McLuhan:<sup>43</sup>

Thank you for sending to me a copy of your fascinating new book<sup>44</sup> (I had never thought of abstract art as marking the end of visual space; the suggestion is an intriguing one) and for your views on the most effective employment of TV. Understanding the proper use of the media and controlling one's exposure to it are, however, quite distinct as you will appreciate.

The identity process of which you speak so often is one that cannot be ignored by government. I am very much aware of the sometimes search and sometimes struggle for new images in which many communities of our society are engaging. What I lack is an intuitive process to forecast for me the likeliest form of a satisfactory nature which these new images will assume. Can you help me?

Yours sincerely,

Pierre E. Trudeau

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<sup>42</sup> *Through the Vanishing Point: Space in Poetry and Painting*, written with Harley Parker and published in 1968. Parker (1915-1992) was a Canadian artist and innovative thinker who worked closely with McLuhan from 1967 to 1975 at McLuhan's Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto.

<sup>43</sup> One LAC copy was signed by Trudeau and one was initialed by Davey.

<sup>44</sup> *Through the Vanishing Point*.

December 2, 1968

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:<sup>45</sup>

Miss McDermott of your new Information Task Force has contacted me. She will be coming to participate in our media seminar at the Centre<sup>46</sup> tonight (we meet every Monday evening from 8 to 10).

I wish I had much more time to be of help. I still have a full academic program and I am still convalescing from the brain surgery of one year ago. It is this latter fact that restricts my travels.

My forte is structural analysis of new problems and environments that, unawares to us, re-program our sensory lives. In effect I am saying that it is now possible to bypass what used to be called "fate" by anticipating the effects of new man-made environments.

Naturally this concerns every level of our personal and political lives. I am therefore very eager to be of help to you. Perhaps we can invent a way of making this possible within the severe limits imposed upon your time. Do you think the telephone a practical possibility? Would a personal representative of yourself, visiting me here, be another possibility?

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<sup>45</sup> There is a notation that the original was sent to "Miss Mary Macdonald (for P.M.), so this may be the first letter we know for sure got to Trudeau himself. Copies were also sent to Marc Lalonde, Jim Davey, P. Lavasseur and the PMO files.

<sup>46</sup> The Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto.

Your Grey Cup<sup>47</sup> kick-off was, of course, a media triumph. This is audience participation and image-making at its best. Fire-side dialogues with small groups of students would be even more potent.

One theme that may have some immediate relevance: Canada is the only country in the world that has never had a national identity. In an age when all homogenous nations are losing their identity images through rapid technological change, Canada alone can “keep its cool.” We have never been committed to a single course or goal. This is now our greatest asset.<sup>48</sup>The parallel is to be found in the recent need of the business world to switch from private enterprise to tribal conglomerates on the pattern of medieval dynastic marriages, another massive example of decentralism foisted upon us by electric speeds.

With cordial good wishes and prayers for your welfare,  
Marshall McLuhan

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<sup>47</sup> The most important annual football game in Canada, named for the silver trophy donated in 1909 by Governor-General Lord Grey (1851-1917) and presented to the winning team.

<sup>48</sup> In one copy, this sentence has been underlined and has a question mark. In the Molinaro collection (359), “now” has been inserted before “our.”

cc: Mr. Jim Davey\*<sup>49</sup>  
 -- Mr. Marc Lalonde\*\*  
 -- Miss Mary Macdonald\*\*\*  
 -- Mr. Pierre Levasseur\*\*\*<sup>50</sup>

December 12, 1968

Dear Mr. McLuhan:

It is with great interest that your stimulating letter of December 2 was received in this Office [sic] on December 4. It has been brought to the Prime Minister's personal attention and you should hear further from him within the next few days.

Yours sincerely,

William G. Morris,

Secretary.

\* As discussed, would you please let me have some information to help prepare a substantive reply for the Prime Minister's consideration.

\*\* For information

\*\*\* After I sent the original to you last week, Marc suggested I see Jim Davey with a view to preparing a substantive reply for the P.M.'s consideration.

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<sup>49</sup> I've included this here, rather than in an Appendix, to give an idea of the path of one of these letters.

<sup>50</sup> A Quebec advisor who worked closely with Jim Davey on political analysis for Trudeau (English, *Just Watch Me*, 149).

December 13, 1968

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRIME MINISTER VIA MR. LALONDE

From: J. M. Davey

Re: Marshall McLuhan

Attached is a letter from Dr. McLuhan and a suggested reply. The periodic comments from Dr. McLuhan have been fascinating and often illuminating. He is a man of immense capacity and great gifts of insight, but he is far enough out in the future that it is difficult to discuss usefully current problems with him. I believe that we can get the greatest value from the horizons that he can open to our thinking rather than illumination of the path immediately ahead.

Perhaps you think otherwise, but I believe that Dr. McLuhan may be hard to handle if the contact is too frequent and too close. What would be helpful would be occasional correspondence and a lunch once or twice a year in which he could open up over a broad range of subjects.<sup>51</sup>

J.M. Davey

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<sup>51</sup> Handwritten notations from both the PM and Marc Lalonde agreeing to this suggestion, with Lalonde also adding "& Gordon Gibson."

December 13, 1968

Dear Dr. McLuhan,<sup>52</sup>

I would like to thank you very much for your letter of December 2<sup>nd</sup>. As always, I read with great interest your comments. I would also like to say how very grateful I am for your kind offer of help.

Given the difficulty that both of us have with schedules, it would be most helpful to me if, as in the past, you could take the trouble to send me from time to time your comments and suggestions. I also feel sure that there will be occasions when we can get together and talk more fully about matters of common interest.

I do appreciate very much the interest that you have displayed on my behalf by your letters and I value the ideas that they contain. I hope that I will benefit from your continued interest and thinking.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>52</sup> This letter was drafted by Jim Davey (it is marked JMD/FML), but there is a written addition – “Perhaps lunch or dinner from time to time” – that is the same handwriting as a note scrawled on the bottom of the page, reading “With all good wishes for Christmas & the New Year.” The handwriting in both versions is different, but the one in the O20 9-28 file (which reads “Christmas and the New Year”) seems to be the same as the full Trudeau signature on the page.

1969

January 24, 1969

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Your very cool dealings with our very hot medium the press, naturally produces intense interface or friction. The press has to have hot quotes and sharp points of view. Real news is bad news. Since the press lives on advertising, and all advertising is good news, it takes a lot of bad news to sell all this good news. Even the good news of the gospel can only be sold by hellfire. Vatican II made a very big mistake in this matter as in other matters.

The very cool corporate mask that is your major political asset goes naturally with processing of problems in dialogue rather than in the production of packaged answers. That is why I urge you to go on the air with small groups and to trade problems with them rather than seeking answers or stating mere points of view.

In his new book 'The Age of Discontinuity' (Harper & Row, 1969), my friend Peter Drucker<sup>53</sup> presents a magnificent inventory of problems in current decisionmaking. He hasn't [sic] a clue as to why these problems have arisen but he cries out for a new theory of organization. He indicates that every organization in the world whether in the home or the school, the business or the political or the religious, has broken down today regardless of ideology [sic] or geography. On page 223 he focuses these problems onto the concept of the new 'ministate'. Every centralist organization large or small is now broken up into mini-states; even the Catholic individual, as he relates to the Mystical Body, regards himself as a mini-state.

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<sup>53</sup> Management consultant and theorist (1909-2005).

This is the exact antitheses [sic] of 16 [sic] century individualism based on a private interpretation of scripture. Superficially, doctrinally anarchy today and 16 [sic] century schismaticism look alike. Strict regard to structural character enables one to avoid confusion.

The change in all organization today is the result of putting fast electric information services around slow ones. Jet City transforms the globe into a single metropolis but it also destroys all existing metropolitan areas based on slow transport. In the same way, the telephone destroys the bureaucracy based on the memo or the letter.

Paradoxically, the slow system is 'open' and the fast one is 'closed'. Electric telecommunications create multitudes of tribally structured mini-states. These now begin to appear inside all the older maxi-states whether of business or politics. The unions and universities are mini-states, so are the police, the armed services, all media and all branches of business and government bureaucracies. The hierarchy of the organization chart is finished. Job specialism leads to role-playing in the global theatre.

You are the only political image of our time able to use the T.V. mediam [sic] without being forced to become a tribal buffoon or cartoon like De Gaulle<sup>54</sup>. All the other political figures of the Western world are merely faded photographs on the T.V. medium.<sup>55</sup>

F.D.R.<sup>56</sup> had the press against him and this was his major asset as long as he relied on radio. But radio is a hot medium and fostered the lecture.

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<sup>54</sup> Charles André Joseph Marie de Gaulle (1890-1970), President of France from 1959 to 1969.

<sup>55</sup> This paragraph was marked out on the left margin by a vertical line, added by the reader, possibly Trudeau (the original is stamped as having been seen by the prime minister).

<sup>56</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945), President of the United States from 1933 to 1945. His initials are more typically abbreviated "FDR."



T.V. permits audience participation in problem sharing. T.V. is a mini-state that has created various other ones such as the teeney-boppers [sic] and the hippies to say nothing of innumerable separatist tribes around the globe.

Most cordial good wishes,

CC: Mr. Lalonde

February 13, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRIME MINISTER

From: J.M. Davey

Re: Letter from Dr. Marshall McLuhan

I am attaching a possible reply to Dr. McLuhan's letter suggesting that he give some thought to the use of television in association with such conferences as the one on constitutional matters.<sup>57</sup>

I recommend that you take a moment to study Dr. McLuhan's letter, particularly paragraphs marked 1 and 2 on page 2.

I spent about 30 hours watching the television and listening to commentaries during the three days of the conference and, while I was very happy indeed with the way in which it proceeded and the education that it provided to the viewers, nevertheless there was something about the process that was disturbing me which I was unable to define. In essence, we put a fast electric information service, namely television, around a slow one, which is the deliberative process involved when a committee studies a subject.

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<sup>57</sup> In Ottawa, from February 10 to 12, there had been a First Ministers' conference on Constitutional review.

In effect, we short-circuited the provincial representatives by letting electors participate in the process. After having heard the evidence provided by the speakers and by the commentators on the various issues, the electors were ready to cast their mental votes but there was no opportunity. Matters were sent off for further study by committee.

This had the same anti-climactic effect of a magazine serial, when at the high point of the drama, the action is interrupted with the statement “See next week’s exciting instalment [sic] to find out what happens”.

I believe this explains the underlying impatience of the reporters who were concerned, in their questions to you, that no hard results had been achieved and everything is now going to committees.

I seriously believe that we will have to rethink our approach<sup>58</sup> to constitutional change or at least the way in which we use television in the process. Perhaps Dr. McLuhan would have some ideas and it could be extremely valuable and fascinating for us to explore this subject with him.

J.M. Davey

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<sup>58</sup> The words “rethink our approach” were underlined by Trudeau, who also wrote and initialed the comment “good point” in the margin. A memo from Mary E. Macdonald, Trudeau’s secretary, notes that the document was seen by the prime minister on February 28, 1969, and draws Davey’s attention to his comment.

February 13, 1969.<sup>59</sup>

Dear Dr. McLuhan:

Thank you very much indeed for your letter of January 24<sup>th</sup>. Because of the preparations for the Constitutional Conference, I did not have the opportunity to read it until today. On reflection, I feel this was rather fortunate, for now that the conference is over, a number of ideas have acquired a particular significance.

If you could take the time, I would be more than interested to have your views on the impact of television on conferences such as these. It does look as if there will be others in the future and I would like to see how we could use such occasions to help Canadians to better appreciate their country and the problems of its government.

Perhaps, if you are coming to Ottawa in the next month or so, we could have lunch or dinner together or, alternatively, I could send a member of my staff, Mr. Jim Davey, to see you in Toronto at your convenience.

Again, my thanks for your very valued comments and suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>59</sup> This letter, like the preceding one, was not signed by Trudeau until February 28. It was drafted by Jim Davey.

March 12, 1969<sup>60</sup>

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

It isn't feasible for me to be in Ottawa during the next month since I am racing to meet a deadline with a new book. However, it would be possible for me to chat with Mr. Jim Davey here.

It would be helpful if he had some acquaintance with my written things. That would save time that would otherwise be spent in capsulating. At least, Mr. Davey could familiarize me with what seemed to you to be the "crunch in current political hang-ups."

Cordially,<sup>61</sup>

March 31, 1969

# MEMORANDUM FOR MR. LALONDE

From: J.M. Davey

Re: Toronto Visit – Thursday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>

I will be in Toronto next Thursday to visit Dr. Marshall McLuhan. This is a follow-up from an exchange of correspondence between Dr. McLuhan and the Prime Minister. I want to discuss the whole question of the use of television as a vehicle of public information on such events as Federal-Provincial Conferences.

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<sup>60</sup> This letter was preceded by a February 17, 1969 letter from A.C. Spector, editorial director of Playboy, apparently to Trudeau, inviting him to comment in their letters section on their McLuhan interview in the March 1969 issue. Marked "No answer" (underlined twice) by press secretary Romeo LeBlanc. In that interview, the claim is made that "Canada's turned-on Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau engages him in monthly bull sessions designed to improve his television image" (McLuhan and Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan*, 233), but the correspondence I have seen doesn't support this.

<sup>61</sup> The original has a number of handwritten markings that seem to include one by Trudeau regarding further action.

While I am there I also intend to meet Superintendent Harold Genno, of the Metropolitan Police. I gather, from the attached clipping, that he has made a study of the question of police tactics and relations during public manifestations. Don Wall<sup>62</sup> is aware of my visit.

While we are on the subject, you might want to consider asking a number of questions of the Department of National Defense. Last week the Government was in the position where it might have had to furnish armed forces to assist the Montreal police. In this instance, the government would have had no option had a written request been made for such support. While everyone concerned is happy that the eventuality did not arise, I can't help asking myself what would have been the outcome if it had.<sup>63</sup>

Question:

- 1) If the Armed Forces are under this obligation, what in their training would give them the necessary experience and competence?
- 2) Do the Armed Forces receive specialized training in crowd control and relations with manifesters under such conditions?
- 3) Which troops would have been used on this occasion, were they in particular, adequately trained to carry out the task?
- 4) What will we do in future if we receive another such request?

J.M. Davey

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<sup>62</sup> I believe, based on a number of online references (such as [https://books.google.com/books?id=sam\\_hcySs20C&pg=PA295&lpg=PA295&dq=Don+Wall+and+RCMP&source=bl&ots=QfpIIA6x5k&sig=Hq\\_TRwlfizZKzjJPhK\\_Yea80RBA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjvrKDNgu7KAhXfGZAKHTckAwEQ6AEIRDAI#v=onepage&q=Don%20Wall%20and%20RCMP&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=sam_hcySs20C&pg=PA295&lpg=PA295&dq=Don+Wall+and+RCMP&source=bl&ots=QfpIIA6x5k&sig=Hq_TRwlfizZKzjJPhK_Yea80RBA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjvrKDNgu7KAhXfGZAKHTckAwEQ6AEIRDAI#v=onepage&q=Don%20Wall%20and%20RCMP&f=false) accessed February 10, 2016) that Wall was involved in security matters, including serving as assistant secretary for security and intelligence in the Privy Council Office.

<sup>63</sup> This foreshadows the 1970 October Crisis.

April 14, 1969

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Thank you for sending Mr. Jim Davey. We had a very pleasant chat. Please let me clarify at once that matter of consulting fees. Naturally it would not concern any personal conversation between us, whether in private or by phone.

As for “remuneration” for consulting with your colleagues on a variety of problems, it might be possible to arrange fellowships for people of your own choice to study at the Centre for a few weeks. This, in turn, may call for some resource material to assist them.

For example, Paul Hellyer’s report<sup>64</sup> is entirely a 19<sup>th</sup>-century study of “hardware” that omits all awareness of the new dominance of the knowledge industries. As electronic “software”, or information, creates the main environment or garb-age [sic] of the planet and cities, the meanings and role of buildings and industries are completely altered. In the knowledge industries a man can work at home, or beside his home, as readily as “downtown.” Business itself has become a dozen times more involved in education than schools and colleges. The educational budgets of personnel on company time (not even mentioning the armed services) is twenty times that of the communal budget for schools and colleges. This new dominance of information and the knowledge industries completely alters what has been called “zoning.” Nineteenth-century hardware industry is now receding into insignificance. This means the end of the old division between work and residence.

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<sup>64</sup> In January, the Task Force on Housing and Urban Development, headed by Hellyer, issued its report. It was not accepted by the Trudeau cabinet and Hellyer resigned from the cabinet the same month this letter was written.

Jet city is a circulating city. People now circulate in the same way that books used to, one hundred years ago. This means that it is pure folly to spend money on classrooms for schools and colleges. It is much cheaper and more effective to send the young to the areas of the world in which they have need to immerse for their studies. This is “crash-programming” instead of the assembly-line package job they now get. But Dr. Bissell<sup>65</sup> has asked, “What will I do with all these buildings?” The answer is simple. They will now serve for continued education of the elders of the tribe.

As knowledge replaces experience in human affairs, senior business men feel a deep urge to go back to the campus. Having circulated around the world, and having immersed themselves in many problems, they now feel the need to specialize. That is, they are eager to do what the young detest, and the young are eager to do what the elders are fed up with. These inversions, or reversals, result from the exhaustion of the potential of any form, as Aristotle points out in *The Physics*. It is a pattern of growth: as the caterpillar said as he scornfully watched the flutterings of a butterfly: “You’ll never catch me up in one of those danged things!” It is also known as the Hertz law: the consequences of the images will be the images of the consequences.

The big TV networks, including the C.B.C. are collapsing. [sic] by attempting packaged programming, 19<sup>th</sup> century style, [sic] For the same reasons the same fate is overtaking the bureaucracies and governments of the world. It is the attempt to pursue goals and policies in an instantaneous world of total public involvement.

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<sup>65</sup> Claude Thomas Bissell (1916-2000), president of the University of Toronto from 1958 to 1971.

Last Sunday, after the Smothers' [sic] Brothers show<sup>66</sup>, the C.B.C. did a study on "violence." It consisted in simply asking a diverse group in age and occupation what they thought violence was. They did not ask about any cures<sup>67</sup> for violence. There was instant and total participation. Let me take the opportunity of this instance to urge you to experiment in problem inventories with small diversified groups. It is important to avoid all attempt at solutions. The "solution" is always the mark of the 19<sup>th</sup> century packaging mind. The real solution is in the problem itself, as in any detective story.

Jacques Ellul<sup>68</sup> has written a new book entitled Political Illusions. Under existing political forms, he says, the first illusion is participation. The second illusion is that there are solutions, e.g. there is no ignorance where there is no learning. There is no poverty where there is no affluence. There is no privacy where there is no public. These, and many forms, are complementary. The white man creates the coloured man, as affluence creates poverty. A convict has no privacy. He has solitude. A tribal man has no privacy. Under electric conditions there can be no privacy. The privacy invaders are the bulwark of the new knowledge industries, from the pollsters, to the insurance companies, and the credit ratings, "the eye in the sky", the age of the "snoop."

I collect funny stories since they are infallible indexes of public grievance. You cannot only predict, but pin-point areas of grievance by the jokes that circulate. There are

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<sup>66</sup> The *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, which ran on CBS from 1967 to 1969, was often both funny and politically controversial.

<sup>67</sup> Someone, possibly even McLuhan, underlined this in red.

<sup>68</sup> Jacques Ellul, French philosopher and radical Christian theologian (1912-1994).



now floods of bi-lingual jokes, as well as Newfie jokes<sup>69</sup>. Perhaps you have heard of the big Newfie breakthrough: the first hernia transplant!...etc. The reason for the flood of Newfie jokes is quite simply the shift of the Newfoundland population from rural to urban areas. There is a new interface, creating much irritation. East Berliners express their grievances by pointing to the great Russian breakthrough: the crossing of glow-worms with body lice now permits the entire population of Russia to read Pravda<sup>70</sup> in bed at night!

Our own grievances concerning drugs and cops may break out in many forms, e.g. the reporter checking the man-in-the-street opinions on LSD, is told: "I think he is a great President, even if he has many enemies. History will vindicate him!" He then asks, "What about marijuana?" He is told, "Well, my wife and I spent a week there last year and found it absolutely delightful!" In a quite different category, Lord Birkenhead<sup>71</sup> asked, jocularly, to render a legal opinion on whiskey and water, observed: "Making water in public is a misdemeanor; making whiskey in private is a felony." Woodrow Wilson<sup>72</sup>, asked how many times he thought it permissible to use the same speech, replied: "I can't answer that question, I'm still using mine!"

I hope you find some of this useful.

Sincere good wishes,

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<sup>69</sup> In pre-politically correct times, Newfie jokes were the Canadian equivalent of jokes in other cultures that single out one particular group as being less intelligent than the majority and, therefore, the butt of bad jokes.

<sup>70</sup> *Pravda*, a daily newspaper at the time, was the official propaganda organ of the Soviet government. I think McLuhan's use of "Russia" here was a common usage during the Soviet era, where "Russia" was often used to refer to the U.S.S.R. of which it was only a part, albeit the most important part.

<sup>71</sup> British statesman Frederick Edwin Smith, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Birkenhead (1872-1930).

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), President of the United States from 1913 to 1921.

CC: Mr. Gibson

April 23, 1969

## MEMORANDUM FOR MR. LALONDE

From: J.M. Davey

Re: Marshall McLuhan

I am attaching a copy of a letter from Dr. McLuhan which he wrote since my recent visit with him.

My recommendation is that he be invited for an evening with the Prime Minister, in Ottawa, so that he could spell out his ideas of what could be done in the field of communications. Such a meeting should be very small and probably not include anyone other than the Prime Minister, Dr. McLuhan and yourself.

I believe that Dr. McLuhan can be a source of valuable insights but, because he is a somewhat overpowering personality, the problem will be to find if any arrangements with him can be effective, and, if so, which.

J.M. Davey

May 29, 1969

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

The enclosed tam is an official Maple Leaf tartan designed and made here in Toronto and registered with the proper Scottish tartan buffs of Edinburgh, Scotland! I was thrilled to discover that there is [sic] a Maple Leaf tartan of great attractiveness. I am

presently having a blazer made of it and the material is supplied by Mr. Richardson, Richardson's Blazers,<sup>73</sup> 546 Yonge St.

I am sure there is lots of Scottish blood in your ancestry. The fur-traders, who are mostly Scots, intermarried with the French very freely.

I like to think of you in a proper Maple Leaf tartan kilt!

Most cordially,

P.S. The kilt, of course, is a mini-skirt, such as is worn by all tribal peoples. The mini-skirt is the same for men and women. Sex is not taken seriously by corporate societies. Hence the seeming nonsense of the hippies in this area.

P.P.S. A joke that may serve your turn: the witness in the stand was asked by the judge: "Did you really see him bite off the man's ear?" Answer: "No, I did not." Question: "Then why in blazes are you here in the witness stand?" Answer: "I saw him spit the ear out!"

While attending the idiotic Bilderbung<sup>74</sup> Conference on world unrest I spoke to George Ball<sup>75</sup> of the U.S. I said: "The Canadians are a very cool crowd." He replied: "Not according to my mail." I asked him: "What was the cause for irritation?" He then explained his plan for taking over Canada. I replied: "Well, Mr. Ball, to be quite frank, I have not only never heard of your plan, but I have never heard of you [sic] before in my

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<sup>73</sup> A variation of this establishment still exists, about an hour north of Toronto and run by the same family.

<sup>74</sup> Given the disdain McLuhan shows here for the conference, it is probably intentional that he referred to it as Bilderbung, rather than Bilderberg. The invitation-only Bilderberg Conferences have been held annually since 1954. In April 1968, it was held in Mont Tremblant, Quebec, and I think this is the event to which he is referring.

<sup>75</sup> George Wildman Ball (1909-1994), banker and high-level American civil servant who, at the time of this meeting, was about to begin three months serving at U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

life. Why don't you all come up and live on the Dew Line<sup>76</sup> which you have built? All Americans could live up there without even being noticed!"

Later he told me the story about George Jessup<sup>77</sup> [sic] and Dean Acheson [sic]<sup>78</sup>. Acheson was complaining about his long, sleepless nights and Jessop [sic] said: "Try these, Dean." Later that night, about 3:00 a.m., he had a frantic call from Dean Acheson. "George, I can't swallow these damned things you gave me!" To which George replied: "Dean, those are ear plugs!"

I hope you have already begun to entertain yourself by paging through the hilarious book about bureaucracy by Lawrence [sic] Peter<sup>79</sup>, The Peter Principle (Wm. Morrow & Co., N.Y., 1969). The Peter Principle is stated in a word or two on page 25: "In a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence." The corollary is on page 27: "In time, every post tends to be occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out its duties." This constitutes the normal state of equilibrium in all organizations. One might re-word Lord Acton to say: absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely.

M.M.

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<sup>76</sup> The DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line was a largely Arctic line of radar and other tracking stations built by the U.S. and operated by Canadians as a joint security project, beginning in the mid-1950s. McLuhan used DEWLINE as the name of a short-lived newsletter he produced at this time to warn of the influences of new media and technologies.

<sup>77</sup> I assume McLuhan did not mean George Jessel, a popular comic at the time, but rather U.S. diplomat and international jurist Philip Caryl Jessup (1897-1986).

<sup>78</sup> Dean Gooderham Acheson (1893-1971), statesman and presidential advisor.

<sup>79</sup> Laurence Johnston Peter (1919-1990), Canadian educator whose eponymous 1968 book became wildly popular.

June 18, 1969.

Dear Mr. McLuhan:

Many thanks for the Maple Leaf tartan tam. Some people in Sherbrooke<sup>80</sup> would perhaps have liked to see it on June 24<sup>th</sup>!

With warm regards and wishes,

Yours sincerely,<sup>81</sup>

July 3, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRIME MINISTER<sup>82</sup>

From: J. M. Davey

Re: Sussex Dinner with Dr. Marshall McLuhan, July 9<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. McLuhan was very happy to accept your invitation for dinner next Wednesday.

McLuhan is essentially a monologist and requires very little priming to encourage a discourse. He does feel much happier in a smaller group and my suggestion would be that you invite no more than about two or three other guests.<sup>83</sup>

You might want to choose from amongst the following:

Marc Lalonde

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<sup>80</sup> This refers to the riot that broke out on Sherbrooke St. in Montreal in Trudeau's presence on June 24, 1968.

<sup>81</sup> Stamped that Trudeau signed the original.

<sup>82</sup> Original has handwritten notations by Marc Lalonde, and perhaps Trudeau, and is stamped as having been seen by the PM.

<sup>83</sup> The suggestion about the number of guests has been underlined, likely by Lalonde, who also noted in the margin "I agree."

