

*At the Speed of Light There
Is Only Illumination:
A Reappraisal of Marshall
McLuhan*

Edited by
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(2004)

University of Ottawa Press

Understanding Language and Media (Agincourt, Ont.: Book Society of Canada, 1977); see also McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws*, and McLuhan and Powers, *Global Village*.

52. I would like to thank Robert Logan from the Department of Physics at the University of Toronto for his kind contribution to this "periodic table" of elements.
53. McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws*, 91.
54. *Ibid.*, 222.
55. *Ibid.*, 63.
56. McLuhan, *Letters*, 429 (emphasis in original).
57. See, for instance, the McLuhan-inspired journal *Media Ecology*. Available online at: http://raven.ubalt.edu/features/media_ecology/me_home.html.
58. A. Tepper, "Controlling Technology by Shaping Visions," *Policy Sciences* 29 (1996), 29–44.
59. See A. Rip, T. Misa, and J. Schot, eds., *Managing Technology in Society: The Approach of Constructive Technology Assessment* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1995).

What McLuhan Got Wrong about the Global Village and Some Things He Didn't Foresee

BRIAN FAWCETT

IN MAY 2000, I accepted an invitation from the University of Ottawa to investigate Marshall McLuhan's mistakes and oversights at a commemorative conference. I was invited, at least in part, because in the realm of McLuhan studies I have become "the troll"—as one critic put it years ago—who lives under the bridge that leads to the information superhighway, the metaphor for the street system of the "Global Village." I confess to liking this role, which has been evolving since my book *Cambodia: A Book for People Who Find Television Too Slow* (1986) portrayed Marshall McLuhan variously—on the road to Damascus, being kicked by irritable camels, and discussing entrepreneurial techniques with St. Paul. For all the disjunction of the approach in this book, it provided a serious critique of two of McLuhan's weaknesses: his lack of contact with ordinary life and his "gift" for public relations. Since McLuhan has not proved to be a flavour-of-the-week guru, but a thinker who had seen farther into the future than even he imagined, I had some updated remarks to make about his insights and his errors.

I like my job as troll primarily because I do not have to do much beyond what I would otherwise do: steer clear of official public discourses and the disciplinary straitjackets of jargon, and keep a watching brief on the real streets and media corridors amidst which I live. For this temerity, I have been tossed squarely into the camp of those who are hostile to

McLuhan's ideas and approach, or who are judged to be unreasonably disturbed by the recent evolution of mass systems.

I *am* disturbed by the recent evolution of mass systems, particularly those related to communications. These systems seem to be increasingly shaped by and driven for financial profit, and to be run by corporations that are as single-minded as reptiles. By contrast, I have always found McLuhan's slapdash style of thinking admirable and curiously efficient—in other words, everything that is good about human beings. In a sense, it is my admiration for McLuhan that has fueled my concern about the way in which mass systems are being rigged across the human community.

Because I am not an academic, I have no affiliation with any of the various factions that now ride McLuhan's intellectual slipstream, and I'm also prone to ridicule these factions without being completely clear about which is which. I didn't get the opportunity to study with McLuhan, much to my regret. As it happens, however, I come from what easterners and Americans alike tend to think of as a similar locale—that snowy, utterly Canadian wasteland to the north and west of Toronto and Montreal. Beyond that, I am, methinks, quite close to McLuhan's worst nightmare: a foul-mouthed, ex-Protestant atheist, who occasionally struggles with bouts of moral earnestness. In spite of the differences, I have become, in the sanguine sense, more a student of McLuhan than a critic.

It seems to me that McLuhan was a generally admirable man who could be, when occasion and his own character sideswiped him, a jerk. He was a veritable swamp of opinions and beliefs that many people today would regard as disagreeable. He was anti-Communist, homophobic, misogynist, and occasionally less than fond of some of his Jewish contemporaries and colleagues without being anti-Semitic or anti-Zionist; he thought that women were capable of very little (“women go downhill from the age of twelve”); he thought that most of his students and all of his university colleagues were morons; and he spewed forth an endless cascade of opinions largely unsupported by facts, but filled, nonetheless, with perceptive insights and unorthodox ideas.

There are many things to like and admire about this man, so I'll list those first:

1. McLuhan was a first-rate intellectual thief. He was so good at it that it is often difficult to pin down the sources of his key ideas.

Among the examples of this tendency is his coining the term “Global Village,” which is central to his entire project. Did he steal the term from Ezra Pound? Lewis Mumford? Or did he adapt it from Wyndham Lewis's *America and Cosmic Man* (1948), in which Lewis writes that “The earth has become one big village, with telephones laid on from one end to the other, and air transport, both speedy and safe.”

2. McLuhan's fame as a talker was matched by his skill as a listener. Consider his insight that media tend to transform the fields in which they operate. Academic Marxists tend to see this notion as pilfered from University of Toronto colleague Harold Innis. The idea is, however, also a logical projection of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in physics, of which McLuhan was cognizant. The applicable part of Heisenberg says that measuring a phenomenon changes it, and that the effect of observation and calculation is an integral and sometimes crucial part of phenomenology. This particular piece of McLuhan's conceptual assemblage also appears in a seminal essay on poetics, “Projective Verse” (1951), by the American poet Charles Olson. Funny thing: if we go back and do a little investigative work, we find that Olson and McLuhan were in communication during the early 1950s.
3. McLuhan was a remarkably resourceful and courageous reprocessor of ideas, an intellectual fabricator, and a compulsive and incorrigible contextualizer.
4. McLuhan had an admirable gift for what pop psychologists call “lateral thinking,” an ability that runs contrary to that of computers and corporations. Denizens of the latter found him exotic because his thinking was on the other side of the universe from their own.
5. McLuhan is commendable for adhering to his wonderful but unsubstantiated-by-science insight that the low-density images of television scramble the order of perception and information intake. He was, as it turns out, correct. Neurologists have since discovered that the neurological effect of scanning a pixel matrix generates alpha waves, which render most people barely capable of critical thought within about twenty minutes.

Beyond these, McLuhan had other, less generally appreciated qualities that I've come to respect and, sometimes, treasure:

1. His chronic insolence when faced by institutional bullying, and the intellectual cowardice and mediocrity that always seems to lurk beneath it.
2. His always-evident pleasure at being alive and in possession of a human mind. He loathed strangers who asked him about his feelings and once remarked that he wanted to "study change to gain power over it." By themselves, these constitute an intellectual method the twenty-first century desperately needs to adopt.
3. His unapologetic generalism, and his desire to see *that* mode of understanding at least stand equal to the specialism and expertism that has swept most of the interesting cognitive technologies of human civilization straight into the dustbin.
4. His ability to abandon moral earnestness, which might have crippled him, or at least slowed him down to the point where the entropy of academic life would have strangled his wave-motion mode of moving thought along.

Then there's the "Global Village" and the things about it that McLuhan got wrong in defining its promise and its limits. To a certain extent, blaming McLuhan for the Global Village is like blaming the postman for a "Dear John" letter. He was a messenger, a marvellously insightful delivery boy with winged shoes. But he did not create the world as we now have it, nor was he the Marsha writing the dear-Johns we get more or less daily now from the Global Village. Most of what we ascribe to McLuhan is in our fevered imaginations or specious interpretations.

The intellectual industries and the various hagiographic discourses that, mainly in Canada, have grown up around McLuhan and Harold Innis are another matter, as are many of those who have ridden on McLuhan's intellectual coattails as if they were a magic carpet, the flight quality or air-worthiness of which one must never question. I guess it is acceptable to exploit McLuhan and to charge as high fees as possible to take élan-seeking corporate sightseers for joy rides. Educated folks need jobs like everyone else, and they may even deserve to be handsomely paid

for doing them. Still, I won't speak to or within any of these discourses because of their solipsistic natures.

Instead, I want to chronicle some of McLuhan's faults and errors, which I've admittedly had difficulty distinguishing from his miscalculations and minor virtues. Hence, I'm going to list the faults and errors anecdotally, and then try to sort out their effects:

1. For the ten years between roughly 1955 and 1965, McLuhan appears to have believed that television was actually going to make people's lives better. Today, it is very hard to argue seriously that television has improved the active quality of anyone's life. It has made for more immobile lives, yes, and a scourge of obese children. Has it made for less thoughtful lives? Yes, indeed. Lives that are more opiated by entertainment? Certainly. Lives communalized by product consumption habits and the uncritical ingestion of half-assed facts? Yes. But it has not contributed to lives of superior quality and self-determination, collectively or individually. McLuhan's optimism about television is like his bouts of enthusiasm for Disneymania and his frequent misidentification of popular culture as a positive political force rather than the neutral sum total of information overload, cybernetic engineering, and mass-market advertising.
2. McLuhan's partisanship to his own theories led him, later in life, to overestimate the pedagogic possibilities of video. This is now a long-standing but still-volatile educational debate that today is inhabited mainly by raucous entrepreneurs and, more recently, by gored oxen. Anyone who has sat through a mind-numbing math class or taken a bookkeeping course knows that video and film can be valuable and cost-saving aids to rote-learning educational situations in which the chief issues are over how to organize, memorize, and/or recall data. But video is dead neutral on data interpretation and on how to get along with one another and with our technology while we're reinventing the world.

