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A Philosophical Perspective On The Problems And Implications Of The Communications Theory Of Harold Innis

Ray Charron

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ABSTRACT

A Philosophical Perspective On The Problems And Implications Of The Communications Theory Of Harold Innis

Ray Charron,

Concordia University, 1993.

This thesis maintains that the richness and difficulties characteristic of Innis' work are implied rather than obvious. These issues lie far beneath the surface of his texts and must therefore be first extracted and then evaluated. One of the most important keys used to unravel what is really an intellectual puzzle is Innis' use of the concept of time. It will be shown that in defining time with respect to the oral tradition of ancient Greece, and the latter in terms of Socrates and the Platonic Dialogues, Innis actually has a very particular philosophical perspective which animates much of what he says and determines its relevance to contemporary society. This thesis maintains that this philosophical base is indispensable for the most fruitful interpretation of Innis.

However, because of the richness and complexity of his thought, this philosophical framework must be related to a context of political economy, epistemology, ethics, cultural studies, philosophy of history and communication theory. All of these disciplines are required in order to evaluate the theoretical soundness and social relevance of Innis' belief

that our society, like past civilizations, is doomed to extinction unless a balance is struck between space and time-directed technologies. This basic recommendation is much more complicated than is initially recognized. It contains some very serious problems which must be resolved to determine whether Innis' solution to our contemporary social problems is in fact a practical possibility.

Of central importance is the fact that Innis does not understand modernity's crisis as an ethical crisis. He goes deeper than ethics. It will be shown that his real concern is with epistemology. He maintains that since knowledge preceeds ethics and in light of the fact that our definition of knowledge is deeply and fundamentally flawed, the so-called modern ethical crisis is actually a social manifestation of a much deeper problem. To Innis, the real crisis is modernity's narrow definition of knowledge which excludes the institutional and social recognition of a certain type of ethical knowledge which is absolutely essential for our society's long-term survival. In effect, our society is inevitably doomed because it is producing people and institutions without the capacity for ethical thinking.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the wisdom and the problems associated with these issues in a fair and thorough manner.

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INTRODUCTION

In attempting to reach an understanding of the full implications of Harold Innis' work in communication theory, it must be remembered that he was a holistic thinker who disliked the intellectual confinement which results from a narrow, specialized perspective. It is important to situate his thought within the historical framework in which it was initially developed and without which it cannot be properly understood. Although Innis was not a philosopher by training and did not possess the closely and carefully reasoned style characteristic of philosophical thinking and writing, his work nevertheless possesses a very definite philosophy of history which underlies and supports the development of his general intellectual perspective. It is within this specific interpretation of history that he elaborates his views on the role of communications technology in shaping a particular society. His perspective of history is also important because the basic assumptions which shape his view of history also serve to interpret the structure and workings of a specific society. Historical context is therefore critical in understanding Innis' thinking.

His view of history has two essential characteristics. It is, first of all, materialistic. Metaphysical, transcendental, or spiritual forces play no causal role in the unfolding of history. Secondly, history is dialectical in the sense that it is the interaction and resolution of opposing societal forces. However, it must be noted that Innis' view of dialectics is very different from that of the traditional Marxian approach. In the latter instance, the concepts of surplus value, the social conflicts resulting from the ownership of the means of production and the social, political, and cultural implications attached to the concept of class form the analytical core. None of these fundamental Marxian notions is used by Innis as concepts of social analysis. This is not to suggest that Innis was unconcerned with the many manifestations of social inequality. He clearly was. Nor was Innis unaware of the privileged position enjoyed by those who wield economic, social, and political power. It is therefore not my intention to suggest that Innis was unaware of the many structural problems which define our capitalistic society. The fact is that he was a very perceptive and humane observer of the various injustices resulting from the inequalities of capitalism. However, the point is this. While he was intensely conscious of the problems characteristic of capitalism, at no point did he seriously challenge the very basic assumptions on which capitalism is based. Innis offered solutions to the many

social problems he detected within a general acceptance of the fundamental assumptions of capitalism. He therefore assumed that capitalism possessed the capacity and the resilience to solve the many problems it caused. As will be seen during the course of this study, this assumption results in several very critical problems located at the very center of Innis' thought. For the moment however, it need only be pointed out that though there are similarities between a Marxian analysis and that offered by Innis in that both view history from a materialistic and dialectical perspective, the differences in approach are so basic that any attempt to identify them as offering a similar analytical framework is to basically misunderstand what Innis is telling us.

As he studied various societies within the parameters of his interpretation of history, Innis became convinced that the basic cause of the rise and fall of the many civilizations in history was the presence or absence of a certain type of knowledge. This knowledge, in turn, was directly related to the nature of the communications technology which developed within a particular society, with other forms of technology developing as a reaction to the epistemological power and general social influence of communications technology. Consequently, the overwhelming influence of communications technology in the development of human affairs was located in its capacity to not simply define what was thought, but, what proved to be of more basic importance, it determined how

thinking actually occured. It was for this reason that Innis' interest in technology went beyond technology itself. He focused on technology because it defined the manner in which a society perceived itself concerning the most critical questions that it could consider. As a result, the question of epistemology was central to Innis' analysis since it was on the basis of a society's epistemological beliefs that it defined itself with respect to its political, economic, social, cultural, and ethical life. Innis' most basic interest was therefore clearly focused on epistemology. In his opinion technology was the key to be used to unlock the secrets of how we know and what we know.

In evaluating contemporary society from this perspective, Innis was convinced that the technology which defines modernity inherently transmits a definition of truth and knowledge that has societal repercussions which are, quite literally, disastrous. He believed that modern technology was acting as an agent of social destruction in the fullest sense of the word. Contemporary technology was a concrete manifestation of a definition of truth and knowledge which was secular to the point of crippling our intellectual capacity to even begin to appreciate the significance of the great ethical questions which had traditionally captured the interest of the most powerful minds of Western civilization. Past societies had considered the relevance of these questions in relation to the problems and concerns of their respective

historical situations. However, modernity was on the brink of losing its capacity to even understand, to grasp, the extent of the moral impoverishment it was undergoing by refusing to see the relevance of these ethical questions in relation to itself. To Innis, technological modernity had turned upon its human creators with a vengeance by destroying their capacity for ethical thinking. When carefully studied, Innis' work in communications technology is really a very eloquent and courageous attempt to explain the causes of this imminent disaster and to offer the one solution capable of saving us from our own technology. That one solution is the introduction of a certain type of ethical thinking into contemporary society. The problem, however, is that the epistemological basis which would provide this type of ethical thinking with the label of "knowledge" as opposed to "opinion" had long ago been consigned to the garbage heap of Western intellectual history. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to suggest that the elaboration and attempted resolution of this dilemma is one of the more important legacies which Innis provided to modernity.

In studying Innis' approach to both this and other questions which he addresses, it appears that he was not a linear thinker. He did not arrive at conclusion D via the normal scholarly routes of A, B and C. It is more in keeping with his style of thinking and writing to arrive at D without even mentioning A, B or C. It is also characteristic of him

not to expand on important conclusions or to define his most important concepts. This lack of definition and of precision is readily acknowledged by all commentators. It is equally recognized that his unique literary style, coupled with his manner of thinking, results in an intellectual perspective which is exceptionally difficult to unravel. Innis' texts can support very different and, at times, opposing conclusions. This is particularly the case if one attempts to understand one part of his work in isolation from the totality of his general intellectual outlook. It is for this reason that Innis must be interpreted in the same manner as he thought and wrote, namely, from a holistic point of view. Furthermore, in light of the fact that his key concepts remain largely undefined within his own writings, interpreting Innis has both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, an unpacking of his more important concepts and an elaboration of his general thinking reveals a wisdom and a relevance to contemporary society which has been unrecognized except in the most general of ways. On the other hand, Innis' lack of precision and the inattention concerning the implications of certain of his ideas, has resulted in very serious problems. These major problem areas will be carefully discussed during the course of this study.

There is one issue which must be raised at this juncture. It is a matter of some delicacy in that it involves the interpretation accorded Innis by the vast majority of

commentators in communication studies. Since his death in 1952 there has been virtually no criticism of his communication theories. It is both remarkable on the one hand, and very perplexing on the other, to discover that a thinker of Innis' caliber has been virtually unanimously accepted by the community of communications scholars. In the field of expressing and evaluating ideas, this is indeed a rare thing. Anything which can be interpreted as a criticism of Innis is really of such a gentle nature that it could hardly be classified as a criticism in any meaningful sense of the word. His interpretation of history, his general approach to the study of technology, his reliance on the two basic analytical concepts of time and space, his recommendation to strike a balance between these two extremes and his emphasis on monopolies of knowledge have all been accepted without significant opposition. The reasons for this uncritical acceptance are no doubt complex. However, one of the more unfortunate results of this lack of critical assessment has been that some of his more important insights concerning the resolution of the problems of modernity have remained basically undeveloped since his death. The general purpose of this thesis is to contribute to this development.

The lack of precision and the lack of critical reflection referred to above is clearly obvious with respect to the two key analytical concepts of space and time. Of these two notions, that of time proves to be of major importance to the

entire Innis undertaking and it is this very idea which is at the center of some very serious difficulties . But there are other matters which must be considered in order to both clarify and develop Innis' most important insights. The following six questions are, in my opinion, the most serious issues which must be addressed in this regard.

THE QUESTIONS

1. The central recommendation offered by Innis of balancing space- directed technology (general domination) with time-directed technology (the values of the oral tradition) has been accepted by commentators as a moderate, feasible solution to what is called the crisis of modernity. It has been assumed that this balancing of two opposed tendencies of technological development is indeed possible. The literature suggests that the only impediment to this balancing is the political and social desire to do so.

Innis defines the concept of time in terms of the oral tradition of ancient Greece. From the perspective of this study, the oral tradition is, in turn, defined by the Dialoques of Plato. Innis tells us that the only means available to modernity to save itself is to incorporate the values of the oral tradition into contemporary society. However, he does not discuss, except in the most general way,

what specifically these values are. Also, nobody has identified the nature of these values as they are discussed in the Dialogues to determine, firstly, what they are and, secondly, to assess whether they can in fact be incorporated into our so-called postmodern capitalist society.

What has escaped the attention of commentators is the fact that all of the values of time as discussed in the Dialogues are based on a very particular epistemology which was rejected in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was an epistemology based on ontology. This definition of knowledge was replaced by an epistemology based on a particular method coupled with empirical experimentation and verification. This definition of truth became known as the scientific method. The resulting epistemological shift had a direct and profound impact on the definition of both the individual and the role of the state. The consequence of this change in the definition of knowledge is that the epistemological assumptions underlying the ethical system of the oral tradition are fundamentally different from those that generally define modern capitalism. As a result, there is a very serious problem which has remained undetected at the very core of Innis' recommendation of striking a balance between space and time. To the best of my knowledge, this difficulty has not been discussed by Innis scholars. However, it must be carefully explored in order to determine the basic feasibility

of Innis' most essential recommendation to solve our contemporary social problems.

2. There has been no systematic analysis of the assumptions underlying the exclusive use of the concepts of space and time to explain the influence of communications technology in bringing about social change. The belief that these two concepts apply with equal strength to all historical periods and, further, that they are the determining forces in any and all societies, can be challenged on the basis that this assumption necessarily relegates all other social forces to the status of effects rather than causes. While recognizing the difficulties of assigning precise causes to social and historical change, a very strong argument can be made to the effect that restricting an explanation of social change to space and time is to adopt an excessively restrictive perspective which is, in consequence, necessarily flawed. The key analytical role played by the concepts of space and time must therefore be explored in detail.

3. The full implications of Innis' central notion of monopolies of knowledge have remained largely undeveloped as a vehicle to explain the crisis of modernity. The usually expressed opinion of Innis' commentators that the nature of this crisis is an ethical crisis identifies and articulates only the most obvious aspect of the problem. By developing the

concept of monopolies of knowledge it can be shown that the ethical crisis is in reality a manifestation of a deeper rooted problem. It will be argued that the fundamental crisis is epistemological in nature and it is this basic problem which results in the more obvious ethical crisis. This particular insight of Innis' will prove to be his most significant legacy to our contemporary world since it is from an elaboration of this concept that the entire Innis perspective flows, including his more celebrated concepts of space and time.

4. There has been no careful analysis of the effect which twenty years of being an economic historian had on Innis' perception of society and on his interpretation of the role of communications technology in bringing about social change. As will be shown, Innis retained the basic perspective of an economic historian during his progression from the study of economic history to that of communications studies. Though he remained a concerned, humane economic historian, there are very strong indications that he projected his interpretation of a particular development of capitalism backwards into history and this projection influenced his entire approach to communications studies. One can argue that the competitive social forces which defined capitalism as it developed in North America were in effect superimposed on the rest of history. As a result, his general intellectual framework

contains many questionable assumptions which must be identified and discussed.

5. Innis maintained that technology has an inherent bias in its development. According to him, technology contains a tendency to develop towards either space or time and, in so doing, perpetuates values which are characteristic of either tendency. In discussing this issue, this study will argue that as ironic as it may initially appear, Innis' interpretation of technology is entirely technological in nature.

6. There has been no elaboration of the implications of Innis' thinking as they apply to the ethical development of the individual within a technological society which is basically hostile to this type of growth. The discussion of this question will reveal the richness and wisdom which he intuitively grasped and the deep concern he had for the person. It will also be seen that he considered the university to be the most important mediating institution in contemporary society. It is the university's task to ensure that both the individual and society are provided with a particular definition of knowledge necessary to strike the balance between space and time, thereby ensuring a healthy society capable of persevering in existence. In Innis' view, the universities were complete failures in meeting this responsibility and were therefore directly responsible for a

great deal of the problems now confronting our contemporary society. It is in discussing this issue that many of Innis' deepest concerns are most apparent: the importance he attaches to the individual, the significance of a particular type of epistemology for the welfare of contemporary society, and his deep disatisfaction with the dehumanizing effects of modern technology. All of these concerns testify to a refinement of spirit and intellect which takes its place among the most important of contemporary thinkers. It is for reasons such as these that a study of Innis' work is personally enriching and of immense value to a society that attempts to take his message seriously.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS THESIS

This thesis will undertake a critical analysis of Innis' works concerning the media of communications and the role of technology in bringing about social change. Though critical in nature, there is no intention to be destructive. Quite the opposite. A critical approach is required to contribute to the clarification and development of Innis' thought with the view of demonstrating the relevance of his many astute insights to some of the most important problems of modernity. The only way this can be achieved is to unpack many key concepts not developed by Innis himself. In so doing, serious difficulties

will be exposed and these problems will have to be discussed in detail. On the other hand, it will be shown that the implications of some of his more important, though largely undeveloped insights, are not only directly relevant to contemporary society but disclose a wisdom that has gone largely unnoticed. However, the practical application of this wisdom is contingent on the introduction of very significant changes into our contemporary society.

One of the principal purposes of this thesis is to show that the deeper implications of a large portion of Innis' thinking have gone undetected. The reasons for this are many and complex. They range from the difficulties caused by his writing style, to his manner of thinking, to the vast scope of his subject matter. However, the most essential reason has little to do with these traditionally accepted explanations. The central issue in understanding Innis rests with the critical concept of time and it will be shown that the full meaning of this concept can only be obtained if its interpretation is based on philosophy. The definition of time in terms of philosophy is clear in Innis' work. He defines time in terms of the oral tradition and the oral tradition is, in turn, defined by the Dialogues Of Plato. One must therefore unpack the concept of time by means of the Platonic dialogues and then apply the results of this analysis to contemporary society in order to determine the possibility of implementing Innis' key recommendation of striking a balance between space

and time. To date, this has not been attempted. What this thesis will demonstrate is that though there are very serious difficulties, Innis' message to our contemporary society is of sufficient importance that it is well worth the time and effort required to carefully and patiently draw out the full implications of his thinking.

THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature is very helpful in providing a basic understanding of what Innis is saying. It is also of assistance in placing his views within a general framework and of providing an overall understanding of his most important concepts. However, as has already been noted, there are two main omissions which characterize the literature interpreting Innis. Firstly, there is a very noticeable absence of anything resembling a critical evaluation of his perspective. While a discussion of the reasons for this lack of critical analysis is beyond the scope of this study, the end result is that Innis' thinking has remained largely undeveloped beyond what is traditionally said of him. Hopefully, this study will contribute to this development.

Secondly, the approach relied upon to interpret Innis has, by and large, been one which has remained within the parameters of theorists of communications studies. While this

approach is of great assistance in describing the central role Innis plays in the development of the field of communications studies, it nevertheless inherently entails severe limitations in terms of drawing out the implications of his point of view. As mentioned above, this study will attempt to show that the most fruitful analytical approach should be based on a philosophical perspective and this has not been attempted. In summary, for the purposes of this thesis, the literature concerning Innis must certainly be read and carefully considered. However, having said this, it remains of limited value in developing the approach which I believe is required to do full justice to what Innis is telling us about contemporary society.

THE METHODOLOGY

There are four methodological branches required to form a cohesive and coherent study with each particular methodology growing from the one which precedes it. The four approaches are as follows:

1. A review of the works of Innis relating to communications studies and the literature dealing with their interpretation. During the course of this phase one of the essential problems to resolve is the definition of the critical concept of time.