Fernand Cadieux<sup>84</sup>  
 Romeo LeBlanc<sup>85</sup>  
 Ivan Head<sup>86</sup>  
 Gordon Gibson<sup>87</sup>

You may wish me to attend, but I do not personally regard my presence as essential.

J.M. Davey

July 8, 1969

# MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRIME MINISTER

From: J.M. Davey

Re: Sussex Dinner with Dr. Marshall McLuhan<sup>88</sup>

Messrs. Jamieson<sup>89</sup>, Head and Wylie<sup>90</sup> are most pleased to accept the invitation to dine with Dr. McLuhan and yourself tomorrow [sic] night at 24 Sussex. I have informed each of your guests that dinner would likely last from 7:30 until 9:30 as you have another engagement later in the evening.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Cadieux was an intellectual inspiration to Trudeau and others in his circle as young adults and, until his death in 1976, served as special adviser to the prime minister.

<sup>85</sup> Roméo-Adrien LeBlanc (1927-2009) became a politician and, eventually, Governor-General of Canada, but was at this time Trudeau's press secretary. His son, Dominic A. LeBlanc, is a Member of Parliament and a close friend of, and advisor to, Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau.

<sup>86</sup> Ivan Leigh Head (1930-2004), lawyer and foreign policy specialist who became part of Trudeau's inner circle of advisors.

<sup>87</sup> Beside this list, someone, likely Lalonde, has added "or from some of your colleagues in Cabinet or in the House."

<sup>88</sup> The file also contains a July 8 memo from Davey, stating that something, presumably this document, has been "Released by PM."

<sup>89</sup> Politician and diplomat Donald Campbell Jamieson (1921-1986) was a member of Trudeau's cabinet.

<sup>90</sup> Liberal Party operative Torrance Wylie.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Gwyn and others note that Trudeau always stopped work at 9:30 p.m., as he then prepped for the next day.

I will meet Dr. McLuhan earlier in the day and arrange that he will be at Sussex by 7:30. Ivan Head will arrange to look after Dr. McLuhan at the conclusion of the evening.

I have briefed each of your guests on the background to the dinner and the likely form that it would take, i.e., more of a discourse by Dr. McLuhan than a dialogue.

Dr. McLuhan will very likely broach with you the desirability of yourself appearing on television in conversation with different groups of the population to discuss problems of the country. You may wish to probe him somewhat on the value of such an exercise.

Other subjects where I believe Dr. McLuhan's insights are very interesting include:

- Youth
- Education
- Organizations (particularly government).

J.M. Davey

July 17, 1969

Dear Jim:

The visit with Trudeau was most delightful. For now, just a note on some of the economic and executive patterns that Barry Nevitt<sup>92</sup> and I are working with in our book. One of these may have immediate relevancy.

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<sup>92</sup> Canadian writer and international communications consultant Henry James Barrington Nevitt (1908-1995), longtime collaborator of McLuhan.

As you know, in airplane controls, when you go through the sound barrier the control patterns reverse. You push the stick forward when you wish to ascend and vice versa. The same applies in economic controls, and under electronic conditions of speed. Rasminsky<sup>93</sup> still assumes the pre-electronic speeds of slow movement. The older economists including Keynes<sup>94</sup> had no awareness of this reversal pattern at speedup points. When going into any of the variables or details of wages and prices, the mere matter of interest rates is the obvious control stick in question. By pushing up on the interest stick the “plane” is going to make a very sudden descent. By pulling up on the stick or pushing up interest rates the effect will be the exact opposite of the one intended.

This reversal principle works in every field of decision making whatever. The fast environmental spin destroys the slower environmental structure just as the plane destroys rail or telephone destroys postal and memo systems and the organization chart.

I have had much yardage out of your joke about the man with both feet planted firmly on the ground. Had you heard the synonym for the “Pill” – Absorbine Jr.?

Cordially,

H. M. McLuhan<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Internationally influential banker Louis Rasminsky (1908-1998), Governor of the Bank of Canada from 1961-1973.

<sup>94</sup> John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), revolutionary British economist.

<sup>95</sup> There are many handwritten notations at the top of this letter, which appear to involve wordplay, some if it McLuhan-inspired. I assume Davey was the author.



August 27, 1969

Dear Jim:

Working to complete The Executive as Dropout: The Future of Management.

Have had much occasion to consider inflation in relation to general social speed-up. Am sure money has little to do with inflation. Of course, a penny at computer speeds could serve to affect all the transactions of the total currency. The mistake is to isolate money from our economy when most of the information transactions are no longer monetary. Anthropologists are very conscious of the incongruity of studying sex in non-Western societies (it would be ridiculous to study the economic life of the Navaho!). Sex only isolated out in recent times in the West and is now merging once more with the total culture. Real inflation is caused by speed-up in the total society.

In the 1920's it was the advent of radio that put a new rim-spin on the whole show, including the sound track on film toward the end of the decade. I saw my first talkie in 1929. It was The Coconuts<sup>96</sup> with the Marx Bros.<sup>97</sup> An example of speed-up and inflation is summer school in the university. The entire planet is given an extra spin, a third term. Having taught summer school for several years in the States, I know the results. As compared with the two semester Canadian school, with its long summer (practically a sabbatical), there is, in the American tri-semester patterns, gradual loss of dialogue both among students and faculty, and a great increase in bureaucratic activity. Summer school keeps American universities "in the black".

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<sup>96</sup> The film was actually titled "The Cocoanuts."

<sup>97</sup> The five Marx Brothers were internationally famous U.S. entertainers in several media during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Our current inflation is computer inspired, with TV playing a major role in shifting real war into a clash of iconics [sic] and corporate images. “Hardware” war (the military industrial complex) is obsolete. Even atomic warfare has been by-passed by “softer” and more penetrating weapons, whether of gas or information.

A second glance at money reveals that it has shifted steadily from bullion (hardware) to credit (software).

Best wishes for a reposeful summer,

**1970**

March 2, 1970<sup>98</sup>

Dear Jim:

A couple of basic principles apropos administrative dynamics popped into mind while watching the movie “Z”<sup>99</sup>. In a word, any conventional bureaucracy becomes a police state when speeded up by a new technology such as telephone or telex. Just as Machiavelli<sup>100</sup> could regard the state as a work of art as soon as the medieval order had been scrapped by the new speed-up of Gutenberg<sup>101</sup> technology, so our political structures become “works of art” as they are scrapped by new technology. The movie has

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<sup>98</sup> Someone has written “Have spoken on phone to him about Mike” near top of page, in red ink.

<sup>99</sup> 1969 political thriller directed by Costa-Gravas.

<sup>100</sup> Niccolo di Bernardo dei Machiavelli (1469-1527), Italian Renaissance philosopher and political mastermind.

<sup>101</sup> Johannes Gensfleisch zur Laden zum Gutenberg (1398-1468) introduced movable type printing into Europe, ushered in the print revolution and the world of mass communications. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) was one of McLuhan’s earliest and best works.

become a work of art since TV. The planet has become a work of art since the satellite, i.e. the planet in the sense of “Nature” has been scrapped and we now confront it as an art project in the name of “pollution.” Once surrounded by human artefacts, Nature is a mess. A good example of new technology turning bureaucracy into a police state is the traffic question. As the motor car becomes obsolete and traffic is aided by helicopters and computers, etc. you have the extreme instance of police state resulting from the speed-up of obsolete technology.

The second theme. Drugs. The clue is in prohibition of the 20’s. Booze was not new. It was the panic that was new. So with drugs today. It was the panic that was new. The new radio environment of the 20’s created a new primitivism and tribalism which we associate with the jazz age. Tribal people cannot abide booze. It sends them berserk. They are already excessively involved in each other without stimulants. The Wasp [sic]<sup>102</sup>, on the other hand, needs gallons of booze in order to be sociable. In the 20’s the Wasp had gone tribal and booze began to terrify him.

The key to the drug panic is TV. TV intensifies the already numerous forms of inner-tripping. Colour TV is a psychedelic input. The kids are simply putting jam on jam when they take to drugs. They seem to imagine that it helps them to relate to an electric speed world, whereas they are quite unable to relate to the fractured and fragments specialties of a pre-electric school and goal and job system.

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<sup>102</sup> Typically written as WASP, this acronym, which started to become popular in North America in the 1950s, means “white Anglo-Saxon Protestant.”

In the 20's booze created a huge police state as we tried to prop up the old form of social arrangements. Drugs likewise provide a field-day for the Mafia<sup>103</sup> as we try to maintain the patterns of the pre-electric age while the kids are miming electric speeds and the externalization of their nervous systems created by electric circuitry.

The third matter concerns the need for a program on "learned ignorance". What has often been called "trained incapacity" flourishes as never before in our bureaucratic society. Computer speeds actually are making practical the return to the "cottage economy". It may soon be fashionable to run a factory from the kitchen. The Middle Ages<sup>104</sup> have returned to us long ago by electric means as you can see in the kids' costumes and in their avid pursuit of role-playing. With the satellite surround the planet becomes a global theatre with the audience as actor. Hence the new politics of "unrest". The public has no intention of remaining in the spectator role. Hence a program in which all the hang-ups of the learned in the arts and sciences and in all areas of our Establishment would be one means of getting the audience directly into the administrative act. Again, the pattern of the program should be inventory of hang-ups, not solutions. If the audience makes instant breakthroughs on previously insoluble matters, fine. This would happen, but it needn't be the main purpose of the program.

Cordial regards,

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<sup>103</sup> I assume this was a reference to organized crime in general, not specifically to the original Sicilian Mafia.

<sup>104</sup> The Middle Ages in Europe is generally considered to be the time period from the fall of Rome in 476 CE to the beginning of the Renaissance in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century, depending on location.

June 18, 1970

Dear Jim:

This came like an electric bolt from the blue for a nut – the nut being me! If you start with the last few lines on pages 17 and 18 [of Krugman<sup>105</sup>], then look at the bottom of page 13, you will know what you are in for. Krugman has validated quantitatively everything I have been saying, even though he doesn't understand very much about it. The evidence that all [sic] media communicate themselves by transforming the participant but fail to convey very much of their supposed "content" applies as much to English or Russian as to print or telephone or TV. It throws a flash of awareness into the mystery of the blocks in the so-called teaching and learning processes.

People have always been able to absorb the media, whether linguistic or material. Their performance in this area is super-human compared to their power to absorb "content". The ability of a child to learn a complex mother tongue by three is a fantastic feat never duplicated again by any other activity of the individual human life. Susuiki's [sic]<sup>106</sup> discovery of "learning by immersion" is really the transfer of the learning effort to the media rather than to their content. The implications in politics are as weird as for education and commerce. When I gave a talk in Montreal yesterday to the Association of Industrial Advertisers, the General Electric report findings created a considerable hush and were duly omitted from the press reports.

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<sup>105</sup> This refers to public opinion researcher Herbert E. Krugman (b. 1921), manager of corporate public opinion at the General Electric Company from 1967 to 1983. McLuhan is citing the GE report mentioned later in the letter, which may have included research for the paper Krugman presented the following year as "Electroencephalographic Aspects of Low Involvement: Implications for the McLuhan Hypothesis" (Molinaro, *Letters*, 409, footnote 3).

<sup>106</sup> Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998), Japanese musician and educator whose method of teaching music to children, remains influential in music and other fields.

Just wanted you to have an early look at this for the benefit of your department as well.

December 3, 1970

Dear Mr. Trudeau:

Since the dinner on Friday, November 27, much of the time I have been down with flu. My first act since recovery is to thank you for the wonderful evening and the incomparable honour which you conferred upon me and my family. Teri<sup>107</sup> and Corinne<sup>108</sup> insist that their lives have an entirely new dimension as a result of that event! Part of the satisfaction, however, was in the assured feeling that each of us was in fact being entirely “himself”. The events of the next day – the unveiling of the dramatic hat and cloak, the kick-off, and the Alouette triumph<sup>109</sup> – all seemed to be an extended part of the same euphoric experience of our dinner meeting.

Your comments on the political developments in Canada have been recurring in my thoughts. I know some good fruit will come of this, and I shall report to you before too long.

In friendship and esteem,

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<sup>107</sup> Teresa McLuhan (b.1945) and her twin sister, Mary, were the second-born of McLuhan’s six children.

<sup>108</sup> Corinne Keller Lewis McLuhan (1912-2008) married McLuhan in 1939.

<sup>109</sup> The Montreal Alouettes football team defeated the Calgary Stampeders 23 to 10 in Toronto to win the Grey Cup.

December 11, 1970

Dear Mr. McLuhan:<sup>110</sup>

I was pleased and touched at your kindness in sending to me the inscribed copies of “Culture Is Our Business”, “From Cliche [sic] to Archetype”, and “The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan 1943/1962”.

I will be delighted to have them in my own personal library, not only so that I can have them close at hand but also because they will be a pleasant reminder of an enjoyable evening that I spent in company with Mrs. McLuhan, Teri, yourself, and the Daveys.

It was very thoughtful indeed of you to think of me in this way.

Yours sincerely,

Pierre E. T.

**1971**

March 5, 1971

Dear Pierre:

We rejoice in your marriage and in the enormous discomfiture of many of your enemies! We also rejoice in the loveliness of your bride, and in sharing the Catholic faith with both of us.<sup>111</sup>

Many blessings.

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<sup>110</sup> The salutation was handwritten by Trudeau, as was the signature.

<sup>111</sup> The day before, Trudeau had married Margaret Joan Sinclair (b. 1948), who became a Catholic at his request.

March 8, 1971

Dear Jim:

We have naturally been delighted by the great Pierre and Margaret wedding event. Surely there is nothing in the history of democratic politics to match the mise en scène [sic] of this event. It was not only a personal but a political triumph, putting both the opposition and the media in Pierre's pocket, as it were. The media people have to be grateful for being duped, since their unpreparedness was very much part of the show.<sup>112</sup>

In this very connection I have a new essay, a copy of which I am enclosing, explaining that, why, and how the user is the content of any medium or environment. I am still working on the many features of this situation, and am quite at a loss to explain why I had been unable to see so obvious a fact before. When Trudeau "uses" the media, as in the current nuptial drama, he [sic] is their content. When they use him, they [sic] are the content. It is a sort of reciprocal hi-jacking. Only yesterday I was reading a chapter on "Judgment and Truth in Aquinas"<sup>113</sup> by my friend, Fr. Owens<sup>114</sup>, here at the Medieval Institute<sup>115</sup>. He concludes: "They involve the traditional Aristotelian view that the cognitive agent itself becomes and is the thing known....Its structure comes from the thing known, and not from any apriori [sic] in the intellect."

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<sup>112</sup> According to Clarkson and McCall (*Trudeau and Our Times*, 126), "Marshall McLuhan saw the marriage as the act 'of a wizard...the transformation of the whole political scene into a marriage feast,' a sign of Trudeau's playfulness, his creativity, and, best of all, something that meant 'the Americans...have begun to envy us.'"

<sup>113</sup> Tommaso d'Aquino/Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Catholic priest and extremely influential theologian.

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Owens (1908-2005), Catholic priest and scholar of medieval philosophy.

<sup>115</sup> Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies at the University of Toronto.



It turns out then, that my communication theory is Thomistic to the core. It has the further advantage of being able to explain Aquinas and Aristotle<sup>116</sup> in modern terms. We are the content of anything we use, if only because these things are extensions of ourselves. The meaning of the pencil, or the chair I use is the interplay between me and these things. Again, the message [sic] of these things is the sum of the changes that result from their social use. Thus, I have added two features to “the medium is the message”, namely the content and the meaning, Perhaps Pierre Juneau<sup>117</sup> or someone at C.R.T.C. would like to have this essay apropos the problem of “Canadian content”<sup>118</sup>? The consequence for the discussion of the problem of Canadian content for the media is drastically simplified by noticing that the user is the content. If Canadians use or watch American programs or drive American cars, it is the Canadians who are the content of these things. The meaning [sic] is in the resulting interplay or dialogue between Canadians and these things, but there can be no question that the Canadian user of American things is the content of these things. The meaning and the message are something else. It is unfortunate that the C.R.T.C. ever involved itself in the question of

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<sup>116</sup> Aristotle (384-322 BCE), arguably the most important Western philosopher ever.

<sup>117</sup> Pierre Juneau (1922-2012), first chairman of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (commonly “CRTC” not, as McLuhan writes in this letter, “C.R.T.C.”), established in 1968 before Trudeau became prime minister.

<sup>118</sup> The struggle over Canadian content – whether government should be allowed to control it, what the proper amounts might be, even how to define it – has never gone away. In the early days of government control of the issue, which includes the time of my grade 12 media project, I was told by Jim Rennie, then the entertainment editor at the *Toronto Star* that “We cover Canadian talent more out of nationalism and obligation than talent or the belief it will be read.” Jean Wright, then managing editor of *Chatelaine* magazine was even harsher: “You can’t say to people that part of their duty is to sit down and read a dull article about a dull person that you don’t want to read about” with the only exceptions in Canada being “Nancy Greene, Pierre Berton, Gordon Sinclair, Betty Kennedy, Leonard Cohen, Monique Leyrac maybe, Pierre Trudeau – who else is there?”

content, especially since it does not understand the nature of media at all, except as hardware.

A note on hi-jacking apropos media and politics: in our book The Executive as Dropout,<sup>119</sup> which is close to being sent to the publisher, we have a section on the nature of hi-jacking in business and in politics. Realizing that the very nature of hi-jacking is related to new services and environments, I asked a New York tycoon whether there were any parallels to hi-jacking in business. He replied at once that the bigger the business, the easier it is to hi-jack it. He said the biggest banks in the world today are being sued by their own share-holders for misallocation of funds. The Penn Central<sup>120</sup> discovered that its entire funds had been appropriated for non-transportation uses. This is done in the bookkeeping division of the firm, unbeknown to the rest of the operation. It is almost impossible to check. Hence the larger the operation, the less it knows about whether it is going “to land”. Cities are hi-jacked every day by developers who simply pressure the bureaucracy into “landing” in areas favourable to the developers. Countries can be hi-jacked as readily as a big business.

It is a useful metaphor since it really concerns the problems of the new service environments as created by jet planes at high speed. The question arises whether the passengers could agree to be hi-jacked by democratic process. Could everybody on the plane agree to go to Cuba instead of Miami? This raises the problem of swinging blocks

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<sup>119</sup> *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout*.

<sup>120</sup> The Penn Central Transportation Company (1968-1976) which, in 1970, filed for bankruptcy, at that point the largest bankruptcy in U.S. history.

of votes as a form of hi-jacking. Historically, the creation of the C.P.R.<sup>121</sup> could be considered under the aspect of hi-jacking the country. Pollution is another form of taking over of an entire service environment, whether of land, water, or air and perverting its uses. If some private enterprise in fact uses [sic] land, water, or air, it is that enterprise that becomes the content [sic] of the environment in question, just as the hold-up man on the plane, by assuming the use of the plane to himself, becomes the content of the plane by usurping the role of all the other passengers.

Since the user as content [sic] is not a figure of speech but a basic dynamic and cognitive relationship, I think you will find that it can be pushed all the way as a means of orientation in media, economics and politics. I suggest that it can be the basis for a complete restatement of political and economic realities in the information age of the wired planet.

*[Indecipherable handwritten closing]* [ital. in orig]

March 24, 1971.

Dear Marshall and Corinne:<sup>122</sup>

My wife and I were delighted to receive your message. It was most thoughtful of you. Both of us want to say thank you, [sic]

Very sincerely,<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Canadian Pacific Railway (more typically abbreviated "CPR"), Canada's first transcontinental railway, completed in 1885.

<sup>122</sup> First example of Trudeau addressing the McLuhans by their given names. Interestingly, he does not then go on to use his own wife's given name.

<sup>123</sup> Signed "Pierre E. T."

September 21, 1971

Dear Mr. Trudeau:

In the violent seas of “news” and publicity in which you have had to exist in recent months, I have refrained from saying anything whatever. I want you to know that you are in my prayers and that I have been perpetually amazed at the imaginative skill with which you have managed the utterly conflicting jobs with which you are confronted. You are immeasurably the greatest Prime Minister Canada has ever had, the first who has ever been equipped with an awareness of contemporary culture. Heath<sup>124</sup> and Nixon<sup>125</sup> are provincial schoolboys beside you. With this advantage of your pre-eminence and contemporaneity is the back-lash of uncomprehending fury and envy which they elicit. Your detractors cannot imagine how humble one is made by the recognition of the scope of your problems.

Some while ago I sent Jim Davey a manuscript of my Executive as Dropout which I have written with Barrington Nevitt. He is an electric engineer and a management consultant with long experience in Europe and South American countries. Our book is now in the press and will, I hope, be of direct aid in relating decision-making to the new fact of speed-up.

Corinne and I rejoice in your marriage and keep you and Margaret in our prayers.

In a few days our daughter, Teri, has a new book on the orations of American Indian chiefs to their tribes. It will be published in the U.S. and in Canada, and you will of course receive a copy. Teri hopes that it may have some direct use in focussing [sic]

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<sup>124</sup> Edward Richard George Heath (1916-2005), Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1970 to 1974.

<sup>125</sup> Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994), President of the United States from 1969 to 1974.

the matter of Indian and ethnic minorities. The alienated ones have a natural intuition of ecology, since they are the victims of its absence.

September 29, 1971

Dear Jim:

Naturally, Nevitt and I are watching the changing relationship between Canada and the U.S. in relation to the analysis we did on hardware and software in our Executive as Dropout, which I think you have. It is now in the press for early Spring publication.

A great advantage which Canada enjoys over the U.S. is the relative absence of massive installations. We enjoy many of the 20<sup>th</sup> century opportunities of other “backward” countries. We are free to start in with the software and by-pass the hardware. That is our privilege for having missed the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, areas like Montreal and Toronto, precisely to the degree to which they did [sic] have a 19<sup>th</sup> century are in a bad way. The message of the electric age is to by-pass these places also, and not to make their problems those of the country at large. Highly centralist hardware and hardware areas have to be regarded as bad investments that are better forgotten. Sooner or later the U.S. will have to write off its big cities and hardware also. In this situation the U.K. is almost helpless.

I want to ask your counsel and aid in some anti-abortion strategies which I am beginning to be associated with. The abortion mill closely resembles Buchenwald.<sup>126</sup> People directly engaged in it would risk their lives to save the life of a two-year-old child from a car or truck. What has happened is a complete collapse of community awareness

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<sup>126</sup> Nazi concentration camp operating in Weimar, Germany, from 1937 to 1945.

via specialism of function. As long as an operation or process is divided into sufficiently small segments, nobody feels any responsibility for anything. Communal awareness has no chance to come into play. This was the mystery of Buchenwald and such camps. A few weeks ago I spoke with Germans and Austrians directly related to those events. They were pious Catholics, and I asked them how they could have permitted these things. Their answer was simply “We just did our bit and were unaware of the other bits.” It is by this type of programming that we can calmly expect our highways to deliver a given number of dead per day or week. The really devastating programming is the destruction of perception and sensitivity by the creation of vast environments far exceeding human scale. The King Kong<sup>127</sup> fantasies are direct expressions of the feeling most people have in their environments which have become monsters. Yet, the best intentioned bureaucrats in all governments are busily engaged in creating bigger and blacker King Kongs every day of the week. Meantime, the kids are repudiating the society and fleeing to small communes. Of course, the effect of current unemployment will be to reconcile many of them once more to the environment as it is.

Our anti-abortion group here at St. Mike’s<sup>128</sup> needs to discover ways of presenting films on national networks, if possible. These films don’t have to have any pro or con slant, if they are permitted to show the actual process. If any practical program has begun anywhere that you know of, I would be happy to hear about it.

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<sup>127</sup> King Kong, a colossal gorilla-like fantasy monster created by Merian C. Cooper, first appeared in a 1933 film.

<sup>128</sup> The University of St. Michael’s College, one of the federated colleges of the University of Toronto, was McLuhan’s academic home from 1946 til his death.

Hoping you have had a good summer, and that your family is in the best of shape,

Warm regards,

Marshall

October 1, 1971.

Dear Marshall:

Thank you very much for your recent letter. Jim Davey keeps me informed of your activities and sends me from time to time copies of your correspondence to him, but I was certainly very pleased to hear from you directly. I will also be looking forward to your new book, "Executive as Dropout".

I am very flattered by some of your comments about me and I am very touched by your thoughtfulness for Margaret and myself.

My best wishes to Mrs. McLuhan and yourself, and also to Teri on the publication of her book.

Yours sincerely,<sup>129</sup>

October 25, 1971.

Dear Marshall and Corrine:

Many thanks for your prayerful good wishes. It was indeed kind of both of you to think of my birthday.

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<sup>129</sup> This was signed "Pierre," the earliest example I've seen of such informality between them.

Best personal regards,

Sincerely,<sup>130</sup>

**1972**

June 12, 1972.

Dear Marshall:<sup>131</sup>

I was delighted indeed to receive from Barry Nevitt and yourself a copy of your new book, "Take Today: The Executive as Dropout" inscribed for Margaret and myself.

My first glance at the book has been all too tantalizingly brief but just enough to savour at once the vigorous and obvious craft of fellow players. I am looking forward with pleasure and anticipation to the prospect of enjoying the full performance soon.

Would you please pass on my thanks and congratulations to Barry Nevitt.

On behalf of Margaret and myself, best personal wishes to Corinne, Teri, the other members of your family, and yourself.

Yours sincerely,

Pierre E. T.

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<sup>130</sup> Signed "Pierre."

<sup>131</sup> Salutation and signature in Trudeau's handwriting.



August 2, 1972

The Rt. Hon.<sup>132</sup> P.E. Trudeau,  
Prime Minister  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario.

Dear Pierre:

Politics and the media present a tireless set of variations these days. Some of these variations are noted in Take Today: The Executive as Dropout which I hope you will find a moment to look at from time to time. It is not that I covet your personal approval so much as the hope that it may be of some usefulness in your extremely arduous course.

Recently, in Dublin and Paris and Athens, friends urged me to set up "Centres for Understanding Media." They had in mind a kind of dialogue that could be maintained among several such places with the help of a Newsletter or periodical brochure into which they could put their current problems and discoveries concerning the interplay between media and the major institutions of our time. It might be a great help to have such a Centre in Quebec, for example. If Quebec could see its patterns and role in our twentieth century against the ground of other countries facing the same separatist pressures under media impact, it might greatly relieve tension and play down the merely personal feelings.

I consider that Canada has become a world Utopia, as it were, by chance. Our unique situation seems to me to be that we are the only country in the world without an "identity." We have two identities which in effect polarize one another and create a very important pattern of complementarity. It is a complementarity of a special kind, deriving

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<sup>132</sup> I am including this heading information because it is the first time I know of when McLuhan uses, properly, "Rt. Hon." instead of "Hon."

on the one hand from a great land power (France) and, on the other hand, a great sea power (England). Canada, in a most eminent way, embraces both of these cultural forms of land and sea. There is also the fact that English in this century has become a world language through the particular agency of jazz and rock. Yet the French tongue richly modifies and controls this enormous world monopoly of English (just how English became the means of processing the sounds of jazz and rock is an amazing story which has not yet been written. I have hit upon it recently).