Even educational television, however, has turned out to be a bitter oxymoron. Learning situations in which texture and complexity exist demand more than simple data input/output.

They require conversation, dispute and discourse, and the “play of ideas” that leads to contextually accurate applications. Ironically, McLuhan’s own idiosyncratic pedagogic and discursive habits—about which he may have felt slightly guilty—involve a Zen that simply doesn’t translate onto video, as anyone who has seen McLuhan in a can will attest. To learn from personal testimony, you have to be there. To teach—and learn—complex subject matter likewise requires physical contact.

Secondarily, and worth adding, is that video educational entrepreneurs have employed many of McLuhan’s one-liners outside their intended context, and have made him appear more enthusiastic about their cause than he would have been if he’d ever been asked to consider their uses of him and his ideas.

3. McLuhan’s chronic obliviousness to criticism became a tendency, particularly in his later years, to ignore feedback. I understand that this was at once a damaging shortcoming and an intellectual strength. The paradox needs to be pointed out. Sometimes it undermined him; at other times it kept him from being buried by the pedants.
4. McLuhan’s failure to be more circumspect about the retribalization of the world was a damaging oversight. He believed that the dangers of retribalization could be handled by men acting in good faith, and that the dangers were the result of a lack of organization and good ideas. This view was the product of his Christian optimism, which I’ll discuss further along.
5. McLuhan did us no favour by positing the pernicious notion that the present is going to be reprocessed by the future as its art forms. He did so without bothering to point out that this was only part of how art accumulates and disperses formal energy, an inexcusable error for a James Joycean scholar to make. The notion as relayed by McLuhan was not merely a free insight, it was also an incitement to mass-media entrepreneurs, and they’ve been drowning the public realm in rewarmed art gravy ever since. The present has thereby become the future’s raw materials for a nostalgia industry so besotted with messianic commercial enthusiasms that it’s no longer clear that the term “art form” will even survive much longer. McLuhan sometimes mistook “art

form” for “profit-generating vehicle,” which is a mistake that the consumer corporations haven’t ever made.

6. Similarly, McLuhan didn’t do anyone a favour by puffing what are really sensory media tendencies into laws, particularly within a culture in which people tend to be overwhelmingly law-abiding. His enthusiasm for codifying things that ought to be treated as dynamic and situational contributed to his celebrity, but it has also been responsible, in part, for the uncritical public and academic response to the media’s flattening and reshaping of human reality over the last fifty years.
7. McLuhan’s passionate and entrepreneurial defence of his theories has been a posthumous problem because it has given rise to an academic religion within Canadian communications theory no less pernicious structurally than that of contemporary science or, less seriously, among the University of Toronto’s Northrop Frye-inspired tenure-tracked upper-middle-class Anglican hooligans. In McLuhan’s case this is more tragic because his true intentions were to provoke multidisciplinary thinking and to head off the interdisciplinary gang warfare that has become our university system’s garden of Gethsemane.
8. McLuhan’s annoying and shameless propensity to suck up to the rich is a fault. Some of his later work was aimed at making his earlier insights palatable to the corporations and their boardroom self-propaganda choirs and, in part, may be an explanation for the tetrads with which he was doodling at the end of his life. The tetrads were probably intended to be corporate boardroom puzzles. More shouldn’t be made of this than is relevant, but it shouldn’t be forgotten either. McLuhan was a man who believed, to the end, that the corporate captains he encountered in his travels were *superior beings* when they were merely *specifically focused* people. They occasionally tried to explain their focus to McLuhan—and that they were more entertained by his enthusiasms and unique delivery of ideas than they were edified by them. He does not seem to have listened.
9. Finally, and more seriously, McLuhan’s entrepreneurial sense of proprietorship left him unable to recognize that communications are only a *part* of the human puzzle. These days, commu-

nications are a very large part of it, but they're not *the* puzzle or, as Innis was convinced, the cipher to all the other parts.

I don't intend to demean or disparage him for not having experienced the events of the decades since his death. But it seems useful to point out that McLuhan wasn't a particularly organized thinker, that he was a dreadful empiricist, and that these shortcomings had serious effects. Jane Jacobs, likewise a genius, has similar shortcomings. Like McLuhan, she is a fabulous synthesizer and framer of ideas. And like McLuhan, she's a mediocre researcher.

My most serious criticisms of McLuhan's ideas—and his ideational habits—are rooted in a model that he had no way of knowing anything about. The human genome project, which a few years ago geneticists were arrogantly claiming they'd have mapped and deciphered in no time, turned out to be hundreds or even thousands of times as complex as any geneticist initially calculated. For every affective gene sequence they expected to find, in other words, there are actually a hundred or a thousand, each conflated with all the others. Even these, it now appears, are mixed in with non-sequitur genes that have no decipherable relevance to anything. If we learned anything from the twentieth century, it should have been that there is no single cipher to life. And it is not because I'm an atheist that I argue this point. Empirical evidence has been piling up for one hundred years to suggest that life—human and otherwise—is infinitely more complex than hitherto recognized. As a devout Catholic, McLuhan was constitutionally incapable of considering this.

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Before I get specific about McLuhan's errors, let me lodge two caveats. First, those of us able to read McLuhan today have had thirty years of additional data on the Global Village that McLuhan didn't have. It is important that we hold him responsible only for what he knew, not for what we *now* can see.

Second, most of McLuhan's mistakes are the result of either his characteristic carelessness or his too-secure belief in an orderly and ordered world. I realize that, in his case, "carelessness" is a double-edged term and that one edge helped him to slash through masses of mental algae and

other kinds of intellectual and ideological gunk in which our universities were (and still are) mired. His carelessness was a mixed blessing. It gave him velocity, an energy-saving nonchalance, but it also led to damaging inaccuracies.

McLuhan's belief in order was the product of his Roman Catholic conservatism. It simply does not occur to a man who believes in God and in the idea that a physical institution (the church) can be the arbiter of God's word and wisdom that the world can go utterly wrong. That the twentieth century might simply have been a locomotive running at full steam without a driver, a transmission, or track was a thought McLuhan wasn't capable of seriously entertaining.

The Global Village is today primarily a fiscal phenomenon: It is organized around the World Bank, The International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), all of them organizations with powers that supersede those of elected governments and whose narrow goals are to protect the financial portfolios of what are mostly extremely wealthy North American and European families. To accomplish this, they are most interested in finding ways to suppress inflation and thereby to ensure that the wealthy retain their wealth and that debtors stay indebted. They want to keep the banking system stable and unreasonably profitable. I don't believe, as some people on the political left do, that these are demonic organizations dedicated to impoverishing the poor and denying them self-determination. I think it is more accurate to say that the financial sector simply doesn't give a damn about the poor and the disadvantaged one way or another.

A few years ago, I wrote a book that suggested that McLuhan's greatest mistake was not recognizing that the Global Village was going to be southern California, specifically Disneyland and Los Angeles. A passage in this book, *Public Eye: An Investigation into the Disappearance of the World* (1989), since revised, described it in this way:

When Marshall McLuhan coined the metaphor of the Global Village to describe the effects massive increases in the volume and speed of information flow were going to have on human individuals and groups, he misread several crucial aspects. Nearly all of his misreadings can be tracked to the same source: McLuhan was a Christian, a Roman Catholic, and he was

blinded by the optimism and belief in the essential benevolence of invisible authority inherent in Roman Catholic doctrine and practice—that there is something out there that can forgive mistakes and cruelties. Some of the misreadings, such as thinking that computers would save us from our own stupidity, now seem laughable. But they're typical of a man who believed that if we ourselves weren't able to control our fate, then God would help.

I was right to say, ten years ago, that McLuhan misread what the Global Village would be like, but I was wrong about how the Global Village would evolve as we enter the twenty-first century. Since 1989, it has become more a series of fiscal malls around the world than a unified village: London, Tokyo, Milan, Paris, Frankfurt, New York City. The best thing to be said about these malls is that they're impervious to cultural differences and race, which is, I suppose, some advance if you think the first and final aspiration of human life is ownership of a BMW and a diversified investment portfolio. Although there is now a global financial apparatus and, to a lesser degree, a consistent international market for commodity exchange and natural resource exploitation, there is no coherent global culture beyond some insincere corporate glorification of independent businesspersons and endless enticement to buy and consume products.

The mediated mass culture of the Global Village is highly manipulated and manipulative corporate/Disney consumerism, while interpersonal, social, and political culture—outside a few enclaves of extreme privilege and wealth—has degenerated into partisan and frequently violent competition over race, ethnicity, gender, and, in the West, sexual and lifestyle preferences. Within that competition, everyone loathes everyone who displays difference or indifference. In North America, where there is sufficient wealth to buffer us from the inherent violence of tribalism, the majority of us get to interact with our preferred institutions and recreational camps while we drift, collectively, toward self-inflicted segregation. At the flashpoints in the world—Kosovo, Somalia, Rwanda—people carry machetes and automatic rifles and suppress differences with flashing blades and flying bullets.