Innis defines this concept in terms of the oral tradition. The oral tradition is, in turn, defined by the Dialogues Of Plato. Therefore, in order to understand the concept of time, it is necessary to begin with Plato. This requirement leads to the second methodological stream namely, philosophy.

2. Philosophy is required to provide an interpretation of the values of the oral tradition which are so central to what Innis is recommending to modernity. An integral aspect of this value system is the definition of the individual and the state as they exist in the Dialogues Of Plato. Also, a philosophical approach is needed to define and compare the epistemology supporting the definition of knowledge as understood in the oral tradition with the epistemology characteristic of modernity. This is of major importance in understanding Innis' recommendation to modernity since the solution he offers presupposes an epistemology similar to that which was once consciously rejected at the beginning of the modern era. It is then necessary to compare the results obtained from this philosophical inquiry with the same questions and issues as they exist in modern capitalism. This task then leads to the third methodological branch namely, political economy.

3. Political economy is necessary to evaluate the compatibility of certain definitions of the individual, the state, and the nature of technological development with the

realities of capitalism. It is a basic assumption of this study that it is quite pointless to suggest that the solution of any problem depends upon the rejection or disappearance of capitalism. Rather, the assumption is that capitalism is here to stay. The interesting question then becomes whether, and to what extent, capitalism is capable of being modified in order to accept the value system which Innis is recommending. Put in different terms, one of the basic issues to be considered concerns the flexibility of capitalism to incorporate values which are generally viewed as being at variance with those values which have historically defined capitalism. This is the crux of the Innis message. In order to consider this matter, it is necessary to rely on a combination of political economy and the two methodological approaches identified above. However, during the course of this thesis, a series of problems are raised which can only be satisfactorily discussed by the introduction of a fourth methodology. This fourth approach focuses on some of the general literature dealing with issues not covered in the three methodologies mentioned thus far. An example of a key issue not adequately discussed in the above three approaches is the question of the influence of technology in modern society. Readings in this important area will be incorporated into the general problematic of this thesis.

These four methodological branches are required to form a coherent whole and they are really dictated by the nature

of the subject matter under review. To neglect any of these four methodologies would be to provide an analysis that would fail to consider the holistic nature of the issues involved, thereby providing conclusions which would be seriously deficient.

PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION

There are two basic reasons which convince me that the time and effort needed to complete this work is time and effort well- spent. The first reason might be termed professional in nature in that it will clarify and develop the thoughts of a wise person. Hopefully, my contribution will be of assistance in showing the relevance of Innis' thinking to contemporary society.

The second reason is entirely personal. Since Innis' works are characterized by a high degree of imprecision, and in light of the subject matter which preoccupies him, any researcher has the opportunity to consider a very wide scope of human activity from both a historical and a contemporary point of view. Approached in the right frame of mind, a study of Innis' works is a truly rare opportunity for personal growth and reflection. I sensed this very early on when I was first exposed to Innis. As time passed, and I became better acquainted with his works, this suspicion has been proven

correct many times over. However, there is a down side to this project. I have mentioned that the range of problems to be considered and resolved is extremely broad. I have also pointed out that I believe that a knowledge of philosophy is mandatory. More specifically, there is a need to be familiar with the history of philosophy, ethics, political philosophy, and epistemology. It is also necessary to know something of political economy in order to relate these philosophical concepts to contemporary society. In addition, there is an obvious need to relate all of this to communications studies. I have done my best in this regard while recognizing that the richness of Innis' work can provide many insights which are absent from this thesis.

CHAPTER 1

Intellectual Influences

In his biography of Harold Innis, Donald Creighton notes that two men were responsible for the general intellectual perspective that Innis adopted in his approach to the study of the economic history of Canada, and the impact of communication technology on its social, political, cultural and ethical social fabric. Those two scholars exerted this influence on Innis while he was a Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago subsequent to his return from World War I. One of these men, C. S. Duncan, lectured in marketing and emphasized the very close relationship which existed between the physical characteristics of a particular commodity and the marketing approach which was necessary in light of this fact. This was the basic insight which Innis applied to his book The Fur Trade in Canada as he drew out the implications of the technology employed to sell beaver pelts. (Creighton 1957, 60). Convinced of the soundness of approaching the history of Canada's economic development by analyzing its staple products, Innis followed this approach for two decades. He moved from the study of the fur trade in the 1920's to that of

Canada's second great staple, fishing, in the 1930's (Ibid., 74) culminating in the publication of The Cod Fisheries in 1940. Duncan was therefore a formative influence while Innis applied his educational training as an economic historian from about 1920 to 1940. Creighton is quite correct in pointing out that it is possible to divide Innis' work into ten-year periods " . . . which coincided nearly if not exactly, with the decades of the century" (Ibid., 96). Innis' Ph.D. thesis, A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway was published in 1923, his Fur Trade in 1930, while The Cod Fisheries appeared in 1940.

Subsequent to 1940 there was an obvious shift in Innis' interest as he moved from a study of economic history to an analysis requiring a great deal more scope and depth. He attempted to explain the incredibly complex reasons which led to the rise and fall of societies throughout history. It was during the course of this analysis that Innis came to understand the critical role that the various technologies of communication played in the growth and decay of civilizations. This thesis will focus on his study of communications.

However, there is an obvious question which must first be addressed. That is, why would an economic historian, deeply conversant with his profession and at the height of his professional success, suddenly move out of the relative safety and familiarity of his chosen field? Because of its complexity and vastness, such a study would inevitably be

fraught with difficulties and uncertainties which could result in highly debatable conclusions, thereby placing his professional credibility and reputation in question. A possible answer may be found in the second and most important intellectual influence on Innis while at the University of Chicago. The scholar whose ideas so influenced Innis, though these ideas lay dormant for some twenty years, was Thorstein Veblen.

Creighton tells us that as a student, Innis was a serious and avid reader of Veblen, who provided him " . . . with a general theoretical framework for his ideas." (Ibid., 59). Veblen provided Innis with a particular type of intellectual perspective which would eventually lead him to attempt a synthesis of what he considered to be the major forces at work in particular societies throughout recorded history.

Born on a farm in Wisconsin in 1857, Thorstein Veblen graduated from Yale in philosophy and, unable to find employment, lived in the wilds of Minnesota for eight years. (Mitchell 1964, x-xiii). He then entered Cornell as a graduate student in the social sciences and eventually ended up in the economics department at Chicago where Veblen " . . . became one of the extraordinary faculty which President Harper gathered around him - perhaps the most stimulating group of scholars in the country . . . ." (Ibid., xiii).

Veblen was an economist who approached his subject matter from a philosophic perspective. As such, his analysis

emphasized not simply economics, but also the intricate interrelationships between the many societal forces and economic realities. Veblen's perspective was far wider than any other American economist of the early twentieth century. His unique insights, critical analysis and devastating social commentary on the habits, character, aspirations and influence of the upper reaches of American society became widely known with the 1899 publication of The Theory of The Leisure Class.

The philosophical concept which Veblen applies to society in this book is the concept of causation. He maintains that a society pursuing economic wealth as its main objective inevitably results in a society where the most privileged members establish a set of social standards according to which the self-worth and personal reputation of all members of society are judged. According to Veblen:

> . . . in any community where class distinctions are somewhat vague, all canons of reputability and decency, and all standards of consumption, are traced back by insensible gradations to the usages and habits of thought of the highest social and pecuniary class-the wealthy leisure class. It is for this class to determine, in general outline, what scheme of life the community shall accept as decent or honorific; and it is their office by precept and example to set forth this scheme of social salvation in its highest, ideal form. (Veblen 1912, 104).

Consequently, those who occupy the lower positions of the socio-economic order dedicate their existence to an emulation of the lifestyle and personal values of the wealthier members of society. The result is that the entire society develops a value system based on the "conspicuous consumption of goods".

(Ibid., 84). Veblen further maintained that the pursuit of conspicuous consumption coupled with the influence of the industrial process shaped the very consciousness of society and determined its habits of thought, its canons of rationality, in a specific direction. (Veblen 1919, 17).

This was a critical insight that would prove to be of enormous importance to the perspective developed by Innis many years later. He would also expand on Veblen's belief that science and technology both contained the potential to destroy the belief in the relevance of the values traditionally serving as the standards of human excellence. In speaking of science and technology, Veblen states that " . . . in both, the terms of standardization, validity and finality are always terms of impersonal sequence, not terms of human nature or of pre-ternatural agencies. Hence, the easy co-parternership between the two." (Ibid., 17). Thus, at a relatively early stage, Innis was exposed to the idea that scientism, technology and industrialism had profound epistemological repercussions directly affecting the way in which a society viewed itself. In addition, these forces were also of overriding importance in contributing to the fundamental ethical definition and basic purpose of the individual members of that society.

Innis would eventually focus on such ideas as these but he would extend them in scope and pursue them much further than Veblen. Indeed, one may wonder whether Innis' emphasis

on the importance of institutions as agents of social change did not originate with Veblen, since his Theory Of The Leisure Class has the suggestive subtitle of An Economic Study of Institutions. Parker maintains that " . . . Innis' work is most evidently dependent on Veblen in The Fur Trade In Canada . . .", published in 1930. (Parker 1977, 552). Parker goes on to state that as Innis progressed in his studies, he moved steadily away from Veblen's perspective on the role of institutions towards a deeper appreciation of the significance of the dialectical process as the defining characteristic of history itself. (Ibid., 552). Innis also saw much benefit in Veblen's concept of marginality. This notion became a significant influence in the development of Innis' elaboration of the center - margin dialectic which, in time, developed into an analysis of the role of communications technology as the central factor in the historical dialectical process (Ibid., 564, note 1).

There is no doubt that Innis was a convinced advocate of Veblen's insistence that to study economics or any social discipline in isolation from other social forces is to make a profound error which can only lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Veblen insisted on inter-relationships within society at a time when other American economists not only refused to acknowledge this fact but actively opposed and vilified Veblen for suggesting it. (Veblen 1964, footnote 7, xv). As Wesley Mitchell notes: "About many matters quite

invisible to economists immersed in the nineteenth century, he thought intensively." (Mitchell 1964, xxxii).

In spite of the abuse he endured, Veblen never recanted his belief that society must be understood from a holistic perspective. It is this holistic approach which Innis attempted to apply. Though he applied it not simply to a particular society, as Veblen did, but to the many different civilizations which constitute human history, the inspiration provided by Veblen is unmistakable. His influence on Innis can be seen in the many positive references Innis makes to Veblen in his writings (Political Economy, 34, 86), and in particular, to the article he devoted to Veblen in Essays In Canadian Economic History. In this article, originally presented in 1929, he viewed Veblen as " . . . the most important economist to come out of America", specifically because Veblen's understanding of economics was informed by his background in philosophy (Essays, 19). Innis goes on to make a truly revealing observation with respect to Veblen's analysis of the forces operating in society:

> . . . he insisted upon the existence of laws of growth and decay of institutions and associations. His life work has been primarily the study of processes of growth and decay. It is much too early to appreciate the validity of this work- certainly he attempted far too wide a field for one individual but it is the method of approach which must be stressed, and not the final conclusion. (Ibid., 24)

Thus, we are provided with the essential framework within which Innis would pursue his analysis of the rise and fall of civilizations. Fundamental to this perspective is the

conviction that societies prosper and decay as a result of very specific social forces. This analytical perspective would be used by Innis a decade later to undertake a study of the forces affecting the development of civilizations. However, the uses to which Innis would put this fundamental insight would be far more extensive than that originally intended by Veblen.

In this regard, it is interesting to note the reprimand which Innis directs towards Veblen, namely that Veblen attempted to analyze a field of study which was all-encompassing; a reprimand which can only cause a student of Innis' work to smile, for no one attempted a broader synthesis than Innis himself. He goes on to pay tribute to Veblen as a unique thinker who was " . . . the first to attempt a general stocktaking of general tendencies in a dynamic society saddled with machine industry, just as Adam Smith was the first to present a general stocktaking before machine industry came in." (Ibid., 25). He concludes by stressing the positive results of the Veblen approach to the study of society and expresses the hope " . . . that Veblen's attempts at synthesis may be revised and steadily improved." (Ibid., 26). Most probably Innis was unaware that after the passage of some ten years the person who would revise and greatly enlarge the Veblen perspective was Innis himself. Although Veblen's influence would be important in Innis' selection of the most significant questions to be considered, Innis added a crucial

element of analysis which was absent from Veblen's theoretical framework. This added consideration was an emphasis on the historical context of any social analysis. "It was through his historical studies that he lived up to his expressed hope that Veblen's attempt at synthesis might be revised and steadily improved and it was his historical insights that were to carry him into areas beyond the reach of Veblen." (Easterbrook 1953, 293). As will be seen during the course of this study, the emphasis on synthesis within a historical context was the guiding principle as Innis pursued his analysis of the major forces operating in history. This study will attempt to show that Innis' intellectual framework reveals a philosophy of history (Ibid., 291) that can be seriously questioned. For the moment I will only suggest that this particular interpretation of history is the result of many years as an economic historian and forms the general framework within which his perspective is expressed and developed. This historical context results in several very serious problems which can be identified and then clarified by first focusing on the literary style that Innis employed.

Innis wrote and, presumably, thought in a way which would prove to be exceedingly difficult for his interpreters to clearly understand. Hugh Aitken maintains that to be " . . . taught by Innis and to learn from Innis called for an act of faith. You had to believe that there was something really

important there. . . ." (Aitken 1977-78, 96). Certainly, his mind worked in a unique manner. It is also stated that to look " . . . for logical connections, or to try to impose it, in some of Innis' work is a completely futile enterprise leading only to frustration of mind and purpose." (Patterson 1990, 30). The reason for this difficulty, according to Patterson and most other interpreters of Innis, is the fact that he " . . . did not have a tidy mind. Because he tended to think dialectically and non-sequentially, his work is full of contradictions that are not always easy to understand." (Ibid., 71).

Patterson suggests that the effort to extract logical connections from Innis' work, or the attempt to introduce such connections into the many undeveloped concepts which characterize his perspective are futile exercises. This is hardly an invitation to attempt to understand one of the more important figures in the history of communications studies. Should this advice be accepted, it is difficult to see how any understanding of Innis would be possible, or any development of his work feasible. It is only as a result of making such an effort that Innis' recommendation for the solution of modernity's most significant problems can be seriously considered and evaluated. Rather than following Patterson's advice, a much more fruitful possibility would be to accept Wernick's suggestion. "To continue Innis' project, then, we have to do precisely what Innis himself was not prepared to

entertain: systematize his categories and reflect on their inter-connected logic." (Wernick 1986, 148). In pursuing this particular approach it will become apparent that there are indeed very serious problems in the work of Harold Innis. Whether they are the result of the commonly accepted reason that Innis thought in a uniquely dialectical manner, or whether they can be attributed to serious flaws in his analytical approach remains to be seen.

Though influenced by Veblen, Innis' fundamental perspective was that of an economic historian. Of the thirty years he spent in scholarly pursuits, the first twenty were a continuation of his formal education in the field of economic history and, as is well known, his achievements during this period were brilliant. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that his attention to the wider question of the general influence of technology on a particular society occurred subsequent to 1940. It is therefore important to keep in mind that his general perspective in approaching this wider issue flows from years of perceiving history from the point of view of an economic historian. Furthermore, and just as significantly, it is an understanding of economic development as it occurred within the North American context. This intellectual background is acknowledged by most Innis scholars who attempt to explain the key influences which combined to direct his assessment of the role of technology. (Heyer 1981, 255. Carey 1988, 141. Kroker 1984, 117). However, while these

authors acknowledge this particular influence, this study will show that the full implications of this very important intellectual outlook have not been fully developed and incorporated into a general interpretation of Innis' work.

A second significant point which is also generally recognized but has remained exempt from being critically assimilated into a general interpretation of the Innis discourse is the fact that his interpretation of history is both materialist and dialectical. (Parker 1981, 127. Melody et al 1981, 96). As will be shown, this is a point of major significance. For the moment, it is sufficient to mention that the influence of the laws of economics and the general thrust characteristic of economic activity are of such importance that Innis' understanding of society was " . . . based upon a model of competition appropriated from economics and extended to all social institutions. And in this competitive model, competition for new means of communication was a principal axis of the competitive struggle". (Carey 1967, 7-8) What this means is that the context for assessing the role of technology in any particular society was historically provided by capitalism as it developed in Canada in particular and in North America in general. Carey maintains that " . . . Innis' work represents the distinctively Canadian effort to erect a theory of communications that is true to the realities of Canadian existence yet possesses, as well, applicability to the history of communications in other countries and on other

continents." (Carey 1975, 27) While more will be said of the soundness of this approach to the historical analysis of communication, I will only note at this point that Carey, like Innis, is assuming that the capitalist context as it evolved in Canada has general historical applicability regardless of the particular society being considered. One of the main objectives of the present work is to argue that such an assumption is not only unjustified but, if applied to an historical analysis of communication technology, will necessarily result in flawed conclusions. It will be argued here that a particular social context has extremely important ramifications when interpretating general historical forces. For it is only as a result of understanding the social context that one can relate the all important question of human intention or purpose to the question of technological development. It will be argued here that this relation is the central issue in assessing the question of technological development within any society.