A “Centre for Understanding Media” need not include any new physical hardware. I have discovered that friends and acquaintances in many places are eager to use their existing operations, whether of broadcasting or business, to play host to a Centre. It would in effect be a great advantage to themselves to share media problems and insights around the world. This could be done on the side, as it were, without extra staff or office space. I have run my own Centre here in Toronto that way, as an extra-curricular activity. What would be needed, in order to interlace a whole group of Centres, would be minimal means for publishing a periodic Digest of discoveries and problems relating to media and politics. My own preference would be to keep these things minimal and succinct and iconic. However, I assume that this is not the time or place to go into details.

Heartiest congratulations and good wishes for your unremitting excellence of performance.

Sincerely

Marshall

August 4, 1972.

Dear Mr. McLuhan:

The Prime Minister is at present away from Ottawa on a short holiday. In his absence, please accept this acknowledgement, on his behalf, and my assurance that your letter will be brought to Mr. Trudeau's personal attention upon his return.

Yours sincerely,

T. J. D. Burke,

Correspondence Division.

c.c.: Mr. J.M. Davey, (PMO) with original\*  
Miss Mary E. Macdonald, (PMO)\*\*

\* For necessary action, please.

\*\* For information<sup>133</sup>

August 21, 1972.

Dear Marshall,

Thank you very much for your letter, which I have just had the chance to see after returning to Ottawa. Your idea of setting up "Centres for Understanding Media" is an interesting one but perhaps I might have some time to think about it.

As always, your kind remarks are very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,<sup>134</sup>

Pierre

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<sup>133</sup> I have included this here, rather than in an Appendix, because of what it may indicate about a typical path for letters from McLuhan to Trudeau.

<sup>134</sup> Signed by the PM, and he wrote the salutation, but the letter was written by Jim Davey.

1973

January 4, 1973

Dear Pierre:

May it be a blessed New Year for you and your family. We much enjoyed the greeting card with Justin's picture with "one shoe off and one shoe on."<sup>135</sup>

I feel that I should not take up your time with ordinary verbiage. One of the effects of TV is to reduce the human attention span, which may explain why the one-line joke is in, and the old story-line joke is out. I am going to venture to send you, from time to time, some one-line jokes and observations that can serve your turn in a great variety of situations. Here, for example, are some one-liners apropos statistics:

Have you heard about the statistician who drowned while crossing a river whose average [sic] depth was six inches?

"If you put those figures on a rack, they will confess anything."

The average Canadian has one breast and one testicle.

Don't look back, they may be gaining on you!

Tarzan's last scream: "Who greased my vine?"

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<sup>135</sup> During the 2015 Christmas season, the first in office for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, his mother talked to the press about this same greeting card: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-baby-christmas-card-1.3371486>.

January 5, 1973

Dear Pierre:

A one-liner that is very flexible in its uses goes: “As Zeus<sup>136</sup> said to Narcissus<sup>137</sup>: ‘Watch yourself!’”

There is a basic political principle that may or may not be Hegelian<sup>138</sup> in pattern. It follows the structure of the wheel and the axle. Between the wheel and the axle there must be “play”. This play is “touch”. When the interval between wheel and axle is too small, they seize up and there is neither wheel nor axle. When the interval is too large, the wheel falls off. The principle that the resonant interval between the wheel and the axle is where the action is [sic] would seem to apply quite well to war, and politics, and many social situations. Let me illustrate: the Western world is going Eastward via electricity. That is, it is going inward and abandoning its outer goals. The Eastern world, on the contrary, is going outward via our nineteenth-century technology and is acquiring outer goals and objectives. Between these two vast components moving antithetically, there is a resonant interval, a gap. As with the wheel and the axle, the gap is where the action is [sic]. At the moment this gap is Viet Nam.<sup>139</sup>

Is it not important to understand that Viet Nam is not a component nor an objective nor a target, but only a resonant interval or “interface”? In quantum mechanics the chemical bond is referred to as the resonant interval, since there are no connections.

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<sup>136</sup> In ancient Greek mythology, Zeus, god of the sky, was ruler of the Greek gods.

<sup>137</sup> In ancient Greek mythology, Narcissus was a beautiful self-centered youth who fell in love with his own reflection seen in a pool of water and died staring fixedly at it.

<sup>138</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), German philosopher.

<sup>139</sup> The country’s name is also written “Vietnam.” McLuhan is referring to the Vietnam War (1955-1975).

The same principle would seem to apply to the interface between political parties. That is, the action would take place in the gap between them. By the same token, Women's Lib<sup>140</sup> would be the interval between masculine and feminine sexes or parties. The interval would be a gap of non-sex, "where the action is."

The ordinary instinct to speak of the business game, or the political game, would seem to be rooted in the awareness of "play" as crux in all forms of social action. It is a basic feature of play that it keeps us in touch, and is also extremely involving of our faculties. Paradoxically, there is also the principle of leisure involved in play, since it is only the specialist who works. When we are using only a small part of our faculties, we are working. When we are totally immersed, we are playing. The artist is always at leisure, especially when most intensely engaged in making.

January 17, 1973

Dear Pierre:

Corinne and I join in prayers and concern for you, especially at this time of the loss of your mother<sup>141</sup>.

Sincerely,

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<sup>140</sup> "Women's Lib," a shortened and often pejorative form of "Women's Liberation, first seen in print in the Nov. 21, 1969, issue of *Time* magazine.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/275979?redirectedFrom=women%27s+lib#eid>

<sup>141</sup> Grace Elliott Trudeau (b. 1890) had died the previous day.

Suzette<sup>142</sup>

Pierre

Charles<sup>143</sup>

deeply appreciate your kind  
expression of sympathy  
on the death of their mother  
Mrs. Grace Elliott Trudeau  
Montreal, January 1973

January 23, 1973.

Dear Marshall:

Thank you very much for your letters of January 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. The one-liners are delightful and I certainly intend to keep them ready for the right occasion.

I was also very intrigued by your idea of the resonant interval being where the action is. It certainly describes well what is going on in the House of Commons<sup>144</sup> at the moment.

It was kind of you to write and I will certainly be glad to get your future one-liners and observations.

With best wishes to you and your family,

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>142</sup> Suzette Trudeau Rouleau (1918-2008), Trudeau's elder sister.

<sup>143</sup> Charles Trudeau, Jr. (b. 1922), Trudeau's younger brother.

<sup>144</sup> The lower house of the Canadian Parliament whose members, unlike those in the Senate, are elected, not appointed. At the time this letter was written, there were 264 members of the house; there are now 338.

February 12, 1973

Dear Pierre:

Just a word about interviews on the subject of your “arrogance”.<sup>145</sup> Is it not relevant to ask the interviewer for help in clarifying the problem as it affects the supposed public that is represented by the interviewer? Are there not many hidden factors that the interviewer should explicate as part of his or her job in mediating between you and the public? For example, to the Wasp world (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) your mere existence as head of state is arrogant presumption. That is, for a French Catholic to rule over the “superior and dominant” group, represents to them a kind of reversal of nature, an upsetting of the relation between figure [sic] and ground [sic], in gestalt terms.

In a word, there is a wide spread assumption that your arrogance exists in merely occupying your present role. That is, it has nothing to do with your personal image but rather with your corporate role. As long as you were content to “put on” your public by playfulness and “clowning”, it was felt that they did not have to take you seriously. As soon as you “play it straight”, the Wasp public feels abused, since it alone has the right to assume the mask of serious corporate power.

Note how Richard Nixon<sup>146</sup> has ineptly tried to mitigate his crude and harsh image by liaison with various figures in the world of entertainment. He is quite unable to combine these qualities in himself in the way that you have done. To the Wasp world the light-hearted approach to power represents aristocratic insouciance and security. The

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<sup>145</sup> Another friend responded to the frequent charge of arrogance against Trudeau by writing “His arrogance, if that is what it was, was saved for those whose questions and comments arose not from an interest in his answers but from a desire to score points” (Cook, *The Teeth of Time*, 46).

<sup>146</sup> Molinaro version adds “President” before the name (470).



entertainer is a figure which they themselves have crowned. He is permitted to hurt them by his humour, for that is the mask of his power and relevance alike.

A great complication occurs in the matter of your image as it must be presented simultaneously to French and English. Our media totally ignore this fact. The obligations which you have to the French electorate seem to be much at odds with the forming of an image for effective relatedness to the Wasp world. Neither on radio, TV, nor in the press is there ever the slightest hint that this problem exists. You are obliged to perform a balancing act on the high wire for two conflicting publics. It is very important that these publics should see each other at the same time that they are watching you, for their responses to you and to one another are totally diverse.

Cordially and

Prayerfully

Marshall

February 25, 1973<sup>147</sup>

Dear Marshall:

I found your letter of February 12<sup>th</sup> very perceptive, as usual, but also applicable to my immediate actions. – I plan to reflect on it, when next considering any public appearance [appearances?]. Perhaps ~~even~~, I could even give a talk (in Ottawa) on the importance of the two publics you describe seeing “each other at the same time that they are watching (me)”

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<sup>147</sup> This letter was handwritten by Trudeau on personal stationery from the PM’s official residence, 24 Sussex Drive, in Ottawa.

Many thanks for your thoughts and prayers. God bless.

Pierre

July 6, 1973<sup>148</sup>

Dear Pierre:

A friend in Dallas phoned to suggest that I do a short piece on Mr. Nixon. It is somewhat tentative, but I enclose a copy<sup>149</sup> in the event of its having some interest for you. Some of the most obvious features of the affair, like the civil war between the two secret services and the co-opting of national politics for summer network relief, I simply pass over.

Cordial good wishes for a recreative summer,

Marshall

July 10, 1973

Dear Pierre:

Last night's Toronto Star<sup>150</sup> mentioned your having some doubts about the Canadian West and its strange attachment to the Mounties and the monarchy. As a Westerner, I can help to illuminate this matter. The West has always been on the defensive, if only because it is relatively uninhabited territory. Both the Mountie<sup>151</sup> and

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<sup>148</sup> Under the date there is a handwritten notation I cannot decipher from the photocopy.

<sup>149</sup> "Mr. Nixon and the Dropout Strategy."

<sup>150</sup> A Toronto daily newspaper that has been published since 1894.

<sup>151</sup> "Mountie" is the common colloquialism for a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the national civilian police force established in 1873 as the North West Mounted Police.

the monarchy are figures, as it were, without a ground. They are lonely and isolated images, dedication without a cause.

There is a great vacuum between the Western provinces and the U.S. to the south, and this constitutes a sort of psychic frontier which is an area of intense interface and uncertainty and stress. This frontier lends itself to a great deal of creativity in vision and resourcefulness. As is only natural, it is a state which is least active in Vancouver, which is so close to the really populated U.S.A. that it can share some of the filled-in, comfortable outlook of Eastern Canadian cities that are close to the U.S.A. It would be quite easy to fill in this story with reference to Canadian writing and activities, but this would not be at all necessary for yourself.

Warm regards,

Marshall

August 14, 1973

Dear Pierre:

I hasten to enclose these thoughts on inflation and crowd dynamics<sup>152</sup> in the hope that they will be of direct aid to you in tackling the whole question.

Corinne and I rejoice in your current appearances as we follow them in the press.

Cordially

Marshall

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<sup>152</sup> "Media and the Inflation CROWD" [sic], which is apparently a play on "Inflation and the Crowd" by Elias Canetti, cited at the end of the piece.

August 24, 1973.

Dear Marshall:

You sent to me two most interesting pieces of information in early July – your article on Mr [sic] Nixon and the Drop Out Strategy and your illuminating explanation indeed with regard to my doubts about the Canadian West and its strange attachment to the Mounties and the Monarchy.

I wish I had been able to thank you sooner but the summer has been really hectic.

With appreciation and kindest personal regards,

Sincerely,<sup>153</sup>

c.c. Hon. M. O'Connell<sup>154</sup>  
 Pierre O'Neil  
 Jim Davey  
 D. Hudon  
 August 27, 1973.<sup>155</sup>

Dear Marshall,

Many thanks for your note of the 14<sup>th</sup> and for accompanying copy of your paper.

Your perception of inflation as a psychological manifestation of crowd behavior in the market place is enlightening. When our government tried to combat the “inflation

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<sup>153</sup> This letter was stamped to indicate that the original was signed, apparently with “Pierre,” by Trudeau on August 27. The next letter, also dated August 24 in some versions, is stamped as having been signed by the PM on August 28.

<sup>154</sup> At the time this letter was written, politician Martin O'Connell (1916-2003) was serving as Trudeau's principal secretary.

<sup>155</sup> An earlier version of this letter, dated August 24, has the many handwritten changes that result in this August 27 version. The earlier version is in LAC MG26 Vol. 350 File 350.8 McLuhan 1972-1975.

psychology” in 1969, I had to use strong words<sup>156</sup>, so that the crowd would be convinced that we would not back off in our fight. We succeeded better than most countries; but then my strong words were remembered, and the government became the direct culprit of other economic evils.

Such a phenomenon not only makes it difficult to counteract inflationary psychology; but perhaps explains why the crowd, led by the press, having through inflation experienced depreciation of self, then must ensure that the government and politicians are depreciated even more!

All the best to you both.

Cordially,

October 17, 1973.

The Rt. Hon. P.E. Trudeau,  
Prime Minister,  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ont.

CONGRATULATIONS. HAPPY BIRTHDAY AND CONGRATULATIONS ON  
CHINA TRIUMPH<sup>157</sup>.

MARSHALL McLuhan

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<sup>156</sup> For example: ““We can only get tougher, we can’t get weaker...I’m afraid there are a lot of people who are bargaining that the Government can’t act tough for too long because it will only get frightened if it sees unemployment go up to 6 percent. But if people think we are going to lose our nerve because of that, they should think again because we’re not.” These unwise comments and his upturned finger to the striking Lapalme truck drivers in 1970 as he told them to ‘eat shit’ transformed Trudeau’s image for many Canadians” (English, *Just Watch Me*, 160).

<sup>157</sup> On October 10, Trudeau and a group that included his 7-months pregnant wife flew to the People’s Republic of China, making him the first Canadian prime minister to visit the PRC.

October 31, 1973.

Dear Marshall:

I was pleased to receive your telegram wishing me a Happy Birthday and referring so enthusiastically to my trip to China. Do let me thank you for your thoughtfulness.

With kind regards,

Sincerely,

Pierre

**1974**

February 25, 1974

Dear Mr. McLuhan,

I apologize for this very late reply to a letter to Jim Davey, copy of which came to me “for action” as they say in the Public Service.

I was very interested in your letter. I think you make a very good point. It was again brought home to me yesterday as I listened to an interview of the Prime Minister by André Payette on the French network, when the Prime Minister discussed the question of cultural sovereignty and the status of French in Quebec.

The shortest way to get a discussion going might be for you to get in touch with the people responsible for News and Public Affairs at the CBC and Radio-Canada<sup>158</sup>. At

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<sup>158</sup> La Société Radio-Canada, the French-language arm (both radio and television) of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

CBC, I would say that your man is Knowlton Nash<sup>159</sup>. At Radio-Canada, it's Marc Thibault<sup>160</sup>. I, of course, will also keep in mind your views as it should be possible to take them into account when this Office discusses interviews with the networks.

I was also interested in your views on “the ordinary human pattern of going outside to be with people and inside to be alone”. One of the Servan-Schreiber<sup>161</sup> brothers or cousins writes about this in a book called “Le Pouvoir d’Informer”<sup>162</sup>. Discussing newspapers and television, the author points to the fact that whereas in days past the citizen was ready to run out of home to get the paper and thus be in touch with the world, he now runs back home to do the same.

We have been thinking here of using some of your one-liners for the Prime Minister’s off-the-record Press Gallery meeting. I am sure we will find a way of giving you credit for them!

Sincerely,

Pierre O’Neil<sup>163</sup>

Press Secretary

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<sup>159</sup> Cyril Knowlton Nash (1927-2014), prominent broadcaster and journalist. During the 12<sup>th</sup> grade media project in the spring of 1970, when I briefly met McLuhan, I also spent part of a weekend at CBC-TV’s news magazine show, *Weekend*, meeting not only Nash’s right-hand man, John Kerr, but also coming across the name “Bob Frye,” the show’s senior producer. Decades later, Frye co-taught a Rutgers University Division of Global Affairs seminar in which I was enrolled.

<sup>160</sup> Thibault (1922-2006) was the powerful director of news at Radio-Canada through this period.

<sup>161</sup> Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber (b. 1937), French journalist and human rights activist.

<sup>162</sup> Published in 1972 by Editions Robert Laffont in France.

<sup>163</sup> Journalist Pierre O’Neil (1934-2007), Trudeau’s press secretary from 1973 to 1975.

March 14, 1974

Dear Marshall:

I have heard that recently among your many honours, you have received a civic award of merit from the city of Toronto on the occasion of Toronto's 140<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Here's one occasion where it cannot be said 'A prophet has no honour in his own country.'<sup>164</sup>

Congratulations, Marshall, and as always, my best wishes.

Sincerely, and God bless!

Pierre<sup>165</sup>

March 26, 1974

Dear Pierre:

There may be some relevance in the questions that Clare Booth Luce<sup>166</sup> asked recently,<sup>167</sup> and my replies. First, her questions:

1) How do you explain why Vatican II<sup>168</sup>, which closed in a burst of ecumenical fervor that was expected to revive the faith of the Catholic world in the Church's institutions and teachings was, instead, followed (and so soon) by the greatest loss

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<sup>164</sup> Trudeau used the same thought, less cheerfully, in his April 28, 1980, letter to McLuhan.

<sup>165</sup> The signature and the phrase "and God bless!" are in Trudeau's handwriting.

<sup>166</sup> Clara Booth Luce (1903-1987), author and diplomat, converted to Catholicism in 1946.

<sup>167</sup> Molinari notes that this refers to a March 19 letter (492).

<sup>168</sup> More formally known at the Second Vatican Council, this very influential meeting ran from 1962 to 1965 and addressed issues of Church renewal and relations with the non-Catholic world.



of faith in them that we have seen since the Reformation<sup>169</sup>? Was Vatican II the cause?

2) Please explain why you think (or don't think) that the impeachment of R.N.<sup>170</sup> is going to purify democratic politics and "restore integrity" to Government, and how this will help us control inflation, pollution, repair the breach with NATO<sup>171</sup>, etc.

3) What are your theories of money and of value? Why, for example, did those great Etruscan<sup>172</sup> statues which stood for years in the Great Hall of the Met.<sup>173</sup>, praised by all the critics and admired by all the populace, valued in nine figures, suddenly become valueless when they were discovered to be forgeries? Are Value and Money, like Beauty, in the eye of the beholder? Or, what other than life itself (and health in life) has intrinsic value?

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Now, my replies to her questions:

Vatican II was a blossoming of liberal individualism and a kind of immolation of the individual in the great new involvement plunge made possible by the TV sensibility of inner-tripping. The moment that people become deeply involved they lose their private

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<sup>169</sup> The Reformation in Europe was a 16<sup>th</sup>-century religious struggle that gave birth to Protestantism.

<sup>170</sup> Molinari explains that the initials refer to Richard Nixon (493).

<sup>171</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a military alliance founded in 1949 by the U.S.A, Canada and a number of European countries, pledged to protect each other from the then U.S.S.R. and Warsaw Pact countries.

<sup>172</sup> An ancient civilization that existed in Italy from approximately 750-250 BCE.

<sup>173</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

identity and their direction. If the Reformation was the tossing away of acoustic and musical hierarchies in favour of visual and private points of view, Vatican II was the burial of this kind of individualism in the newly created swamp of electronic togetherness and total involvement, as in a skin-flick where everybody gets inside one skin. In the novel *Silence* [1969],<sup>174</sup> Shusaku Endo<sup>175</sup> has an introduction explaining how impossible it is for Hellenistic or Western Christianity to find a foothold in the tribal or acoustic swamp of Japan. I have written in the *Critic*<sup>176</sup> and elsewhere, on this subject, asking Catholic philosophers and theologians to explain what successor to the Graeco-Roman literary tradition they foresee. The mystery of how the church was committed to this Graeco-Roman thing is quite beyond me, although I perceive it as providential, in the strict sense. Today, under electric conditions there's no way in which the Graeco-Roman tradition can survive in the West.

To use the terms of Ballandier who invented the phrase "the Third World"<sup>177</sup>, there is the First World of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialism and the Second World of Russian Communism and the Third World is that which is left out of these benefits. But he forgot the Fourth World, the instantaneous global village which, since Sputnik<sup>178</sup> (October,

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<sup>174</sup> A movie based on this book and directed by Martin Scorsese was released in January 2017.

<sup>175</sup> Shusaku Endo (1923-1996), Catholic Japanese writer.

<sup>176</sup> McLuhan's article, "Do Americans Go to Church to Be Alone?," appeared in the January-February 1973 issue of *Critic* (14-23).

<sup>177</sup> French anthropologist Georges Ballandier (1920-2016) used "Third World" in print in 1956, but gave it the proper attribution, to his colleague Alfred Sauvy (1898-1990), who had used it four years earlier. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/200854?redirectedFrom=Third+World#eid> (accessed 2/23/2016). Trudeau refers to Sauvy in a different context in his October 14, 1975, letter to McLuhan.

<sup>178</sup> Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite, was launched by the U.S.S.R. on October 14, 1957, which also launched the space age and the space race between the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union.

1957), created Spaceship Earth<sup>179</sup>, an ecological entity, without passengers but only crew. The First World has as much trouble relating to the Fourth World of electronics as the Third World has in obtaining benefits from the First World of industrial hardware. On the other hand, the Third World has no trouble in relating to the acoustic and electronic Fourth World.

The magisterium of the church tends to become multi-locational and acoustic, with central Roman authority becoming difficult to imagine. Please note that I am doing now, as elsewhere, a structural or formal meditation on the situations we have encountered.

The Protestant strategy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was to use the new portable book as a God-given means of escape from the Roman yoke. Rome used the book in the opposite way, as a means of standardizing and centralizing by uniformity. The law of implementation is always to use the new thing for the old purpose, while ignoring that the new thing tends to destroy the old purposes. I have discovered over the years that the effects [sic] of innovation are always subliminal, and people resent having this pointed out, feeling that you are invading their privacy in so doing.

Let us turn, then, to your question about the impeachment of Richard Nixon. Nixon and the U.S.A. is caught between the First World and the Fourth World. That is, while having all its commitments to the old Graeco-Roman hardware, it is totally involved in the new electronic information environment which is dissolving all the

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<sup>179</sup> “Spaceship Earth, popularized in the mid-60’s, was used Buckminster Fuller in the context of his primary concern- a vision for comprehensive planetary planning that resulted in new strategies intended to enable all of humanity to live with freedom, comfort and dignity, without negatively impacting the earth’s ecosystems or regenerative ability. He emphasized that the technology and know-how already exists, so that humanity can successfully surmount global challenges.” <https://bfi.org/about-fuller/big-ideas/spaceshipearth> .

controls and all the goals of the First World. The Fourth World, or the electronic world, reduces personal identity profiles to vestigial level and, by the same token, reduces moral commitments in the private sector almost to zero. Paradoxically, however, as private morals in the private sector sink down, new absolutist demands are made of ethics in the public or political sector. R.N. had the misfortune to bring the old private morals into the public place just when this reversal had occurred. There is also the misfortune of his image which is intensely private and non-corporate and therefore totally unsuited to TV. (Charisma is looking like a lot of the people – anything except one's self!).

The U.S., the only great country in the world based on a written Constitution, has no way of coping legally or politically with the new oral and acoustic situations created by the electronic bugging and the general X-ray procedures in the entire private sector. Man-hunting has become the biggest business on the planet in the electronic age, and is a return to the Paleolithic conditions of the hunter. The impeachment threat represents the rage of the literate media against the new electric environment which has invaded their world and corrupted all their values. I would like very much to explain in more detail the clash between written and oral patterns to commitment in society and politics and personal life alike.

You ask also about inflation and pollution and the breach with NATO, etc. I have an unpublished paper in which I try to explain that inflation also is the encounter of incompatible worlds, the clash between the old commodity markets and the new money, or information markets. Money as information, and investment, now moves at instant speeds, putting an unbearable strain and rim-spin, as it were, on the old price system with its quantified commodities. This huge disproportion between the old speeds of the

hardware world and the instant electric speeds of the software Fourth World extends to our private lives as much as to our social existence. It is impossible to retain private goals in an instant world. One must flip into role-playing, which means submergence in corporate situations. Strange that I should be mentioning these things today when I am going to introduce Eric Havelock<sup>180</sup> to a University of Toronto audience. In his Preface to Plato (Oxford University Press, 1963) he explains how the phonetic alphabet evoked a private image of the substantial individual. I understand this much better now than even he explains it. The unique technology of the phonetic alphabet was the fact that its components were phonemes (meaningless bits) rather than morphemes (meaningful bits). Magically, the fission of the phonetic alphabet is to isolate the visual sensory factor from all other senses, and to constitute the image of the private person. We are now playing this drama in reverse in the electric age.

Your question about my theories of money and value and the Etruscan forgeries would take a little while to elaborate. Let me mention, however, that we live in the age of the “genuine fake” because we understand for the first time the art process and the making process as never before, so that Picasso<sup>181</sup> said long ago: “I always paint fakes”. The function of art in relating us to ourselves and to our world and in freeing us from the adaptive or robot role, has changed entirely in the electric time. The art product as such becomes relatively insignificant compared to the process of making and of participation in that making. What you mention as the “value” of the Etruscan images, relates very

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<sup>180</sup> British classicist Eric Alfred Havelock (1903-1988) taught at the University of Toronto before moving on to prominent positions at Harvard and Yale. His theories on communications influenced McLuhan.

<sup>181</sup> Spanish-born Pablo Ruiz y Picasso (1881-1973), one of the most influential artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

much to their commodity character in the First World of industrial hardware. In that world they stood for the antithesis and, therefore, the ideal of industrialism.

Hypocritically, the First World worshipped art as its own opposite. The Etruscans themselves would have agreed with the Balinese who say: “We have no art. We do everything as well as possible.” Or, they would agree with a local junkyard sign which read: “Help beautify junkyards. Throw something lovely away today.”

You are most generous in even noticing my Civic Award, and it is quite princely of you to have written me about it. Mrs. McLuhan joins me in heartiest and most cordial regards to you and your family.

P.S. In the cause of bilingualism, I enclose a new book made by a friend of mine who is a former Professor of French here at the University of Toronto.<sup>182</sup> It seems to me to hold the promise of a live TV show in which French idioms are presented both acoustically and visually.