The retribalization that McLuhan imagined hasn't produced a single, vast tribe connected by electronic communications, but, rather, virtually its opposite: a clamour of hostile, competitive entrepreneurs crawling over

one another for commodities and the dignity they believe possession confers. Culturally, the Global Village most resembles the biblical Tower of Babel with franchise kiosks sprouting from it. This tower is becoming more murderous and fractious as it transforms the constitutional democracies into societies dedicated to the mere accumulation of capital and whatever else the unremitting pursuit of material wealth permits.

Part of this is the evolution of television into a five-hundred-channel universe, and that, like the Internet, wasn't something McLuhan was able to predict. Instead of a unifying, pacifying force that brings a universal language and a new sense of community, television has become the forum within which the emptiness of consumerism enfolds the competitive violence of tribalism. The unifying mega-network not only did not arrive to bring electronic democracy to the world, the existing structure of television broke apart into a chaos of single-minded specialties that allow corporate sponsors direct control over the content to a degree of thoroughness that Stalin never dreamed of at the height of his tyranny in Soviet Russia.

In the realm of ideas and discourse, our universities have evolved into a vicious state of intellectual tribalism most commonly called interdisciplinary thinking. McLuhan's vision of a global community called for "multidisciplinary studies," which would have involved an unprecedented degree of intellectual sincerity and cooperation fueled by a substance McLuhan himself possessed in abundance, but which is much rarer in others than he imagined: open curiosity.

Here are some of the specific errors I think McLuhan made:

1. By restricting his working concept of sense biases to the visual and acoustic sensoriums, McLuhan ignored the olfactory bias in human communications by which fundamental sexual relations between individuals are largely determined, along with a much greater portion of interpersonal and social life than we care to admit.

Let me illustrate how complex this may become with an anecdote: A few years ago, an experiment with mice determined that female mice were more likely to be attracted to genetically dissimilar mice (male or female) before breeding, but that afterward they tended to hang out with mice of similar genetics (not

necessarily those related to them). There was some correlation in these data and the reason is almost obvious: at the breeding stage, the female mice were extending the gene pool (not because they had any moral objections to incest) to guarantee the health of their offspring's immune systems, which is what it turns out exogamy is designed to secure for organic groupings of any kind. With an obviously smaller and less credible sample of human females, the same scientists found that women of breeding age, by scent alone, made precisely the same choices when it came to which men they found attractive—unless they were pregnant or on birth-control pills, in which case they preferred genetically similar males.

Twenty-five and thirty years ago, a substantial proportion of human females in our culture were choosing their breeding mates while they were taking birth-control hormones. Ever wonder why there's such a preponderance of allergies and immune system difficulties among the children born since? Maybe it is the too-complex bio-environments, as most conventional scientists currently believe—too much pollution over-stimulating fragile immune systems. But maybe the hormones we've been putting into our systems are causing us to make erroneous immune-system decisions that may have originally been made, as with mice, largely on the basis of olfactory stimuli.

I'd be prepared, at the very least, to suggest that the olfactory bias is more effectual than the tactile sensorium, which has done little more than impede the ascendancy of the polyester industry. I won't be making an outrageously "modest proposal" if I suggest that the olfactory bias is as effective as the visual and acoustic biases McLuhan favoured in determining human behavior.

2. McLuhan didn't foresee the evolution of corporations, even though the corporations were among his most avid readers and propagandists. There's evidence to suggest that, notwithstanding his habit of taking anyone wearing an expensive business suit seriously, McLuhan thought that the corporations were a lot of small-scale Soviet Unions, albeit with an internal culture less murderous and threatening. In those days, he was right, but

things have changed. The barbarization of corporate culture over the last thirty years is an almost wholly unexamined phenomenon, in no small part because no corporation will fund research for it and corporations may be actively discouraging any serious examination from without—or introspection from within.

3. McLuhan did not understand computers or binary logic despite his isolated insights about both. What he did understand of computers—that they might offer us a cosmic consciousness or, at least, a collective interface with the world—is a misconstruing of the functioning of the Von Neumann neighborhood and of how computer-based artificial intelligence constructs the world and also its contents. For those who want a detailed discussion of the implications of artificial intelligence, there is one in *Public Eye*. They can also go to the December 1990 *Scientific American*, which devoted most of that issue to the subject.

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, which was a hot topic a decade ago, cooled because most of the AI scientists fled the field. One of the reasons they left was because they discovered that binary AI would be a very *different* sort of intelligence from that exercised by human beings. AI, when achieved, will be capable of vastly superior computative and calculative extrapolation, but extremely limited (even using linked CRAY-level supercomputers) in its ability and propensity to contextualize. Ultimately, there was something still more disturbing: even computing at light speed (as opposed to the 276 MPH at which nerve synapses travel along and through human nerve tissue), AI would remain without the ability to experience humour, which turns out to be the most complex of human neurological maneuvers. One wild-eyed UC Davis AI scientist told me, as he was temporarily leaving the field to study metaphor in Russian literature, that AI wouldn't think we were very funny, and he feared it would, sooner rather than later, try to exterminate us.

4. McLuhan's understanding of tribalism was inexcusably romantic and naive. Or rather, he thought the introduction of global systems would produce one vast tribe unified by electronic technologies. What has evolved isn't anything like that. We have

devolved into uneasy fiscal agglomerations, with many of the subcomponents armed and frequently ultra-violent: Rwanda, Somalia, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia. The "civilized" effects may be witnessed in such cities as Vancouver, where official multiculturalism has reduced the city to a less violent version of gang and ethnic warfare, with the subtribal enclaves squabbling with dysfunctional governments and one another for privileges they would deny to everyone else.

5. McLuhan didn't see the Internet coming. He may be excused for that because no one did. How could anyone have foreseen an infinity of Von Neumann neighbourhoods, first, being transformed by the intelligence community into a secure dispatch network capable of surviving a nuclear war that takes down 95 percent of existing communications systems, and, second, making nearly all existing public communications technologies obsolete, superfluous, and/or ripe for colonization?

Some other transformations that were still in the cocoon when McLuhan was alive have altered the evolution of human society in ways for which he can't be held responsible:

1. Cellular telephone technology and other wireless communication systems. Cell telephones have universalized—or, rather, rendered ubiquitous—the communications environment, jumping telephones from hot to ultra-cool, and making interpersonal and commercial transactions no longer limited to specific locations. This technology may make life in the Global Village impossibly intimate and irritatingly remote simultaneously.
2. In 1986 I suggested that the problem with the Global Village was that its culture too much resembled New York and Los Angeles, and that it was making everything else a suburb and, all but a tiny minority, alienated suburbanites. This culture's evolution in the last fifteen years has actually been transformed in this way: The Global Village isn't New York or Los Angeles. It is Wall Street and Rodeo Drive, with the poor outside the gates. I could go on and on with McLuhan's shortcomings and mistakes, but there is a point at which speculations simply devour common

sense, particularly when they are the hard-to-quantify kind that I seem to specialize in. When I had lunch with one of McLuhan's biographers, Phil Marchand, a while ago, he suggested that I see McLuhan neither as huckster nor as an Old Testament Jeremiah wailing on the arid hilltops, but as a man in the line of Socrates and the Greek cynics.

That helps. McLuhan is indeed very much like Ezra Pound, something of a temperamental village explainer, prone to be wrong as often as right, but willing to stir the pot without fear or rancour because he believed that if the pot isn't boiling and no one stirs it, the Republic will fail, the stew will be spoiled or charred at the bottom. Unlike Pound, who thought that the Republic was a series of elevated art fascistas, McLuhan believed it could have the commonality and comprehensibility of village life. If we're going to dream, I prefer McLuhan's, which was of an intimate democracy where ideas would flourish, and the human mind could expand and be gentled.

Something else, too, this time my own: as I've slowly been turning into an older and more circumspect sort of troll, I've learned to be most grateful for the alternate realities writers and thinkers place me in, and less and less interested when I find them confirming my interests and prejudices. Most often in our era, the realities to which we're introduced are depressingly small and confining—a garden here, a dysfunctional family there, a quilting bee here, a jeweler's dais there. With McLuhan, one is always in or about realities so fast that the danger is that of disorientation, not sleep-inducing boredom.

Panel Discussion: “Trouble in the Global Village”

Leslie Shade: Welcome to this session, “Trouble in the Global Village.” My name is Leslie Shade, and I am a professor here in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Ottawa. For this panel, we have three esteemed members who are going to address the various problems in the “Global Village.” Starting from my immediate left, we have Canadian author Brian Fawcett, then Professor Robert Babe, followed by Professor Arthur Kroker.

First, a few introductory remarks. What did McLuhan mean by the term “Global Village,” and how has it altered and been appropriated into the twenty-first century? Popular culture has adopted the term in diverse and, in many instances, peculiar ways. Consider the following book titles that use the term “Global Village”: *Networks in the Global Village: Life in Contemporary Communities*; *Power of a Third Kind: The Western Attempt to Colonize the Global Village*; *Staying Local in the Global Village: Bali in the Twentieth Century*; and *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America*. So far, not so abnormal. Global Village here is a metaphor for life beyond the local, but with the local encompassing the global, and vice versa. But wait—*the Global Village of Dentistry: Internet, Intranet, Online Services for Dental Professionals?* One of McLuhan’s last books was *War and Peace in the Global Village*. What would McLuhan have thought of the way we now conduct wars—virtual wars—and watch them in the comfort of our living room?