INNIS'S VIEW OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

After a lifetime of scholarship conducted at a high level of excellence, Innis reached the conclusion, five years before his death, that the " . . . enormous improvements in communication have made understanding more difficult". (Innis Bias, 31). How are we to understand this statement? It would initially appear that the constantly increasing proliferation of information by means of the various technologies of communication could only assist understanding rather than making it a constantly receding objective. Yet, Innis not only believed the opposite, but also considered modern communication technology to be such a powerful negative force, such a crippling agent with respect to the intellectual and moral development of contemporary society that it actually amounted to being the primary cause " . . . of the collapse of Western civilization which begins with the present century". (Innis Political Economy, 94). A careful reading of Innis' works clearly indicates that this quotation is not an isolated instance in which he engages in either oversimplification or exaggeration. What Innis was establishing was a relationship between changes in communication technologies and a general social intellectual framework which determines the manner in which most individual members of society actually think. To Innis the real problem associated with communication

technologies goes beyond technology itself. The essential question is the way in which these technologies shape both a social and an individual perception of reality or, synonymously, of consciousness. Innis was therefore interested in communications technology because he believed it to be the key to understanding those very social issues and conditions which determined the nature and substance of any society. As insightfully noted by Christian, many observers have mistakenly concluded that Innis' works " . . . are studies in communications and the effects of different media of communication. Innis's real interest lay in the underlying political and cultural issues, and the studies in communication were to a considerable degree a device for getting at more important questions." (Christian 1980, xi) In short, the fundamental issue is the well-being of a society which, according to Innis, was intimately linked to the manner in which a society thought. Hence, at the very center of this critical undertaking we detect an epistemological foundation.

Carey's opinion on Innis' basic project is as follows. "The question for Innis then was how do changes in forms of communication change the construction men place on experience, the nature of their thought, or to return to our more inclusive term the structure of consciousness". (Carey 1975, 35) It was Innis' considered opinion that such was the case in a very literal sense. In light of the sweeping and rather pessimistic reference noted above concerning the collapse of

Western civilization, one must determine what precisely has collapsed, and what caused such a calamitous event.

In Innis' view the answer to this question lies with the influence of science and technology and the general commercial purpose to which they are put. In the preface to Political Economy In The Modern State the basic problem in modern communication theory is described as follows. "The first essential task is to see and break through the chains of modern civilization which have been created by modern science". (1946, vii) Science and technology, in being closely related to the demands of industrialism have produced a civilization dominated by machine industry and ". . . concerned always with specialization which might be described as always in excess". (Innis Bias, 139) To Innis science, technology, and industrialism, which are at the very core of modern communication, have a fundamental and critical impact not only with respect to what we think, but also to the very way in which we think. The epistemological effect of the modern context is therefore of critical importance since it is at the very heart of the definition we create of ourselves both as individuals and as a society. This definitional source is mainly negative in character. Our perception of reality, in being narrowly channelled by science, technology and industrialism, results in an understanding of the world reflecting the standards and values which it privileges, supports and requires for its continued existence. Such

standards and values not only determine what is to be legitimately viewed as knowledge as opposed to personal opinion but, in addition, the nature of the value system which provides society with the guidance it requires to define and fulfil its fundamental purpose. The result of this epistemological framework is a general rejection of any inquiry which does not conform to the demands of modern science and technology. Such an inquiry would be viewed as irrelevant to the advancement of knowledge, individual and social development, and progress as it is conventionally defined. In failing to conform to the dictates of this modern definition of knowledge such areas of study are necessarily relegated to the sphere of individual opinion, considered to be of marginal importance to the good of society generally. As the following text indicates, Innis believed this restriction of knowledge to be the most critical problem in contemporary society.

> The whole trend today is to exalt the rationalist scientific approach and to discard the philosophical. I am not thinking only of the worship of the physical and mechanical sciences but rather the attempt to make ethics, philosophy, etc. conform in method and language to the physical sciences- with disastrous results. Specialization runs mad, and when it does so, never leads to understanding. Its natural result is strife and violent dogmatism. (Innis Political Economy, 144).

Our industrialized society therefore entails profound epistemological consequences and, by extension, equally profound ethical repercussions. The contemporary definition of knowledge not only excludes the questions of philosophy and

ethics, historically viewed as of essential importance to human understanding and development. Perhaps more dangerously, the uncritical acceptance of the scientific method has undermined our ability to even understand and recognize the significance of these "non-scientific" concerns. Innis was convinced that this restriction of knowledge profoundly limited our consciousness, with the result that our industrialized society and the modern methods of communication have provided us with " . . . all the answers and none of the questions." (Ibid., 128) As a result of this intellectual restriction " . . . we have learned fanaticism", and " . . . thought has been paralysed." (Ibid., 127-8) Consequently, the very nature of contemporary technologies of communication prevents us from developing the type of critical understanding needed precisely at a time when it is most urgent to engage in this type of reflection. Ours is therefore a truly radical society in terms of values, understanding and intellectual scope and depth. The inevitable result is that the institutions and individuals which our society produces are seriously deficient in both intellectual and moral development. Innis was convinced that our society was dangerously out of balance and was becoming increasingly so as time went by. It is not an overstatement to say, along with Whitaker, that towards the end of his life Innis " . . . saw the fate of modern western civilization as catastrophic." (Whitaker 1983, 823). In Innis' opinion, the eventual

collapse of western civilization was inevitable. He believed that the only way in which our civilization could be saved was to move away from our current position of radical technological extremism towards a more balanced approach to technological development. But balanced with what? It was to answer this question that Innis introduced the central and critical concepts of space and time. Since these two concepts are at the center of Innis' recommendation to resolve the basic problem of technological modernity, it is imperative to understand both what they mean and what they imply with respect to contemporary society. However, before this can be done, it is first necessary to appreciate the significance Innis attached to the oral tradition of ancient Greece. This is particularly important with respect to grasping the full implications of the concept of time since this latter concept is actually defined in terms of the oral tradition. It is therefore to a discussion of this subject that I now turn.

CHAPTER 2- THE ORAL TRADITION OF ANCIENT GREECE

Whenever he discusses the oral tradition, Innis reveals a deeply rooted pessimism with respect to the ability of the contemporary individual to understand, much less acknowledge the significance of his insistence on the critical importance of ancient Greek values. This point is made in Empire and Communication (1986, 6) and in even stronger terms in The Bias of Communication where he sadly notes that " . . . the tragedy of modern culture has arisen as inventions in commercialism have destroyed a sense of time." (1984, 85-6). To Innis, the tragedy of modernity is therefore an ethical tragedy at the profoundest level of society. However, underlying this ethica. problem is a deep- seated epistemological problem. The modern definition of knowledge necessarily excludes the intellectual parameters which could formulate this ethical problem in terms which would appear rational and, hence, intelligible to the modern mind. In essence, therefore, the modern epistemological environment cannot even begin to either recognize or formulate the problem to be resolved. In spite of this discouraging situation, Innis nevertheless undertakes to first define his views of the oral tradition and then to explain why they are critical to the resolution of the most fundamental of contemporary problems.

He maintains that the oral tradition in ancient Greece " . . . was shown in the position of the assembly, the rise of democracy, the drama, the dialogues of Plato, and the speeches including the funeral speech of Pericles in the writings of Thucydides." (Innis Bias, 9.) As noted in the introduction, this study is a philosophical perspective on Innis. As such, it will focus on the Dialogues of Plato. Socrates, the chief spokesperson of the Dialogues, is Innis' personal selection as the epitome of the philosophical perspective of the oral tradition. The Dialogues will therefore be used as a means of drawing out the full implications of the concept of time and a major element in this task centers on their very form as practised by their chief spokesperson, Socrates.

The Dialogues As A Method

Innis tells us that Socrates " . . . was the last great product and exponent of the oral tradition" and the Dialogues of Plato were extremely effective ways of preserving the effectiveness and power of the spoken word by means of writing. (Innis Empire, 60.) Innis believed that the real effectiveness of the Dialogues as an approach to the search

for truth was the very absence of a completed, close-ended discourse. Therefore, the value of Plato's approach is to be found in the search for truth rather than in the establishment of a finished product. To both Plato and Innis, the vital element is the quest, the intellectual adventure focusing on the full consideration of alternative possibilities and options rather than gaining comfort in a final answer. In speaking of Plato, Innis notes that:

> The Dialogues were developed as a most effective instrument for preserving the power of the spoken word on the written page, and Plato's success was written in the inconclusiveness and immortality of his work. His style was regarded by Aristotle as half-way between poetry and prose. The power of the oral tradition persisted in his prose, in the observance of a closely-ordered system. Continuous philosophical discussion aimed at truth. The life and movement of dialectic opposed the establishment of a finished system of dogma. He would not surrender his freedom to his own books and refused to be bound by what he had writ en. (Innis Empire, 60).

We here have a valuable insight into the importance which Innis attached to the particular definition of truth as it existed in the oral tradition. Firstly, it is a definition which emphasizes the continuous search and personal effort which is characteristic of the dialectical process of the Platonic dialogues. Secondly, and of equal significance, is the subject matter to which the dialectical process is applied. Dialectics was used to consider questions of philosophy as this subject was defined by the ancient Greeks. Though Innis recognized the importance of the subject matter to which the dialectical process was applied, he did not

provide an analysis of the full implications of this total process, just as he did not provide a thorough analysis of the concept of time. Consequently, some clarification of Innis' understanding of the Dialogues is in order.

In the particular instance cited above Innis can be accused of overstating the case. If, in stating that Plato " . . . refused to be bound by what he had written", he meant that Plato had not arrived at certain very definite conclusions, and was therefore quite willing to be considered as being undecided on many key questions, then Innis is of course fundamentally incorrect. There is no doubt that Plato firmly believed that he had reached some very definite truths. He was convinced that there existed something higher than human nature, that the world of physical reality was a copy of the world of ideas which was the most real, that the true development of human nature depended upon an understanding of virtue, that vice was evil and that the correct development of the soul was the key to human perfection. Guthrie maintains that with respect to Plato's thought we " . . . may take it that the existence of the Ideas, the immortality of the soul, and the view of knowledge as recollection were all seriously held philosophic doctrines." (Guthrie 1975, 98). There is no question that Plato would be bound by his words insofar as they were related to these general truths. Innis' tendency to over-generalize and sacrifice a detailed analysis in favour of a more intellectually sweeping but somewhat imprecise overview

is well illustrated by this interpretation of Plato's philosophy. However, given the general context of Innis' thinking, it is probable he meant that the dialectical search, carried out within the framework provided by those general truths, is the aspect of Plato's thought open to discussion and modification. Assuming that this is in fact the case, he is quite correct in his understanding of the Platonic dialectic. To Innis the real power and value of the oral tradition as revealed in the Dialogues is the fact that ideas are exchanged as in a lively conversation. As the conversation progresses, the issues being discussed are gradually clarified and the understanding of the participants is increased accordingly. This, to Innis, is the key point. The emphasis is on an intellectual give-and-take which will necessarily lack the rigour of a closely reasoned treatise but which nevertheless brings forth the essence of an issue to the attention of those who engage in or witness such an intellectual process. Gadamer makes this point in Dialogue and Dialectic. "As opposed to methodical deduction, in discussion, the question as such prevails over the answer. Good discussions are provocations to think further and precisely therein lies the pedagogical genius of Socrates' elenchus [refutations]." (Gadamer 1980, 8).

It is the absence of a spirit of intellectual finality or, synonymously, the invitation to continually rethink issues, which is at the core of the dialectical process Innis

considered so important. However, it must be recognized that he emphasizes the dialectical process as itself producing certain results without fully considering the subject matter to which it was applied in the oral tradition, as noted previously in his interpretation of the philosophical conclusions reached by Plato. The failure to do so has very significant implications that will become clearer as this study develops. However, while Innis failed to provide this type of analysis, he certainly recognized the fact that the effect of the oral tradition and its particular type of truth-seeking was clearly reflected throughout Greek society. He admired the oral tradition because it was a total way of life which was apparent in athletics, in ethical standards and in the social and political institutions of ancient Greece. (Innis Empire, 79) As a result of the flexibility of this tradition the Greeks were able " . . . to work out a balance between the demands of the concepts of space and time in a city state" and the effect of this balance was an unmatched excellence of cultural activity. (Innis Bias, 64,68).

From a contemporary perspective this conclusion could very well elicit severe opposition, for this was a society in which slavery was unquestionably accepted, where equal rights for women were not even a subject of serious discussion and where the rights of citizenship were jealously guarded. In addition, one can read of extreme barbarism and cruelty in such accounts as Thucydides' History Of The Peloponnesian War.

Certainly, an effort must be made to place the evaluation of ancient Greek society in an historical context and John Stuart Mill, among many others, made such an assessment in his Representative Government Mill's conclusion was that in spite of the defects of the social inequalities of ancient Greece, the intellectual standards of a typical citizen of Athens was " . . . far beyond anything of which there is yet an example in any other mass of men, ancient or modern." (1952, 349). In considering the question from a contemporary standpoint, Jacques Ellul reaches the same general conclusion as Mill. In evaluating the balance achieved by the Greeks, he concludes that " . . . it was the result, perfectly mastered and perfectly measured, of a certain conception of life. It represented an apex of civilization and intelligence." (Ellul 1964, 29).

Thus, according to Innis and many others, the early Greeks were the first and last society to strike a balance with respect to technology's inherent tendency towards space or time. In achieving this balance, they realized a level of human excellence that has never been repeated or duplicated. Also according to Innis, the beginning of the decline from excellence was caused by a thinker who, many would argue, had the most powerful and wide ranging intellect in human history, namely Aristotle. It was Aristotle, says Innis, who undermined the power of the spoken word by approaching the question of truth in a systematic, logically rigorous manner in which the

conversational, interactive Platonic dialogues were replaced by the deliberate, analytical thinker. "In Aristotle, the power of the spoken word declined sharply and became a source of confusion. The dialogue form was used, but with an important change in which he made himself the interlocutor." (Innis Empire, 61). Aristotle's approach shifted the intellectual focus from the dynamic interaction and mutual discovery of the Dialogues to the logically demanding, systematic, semantically careful treatise of the written word. As a result of this change in the search for truth, the " . . . immortal inconclusiveness of Plato was no longer possible with the emphasis on writing". (Innis Bias, 10). Thus began the drift away from the time-related oral tradition.

> The conquest of prose over poetry assumed a fundamental change in Greek civilization. The spread of writing destroyed a civilization based on the oral tradition, as reflected in the culture of Greece, has continued throughout the history of the West particularly at periods when the dead hand of the written tradition threatened to destroy the spirit of Western man. (Innis Empire, 61).

It should be pointed out that Innis' interpretation of Aristotle as presenting a philosophical system which has reached truth, as opposed to the open endedness of the Platonic dialectic, is fully supported by the well known Aristotelian scholar Alasdair MacIntyre, who reaches the following conclusion:

> Aristotle of course recognized that he had predecessors. Indeed he tried to write the history of previous

> philosophy in such a way that it culminated with his own thought. But he envisaged the relationship of that thought to those predecessors in terms of the replacement of their errors or at least partial truths by his comprehensive true account. From the standpoint of truth, on Aristotle's own view, once his work had been done theirs could be discarded without loss. (MacIntyre 1984, 146).

It is here that an important distinction must be made. As noted in his evaluation of the respective methods followed by Plato and Aristotle, Innis clearly prefers and advocates the open-ended dialectic of Plato to what he perceived as being the close-endedness or definitiveness of Aristotle. Yet, it should be noted that both Plato and Aristotle, in spite of their different methodological approaches and intellectual perspectives, were nevertheless concerned with the same fundamental philosophical questions. It is in this sense that Innis places more emphasis on the method used to conduct an inquiry than he does on the subject matter being discussed. For Innis, what is of overriding importance is the dialectical process itself. This emphasis on dialectics in no way is intended to suggest that he was indifferent to the subject matter but rather that he seemed to simply take it for granted. Though using different methods, both Plato and Aristotle wrote of virtue, justice, the soul, politics, metaphysics and the ultimate human good. It is therefore not the subject matter which Innis objected to. Indeed, it is safe to conclude that he believed that the issues discussed by both Plato and Aristotle were the issues that any ethically

conscious society had to consider. The great moral failure of contemporary society was its inability to engage in this kind of discourse or, what is even worse, to even understand its significance. Innis' real criticism centered on the fact that in Plato the inquiry was never considered finished while with Aristotle final answers are provided, effectively ending the search and, therefore, the debate. To Innis, the effectiveness of Plato's approach consisted in his search for means (Innis Bias, 42), whereas Aristotle's perspective " . . . implied a decline in the power of expression and the creation of grooves which determined the channels of thought of readers and later writers. (Ibid., 11). In short, with respect to Aristotle, Innis concludes: "The written tradition had brought the vitality of the oral tradition to an end". (Ibid., 44). In speaking of Plato's use of dialectic, which was one of the more important aspects of the vitality of the oral tradition, Innis notes the following:

> A well-planned conversation was aimed at discovering truth and awakening the interest and sympathy of the reader.... The power of the oral tradition persisted in his prose, in the absence of a closely-ordered system. Continuous philosophical discussion aimed at truth. The life and movement of dialectic opposed the establishment of a finished system of dogma. (Ibid., 60).

On the other hand, with Aristotle, the power of the spoken word declined and became a source of confusion (Ibid., 61). In appealing for the modern recapturing of the spirit of the oral tradition, Innis is in fact suggesting that the flexibility of the Platonic dialectic allows it to be used as

an intellectual framework capable of being modified or expanded in light of the historical development of human understanding in contrast with the Aristotelean position which he viewed as presenting a finished product which could be studied and evaluated but which had to be accepted as a completed undertaking.