March 29, 1974.

Dear Marshall,<sup>183</sup>

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your letter of the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Your ‘First, Second, Third and Fourth Worlds’ framework for the purpose of analyzing current events and determining public attitudes is intriguing and fascinating.

What you said about money and value theories and your reference to “genuine fakes”

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<sup>182</sup> Alta Lind Cook, whose book, *Daisy*, was published in 1974. There is a notation near the top of the letter, in pencil, that the letter had arrived with a copy of a book of that name.

<sup>183</sup> This salutation and the signature were handwritten.

reminded me of Clifford Irving's<sup>184</sup> contribution to the age you speak of. His biography of Howard Hughes<sup>185</sup> – himself often thought no longer to be alive – is now known to be a fake, and his first best-seller, Fake, was about the life of Elmyr de Hory<sup>186</sup> who gave untold happiness to hundreds by selling them fake Impressionists which he didn't copy but created!

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of Alta Lind Cook's Daisy; it is utterly delightful. Please congratulate Miss Cook for me when you next speak to her.

All the best to you and to Mrs. McLuhan.

Pierre

April 3, 1974

Dear Pierre:

I see by the papers that there is, and will continue to be, a great deal of confusion about streaking. It is just possible that I can be of some help here. The streaker is a "put on" in the same way that the stripper is. She takes off her clothes in order to "put on" her audience. Though nude, she is completely clad in her audience, as much as a model in a life class. It is when she steps backstage that she is naked, or minus her audience.

The streaker<sup>187</sup> is putting on his audience because he wishes to be seen. He is a role-player and not a private person, therefore he hides his face and his name. His "put

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<sup>184</sup> Clifford Michael Irving (b. 1930), author of a fake 1972 autobiography of Howard Hughes.

<sup>185</sup> Howard Robard Hughes, Jr. (1905-1976), billionaire businessman, aviator, filmmaker and noted recluse.

<sup>186</sup> Born Elemér Albert Hoffman (1906-1976), painter and art forger de Hory was the subject of a 1969 biography by Clifford Irving.

<sup>187</sup> The Molinaro version (496) explains that "streaker" means "nude runner."

on” has to do with a grievance againstt [sic] what he feels to be a hypocritical society.

The streaker and the striker are near kin, only the striker strips off the services which are the social clothing in order to “put on” his audience. It would be easy to enlarge this theme, but probably not necessary. The moral issue of decency or indecency is really irrelevant in view of streaking as essentially a political act of defiance and rebellion.

April 8, 1974.

Dear Marshall:

Many thanks for yours of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The explanation you offer as to the why of streaking makes a lot of sense.

One thing though: why do you say that streaking is an essentially political act of defiance?<sup>188</sup> To me, there is an even greater element of rebellion against social values in this latest fad.

All the best.

Sincerely,

Pierre

June 13, 1974

Dear Pierre:

Just a note to indicate one very effective way of dealing with hecklers. Beckon him to come forward to the microphone and not to waste his sweetness on the desert air, as it were. There might be an occasional heckler who had a speech ready for such an

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<sup>188</sup> Underlined in the original.



occasion, but it shuts up 99% of them instantly. It is a way of turning the tables, and compels the heckler to “put on” the public instead of “putting on” the speaker. There’s a great gap between using the speaker as a captive audience and using the captive audience as a public.

Apropos your query about streaking as social rather than political defiance, I agree, since I was using the word “political” to cover social forms as well.

Recently, I was in Stockholm to give some talks and I discovered that Scandinavia is the world in which North American hippies would be at home. The reason for this lies in the fact that Scandinavians have very low identity profiles. They are real “cool” in the sense of being group-oriented rather than private goal-seekers. They originated the ombudsman<sup>189</sup>, and think of themselves as dedicated to helping the little people like themselves. Wouldn’t you say that our own rebellious youngsters are “nobodies” who resent having to share the establishment with the somebodies of yesterday? That is, the young people with very low identity profiles<sup>190</sup> find it difficult to accept jobs or roles in which high identity is expected. Is it not Nixon’s earnestness and specialist goal-seeking that alienates him from the new generation?

May I venture to suggest also an approach to the women’s-lib matter? Women are less specialized than men, and long accustomed to adapting to a variety of roles. In our new instant-information environment, most men who have been accustomed to specialist jobs and functions must now switch from role to role in the course of a day. In the big hierarchies this creates extreme discomfort and dismay, and it is increasingly obvious that

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<sup>189</sup> Most of “ombudsman” has been underlined by a reader.

<sup>190</sup> There is a notation here by someone, about TV generation.

women could perform many of these functions better than men. However, when a woman is compelled to assume the job<sup>191</sup> of a customs or immigration official, she becomes the specialist monster, the very antithesis of role-playing. Yet we consider it natural for men to perform these specialist functions

Prayerfully

Marshall

September 20, 1974

Dear Pierre:

Friends in the Ontario government told me yesterday that Davis<sup>192</sup> is moving for an immediate snap election to prevent any opposition organization and to anticipate the unpopularity he foresees resulting from economic impasse. I enclose a small essay on inflation<sup>193</sup> in which I propose the only dis-equilibrium theory, so far as I know.

Corinne and I are naturally distressed at Margaret's illness, and we shall pray.

Yrs Marshall<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> This has been changed, by hand, from "role."

<sup>192</sup> William Grenville Davis (b. 1929), Conservative premier of Ontario from 1971 to 1985.

<sup>193</sup> I do not have a copy.

<sup>194</sup> Someone has added "McLuhan" here, but it is not McLuhan's handwriting.

September 26, 1974.

Dear Marshall,<sup>195</sup>

A short note but I do want to thank you for your thoughtful letter of September 20 and for your essay on inflation – it is on my list of priority reading and study material.

I also owe you my thanks for your letter of June 13. I was absent from Ottawa almost continuously during the last two weeks of June and did not read your letter until after the election. It is a strange coincidence, but I fairly well followed your recommendation about the handling of hecklers, at a public meeting in Peterborough on July 6.

With my deep gratitude to you and Corinne for the prayers you are saying for Margaret – the latest news are [sic] encouraging.

Sincerely, and God bless!

Pierre

**1975**

January 22, 1975

Dear Pierre:

Apropos my inflation piece, which you mentioned you might show to John Turner<sup>196</sup>, two articles on multi-national corporations in the New Yorker for December 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> drew attention to some of the ways that they avoid the equilibrium operations

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<sup>195</sup> Salutation, signature and “and God bless!” all handwritten.

<sup>196</sup> John Napier Turner (b. 1929) was Finance Minister at the time. In 1984, he succeeded Trudeau as Liberal Party leader and prime minister, but served only 80 days before being defeated in an election.

of our own commodity markets by direct “transfer trading” among themselves.

Computerized book-keeping enables them to “cook the books” in such a way as to accommodate them to a wide range of needs. A separate set with unique “bottom line” is kept for each government and each government department so that there is no question of their ever paying any income tax.

It is computerized book-keeping that by-passes the structure of the old industrial markets of nineteenth century hardware, rendering Keynesian strategies helpless. That is, the computer is an electric form that is able to transcend the structure of the “First World” arrangements. (i.e., the “First World” = the Western industrial set-up, the “Second World” = Russian socialism, the “Third World” = all those countries without a nineteenth century, and the “Fourth World” = the electric information world which goes around all of them, having quite different effects on each.)

We shall persist in our prayers for you and Margaret.

February 14, 1975<sup>197</sup>

Dear Pierre:

Wishing not to take up your time and attention beyond a minimum, let me point to one of the big shifts now current in life and society. The split between work and residence which came with industrial specialism and division of labour is ending swiftly with the new electronic environment of software information. The return to human scale and human involvement is getting spectacular play in the Thatcher<sup>198</sup> episode, but it has

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<sup>197</sup> Also, stamped 5049 129, with a handwritten note that it was received February 18.

<sup>198</sup> Margaret Hilda Thatcher (1925-2013), who served as prime minister of Great Britain from 1979 to 1990, had been elected leader of the Conservative Party three days earlier.

also invaded the entire range of young peoples' attitudes and interests. Women's Lib belongs very much in the shift from specialist job-holding to multiple role-playing.

Another major pattern appears with the multi-national corporations who use the new computer technology to play the old game of equilibrium economics. By leaping across national and market boundaries, they by-pass the old controls that had been developed in those separate areas. "Transfer pricing" is the name they use for this by-pass. No new controls have been invented to restrain their arbitrary price-setting. These arbitrary tactics have long been the practice in the Second World of socialist Russia. Equilibrium, which works within a single market or single nation, is completely disrupted when these boundaries are transcended. We are, therefore, in the position of watching the new electronic information speed dissolve the structures of the old hardware, which moves very slowly. Systems analysis, in the same way, applies electric speed to older organization patterns, eliminating human scale and relationships.

Ever in our prayers

yrs Marshall<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Someone other than McLuhan wrote "McLuhan" after this handwritten closing.

February 17, 1975.<sup>200</sup>

Dear Marshall

Many thanks for your letter of January 22 commenting about the two articles on multi-national corporations which appeared in the December 2 and 9, 1974 issues of the New Yorker.<sup>201</sup>

Your remarks are typically incisive. I have been able to secure a copy of the articles<sup>202</sup> and propose to give them a careful reading.

Margaret and I are grateful to you and Corinne for your continued prayers. With warm regards to you both.

Sincerely,

Pierre<sup>203</sup>

March 17, 1975.

Dear Marshall,<sup>204</sup>

Your most recent “signal and warning” reached my desk on the eve of my departure for an almost three-week official trip to Europe.

If I understand you well, the “global village” is characterized by a significant tension between “the return to human scale and human involvement”, on the one hand,

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<sup>200</sup> Also sent to 391.8 for filing and is stamped 5024 063.

<sup>201</sup> The words “the New Yorker” have been underlined by someone, in addition to McLuhan’s underlining.

<sup>202</sup> There is a typed notation at the bottom of the letter: “The articles were obtained from PCO library.”

<sup>203</sup> Stamped that the original was signed by PET.

<sup>204</sup> Salutation and “Yours, Pierre” are handwritten.

and the use of technology to “eliminate human scale and relationships”, on the other. For my part, I feel confident that political man as such (and in my view every adult citizen should be a political man in the best sense of the term) is not inevitably doomed to the passive observer status! Your remarks remind me of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s<sup>205</sup> comments on the bearing which apparently neutral, innocuous economic planning does have on our innermost personal values as well as on our way of life. When I think back on my college years, I wonder how Lucretius’<sup>206</sup> aloofness could ever lull anyone from keeping on the alert! Do you recall:

“Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,  
E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;  
Non quia vexari quinquamst iucunda voluptas,  
Sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere  
suave est.”?

De Rerum Natura,  
ii, I.

(Sweet it is, when on the great sea the winds  
are buffeting the waters,  
To gaze from the land on another’s great  
struggles;  
Not because it is pleasure or joy that any  
one should be distressed;  
But because it is sweet to perceive from  
what misfortune you yourself are free.”  
-- Trans. by Bailey).

Well, being above all an adamant optimist, I am strongly convinced that this tension can be turned into a most creative force, so that the “global village” will gradually take shape as a true city [sic], i.e. a place worth living for all mankind. Please go on helping us to keep on the alert!

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<sup>205</sup> Paul Ricoeur, French philosopher (1913-2005).

<sup>206</sup> Lucretius, a 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE poet, wrote only one work, *On the Nature of Things*, quoted from here.

You too are ever in my prayers and in Margaret's as well.

Yours,

Pierre

July 2, 1975

Dear Pierre:

I think this may be a rather important note, and its brevity should be no indication of its significance. Apropos the problem of hanging and capital punishment, there seems to be a universal assumption that hanging is punitive, retaliation for misdeeds. I suggest that this is a very minor aspect of the matter. The central significance of capital punishment is the ritual that it entails, and this ritual serves primarily to enhance the significance and importance of human life by drawing attention to the decisive and infinite implications of the moment of death. If this is taken to concern capital punishment as figure [sic], let us consider the ground [sic] that supports that figure or procedure.

We live in a time when the coalescing of all people on earth into a single mass-public has diminished human private identity almost to the vanishing point. Anybody at a ball game, for example, is a nobody, and the entire planet has become our ball park. Under electric conditions of our inter-involvement of all mankind, the information environment has blanketed [sic] and smothered private identity. This effect has made human life appear very cheap indeed. The TV generation cannot feel [sic] very much importance attaching to the private person. On the other hand, the loss of private identity which has come rather suddenly upon Western man has produced a deep anger at this rip-off of his private self.



There are two kinds of violence relating to the same situation, first, the kind that comes from the unimportance of everybody, and second, the kind that comes from the impulse to restore one's private meaning by acts of violence. On the frontier everybody is a nobody and violence is the order of the day. Electronic man lives on such a frontier at all times, doubting his identity and his survival alike. Psychologically considered, violence is an attempt to restore order to achieve identity.

With prayers for you and Margaret

Yrs Marshall<sup>207</sup>

July 21, 1975

Dear Marshall,<sup>208</sup>

As your letters to me always are, your latest note is thought-provoking. But I find it hard to follow your thinking all the way through it. You seem to take the paradox to the point of contradiction! (Unless I am less perceptive at the end of the House session...or because of the extreme "density" of your note.) For instance, your last paragraph: if it were true that "On the frontier everybody is a nobody", I would assume that "indifference" in respect of life and death (and consequently, comfortable suicide – like Petrone's<sup>209</sup> – and euthanasia) would be the order of the day, not violence which, in your logic, is a tribute to the value of life ("I don't want to be a nobody. But the only way of being somebody is to commit murder"... ) I would rather subscribe to the following

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<sup>207</sup> The signoff and signature are handwritten.

<sup>208</sup> Salutation, signature and "and Corinne" in the last sentence are handwritten.

<sup>209</sup> Gaius Petronius Arbiter (c. 27 to 66 BCE), author of the comic novel *Satyricon*.

explanation: material comfort, social conformity, monotonous and repetitive jobs generate frustrations and aggressions for which our culture (or social organization) does not provide enough creative outlets, and destructive behaviours are the result. Konrad Lorenz's<sup>210</sup> thesis seems illuminating in this regard: even when all basic needs are satisfied and the fight for freedom from (starvation, natural fears, plague, etc.) is no longer necessary, there is still a need to fight and to relieve aggressions. The problem is: in a creative way. And in the wake of Paul Ricoeur and Erich Fromm<sup>211</sup>, I would stress that daily work and general working conditions should, as such, be creative outlets. In other words, creative opportunities must exist in more than just special hobbies or occasional ventures...Otherwise, as Ricoeur points out, we mostly "live in deferment."

Well, I find myself lecturing you. That should suffice for the time being

Margaret joins me in wishing you and Corinne all the very best.

Sincerely,

Pierre

July 30, 1975

Dear Pierre:

When you reply to my letters, I feel extremely selfish for taking any of your time at all. However, I feel obliged to clarify the theme of violence and capital punishment, if possible. Rollo May<sup>212</sup> has a book – Power and Innocence –in which the theme is my

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<sup>210</sup> Konrad Lorenz (1903-1989), Austrian-born zoologist and Nobel prize winner, whose theory of the imprinting instinct was very popular at the time.

<sup>211</sup> Erich Seligmann Fromm, psychologist and philosopher (1900-1980).

<sup>212</sup> Rollo Reece May, psychologist (1909-1994).

own, namely, that violence in its innumerable modalities is typically a response to loss of identity or to a threat against one's self, or one's thought. Technical innovations, simply by creating new environments, upset people's images of themselves. The bigger the technology, the bigger the upset, and the bigger the threat to one's image. The image can be private or corporate.

All this relates to the other situation I mentioned, namely, that one's image of one's self at a ball game is minimal. The most important figure in the world is a nobody at a ball game. Electronically, however, all of us are attending the same ball game in the same ball park, namely, Spaceship Earth. Our involvement in each other has become so intense that our private image has been reduced to the minimum [sic]. The universal response is one of anger and violence, which is not made the less by the mysteries and unexpected rip-off of the private self which has taken place. Violence is a natural attempt to re-establish and to re-discover the nature of one's being. The Scripture tells us that "the King of Heaven doth suffereth violence, for there the least shall be the most."<sup>213</sup>

My other thought in this matter concerned capital punishment as a means [sic] of re-establishing the importance and dignity of individuals. I am not advocating capital punishment, but I am pointing to its effects in enhancing the significance of the human drama of life and death. At present, the legal procedures of trial and incarceration for murder seem to multiply the sheer quantity of bureaucratic activity, while withdrawing all dignity from the participants. When you say: "I would rather subscribe to the following explanation: material comfort, social conformity, monotonous and repetitive

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<sup>213</sup> This seems to be a conflation of verses from the Gospel of Matthew.

jobs generate frustrations and aggressions for which our culture (or social organization) does not provide enough creative outlets, and destructive behaviours are the result”, I certainly agree with you. However, this situation is itself a monstrous rip-off of private identity. I also agree with your idea of the problem as one which demands creative outlets. However, I seem to be saying that the ritual of capital punishment, carried out in the most public possible way, is itself an intensively creative outlet for the entire society.

Our daughter Teri, whom you met, has spent the last three weeks at the Moscow Film Festival. Her picture on Curtis,<sup>214</sup> the photographer of North American Indians, having been one of three North American films chosen by the Russians, for their Festival. She has certainly found her creative outlet, though it has entailed some very vicious competition and frustration.

One of the strange things I have discovered about my own work is that Westerners in general resent having the effects of any technology brought to their attention. That print, or the telephone, or TV should have any effect on them at all, is taken to mean that they have been manipulated and degraded. The person who is blamed for this, is the person who points it out to them.

I enclose two or three jests which I hope you will find usable.

October 14, 1975.

Dear Marshall,

You shouldn't feel selfish for "taking any of my time at all" in writing to me. I do enjoy reading and answering your letters.

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<sup>214</sup> Molinaro explains (513) that this refers to Edward G. Curtis, and Teri McLuhan's film *The Shadow Catcher*.

Since receiving your July 30<sup>th</sup> one, I have been able to follow up your reference to Rollo May's book on Power and Innocence. Chapters 6-9 helped me get a better grasp of what you were trying to put across in your previous of July 2<sup>nd</sup> about violence and capital punishment. So too did the further elaboration you offered on the comments you made in this previous one.

I am – at least intellectually – prepared to accept as a crude fact of our present civilization that “the ritual of capital punishment, carried out in the most public possible way, is itself an intensely creative outlet for the entire society”, as you write. But I cannot help deplore such a “fact” (or “necessity”) as a serious symptom of “collective insanity”, to which remedies other than capital punishment can and will, I hope, be determined and applied in the not too distant future. And in so “deploring”, I am in no way resentful about such a fact being made known to me, nor am I inclined to place any blame on the sharp-minded thinkers and socio-analysts who apprise me of it! (By the way, “this strange” reaction of resentment and blame to bad news or to the “prophet of evil” seems to resist all technological changes, even the most sophisticated ones: in this regard, I have just read a few relevant remarks in French demographer Alfred Sauvy's most recent book, La fin des riches (p. 253 ss.). In the footsteps of scores of others, Sauvy substantiates in his own way the views of Gaston Bachelard<sup>215</sup> in his La formation de l'esprit scientifique, contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective.)

In closing, I must say how pleased I was to learn about the creative outlet...and frustration (!) your Teri found at the Moscow Film Festival. Please pass along my warmest congratulations for her so successful picture on Curtis. Your “jests” were,

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<sup>215</sup> Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962), French philosopher whose 1938 work Trudeau cites here.

indeed, highly refreshing. I will look forward to making use of them on an “appropriate occasion”.

Margaret joins me in wishing you all the very best.

I cannot end this letter without a reference to our friend Jim Davey, since he and I so enjoyed discussing your letters together. He left us at a time when we in the government needed his counsel badly. But then, there is no time when a man like Jim isn’t needed...I am sure he is helping us, and Pat and the family, with his prayers.

In friendship

Pierre<sup>216</sup>

**1976**

September 3, 1976<sup>217</sup>

Dear Pierre:

The enclosures<sup>218</sup> may help you to follow my work more easily. For thirty years at least, I have been using the two hemisphere [sic] approach under the names of the written and the oral, the visual and the acoustic, the hot and the cool, the medium and the message, figure and ground, and so on. Now it turns out that medicine has been building a great beach-head for this approach with its new understanding of the two hemispheres

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<sup>216</sup> The salutation, and everything from the beginning of the final paragraph through the signature, are handwritten.

<sup>217</sup> Also marked in handwriting with the number 280216.1

<sup>218</sup> One enclosure was a photocopy of “The Other Hemisphere” by Robert J. Trotter, from *Science News* (vol. 109), April 3, 1976 (218-223). The other was an apparently unpublished January 1967 piece by J.J. Dronkers, titled “The Great Train Robbery.”

of the brain. If you look at the traits of the left hemisphere, you will discover the lineaments of the First world – the literate and industrial world – and, on the other hand, in the right hemisphere you will perceive the characteristics of the Third world – the world without the phonetic alphabet.

During the past century, while the knowledge of the two hemispheres has been growing, there has also been a new electronic milieu or environment which automatically pushes the right hemisphere into a more dominant position than it has held in the Western world since the invention of the phonetic alphabet. The two hemispheres naturally respond to the milieu or total surround in which people live and work. My work has been a dialogue between the two hemispheres in which the characteristics of the right hemisphere are given so much recognition that I have been unintelligible to the left hemisphere people. It happens that the left hemisphere people are completely out of touch with the results and the formal characteristics of their own new electric technologies.

Courage!

yrs Marshall<sup>219</sup>

October 4, 1976.

Dear Marshall,

Thank you very much for your letter of September 3. I appreciate your thoughtfulness in keeping me informed about your work.

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<sup>219</sup> The sign-off and signature are handwritten.

As always, I find your pioneering in ideas to be most stimulating, although, I must admit, not always effortlessly grasped. Your perspective challenges us to reach towards a fuller understanding of ourselves and the world we've created.

With best wishes, and God bless,

Pierre<sup>220</sup>

November 26, 1976

Dear Pierre:

I have been "under the weather", but keeping my eye on the all-too-interesting developments in our Canadian world. This includes prayers for you and Margaret.

I enclose a few pages sent to me by Tony Schwartz<sup>221</sup>, an old friend and follower of mine who is now a recognized maestro in managing media in political terms. He has a little book called The Responsive Chord (New York: Anchor Press, 1973) which relates to many of these matters, and his page 14 states that "TV uses the eye as an ear." He is one of the very few who really understands that TV is not merely a visual medium. His late intervention may well have turned the trick for Carter.

Heartiest good wishes,

Marshall

(dictated by telephone and signed in  
Professor McLuhan's absence)

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<sup>220</sup> Stamped to note that the original was signed by Trudeau on October 12.

<sup>221</sup> Tony Schwartz was a creator of the "daisy ad," which is generally credited with helping Lyndon Johnson defeat Barry Goldwater for the U.S. presidency in 1964. The "few pages" referred to are a selection of news clippings related to the 1976 U.S. presidential election. McLuhan wrote to Trudeau again about Schwartz on April 16, 1979. In a dissertation on global issues and the importance of connection, it is worth noting that Schwartz was a lifelong agoraphobic who almost never left his New York apartment.



December 13, 1976.

Dear Marshall.

I am sorry to hear that you have not been well and hope that you are steadily improving. I appreciate your taking the time to send me the interesting articles on the use of television in the American presidential campaign. As ever, I rely on you to keep me informed of developments in the field of communications.

With best personal regards, and prayers,

Yours sincerely,<sup>222</sup>

**1977**

February 14, 1977

Dear Pierre:

This is a note on the structural reasons for the P.Q. success<sup>223</sup>. Barrington Nevitt (the management consultant with whom I did The Executive as Dropout) and I are doing an essay on the P.Q. thing, which we will send to you shortly.

What has been missed by all parties to the discussion is the hidden ground [sic] that underlies not only the Canadian but the world structure in politics. Without exception, all the 19<sup>th</sup> century patterns of relatedness or of centralism are being reversed by the sheer speed-up of information. In terms of the twin hemispheres of the brain, the

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<sup>222</sup> Stamped to say the original was signed by Trudeau on December 27.

<sup>223</sup> On November 15, the separatist Parti Québécois had won its first provincial election in Quebec.

new ground of instant information pushes the right hemisphere of the brain up into dominance. In the Third World this is not especially noticeable since they have a dominant right hemisphere at all times. However, it is very noticeable in the First World since it upsets all existing organizations of family, education, business and politics alike. The left hemisphere which has been dominant in the First World for centuries, is lineal and logical and quantitative and goal-oriented. The right hemisphere is simultaneous, oral, acoustic, intuitive and qualitative. The upsurge of this long neglected hemisphere brought Jimmy Carter<sup>224</sup> to the White House with a black vote. Jimmy is the first President from the deep South, the oral territory of the U.S.A., the place where jazz and rock and roll originate.

The hidden ground of instant information, which is as prevalent as transistor radios, automatically collapses the organization chart in all its forms, whether in classroom curriculum or in family life and bureaucracy alike. Dropout-ism, in all its forms, is the result of speed-up of information and the resulting reversal of patterns, e.g., Women's Lib, and also the powerful return of the oral tradition in Quebec. The same forces that make Roots<sup>225</sup> the top show on TV, make French nostalgia for independence and tradition a major fact. The sociologists with whom you have talked, pay no attention to hidden ground or the new subliminal factor in this electronic time. Scientists and sociologists are trained to look only at the figure [sic], not the ground. They quantify, and count noses, and ignore patterns of change. The instant or simultaneous is necessarily

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<sup>224</sup> James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, Jr. (b. 1924), President of the United States from 1977-1981.

<sup>225</sup> *Roots*, based on the 1976 Alex Haley novel *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, was a groundbreaking 8-part miniseries broadcast on ABC-TV less than a month before this letter was written.

oral and acoustic, so that all forms of lineal and connected and logical discourse yield to the analogical and the imaginative. Separatism is at present a planetary phenomenon, familiar inside every home and every community and every nation.

Prayers and good wishes,

P.S. I should add that at every level and in every situation the dropout, whether individual or group, is in search of an identity. Violence accompanies the quest for identity. On the frontier (Westerns) everybody is a nobody, ergo, everybody is rough and tough and in search of an identity.

February 24, 1977

Dear Pierre:

Everybody I know has been deeply thrilled by your recent performance and reception in the U.S. That was a really imaginative and masterly approach, which you brought off superbly.

It was while I was trying to explain charisma [sic], as manifested by Jack Kennedy and also by Jimmy Carter, that I raised the fact of your [sic] very powerful charisma. Jack Kennedy<sup>226</sup> looked like the all-American boy, the corporate, inclusive image of American ideals. Nixon, on the other hand, looked like himself alone, a private image, fatally defective in the TV age. In contrast, Jimmy Carter has the charisma of a Huck Finn<sup>227</sup>, a Southern boy, and he also has the vocal rhythms and corporate power

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<sup>226</sup> John Fitzgerald "Jack" Kennedy (1917-1963), President of the United States from 1961 until his assassination on November 22, 1963.