According to McLuhan's son, Eric, the source of the term "Global Village" came about as a way for him to describe the early effects of the introduction of radio in the 1920s. Radio brought people into faster and more intimate contact with each other. Space became significant, although radio relied on synchronous time for the listener. With the advent of the Internet, the term "Global Village" has become almost ubiquitous. It's used as a way to describe how the Internet will bring cultures and peoples together regardless of geographic borders, gender, race, religious orientation, sexual preferences, and so forth.

Consider how corporate interests have co-opted the idea of the Global Village to promote their vision of a totally interconnected networked world. We have IBM's advertising slogan of "Solutions for a Small Planet." The Global Village™ brand refers to hardware and software designed for the Macintosh computer (see www.GlobalVillage.com). The term has also been appropriate by a variety of commercial interests:

- GlobalVillage Backpackers is a private Canadian company offering "hostel-style accommodations and related services . . . we cater to young and young-at-heart backpackers travelling in Canada" (see www.globalbackpackers.com)
- Global Village Escapes™ and Tourism Road dot Com™ is the Internet travel and tourism guide (see <http://www.globalvillageescapes.com/>)
- The Iacocco Institute at Lehigh University offers the seminar "Global Village for Future Leaders of Business and Industry" (see <http://www.lehigh.edu/~village/>)
- Jowi Taylor is the host and producer of CBC's radio program Global Village—"the news of the world in the world of music" (see <http://www.radio.cbc.ca/programs/global/>)

Other applications are more popular: "Solutions for a Small Planet" . . . what ad campaign am I thinking of right there? Does that bring up any sort of –

Floor: IBM?

LS: IBM. Okay, and . . . what was IBM's "Solutions for a Small Planet"?

Floor: Technical.

LS: Technology. . . . You may be in remote parts of the world and, all of a sudden, there you are: you are marketing your olive oil through the benefits of IBM's e-commerce technologies. . . . Who did "It's a Small World"? –

Floor: Disney or Coke.

LS: Disney. Is that Disney, or is that Coke, or is it all the same? All the same after a while. . . .

(Laughter from the audience)

LS: I think it's been picked up by corporate interests, by advertisers, because it appeals to this utopian sensibility of bringing the world together. But I think there are other issues that we need to think about in terms of the trouble, the "trouble" of the title in this panel: the overall issues of globalization, whether economic or cultural, and what's called our knowledge-based economy society. . . . What's the common good in the Global Village now? What's our conception of social justice? Is it "Global Village," or "global pillage"? As a technological imperative continues unabated, there are many issues with such overdeveloped countries as Canada and the U.S. in relation to developed countries; large issues with digital capitalism; large issues dealing with intellectual property and the ownership of knowledge; the precarious sense of indigenous knowledge; and large issues regarding the digital divide—who has access to information? Who doesn't have access to information? And what counts as information and what counts as knowledge in these days?

Culture. What's our culture in this Global Village? Who has the monopoly on knowledge? Whose culture is it? What are issues of cultural imperialism and cultural sovereignty and cultural ecology? Corporate synergies have overtaken the world. Media convergence and globalization are incessant. Also, consider environmental and health issues.

War and peace in the Global Village. How do we conduct wars now? Virtual wars: it's like a video game conducted in the comfort of your own living room. And how do we turn these issues around? . . . Let's think optimistically instead of pessimistically; it's fun to think pessimistically

because it's so easy, but let's talk about what the trouble is and figure out what we're going to do about this trouble.

Each panel member will provide us with an opening statement, and then we'll open up the discussion to the audience. Arthur?

AK: I would like to talk briefly today about one example of trouble in the Global Village. Let me provide the context: I edit an electronic journal called *C-Theory*, which is like an alliance, a free space for publishing. . . . It involves software engineers from around the world, and new-media designers, and writers, and poets, and philosophers, and members of the general cultural community, people on the net itself. We like to provide a space for free contestation for some serious and in-depth reflections on art, and technology, and culture.

In the process of editing articles for the journal one afternoon late last December, 1999, we suddenly received an e-mail from a student who is at Ithaca College and whose e-mail tag is Sugar Morpheus. I want to read out this e-mail and talk about some of the issues involved in it: as we examined and tried to think about the development of the 'Net in the culture of high-intensity capitalism, we became concerned about the profound contradiction today, I think, in the 'Net between the attempt to pirate away the utopian possibilities in the 'Net on behalf of a digital capitalism, one which is trying to crush, I believe, the free expression of opinion on the 'Net with the use of surveillance.

Anyway, let me just read this e-mail, which is pretty brief, and then just make a few comments. This is from Sugar Morpheus [reading from the letter]:

On December seventeenth, I participated in the E-toys virtual sit-in [RT-Mark, this was a group of hacker-activists on the net who had organized this resistance against E-toys, the first part of which was a sit-in, and the aim of which was to drive their share price down as low as possible to really begin to play in the same kind of symbolic territory that they play in]. On December seventeenth, I participated in the E-toys virtual sit-in on an Ithaca College computer. After doing what I felt was "my share of the fighting the fight against E-toys," I left the computer and went home.

The next day I was called by the Ithaca College police and told

to come to the station to discuss something urgent. They sat me in an interrogation room, not telling me why I was there and proceeded to ask me vague questions about my computer usage the day before. After about half an hour, it finally dawned on me that they were talking about my participation in the E-toy sit-in. Not someone who is normally confronted by police interrogation rooms and accusations of crime, I immediately explained the entire situation from start to finish to the police, saying that this was organized by E-mark and really I was participating on-line to do research for a writing, for Dr. Patricia Zimmerman's Senior Topics Film Class—a likely excuse. We were studying RT Mark's site of resistance against the corporate world. I explained that I had received an e-mail from the thing.net informing me of the drastic E-toy situation and landed at RT Mark to participate in the sit-in. I tried to explain that I was not violating any policy, and was voicing my protest against the outrage of E-toy's corporate crimes with thousands of others on-line. When I left the station, the officer told me—and I quote—not to talk about this to anyone. I asked if it was alright to tell my professor. He said, "of course. That wasn't what I meant." I don't know what he meant. That was about three months ago.

Today I received a letter from Michael O' Leary, the Assistant Director of Judicial Affairs at Ithaca College. The letter was dated February 11th, 1999, but I hadn't received it until the 16th. Let me quote some of the highlights: "You have allegedly violated Section 3H.2 of the Ithaca College Student Conduct Code. Specifically, your alleged unauthorized, and inappropriate use of the college computer on December 17th, 2000. If, however, you choose not to appear at this meeting, I will assume that you waive your right to a hearing. I will assess an appropriate sanction based on the evidence available to me."

I received this letter today. I haven't heard a thing either out of Judicial Affairs or the Campus Police since last—since December the 18th. I am supposed to meet with Mr. O'Leary on this coming Monday. After three months, I am asked to meet with Mr. O'Leary within five days for a hearing to discuss the matter. I honestly thought the charges had been dropped, since it had been so long. I don't believe this is a fair amount of time to prepare for a hearing, which may result in, at worst, being expelled, and, at best, if I am found guilty of violating the code, complete suppression of my academic computer privileges. I am a senior digital video maker; I am web designer; I am a digital photographer; I am the web

master for two different departments on campus—alumni and film studies. I simply cannot afford to lose my computer privileges any more than one could afford to lose their privileges to use the telephone, create art work, and participate in a free environment. I understood that I took a risk when I participated in the virtual sit-in. My question is have you heard of any struggles similar to this one: any examples of other students who are threatened by a College for expressing free speech through computers would be of great help in defending my own case. Regardless of the outcome, what Ithaca College is doing is, I believe, wrong and it should be made public.

When Marshall McLuhan was creatively conceiving the utopian possibilities of the Global Village, I don't think he really had in mind the prospects for corporate consolidation of control of information flows, involving the dean at Ithaca College, the police force at Ithaca College, and an anonymous, alien corporation from Los Angeles itself. This really highlights, in some ways, the ubiquitous forms of electronic surveillance that go on on the 'Net, at the behest of corporate control. Secondly, it highlights the life-and-death struggles between . . . a model digital elite that is working at the behest of a digital model of business, and that is seeking to pirate the 'Net away and to suppress creative relations, the new relations of creative possibilities that are made possible by the 'Net and the Web itself. The situation today is fluid with activists and resisters on the 'Net and possibilities, for example, the electronic disturbance theatre with the new coalition in San Francisco, a new group of artists called the Coalition for the Defence of Artificial Life Forms. They are creatively thinking on the 'Net and thinking of issues between digital reality and biogenetics itself. But against these activists and resisters stands material power and material capitalism. The only form of hope that I find is in the belief that activists on the 'Net . . . will open up the 'Net for purposes of creativity, for communication, for solidarity. I do not, by any means, want to castigate all digital capitalists, many of whom are creative and have visions of the 'Net itself, and who are in fact seeking to defend an outmoded form of capitalist production, which for its defence today requires that the 'Net and the Web be cut down to size—in fact, that the McLuhanite possibility of the Global Village, in fact, be suppressed. I just wanted to make that short introduction. Thanks.