In addition to the intellectual flexibility of dialectics, Innis' commitment to the oral tradition rests on the fact that it could not be monopolized and the state could therefore not be in a position to control the public's interpretation of reality. Theall interprets this to mean that " . . . the oral tradition constituted for Innis a dialectical corrective to a preoccupation with writing and the mechanization of knowledge- a corrective that meant to reassert an interest in form, a condition of mutual respect for time and space, oral and written, unity and disunity." (Theall 1981, 227). What is of importance here but remains undeveloped by Theall is the characterization of the significance of the oral tradition as a "form". As will be shown, unpacking this concept of "form" is a key issue in understanding Innis' position with respect to his concept of time.

Innis believed that the only way to group and connect the polarities involved in a series of opposite concepts was by dialectical inquiry. (Carey 1975, 29). As has been already mentioned, the dialectical process itself was viewed as the basic cause of the balance established between time and space,

resulting in a certain critical perspective and a unique set of values permeating society. Dialectic, in and of itself, was considered a cause of significant social change in much the same way as technology was itself considered a cause with very definite effects. However, complications in Innis' perspective become evident when attention is focused on the subject matter to which the dialectical process was applied.

It is obviously not the case that a method alone can allow a society to reach the heights which Innis believed the ancient Greek society had achieved. There had to be a content to which the method was applied. This very important point, like the concept of time, remains undeveloped and unexplained by Innis. What he implies but does not explicitly discuss is the fact that a specific method, when applied to a specific subject matter, results in a particular value system which subsequently permeates society. He concludes that only a value system of this quality would be capable of diverting our modern technological society away from its space-biased technological development towards the required time-biased direction. Since Innis did not provide the required analysis, it is therefore necessary to know what this value system involved. To accomplish this, it is necessary to discuss the general subject matter which was the concern of the Platonic dialectic.

The Subject Matter Of The Dialectical Process

In his Metaphysics, Aristotle tells us that Socrates was not the least bit interested in studying questions dealing with the physical sciences. Rather, he was exclusively concerned with ethical questions and the attempt to discover " . . . the universal in these ethical matters." (Aristotle I, 6, 700). The focus of the Socratic effort was to reach an understanding of the meaning of virtue and apply this knowledge to everyday life in order that individual ethical potential could realize its highest and most concrete expression. During the course of this investigation the conclusion was reached that human nature had a purpose which was defined by the very nature of the individual soul. The perfection of the soul consisted in an understanding of virtue and the subsequent practice of virtuous acts. This could only be achieved by developing the basic and all-encompassing virtue of justice. In the Republic Socrates says " . . . justice is the excellence of the soul, and injustice the defect of the soul . . . . Then the just soul and the just man will live well, and the unjust man will live ill." (Jowett 1982, 43). The main function of a human being is to increase her understanding and practice of virtue and in so doing, develop and fulfil her highest capacities.

No individual could experience this ethical development in isolation. It was necessary to interact with others. Since the individual could only develop morally within society, the essential developmental requirements of citizens constituted the foundation and the very reason for the existence of the state. Socrates notes the following in this regard. "A State... arises... out of the needs of mankind; no one is self sufficing, but all of us have many wants." (Republic, IV, 60). The significant point is that the purpose of the state is directly and ethically linked to the moral purpose of the individual and the moral purpose of the individual is, in turn, based on a specific definition of human nature. Therefore, the root of both human and societal development rests on the ontological definition of the individual. This ontological connection is of the highest importance in satisfactorily understanding the full implications of the meaning of the oral tradition as well as clarifying Innis' concept of time. In terms of its functions, the state was not simply to provide the conditions necessary for the individual citizen to achieve virtue. In addition, the state itself had to act wisely and justly by means of the virtuous conduct of those who acted on its behalf. (Ibid., 141). Basic to this expression of the oral tradition is the central concept that the individual and the state have the same basic purpose, that being the care and development of the soul by means of virtuous behaviour. Again, to quote Socrates. " Must we not

infer that the individual is wise in the same way, and in virtue of the same quality which makes the state wise." (Ibid., 160) Justice in the soul is the same as justice in the state and

> . . . the actions of the state can be right and just only on the basis of this order. In precisely the same way it was demonstrated that the justice of the soul does not consist in some external act which it performs.... Rather, as was the case in the state, it consists in an 'inner' action, the action of the soul by which it too attains to a unity in the diversity of its strivings and drives, and to friendship with itself. An action is just which is in conformity with the inner order of the soul and which brings about and sustains that order. (Gadamer 1980, 85-86).

As a result of the ontological basis of human development and political activity, the oral tradition is characterized by a very clear and a very distinct intertwining of ethics and politics. There is an indissoluble link between the moral perfection of the individual and the political society which provides the context within which this striving for perfection occurs. This mutually positive relationship results, on the one hand, in the achievement of excellence on the part of the individual citizen and, on the other, in the establishment of a cohesive, ethically conscious state. As a result, it is a vital interest of the state that it's citizens be as morally developed as possible (Republic, V, 178). This was the concept of the Greek polis which is described by Kitto in the following manner. "The Greeks thought of the polis as an active formative thing, training the minds and characters of the citizens.... The training in virtue which the medieval

state left to the Church, and the polis made its own concern, the modern state leaves to God knows what." (Kitto 1951, 75).

From what has been presented thus far it can be seen that the oral tradition advocated by Innis was based on an ontological definition of human nature which was the direct cause of a particular type of state. This state had a strict responsibility to provide the institutions and the societal environment which would provide citizens with the opportunity to develop in a particular ethical manner. Since Innis defines the concept of time in terms of the oral tradition, his insistence on the necessity of introducing time-biased technology into contemporary life is in fact an insistence that the value system of ancient Greece should be introduced into modern society. As has been shown, this value system is based on certain ontological assumptions. The first question which occurs is the nature of these assumptions and the second is whether these assumptions are compatible with our contemporary capitalist society.

As has been shown, the heart of the ontological assumptions of the oral tradition as discussed in the Platonic dialogues is based on the contention that human beings have a particular nature. The rational element of this nature is capable of understanding that it is only as a result of specific activities that it will develop as it should. Other types of activities will necessarily distort and cripple the development of this nature. These general standards of

behaviour are universal, thus they do not vary from individual to individual nor can they be rightfully denied by any law that a state may elect to pass. Also, the nature of the state, in flowing from and being grounded in the nature and purpose of the individual, automatically entails ethical responsibilities towards the citizens of the state. Consequently, the relationship between the state and the individual is an ethical one, in which the state has an obligation to provide the institutions and the general environment required for the full ethical development of each individual.

This is the ontological position which Innis is recommending as the sole means of saving Western civilization. In essence, he is defining his concept of time in terms of the values of the oral tradition. The concrete application of these values will counteract the destructive influence of our space-biased technology and thereby save contemporary society. However, to perform this saving function, it is obviously the case that this particular value system must be capable of being inserted into our advanced capitalist society. If it can be so inserted, then Innis is advocating a possible approach to the resolution of what is often referred to as the crisis of modernity. However, if it cannot become part of modern society because of fundamental and irreconcilable differences, then Innis is offering a solution that cannot work. More seriously, he is faced with a damaging tension at the very

center of his discourse. However, a full assessment of these questions cannot be made without a clear understanding of the twin concepts of space and time. Now that the significance Innis attached to the oral tradition has been discussed, I will now focus on relating the oral tradition to the concepts of space and time.

CHAPTER 3- SPACE AND TIME

Unique Problems In Interpretation

It is important to keep in mind the scope of the analysis undertaken by Innis. His biographer, Donald Creighton, points out that Innis " . . . was driven inevitably into a stupendous comparative investigation of the interrelations of communications with politics, economics, and religion, throughout history and over the entire world." (Creighton 1957, 121) From the point of view of clarity of scholarly exposition, such a task obviously entails very significant difficulties under the best of conditions. However, these expected problems of interpretation are seriously compounded as a result of the writing style which Innis adopted.

In the introduction to The Bias Of Communication, Marshall McLuhan makes the following comment:

> Innis presents his insights in a mosaic structure of seemingly unrelated and disproportioned sentences and aphorisms.... In turn, he presents his finds in a pattern of insights that are not packaged for the consumer palate. He expects the reader to make discovery after discovery that he himself missed. (McCluhan, Introduction to Bias, vii).

The same point is emphasized by James Carey:

> The literary style adopted by Innis to convey the complexity of social change is a principal barrier to any adequate understanding of his work.... Nowhere does he present an orderly, systematic argument...depending rather on the reader to impose order, to capture not

merely the fact of history but a vision of the dynamics of historic change. (Carey 1967, 6-7).

Paul Heyer notes that Innis' work is:

> ...perhaps more incomplete than that of any other major scholar. In fact, he was very much aware of the incomplete and provisional nature of many of his formulations.... However, within Innis' incomplete researches are viable directions that can be freshly followed by a new generation of interdisciplinary scholars.... Conscientiously pursuing some of the directions highlighted by Innis will frequently lead to conclusions that are at odds with those Innis reached. (Heyer 1981, 258).

With respect to the same difficulty associated with Innis' work, Andrew Wernick mentions that an understanding of Innis requires a rather unique approach in that one must actively supplement what he is reading and in so doing, "...to do precisely what Innis himself was not prepared to entertain: systematize his categories and reflect on their interconnected logic." (Wernick 1986, 148).

There is common agreement among Innis scholars that he cannot be satisfactorily understood by following the traditional methods of scholarly research. In a second article, Carey tells us that "...the great challenge of Innis' work is not to attempt to figure out what he really meant. Rather, it is the attempt to apply and extend some of his major ideas by interpreting them within the context of concrete periods". (Carey 1981, 87-88). Theall believes that Innis' style is awkward and complex but insists that this problem disappears if his writing is interpreted as an attempt to achieve oral discourse by the use of writing. (Theall 1981,

229). Salter maintains that Innis' work should not be approached in terms of a systematic analysis but as a series of essays and a collection of analytical insights. (Salter 1981, 194).

The difficulties a researcher faces in attempting to understand what Innis is really saying are therefore very real and widely acknowledged by those who are experienced in the field. One looks in vain for a systematic presentation of a line of argumentation, conceptual clarification or a precise definition of his most important insights. Consequently, the key to unravelling the implications and consequences of Innis' work is to understand that he implies much more than what he actually says. As a result, one can reach important conclusions which, though implied by the text, cannot be substantiated by a direct reference to a particular text. Within the Innis discourse, this is a normal situation. His writings must be used as suggestions or insights that require development in light of the totality of his works, combined with the personal knowledge and experience of the reader. The result is that the conclusions reached actually develop and expand upon what Innis initially wrote. In short, a partnership in the real sense of the word is an absolute prerequisite if one hopes to understand the substance of Innis' thought.

It could well be that the inconclusiveness and imprecision of Innis' writing style is a main contributor to

the rather unique way in which Innis has been generally received. One of the most striking things to be encountered in the scholarship dealing with Innis is the virtual absence of any critical comments concerning the major assumptions and conclusions of his intellectual framework. What could pass for criticism is of such a mild nature that one is very difficult to call it criticism in a meaningful sense of the word. As noted by Aitken: "It is very hard to find in Canadian scholarship today any serious criticism of Harold Innis. There has developed a kind of cult of personality . . . ." (Aitken 1977-78, 96). In this sense Innis is a rather unique thinker in that he is one of the very few influential scholars who has not been subjected to the rigorous criticism which is normally directed towards the type of recommendations made. Though this general lack of critical assessment has done much for the popularity of Innis in terms of his historical influence in the field of communication studies, securing a well-deserved place in university curricula and providing fertile ground as a source of articles which academics write for one another, this uncritical acceptance has had a serious and unfortunate side effect. Innis' general perspective and his most fundamental insights have remained largely undeveloped since his death and, to this extent, his relevance to contemporary society has not been examined to the extent that he deserves.

This has been the case in spite of his commentators' constant urging that his insights should be applied to the

problems which we are currently facing. There are many critical problems to be resolved in the Innis discourse before his recommended solutions can be of use to our modern capitalist society. More significantly, it is not at all certain at this point whether these problems can, in fact, be resolved. After becoming familiar with the general purpose and spirit of Innis' vision, one is safe in concluding that both the historical and the current state of uncritical acceptance of Innis is something which Innis himself would have regarded as highly undesirable.

He firmly believed in the need and the importance of constantly questioning and always pursuing truth by applying the method and spirit of critical inquiry. There are many valid reasons to support Patterson's conclusion that it is ". . . ironic that admirers of Innis have assimilated his thought to conventional patterns he was breaking away from." (Patterson 1990, 173). It is in this spirit that one should undertake an analysis of the very critical concepts of time and space, for these are the concepts that are absolutely central to Innis' message to the modern world.

The Concepts Of Space And Time

In assessing the adequacy of the concepts of space and time one's initial optimism gradually shifts to increasing uneasiness. Partly this results from the fact that Innis did not define these concepts except in the most general way. (Wernick 1986, 148). Partly it is due to the various analytical roles which these two concepts must fulfil in order to support his general perspective. For example, while space and time constitute the essence of Innis' solution to the problem of modernity they are also the only two concepts which he relies upon to evaluate both the role of communications technology as well as the whole of human history. The layers of meaning, the analytical functions and the major assumptions contained within these two concepts have not been satisfactorily discussed by Innis. Consequently, in order to first understand and then assess the viability of what he is saying, it is first necessary to unpack the concepts of space and time in order to clarify these issues. As Graeme Patterson notes: "Our problem here is not simply to review or assess that material; it is to discover the concepts of space and time entertained by Innis himself. For these he never directly asserted." (Patterson 1990, 71). So, I will first focus on the meaning Innis attached to these concepts and then move on to discuss the function they served in supporting his position.

In the introduction to Empire And Communication, Innis identifies the relationship between media of communication and his concepts of space and time in the following manner:

> The concepts of time and space reflect the significance of media to civilization. Media that emphasize time are those that are durable in character, such as parchment, clay, and stone. . . . Media that emphasize space are apt to be less durable and light in character, such as papyrus and paper. The latter are suited to wide areas in administration and trade. . . . Materials that emphasize time favour decentralization and hierarchical types of institutions, while those that emphasize space favour centralization and systems of government less hierarchical in character . . . Empires persist by overcoming the bias of media which over-emphasize either dimension. (Innis Empire, 5).

We are here told that the relationship between media, space and time culminates in a particular political organization characterized by one of two possibilities. These two dimensions of political organization are " . . . on the one hand the length of time over which the organization persists, and on the other the territorial space brought within its control . . . ." (Innis Bias, xvii). According to Innis, the major lesson to be learned from history is that empires decline and disappear in direct proportion to their failure to control the natural tendency of media of communication to favour space (territorial expansion) or time (duration).

At this point, Innis is concerned with the practical objectives and difficulties of political organization. As he notes in A Plea For Time:

> We are concerned with control not only over vast areas of space but also over vast stretches of time. We must

> appraise civilization in relation to its territory and in relation to its duration. The character of the medium of communication tends to create a bias in civilization favourable to an over-emphasis on the time concept or the space concept and only at rare intervals are the biases offset by the influence of another medium and stability achieved. (Innis Bias, 64).

There are therefore practical, pragmatic meanings attached to the concepts of space and time. To put the matter in Innis terminology, there is a very pronounced secular function to be served by governing societies on the basis of the requirements of space and time since achieving a balance between them results in an empire which will prosper from both a physical and a structural point of view. (Carey 1975, 31). In terms of the persistence of empire within this political and historical context, Innis' use of the concept of time is linear in nature. In "The Problem Os Space", Innis points out: " Control over time was strengthened by the practice of reckoning in terms of the years of the reign of the king." (Innis Bias, 99). Therefore:" A balanced concern with space or extent of territory and duration or time. . . ." (Ibid., 76) allows a civilization to persist from one measurable aspect of time to another.

The linear aspect of time is therefore clear. However, there is more to the definition of time than simple linearity. In pointing out that " . . . industrial demands meant fresh emphasis on the ceaseless flow of mechanical time." (Ibid., 74), Innis is suggesting that his understanding of the concept of time is more than simple duration. It is rather a certain

type of qualitative duration and in our effort to understand " . . . the character of the time concept", (Ibid., 62) Innis warns us that our modern mentality is itself a serious impediment to this undertaking. "The difficulties of appraisal will be evident particularly in the consideration of time. With the dominance of arithmetic and the decimal system . . . modern students have accepted the linear measure of time. (Innis Empire, 7). There is therefore the very forceful assertion that a correct understanding of time, while including linearity, must also include an element of meaning which extends beyond linearity. In attempting to grasp this aspect of time, Innis tells us to guard against " . . . the impact of commercialism on time." (Ibid., 83).

In telling us to go beyond linearity Innis suggests that in their persistence in linear time, empires create cultures and in so doing, they necessarily create values. A culture's values both allow, and are expressed in, its decisions concerning technology and it is the nature of these decisions which allow a society to persist in linear time. Ancient Greece had created a society which contained the cultural values which allowed it to strike the required balance between space and time directed technologies. On the other hand, contemporary society had a value structure that discouraged, or even disallowed, the types of social decisions necessary to strike the balance that would ensure persistence in linear time. Innis is very definite on this point:

> In contrast with the civilization dominated by Greek culture with its maxim "nothing in excess", modern civilization dominated by machine industry is concerned with specialization which might be described as always in excess. . . . The concern with specialization and excess, making more and better mousetraps, precludes the possibility of understanding a preceding civilization concerned with balance and proportion. . . . Constant changes in technology particularly as they effect communication, a crucial factor in determing cultural values (for example, the development of radio and television), increase the difficulties of recognizing balance let alone achieving it. The cultural values of an industrial society are not the cultural values of other societies. (Innis, Bias, 140).