<sup>227</sup> The classic American novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, written by Mark Twain, was published in Britain in December 1884 and in the U.S.A. two months later.

that got him the black vote. It was while I was explaining these things that the interviewer asked: “What about Pierre Trudeau?” I replied that your corporate mask, your charisma, is both powerful and very popular with the young, in part because of the subtle hint in your image or “mask” of the native Indian. As you know, the Red man is very powerful with the TV generation since he is Third World, and they are also Third World. He was always [sic] Third World, but they, the young, are having their first experience of it. Naturally, pulled out of the context of this image discussion, it sounds very different, and even derogatory. You know me well enough to know that I would never say anything derogatory about you.

In the case of Carter, it became clear during the election that the image has supplanted the policy. A political point of view is not practical on TV since it is a resonating, multi-positional image, so that any moment of arrest or stasis permits the public to shoot you down. Maybe that is the meaning of the old gangster quote: “Talk fast, Mister!”, and also, “Smile [sic] when you say that!” I have yet to find a situation in which there is not great help in the phrase: “You think my fallacy is all wrong?” It is literally disarming, pulling the ground out from under every situation! It can be said with a certain amount of poignancy and mock deliberation.

I am doing a piece about separatism and media in collaboration with Barrington Nevitt. He’s the management consultant with whom I did the book on The Executive as Dropout. Our piece draws attention to the hidden ground [sic] that underlies all the many forms of separatism in our time. I refer to the ground [sic] of instant information that extends to the entire planet, and the effect of which is not centralism but decentralism. Any form pushed to its limit, as is pointed out by Aristotle and Aquinas, flips into the

opposite form. Whereas hardware communication is a kind of transportation which centralizes organizational structures, electric communication is simultaneous and confers autonomy on every part of a structure. That is why the executive drops out of the old organization-chart patterns at electric speed. At electric speed, which is the speed of light, we are disembodied beings. On the phone, or “on the air”, we are instantly present, but minus our bodies. Politically, discarnate man may have an image, but not a physical body. There is a corresponding loss of personal identity and responsibility which creates separatism in private life and family life and in all institutional existence. When one becomes aware of this hidden ground [sic] and its effects, one should be better prepared to cope with, and to counteract, these effects. Ours is surely the first human generation that has ever encountered such an undermining disease which afflicts us at all levels of church and state.

April 4, 1977

Dear Pierre,

I enclose my meditations on the relations of French Canada and English Canada.<sup>228</sup> Perhaps the two new things I have to say, concern the hidden effects of the ground [sic] of simultaneous information around the world, on the one hand, and the parallel to the secession of Quebec and the secession of the American South a century ago, on the other hand. In both cases the predominance of the oral culture vis-à-vis a written culture, was the decisive factor. Oral culture has been enormously enhanced by the electronic environment.

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<sup>228</sup> I have not seen the enclosure.

It is obvious that prayer is going to have more to do with easing this matter than human wisdom. I know, however, that you, for one, will bring a great deal of wisdom to bear.

Yrs Marshall

May 11, 1977

Dear Pierre:

Recently, at a Pro-Life Conference in Ottawa, it dawned on me that the peculiar character of discarnate man stems from his non-relation to “Natural” law. The mere fact of being disembodied, as we are in dreams, dissolves the relation to Nature and to “Natural” law. In the TV age especially, it is notable that the young feel few ties to external and private morality. I enclose a note on this subject.<sup>229</sup>

May 14, 1977

Dear Pierre,

I have been especially interested in the multi-culturalism of late since my daughter Teri is working on a feature film on this same theme. She is shooting the film on Cape Breton because of its tradition of French-Scottish dualism. Teri is a twin, and this picture concerns twin people and twin cultures.

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<sup>229</sup> I have not discovered the note.

Currently she is working on the film with Patrick Watson in Ottawa, and she plans to call you within the next few days. You may recall that she had dinner with us about four years ago at the Provençal here in Toronto.<sup>230</sup>

Teri's documentary film on North American Indians, The Shadow Catcher has received much international attention. Her new film will make a big contribution toward understanding the Canadian situation – the cultural one.

(My secretary is off duty on weekends!) .

Yours,

Marshall

July 25, 1977

Dear Marshall,<sup>231</sup>

Thank you for your May 11 letter and the enclosed note. I apologize for the delay in replying.

You continue to fascinate us with your treatises on the interaction and interrelation between technology and man. Your recent thoughts on the effects of the media on private morality present provocative though frightening observations of our society. One begins to wonder if our age of rapid communication leaves room for anything private – not just morality but thoughts and even creativity.

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<sup>230</sup> This paragraph has been marked out with a handwritten vertical line along the left side.

<sup>231</sup> Salutation and everything from “and in friendship” through to the end are handwritten.

I welcome your correspondence, Marshall.<sup>232</sup> You open to me an opportunity to turn my thoughts to different channels. I look forward to hearing more on your ideas of “private” morality.

Yours sincerely, and in friendship,

Pierre

When I was twenty, I was greatly influenced by Christian humanists like Mauritian<sup>233</sup>, and Christian existentialists like Mounier<sup>234</sup> and Berdiaeff<sup>235</sup>, who – in reaction to Descarte’s<sup>236</sup> dualism – were teaching us to “incarnate” our souls into our bodies, and hence to better [word needs deciphering] to Natural Law.

The T.V. age has created a new dualism, but the disembodiment is just as effective as the cartesian one. Can we get the T.V. generation interested in books? In natural law? In private morality?

P.

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<sup>232</sup> Everything from the beginning of this paragraph to the end of the letter was also sent to me as page two of Trudeau’s June 19, 1978, letter to McLuhan.

<sup>233</sup> Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), French philosopher and convert to Catholicism.

<sup>234</sup> The Personalist philosophy of Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) is cited in many sources as a great influence on Trudeau.

<sup>235</sup> Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948).

<sup>236</sup> French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) can be considered the father of modern Western philosophy.



August 5, 1977

Dear Pierre,

I enclose copy of a letter that you may find interesting.<sup>237</sup> Arthur Hurst<sup>238</sup> and I have been working for fifteen years on this problem, and only recently have we realized that Dyslexia [sic] and the loss of motor skills is directly related to television. Television is a disembodied experience. Being “on the air” is like being “on the phone” – one has no physical body.

Sincerely,

Marshall McLuhan

August 11, 1977.

Dear Dr. McLuhan,

On behalf of the Prime Minister and in his absence, I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter of August 5 and the enclosed copy of a letter of the subject of dyslexia. I will be pleased to ensure that your correspondence will be brought to Mr. Trudeau’s attention on his return.

Yours sincerely,

Hellie Wilson

Assistant Correspondence Secretary

cc: Cécile Viau – for PM’s reading file<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> The letter is addressed to Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr., then and now the governor of California.

<sup>238</sup> William Arthur Hurst (b. circa 1911/12, d. 2013) was an optometrist in Newmarket, Ontario, who also became a research associate at McLuhan’s Centre.

<sup>239</sup> This letter is included because it is the only reference I have seen to Trudeau’s reading file.



December 13, 1977

Dear Pierre:

We deeply appreciated your princely hospitality at the “Three Little Rooms”,<sup>240</sup> and your presence at our seminar left a very deep impression of your cordial and lively person.

One of the things we have been working over in the seminar has been the problem of inflations and joblessness, two closely related things. To put both matters very briefly, the nature of work has changed drastically since we have begun to live in a simultaneous information environment. By the same token, the nature and function of money has been greatly altered by the electric information environment. Apropos work, the repetitive nine-to-five job has shifted into a new pattern of role-playing [sic], which means a variety of functions, e.g. a mother doesn't have a job, she has fifty [sic] jobs, i.e., a role. The major form of work in the electronic age has become “keeping an eye on other people”, whether audience research or public relations or simply espionage. It is sometimes called “data processing”. On the other hand, apropos money, it was long ago obsolesced by “credit” whose natural tendency is towards debt and poverty. When given the speed of the computer, the credit card covers a lot of ground.

The main verb in all this is the speed of light, which also alters the role of politician from a party representative to a charismatic image. This image obsolesces parties and policies alike. This is very compressed, but I know you are busy – perhaps not too busy to hear a joke that has just turned up. It concerns a traveler returning from the U.K. with a dozen bottles of whiskey. At the Customs he is asked: “What have you got

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<sup>240</sup> Molinaro notes (537) that this refers to Three Small Rooms, a popular upscale restaurant of the era, at the Windsor Arms hotel in Toronto.

here?” He replies: “Holy water.” The Customs officer opens one of the bottles and takes a swig, and says: “That’s not holy water – that’s whiskey!” At this the traveler exclaimed rapturously: “It’s a miracle!”

Corinne and I pray that your Christmas and New Year will be liberally strewn with miracles!

December 21, 1977

Dear Pierre:

I enclose a jest that I hope will turn the Separatist tide!

Again, a Blessed New Year for you, and for Canada, and the world.

One day Trudeau had an inspiration and called Lucifer on the phone, and found that Lucifer could speak eloquent French. They talked for a long time and Lucifer had some superb ideas and suggestions. After the call, Trudeau checked on the charges, since he didn’t wish it to appear as a bill to be paid by the party, and was told the cost was \$175.00. He said: “Very good. I got wonderful value for my money on that call.” When Levesque [sic] heard about the call, he, too, put in his call and had a long talk with Lucifer. At the end of the call he asked for the charges, since he didn’t wish it to appear as a public charge. He was told: “No charge.” “But”, says he, “you charged Trudeau \$175.00.” The answer then came: “Yes, sir, but his was a long distance call, and yours is local!”

1978

June 19, 1978.

Dear Marshall,

Thank you for your letter of May 23 and the enclosed documentation.

As always, I find your thoughts most interesting. Your comments\* on an existing biculturalism in our school system present a new slant on the reasons behind the growing problem of dyslexia. I am pleased that you and Arthur Hurst are to receive funding from the Ontario government to pursue this research.<sup>241</sup>

I was interested to read your essay on Quebec and English Canada in its final draft. In the light of recent events, your theories take on a prophetic aspect. Camille Laurin's White Paper on Culture would seem to bear out some of your premises. Future events will no doubt prove or disprove their validity. Perhaps you and I will have the opportunity to discuss this at some time.

\*They also explain for me my sometime bewilderment at the lack of logic of many in the T.V. generation!

10<sup>th</sup> November, 1978

Dear Pierre:

Imagine my discomfiture when I discovered that October 18<sup>th</sup> had flitted past without a birthday greeting to you!

In place of a birthday greeting, a couple of one-liners that may come in handy:

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<sup>241</sup> If what he meant was government funding for Hurst's stereoscopic head camera, that funding never came through. Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 301 n. 59.

Time wounds all heels.

Apropos the new Pope<sup>242</sup>:

We used to have a Peter's Pence, and now we have a Poll Tax.

Whereas the Church was thought to have been

built on a rock, it is now built on a pole.

The inflation situation is world-wide, yet it demands a scapegoat for each region.

As for unemployment, the nature of work necessarily changes in an information environment based on electric speed, so that what used to be called espionage now appears to be a natural form of human occupation.<sup>243</sup>

You may find some use for my definition of "charisma", namely "Looking like a lot of other people." Kronkite [sic] looks like everybody's favourite guardian, and Carter looks like the All-American Southern boy, namely Huck Finn.

We keep up our prayers for you and other crucial figures.

6<sup>th</sup> December, 1978

Dear Pierre:

Seeing a headline about the "Unity Task Force"<sup>244</sup>, I was suddenly struck by the incongruity of relating bilingualism to unity. If all Canadians spoke both languages there would be great enrichment of our culture, but there would be a much greater tendency

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<sup>242</sup> Karol Józef Wojtyła (b. May 18, 1920) had been elected Pope John Paul II on October 16, 1978, and served until his death on April 2, 2005.

<sup>243</sup> Someone has added, in handwriting, "and the largest!"

<sup>244</sup> The Task Force on Canadian Unity had been established in July 1977 as part of the reaction to the election of the Parti Québécois government in Quebec the previous November.

towards plurality and diversity rather than unity. Surely to reach unity as a desired effect of a bilingualism programme requires imposition from above. On the other hand a bilingual pattern could be **acceptable** [sic] if it grew up naturally from below. But again, such an idea would not lead to unity, but rather to diversity. Somehow a non-sequitur [sic] has entered the rationale of the bilingualism programme. The federal idea of free association is not the same thing as unity. Do not English Canadians speak American and feel at home in the U.S.A. without the slightest thought of unity? Many French Canadians must likewise feel quite at home in English Canada linguistically without supposing that they have any commitment to unity. I am trying to discover the line of reasoning that led to the adoption of a bilingualism policy as a means of unity, when it almost certainly has the opposite effect.

Just as a possible parallel, Governor Brown<sup>245</sup> in California was originally flatly opposed to Proposition 13<sup>246</sup>, but managed to switch horses in midstream and to take on Number 13 as his personal policy and as his primary election issue. This switch proved to be completely successful. In other words, might it not be entirely practical to modulate the bilingual programme as a means of fostering enrichment rather than unity?<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Edmund Gerald "Jerry" Brown, Jr. (b. 1938) was governor of California from 1975 to 1983, as he is now.

<sup>246</sup> California Proposition 13 (People's Initiative to Limit Property Taxation), passed earlier that year, placed extreme limitations on property tax increases.

<sup>247</sup> LAC version, slightly different in punctuation than Molinari (540). No signature or signature line.

December 15, 1978

Dear Marshall:

Many thanks for your kind note of November 10.

Please don't feel too wretched. I was not entirely forgotten by your family on the occasion of my birthday!

With kindest regards and wishes.

Sincerely,

Pierre<sup>248</sup>

December 18, 1978

Dear Marshall,<sup>249</sup>

Thank you for your letter of December 6 in which you comment on bilingualism as it relates to national unity.

I am not quite sure what reasoning lies behind your statement that if all Canadians were bilingual, there would be more diversity in the country. Surely if we could all communicate with each other, we would feel a greater degree of unity. You say we feel no unity with Americans even though we speak the same language. This may be true to some extent; however, I think we feel closer to Americans than we do to others and that

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<sup>248</sup> This letter was typed, except for the signature and a note from Trudeau at the bottom of the page: "For your collection, here is a great one-liner from Chateaubriand: 'Il y a des jours où il faut dépenser son mépris avec économie, à cause du grand nombre de nécessitez.' Trudeau must have been quoting from memory, as the actual quotation is "Il y a des temps où l'on ne doit dépenser le mépris qu'avec l'économie, à cause du grand nombre de nécessitez."

<sup>249</sup> "Dear Marshall" and, at the end, "Pierre" are the only parts handwritten. The prime minister appears to have favored the use of a fountain pen with blue ink. Later in the letter, the word "both" is lightly underlined in the same ink.



this feeling has resulted not just from geographic proximity but also the idea that they are less “foreign” than those who do not speak one of our languages.

As for your assertion that the government’s bilingual policy is divisive, I fear that you, as well as a great many other Canadians, have not fully understood the purpose of the policy. The Official Languages Act<sup>250</sup> guaranteed that Canadians could deal with their federal government in the official language of their choice. The main thrust of the law was not to change the languages spoken, or to make people bilingual, but rather to ensure that both the principal languages of the country would be fully respected at the federal level. The promotion of this concept of language equality in turn ensures that the linguistic groups are treated equally by their government. Neither group will feel that the other is being shown favoritism by the government. When people are made to feel inferior or unfairly treated on the grounds of the language they speak, it is impossible that they feel any kindred spirit with the group they see as being treated as superior. In this way, the language policy does promote unity. This is the line of reasoning that led to the adoption of the policy and its implementation.

I hope that I have explained this to your satisfaction Marshall, and thank you again for giving me the benefit of your views.

With kind personal regards and prayers.

Yours sincerely,

Pierre

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<sup>250</sup> The Official Languages Act, passed in 1969, made both English and French the official languages of Canada.

1979

1<sup>st</sup> February, 1979

Dear Pierre:

Your thoughtful reply to my query about what line of thinking lay behind the bilingual policy brought to my mind the familiar phrase of Baudelaire<sup>251</sup> in his Envoi to Les Fleurs du Mal, “Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frere [sic]”. The “lecteur” is the reader of the poem who “puts it on” as a mask through which he looks at the world. (The hypocrite is a mask-wearer.) When the reader “puts on” the poem he inevitably distorts it, and this is reciprocated by the poet, who “puts on” the reader as his “semblable” and his “frere” [sic]. The poet has a natural grievance against the reader’s distortion of his poem, and so he enjoys the activity of distorting the reader in turn by putting on the reader as his mask. (Behind the idea of the “put-on” is the metaphysical idea of the cognitive agent who is and becomes the thing known in classical philosophy [emphasis and lack of ending parenthesis in orig].)

If a poem has the natural and inevitable power of altering both the reader and the poet and their inter-relationship, how much more is this true of our two languages! The speaker of any language assumes it as a medium or a mask by which he experiences the world in a special way, and by which he relates to people in a very special way. The French tongue as a mask or medium at the federal level has a quite different meaning and function from the same tongue at the private level. A language in the hands of a lawyer or a judge or a bureaucrat has a quite different significance from the same language used by

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<sup>251</sup> French poet Charles Pierre Baudelaire (1821-1867).

friends or enemies. I suggest that your approach to bilingualism as a means of “language equality” is abstract and objective, but not related to the experiential, subjective level.

That is not to say this is a misguided attitude, but it merely indicates that the effects [sic] of languages as media are quite different from the input or intended meanings. All inputs have side effects which are usually considered irrelevant to the speaker or sender.

You are probably familiar with the Shannon-Weaver model of communication theory<sup>252</sup>. (I enclose a copy of it in an article on the two hemispheres of the brain.)

Shannon and Weaver were mathematicians who considered the side effects as noise [sic]. They assumed that these could be eliminated by simply stepping up the charge of energy in the circuit.

The left hemisphere, the one developed in our Western world by phonetic literacy is the lineal and visual mode of objective awareness, whereas the right hemisphere is the acoustic and involved mode of awareness. The third world is almost entirely right hemisphere, and the first world is tending, under electric-information environments, to transform itself into a new kind of third world. The third world, on the other hand, is frantically trying to develop the attributes of the left hemisphere by lineal and quantitative education and production. The confusion and loss of identity in the first world is one of the results we experience as we acquire third world characteristics (loss of private identity and loss of goals, etc.). Should China be effective in acquiring phonetic western literacy, the explosion in that ancient culture would be total. The ancient Greeks did not long survive their own acquisition of phonetic literacy. The explosion within our

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<sup>252</sup> Developed in 1949 by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, this is the most well-known model of communications theory, explaining the steps in transmitting and receiving a message.

own world is telling enough and is the occasion for much prayer from us for you and your great responsibility.

Corinne and I thought that the Christmas card photo of you and the boys was and is most eloquent and delightful.

16<sup>th</sup> April, 1979

Dear Pierre:

I have been following the election campaign and wish to make a brief note, namely, that since the issues are tending to get “hot”, it would be a huge advantage to shift the main broadcast coverage to radio. Radio is a “hot” medium and is indispensable when the issues get hot. TV is a fantasy medium, and has good reason to be called “cool” or all-involving. The current issue of Business Week, I have been told, carries comments on the surprise return of Bill Clement<sup>253</sup> as Governor of Texas, the first Republican in many years. He did it by radio – radio spots. The best man in the world for such spot coverage is my friend Tony Schwartz in New York City. He put Carter in by some inspired spots at the last moment. Tony is basically a sound, or radio man, although he has a little book on television called The Responsive Chord. I tried to get in touch with Bill Coutts<sup>254</sup> about this but failed to reach him.

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<sup>253</sup> William Perry “Bill” Clements, Jr. (1917-2011), governor of Texas from 1976 to 1983 and again from 1987 to 1991.

<sup>254</sup> Molinaro points out (544) that McLuhan meant James Coutts (1938-2013), Trudeau’s principal secretary at the time. I made contact with Coutts to try to arrange an interview, but he died before we could make that arrangement.

Radio charisma is a completely different thing from TV charisma. TV charisma means looking like a lot of nice people, e.g. the Kronkite [sic]<sup>255</sup> image. Radio charisma merely consists in sounding dedicated.

Address for Tony Schwartz is:

455 West 56<sup>th</sup> St.,

NEW YORK, N.Y. 10019

U.S.A.

July 25, 1979.

Dear Marshall,<sup>256</sup>

I have just reread the telegram<sup>257</sup> which you sent to me the day after the election.

It is indeed time for renewal and I find it most encouraging that there is so much good will and determination by so many who want to take part in the refreshment process.

With many warm thanks and wishes.

Sincerely, and God bless!

Pierre

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<sup>255</sup> Walter Cronkite (1916-2009), arguably the most trusted television news anchor and reporter of the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>256</sup> This letter was on stationery with the letterhead “Leader of the Opposition – Chef de L’Opposition,” as it was written during Trudeau’s brief tenure in that office. The salutation, signature and “and God bless!” were handwritten.

<sup>257</sup> I have been unable to find this telegram.

7<sup>th</sup> September, 1979

Dear Pierre:

I think there is no question but that your beard has cooled your image many degrees! There may be a time when you would wish to hot it up again. This, by the way, reminds me of a factor that relates to our Centre here: we have a monopoly on the study of the effects of media and technology<sup>258</sup>. I wish this were not so but the monopoly is very real. The Greeks did not even study the effects of the alphabet on themselves, or its relation to the rise of Euclid and rationalism.

Another matter is that this is the last year for the Centre as it is presently related to the University of Toronto. This is mainly a financial matter, although there is also the fact that they cannot find anybody to replace me. I personally know of some possible replacements and this could be one of the matters I would like to discuss with you when we get together.

Our own study of the relations of media and politics might be an aspect that would favour some support. Hutchins<sup>259</sup> once set up a Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in California, which is still functioning. It would be easy to improve on their programme. There is, incidentally, a basic reason why we have this monopoly on the study of the effects of media and I would be happy to discuss that with you also when we get together.

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<sup>258</sup> Both the beard and the Center show up in a YouTube audio clip of an interview with Trudeau by a former head of the university's McLuhan program. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K4LooUizml>.

<sup>259</sup> Prominent educator Robert Maynard Hutchins (1899-1977) established the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in 1959.

Jimmy Carter, by the way, is the first American President from the Deep South, and many of his problems arise from a culture-clash between his oral tradition and the bureaucratic world of modern politics and government. I have often said that he is, as it were, Huck Finn in the White House. Since he is coming up here in November it might be feasible to be of some help to him!<sup>260</sup>

1980

April 28, 1980.

Dear Marshall,<sup>261</sup>

I have been hearing about the difficulties you are presently experiencing at the Centre and would like you to know that you are in my thoughts. You had intimated that there were financial problems, but I had no idea that the University was considering closing the Centre.

Who knows better than you and I the bitter irony of the old saw about a prophet in his own land...However, you can be assured of a prominent place not only in Canadian history, but in the annals of technocracy. It is heartening to see that the press is treating you with the respect you are owed.

All the best to you and Corinne.

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<sup>260</sup> The next piece of correspondence is an October 18, 1979, birthday card from McLuhan to Trudeau, with "Happy Birthday" written across the top and signed "All the best, Marshall" (in handwriting that is not his, as it is much better writing and only a month after his massive stroke). It was sent to the prime minister as simply "Monsieur Pierre Trudeau" at 541 Acacia in Ottawa. This is the second envelope I have seen addressed Trudeau at that address.

<sup>261</sup> Salutation, signature and "and God bless" are handwritten.

Yours sincerely, and God bless,

Pierre<sup>262</sup>

**1981**

[Lahr? Lake?]<sup>263</sup>

January 7, 1981.

(Ottawa, K1A 0A2)

My dear Corinne,

It is with great sadness that I write to express my sympathy to you and your family. Despite the setback which Marshall suffered more than a year ago, the news of his death was still a terrible shock.

Much will be said and written, and rightly so, about his marvelous intellect, his years of teaching, his global eminence as a social theorist, as a seminal scholar and writer. But the dominant thoughts in my own mind are of you and your children, and of my own sense of loss.

I have longed valued his friendship, and have warm memories of our stimulating conversations. His letters were a constant delight, even when they included those terrible puns he used to urge me to use in political debate.

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<sup>262</sup> I have seen reference to a December 1980 Christmas card from Trudeau to McLuhan, but have not been able to locate it.

<sup>263</sup> Trudeau has corrected this to show he is not actually in Ottawa. The salutation and signature are also in his hand.



Marshall's life and work increased my sense of pride in being a Canadian. His crackling mind provided me with much pleasure and many lasting insights. His work, I am sure, will live on to challenge thoughtful men and women of future generations.

At this time, perhaps what is of most consolation to you is your knowledge of his great faith, and of the goodness of his life. He was a man whose fame did not dilute his profound awareness that our destiny in life is to love and to serve.

In the name of the government and people of Canada, I want to express the sympathy of a nation which is saddened by his death, and grateful for his life. For my part, I simply pray that God will grant strength, lasting peace and serenity of spirit to you and your family.

Yours sincerely,

Pierre

### Part III: The Resonating Interval

Trudeau and McLuhan were aware of each other before Trudeau won the federal Liberal leadership in 1968, but it wasn't until after that win that the relationship began and it was McLuhan who reached out first. His admiration for Trudeau is not in doubt, but he also was fond of making himself useful to the well-known, or at least trying to. If looked at as a status issue, based on the letters, McLuhan, the teacher, was below Trudeau, the increasingly known figure, but, perhaps as befits a teacher, his letters are generally longer and more frequent than the prime minister's.

At the time of that first letter – April 16, 1968 – McLuhan was teaching at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York, and living in affluent Bronxville, next door to television icon Jack Paar, host of the *Tonight* show. In that letter, McLuhan alludes to a number of issues that are important to him and that will recur in the correspondence – it is almost as if the rest of the letters unpack the first. Those issues include both “media” and various media, Canadian identity, post-Fordism (though he doesn't use that term), religion, Canada-U.S. relations and the use of image in politics.

McLuhan told Trudeau, Canada's “first true media-imaged leader,”<sup>395</sup> that he decided to be in touch after reading a column in the right-leaning *Toronto Telegram* tentatively and briefly extending the hand of peace to the newly-elected Liberal party leader. McLuhan then launches into an explanation of why the columnists, Douglas Fisher and Harry Crowe, are “irrelevant to the electronic age” because, like all “men of the press,” they are linear thinkers in a mosaic world, aiming at targets with fixed ideas when all that is really possible is to send out probes.

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<sup>395</sup> Souaid, “Poetry, philosophy, spirituality,” 15.