LS: Thank you. Do you have any comments about that, Professor Babe? Or would you like to make your comments about what you think the trouble of—

RB: I'd like to make comments on what I think—

LS: (at the same time) Globalization is—

RB:—the problem is. The trouble with the Global Village is that almost inevitably the language that is used drives out or marginalizes other languages, and the language of the Global Village is the language of money or the price system. Everybody understands the language of money. Currencies of any particular nation are easily translatable into other currencies. Money and prices transcend geography and cultures. The universalization of commodity exchange is the essence of the Global Village. Everyone knows what everyone else is doing in the sense that all participate in a global marketplace. We know, for example, that trillions of dollars are exchanged daily in terms of speculation of currencies.

So what's the trouble with this—what's the trouble of the ascendancy of prices as the language? Three suggestions. First: environmental. There is a tendency—an increasing tendency—to treat all value as price. We even have movements today for governments to auction off pollution rights, but . . . the problem is that much of the environment does not, cannot, and should not be commodified. Air, water, biodiversity, for example—these are public goods, we can't turn them into private goods. We shouldn't even try. To give you an example in terms of biodiversity: according to David Suzuki, about 80 percent of the species now existent aren't even named. He believes they haven't even been discovered. You can't assign a value to something you don't even know is there. The price system cannot measure the value of 80 percent of the life forms, and yet we know that biodiversity is something that maintains all life. In this regard, the price system inherently means individualism, individual private property, whereas a safe, healthy environment is a collective or a public good.

Secondly: what's the second problem with using price to drive out other languages? There is a problem with regard to both community and human dignity. The commodification of human relations and of culture is what we increasingly experience. But relatedness, human feelings—they

disappear when commodity exchange comes in and relations go out. Here is the *real* importance of hanging onto things like Medicare, public education, the social welfare net, because that establishes a sense of community as well as individual worth. As soon as we begin to evaluate people's worth in terms of commodity exchange, we are evaluating them in terms of income, and there *are* "worthless people"—there are worthless people. So we lose a sense of commonality and community, and that doesn't bode well for the future.

The third problem with the Global Village and the use of prices as its means of communication and information is the lapse of democracy. Dollar votes: this is what I learned in my first economics class. We vote with dollars as if dollars are . . . somehow an instrument of democracy. Dollar votes replace the notion of one vote per person with concentrations of wealth. This is especially pernicious when we recognize that corporations in Canadian law, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, are treated as *persona ficta*. They are treated as artificial persons; therefore, Southam and Hollinger have the same rights to speak as you and me. Equal rights. And the further we commodify all our freedoms, the more observed that statement becomes. I guess I'll end that by referring to Anatole France, who said that the king treats everyone equally under the law, forbidding the rich and poor alike from sleeping under bridges.

LS: Thank you. Brian?

BF: Well, Professor Babe scooped me, but I'll do my best.

First of all, there *is* trouble in the Global Village. It is primarily a fiscal phenomenon—the World Bank, the IMF—organizations whose powers now supersede those of governments and whose goals are to protect the portfolios of mostly wealthy North American and European investors, to repress inflation to ensure that the wealthy retain their wealth, their debtors stay indebted, and to keep the banking system stable and unreasonably profitable. I do not believe, as some of my friends do, that these organizations are dedicated to impoverishing the poor and denying them self-determination. I think they simply do not give a shit.

Today, the Global Village has evolved into a series of wired financial malls around the world, which are, at least, oblivious to cultural differ-

ences and race. Beyond this and some trade agreements, the Global Village has not developed into an integrating planetary culture.

Now, when I use the term "culture," I mean the things that we do to keep us from social, political, and interpersonal violence. If you treat culture by that definition, it has a workable meaning. The media-infused conventional cultural milieu produced by the Global Village is both highly manipulative and manipulated—primarily corporate, Disney consumerism. Its interpersonal, social, and political culture—outside of a few enclaves of extreme privilege and wealth—has led to intense tribal competition over issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual, and lifestyle preferences, within which everyone loathes everyone who displays difference, or, for that matter, indifference.

In North America, we get to interact with our preferred institutions and recreational camps without much more than inter-camp bullying and cheerleading that has us drifting toward self-inflicted segregation. Elsewhere in the world—Kosovo, Somalia, Rwanda, and Cambodia—people carry machetes and automatic rifles and try to suppress differences with violence. The retribalization that McLuhan dreamed of, then, didn't produce a single vast tribe connected by electronic communications, but rather a clamour of hostile competitive entrepreneurs crawling over one another for commodities and the dignity they believe possession confers; simultaneously, they try to exclude anyone who displays any differences from the gravy. The Global Villages, as evolved, most resemble the biblical tower of Babel, with each level and enclave becoming more murderous and fractious.

The evolution of television into the five-hundred-channel universe is likewise something McLuhan didn't see coming. Instead of a unifying, pacifying force that engenders a universal language, television has become the forum within which the emptiness of consumerism meets and embraces the competitive violence of tribalism. The mega-network did not only *not* arrive, television broke down into a chaos of shallowly conceived specialties that have allowed corporate sponsors editorial control of program content to a degree of thoroughness Stalin never dreamed of in the most totalitarian moments of the Soviet Union.

I think I'll leave it there: that's enough for the purposes of our discussion.

LS: Okay, thank you. We need Sheila Copps to respond to that. Are there any closet neo-cons in the audience? (Laughter from the floor)

LS: I don't disagree with anything anybody in the panel has said. . . . We need some disagreements here, but I haven't –

Floor: I think of the world as wonderful. I think these young Canadian people are trying to pursue me.

LS: These young people up here? (She points to panel members)

Floor: They are all wearing black.

LS: I'm not wearing black –

Floor: – I think we're too . . . we have too much visual trash in our head and we are moving around, feeling a little down and a little . . . I see the world as bursting with possibilities. Young people twenty years old are becoming millionaires, with their dot-com companies. I believe that we actually get more efficient distribution of goods using the Internet. I don't understand all the doom and gloom. I don't know, maybe I'm just out of touch with reality.

BF: Okay, what kind of car do you drive?

Floor: What?

BF: What kind of car do you drive?

Floor: Cadillac.

BF: Thank you. (Laughter from the floor)

Floor: I almost lost my place in an Oldsmobile, so I got something bigger.

LS: You should get an SUV the next time, they're . . . Yes –

Floor: Well, I think some countries are retribalizing not because have violence there, but because there are countries that sell armaments to them, and these countries go over and sell them guns without realizing that they are without some of the other necessities. So, it's a global issue and we are globally responsible.

BF: Can you do that conceptual progression again? I'm not quite sure what you're getting at. It sounds interesting, but I don't quite get it.

Floor: What I understood was that you said Kosovo and all these other countries –

BF: – Right . . .

Floor: – are fighting against each other, between themselves –

BF: Yes. They don't like each other very much.

Floor: They don't like each other in these countries. But I think it's not in countries themselves at fault, but interests outside the country: the countries that sell armaments are responsible. There are interests, global interests –

BF: So, you're saying that when the Hutu tribesman with machete whacks a Tutsi, he's really whacking Mickey Mouse?

Floor: In Kosovo especially, people were being killed for those reasons.

BF: These were ethnic Serbs allegedly—although it turned out they weren't really doing very much of it—killing Muslim Albanians, ethnic Albanians.

Floor: Where did the Serbs get the rifles from? Where did their armaments come from?

BF: Actually, I have the answer to those questions. The Soviet Union packed so many AK-47s into the mountains of western Serbia and Bosnia

during the Cold War, fearing a NATO attack, that the Serbs could go on fighting a ground war forever. That's why the Americans didn't want to use ground troops in that action: they knew they were going to suffer heavy casualties if they did so, and be involved in a very long war. So there is an answer to these kinds of questions, at least most of the time.

Floor: So there are outside countries there who are responsible.

BF: Look, I would like to blame the trouble in Yugoslavia on Stalin and Mickey Mouse too, but I think that's a little simple-minded, and it doesn't address the fact that the people who live there don't like each other and they don't like us. If we make the argument that it's all our fault, then they don't have to take responsibility for what they've done. That's not fair to anyone because it lets everybody off. I think we have a duty to find out what actually happens when violence breaks out, as opposed to simply using the outbreaks as occasions to exercise our preferred ideologies.

LS: There's a guy in the blue shirt—did you have your hand up? . . .

Floor: I hesitate to say who I am, who I . . . where I work, where I was born—
(Laughter from the floor)

LS: You must be from the government or CSIS. Well, now you have to tell us who you are. I won't let you speak until you tell us who you are.