Therefore, Innis is of the opinion that the capacity of a civilization to persist in linear time presupposes the existence of cultural values which allows it, or encourages it, to make the decisions which ensure a balanced development of its media. In this sense, the use to which media are put constitutes a concrete expression of social values and the ultimate, practical expression of social values is the persistence of a civilization from one age to another. In applying this criterion to contemporary society, he concludes that " . . . the balance between time and space has been seriously disturbed with disastrous consequences to Western civilization. . . ." (Ibid., 76). To Innis, our predominant value system is seriously flawed since it excludes those values which, when concretely expressed, would ensure our continued existence. Consequently, Innis concludes that our society is doomed to extinction unless we re-examine our social structure with a view of widening both our epistemology and, by extension, our value system.

Time and space are obviously central to Innis' perspective. Space is understood in relatively uncomplicated terms. It implies territorial extension and various forms of domination. However, space does not play the analytical role that time does. Throughout his analysis, Innis relies very heavily on the concept of time to reach many key conclusions. Time is a category used to discuss the continued existence of societies across history and to appraise the quality of the culture which various societies produce. It is also a qualitative interpretation of time that leads Innis to advocate the values of the oral tradition of ancient Greece to counteract the influence of our predominant space-directed technology. In addition, time-related values constitute the ultimate standard which all societies should follow. Innis pleads for the inclusion of the spirit of the oral tradition of ancient Greece in contemporary society for the precise reason that the values of time have been systematically excluded from our social structure. He connects time and the oral tradition and quite literally uses both terms interchangeably. Time therefore plays a very powerful analytical role for Innis. The major tendencies of our society are destructive for the precise reason that they exclude the values of time.

> States are destroyed by lack of culture and so, too, are empires and civilizations. Mass production and standardization are the enemies of the West. The limitations of mechanization of the printed and the spoken word must be emphasized, and determined efforts to

> recapture the vitality of the oral tradition must be made. (Innis Empire, 168).

The reason Innis placed so much emphasis on the oral tradition of Greece is due to the fact its values " . . . supported a brief period of cultural activity such as has never been equalled." (Innis Bias, 64). But what kind of cultural activity? Let us notice what Innis considered to be the most important aspect of this tradition. It was not the great creations of literature, philosophy, architecture, or drama. These individual acts of creativity were a manifestation of something more basic and of more ultimate importance. Innis attached so much importance to the values of the oral tradition because its real power " . . . was evident in the effectiveness of a search for means by which freedom might be achieved." (Ibid., 42). To Innis, the fundamental purpose of technological development and its various social influences is actually a means by which human freedom might be expressed and further developed in an orderly manner in linear time. And, what is of fundamental significance, this cannot be done without the creation and perpetuation of particular values. There is therefore a very b ic ethical foundation to this entire undertaking. As Innis notes:

> . . . the oral tradition in Greece implied an emphasis on continuity. It created recognized standards and lasting moral and social institutions; it built up the soul of social organizations and maintained their continuity; and it developed ways of perpetuating itself. The oral tradition and religion served almost the same purpose. (Ibid., 105).

To Innis, the concept of time is a method of interjecting a particular ethical content to duration. He is therefore not saying that the objective of a society is to persist in an ethically neutral period of time. Rather, he maintains that, in order to so persist, a society must contain and act upon a particular ethical consciousness. And the required values are those of the oral tradition as it existed in ancient Greece. "The significance of Greek civilization to East and West provides an approach to modern problems." (Innis Political Economy, 263). In addition, " . . . we have seen the effects of the disappearance of the Platonic tradition in the necessity of appealing to force as the unifying and dominating factor." (Ibid, 79). The essential value of the oral tradition to our society is the fact that it " . . . implies the spirit but writing and printing are inherently materialistic." (Innis Bias, 130).

THE BIAS OF TECHNOLOGY

Having used the concept of time to determine that the values of the oral tradition are necessary for our society's continued existence, Innis then turns his attention to the way in which values are transmitted within any society. Once again, his analysis depends upon space and time. Marshall McLuhan provides a helpful suggestion in understanding Innis'

perspective in this regard in his introduction to The Bias Of Of Communication, where he notes the following:

> Once Innis has ascertained the dominant technology of a culture he could be sure that this was the cause and shaping force of the entire structure. At a stroke he had solved two major problems that are forever beyond the power of the "nose-counters" and of statistical researchers. First, he knew what the pattern of any culture had to be, both psychically and socially, as soon as he had identified its major technological achievements. Second, he knew exactly what the members of that culture would be ignorant of in their daily lives. (McLuhan Bias, xii).

As will be shown below, McLuhan is quite correct in his interpretation of the central role Innis attaches to a society's media of communication as transmitters of social values. It can be argued that Innis places too much emphasis on technology as a causative agent. Indeed, it remains to be seen whether Innis must defend himself against the accusation of being a technological determinist or, if not, then guilty of according the technology of communication an epistemological function which far exceeds its actual role in shaping a society.

In assessing the role of a society's medium of communication, Innis says the following:

> According to its characteristics it may be better suited to the dissemination of knowledge over time than over space, particularly if the medium is heavy and durable and not suited to transportation, or to the dissemination of knowledge over space than over time, particularly if the medium is light and easily transported. The relative emphasis on time or space will imply a bias of significance to the culture in which it is embedded. (Innis Bias, 33).

The first point to notice is that Innis is concerned with knowledge. There are two epistemological issues of significance in this regard. Firstly, he maintains that the physical characteristics of the medium of communication determine the distance over which knowledge can be transmitted. If the technology is heavy, knowledge travels a short distance. If the technology is light, knowledge travels a long distance. And both types of technology result in unique social organizations that reflect their particular characteristics. The second point concerns the type of knowledge which can be transmitted by these two basic types of technologies. Space-directed technology is essentially secular and concerned with some type of domination. In evaluating the social and epistemological repercussions of paper and writing, Innis concludes that: "A marked increase in writing by hand was accompanied by secularization of writing, thought, and activity". (Ibid., 15-16). On the other hand, time-directed technology is essentially concerned with some aspect of spiritual or ethical knowledge. There is therefore a very close relationship in Innis between the nature of the technology and the nature of the knowledge which that technology is capable of transmitting.

In applying this basic principle to contemporary society, Innis assigns a great deal of importance to the impact of science.

> The impact of science on cultural development has been evident in its contribution to technological advance,

> notably in communication and in the dissemination of knowledge. In turn it has been evident in the types of knowledge disseminated; that is to say, science lives its own life not only in the mechanism which is provided to distribute knowledge but also in the sort of knowledge which will be distributed. (Ibid., 192).

By "science" Innis means mechanization, quantification and standardization as opposed to what he viewed as the ethical and spiritual. What Innis appears to be saying is that the physical characteristics of a medium of communication determine the type of knowledge which that medium is capable of transmitting into a society. "We are compelled to recognize the significance of mechanized knowledge as a source of power and its subjection to the demands of force. . . ." (Ibid., 195). And our civilization, with its particular technology of communication is simply reflecting the historical principles of social growth and decay which Innis established between the physical characteristics of communication technology and the type of knowledge which that technology was capable of transmitting.

> The Byzantium Empire developed on the basis of a compromise between organizations reflecting the bias of different media: That of papyrus in the development of an imperial bureaucracy in relation to a vast area, and that of parchment in the development of an ecclesiastical hierarchy in relation to time." (Ibid., 112).

In attempting to understand what is implied in Innis' central message of striking a balance between media with two opposing biases, it is important to understand that Innis is referring to the epistemological capacity of a particular technology. He is referring to a particular technology's

capacity, or inclination, or bias, to transmit a certain type of knowledge. Secondly, it is necessary to focus on the words " bias of technology". Generally, the word "bias" suggests an inclination yet, part of the meaning of the word is the capacity to act in a direction different from its inherent inclination. In other words, "bias" does not necessarily exclude an element of freedom. However, this conventional meaning of "bias" does not adequately convey the meaning Innis attached to the function of technology.

"Bias" understood as "tendency" or "inclination", is too indeterminate and contains too much possibility to accurately describe what Innis is saying. Within his perspective, moving against the bias of a particular technology simply does not happen. One searches Innis' works in vain to discover a particular technology which actually transmits knowledge that goes against its particular bias. When Innis refers to the "bias" of technology he is in fact referring to a specific technology which transmits a very specific type of knowledge. Therefore, a very convincing argument can be made that Innis, uses the word "bias" in a manner which is intended to restrict a technology's epistemological capacity or freedom.

One can argue that the element of predictability which Innis assigns to a particular technology's epistemological capacity accounts for the simultaneous strength and weakness of any communication technology. Its strength lies in its capacity to always transmit a type of knowledge which reflects

its technological definition in spite of opposing forces. However, its weakness lies in its lack of flexibility to accommodate itself to alternate types of knowledge. In effect, though Innis employs the word "bias", he actually means something much stronger, more predictable and more definite than simple inclination. On this basis, it is very difficult to agree with traditional Innis scholarship which maintains that he was not a technological determinist. (Crowley 1981, 242). On the contrary, it seems that a very convincing argument can be made that technological determinism is at the foundation of his entire perspective.

In attempting to clarify this issue, let me first begin by defining the word "determinism" as it applies to Innis. Perhaps the word "cause" can be of some assistance. Innis insists that we must strike a balance between space and time-biased technologies because both types of technologies result in the two different types of knowledge which are indispensable for social survival. Societies survive by striking a balance between the secular knowledge of space-related technology with the spiritual, ethical, historical knowledge of time-related technology. According to Innis, it is impossible to obtain a time-type knowledge from space-biased technology. That is why a balance between the two is necessary. It therefore seems clear that the causative agent in the transmission of knowledge is the communication technology itself. This in turn implies that it is the

technology which determines knowledge. With respect to the question of causation, human agency is restricted to the attempt to balance the two technologies and in so doing interject a balanced epistemology into society at large.

While recognizing the causal efficacy and inherent power of technology to affect society, Innis is nevertheless deeply pessimistic of the social effects of an unchecked technology. He believes that technology, in itself, has inherent destructive tendencies. In not counteracting these natural technological limitations by the ethical values of time, we have overemphasized the secular at the expense of the ethical and in so doing unleashed forces which will inevitably result in disastrous social consequences. Carey emphasizes this point:

> In contrast to almost all other writing about technology, Innis constantly emphasized the limitations of technology in solving human problems. He did not so much emphasize the capacity of technology to bring about useful change as the amount of cultural loss that was attendant upon technical innovation and the degree to which given technologies, when imposed throughout social organization, finally destroy the very ends they are trying to achieve. (Carey 1975, 51).

The above statement by Carey is useful in assessing the significance of the question of technological determinism with respect to the main message which Innis is trying to convey. "Technological determinism" is usually understood in a pejorative sense. However, it is dangerous to try to neatly categorize Innis by applying simplified labels to the meaning that he is trying to convey. In considering the question of

technological determinism, it is not my intention to characterize his position in a manner that excludes further discussion. However, having said this, the importance that Innis attaches to the causative power of technology in transmitting knowledge into society must be recognized. Furthermore, the capacity of technology to do this very thing is the unifying theme which runs throughout Innis' work. His entire definition of history and social change turns on this precise point.

I see no real purpose being served in debating the extent to which Innis is or is not a technological determinist. I also suspect that Innis himself would have considered such a debate as being both sterile and irrelevant to the most important issues which he wanted us to understand and discuss. It is obvious that he was not interested in technology for its own sake. Rather, he viewed a study of technology as the key to understanding much wider social issues. More specifically, he believed that it was the most important means of locating and discussing social power. (Kroker 1984, 110). As will be discussed below, this is perhaps the most fruitful insight developed by Innis in helping us understand the nature of those powerful though invisible forces which shape the nature of our social institutions and, to a very significant extent, the very characters of individual citizens.

Most Innis scholars maintain that the recommendation to strike a balance between space and time categorizes Innis as a moderate thinker advocating a well balanced strategy with respect to contemporary technology. Arthur Kroker is a representative of this interpretation. He maintains that Innis' position is a well-balanced perspective located between the pessimism of a George Grant and the uncritical optimism of Marshall McLuhan. (Kroker 1984, 87-124). Yet, a very strong argument can be made that such is not the case. Since Kroker's interpretation is characteristic of scholarship on Innis, it may be helpful to consider this question by dividing the Innis discourse into two distinct parts. The first part concerns his analysis of the influence of the development of technology on contemporary society while the second involves a recommendation to resolve the difficulties brought to light by the conclusions reached in the first part.

There seems little doubt that Innis' views concerning the influence of modern technology are negative by any standard. According to his interpretation, our understanding of reality and our role within this reality have been crippled by technology and industrialism to the point that we are no longer even capable of recognizing or asking the most urgent ethical or philosophical questions. The epistemological confines characteristic of modernity have resulted in nothing less than a reduction in our capacity to even understand the significance of influences restricting our very humanity.

Innis tells us that we have been victimized by a force which has such potent and far-reaching destructive consequences that it has succeeded in actually destroying Western civilization. Therefore, from the point of view of the first question it is very difficult to conclude that Innis is a moderate in any meaningful sense of the word.

It is stated that though Innis grew darkly pessimistic about modern society he " . . . seems never to have concluded that the circle was irrevocably closed. Innis can never be a truly conservative pessimist like George Grant because, unlike Grant, he is fundamentally dialectical in his mode of thought." (Whitaker 1983, 828). Why somebody who is "fundamentally dialectical in his mode of thought" cannot be "a truly conservative pessimist" is not explained. However, Whitaker does go on to say the following:

> Like Plato in the Republic, Innis' position is, truly, tragic: he sees what is wrong with the world, he knows how it could be better, but he has almost no faith that anything can in fact be done about it. The very radicalism of his vision ironically deepens the tragedy: he knows better than most what it is that eludes our grasp. (Ibid., 829).

There is little in this quote that could lead one to believe that Innis was optimistic to any significant extent. Notwithstanding the interpretation represented by Kroker and Whitaker, it is difficult not to conclude that Innis' pessimism, though differently articulated, is nevertheless as deep as that of George Grant from the perspective of diagnosing the problem. However, from the recommendation he

advances to resolve the identified problems, that is, by his plea to strike a balance between space and time, one can conclude that there is a sense of optimism and hope in what Innis is telling us. However, in spite of this sense of possibility, the truly decisive question is not the nature of the specific course of action which Innis recommends as a solution to technological modernity. Rather, the real question to be answered is whether the particular recommendation which Innis advocates to resolve modernity's most serious problems can, in fact, be applied to and become part of contemporary society.

One very important consideration in coming to grips with this question rests with the nature of the epistemology which characterizes contemporary society as well as the location of the sources from which it emanates. To Innis, this epistemological question is perhaps the most crucial consideration since its defining characteristics move from its sources into society in general and in so doing literally define a society's most important parameters. In attempting to explain this social phenomenon, Innis develops his very important notion of monopolies of knowledge.

MONOPOLIES OF KNOWLEDGE

After reviewing the history of humankind, Innis concludes that as each medium of communication develops, there also arises a group of people who have the skills and knowledge needed for the effective use of that medium. Otherwise stated, history demonstrates that it is the normal state of affairs for each medium to be controlled by a relatively small group of people possessing specialized knowledge. This exercise of professional control goes back to ancient Egypt. "The scribe had the full qualifications of a special profession and was included in the upper classes of kings, priests, nobles, and generals....The complexity of the script favoured increasing control under a monopoly of priests and the confinement of knowledge to special classes...." (Innis Empire, 21-22).

Let us carefully notice what Innis is saying here. He concludes that these specialists do much more than simply use communication media according to the wishes of their political or social masters. Rather, he maintains that they exercise control over particular media. Since the purpose of any medium is concerned with knowledge and its transmission, exercising control of a medium is exercising control over knowledge. One projects a particular definition of knowledge into society via a particular medium. Innis calls these instances of control monopolies of knowledge. Thus, says Innis, the history of humankind is, to a very substantial degree, a history of the

definition and control of knowledge by different groups of elites who arise in response to changes in media.

In their role of controllers and definers of knowledge, these elites become very powerful within society. As with most powerful people, an intrinsic objective in their exercise of power is to do nothing that could seriously compromise their power base. Innis points out that this characteristic relationship between the media and those who control them goes back to the very beginning of recorded history. He describes this relationship as it existed in Babylonia. "Since the art of writing as the basis of education was controlled by priests, scribes, teachers, and judges, the religious point of view in general knowledge and in legal decisions was assumed." (Ibid., 29).

As different media of communication developed, the same historical pattern asserted itself.

> We have described the implications of papyrus to the rise and fall of bureaucratic administration in the Roman Empire and the tendency of each medium of communication to create monopolies of knowledge to the point that the human spirit breaks through at new levels and on the outer fringes of society. We can now turn to the implications of parchment to the civilization of the West, in the growth of a monopoly of knowledge and in its breakdown following the introduction of paper. (Ibid., 117).