The U.S.A. is a particularly good example of that obsolete thinking, he continued, but Canada, and especially French Canada,<sup>396</sup> having never had a fully industrialized 19<sup>th</sup> century, were not.

“I have always felt that one of Canada’s greatest assets was its being a kind of backwater,” he wrote. Russia and Japan were also among the countries that skipped a century and “can now speedily adapt to electric technology without endangering any literate and mechanistic backlog of achievement.”

In 1968, new media was already profoundly shaping one of Trudeau’s core constituencies, even if one too young to vote for him: my generation. “The TV generation, for example, is almost oriental in its involvement in the inner rather than the outer life. This means, naturally, a total loss of goal orientation in the old sense,” McLuhan wrote Trudeau.

Catholicism is another recurrent topic introduced in this first letter, not only in McLuhan’s inclusion of “the de-Romanization” of the Church as an example of an old power learning to cope with “the decentralizing effects of electric information,” but also in his complimentary close: “With most cordial wishes and prayers.” Through the years, both men sent each other prayers in this form or even slightly more directly.

A month later, James Davey<sup>397</sup> replied to McLuhan on Trudeau’s behalf and said the Liberal leader, by that point in the middle of his first election campaign as leader, had

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<sup>396</sup> Although by 1968 the people of Quebec, the Québécois, had pretty much stopped referring to their province as “French Canada” or themselves as “French-Canadians,” the rest of the country had not.

<sup>397</sup> Because James Davey was so important in managing the relationship between Trudeau and McLuhan, and because there was a basic understanding that he might often act as Trudeau’s surrogate in the conversation, I had no hesitation in including correspondence from or to him. I took longer to decide to include a number of memos and letters from outside that group of three characters, but each in its own way helps illustrate the underlying mechanics of the relationship.

already used some of McLuhan's ideas while addressing a group of broadcasters and was interested in a meeting once the election was over. Davey was their intermediary for the next six years.

In the U.S., it was primary season and, on June 3, McLuhan wrote Trudeau to comment on the television debate between Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy, saying that TV "is not a debating medium" and so it is too bad Trudeau feels like making such appearances during the campaign. In this letter, he wished the prime minister the best for June 9 when, for the first time in Canadian history, there was a debate between political leaders before an election. It seems McLuhan was correct in his assessment of television as a poor medium for such an event:

The debate included Trudeau, Stanfield, Douglas, and in the latter part Réal Caouette [sic], with Caouette speaking French and Trudeau alternating between the languages. The assassination of Robert F. Kennedy three days before cast a pall over the proceedings, and the stilted format was generally seen as boring and inconclusive.<sup>398</sup>

Writers vary in their reports of whether McLuhan ever watched television, but he apparently did for work (Trudeau very rarely watched TV).

Never one to worry about what would come to be known as political correctness, McLuhan told Trudeau that world leaders are so unprepared for the world-changing global effects of the new technologies that all so-called political action "takes on the appearance of a paraplegic soccer match." Ever prescient, he noted that the "software" environment erodes human identity and then "[t]here is a corresponding release of violence to recover identity after technological innovation." He asked, "Would not a high

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<sup>398</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian\\_federal\\_election,\\_1968](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_federal_election,_1968)

degree of awareness of these media effects (e.g. radio in Nigeria or in any tribal territory) enable us to set up social therapies and immunizing programs exactly comparable to medical action in the face of an endemic disease?"

On June 12, McLuhan returned to the subject of television debates and why they are not set up visually to be effective in that medium. He doesn't spell out the reasons, but it seems he felt the physical set-up restrained the candidates.

He also claimed in this letter to having never seen either Trudeau or opposition leader Robert Stanfield before this debate but, given evidence that he met Trudeau at least fleetingly in 1964, this must mean he had never seen them on television. He commented on Trudeau's image, cool and mask-like, comments which are among the most quoted in discussions of their relationship: "Your own image is a corporate mask, inclusive, requiring no private nuance whatsoever. This is your 'cool' TV power. Iconic, sculptural. A mask 'puts on' an audience. At a masquerade we are not private persons."

Then, in McLuhan-speak of the highest order, he went on to discuss the cover of that week's *TV Guide*, "a Dali masterpiece." I find the cover desolate and off-putting, but McLuhan saw a picture showing "in detail the tactile quality of the TV image" in which

The two thumbs with the TV images on the nails are carefully separated to indicate the "gap" or interval constituted by touch. The age of tactility via television and radio is one of the innumerable interfaces or "gaps" that replace the old connections, legal, literate and visual.

The reference to Dali is not the only art reference in their correspondence and what is interesting is the assumption that there was still some shared basic knowledge among certain educated classes that could assume both men would, without explanation, know who Dali was. That world of that kind of shared knowledge was already coming

apart (and would explode into bits with the full bloom of the computer age), a development McLuhan deplored. As he told Tom Wolfe,

I do see the prospect of a rich and creative retribalized society -- free of the fragmentation and alienation of the mechanical age -- emerging from this traumatic period of culture clash; but I have nothing but distaste for the process of change. As a man molded within the literate Western tradition, I do not personally cheer the dissolution of that tradition through the electric involvement of all the senses: I don't enjoy the destruction of neighborhoods by high-rises or revel in the pain of identity quest. No one could be less enthusiastic about these radical changes than myself. I am not, by temperament or conviction, a revolutionary; I would prefer a stable, changeless environment of modest services and human scale. TV and all the electric media are unraveling the entire fabric of our society, and as a man who is forced by circumstances to live within that society, I do not take delight in its disintegration... I derive no joy from observing the traumatic effects of media on man, although I do obtain satisfaction from grasping their modes of operation.<sup>399</sup>

There is a strange omission in the letters here: none I have seen mention the assassination of Robert Kennedy. But one of the many clippings found in the McLuhan archives' Trudeau files has a fascinating juxtaposition between that tragedy and Trudeau's election campaign. A June 10, 1968, front page clipped from the *Toronto Star* had a lead story about a televised debate of party leaders during Trudeau's first election campaign; in a photo in a black-bordered box to the left of that story, Ethel Kennedy and one of her sons stand at Robert Kennedy's graveside.

Trudeau led the federal Liberals to a majority win on election night, June 25, taking 154 seats of the 264 seats and over 45% of the popular vote. The Progressive Conservatives, with 72 seats, remained the official opposition party.

The first letter from Trudeau to McLuhan is in early July, thanking him for the gift of two books, one of which, the French-language version of *Understanding Media*, would have given the prime minister the core of McLuhan's thinking (that work was the

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<sup>399</sup> McLuhan and Zingrone, "Playboy Interview" in *Essential*, 267.

high point of McLuhan's career). This letter is important because it is stamped as having been seen by the prime minister and has a handwritten note from Trudeau at the bottom: "Ever since our brief exchange in Charlottetown June 1964, I have been hoping we might meet again."<sup>400</sup>

Trudeau was himself at that time finishing the book that he would be best known for, a collection of his essays published as *Federalism and the French Canadians*. The *New York Times* asked McLuhan to review it and, on September 27, he sent Trudeau an advance copy of the review.<sup>401</sup>

"I hope it will not displease you," McLuhan wrote. "I did, of course, intend to tease the Americans," writing in the review that "No American President, past or present, can approximate his range of awareness or his reading of men and affairs."

The review, filled with puns and references to many McLuhanisms current at the time or soon to come into fuller bloom,<sup>402</sup> was effusive in its analysis of Trudeau, "the Man in the Mask" who "grew up straddling two cultures, perfectly at home in both."

McLuhan wrote that, rather than having a national identity, Canada

...has had a cultural interface of seventeenth century France and nineteenth century America...Like all backward and tribal societies it is very much "turned

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<sup>400</sup> John English suggested to me in a May 2012 meeting that the encounter was probably at a meeting of the Learned Societies. The first volume of the Clarkson and McCall bio (p. 83) places Trudeau in Charlottetown in 1964 at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association and the speech Trudeau gave there, reprinted in his *Federalism and the French Canadians* and elsewhere, is dated June of that year.

<sup>401</sup> McLuhan obviously read the book before he was contacted by the Times. In his June 12 letter to Trudeau he said, "Your book on *Federalism* is on the Edmund Burke level. My favorite quote from him is: The first right of every man in civilized society is the right to be protected against the consequences of his own stupidity."

<sup>402</sup> "To this day, the French term *McLuhanisme* describes the junction of discrepant worlds that can mingle and intersect, bringing illumination to one another." McLuhan and Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan*, 270.

on” or at home in the new electric world of the twentieth century. Japan, of course, is a much greater instance of the same dynamic.

On October 17, the Official Languages Act was introduced in Parliament.<sup>403</sup> The Act, which made both French and English the official languages of Canada, guaranteed the right to use either language in all federal institutions and services. The Act’s passage

...and its later entrenchment in the new Constitution in 1981, was the centrepiece of Trudeau’s policy. Its intent was to give legislative effect to Trudeau’s belief that only when the French and English languages were given equal protection as working languages at the federal level would French Canadians come to look upon the Canadian government as their own.<sup>404</sup>

Yet somehow, the night before this critical event, Trudeau had made the time to drop in at a strategy meeting with McLuhan, a number of Trudeau’s advisers, Liberal politicians, Davey and others. The day after this “McLuhan seminar,” the first of an anticipated series, McLuhan wrote the prime minister with some suggestions that were generated, especially on how to bring young people usefully into the political process in a way that had never before been tried. Student power leaders, he wrote “represent one of the principal problems of government today” and he suggested strongly that Trudeau hold a series of televised meetings with small numbers of them, not in front of a studio audience.<sup>405</sup> McLuhan offered to contact student leaders at the University of Toronto and invite them to participate in this “government of the air” and wrote,

The answer to their problems...does not consist in plugging them into some existing bureaucracy, whether of high school or of college. They are not looking for “feed-back” but “feed-forward” ...

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<sup>403</sup> The Act passed on July 7, 1969.

<sup>404</sup> Cook, *The Teeth of Time*, 202.

<sup>405</sup> In a November 7 letter which sounds more like Davey than Trudeau, the prime minister says the idea of such a television show is “provocative,” but he will consider it.



Just as the gap between culture and business has closed by virtue of an electric information environment, so the gap between politics and youth has closed. Teenagers are no longer young persons mentally or emotionally. Indeed, part of their dilemma consists in being categorized [sic] as teenagers or as youngsters.

Davey's analysis of the same meeting, written to Stanbury on October 22, concentrated more directly on ways McLuhan might help participants better understand contemporary politics, nationally and globally. In future sessions, he wrote, it would be useful for McLuhan to share his thoughts on "pluralistic societies or two-language societies," "the role of Canada versus the U.S. and Canada versus the world," "the future role for the United Nations" and, more practically, especially for McLuhan's expertise,

What is the role of a political party in today's electric age? The old and very slow ways of feeding information through the channels of local associations, provincial and national associations and M.P.s, etc., don't seem to me to have much continued relevance. How do we short-circuit this process but still maintain a "political party"?

The attempt to have McLuhan meet with politicians and Liberal party members in a structured setting seems to have fallen apart almost immediately: on November 12, Stanbury wrote Trudeau to tell him of McLuhan's complaints and unwillingness to continue, especially if not paid a large (unspecified) amount of money and there is no reference in the correspondence to any more such seminars. There is an underlying theme in a variety of letters about McLuhan to the prime minister, never completely spelled out, that the professor is a prima donna.

On November 13, McLuhan wrote to Trudeau with advice about media strategy, criticizing as too formal the form of a televised discussion with students Trudeau had held a few days earlier. Although he made no reference to the election of Richard Nixon to the U.S. presidency only a week before, he called American political conventions a "disaster," for their lack of intimacy. He told the prime minister that his *War and Peace*

*in the Global Village* explains “how technological change deprives individuals and societies of their identity images, with resulting struggle for new images” and enclosed a copy of his new work *Through the Vanishing Point* which explains “how many new kinds of space, psychic and social, result from technological change.”<sup>406</sup> It is in response to this letter and book that Trudeau wrote McLuhan on November 25, asking for help.

What is also interesting about that letter is that the prime minister admits to a lack of intuition in figuring out the implications of “the sometimes search and sometimes struggle for new images in which many communities of our society are engaging.” According to one writer, “...his lack of rapport with people on an individual level, and ‘the people’ on a national level, is due in part to his ‘consistent denial of the importance of intuition. To be intuitive, you have to be vulnerable, and Pierre didn’t want to be open to hurts.’”<sup>407</sup>

Several months earlier, Trudeau had established a Task Force on Government Information, charged with discovering how to improve the federal government’s information services and “recommend methods which would increase the government’s knowledge of the needs and concerns of Canadians.”<sup>408</sup> This is likely what McLuhan meant by “your new Information Task Force” in his December 2 letter to the prime minister. In that letter, McLuhan not only explained what he does (“My forte is structural

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<sup>406</sup> One of McLuhan’s critics wrote that technology’s effect on space was not quite as ethereal: “...each of the modern media has increased the capacity for controlling space...by reducing signaling time (the gap between the time a message is sent and the time it is received) between persons and places...While allowing for production efficiency, print does not possess an efficient distribution system and is dependent upon ship, rail, and air transportation to gain rapid and widespread circulation. The development of electronic communication beginning with telegraph and perfected by radio and television solved simultaneously the problems of rapid production and distribution.” Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 136.

<sup>407</sup> McCall, *My Life as a Dame*, 297.

<sup>408</sup> Murray, 8. The report of the task force led to the establishment of the short-lived Information Canada.

analysis of new problems and environments that, unawares to us, reprogram our sensory lives”), but also said he would like to be more help to Trudeau in person but cannot travel much because of a full academic schedule and continued recuperation from extremely serious brain surgery a year earlier. He provided the prime minister with insight into the globalizing business world, noting that, just as Canada has never been committed to a single course, there is a “recent need of the business world to switch from private enterprise to tribal conglomerates on the pattern of medieval dynastic marriages, another massive example of decentralism foisted upon us by electric speeds.” This letter has hints of both McLuhan as *prima donna* and as a person who fawns over celebrities.

By now, even Davey wants to see McLuhan less and handled carefully, writing to Trudeau on December 13, via Marc Lalonde, that

He is a man of immense capacity and great gifts of insight, but he is far enough out in the future that it is difficult to discuss usefully current problems with him. I believe that we can get the greatest value from the horizons that he can open to our thinking rather than the illumination of the path immediately ahead.

On January 24, 1969, McLuhan wrote Trudeau a wide-ranging letter touching on a number of global issues, including religion (“Even the good news of the gospel can only be sold by hellfire. Vatican II made a very big mistake in this matter as in other matters”) and, to begin with, media (“Your very cool dealings with our very hot medium the press, naturally produces intense interface or friction”). The comments on media were likely prompted by press reaction about ten days earlier to Trudeau’s behavior during the Commonwealth Conference in London when, after one formal banquet, he infamously slid down a bannister.

McLuhan here also discussed organization, with a plug for the recently-published *The Age of Discontinuity* by his friend Peter Drucker. Discontinuity, in this sense,

...characterizes the electronic era; unlike the connected environment of print culture, electronic culture produces meaning through juxtaposition, as in hypertext or the frames of a graphic text. McLuhan characterized such spaces as “resonant” because meaning is produced in the interval between these spaces, as sound is produced between the tines of a tuning fork and surfaces are produced by molecules in tension...<sup>409</sup>

This letter also initiated a discussion of “Jet City” that comes up again in their correspondence. McLuhan wrote,

The change in all organizations today is the result of putting fast electric information services around slow ones. Jet City transforms the globe into a single metropolis but it also destroys all existing metropolitan areas based on slow transport. In the same way, the telephone destroys the bureaucracy based on the memo or the letter.

In farsighted comments about the same subject, in a letter on April 14, 1969, McLuhan wrote that

Jet city is a circulating city. People now circulate in the same way that books used to, one hundred years ago. This means that it is pure folly to spend money on classrooms for schools and colleges. It is much cheaper and more effective to send the young to the areas of the world in which they have need to immerse for their studies.

Moreover, the buildings that do exist can now be used “for continued education of the elders of the tribe.”

Davey tried to understand and explain the January 24 letter and drafts a reply for Trudeau on February 13. Davey’s memo to Trudeau the same day is one of the more practical discussions in the correspondence, trying to apply McLuhan’s ideas to an actual political reality – in this case, how his ideas about the use of television could be helpful at future conferences.

McLuhan sent quite a self-centered reply on March 12, suggesting that, when it comes to Davey, “It would be helpful if he had some acquaintance with my written

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<sup>409</sup> McLuhan, *On the Nature of Media*, 164.

things” – surely he would have known by then that it was Davey’s interest in his work that helped his access to the prime minister. Davey pressed on -- in a memo to Lalonde on March 31, he mentioned a planned visit with McLuhan and also with the Toronto police superintendent and raised issues concerning the FLQ and Quebec politics of the time. He reminded the prime minister that, just the week before, the federal government almost had to send armed forces to assist the Montreal police (I assume to handle the large pro-FLQ demonstration at McGill University) and asked the critical question: “What will we do in future if we receive another such request?” The answer came during the October Crisis the following year.

On April 14, after meeting in Toronto with Davey, McLuhan wrote a long letter to Trudeau, leading with a clarification that the consulting fees he would like to charge would not apply to any personal conversations between them. The letter touched on concepts of work and home, young and old, tribalism, privacy, media and what the global means to business and education. McLuhan wrote that

Business itself has become a dozen times more involved in education than schools and colleges. The educational budgets of personnel on company time (not even mentioning the armed services) is twenty times that of the communal budget for schools and colleges. This new dominance of information and the knowledge industries completely alters what is called “zoning.” Nineteenth-century hardware industry is now receding into insignificance. This means the end of the old division between work and residence.

There is also no division between public and private, he continued:

A tribal man has no privacy. Under electric conditions there can be no privacy. The privacy invaders are the bulwark of the new knowledge industries, from the pollsters to the insurance companies, and the credit ratings, “the eye in the sky”, the age of the “snoop.”

McLuhan often sent Trudeau jokes and puns (his May 29 letter to the prime minister is almost nothing but), noting here that

I collect funny stories since they are infallible indexes of public grievance. You cannot only predict but pin-point areas of grievance by the jokes that circulate...East Berliners express their grievances by pointing to the great Russian breakthrough: the crossing of glow-worms with body lice now permits the entire population of Russia to read Pravda in bed at night!

Davey now began arranging a private meeting for McLuhan with Trudeau and a few others, although noting in an April 23 memo to Lalonde that, while the professor can be valuable, “because he is a somewhat overpowering personality, the problem will be to find if any arrangements with him can be effective and, if so, which.”

Trudeau and McLuhan’s first dinner together in Ottawa, which took weeks to plan, was held on July 9. A week earlier, Davey warned Trudeau in a memo figuring out the guest list that “McLuhan is essentially a monologist and requires very little priming to encourage a discourse.”<sup>410</sup> Cabinet member Don Jamieson, foreign affairs advisor Ivan Head (who was given the responsibility of looking after McLuhan at the end of the evening) and Liberal Party operative Torrance Wylie were guests. Head “was the inspiration for Trudeau’s decision to develop a network of personal friendships with Third World leaders, and to become an authority on north-south relations.”<sup>411</sup> Davey suggested certain subjects be discussed at the dinner: youth, education, organizations (particularly government) and McLuhan’s persistent suggestion that the prime minister appear on TV with various groups to discuss the problems of the country.

Two days before the dinner, Parliament passed the Official Languages Act, but I don’t know whether that came up at dinner. When McLuhan next wrote to Davey, on July 17, he opened with “The visit with Trudeau was most delightful” and then skipped

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<sup>410</sup> Memo, Davey to Trudeau, July 3, 1969.

<sup>411</sup> Gwyn, *The Northern Magus*, 83.

on to briefly discuss economic notions he thought might be relevant follow-up to the dinner party. That discussion continued in a letter on August 27, drawing heavily on the book he was writing with Barrington Nevitt.<sup>412</sup>

As mentioned in my introductory essay, there is now a large gap in the correspondence. This was the period during which Trudeau was falling in love with his future wife, Margaret Sinclair, while dealing with the usual affairs of state and, perhaps above all, the developing FLQ situation that would culminate in the 1970 October Crisis. When the correspondence picks up again on March 7, 1970, with a letter from McLuhan to Davey, McLuhan used as his starting point a recent viewing of the movie “Z,” a political thriller in which a rightwing government attacks pacifists supporting the opposition, and he made a couple of references to ways in which any bureaucracy becomes a police state when sped up by new technologies:

A good example of new technology turning bureaucracy into a police state is the traffic question. As the motor car becomes obsolete and traffic is aided by helicopters and computers, etc. you have the extreme instance of police state resulting from the speed-up of obsolete technology.

...In the 20's, booze created a huge police state as we tried to prop up the old form of social arrangements.

However, there was no direct reference to anything happening politically in Canada, not even in Quebec, and then another gap until McLuhan wrote Davey on June 18, 1970, to discuss ways in which people communicate and learn. And then again nothing until a December 1970 letter from McLuhan to Trudeau, talking about their wonderful dinner together in Toronto on November 27 (at which they apparently talked

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<sup>412</sup> *The Executive as Dropout: The Future of Management.*

frankly about politics) and Trudeau's theatrics at the Grey Cup game the next day. At the same time, McLuhan sent Trudeau inscribed copies of his *Culture Is Our Business, From Cliché to Archetype* and *The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan 1943/1962*.

Whether Trudeau had time to read them while in office is not known, but he did crave the intellectual stimulation McLuhan and others provided, whether formally in their work or through visits and phone calls.<sup>413</sup>

On March 5, 1971, McLuhan wrote Trudeau on behalf of himself and Corinne on the occasion of the prime minister's marriage the previous day (Trudeau thanked them in a one-sentence note on March 24). This was McLuhan's first reference to Margaret and to his pleasure in sharing the Catholic faith with both Trudeaus. He noted too that many of Trudeau's enemies were discomfited by the event and, in a subsequent letter to Davey, expanded on his view of the wedding as both a private and political event. Over the years, McLuhan would send regards or get well wishes to Margaret in his letters to Trudeau – Trudeau would reply with thanks, but no details.

That same wide-ranging letter touched on hijacking, business, nature and McLuhan's communications theory as essentially Thomist,<sup>414</sup> as well as content, message and media in the context of the "wired planet." McLuhan applied his theory to the issue of mandated Canadian content in media, a controversial topic of the time:

We are the content of anything we use, if only because these things are extensions of ourselves.

...The consequence for the discussion of the problem of Canadian content for the media is drastically simplified by noticing that the user is the

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<sup>413</sup> Conversation with B.W. Powe, March 11, 2015.

<sup>414</sup> Trudeau was much more Thomist than McLuhan, according to B.W. Powe (conversation, March 11, 2015). I have little understanding of Aquinas and his theology, so find this difficult to understand.



content. If Canadians use or watch American programs or drive American cars, it is the Canadians who are the content of these things.

The correspondence then has another significant gap, a time during which McLuhan had a serious illness from which he never fully recovered<sup>415</sup> and the prime minister was dealing with national issues including inflation, unemployment and the failure of the Victoria Conference in British Columbia, the culminating event in a series of conferences representing Trudeau's first formal attempt to patriate the Canadian constitution, although attempts has been made by others as early as 1927<sup>416</sup>. In his September 21, 1971 letter to Trudeau, McLuhan referred to the period as "the violent seas of 'news' and publicity in which you have had to exist in recent months." He went on to say that Trudeau is "immeasurably the greatest Prime Minister Canada has ever had, the first who has been equipped with an awareness of contemporary culture. [Edward] Heath and [Richard] Nixon are provincial schoolboys beside you."

The next letter, from McLuhan to Davey on September 29, was in part a detailed plea for help for the anti-abortion group on campus, partly by using his influence on the national TV networks to broadcast films of abortions,<sup>417</sup> and in part a discussion of Canadian advantages over the U.S.A. in the new technological age, given that Canada

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<sup>415</sup> Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 243.

<sup>416</sup> Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 300.

<sup>417</sup> There is no indication why he thought Davey would be receptive to the idea and Trudeau, though personally opposed to abortion as a sin, did not believe it to be a crime (English, *Just Watch Me*, 112). Asked about abortion at a meeting of his riding association in November 1971, he replied "I don't think that I can speak with great authority about this mainly because I am not a woman..." (Trudeau, *Conversations with Canadians*, 37). Trudeau was also personally against birth control (M. Trudeau, *Beyond Reason*, 55)

“missed the 19<sup>th</sup> century.” His thoughts on the latter came from the book with Nevitt, which was finally ready for publication. McLuhan wrote Davey that

We are free to start in with the software and by-pass the hardware...Of course, areas like Montreal and Toronto, precisely to the degree to which they did [sic] have a 19<sup>th</sup> century are in a bad way. The message of the electric age is to by-place these places also, and not to make their problems those of the country at large. Highly centralist hardware and hardware areas have to be regarded as bad investments that are better forgotten. Sooner or later the U.S. will have to write off its big cities and hardware also.<sup>418</sup>

There is then another large gap in the correspondence, until the summer of 1972, aside from three brief notes from Trudeau thanking McLuhan for various compliments and kindnesses, including happy birthday greetings.<sup>419</sup> Surprisingly, there is no letter congratulating the Trudeaus on the birth of their first child, Justin, on Christmas Day, 1971 (nor any mention in the correspondence of the subsequent births of his two brothers). During this gap, Trudeau met with Nixon in Washington and Nixon paid a visit to Ottawa, despite a vow to “never set foot in Canada so long as Trudeau was leader.”<sup>420</sup>

In McLuhan’s obsequious letter to Trudeau on August 2, 1972, he touched on issues of national identity, writing, in the language of a resonating interval, that in Canada, “a world Utopia,”

We have two identities which in effect polarize one another and create a very important pattern of complementarity. It is a complementarity of a special kind, deriving on the one hand from a great land power (France) and, on the other hand, a great sea power (England). Canada, in a most eminent way, embraces both of these cultural forms of land and sea.

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<sup>418</sup> I can’t help thinking that this advice about the mistake of using the big cities as the template for an entire country remains insightful, given the 2016 U.S. election results.

<sup>419</sup> Over the years, the two men often exchanged birthday and Christmas greetings.

<sup>420</sup> English, *Just Watch Me*, 169.

Primarily, however, McLuhan was writing to ask for Trudeau's help establishing "Centres for Understanding Media" around the world, patterned on his center at the University of Toronto, so that countries and other entities could learn from, and about, each other, especially regarding "the interplay between media and the major institutions of our times." If there were such a center in Quebec, for example, the province "could see its patterns and role in our twentieth century against the ground of other countries facing the same separatist pressure under media impact, [which] might greatly relieve tension and play down the merely personal feelings." McLuhan was not suggesting physical centers be built, but that means of communications, such as a newsletter, be created. One needs to remember again that this was pre-Internet.