Floor: I've spent twenty-five years as a bureaucrat in this town, working for CRTC by myself, and, in these last few years, hosting international delegations and conferences for the CRTC, trying to help them sort out their telecommunications problems. I am going to pick up on just the last little bit that you said because that intrigued me. I am involved in a broadcasting situation but I know very little about the television side of it, because I never worked on that side of the CRTC.

I would have thought that the fragmentation of these multiple channels of people—I can't even imagine what life is going to be like sitting in an evening trying to figure out which one of the five hundred you're going to watch, but they'll figure that out for us—I would have thought that corporations would have been horrified by this phenomenon.

BF: No, they're not.

Floor: Corporations wouldn't like it—I thought—because if the market becomes fragmented, they can't exercise effective advertising techniques anymore.

BF: Let me give you a demonstration of why corporations aren't bothered by the five-hundred-channel phenomenon by using a specific example. I happen to know a television producer who is putting together a program for ESPN International on golf. In order for this person to get the funding for the production of individual programs, she has to go to the corporations before scripts are written and video shot. This is because most of the specialty channels now give out no money whatsoever for production, they simply provide an outlet for programming. What you now must do if you're a producer trying to produce a television show is go out and get the sponsors beforehand and sell your program to them. The sponsors, therefore, get to dictate the treatment of the content and shape the message, rather than endorse it in the often abstract way of old-style television. This is now the model on which nearly all television production at that lower-level specialty programming is done. And it's dangerous because it means the advertisers have editorial control. They don't get to come in and stomp you after you screw up, they get to stomp you beforehand or they don't give you the money to make the programs.

Floor: But why would they put the money up if they're only going to get the minuscule audiences that specialty channels have? I'm missing something here.

BF: Let me give you an even more detailed example. Say Air Canada puts up the money for this theoretical golf show. They will have Air Canada logos and messages plastered throughout the video. It won't be a commercial halfway through the program—it's in the program—the golfers will fly an Air Canada jet, they'll be wearing Air Canada hats and clothing, and the continuity will keep coming back to reinforce the subliminal message that good golfers fly Air Canada. The audience may be small in Canada—the ostensible or primary market for the program. But wait! It goes to sixty-seven other countries, too. So instead of a possible audience of 30

million, it's 300 million, or maybe it's 3 billion because the program will be repeated in dozens of windows in each market.

Then there are the formal touches, which I find almost as disturbing as the extended scope for advertising. Because the program has to be translated across cultures and markets, there are no on-screen humans testifying to the validity of the information. It has to be produced as voice-over stuff, and the generality of the content has to increase accordingly, because the producer has to appeal to the 300-million- or 3-billion-person audience. This is forcing television narrative back the way it came, back to a kind of level of generality that existed in the 1960s.

There's a side effect to this that's almost as scary. Somebody was telling me yesterday about a producer who had made a program for the Discovery Network, which is, you know, a good little environmentally conscious venue. It was shown on the Discovery International in Canada and the United States, but even so, the broadcast fees they received for it weren't enough to stay in business with. If you want to make money as a producer of television, you have to do the sixty-seven-country routine, which the big corporations will buy into because they get 325 thousand or 325 million theoretical viewers out of it somewhere down the line, however indirectly.

Floor: That's where, that's why –

BF: The other issue we haven't touched on yet is that corporations do television because it is a way of getting control over the medium. In other words, the concept of advertising as it was practised twenty-five years ago, in which a company would make a direct pitch for you to buy a simple product, is now a relative rarity. Today, most commercials on television are for the corporation itself, an enhancement of image. You'll get a corporation that produces no physical product at all—say a chartered accountancy firm that offers high-level services to corporations—advertising widely on national television. So what's going on here? They're occupying the space, controlling the networks because there's that huge screen out there and it has to be filled. The reasoning of the corporations, I think, is that if the screen isn't filled with their messages, it is going to be filled with somebody else's messages. So, they're buying your attention, associating any specific piece of content.

Floor: My little query for the CRTC man is to ask what happened to the idea of airwaves as public property. That's written in the broadcasting act, I believe.

Floor (CRTC employee): Well, I never worked for the broadcasting side.

Floor: But that was an idea that was supposed to be extending through the media because of big mistakes that happened in the newspaper world. And what happened?

Floor (CRTC employee): I'm not sure what you think the problem is. They've been issuing CANCON rules to radio stations and TV stations for about fifty years now, okay? And now we're in this year where an awful lot more licences are apparently going to be issued to people who are at television stations, that's all. The airwaves are still public property.

Floor: Only in the weirdest kind of definition, and I think that goes right back to what was said at the table. The airwaves have now become private property. If you think the spectrum is our public property, then it's common ground. It's no longer common ground—it's divided up into little fiefdoms.

Floor (CRTC employee): Do you think the airwaves were public property in the 1930s and 1940s?

Floor: That was what, at some point, you know, we actually had it together enough to say that, but we never enforced it. And CRTC was an agent of that change.

Floor (CRTC employee): Uh, no, in fairness it wasn't. The CRTC didn't exist until 1968.

Floor: No, they existed when they moved from the CBC; CRTC . . . CBC was a licensing authority. In fact, the broadcasting in Canada was supposed to be all public. And the private people said, "Oh, no, we want part of the action."

Floor (CRTC employee): So, you're saying that government control is much more to your liking. You'd like to –

Floor: – I'm just saying what happened. These are the same issues we are talking about here.

BF: I don't think she's saying we want to go back because everybody knows we can't go back. But that doesn't mean that what is going on right now has to be automatically acceptable. Right?

Floor (CRTC employee): I agree. But I'd like to challenge . . . then I'll stop talking unless I am asked to forbear the doom and gloom talk I've been hearing today. Where is it you would take us instead?

LS: Arthur?

AK: Well, I don't use doom and gloom, because, I thought the . . . CRTC was acting in complicity with the largest broadcasting private corporations in this country, which I found as a Canadian has been singularly depressing.

The only salutary moment that I can find right now is a comment that Albert Nuremberg made. He was introducing his *Trailervision*. *Trailervision* are . . . done for City TV; and City TV didn't like it, so they ran it in the morning, on December 25th, about five o'clock in the morning. So he said, "Well, to hell with this—I'm going to become a broadcaster myself." So he put his first *Trailervision*—do you know *Trailervision*? *Trailervision* are very neat things. Albert would go to movies and say, "Why do I like the trailers for the coming movies better than the movie itself?" So he sat down and he actually mimicked the form of the trailer. Then he did a whole series of product trailers for movies that don't exist . . . like *The Man with no Head*, *The Girls Will Rule*, a woman-dominated universe with a lot of violence against men, which broadcasters won't run because they said there's too much gratuitous violence against men. And he says, "What about all the gratuitous violence against women?" They respond that people aren't accustomed to this kind of other gratuitous violence. So they also refused to run that.

He did this whole series of trailers, and organized it; I think City-TV ran it as a one-hour broadcast. . . . You know, after the police

repression in Argentina, they commented about people, who—even though the police had gone and the repression had lifted—repress themselves. They've got a cop in their head. Nuremberg's advice to documentary filmmakers was that they've a broadcaster in their heads: everyone's thinking about the old broadcasting model of going through television networks, applying for grants, CRTC, the whole structure itself. He says, one effect of digital reality for the moment, at least, is the possibility—through streaming technologies—of acting autonomously, becoming your own broadcaster. So, he tried it. Took one of his videos, streamed it, got a Web site, put it up, went to sleep. The next morning, he had five hundred e-mails from around the world. A lot of people were watching. The next one they tried—I think it was *Girls Will Rule*—he put it up, went to sleep (because he had worked eighteen hours), wakes up in the morning, flips on the TV to see CNN news and, why, there's *Girls Will Rule* on CNN itself. He thought it was a kind of surrealistic experience.

So then he begins to describe this truly—from a cultural point of view—this really explosive event of *Trailervision*, which now has broadcasting offices or sites in six different cities around the world itself, independent broadcasters, and independent video-makers who are creating *Trailervision* and are trying to create a model that's financially viable for independent broadcasting on the 'Net and on the Web. Now that strikes me as something that should be thought of because it's a real alternative to typical broadcasting strategies.

BF: Arthur, can you—can you comment on that a little more in relation to what Professor Babe said about the transformation of everything into price commodities? Because, while I understand that *Trailervision* and all the many enterprises of your friends are really interesting, I get irritable about over the profitlessness of those technologies and the fact that they go nowhere because of that. And that the model Babe is talking about continues to impose itself on everything despite all of the dithering creative on the Internet. The Internet strikes me as being in roughly the same condition Haight Ashbury Street was in about November, 1965—that is, the Summer of Love is just over, and we are headed into the long winter of the profiteers. (Laughter from the floor) Ed Saunders had a wonderful description of Haight Ashbury. He described it as a valley of plump white rabbits surrounded by coyotes. I think that fits the Internet.

There are lots of nice things going on the Internet, but the big machines are rolling in.

LS: Jody, and then the gentleman in the blue, and then Sandy.

Floor: Hello?