Prior to its breakdown, parchment served as the centre of its own monopoly of knowledge. "A civilization dominated by parchment as a medium developed its monopoly of knowledge through monasticism." (Ibid., 133). "Parchment became the medium through which a monopoly of knowledge was built up by

religion." (Innis Bias, 50). As time passed and paper replaced parchment as a medium of communication, different specialists arose and, with them, a new definition of knowledge was created. "Monopolies of knowledge controlled by monasteries was followed by monopolies of knowledge controlled by copyist guilds in the large cities." (Ibid., 53).

Innis was therefore convinced that history supported his conclusion that a particular group establishes itself around a communications medium and in using the medium defines knowledge as it is perceived by a particular society. It should be noted that Innis is not suggesting that this elite group is a ruling class from a political point of view. Rather, it is a group which is concerned with the intellectual life of a society in its most fundamental sense, for these elites define and nurture the broad lines of a society's definition of rationality. They in effect define what a society is prepared to recognize as being reasonable or rational. Meanwhile, others on the fringes of this activity resist this epistemological imposition and actively seek to replace it. Obviously, those exercising power have a vested interest in ensuring that their definition of knowledge remains generally accepted since their position of domination and control is contingent on this social acceptance. Innis therefore establishes a very definite social epistemological claim that the kind of knowledge required to operate the various technologies of communication favours certain social

groups or forces. Thus there is a very definite relationship between the bias of communication and monopolies of knowledge in which the bias clearly favours these powerful social groups.

In studying the history of communications since the development of printing from about 1500, Innis concludes that increasing mechanization was accompanied by increasing monopoly. (Godfrey, Introduction to "Paper And The Printing Press", Empire, 142). With the advances made by science and its pervasive influence on all aspects of social life, the type of knowledge which was legitimated was that which conformed to the standards of truth applicable to science.

> The impact of science on cultural development has been evident in its contribution to technological advance, notably in communication and in the dessemation of knowledge. In turn it has been evident in the types of knowledge disseminated; that is to say, science has its own life not only in the mechanism which is provided to distribute knowledge but also in the sort of knowledge which will be distributed. (Innis Bias, 192).

In using the word "science" Innis is not suggesting that science, as it applies to the study of physical reality, is necessarily detrimental to human affairs. The point to be noted is that his definition of science is very broad. Within his intellectual framework, he is equating science with industrialism, quantification, commercialism and the resulting world view dominated by this perspective. As David Crowley maintains: "Science rather than metaphysics arises as a master idea that directs the conceptualizing of thought, representation and action. It is the epoch, foreshadowed in

the secularizing forces of Gutenberg, Adam Smith and John Locke, which ultimately deepens into the administrative hegemony of the modern industrial scientific order." (Crowley 1981, 237).

Innis maintains that applying these broad, general scientifically-inspired criteria of truth to social issues necessarily results in a society which is excessively secular and, therefore, deeply and fatally flawed unless a counteracting, *non*-secularizing perspective is interjected within public discourse. In speaking of the printing press and the radio, Innis concludes that both media have:

> . . . enormously increased the difficulties of thought. The first essential task is to see and to break through the chains of modern civilization which have been created by modern science. . . . Oral and printed words have been harnessed to the enormous demands of modern industrialism and in advertising have been made to find new markets for goods. Each new invention which enhances their power in that direction weakens their power in other directions. (Innis Political Economy, vii).

He goes on to state his essential and continuing objection that the impact of industrialism on knowledge " . . . weakens the possibility of a sustained philosophical approach." (Ibid., xvi). To Innis, this absence was the crux of the problem.

Within Innis' discourse, "a sustained philosophical approach" means a permanent, coherent moral concern which forms part of the foundation for official social thought, organization and action. Individuals may be so concerned but, as things now stand, this ethical concern is not

institutionalized as a necessary and important aspect of social organization. In other words, the ethical is not part of the official definition of knowledge. The direct cause for this absence of ethical thinking is the extent of our commitment to space-directed technology. As Crowley points out: "In his view, preoccupation with the "control of space" in modern societies has facilitated the suppression of a moral basis for social order in favour of technical ones. The type of knowledge most directly appropriate to a technically based social order was, perhaps self-evidently, the means oriented logic of modern social science." (Crowley 1981, 241).

Innis interprets the modern media in light of the lessons he drew from history. In so doing he focuses on the overwhelming importance of a society's media in determining the type of epistemology which will either ensure or destroy its well being. Our modern mechanized compilation and diffusion of knowledge necessarily results in an epistemology which has the same characteristics as the vehicle which transmits it. "Mechanization has emphasized complexity and confusion; it has been responsible for monopolies in the field of knowledge.... The conditions of freedom of thought are in danger of being destroyed by science, technology and the mechanization of knowledge, and with them, Western civilization." (Innis Bias, 190). Thus, the mechanized transmission of information imparts its own mechanized nature to the knowledge that is being transmitted.

In terms of injecting this definition of knowledge into society, our age is no different from past historical periods. The general principle, says Innis, remains the same. The social epistemological connection which exists between the bias of communication and monopolies of knowledge will favour certain powerful social forces that possess the kind of knowledge required to operate the technologies of communication. A mechanized medium requires a particular group with the skills needed to utilize and maximize its potential and, in so doing, define the broad outlines of a society's understanding of rationality or knowledge. And h points out that an essential aspect of our definition of modern rationality is a concerted attack on any principle which would support permanance.

> The overwhelming pressure of mechanization evident in the newspaper and the magazine has led to the creation of vast monopolies of communication. Their entrenched position involve a continuous, systematic, ruthless destruction of elements of permanance essential to cultural activity. The emphasis on change is the only permanent characteristic. (Innis Changing Concepts, 15).

The above quotation is a typical example of the need to unravel Innis' thinking with respect to key points, for the precise nature of his objection is not at all clear. One can only make an informed guess and try to interpret him in light of the totality of his work. Based on my understanding of his overall concerns, I would suggest that one should focus on his use of the words "ruthless destruction of elements of permanence essential for cultural activity". For Innis

"cultural activity" is consistently used to mean "ethical activity". Such being the case, I think that Innis could have conveyed his intended meaning by replacing the words quoted above with " the conscious elimination of those general ethical truths which, if formally acknowledged, would have to be included as part of the officially recognized definition of knowledge and, therefore, would have to be considered as both an essential and permanent part of public discourse".

I believe that the interpretation I have provided is not only fully consistent with the general position advocated by Innis, but it also clarifies what he is trying to tell us. In addition, it is fully consistent with his concept of monopolies of knowledge since the conclusion becomes that any effort to encourage a consideration of questions of ethical permanence is to simultaneously mount a very serious challenge to those elites who are currently exercising epistemological domination. The general recognition of principles of ethical permanence is the very thing which would result in the balanced epistemological perspective which Innis is recommending. And that is the very thing, again according to Innis, that the current elite are dedicated to avoiding.

Rather than balance, Innis tells us that the vast mechanized information apparatus, which is capable of handling so much data, demands to be constantly fed. Those specialists who manage this apparatus insist that it be so fed. Consequently, our modern media specialists, like their

counterparts in past historical periods, both define what knowledge is and control the way in which it will be released into society.

> Technological advance in communication implies a narrowing of the range from which material is distributed and a widening of the range of reception, so that large numbers receive but are unable to make any direct response. Those on the receiving end of material from a mechanized central system are precluded from participation in healthy, vigorous, and vital discussion. Instability of public opinion which follows the introduction of new inventions in communication designed to reach large numbers of people is exploited by those in control of the inventions. (Ibid., 102).

Innis is here warning us that our definition of truth and rationality is in danger of being constructed by technical experts in such a manner that it reflects their specialized knowledge and specialized concerns. Specific social issues are not simply selected by this elite. They are also provided with the general paradigm within which the issues are publicly discussed. The participatory aspect of the resulting public discourse is consequently illusionary. In reality, most citizens simply react to a well-established agenda. Our knowledge elites prevent them from seriously considering those more important social issues which are indispensable to their well being as individuals.

Innis is here laying the groundwork for a great deal of contemporary scholarship, for he is telling us that the monopoly of knowledge which is being exercised over most of society gives us a false sense of democratic participation. If one assumes, as Innis does, that the objective of democracy is

the creation of the institutions and the general social environment which is most conducive to the full development of the individual, then the monopoly of knowledge exercised by our media elites is in actual fact a very effective hegemonic tool which actively prevents a meaningful exercise of democracy.

In addition to this agenda-setting by elites, Innis believes that our current scientific, industrial, commercial perspective has been enormously successful in eliminating interpretations of reality which could compete with it as a general social paradigm. An inherent aspect of this successful epistemology is an uncritical acceptance of its most basic assumptions. The power of this definition of knowledge is its capacity to exclude any other epistemological framework from serious consideration. It literally takes over the mind. "Machine industry has made impacts on knowledge which have not been realized because it has influenced ways of thinking and left little energy to appraise them." (Innis, Political Economy, xvi).

To Innis, our consciousness is being shaped in ways which prevent us from recognizing that the social knowledge produced by our industrial society comes equipped with an epistemological straightjacket which is woven by our media. In this sense, modern epistemology is an invisible force which victimizes both individuals and the social fabric itself. Not only are the epistemological principles themselves dangerous

in their lack of a critical perspective, but the content which these principles support are both trivial and superfluous. "The technological advantages in communication shown in the newspaper, the cinema and the radio demand the thinning out of knowledge to the point where it interests the lowest intellectual levels and brings them under the control of totalitarian propaganda." (Ibid., 74).

From the preceding discussion it is clear that the impending social catastrophe which Innis predicted is intimately related to our contemporary definition of knowledge and this, in turn, emanates from our communications technology. When the nature of the modern media is combined with the relatively small group of individuals which control them, we have "official" definers of public knowledge and social truth. In effect, we have social manipulation by a group of elite definers of truth. The result is the development of a society largely composed of individuals who are intellectually restricted and preoccupied with the trivial and the irrelevant. To Innis, not only is true individual and social development impossible within such a negative social context but, more ominously, such a society contains the seeds of its certain destruction.

It is apparent that Innis provides many insights which have been subsequently developed by researchers in the fields of cultural and communication studies. The general themes outlined above, in combination with the implications of his

belief that the West " . . . was atomized by the pulverizing effects of the application of machine industry to communication." (Innis Bias, 79) illustrates the wide-ranging influence that Innis has had on countless critical observers of the social scene. The extent of Innis' influence on subsequent generations of scholars has not been fully recognized or acknowledged by those who have commented on his works. While he is generally praised for advocating balance and proportion, very little effort has been made to develop the many perceptive insights Innis had concerning the location, exercise and control of social power. Yet, such themes are at the very center of Innis' concerns, waiting to be explored and developed. His influence, though unacknowledged, can be seen in some very important work subsequent to his death.

Though it is beyond the scope of this study to go into details, it is nevertheless instructive to relate some of the more important themes of contemporary research to Innis' work. For example, the name of Noam Chomsky comes to mind. The basic inspiration of Chomsky's work examines the media as an agent of thought control in a democratic society. To a very significant extent, this topic is a development of Innis' basic concept of monopolies of knowledge as practised by modern media elites. The many perspectives concerning the influence of technology on contemporary society, from McLuhan, to Ellul, to Franklin, develop Innis' idea of the bias of

technology. Those who focus on the ethical aridity of the contemporary scene owe much to Innis' belief that our lack of technological balance creates a social epistemology which results in a systematic exclusion of the ethical from our social context. And one could go on.

In my opinion, there are two main reasons which account for the lack of acknowledgement of Innis' wide ranging influence. Firstly, the full implications related to the concept of time have not been satisfactorily defined. One of the main purposes of this study is to make a contribution to this aspect of Innis' work. Secondly, true to his style of thinking and writing, Innis provides basic insights which remain unexplained and undeveloped within his own work. Understanding Innis means a researcher must use his work as a springboard to enter areas of study far removed from the conventional interpretation of media studies. In particular, it is impossible to satisfactorily understand Innis without considering history, political economy, ethics, epistemology and metaphysics. To range so far afield from communication studies requires a degree of interest and commitment which is rather rare. This situation, though understandable, nevertheless results in a lack of real understanding of the importance and relevance of Innis' work to our contemporary society.

While his insights can be developed in many different directions and provide a variety of conclusions, with some

optimistic and others less so, Innis himself offered a unique perspective of the solution to what he considered the fundamental issue of contemporary society namely, the definition of knowledge which results from the exercise of power and control by the few over the many. He consistently affirmed that the only solution to our social problems rested with the introduction of the epistemology and value system of the oral tradition as it existed in ancient Greece. To Innis, this was the only remedy to what truly ails us.

> We should, then, be concerned like the Greeks with making men, not with overwhelming them by facts disseminated with paper and ink, film, radio and television. . . . A major problem of society emerges in the development of institutions which enlarge the capacities of individuals and enable them to use such enlarged capacities to the greatest advantage of the individual and the institutions. (Ibid., 203-204).

Convincing us of the oral tradition's capacity to provide the social and institutional environment required for the full development of the individual is therefore the ultimate purpose of the work of Harold Innis. While Innis was deeply pessimistic of contemporary society's ability to implement this recommendation, he is equally optimistic of the capacity of the individual to participate in, and benefit from, the epistemology and resulting value system of the oral tradition. Innis wanted to free us from an intellectual and ethical oppression which was literally destroying our capacity to develop in a manner which he considered to be in conformity with our own humanity. The faith which he had in the individual is very well captured by Carey who makes the

following observation concerning the importance Innis attached to the oral tradition: "The strength of the oral tradition in Innis's view was that it could not be easily monopolized. Once the habits of discourse were widespread, the public could take on an autonomous existence and not be subject to the easy control of the state or commerce." (Carey 1988, 166).

All of Innis' main conclusions, from the reasons given for the coming to be and passing away of civilizations, to the bias of technology and the resulting monopolies of knowledge, to the epistemology and predominant ethical framework of a given society, to his belief in the necessity of recapturing the ethical framework of the oral tradition of ancient Greece flow, in the final analysis, from the two concepts of space and time and, in particular, from the latter. It is well to recall what was mentioned earlier by Donald Creighton, Innis' biographer. Creighton tells us that Innis " . . . was driven inevitably into a stupendous comparative investigation of the interrelations of communications with politics, economics, and religion, throughout history and over the entire world." (Creighton 1957, 121).

Given the magnitude of the intellectual task Innis undertook, one has to seriously consider whether this objective can be satisfactorily met by relying on only two major concepts. Therefore, a balanced analysis of Innis' general position must consider whether his reliance on the concepts of space and time can support the scope and diversity

of his conclusions. Fairness requires that one consider whether Innis is guilty of a type of reductionism and over-simplification. It is entirely possible that Innis disregarded other causes of social change which are of equal, or possibly greater importance, than his two foundational concepts of space and time. If that is indeed the case, then much of what Innis concludes will have to be seriously questioned. It is to a consideration of this possibility that I now turn.

CHAPTER 4-SPACE AND TIME AS ANALYTICAL CONCEPTS

The task Innis undertook and the analytical approach he elected to follow is well summarized by Creighton.

> Like Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, Innis was attempting to explain the rise and fall of civilizations, the growth and collapse of empires; unlike Toynbee and Spengler, who found complex explanations laden with diversified historical evidence, Innis relied on a simple mechanical determinant, expressed in the twin categories of space and time. (Creighton 1981, 24).

The question to be considered in this chapter is whether "the simple mechanical determinant" mentioned by Creighton has the analytical capacity to provide satisfactory answers to obviously complex issues or whether these two concepts necessarily result in erroneous conclusions due to their inherent analytical limitations.

Innis' conclusions concerning the nature of the problems characteristic of contemporary society are based on his study of history, which is a very particular interpretation of history. It is entirely possible that those who find his historical perspective seriously problematical will likewise find his conclusions concerning contemporary society equally questionable. One can quite reasonably argue that there are other interpretations of history which are far more sophisticated and elaborately justified than that offered by Innis. For some, this may be reason enough to conclude that these alternate views deserve more serious consideration than Innis' more simplified perspective. For example, for Plato and

Aristotle, the ebb and flow of history " . . . is the rise and fall of political order, and the cause of this rise and fall is located . . . in the nature of political life itself and the psychic order of the rulers and the ruled". (Gunnell 1987, 233). In his The Rise And Fall Of The Roman Empire, Gibbon attaches a great deal of importance to the personal character of the various Roman emperors and the critical role played by the military as central causes in the development of that particular civilization. (Gibbon 1952,I VI, 64,IV III, 79). Gibbon tells us that the emperor Decius, in his investigation of the general causes which led to the decline of Roman greatness, soon discovered that " . . . it was impossible to replace that greatness on a permanent basis without restoring public virtue, ancient principles and manners, and the oppressed majesty of the laws. (Ibid., X, 100). Neither the Greeks nor Gibbon regarded technology or communications as primary causes in the rise and fall of civilizations.