This letter was acknowledged by an aide and briefly responded to by Trudeau. One imagines McLuhan was disappointed. But the prime minister was in a tough political season, getting ready to call a fall election. That election was held on October 30 and, although the Liberals hung onto power, it was with a very slim minority mandate. Trudeau then made major changes in his cabinet and inner advisory team, trading "intellectuals" for those "more politically minded," and Jim Davey was among the casualties, although he remained a friend and informal adviser.<sup>421</sup>

McLuhan's letters to Trudeau on January 4 and 5, 1973, contained a number of jokes, but the second letter then became a discussion, with global political implications, of the resonant interval between wheel and axle:

Between the wheel and the axle there must be "play." This play is "touch." When the interval between wheel and axle is too small, they seize up and there is neither wheel nor axle. When the interval is too large, the wheel falls off. The principle that the resonant interval between the wheel and the axle is where the action is [sic] would seem to apply quite well to war, and politics, and many social

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<sup>421</sup> Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 160.

situations...Between [the Western world and the Eastern] moving antithetically, there is a resonant interval, a gap. As with the wheel and the axle, the gap is where the action is [sic]. At the moment this gap is Viet Nam.

Is it not important to understand that Viet Nam is not a component nor an objective nor a target, but only a resonant interval or “interface?”

On January 23, Trudeau responded that the resonant interval, where the action is, can definitely be applied to the workings of the current Parliament. Meanwhile, his mother, Grace Elliott Trudeau, died on January 16. Trudeau was devoted to her and the family home she lived in in Montreal was his base until he moved into the prime minister’s residence in Ottawa. The correspondence includes McLuhan’s brief note of sympathy to Trudeau on January 17 and the formal acknowledgement card, on behalf of Trudeau, his sister Suzanne and brother Charles, sent to the McLuhans.

In McLuhan’s letter to the prime minister on February 12, he took a dig at Richard Nixon but, more important, explained why the public perception of Trudeau as arrogant is unfair, being the result of power politics that need to have serious white Anglo-Saxon Protestants at the helm, and why it is a difficult job for Trudeau, as a prime minister from Quebec, to be portrayed fairly in both English and French media, whose publics are very different.

“It is very important that these publics should see each other at the same time that they are watching you, for their responses to you and to one another are totally diverse” is the point Trudeau takes most to heart, as evidenced by his brief reply on February 25. These two letters mark one of the relatively few times they show an immediate exchange of ideas in letters, along with real emotion, as the prime minister ends his note “Many thanks for your thoughts and prayers. God bless. Pierre”.

There is then another gap, until July 6, when McLuhan sent Trudeau a copy of an item he'd written on Nixon. On July 10, McLuhan, as a western Canadian, gave the prime minister some advice about understanding the West, a huge area of the country with which he had chronic problems and whose people he seemed unable or unwilling to make the effort to understand, both in public and in private.<sup>422</sup> McLuhan also touched on the "intense interface" between the Western provinces and their U.S. neighbors.

McLuhan gave the prime minister advice on inflation and crowd dynamics in an August 14 letter, for which Trudeau thanked him on August 24, adding thanks also for the earlier Nixon piece and advice on the West. Trudeau wrote McLuhan again on August 27, to briefly discuss his information on inflation, especially "your perception of inflation as a psychological manifestation of crowd behavior in the market place."

"As Trudeau read it, he underlined these words: 'Today the fact of the increasing prices has little or nothing to do with the old laws of supply and demand, but much to do with the new media'."<sup>423</sup> He noted that his own government's attempts to counter inflation psychology had not been completely effective.

On October 17, there was a mix of the personal and the political in a telegram in which McLuhan congratulated Trudeau on his birthday and on his "China triumph." Trudeau had left for the People's Republic a week earlier, and the visit received much favorable attention. He responded to McLuhan briefly, but very warmly, on October 31.

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<sup>422</sup> Gwyn, *The Northern Magus*, 274.

<sup>423</sup> English, *Just Watch Me*, 246.

Almost four months go by and then, on February 25, 1974, McLuhan heard from Trudeau's press secretary, Pierre O'Neil, replying belatedly to some previous letter McLuhan sent Jim Davey (and addressing the professor as "Mr.," which would not have been appreciated). There is no explanation as to why it was not Davey who answered – it could be that he had lost interest in McLuhan or that Trudeau no longer used an intermediary in the relationship. The last piece of correspondence between Davey and McLuhan that I have seen is the September 29, 1971, letter and the last correspondence Davey was officially copied on was Trudeau's letter to McLuhan on August 27, 1973.

On March 14, Trudeau wrote briefly, but kindly, to congratulate McLuhan on receiving an award from the City of Toronto. McLuhan's March 26 answer was, he admitted, almost identical to a letter he had just written to writer Claire Booth Luce and is probably the lengthiest letter in the Trudeau-McLuhan correspondence. It touched on Vatican II, tribalism, privacy, art and theories of money, and, of most interest to the ongoing discussion between the two men, as shown in the prime minister's March 29 reply, the global village and the impeachment of Richard Nixon. McLuhan wrote

To use the terms of Ballandier who invented the phrase "the Third World," there is the First World of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialism and the Second World of Russian Communism and the Third World is that which is left out of these benefits. But he forgot the Fourth World, the instantaneous global village which, since Sputnik (October, 1957), created Spaceship Earth, an ecological entity, without passengers but only crew.

...Nixon and the U.S.A. is caught between the First World and the Fourth World. That is, while having all its commitments to the old Graeco-Roman hardware, it is totally involved in the new electronic information environment which is dissolving all the controls and all the goals of the First World. The Fourth World, or the electronic World, reduces personal identity profiles to vestigial level and, by the same token, reduces moral commitments in the private sector almost to zero. Paradoxically, however, as private morals in the private sector sink down, new absolutist demands are made of ethics in the public or political sector. R.N.

had the misfortune to bring the old private morals into the public place just when this reversal had occurred.

For about a year, some of the world had noted both the peak and end of a fad known as streaking, in which a person or group of people ran naked in public as a form of protest or attention-grabbing. In a letter on April 3, McLuhan said streakers were almost the same as strippers, seeming to take for granted that the former were female and the latter male, and that there was also a connection to strikers. “She takes off her clothes in order to ‘put on’ her audience,” he wrote, and the streaker, because of a grievance against society “is putting on his audience because he wishes to be seen...the striker strips off the services which are the social clothing in order to ‘put on’ his audience.”

Streaking, wrote the professor, is a political act. Trudeau, in his reply on April 8, disagreed, calling it more of a “rebellion against social values.”

By the time they are next in touch, it is June 13, the government had instigated its own downfall<sup>424</sup> and an election had been called for July 8. The letter is usually quoted because of the advice McLuhan gave Trudeau on dealing with hecklers, but to me it is more important in exposing the prime minister, possibly for the first time, to McLuhan’s astute ideas about work, gender roles and specialization in the electronic age, some of which he returned to in a February 14, 1975, letter (some of McLuhan’s comments about women elsewhere in the correspondence are less agreeable to me). He wrote that

Women are less specialized than men, and long accustomed to adapting to a variety of roles. In our new instant-information environment, most men who have been accustomed to specialist jobs and functions must now switch from role to role in the course of a day. In the big hierarchies this creates extreme discomfort and dismay, and it is increasingly obvious that women could perform many of these functions better than men.

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<sup>424</sup> Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 176.

On July 8, the Liberals won a majority government under Trudeau in the federal election. The next letter between the two men was a brief one on September 20 from McLuhan to the prime minister in which he wrote about inflation and expressed concern about Margaret's health. Three days earlier, the news had featured her release from Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal and the first public inklings that she might have mental health problems (in the years since, Margaret Trudeau has become a mental health advocate and has written of her own struggles with bipolar disorder).

Trudeau had been so busy with the election and problems in his personal life that, as he told McLuhan in a September 26 letter, he didn't get a chance to read the June 13 advice about hecklers but had dealt with a situation in the manner McLuhan had suggested anyhow.<sup>425</sup>

Global economic issues again dominated the conversation when McLuhan wrote to Trudeau on January 22, 1975, and suggested he show finance minister John Turner two recent New Yorker articles that explained, among other things, how multinationals can use computers to "cook the books," bypassing old market structures and bookkeeping methods and avoiding income tax. In a further moment of prescience, McLuhan explained to Trudeau in a February 14 letter that

Another major pattern appears with the multi-national corporations who use the new computer technology to play the old game of equilibrium economics. By leaping across national and market boundaries, they by-pass the old controls that had been developed in those separate areas. "Transfer pricing" is the name they use for this by-pass... We are, therefore, in the position of watching the new electronic information speed dissolve the structures of the old hardware, which moves very slowly. Systems analysis, in the same way, applies electric speed to older organization patterns, eliminating human scale and relationships.

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<sup>425</sup> <http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/news/editorial/story.html?id=2de9d765-a8e9-432c-9682-54e92c129642> .



Trudeau answered, kindly but briefly, on February 17, and thanked McLuhan for everything, including the “continued prayers” for Margaret from both the professor and his wife.

In a letter to McLuhan on March 17, Trudeau said he agreed more with McLuhan’s notion that the global village signifies a “‘return to human scale and human involvement’” than he agrees with the other side of the tension, in which technology eliminates “‘human scale and relationships’.” Perhaps more significantly, he expressed the hope, so relevant today, that the global village will become a global city, “a place worth living for all mankind.”

The value of the life of all humankind was the main topic of McLuhan’s letter to Trudeau on July 2, in which he wrote that capital punishment’s value is not as punishment but as ritual, drawing attention to the importance of individual human life at its very moment of extinction. McLuhan positioned this figure against the ground of a cheapening of human life in the electronic age, writing that

The TV generation cannot feel [sic] very much importance attaching to the private person. On the other hand, the loss of private identity which has come very suddenly upon Western man has produced a deep anger at this rip-off of his private self.

There are two kinds of violence relating to the same situation, first, the kind that comes from the unimportance of everybody, and second, the kind that comes from the impulse to restore one’s private meaning by acts of violence...Psychologically considered, violence is an attempt to restore order to achieve identity.

The letter was signed “With prayers for you and Margaret, Yrs Marshall,” which may have referred generally to between the Trudeaus or perhaps specifically to Margaret’s pregnancy (the couple’s third child, Michel, was born on October 2).

The discussion of both capital punishment and violence continued through several letters. Trudeau puts an uncharacteristic amount of thought into his reply on July 21.

Citing zoologist Konrad Lorenz, favored philosopher Paul Ricoeur and psychologist Erich Fromm, he wrote McLuhan that violence is in fact born out of “material comfort, social conformity [and] monotonous and repetitive jobs” with few creative outlets and the danger of living “in deferment.”

McLuhan replied on July 30 that, although he doesn’t advocate capital punishment, “the ritual of capital punishment, carried out in the most public possible way, is itself an intensely creative outlet for the entire society.” He also brought to bear the arguments of psychologist Rollo May, noting that “...violence in its innumerable modalities is typically a response to loss of identity or to a threat against one’s self, or one’s thought. Technical innovations, simply by creating new environments, upset people’s images of themselves.” Moreover, with all humanity now intensely involved with each other on Spaceship Earth, “violence is a natural attempt to re-establish and to re-discover the nature of one’s being.”

Trudeau answered on October 14 that, while he could intellectually understand what McLuhan says about capital punishment as ritual, he hoped a different remedy would be found “in the not too distant future.”<sup>426</sup> He ended the letter by mentioning the death of Jim Davey and his sorrow at that loss. Davey had died in that summer, after falling from the roof of his house while removing storm windows.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Capital punishment in Canada was abolished, with some few exceptions, in July 1976, with the passage of Bill C-84. The exceptions were removed in 1998.

<sup>427</sup> Cook, *The Teeth of Time*, 162.

There is now a gap of almost a year in the correspondence. It was a sabbatical year for McLuhan, although filled with projects. His health continued to decline and he suffered at least one small stroke, the morning after filming his part in the movie “Annie Hall,” a very bit part, playing himself, that fixed “an image of him in viewers’ minds to a surprisingly lasting degree.”<sup>428</sup> Trudeau was dealing not only with what might be called the normal political routine but also with special events like the summer Olympic Games in Montreal, during which there was also a Royal Visit, at the same time as Canada was participating for the first time as a member of the G7 nations, as well as the further dissolution of his marriage and, most immediately important for Canada, the rise to power of the separatist Parti Québécois in Quebec.

The separatist victory was still two months in the future when McLuhan wrote Trudeau on September 3, mainly to discuss the theory of the two hemispheres of the brain and how it had always been reflected in his own work.

It really added nothing to his basic insights; but it did provide a sort of neurological basis for the dichotomies he was constantly finding between acoustic and visual, analogical and logical, and so on...

Left brain and right brain appeared like verbal tics in McLuhan’s conversation and articles after 1976.<sup>429</sup>

He signed off wishing the prime minister “Courage!”

There was a very brief but friendly reply on October 4. On November 2, Jimmy Carter, McLuhan’s “second-favorite politician,”<sup>430</sup> was elected president of the United

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<sup>428</sup> Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 271.

<sup>429</sup> Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 258.

<sup>430</sup> Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan*, 280.

States. On November 15, the Parti Québécois, under the leadership of René Lévesque, with whom Trudeau had a long and complicated relationship, won the provincial election in Quebec.

On November 26, McLuhan wrote Trudeau that, despite recovering from an unnamed illness (a heart attack<sup>431</sup>), he'd been keeping abreast of Canadian events, including those involving the Trudeaus. This letter, "dictated by phone and signed in Professor McLuhan's absence," served to introduce Trudeau to the work of public relations master Tony Schwartz. The prime minister replied very briefly but warmly on December 13, and noted that "As ever, I rely on you to keep me informed of developments in the field of communications."

McLuhan returned to his discussion of left brain/right brain in his February 14, 1977, letter to Trudeau, using it to ground his analysis of current world politics, including Quebec's: "Separatism is at present a planetary phenomenon, familiar inside every home and every community and every nation."<sup>432</sup>

That letter was written a week before the prime minister's state visit to Washington, "primarily to counter a reassuring speech René Lévesque had made the previous month to the Economic Club in New York about Quebec independence."<sup>433</sup>

In a letter on February 24, McLuhan wrote that everyone he knows was "deeply thrilled" by Trudeau's "performance" in the U.S., "a really imaginative and masterly

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<sup>431</sup> Molinaro, *Letters*, 523.

<sup>432</sup> This discussion is taken up again in his February 24, 1977, letter to Trudeau.

<sup>433</sup> English, *Just Watch Me*, 324. English notes that "Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham" were among the guests at the state dinner.

approach, which you brought off superbly.” He then moved from compliments to an apology for any misunderstanding that resulted from an interview in which, after explaining the image of Presidents Kennedy, Nixon and Carter, he then turned to the “very powerful charisma” of the prime minister, attributing it in part to a hint of “native Indian” (or “Red man”) in Trudeau’s image.

“Naturally, pulled out of context of this image discussion it sounds very different, and even derogatory,” McLuhan wrote. “You know me well enough to know that I would never say anything derogatory about you.”

On March 4, the Trudeaus began a trial separation, instigated by Margaret, which was not made public.<sup>434</sup>

A concise letter from McLuhan to Trudeau on May 11, touching on the topics of incarnate man and natural law and morality, and another on May 14 about his daughter Teri’s current film project and advising Trudeau he would be hearing from her shortly prompted an exceptionally warm and comparatively lengthy reply from the prime minister, albeit not until July 25. He thanked McLuhan for giving him a welcome opportunity “to turn my thoughts to different channels.” On May 30, an official announcement of the Trudeaus’ permanent separation had been made by the Prime Minister’s Office.<sup>435</sup>

In August, McLuhan wrote Trudeau to introduce him to the work he has been doing for years with optometrist William Arthur Hurst, assessing the links between dyslexia in children and television. Their work seems prophetic, but never received the

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<sup>434</sup> English, *Just Watch Me*, 325.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 326. The couple divorced in 1984.

government funding they tried for over the years. McLuhan began his December 13 letter to Trudeau by thanking him for dinner at the upscale Three Small Rooms and for then continuing on to be the guest at his weekly seminar at the Centre. McLuhan's subsequent comment on spying remains startlingly relevant: "The major form of work in the electronic age has become 'keeping an eye on other people', whether audience research or public relations or simply espionage. It is sometimes called 'data processing'."

On December 21, in hopes of turning "the Separatist tide," McLuhan sent Trudeau a joke for which the punchline is Lévesque. He wished the prime minister "a Blessed New Year for you, and for Canada, and the world."

1978 was not a year in which they appear to have had much contact. Trudeau was trying to manage the national effects of the Parti Québécois win which, among other things, seemed to embolden other provinces into asking for more rights and, over the summer, he had established a task force on Canadian unity. In a letter to McLuhan on June 19, he says some of McLuhan's ideas on Quebec and English Canada "take on a prophetic aspect."<sup>436</sup>

In a December 6 letter to Trudeau, McLuhan questioned the viability of the link between unity and bilingualism, writing

If all Canadians spoke both languages there would be great enrichment of our culture, but there would be a much greater tendency towards plurality and diversity rather than unity... Somehow a non-sequitur [sic] has entered the rationale of the bilingualism programme. The federal idea of free association is not the same thing as unity. Do not English Canadians speak American and feel at home in the U.S.A. without the slightest thought of unity?

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<sup>436</sup> An earlier version of those ideas was enclosed with McLuhan's April 4, 1977, letter to the prime minister. There is also reference here to a May 23 letter from McLuhan, which I have not seen.

In his December 18 reply,<sup>437</sup> Trudeau wrote that in fact Canadians “feel closer to Americans than we do to others and that this feeling has resulted not just from geographic proximity but also the idea that they are less ‘foreign’ than those who do not speak one of our languages.” He then took apart McLuhan’s objections to his bilingualism policy which “you, as well as a great many other Canadians, have not fully understood.” The Official Languages Act of 1969 was meant to give Canadians the individual choice of dealing with the federal government and agencies in either English or French, wrote the prime minister, and

The main thrust of the law was not to change the languages spoken, or to make people bilingual, but rather to ensure that both the principal languages of the country would be fully respected at the federal level. The promotion of this concept of language equality in turn ensures that the linguistic groups are treated equally by their government... When people are made to feel inferior or unfairly treated on the grounds of the language they speak, it is impossible that they feel any kindred spirit with the group they see as being treated as superior. In this way, the language policy does promote unity.

McLuhan continued the discussion in a letter to Trudeau on February 1, 1979, in which he used some of his regular insights about masks and put-ons and the brain’s twin hemispheres to explain that, since language in the public sphere is different from language in the private sphere, Trudeau’s bilingualism policy might be fine in the abstract but is “not related to the experiential, subjective level. That is not to say this is a misguided attitude, but it merely indicated that the effects [sic] of languages as media are quite different from the input or intended meanings.” The difference between intent and

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<sup>437</sup> In a brief letter on December 15, Trudeau thanks McLuhan for his belated birthday wishes, sent November 10. The prime minister tells McLuhan to not feel bad about being late, as “I was not entirely forgotten by your family on the occasion of my birthday!” Trudeau was friends with two of McLuhan’s daughters.

result is a critical point in the rest of the letter too, which reprised and added to comments in earlier letters about the first world and the third world.

On March 26, Trudeau called for a federal election in May. On April 16, McLuhan wrote to Trudeau, suggesting strongly that he contact Tony Schwartz for help in developing “hot” radio spots for the campaign, as being better suited for Trudeau than “cool” television.

On May 22, Trudeau and the Liberals lost the election. McLuhan sent Trudeau a telegram the next day, for which he was thanked in a July 25 note from the friend who was now the Leader of the Opposition.

A letter from McLuhan on September 7 mentioned a couple of topics they might discuss when they next meet, related to the financial straits of McLuhan’s Centre at the university and the matter of his successor. McLuhan also suggested that, when Jimmy Carter (“Huck Finn in the White House,” a description of which he was fond) came to visit Canada that November, he might be able to give the president helpful advice.

The meeting with Trudeau may have taken place, but the meeting with Carter did not; McLuhan suffered a massive stroke on September 26, leaving him almost totally unable to speak.

On November 21, Trudeau retired. His decision held for a little less than a month, as the Progressive Conservative government, led by Prime Minister Joe Clark, was defeated on a budget vote, an election was called for February 18, 1980, the Liberals had not yet chosen a new leader and Trudeau was ready to come back. The Liberals won a majority and he was again prime minister.



With McLuhan no longer able to head up the Centre, the university decided to shut it down and instead offer a program in McLuhan's name. Even a letter of support from Trudeau could not change the decision.<sup>438</sup> On April 28, he wrote to McLuhan

Who knows better than you and I the bitter irony of the old saw about a prophet in his own land...However, you can be assured of a prominent place not only in Canadian history, but in the annals of technocracy. It is heartening to see that the press is treating you with the respect you are owed.

The correspondence ends here. McLuhan died in his sleep on New Year's Eve.

In a letter both personal and "In the name of the government and people of Canada," Trudeau wrote on January 7, 1981, to "My dear Corinne" that

...Much will be said and written, and rightly so, about his marvelous intellect, his years of teaching, his global eminence as a social theorist, as a seminal scholar and writer. But the dominant thoughts in my own mind are of you and your children, and of my own sense of loss.

I have long valued his friendship, and have warm memories of our stimulating conversations. His letters were a constant delight, even when they included those terrible puns he used to urge me to use in political debate.

Marshall's life and work increased my sense of pride in being a Canadian...

On February 28, 1984, Trudeau decided, this time finally, to step down as prime minister. He died on September 28, 2000.

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<sup>438</sup> Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 284.

## Part IV: Conclusion

I don't know how history will ultimately judge Pierre Trudeau as a politician and I don't care. He is the standard by which I measure all national leaders: smart, inquisitive, worldly, open to other cultures, articulate, passionate about one's own country, charismatic in a way that is not dangerous.

Canadians who still struggle with questions of national identity – it is a deeply ingrained national pastime – should remember Trudeau's remarks to the House of Commons in October 1971, and the rest of the world today should heed them:

A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians. Such a policy should help to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all.<sup>1</sup>

These ideas have infused my own for over 40 years, as have many of McLuhan's. My thoughts turned often to McLuhan's interface and resonant interval, which were foundations of my own cutting-edge journalism on multiculturalism, trying to get others to value understanding those we live with in the global village. I didn't know McLuhan had become largely unknown until I failed to find a Rutgers professor to supervise my master's thesis if he were the topic. I switched programs, from liberal studies to global affairs,<sup>2</sup> got my master's degree, continued into the doctoral program. I switched topics,

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<sup>1</sup> Trudeau, *Conversation with Canadians*, 32.

<sup>2</sup> My first course in liberal studies, "The Great Courts of Europe," was, if not global, at least international, and the main paper I wrote for it involved images: I did a brief study of a number of portraits across several centuries.

to an analysis of the ways in which the immigrant experience has been affected by the wired globe. And then I decided to go to McLuhan100 Then Now Next, an international conference at the University of Toronto in November 2011, one of many events worldwide held that year to mark the centenary of McLuhan's birth. I figured I would put my interest in McLuhan to rest.

Instead, in the interval between sessions, I overheard one of the presenters, B.W. Powe of York University, say that the Trudeau-McLuhan correspondence had not been studied and I changed dissertation topics. I hadn't known McLuhan and Trudeau were friends and it never occurred to me that just the very existence of this correspondence was not in itself valuable – the medium being, after all, the message. But, of course, the value of the correspondence goes beyond the mere fact of it or even the glimpse it gives into the relationship between two of the most influential Canadians of the twentieth century, both in Canada and globally. It contains discussions that remain relevant, whether about privacy issues under new media realities, identity politics and violence, the changing realities of the working world or the manipulation of media images. The Trudeau-McLuhan correspondence is a unique conversation about Canada's place in the world and about using media politically.

I often view globalization through the tighter focus of glocalization (“a complex interaction of the global and local characterized by cultural borrowing”),<sup>3</sup> shaped by a lifelong interest in the meshing and meetings of cultures and culture in all possible ways.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Steger, *Globalism*, 40.

<sup>4</sup> I prefer “glocalization” to Rosenau’s “framegration,” which mixes fragmentation with integration, because I think it gets the point across more clearly and is not as grating. “Distant proximities” gets the idea across, but is too bulky. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities*, 11.

Global fast food conglomerates recognize the need to adapt their regimented preparations to local tastes if they wish to succeed in a country other than the one they were born into;<sup>5</sup> firms know that their core competencies give them only a limited competitive advantage “unless their production is sensitive to the demands of consumers, and the shifting cultural context in which they operate.”<sup>6</sup> The world’s highest award in architecture goes to a trio of young people, cited for being “...a local firm in an increasingly globalized world.”

“They help us to see, in a most beautiful and poetic way, that the answer to the question is not ‘either/or’ and that we can, at least in architecture, aspire to have both,” [the Pritzker award jury] continued, “our roots firmly in place and our arms outstretched to the rest of the world.”<sup>7</sup>

The Internet itself is glocal, though no longer borderless, as it was originally: “The Internet itself was born as a world without borders, developed to withstand a nuclear war and allow the surviving individuals to communicate.”<sup>8</sup>

Economic globalization, considered in isolation, doesn’t interest me at all and I don’t think either McLuhan or Trudeau, a trained economist, saw globalization primarily, let alone exclusively, through that lens. Just as important and unlike many people today, including some world leaders, they didn’t delude themselves into seeing no connection

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<sup>5</sup> I first learned about this issue in the class 10 years that led me into global studies – Professor Alexander Hinton’s class on cross-cultural global issues – but the matter is continually refreshed. Most recently, it involved Taco Bell adapting to China. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/10/business/china-kfc-taco-bell.html>

<sup>6</sup> O’Brien and Williams, *Global Political Economy*, 185.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/01/arts/design/3-win-the-pritzker-long-a-prize-for-starchitects.html>

<sup>8</sup> Langhorne, *Coming of Globalization*, 10.

between globalized money and globalizing culture and technology.<sup>9</sup> They also had a nuanced understanding that did not simply pit the national against the international, although McLuhan understood the urge of financial leaders to try to convince otherwise. The business community, even while conglomerating, “demands a ‘double standard,’” McLuhan wrote to Trudeau. “While making rapid adjustments to changing technologies, it expects the educational and political establishments to remain rigidly fixed in the old pattern.” I find that the most positive take on global affairs is often found in the business section of the newspaper, because it values nation less than money.