LS: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay, you've had –

Floor: Well, it does change the subject slightly, but I wanted to agree with the argument around the general English language driving out other languages . . . to be almost specific, it might be helpful to look at the educational system itself, rather than continue on in these vast imponderable and multicultural issues. So, I will tell you that in my experience of working in Canada, which stems from a colonialist—a specific heritage of colonialism—there are three areas that make the academy rather difficult to work in.

There is an elitist structure in academic hiring and programs . . . There's this large group of part-time workers surrounding a neat little permanent faculty group, and that needs to change within Canadian universities. That's one major thing.

Also, I tried to work on African initiatives and there are no structures to maintain them or sustain them or even just to keep them going on an ongoing basis because . . . Canada doesn't care that much about Africa or the Third World at all. Funding is a serious problem within the university, so people need to think of more and different course-income equalizers to get the university greater funding, so they can change universities to structure things that are the heritage of the specific forms of colonialism.

There are no interdisciplinary or not enough interdisciplinary programs so that the academic programs can become more flexible and then there could be a more genuine cross-cultural dialogue . . . Those are the things I have to say, and they are more specifically about education, and that is what I think could be addressed by the panel. I'd like to get some responses, perhaps, because I do think the Global Village in education, in educational terms is a great misleading measure. So those are three very problematic areas with which I have struggled practically every –

BF: So, you're saying that the Global Village in education doesn't exist?

Floor: "The Global Village" is a misleading measure for education. These are the actual problems with which universities are struggling and people are severely tainted by it. So how might you warn these people who work in education to address those issues which do relate to me, which are . . .

AK: The point you are making about hiring practices . . . they are, you know, elitist and feudalistic in most Canadian universities because you really do have a small permanent core of permanent faculty members and the absolute exploitation of part-time professors within the universities itself. That situation, I find, is not getting better: it's getting much worse. In the university where I am from, they hire people now on a nine-month basis during which time a person is teaching six courses—you know, six half-time courses with extraordinary enrolment in the classroom itself. And the university doesn't really care about the well-being, or the intellectual well-being, of the part-time professors that are hired on. The working conditions are grimy, to say the least, and it's truly exploitative. The administrators are just coarse about this . . . they are really neo-corporatist, a neo-liberal mindset. It's fundamentally disturbing in terms of just justice.

RB: Globalization does have something to do with education. The Ontario government, for example, opening up private universities; and they are talking about Phoenix University—or something like this—coming into Canada. The most efficient way—and don't take me seriously on this, I am using this word, "efficiency," with quotation marks about it—the most efficient way of offering higher education would be to have a one-world "U." You just internet or video conference, or whatever it is, everyone around the globe and they send their exams by e-mail to this central university –

Floor: – Yeah, but as long as they speak English. That's probably not –

RB: – I said "efficient": I am putting quotation marks around this word, "efficient." The other aspect of globalization is how it enters into education—and that is corporate funding, transnational corporations taking over, seizing control of curricula. So, again, curricula gets standardized

more and more around the globe in order to meet the requirements that transnationals see for their labour force. Education should be local; it should be face-to-face; it should ask students to question and develop their critical thought. This is what real education is, but we're moving away from that altogether too quickly. So it's more job-training oriented—when you're talking about job training, this is where the word "efficiency" really works itself out.

AK: So, why don't we move toward the next step, then, in terms of this analysis? In Canada, at least, I think of a different model of a university. . . . My idea is . . . to try to get people interested in the idea of really developing very quickly a national university before any commerce-style university is implanted in Canada as a substitute for it. Why don't people in Canadian education—students and teachers and others who are interested in education—think of the possibility of using the best possibilities of communication of digital reality with local education coming out of the different universities and community colleges? It would provide, simultaneously –

BF: If I heard what you said accurately, you were saying that the best way to educate people is to touch them, and if you can't touch them, you can't educate them.

AK: Yeah, I agree with that, but c'mon –

BF: – so how can you do that, with this coming down around us?

AK: You don't have to have one or the other. I am a teacher, this is how I spend my life, and I love teaching . . . I love . . . the vicissitudes of experiencing that go on in the seminar room itself, and the maturation and . . . the real ruminations on text itself. But, at the same time, all the students I teach spend a good part of their life on-line and are in touch with a transnational world. . . . All we lack is a few old tools of communication. . . . For example, seminars that are face to face and between students, for example, at the University of Ottawa, and Cape Breton, or Acadia, and the University of Quebec and Montreal. I think that would be salutary for the country and I think it would be salutary for everyone

taking part in a seminar of that sort. I don't see one excluding the other; I just think we need to think creatively of a model of education that would allow both to be combined. . . . Take the next step after thinkers, like . . . Harold Innis, and Marshall McLuhan, and George Grant, the great communication thinkers in this country. The next step is to create something anew that—from a point of view of justice, and a basic position which is against the subordination of education to the universalization of the price system, as Professor Babe has eloquently described—creates an alternative educational model that is not subordinated to commodity production. I think it's quite possible to do; I think that's what digital reality makes possible. It's not a sacrifice of one or the other . . .

Floor: Well, this brings up the notion of using the technology *for* positive social change, which reminds me of the recent demonstrations against the WTO in Seattle and how unlikely that would have been to happen without Internet technology to bring people together. So, on the one hand, we can say that the technologies do repress and do . . . cater to the elites and to certain urban centres around the world and so on and so forth, but, at the same time, people are using those technologies to counter those very forces. What would you say about that?

BF: It'll be interesting to see what happens in the aftermath of the Washington demonstration in which I understand the police were much nastier than in Seattle. I think we're going to see in the next few months some attempt to prevent those kinds of things from happening. Meanwhile, I don't think that the Internet can be stopped as an organizing device, and that's perhaps the best thing that one can say about it: whatever the strengths and the powers of the Internet are, it doesn't lend itself to police control. I suspect that mass-action demonstrations in the future are not going to do very well. Maybe I'm being a troll about this, but that's my job. It'll be interesting to see what the progressive forces do in the face of the corporation of the Internet.

Floor: Until recently, I grew up in a small village in Québec . . . Less than two thousand people and the crime rate was very low in that small village. Another cap on the violence comes from the fact that everyone knows what you're doing. . . . We are very dependent on industries in small towns

and villages—if the industry goes away, the village closes. So this is an interesting metaphor. And I'd like to come back to McLuhan, since this is the McLuhan Symposium – (Laughter from the floor)

Floor: – and remind everybody of a McLuhan-ish book in 1968. The name was *War and Peace in the Global Village*. I have the book right here in French, so I'll translate it back into English: "The more we create village conditions, the more discontinuity, fragmentation, and diversity. The Global Village ensures, at every point, maximum disagreement. I never thought that uniformity and tranquillity are the conditions of the Global Village. We find more of envy and"—how do you translate it—discontent?—"discontent."

It's true that in *Understanding Media*, there's a . . . a kind of utopia, but *Understanding Media* was dictated in 1959, dictated and not written. . . . I overheard Philip Marchand . . . he agreed that, at this time, it was a kind of utopia, but with *War and Peace* the metaphor was complete.

LS: Thanks. You got me to thinking about something. Talking about Global Village and the current rhetoric now in government and industry is to say that we are creating smart communities, which are information, communication, and technology-intensive, and to say that we are in a knowledge-based economy Every village has a village idiot; smart communities have to have dumb people, and I think it is creating this sense of who's in and who's out, and privileged and non-privileged. Does the panel want to comment on his comments or . . . at this point?

BF: One of the difficulties with employing metaphor like "The Global Village" is that you are drawn into it. When you use any metaphor, you accept the dimensions it offers you. By using the metaphor of Global Village to discuss what's happening to the world, we are, in practice, believing in the idea of a global community and its built-in reality set, willy-nilly. Maybe what we need to do is write off this term as one of McLuhan's errors—he made lots of them—and stop talking about villages and village socializing, because we're not in a village. We're in a mall.

Floor: My issue is that the village is not necessarily a peaceful place and –

BF: But what we're living is *not* a village.

Floor: But the metaphor is a useful metaphor because if you watch CNN or NewsWorld, we've got our noses stuck in everybody's business. It's a little like Ann Landers at large: "I wanna know what's going on over there." Why am I watching Kosovo? I don't know—because it's important, I guess.

BF: Because we're all part of the Village?

Floor: The Village? –

BF: Why can't we just have a world community that has some decent values, like, say, those of UN Charter?

Floor: Yeah, well, the village is fulfilling its role as a metaphor. Right now, in this room, we are having a debate over what a global community means –

BF: Yes, but I am suggesting that we're all at loggerheads because the Global Village means whatever we damn well want it to. That's why I'd drop it and use some terminology that makes sense.

Floor: Okay, I would like to—I would like to put that to you, then. Would you come up with a metaphor?

BF: Sure. But give me the rest of my life. (Laughter from the floor)

Floor: But if you say we should drop the metaphor, then we need to –

BF: – you didn't hear what I said—maybe we should think about dropping the metaphor and closely examine what it is we mean by it. Maybe the inexactness, the emotionality of the metaphor is the problem: this is not a village we're in.