Marx and Nietzsche defined history in terms of the expansion of human powers and it was as a result of human striving that they explained the historical development of societies. (Love 1986, 89). John Locke and Adam Smith, generally regarded as the two founding fathers of capitalism, both believed that the constant creation and satisfaction of human needs and tastes would result in a very definite break with past civilizations in that the modern capitalist society was capable of indefinite expansion. In so doing, this type of

society escaped the old historical cycle of rise and fall. Capitalism and its basic commitment to constant economic abundance had therefore set human history on a unique path in terms of growth, giving humankind " . . . mastery over its own destiny and broke the age-old cycle of growth and decline, formerly the fate of nations." (Lasch 1991, 120). Oswald Spengler, in The Decline Of The West, states the following: "The decline of the West, which at first sight may appear, like the corresponding decline of the Classical Culture, a phenomenon limited in time and space, we now perceive to be a philosophical problem that, when comprehended in all its gravity, includes within itself every great question of Being". (Spengler 1991, 3). Along somewhat the same lines the great modern scholar, Eric Voeglin, offers the following complicated view of history: "Human existence in society has history because it has a dimension of spirit and freedom beyond mere animal existence, because social order is an attunement of man with the order of being, and because this order can be understood by man and realized in society with increasing approximation to its truth." (Voeglin 1986, 2). It therefore becomes quickly apparent that many different interpretations of history are offered and most, if not all of them, are more carefully and explicitly formulated than the one developed by Innis. In light of this fact, and keeping in mind that Innis' conclusions concerning modernity flow directly from his interpretation of history, a natural sense

of prudence is justified before one accepts his more important findings.

In examining this question, it is relevant to remember that Innis was an economic historian for most of his professional life and he quite naturally applied this basic economic perspective to the study of communications technology. More specifically, the general outlook which guided his thinking was the economic development which occurred within the context of North America. (Heyer 1981, 255: Carey 1988, 141: Kroker 1984, 117). The economic themes and social implications of competition, the interactive relationship of opposing forces and the subjection of one element or source by another all combined to produce a particular outlook and frame certain concerns. Consequently, this general orientation was highly influential in shaping Innis' interpretation of history and it forms the basis of conclusions concerning societies vastly different from his own.

A second significant point, which is also generally acknowledged, is that his interpretation of history is both materialist and dialectical. (Parker 1981, 127: Melody et al 1981, 96). This particular view of history is very directly related to Innis' years spent as an economic historian. It is significant to note that the social dynamics associated with the interplay of economic forces colour Innis' understanding of any society to the point that his view of the social was

" . . . based upon a model of competition appropriated from economics and extended to all social institutions. And in this competitive model, competition for new means of communication was a principal axis of the competitive struggle." (Carey 1967, 7-8). The forces characteristic of an economic paradigm provide the overall context within which Innis identifies and discusses issues concerning communications technology. Of course, such a framework does not imply that the solutions offered to these problems need be economic in nature. As will be seen, the framework adopted by Innis allows him to go far beyond the economic in offering solutions to our most pressing social problems.

Innis And The Social Dialectic

It is within this general perspective that Innis employs the two concepts of space and time to conclude that fundamental alterations in communications technology are the primary causes of the most fundamental and significant social, epistemological, ethical and cultural changes that any society can experience. And it is important to understand that space and time, when analytically applied to these technological forces, provide valid conclusions applicable to <u>any</u> society, regardless of the nature of a specific social context or the particular historical period in which that society may exist.

Though Innis does not specifically describe them as such, in essence, these forces are used as analytical principles which are both objectively and universally applicable in terms of the role they play in his discourse. He is in fact maintaining that in any society, at any historical period, the causal efficacy of important changes in communications technology overpowers the existing epistemological, social, and cultural structures of the host society. Changes in communications technology provide new ways of thinking, new cultural values and a fundamentally different life. Technology is therefore a self-propelling agent of social change which, according to Innis, acts in only one of two possible ways. It privileges either space or time. The question therefore becomes one of determining whether these two concepts have the analytical fecundity to support the intellectual edifice which Innis builds upon them.

The essential problematic is succinctly stated by Raymond Williams. While he acknowledges that technology is without doubt a causative agent, to Williams the central question is " . . . if we think of it as a cause, as what kind of cause, and in what relation with other kinds of cause." (Williams 1975, 9). What Williams is suggesting is that the causal efficacy of technology should not be taken for granted nor should it necessarily be privileged over other social forces. Rather, it must be assessed within a particular social context. It is entirely possible that different societies are

characterized by social forces which, though similar in appearance and definition, are nevertheless very different in terms of their impact in bringing about social change. As such, these various social forces are related to the causal efficacy of their respective communication technologies in different ways. This, according to Williams, is something that must be determined by observation and reflection rather than as an a priori truth. In a similar manner, Herbert Schiller emphasizes the importance of situating the technological within the social and recognizing the fact that the technological is a social construction.

> . . . Orthodox (communications research) work has regarded technology as an independent variable, an autonomous force that creates interesting new conditions. Attention, in work of this kind, has been directed to technology's impacts <u>after the fact</u> of its introduction. This approach has, in effect, excluded technology from detailed scrutiny. In contrast, critical studies have been concerned with the conception, design, financing, and installation of new technology and technological processes. This is in keeping with the view of technology as a social construction. (Schiller 1983, 255).

In terms of evaluating the analytical power which Innis attaches to the concepts of time and space, the approach suggested by both Williams and Schiller is a prudent course to follow and will guide this study.

From an analytical point of view, one of the advantages of adopting an economic framework is the fact that one is automatically provided with various polarities which can then be selected as the basis of analysis. This is precisely what Innis did. The essence of economic competition is the

interplay between competing economic interests. Similarly, the opposing tendencies of space and time constitute opposing social forces which interact with one another and in so doing cause fundamental social changes. He called this type of social interaction dialectics. Salter notes this approach in Innis. " He was preoccupied with dialectics, which he defined as the opposing tendencies in any social or historical situation which serve to create conflict and tension." (Salter 1981, 194-95). To Innis, this type of conflict was the essence of social change and, as might be expected, it produced both positive and negative results.

The notion of social dialectics in Innis follows logically from the concepts of space and time and is central to the analytical approach he adopts. This level of dialectical activity is clear in his work and is recognized by all commentators as being basic to the achievement of fundamental social change. For example, Watson focuses on this notion of a social dialectic.

> I have tried to show that Innis' later work was concerned with an examination of how a different dialectic, the dialectic of power and knowledge was played out in human history using communications systems as a focus for an analysis of this process. The main poles of the dialectic of history in Innis are the living tradition and the mechanized tradition or the concern with knowledge and the concern with power. (Watson 1977, 58).

While this social dialectic is certainly present in Innis, a close reading of the text reveals a second level of dialectical activity in which the interaction of forces play a very different role from that of the social. Yet, unlike the

social, this second level of dialectical activity is not at all clear in Innis' work. There are many hints of it throughout his writings. It is also implied within his definition of the concept of time, but it is not clearly identified nor is it specifically discussed. However, it is very important in terms of understanding what Innis is really telling us. It is therefore necessary to extract this second definition of dialectic from the text. As will be discussed below, this dialectic focuses on the individual rather than the social. As the social dialectic produces change within society at large, the individual dialectic attempts to explain changes in the person firstly as an epistemological agent and, secondly, as an ethical actor. Consequently, both levels of dialectical activity must be understood in order to fully grasp the entire scope of change which Innis advocates. As I hope to show below, this second function of dialectics, though somewhat hidden, is essential not to simply understand what Innis is saying but to also clarify how very relevant his conclusions are to our contemporary world. Let me first discuss the role played by social dialectics.

Salter's and Watson's understanding of the definition and role of dialectics mentioned above is a faithful interpretation of the text and is generally recognized by all commentators. The opposing tendencies of space and time constitute a dynamic source of social change. Carey supports their interpretations as he notes the following:

> This strength in Innis' work derives from his mastery of dialectics and his unromantic location of North American history on the interfusions of technology, politics and economics. . . . The advantage of dialectics reside in its sensitivity to the contradictory tendencies within phenomena, the awareness it creates of the potentialities of any situation, and finally its necessary attention to the dynamics of social life and to the qualitative changes in the nature of the social process. (Carey 1975, 52).

One point in Carey's interpretation should be addressed. Though he is correct with respect to Innis' interpretation of social change as it occurs within the context of North America, it should be noted that this same view of social change was applied to all other historical epochs. It is clear that Innis saw all social change, regardless of the particular historical epoch, as the result of the same essential dialectical tensions, with the widest and most encompassing being the competing tendencies of space and time-directed technologies. The defining characteristic of the balance which Innis advocates is striking the necessary compromise between these opposing tendencies. Therefore, time and space are not positioned to one another in an oppositional binary relationship. Though characterized by opposing tendencies, Innis is maintaining that the key to a successful society is the avoidance of the extremes which result from an exclusive preoccupation with either space or time. Either extreme can result in social destruction. The society which perseveres in existence is the one which, in striking a balance between space and time, in effect has successfully accomplished the required synthesis of these opposing technological tendencies.

However, it is precisely at this point that difficulties are encountered. Significant problems must be resolved when the practicalities involved in striking this balance are carefully considered within the general framework of social and historical change which Innis stipulates.

It has been noted that Creighton, Innis' biographer, tells us that Innis' view of history is materialist. Parker, among others, makes the same point. "In short, to the extent that Innis' later works in the economic history of communication involved a dialectical materialist scientific perspective, both the dialectical and the materialist roots of his communication analysis can be traced to his earlier staples analysis." (Parker 1981, 135). One can take issue with Parker with respect to the "scientific" characterization of Innis' perspective, but the materialist aspect is generally acknowledged. However, this conclusion becomes highly problematical since Innis is unambiguous in his belief that the decisions which must be made to strike a balance between space and time-directed technologies cannot be based on a strictly materialist historical perspective. The very fact that Innis insists that time-related values are those of ethics, culture and philosophy as practised in the oral tradition implies that his view of history is not simply materialistic. Rather, it clearly includes a fundamental qualitative aspect and is, in consequence, much more complicated than is initially suspected or commonly

acknowledged. Indeed, one can make a very strong case that Innis' view of history cannot be exclusively materialist and remain consistent with his fundamental recommendation to resolve any society's deepest social problems, including our own.

Innis was clear in maintaining that it is impossible to strike a balance between space and time unless a conscious decision to do so is made. The very purpose of his work is to identify the negative social effects associated with continuing the privileging of space-directed technology. He is pleading that we understand these dangers and take the initiative in reversing the trend towards imminent disaster that awaits our society. This in turn implies that Innis not only attached a great deal of importance to human agency, but also considered it to be a practical, empirical expression of a society's value structure. In this sense, a society's values lie behind its choices of technological development. In other words, this empirical expression of social values is the driving force that shapes and directs a society's technological development. When Innis tells our contemporary society that it must reverse the modern commitment to an entirely space-directed technology, he is telling us that conscious decisions must be made on the basis of certain values, namely, those which he identifies as characteristic of the concept of time or, synonymously, those of the oral tradition.

These conclusions flow directly from the analysis provided by the concepts of space and time. While it is possible to reserve judgement concerning the soundness of these conclusions, one can safely say that the analytical function which space and time must fulfil is deeper and broader than is generally recognized. It is as a result of the dynamic interplay between them and the exercise of human reason that a clear and very important non-materialist component is added to Innis' generally acknowledged materialist perspective. However, the recognition of this fact presents a serious and perplexing conflict.

The human expression of social values is the non-material means of ordering and directing technological development towards space or time. However, it must be recalled that Innis' notion of the bias of technology is much more than a simple inclination. There is no instance that I am aware of where Innis asserts that any form of communication overcomes its technological bias. If one interprets this overpowering capacity of technology as being a materialist perspective, then there is certainly a very significant presence of materialism in the Innis discourse. Indeed, one can argue that this materialist component is the dominant force since it is precisely this technological power which has actually eliminated the non-materialist element namely, time-related values. The materialism in Innis is therefore both real and very powerful. Yet, the fundamental purpose of the

entire Innis project is to warn us that the destructive nature of this materialism can only be counteracted by following a non-material course of action, namely, by incorporating the ethical values of time as they existed in the oral tradition into contemporary society. The question then becomes whether this is even possible in light of the overpowering strength of the material, technological component of the Innis discourse. This issue is really very significant and is located at the very core of what he is saying. It appears that he is proposing a solution which simply cannot be implemented given his understanding of both technological development and the ethical values of time. Indeed, according to Innis, contemporary society is largely defined by the destruction of time or the ethical by technology or the material. Again according to Innis, there is nothing in between these two forces. Consequently, one is very hard-pressed to understand how any alternative can prevent the continued domination of the technological.

It may be overstating the case to conclude that this is a theoretical contradiction. However, there is a serious problem concerning the possibility of balancing the ethical, ie. time, with the technological. The severity of this difficulty renders the first level of dialectical activity, namely the social dialectic, problematical at this stage of the discussion. However, a word of explanation is in order with respect to this issue. The difficulty does not consist in

identifying the nature or the source of the problem. Innis could well be quite correct in this regard. One can even conclude that identifying technology as a serious social issue with wide-ranging repercussions is not particularly unique. Rather, the problem rests with implementing the solution he offers. We are told that the only way to ensure our future social existence is to incorporate the values of the oral tradition into our society. Yet, it appears that the technological is privileged over the ethical to the point of not simply negating any influence the ethical may exercise but of actively preventing the ethical from being concretely implemented. In short, there is the very real possibility that Innis is suggesting that we do something which, on the basis of his own discourse, simply cannot be accomplished. That is the heart of the problem.

If one considers the way in which the technological is privileged in Innis, one notices that his concept of the bias of technology in effect lifts the technological out of the social. Let us recall that Innis concludes that the technological bias towards space or time occurs regardless of a particular social or historical context. What happens is dependent on the nature of the technology in question. There are no social forces capable of overpowering the capacity of the technological to actualize its space or time-directed potential within the society in which it operates. In practical terms this means that the technological can

neutralize any other form of social causative agency in terms of its capacity to introduce social change. It is in this sense that any particular social or historical context is irrelevant with respect to the effects of communications technology. Thus, the inherent causative power of the technological is both universal and practical. It is universal since it acts in any society at any time. It is practical in that it is concretely realized within all societies. In effect, the social repercussions of the power of technology become the determining characteristics of the society within which the technological functions. But this privileging of the technological raises some serious questions.

A concrete example based on my personal experience with television as it is used in a non-Western social context can illustrate this point. Though television was in its infancy when Innis was writing, Salter maintains that television is an excellent example of what Innis considered space-binding technology. "Although both satellites and television were developed after his death, they are good examples of what he called 'space-binding' communications." (Salter 1981, 198). Carey reaches the same conclusion:

> As spatially biased media, radio and T.V. even when used by religious institutions, contribute to the growing hegemony of secular authority and to the extension of political influence in space. Further, they have contributed to the weakening of tradition and the secularization of religion. Or so Innis might have it. (Carey 1967, 25).

Based on Innis' understanding of the role of technology, both Salter and Carey are quite correct in their interpretation. The point to focus on here is that the space-binding capacity of the communications technology is self-determining in that it cannot be modified, influenced, or prevented from realizing its course by the social context in which it functions.

However, living in the Islamic country of Saudi Arabia for several years serves to graphically illustrate the capacity of the social context to direct the technological in ways not envisioned by Innis. The North American context of profit-driven television simply does not exist in Saudi Arabia. Rather, the Islamic concern with tradition, culture, ethics, and religion is the motivating force behind the purpose and use of television technology. Human decisions intervene in the technological and consciously direct the technology for the express purpose of reinforcing the Islamic faith and the traditional value system of Saudi Arabia. Within this country, television is one of the strongest influences in achieving the precise opposite of that which characterizes its use and definition as a space-binding technology. Within the social context of Islam, the social is privileged over the technological. Based on the requirements of the social, human decisions intervene in the technological to employ it as a means of preserving a particular history, a traditional culture and a specific ethical system. It is, in every sense

of the word, maintaining what Innis would call a sense of time. Yet, as noted above by Salter and Carey, television, in being an inherently space-binding technology, should not be capable of achieving what it in fact does achieve within the social context of Islam. Television is here subservient to the value system of those who use it, which is something it does not have the capacity to do - according to Innis. The social reality of television within the context of Islam is much better captured by Finnegan than by Innis or those who share Innis' view on this question.

> It is not the technology itself that brings results, it is the use and control in one or another way- in other words, the social not the technological aspect. . . . Many other factors besides the purely technological affect the choice of how particular media will be actually used and distributed. One needs to ask...about such things as political control, class interests, economic pressures . . . and so on. General attitudes and views too often play a crucial part. (Finnegan 1988, 42).

This suggests that it is necessary to seriously question Innis' conclusions concerning the relationship which exists between the technological and the social.

In considering this relationship in light of the above, one tends to be receptive to Ursula Franklin's conclusion that " . . . technologies need not be used the way we use them today." (Franklin 1990, 51). Similarly, it lends strength to Carey's belief that " . . . technology is just that: it is simply technology . . . it is a means of communication and transportation over space, and nothing more." (Carey 1988, 140). Obviously, Innis would disagree with Carey, Franklin and

others who support this view of technology. He consistently maintains that technology is much more than simply technology. It is in fact the most powerful of social forces and the most efficacious of causes in bringing about social change. At this point, it is well to recall the general economic perspective which frames Innis' discourse on technology. He was speaking of technology as it developed within the North American context. This of course means viewing technology as it develops within the framework of capitalism. Within this particular framing, an analysis which fails to relate the implications of profit maximization to technological development and use is inherently faulty. The relationship between the two is simply too intimate to be disregarded. Thus, it is entirely possible that the unstated assumption which provides the main justification for the conclusion advanced by both Innis and Salter is the use of technology for the purposes of realizing profit. Whether this is in fact the case remains to be seen. However, it is clear that the relation which exists between technology and its preferred use within a social context is of much greater importance than Innis recognized.