Trudeau and McLuhan lived in a country that has long had a merit-based immigration system. I think they would be appalled by the willed ignorance today, whether among politicians or the general public, of the reality that the global village remains spiky,<sup>10</sup> so immigrants are not treated equally and those with money are welcome to and from anywhere.<sup>11</sup>

When trying to understand any relationship, one faces the question not only of attraction but of influence. McLuhan cited Trudeau in his work and Trudeau, “a fan of McLuhan’s,”<sup>12</sup> worked McLuhanisms (and some of the jokes McLuhan sent him) into some of his speeches. The Trudeau-McLuhan relationship, one of mutual admiration,

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<sup>9</sup> Nor would they have agreed with McLuhan critic James Carey that, “The first task is to demythologize the rhetoric of the electronic sublime. Electronics is neither the arrival of apocalypse nor the dispensation of grace. Technology is technology; it is a means for communication and transportation over space, and nothing more.” Carey (with John Q. Quirk), *Communication as Culture*, 139.

<sup>10</sup> Florida, “The World is Spiky.”

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/your-money/wealth-immigration-millionaires-australia-canada.html? r=0>.

<sup>12</sup> Scott, “Marshall’s Laws,” 30.

undoubtedly had its moments in which one inspired the other, but did these two strong intellects influence each other? The answer cannot be that linear, a matter of going from point A to point B or of “mere source study.”<sup>13</sup> Influence is cumulative, often unconscious – perhaps at its best, “labyrinthine,” an insight of Harold Bloom<sup>14</sup> that seems particularly apt when considering McLuhan.

Although I have not been able to pinpoint the date on which Trudeau and McLuhan first became aware of each other, I do know when I became aware of them myself. I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade when Trudeau became prime minister in 1968 and what came to be known as Trudeaumania infected many Canadians. We were looking for a JFK and seemed to have found him.

Following the example of my history teacher, who said Trudeau was really special, I fell under the influence too. My first newspaper article, published in April 1968 in my hometown paper, the *Oshawa Times*, was about the political convention at which he became Liberal leader;<sup>15</sup> during the federal election campaign that June, I went with my best friend to the local shopping center to catch a glimpse of Trudeau at a campaign event and I stuffed envelopes for our local Liberal candidate. The candidate lost, but the campaign poster is taped to my office door. Trudeau’s autograph, framed, hangs by my desk; my father asked the then-retired Trudeau for it for me at the 1990 Liberal leadership convention in Calgary, which saw Jean Chrétien become leader. On a drive

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<sup>13</sup> Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>15</sup> I was not at the convention.

back from Montreal to New Jersey in 2003, my husband and I made a detour to St-Rémi-de-Napierville to visit Trudeau's grave.

On March 23, 1970, in the course of researching a 12<sup>th</sup> grade special report ultimately titled "The Media Make the Message," I met McLuhan very briefly at his Centre at the University of Toronto. I was tagging along for the day with *Toronto Star* columnist Lotta Dempsey,<sup>16</sup> who was at the Center to interview McLuhan's associate, Harley Parker.

"I noticed a tall greying man in a grey suit in the next room," I wrote later in my rather cloying, youthfully arrogant, report.

He was so nondescript that I knew he had to be Marshall McLuhan. He was.

Hearing I was doing a project on communications, he said, "I think you should make a *camera obscura*," which he then translated into English, not trusting my status as a Latin scholar, and explained. I don't remember listening – I was too stunned!

I do remember McLuhan explaining why the fishnet stockings popular at the time were more involving -- I don't remember him saying "sexier" -- than regular nylons, because one had to mentally fill in the spaces. He had written about this earlier,<sup>17</sup> but it was all new to me.

"The gap is where the action is," McLuhan said that day.<sup>18</sup> "The generation gap generates change."

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<sup>16</sup> Dempsey, "Elaine meets the newsmakers," *Toronto Star*, 1970.

<sup>17</sup> For example, "Audio-tactile space is the space of involvement. We 'lose touch' without it." McLuhan, *Culture is our Business*, 194.

<sup>18</sup> He used "where the action is" often, including in a January 5, 1973, letter to Trudeau.

Several years later, in college at the University of Toronto, when I was seriously grappling for the first time with belief in God, it was the gap, the interface, the resonating interval, that I fell back on. God, I decided, was the filling responsible for the action in gaps and at interfaces that I could explain no other way.

I don't know why I didn't study with McLuhan during my years at U of T. Probably I was intimidated, despite the natural fit with my own interests. McLuhan's seminars were "the dawn of interdisciplinarity," according to Dominique Scheffel-Dunand, former director of the McLuhan Coach House Institute. "He pioneered the concept."<sup>19</sup> I was attracted to journalism because I didn't want to specialize. I didn't realize at the time that my aversion to work specialization placed me firmly within McLuhan's analysis of how roles in my generation were developing.

There are frustrating gaps in the Trudeau-McLuhan correspondence. Despite references to Trudeau's marriage, there is no reference to the birth of his children (although Justin is mentioned by McLuhan in a letter to Trudeau on January 4, 1973) and no direct mention of his divorce. Also, although I have been told by several excellent sources that Trudeau visited the McLuhan home a number of times, I've still found no reference to this in the letters.

A more serious gap, for a study of global matters, occurs in 1970. I have seen no direct correspondence between the two men that year until after the October Crisis, and only four pieces for 1970 altogether, two of them from McLuhan to Davey.

There must have been more, even if mediated through Davey. The October Crisis involved domestic terrorists (the Front de Libération du Québec, or FLQ) and Trudeau's

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<sup>19</sup> Scott, Alec. "Marshall's Laws," 29.



invocation of the federal War Measures Act, the first time the law had been invoked in peacetime, making use of the military and suspending civil liberties.<sup>20</sup> Davey was intensely involved in the handling of the crisis, directing “the Strategic Operations Centre that devised the federal government’s response to the crisis”<sup>21</sup> and involved in its aftermath.<sup>22</sup> I cannot believe McLuhan held back from giving Trudeau advice, solicited or not, during this period.

In the Molinaro collection of McLuhan’s letters, there is a gap from 1940-43, a period during which McLuhan was teaching in St Louis. A study of Trudeau and McLuhan’s thoughts and activities during the war years might be an interesting project. I also wonder whether McLuhan first learned of computers during those years, from his British contacts. Even more valuable would be an examination of third parties like Davey, who, in their own letters, diaries and conversations, might have taken note of the Trudeau-McLuhan relationship and of any sessions by McLuhan, official or off the record, for government or political officials and special advisors to the prime minister.

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<sup>20</sup> At the time, Alan Borovoy, executive director of the Toronto Civil Liberties Union, said on CBC-TV that he “had no idea that the War Measures Act was still on the statute books.” Cook, *Teeth of Time*, 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>22</sup> The partial transcript of Davey’s interview of British trade commissioner James Richard Cross on December 5, 1970, conducted while accompanying Cross back to London after he was released by his FLQ kidnappers after almost two months in captivity, is gripping and stamped SECRET (LAC archival reference MG26-O11, Vol 38, File 14, James Cross interview by Jim Davey [items flagged]). There is also a transcript of a February 2, 1971, interview with Cross by the RCMP. In the December interview, Cross said his kidnappers reacted to the imposition of the War Measures Act indignantly, claiming “this was contrary to British justice. And I found this the most amazing statement...” In a later taped memoir, Cross says there is no recording of the session on the plane: <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Cross.pdf>.

The Cross kidnapping made Canada “the first Western nation to experience a political kidnapping at home.” Crelinsten & Schmid, “Western Responses to Terrorism,” 309.

And did McLuhan work at any time for any foreign governments or agencies and, if yes, did Trudeau know?<sup>23</sup>

When McLuhan wrote about the global village, he wasn't talking about a village of global migrants – traditionally, a village is a place one thinks of as stable, unlike large urban centers. One of his critics has claimed that “global city” would better capture McLuhan's notion of an agitated fragmented web<sup>24</sup> (Trudeau took a more optimistic view that “this tension can be turned into a most creative force, so that the ‘global village’ will gradually take shape as a true city [sic], i.e. a place worth living for all mankind. Please go on helping us to keep on the alert!”).<sup>25</sup> More disconcerting to me, at the centenary conference in Toronto in 2011, I overheard someone say McLuhan himself ultimately switched from “global village” to “global theater.” But I have come to understand that the price of tackling McLuhan is accepting that he constantly played with his work and his readers were part of a performance. He is known to have said that all of his work was satire.<sup>26</sup>

In his earliest known written reference to “global village,” McLuhan wrote in a 1959 letter to a Toronto editor that

The tribe is a unit, which, extending the bounds of the family to include the whole society, becomes the only way of organizing society when it exists in a kind of Global Village pattern. It is important to understand that the Global Village

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<sup>23</sup> McLuhan did some work for the U.S. Office of Education, but no one I have spoken with and nothing I have read supports any suggestion that Trudeau or McLuhan did any covert work of any kind for anyone. The same is true of my earlier comments about the gap in McLuhan's correspondence during much of WWII. I am merely probing.

<sup>24</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 263.

<sup>25</sup> Letter, Trudeau to McLuhan, March 17, 1975.

<sup>26</sup> Derrick De Kerckhove, [McLuhan100 Then Now Next: International Conference, Toronto, ON, November 7-10, 2011].

pattern is caused by the instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time...

If a plane is shot down in Pakistan, it disturbs the existence of everybody in North America, or Europe, or the Near East.<sup>27</sup>

For me, the global village has always been real, even while I can acknowledge from my advantage point that most people, while technically part of that village, are too poor or powerless to be in control of their connection to it. As a third-generation native Canadian, an immigrant to the United States<sup>28</sup> and the child of a second generation Canadian-born mother and a father who fled Nazi Germany, I am almost inherently interested in not only compromise and consolidation, but also understanding and managing life across borders or boundaries. This is also the greatest gift my refugee grandmother gave me, the gift of maintaining connections, which, from a very early age, I understood as not only a nice pastime but critical to one's emotional – and, sometimes, actual physical – well-being. “An immigrant was a man between two worlds; so two places shaped every immigrant experience.”<sup>29</sup> Although we see borders on maps as lines and although we know about border controls such as fences and visualize them too as lines, borders are really border zones, somewhat fluid, definitely fuzzy, with influences flowing more than one way.

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<sup>27</sup> Molinaro, *Letters*, 254.

<sup>28</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* gives an 1809 definition of “immigrant” as a word added to English only because of “the circumstances in the United States.”

<sup>29</sup> Harney and Troper, *Immigrants*, 1.

“[I]n the older imagining, where states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another.”<sup>30</sup> For most of human history, the movement of people came to mark the borders of governed entities; borders did not originate to keep people within those entities. When it comes to the global climate crisis, borders have no effective meaning at all.

Immigrants affect their destinations. Each individual is a palimpsest of identities and attachments and this may be the fundamental challenge to developing successful immigration projects. After all, “if geographical location was the single determining factor, then the moment an individual emigrated from one country to another, he or she would immediately be indistinguishable from others in that country.”<sup>31</sup> That insight should give us pause and give us empathy.

Borderland studies are an important and growing area of study, which I would like to delve into in future. On a human level, and depending on the level of border crisis at any given time, borderlands, more than borders, resemble an interface, where disparate things meet and react. This has already been posited as the concept of “third cultures... ‘conduits for all sorts of diverse cultural flows which cannot be merely understood as the product of bi-national exchanges between nation-states.’”<sup>32</sup> “Third cultures” may also be

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<sup>30</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 19. On page 34, Anderson cites, guardedly, McLuhan’s idea that “the book was the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity.”

<sup>31</sup> Eidelson, “National Identity Repertoires,” 91.

<sup>32</sup> Salamandra, “Globalization and Cultural Mediation,” 287.

another way of describing what is created when Rosenau's spheres of authority intersect<sup>33</sup> or when Ferguson and Mansbach's politics overlap.<sup>34</sup>

I had an immediate understanding of the networking and webbing I learned about in my global affairs studies<sup>35</sup> and tied quite a number of my essays to the global village, no matter what the ostensible topic. Two papers were about global climate refugees, when the issue itself was almost undocumented. The human right to clean water, to internet access, to refuge – such a dense weave.

“Can You Hear Me Now? : Wiring Women into the Global Village” was the title of a proposed research project for my course on feminist methodology. “Europe Unbound: Changing Notions of Borders in the Global Village” was my case study when learning about the evolution of the global system and my essay for the same course was titled “Borders and Immigration: Why Does the Global Village Have Stop Signs?”. Even my political economics paper, on technological change, included two references to McLuhan, one concerning the global village:

We can now live, not just amphibiously in divided and distinguished worlds, but pluralistically in many worlds and culture simultaneously. We are no more committed to one culture – to a single ratio among the human senses – any more than to one book or to one language<sup>36</sup> or to one technology... What began as a

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<sup>33</sup> Rosenau, *Distant Proximities*, 295.

<sup>34</sup> Ferguson and Mansbach, *Politics*.

<sup>35</sup> I only wish this webbing anecdote had a McLuhan connection too: In *Beyond Reason* (44), Margaret Trudeau wrote that, on her first visit to Ottawa, shortly after meeting Trudeau, “I fell in love with a paragon family – Joan and Jack Coyne and their five children. There were old friends of my parents, and I saw through their eyes the tightknit, gossipy circle of Ottawa smart society. I didn’t much care for what I saw.” One of those five children was Deborah, who had a daughter, Sarah, with Pierre Trudeau in 1991; she was friends with a friend of mine and called him from the delivery room.

<sup>36</sup> Those of us who view issues from a global perspective must always keep in mind that languages other than English, having their own vocabularies and coming out of their own cultures, will bring other nuances to the table.

“Romantic” reaction towards organic wholeness may or may not have hastened the discovery of electro-magnetic waves. But certainly the electro-magnetic discoveries have recreated the simultaneous “field” in all human affairs so that the human family now exists under conditions of a “global village.”<sup>37</sup>

During my first stint living in the United States, in the late 1970s and not yet a citizen, I was aggressively Canadian in the books I chose to display in our apartment and in my defense of a country my new American friends knew nothing about, aside from recognizing Pierre and Margaret from tabloid photos, and having a fear of Quebec separation that seemed overblown and shallow and which I did not share. By now, though, I do share Trudeau and McLuhan’s concerns about the dangers of unthinking nationalism and, often, nationalism’s irrelevance. McLuhan wrote that

Pierre Trudeau points to the new treason of the literati:<sup>38</sup> “It is not the concept of nation [sic] that is retrograde; it is the idea that the nation [sic] must necessarily be sovereign.” ...

Homogeneity, the old idea of nation [sic], is useless in the global village of gaps and interfaces.<sup>39</sup>

In those days, as soon as I crossed the border from Canada into the U.S., usually by car, I was cut off from Canadian news – not even U.S. border cities like Watertown, NY, carried Canadian newspapers. Maybe, if I were lucky, I’d be able to pick up scratchy weak CBC radio signals on an election night. The most exciting moment of my first visit to Boston was finding a copy of *Maclean’s* magazine for sale in Harvard Square.

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<sup>37</sup> McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> This plays on the title of what is arguably Trudeau’s most known essay, “La Nouvelle Trahison de Clercs,” which can be found in English translation as “New Treason of the Intellectuals,” in his *Federalism and the French Canadians*.

<sup>39</sup> McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business*, 170.

As an immigrant today, my world is often virtual. I can get all the news online, I can video-chat with family and friends and international phone rates have dropped precipitously. I can tour my old neighborhoods online and walk virtually past the house I grew up in (I note that physical travel to and from Canada has not undergone the same improvements, whether by car or air). I remember being furious with the owner of the excellent bookstore in my New York City neighborhood when I asked why, despite stocking much European fiction in translation, she had no Canadian titles, and being told that, if there were Canadian writers who were any good, she'd stock them (another American who did not understand the links between global economic forces -- this time in the publishing world -- and global culture). Now I order online.

I am now also a dual citizen, which is more of a challenge than those who see no difference between Canadians and Americans might imagine. As one writer observed, "The major difference between Canadians and Americans on the subject of their relationship is in the intensity of their perceptions. There is bound to be a conflict between a people who regards their relationship as critical and those who have scarcely noticed the other country."<sup>40</sup>

Certainly, it has made me think even more deeply about citizenship rights and obligations, borderlands, and what Shachar calls the "birthright lottery." Other models that have been tossed around include "new citizenship," which is essentially economic and social; postnational political citizenship, based on human rights principles; or rethinking national citizenship altogether.<sup>41</sup> It is also tantalizing to think of the nation-

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<sup>40</sup> Holmes, "Impact of Domestic Political Factors," 611.

<sup>41</sup> Schnapper, "European Debate," 203.

state itself as a kind of border, a space in which national particularism or the ethnic dimensions of each historic state are reconciled with the universal claims of citizenship.<sup>42</sup> All my experience and my studies have continued to push me toward forms of activism, especially involving both human migration and human rights, that I hope to develop professionally. First, though, I want to make this Trudeau-McLuhan archive available and I want to tell their story to a wider audience.

How much things can change in a year: from Justin Trudeau and President Barack Obama and their optimism and rapport to Trudeau and President Donald Trump just trying to get through part of a day together. I haven't read the online speculations about what McLuhan might make of Trump, but enjoyed the evocation of his work in an analysis of media obsession with the man who "...is no longer just the message. In many cases, he has become the medium, the ether through which all other stories flow."<sup>43</sup>

But some things do not change. Canada is no more part of the American consciousness than it ever was. When President Obama visited Prime Minister Trudeau in Ottawa in June 2016, the BBC ran an excellent op-ed, "Why the US can afford to ignore Canada," which noted that

One Canadian diplomat to the US entitled his memoirs, *I'll Be With You in a Minute, Mr. Ambassador*.<sup>44</sup> It was a refrain he heard often in Washington.

To say that Canada figures little in the mental American landscape would be charitable....

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<sup>42</sup> Schnapper, "Citizenship and National Identity," 6.

<sup>43</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/technology/trump-news-media-ignore.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/technology/trump-news-media-ignore.html?_r=0) .

<sup>44</sup> Allan Gotlieb (b. February 28, 1928) was a career civil servant who was appointed ambassador to the U.S. by Trudeau in 1981 and served in that position until 1989.



But as Mexico shows, sometimes the worst thing to happen to a country can be American attention.<sup>45</sup>

Writers for the *Globe and Mail* said the February 2017 Trump-Trudeau first meeting in Washington was “perfunctory” in comparison to the Obama-Trudeau meeting at the White House a year earlier, which had included a state dinner:

In contrast, Mr. Trump didn’t speak at all to Mr. Trudeau during the event as the Prime Minister sat beside him smiling. Mr. Trump shook the Prime Minister’s hand when reporters and camera crews were ushered into the Oval office for the photo op.

When a reporter asked if Mr. Trump had ever visited Canada, presidential aides cut the photo op short and escorted the media out. Mr. Trump said goodbye.<sup>46</sup>

Which brings me to a photo, an image, an image that smashes borders of time and place and, in its meanings, pits the inspirational global against the ignorant parochial, with the former victorious.

The photo is of Pierre Trudeau, a head-table guest at a November 5, 1981, dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria, and Trump, speaking at the lectern; Justin Trudeau presented a framed copy to Trump during their time together in February 2017. Trump is looking at the larger audience, not Trudeau. The prime minister is staring into space or at the dinnerware, but not at Trump, and his left hand appears to be gloved in leather.

Pierre Trudeau was being honored that night for fighting for human progress, by the Society of the Family of Man, an interfaith society founded in 1963 by the Council of Churches of the City of New York. Previous recipients included JFK and Lester Pearson.<sup>47</sup> In his remarks, he

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36512850> .

<sup>46</sup> <http://license.icopyright.net/user/viewFreeUse.act?fuid=MjQ3MTMyOTI%3D> .

<sup>47</sup> English, *Just Watch Me*, 509.

...appealed to countries to work together...[and] devote resources to those in need...

Trudeau warned that the world is standing “at the narrowing corridor of opportunity...the longer we delay action on pressing global problems, the less opportunity we will have to avoid the potentially disastrous collisions ahead.”<sup>48</sup>

McLuhan’s “collide-oscope of interfaced situations”<sup>49</sup> and Trudeau’s words about misguided dangerous nationalism -- “Open the frontiers, this people is dying of asphyxiation”<sup>50</sup> -- are only two of the messages from the past brought sharply to mind now through the medium of that photo, for reasons both old and new.

For me, though, Trudeau and McLuhan never get old, and in the following, from a time early in their relationship, I hear both their voices, resonating into a better future:

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau aggressively promoted the idea of a national culture constituted by its cultural pluralism. He argued that: “Uniformity is neither desirable nor possible in a country the size of Canada. We should not even be able to agree upon the kind of Canadian to choose as a model, let alone persuade most people to emulate it.” To those who argue that multiculturalism is a dangerous recipe for a fractiously decentralized state, Trudeau’s response was to make a virtue of the paradox. In 1970, to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Press, Trudeau argued: “Canada has often been called a mosaic, but I prefer the image of a tapestry, with its many threads and colours, its beautiful shapes, its intricate subtlety. If you go behind a tapestry, all you see is a mass of complicated knots. We have tied ourselves in knots, you might say. Too many Canadians only look at the tapestry of Canada that way. But if they would see it as others do, they would see what a beautiful, harmonious thing it really is.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/pierre-trudeau-important-message-donald-trump-1981-article-1.2971483> .

<sup>49</sup> McLuhan and Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Cook, *The Teeth of Time*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> <http://canadianart.ca/features/ken-lum-canadian-culture/>

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## Appendix

The documents in Part II of this paper can be found, almost without exception, in Ottawa at Library and Archives Canada, in the following sites:

**Title:** *Correspondence between P.E. Trudeau and H.M. McLuhan* (1968-1980)  
**Source:** Library and Archives Canada/Marshall McLuhan fonds/MG31-D156 vol. 22

**Title:** *Correspondence between P.E. Trudeau and H.M. McLuhan* (1968-1981)  
**Source:** Library and Archives Canada/Marshall McLuhan fonds/MG31-D156 Vol. 39, files 34-46

**Title:** *Pierre Elliott Trudeau fonds, Personal and Political Documents*  
**Source:** Library and Archives Canada/P.E. Trudeau fonds/MG26-O20, Vol. 9, File 28 – Marshall McLuhan – 1965-1981.

I am listing each piece below, when possible, for easier reference (“MM” refers to McLuhan, “PET” to Trudeau, “JD” to Jim Davey):

MM to PET, April 16, 1968: MG26-O20, 9-28.

JD to MM, May 21, 1968: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, June 3, 1968: MG26-O20, 9-28.

Mary Macdonald to MM, June 5, 1968: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, June 12, 1968: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to JD, June 19, 1968: MG31-D156, 22-2.

PET to MM, July 3, 1968: MG26-O20, 9-28.

JD to MM, July 10, 1968

MM to PET, September 27, 1968: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, October 17, 1968: MG26 391.8 (handwritten note says copies also to 313.3TI and O33).

Gordon Gibson to Al O’Brien, October 21, 1968.

JD to Richard Stanbury, October 22, 1968: MG26 391.8.

PET to MM, November 7, 1968: MG26-O20, 9-28.

Richard Stanbury to PET, November 12, 1968: MG26 391.8.

MM to PET, November 13, 1968: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, November 25, 1968: MG26 391.8 and MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, December 2, 1968: MG26 391.8

William Morris to MM, December 12, 1968: MG26 391.8.

JD to PET, December 13, 1968: MG26 391.8.

PET to MM, December 13, 1968: MG26-O20, 9-28 and MG26 391.8.

MM to PET, January 24, 1969: MG26-O20, 9-28.

JD to PET, February 13, 1969: MG26 391.8.

PET to MM, February 13, 1969: MG26-O20, 9-28 and MG26 391.8.

MM to PET, March 12, 1969: MG26-O20, 9-28 (and marked that copy went to 391.8).

JD to Marc Lalonde, March 31, 1969: MG26 391.8.

MM to PET, April 14, 1969: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

JD to Marc Lalonde, April 23, 1969: MG26 391.8.

MM to PET, May 29, 1969: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, June 18, 1969: MG20-O20, 9-28.

JD to PET, July 3, 1969: MG26 391.8.

JD to PET, July 8, 1969: MG26 391.8.

MM to JD, July 17, 1969: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to JD, August 27, 1969: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to JD, March 2, 1970: MG31-D156, 22-2.

MM to JD, June 18, 1970: MG31-D156, 22-2, Reel H-2057.

MM to PET, December 3, 1970: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, December 11, 1970: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, March 5, 1971: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to JD, March 8, 1971: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, March 24, 1971: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, September 21, 1971: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to JD, September 29, 1971: MG31-D156, 22-2.

PET to MM, October 1, 1971: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, October 25, 1971: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, June 12, 1972: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, August 2, 1972: MG26-O20, 9-28.

T.J.D. Burke to MM, August 4, 1972: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, August 21, 1972: MG26-O20, with copies sent to 2217 O54 (or D54?) and 391.8.

MM to PET, January 4, 1973: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, January 5, 1973: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, January 17, 1973: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

Trudeau family thank you, re: Grace Elliott Trudeau's death, to MM, January 1973.

PET to MM, January 23, 1973: MG26.

MM to PET, February 12, 1973: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, February 25, 1973: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, July 6, 1973: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, July 10, 1973: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, August 14, 1973: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, August 24, 1973: MG26-O20, 9-28 and notes that copies also filed in 3190 167, 3193 O22 and 391.8.

PET to MM, August 27, 1973: MG26-O20, 9-28, with file copies to 3229 O23 and 391.8.

MM to PET, October 17, 1973.

PET to MM, October 31, 1973.

Pierre O'Neil to MM, February 25, 1974: MG 391.8.

PET to MM, March 14, 1974: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, March 26, 1974: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, March 29, 1974: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, April 3, 1974: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, April 8, 1974.

MM to PET, June 13, 1974: MG26-O20, 9-28 and 4169 004.

MM to PET, September 20, 1974: MG26-O20, 9-28 and 4266 O26.

PET to MM, September 26, 1974: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, January 22, 1975: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, February 14, 1975: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, February 17, 1975: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, March 17, 1975: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, July 2, 1975: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, July 21, 1975: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, July 30, 1975: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, October 14, 1975: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).



MM to PET, September 3, 1976: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, October 4, 1976: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, November 26, 1976: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, December 13, 1976: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, February 14, 1977: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, February 24, 1977: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, April 4, 1977: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, May 11, 1977: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, May 14, 1977: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, July 25, 1977: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, August 5, 1977: MG26-O20, 9-28.

Hellie Wilson to MM, August 11, 1977: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, December 13, 1977: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, December 21, 1977: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, June 19, 1978: MG26-O20, 9-28.

MM to PET, November 10, 1978: MG31-D156, 39 (43-45) Reel H-2069.

MM to PET, December 6, 1978: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, December 15, 1978: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, December 18, 1978: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, February 1, 1979: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, April 16, 1979: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to MM, July 25, 1979: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, September 7, 1979: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

MM to PET, October 18, 1975: MG26-O20, 9-28.

PET to MM, April 28, 1980: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

PET to Corinne McLuhan, on MM's death, January 7, 1981: MG31-D156, 39 (34-46).

James Cross interview by Jim Davey: MG26-O11, 38-14.