AK: My town, hometown, Red Rock . . . is like McLuhan's town, like your description as well. It has intimacy, it has tremendous violence –

BF: – those aren't exactly virtues in a world with six billion people –

AK: – and like the quasi, so-called Global Village, it's a highly mediated space—like the Kosovo war, mediated by CNN, by military strategists. So, you know, there are many dimensions of virtual war. Well, the hometown I grew up in was virtual before the word came on the scene. It was mediated by Domtar, by a Quebec-owned corporation that was cutting down all the forests around, poisoning all the workers, and the town itself and making everyone think that a municipality—this draconian, feudalistic political forum—was a democracy of some sort within the town. . . . I mean, that could be blown up into McLuhan's notion, which was fraught with contradictions and paradoxes.

Floor: Actually, thank you for saying that, Brian. You know, I understand where you're coming from now. What made me suggest—and correct me if I am wrong—re-examining the village metaphor is the question that revolves around how we're not a village, but a planet. It's on a planetary scale. The question is, what is fundamentally different? Our problem is this: that we can't capture the village metaphor. And the question that it prevents us from dealing with is this: What is the emergent quality when you move to a global scale?

BF: When we talk about villages, we tend to think of thatched straw roofs on huts, and people running around with baskets under their arms. You know, that's not what we're about.

Floor: The Global Village is not a metaphor—it's a metonym. And I think the confusion here, in part, is because you are confusing the two. Metaphor means one thing stands for another thing.

BF: It means one thing bringing over another, transporting another.

Floor: Metonym means one thing is a projection of another thing. The Global Village is a perfectly adequate metonym if we recognize that it is a metonym. But the problem is –

BF: – but we don't.

Floor: – we take it as a metaphor. Then we get into problems. So I agree with everybody. (Laughter from the floor)

BF: I do too. (More laughter) But we need to remember that one of the reasons why we gave up tribalism a couple of thousand years ago was because the level of social violence was so extraordinary in tribal and intertribal situations that anybody who had moved beyond tribality and exclusion to a larger form of organization could wipe a tribe out: Rome versus the Greeks or Jews is the classic example. The level of social violence within a tribe is inefficient, in every possible sense: socially, economically, politically, interpersonally. The idea that we are retribalizing for me has always been problematic because I understand what it leads to: it leads back to the past, and to people with machetes.

AK: But what's added to things, and makes it complex today, is the strange electronic situation we live in. Like Kosovo, for example: writers from Belgrade, who belonged to resistance movements in Belgrade, would send correspondence reports as they were coming in from the demonstrations and so forth. . . . They themselves had really conflicted feelings about the conflict, about American bombardment. At the same time, you'd flip on your television and you'd see this hyper-virtualized, militarized version of what is going on in Kosovo itself. Yet CNN and the other broadcasting networks were cynically using this also for sopping moral conscience, in some ways.

I was in Cornell University at the time, and it was on a bombing track; I followed the story out, because they would actually load these new low-range bombers up in the morning at some air-force base in the American West. The guys would have their breakfast in an American café, get into the bombers, and, by the afternoon, they'd be flying over Cornell University. They themselves would drop the bombs, not even over the territory of Kosovo itself, safely out of any missile range itself. Even from the pilot's point of view, it was this kind of delirious hyper-virtualized experience.

Meanwhile, on the ground, the people in Kosovo, particularly the Albanians, were being slaughtered, really as a direct result, I believe, of an American decision to engage in this type of warfare, and an unwillingness for UN powers to sacrifice any of our troops for the Kosovo-Albanians

itself. It was a real decision, imperialistically, on whose lives count more. So, that's not a determinant analysis, but it's just to say that this Global Village, which is hyper-virtualized, has such degrees of paradox and contradiction about it, that we're just in the beginnings of understanding it . . .

Floor: To go back to the perils of digital capitalism and the global pillage, and to something that our colleague from the CRTC brought to the floor earlier that wasn't addressed. I think we need to go, of course, past deconstruction and try—which is valuable in itself—to do the difficult task of reconstruction. And coming from my former job at the Department of Canadian Heritage –

LS: Oh, that's where the virtual scene is – (Laughter from the floor)

Floor: Now I have switched jobs. As academics, I think we need to help our policy makers try to find answers to some of these difficult questions. What can we do as academics in that specific area?

LS: Yeah, I think it's also not just educating policy-makers, but, well—policy-makers have to want to reach out to the public because consultative processes in this country are very limited and frustrating, as many of us can attest. But it's also—your neighbours, your public, the general public—how do we educate the general public about these critical issues that we're dealing with, and get it out, you know, into the streets, into the communities, and out of the ivory tower and out of 300 Slater or whatever?

Floor: I'm just interested in how well policy-makers listen to academics. (Laughter from the floor)

Floor: The priorities of the populace are far greater in number than the priorities of the academics. That in itself makes the policymakers easier to listen to them because that's what . . . many of us are supposed to seem to want. That's just the way I see it—someone who has been raised in a very blue-collar town.

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Floor: I think one of the problems is how to approach issues of public space and so on . . . The predominant capitalist system offers a very easy route—where are we going? Do you we have a common goal? Do we have a common purpose for being here? . . . It becomes very difficult . . . unless you are willing to put a lot of time into your community, into your notion of space and who's around you. I think another one of the major problems in Canada is that we have such an incompetent left: the left is so institutionalized in Canada that they have their heads I don't know where and they're not accomplishing anything. . . . It's been so fragmented: it's very disillusioning, but at the same time, I think that it's maybe taking a step back and deinstitutionalize the left that we created.

LS: The gentleman at the back?

Floor: My name is Richard Cavell and I'm from Vancouver. I want to respond to a very important quibble that was raised a few moments ago which had to do with how these academics can help—with protests, or grievance, instruction, or dialogue. And I think one of things we can do is insist on clarity. I think that John has already pointed out that it was important to know the difference between a metaphor and a metonym.

It's also important to understand that "Global Village" is a paradox and a dynamic relationship, such that one produces the other. I think also affecting the issue of clarity is that here we are discussing one of the most massive intellectuals of the twentieth century and yet Canada has not kept his books in print—about twenty.

This is shameful, and we as academics should insist on it. Let's insist that we have access to this thinker who we are supposed to be discussing. I also think it's worthwhile saying that *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is one of the most profound criticisms of Western civilization that has been penned and we might reread it in that context, but I'll give you one quote from page 54 –

LS: Which version is this?

Floor: The first edition. "A meaningless sign linked to a meaningless sound, we have built the shape and meaning of Western Man." Thank you.

LS: You're welcome . . . Okay, in the back?

Floor: I find that e-mail in the office setting is just . . . people send e-mail ad nauseam. I find that this tool ought to be used more effectively. Ordinary human encounters in an office setting get eroded seriously because of this . . . wonderful tool.

BF: Well, it seems with the—with the onset of every new level of technology, we forget that one of the purposes—and maybe the first purpose—of any given technology is to occupy our attention. We probably ought to apply that to e-mail —

LS: And it's sort of the unintended consequences of technology. The paperless office: we're printing and writing more because we can change little font styles or little things. And it's creating more work.

Floor: I'm a bureaucrat. In the context, when McLuhan coined the phrase, it was very powerful in terms of reinforcing that phrase—because the Vietnam War was on—and people thought that's the first war fought in living rooms of North America. The concept of the Global Village, I think, caught on to that. And a lot of people here have mentioned the demonstrations in Seattle and Washington recently. My problem with those demonstrations—well, I didn't understand it, really, but I knew a lot of people didn't understand what they were about. I think the people who run the media are a lot smarter now than they used to be. In fact, McLuhan referred to the televising of the war back then as a kind of Trojan Horse—they had gone into the American households—the world household—without people really understanding what was happening. There seems to be a greater understanding of how it works now and you don't get much explanation of why those people were in the streets in Seattle and in Washington —

BF: I think it's pretty deliberate too —

Floor: — that's what I wondered. How do you counter that?

BF: Well, first, let's look at the Gulf War. That was media-managed from

beginning to end. Consequently, we still don't have any public assignation of what the Gulf War was about. Amazingly, there's been just one movie made about it, *The Three Kings*, and it came out and died. There have been no critical documentaries made that I know of, probably because the major networks got most of their film-feeds from the military and now probably can't get access to footage that would support critical analysis.

LS: One minute left for the discussion. Okay, so what have we learned? So far, we've seen how commercial interests—evoking a trouble-free, nirvana-like, “expand your consciousness” sensibility—have usurped the term. Where's the trouble? In some globalization debates, “Global Village” has been coupled with its opposite, “global pillage.” Here the evocation is one of criticizing the technological imperative. It's especially been used to talk about the schism between the “overdeveloped” versus the “underdeveloped” countries. Digital capitalism figures in here as a prime culprit in promoting the digital divide, the abduction of indigenous knowledge for capitalistic gain and so forth.

What happens to culture in the Global Village? Innis talked about monopolies of knowledge. In our current Global Village, we see a proliferation of what some term “American monoculture,” aided and abetted by media concentration and conglomerization. Corporate synergy happens when Disney meets McDonald's, or when AOL couples with Time-Warner.

The challenge now is to make the Global Village a Global Village for all, not just for the few.

I thank the panelists and audience members for their participation.