Unlike Innis, Raymond Williams is convinced that a social context of profit maximization is of critical importance in understanding the social effects which flow from technology. In attempting to locate the real locus of the power of technology and its relation to social change, Williams points

out that the development of both radio and television were technological systems which were devised for transmission and reception as abstract processes with very little thought given to content. It was a classic case of supply preceding demand. The forces behind the development of this communication technology were the large manufacturing corporations whose profit margins were directly affected by the sale of the technology they developed and indirectly, by the type of broadcasting characteristic of the competitive market. While there certainly existed complex economic, political and cultural forces at work in determining the final form of radio and television, there is no doubt that one of the most important factors was corporate profit. Based on his study of the question Williams concludes: " As the varying solutions in different capitalist societies are examined it is clear that the technology as such was in no way determining." (Williams 1975, 34). Regardless of the minor differences manifested in various capitalist countries, the general framework remained essentially the same: programming for profit and as a vehicle for advertisement, the selling of consumer goods, a particular lifestyle, and a set of values which reflect the market system, thereby encouraging the continued growth of profit. In all cases, the programming is geared towards the basic objective of commercial advertising with the result that the audience is treated as a consuming agent. (Peers 1983, 142).

The critical relationship which exists between technology and profit is also emphasized by Carey. He points out that the main spokespeople for the industrial society assume that technology, in the form of electricity, has the capacity to resolve a host of social problems that are of a non-technical nature. He characterizes this mindset as the "...rhetoric of the electrical sublime." (Carey 1988, 116). Those who practice this rhetoric either possess unique insights into the future, are engaged in wishful thinking or are intent on legitimating the status quo. (Ibid., 117). Historically, he believes that it is essentially the latter position which has prevailed since " . . . the real beneficiaries of the rhetoric of the electrical sublime were the electric and power companies that presided over the new technologies." (Ibid., 120). At the center of the self-serving rhetoric were exceptionally effective public relations techniques designed, again, with corporate profit as the basic goal.

The same point is made by Ursula Franklin who notes that manufacturers and promoters "...always stress the liberating attributes of a new technology, regardless of the specific technology in question". (Franklin 1990, 98). The essential issue which Williams, Carey, and Franklin, among others, wish to emphasize concerns what Innis would call the bias of technology. The question they are addressing is, where exactly is the bias to be finally located? They suggest that if a bias does in fact exist, it is not to be found in the technology

itself but in the purpose to which that technology is put, and this purpose reflects the decisions which individuals, acting either in an individual capacity or on behalf on some institution, are actually making. The question of purpose within any social context is therefore one of fundamental importance which Innis appears to perhaps not neglect, but certainly to de-emphasize. Ellul, in his recent work entitled The Technological Bluff, focuses on the basic impetus underlying the development of the variety of modern communications and asks the following:

> Are these new media wanted by the public. . . . ? Or are they imposed by technicians, financiers, or the state? If they are imposed, for what purpose? For information? For pluralism? For money? To serve the public or to serve political or financial groups. In no study have I found even the outline of answers to these questions. (Ellul 1990, 340).

If Innis' analysis is compared with those mentioned above, one is forced to conclude that the latter commentators situate technology within a much wider and more complicated social framework than does Innis. They consider a wider range of social forces that have the ability to bring about fundamental social change and in so doing recognize a social context which is more complicated than that described by Innis. In situating technology within the larger social, political, cultural and economic life of society, they emphasize the efficacy of human decisions in directing the uses to which technology is put. Specifically, the dominant influence of conscious decisions related to the realization of

profit is privileged in the direction of technology and its social repercussions. In this sense, they subordinate technology to human purpose. Innis was clearly not oblivious to the influence and role of profit in modern society. However, he does not focus on the implications which necessarily exist concerning technology and its resulting social effects when the driving force behind the development and use of that technology is the profit motive. By not expanding the concepts of space and time to take this aspect of social reality into consideration, Innis provides a much narrower social context within which technology overpowers any other social cause.

In comparing these two perspectives one reaches the conclusion that in spite of his best intentions, Innis is responding to what he describes as the crisis of technology in a manner which is essentially technological in nature. Though he clearly recognizes the urgency of counteracting the power of technology by introducing balance and proportion, his own discourse does not permit this balance from being realized due to the dominant position he allocates to technology. Perhaps this is the reason that Innis was so pessimistic with respect to contemporary society's chances of survival. One can interpret Innis' response to the problem of technology as a vivid example of George Grant's description of the extent to which technological thinking has penetrated to the very core of our lives, our social consciousness and the manner in which

social problems are defined and resolved. (Grant 1986, 17). The analytical scope and depth of space and time, as utilized by Innis, do not allow him to escape the technological. In spite of his recommendation to strike a balance between the secular and the ethical, there is really very little reason to be optimistic that this can actually be accomplished due to the inherent capacity of the technological to resist the required guidance and direction which the ethical must provide. Space-directed technology is simply too strong to be deflected from its natural tendency to dominate everything and anything within the social fabric.

The analytical limitations of the concepts of space and time therefore render the first level of dialectical activity, namely, the social dialectic, deeply problematical with respect to achieving the required synthesis between space and time. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there is a second level of dialectical activity which is implied in Innis' work, and that is dialectic as it applies to the individual. While the social dialectic is fraught with problems, it will be shown that the individual dialectic, while offering much greater promise in terms of actual implementation, is also the more important of the two in terms of Innis' message to contemporary society. As will be discussed below, the individual dialectic can be interpreted as a type of "intellectual technology" that can serve as a corrective to the negative social and personal repercussions

flowing from space-binding technology. Furthermore, the requirement for this remedial knowledge leads directly to the only institution capable of developing and propagating this intellectual corrective, namely, the university. There is consequently a definite path in Innis' work which leads from the social dialectic, to an individual dialectic and, finally, to the university as mediating institution. In tracing the development of this line of reasoning, I will now move to a consideration of the individual dialectic.

Innis And The Individual Dialectic

The social dialectic discussed above is the more obvious of the two dialectics and is the one which is usually referred to when Innis' work is at issue. The preceding discussion notes the extent to which the social dialectic can be seriously questioned. To this extent, it is highly unlikely that it can be relied upon to actually achieve any significant amount of social change which is, it must be recalled, its primary purpose. The social dialectic is advanced by Innis as the means to realize fundamental social change. Consequently, if this were the only dialectical discourse, then it would be fair to conclude that Innis, though exerting a courageous

effort, seriously misread social reality and, ultimately, has nothing of importance to tell us. But this is not the case. There is a second level of dialectical activity which is implied and hinted at but is never explicitly discussed. What I hope to show is the nature of this suggested dialectic and, secondly, that it is has much greater potential for change than his more widely recognized social dialectic. It is directly related to the importance Innis attaches, and the social function he assigns, to the oral tradition of ancient Greece. It is therefore necessary to first recall this role and then discuss the resulting implications.

Innis repeatedly tells us that space-directed technology results in an epistemology which supports a cultural value system which must be counteracted by the introduction of time-directed technology with its related epistemology and accompanying value system. Otherwise Western civilization is doomed. The source of these time-related values is the oral tradition as it existed in ancient Greece. Hence Innis' conclusion: "The conditions of freedom of thought are in danger of being destroyed by science, technology, and the mechanization of knowledge, and with them, Western civilization. My bias is with the oral tradition, particularly as reflected in Greek civilization, and with the necessity of recapturing something of its spirit." (Innis Bias, 190). More specifically, he locates the source we should seek out in the character of Socrates, the main spokesperson in the Dialogues

Of Plato. "The character of Socrates worked through the spoken word. He knew that the letter is destined to kill much (though not all) of the life that the spirit has given. He was the last great product and exponent of the oral tradition." (Innis Empire, 60).

To Innis, the philosopher who should be closely studied with respect to our contemporary problems was Plato. He believed this for several reasons but one of the most important was the role which Plato assigned to dialectics as a method in the pursuit of truth.

> Plato attempted to adapt the new medium of prose to an elaboration of the conversation of Socrates by the dialogue, with its question and answer, freedom of arrangement, and inconclusiveness. A well-planned conversation was aimed at discovering truth and awakening the interest and sympathy of the reader. The dialogues were developed as a most effective instrument for preserving the power of the spoken word on the written page. . . . The power of the oral tradition persisted in his prose, in the absence of a closely-ordered system. Continuous philosophical discussion aimed at truth. The life and movement of dialectic opposed the establishment of a finished system of dogma. (Ibid., 60).

The significance of dialectics, as it is used in the dialogues is contrasted with what Innis calls the "rationalist scientific approach" which defines our contemporary definition of truth.

> The whole trend today is to exalt the rationalist scientific approach and to discard the philosophical. I am not thinking only of the worship of the physical and mechanical sciences, but rather of the attempt to make ethics, philosophy, etc; conform in method and language to the physical sciences- with disastrous results. Specialization runs mad, and when it does so, never leads to understanding. Its natural result is strife and violent dogmatism. (Innis Political Economy, 144).

So we see that Innis relies on the Dialogues Of Plato as a counterforce to what he considers to be the main intellectual perspective of contemporary society. He was convinced that the prevailing general "scientific" paradigm which directs and informs the most influential of contemporary interpretations of social reality is epistemologically rigid and exclusive to the point of destroying the very possibility of what he would call true philosophy. Therefore, the essential problem we face, in Innis' view, is a problem of epistemology. We are without the epistemological foundation to engage in the act of philosophy as measured against his understanding of the word. It is this epistemological problem which is at the root of our most significant social difficulties and should therefore be addressed on an urgent basis. Innis recommends that we do so by invoking the values of the oral tradition as practised by Socrates in the Dialogues Of Plato, and he does this for two reasons. Firstly, because of the intellectual openness and flexibility of the dialectical approach to truth and, secondly, because of the subject matter to which this dialectic was applied. The combination of the two was, for Innis, the essence of what philosophical discussion should be and it was this type of discourse which we lacked. Furthermore, this absence created such negative social repercussions that it would inevitably lead to the destruction of Western civilization as we know it. Thus Innis pleads for this contemporary emptiness to be filled

by the values of time, which he defines in terms of the oral tradition, which is itself defined in terms of the Platonic Dialogues. It is important to understand the link which Innis establishes between his concept of time and the Dialogues. When he insists that the spirit of the oral tradition must become part of modernity, he is in fact saying that the animating principle of Plato, or something very close to it, is absolutely essential if modern society is to be saved from its self-inflicted destruction. Thus the sole solution to our deepest and most fundamental social problems is an intellectual perspective which must closely approximate the philosophical tradition of ancient Greece.

However, true to form, Innis does not pursue the analysis that results from this linkage. He speaks of the Dialogues and their dialectical approach to truth in the broadest possible terms. He notes, in very favourable terms, Plato's openness but does not dwell on what he was open about. He tells us that "The mixture of the oral tradition and the written tradition in the writings of Plato enabled him to dominate the history of the West." (Innis Bias, 10). However, he does not specifically discuss how or why Plato dominated the history of the West. Many would obviously take issue with this type of generalization. In addition, while advocating the necessity of the dialectical approach and the intellectual openness which is characteristic of the Dialogues, Innis does not provide us with any specifics concerning the epistemological and ethical

conclusions which this search discovered. Consequently, when we are told that we must introduce the values of the oral tradition into our society, we actually know very little of the specific ethical values that we are, in fact, supposed to introduce. As a result of these analytical deficiencies, there is a very real need to pursue the analysis of the concept of time much further than Innis was prepared to do if we hope to have a more precise idea of what he is really asking of us. In addition, it is also necessary to develop Innis' analysis in order to evaluate the feasibility of implementing what he is suggesting into contemporary society. I will begin by focusing on the notion of dialectics since it is central to the resolution of this entire question. Before beginning however, I must mention that since this involves a clarification of the implications of what Innis is saying, little help can be expected from the texts themselves. It is obvious that he did not see the benefit of discussing these questions at the level of detail which I believe is essential.

The first important point to note is that Innis interprets dialectics as being an all-inclusive, homogeneous concept. He does not make any explicit distinctions concerning different types of dialectical activity. In particular, he does not differentiate between the modern understanding of dialectics and that which prevailed in the oral tradition of ancient Greece. The modern concept of dialectics concerns, in some manner, the interaction of opposites which result in some

sort of social change. This notion of dialectics generally sees no necessity to rely upon, or otherwise proclaim, the need for any metaphysical formulation intended to support universally applicable truths. To the extent that dialectics is involved, the modern intellectual paradigm is one in which each discipline looks after its particular subject, and, together, the totality of these disciplines constitute the "officially" accepted definition of reality. This modern interpretation of dialectics is very different from the perspective which animated Greek thought in the oral tradition. In ancient Greece, there was an intellectual discipline, indeed, the highest of all disciplines since it was considered to be the purest of the sciences, that dealt with this totality. It was metaphysics, the science that studied being as being. With the passage of time, it became known as the queen of the sciences, the highest and most important of all intellectual disciplines because of the universality of the questions it considered. It was the "science" which was generally discredited in the 17th and 18th centuries. Engels spoke on behalf of modernity when he noted that " . . . a special science dealing with this totality is superfluous or unnecessary. That which still survives of all earlier philosophy is the science of thought and its laws--formal logic and dialectics. Everything else is subsumed in the positive science of nature and history." (Engels 1959, 87-88).

Innis fails to note that this modern understanding of dialectics is very different from that which was practised by Socrates as the representative of the oral tradition. Nor is this contemporary use of dialectics the intellectual instrument Plato employed in his search for truth. Rather than being a concept dealing with conflicting or opposing tendencies in the social world, that is, the world exterior to the individual, Plato considers dialectics to be such a potent personal instrument that it is capable of revealing an experience of the transcendent to the person who undertakes the quest. In Republic VI, Plato speaks of the first division of the intelligible as being mathematical hypotheses and then goes on to discuss the other division of the intelligible as " . . . that other sort of knowledge which reason herself attains by the power of dialectic, using the hypothesis not as first principles, but only as hypothesis." (Jowett 1982, 511, 252). He goes on to say that it is by the use of dialectics that reason uses hypothesis as points of departure " . . . into a world which is above hypotheses, in order that she (reason) may soar beyond them to the first principles of the whole; and clinging to this and then to that which depends on this, by successive steps she ascends again without the aid of any sensible object, from ideas, through ideas, and in ideas she ends." (Ibid.). Dialectics, for Plato, is the instrument used to acquire knowledge of the transcendent and it is dialectics which rescues the human spirit from the negative

pull of the life divorced from this quest. Needless to say, this particular definition of dialectics is one which has long been lost to our Western intellectual tradition.

In spite of failing to distinguish between different kinds of dialectical activity, Innis was correct in his interpretation of the essential purpose of the Platonic Dialogues. They were clearly discussions dealing with the search for ethical truths in which the dialectical approach clarifies the subject under review without providing many inflexible conclusions. (Owens 1959, 195). He was also correct in maintaining that the core of the dialectical procedure is the construction of an intellectual framework which remains unfinished and therefore always open to revision at any point in its development. (MacIntyre 1988, 100). It was this open-ended system of inquiry which found such favour with Innis since past knowledge could be considered and modified in light of contemporary problems and concerns. To Innis, the process of constantly relating the past to the requirements of the present was not simply a matter of retaining the most important aspects of tradition in order to serve the present and, possibly, the future. It was also the essence of rationality. As he points out in "The Problem Of Space", "The oral as compared with the written transmission of tradition was inherently more consistent and logical in its results because of the constant sifting, refining, and modifying of what did not fit into the tradition." (Innis Bias, 102). One

here gets a very strong sense of the reason which led Innis to reject what he called the "scientific" interpretation of social reality. It did not have the interest, the capacity, or the flexibility to consider the present in light of the philosophical tradition of the past. To Innis, this was both a recipe for social disaster and the height of irrationality. The dialectical perspective of the oral tradition and the definition of rationality dependent upon it, has two very important consequences which bear directly on the feasibility of introducing the values of the oral tradition into contemporary society. Both of these points are mentioned by Innis though he does not elaborate upon them in any detail.

The first consequence concerns the individual who is engaging in the dialectical process. The second is related to the society within which the inquiry takes place. For Plato, philosophizing dialectically is essentially a personal, spiritual act which is undertaken within a society openly hostile to this type of activity. The great Platonic scholar, Eric Vogelin, states that Plato's dialectics is based on the resistance of the human soul to a society intent on destroying it and that the function of the dialectical process is to " . . . advance propositions concerning right order in the soul and society, claiming for them the objectivity of episteme--of science- a claim that is bitterly disputed by the sophist whose soul is attuned to the opinion of society". (Vogelin 1990, 69).

Though Innis does not discuss this question systematically, there are isolated passages which suggest that he thought along similar ethical lines. However, he stops short of invoking any metaphysical conclusions. Nowhere does he state or imply that it is possible to get beyond the ethical and reach what Plato called "the objectivity of episteme". Like Plato, Innis was deeply concerned with the training and development of character, or virtue. For example, in " A Critical Review", he quotes Redding in order to illustrate how contemporary society should educate its students. "Education is apt to become merely the art of reading and writing, without training minds to principle of any kind, and destitute of regard for virtue and even decency." (Innis Bias, 194). He also notes: "We should, then, be concerned like the Greeks with making men, not with overwhelming them by facts. . . . Education is the basis of the state and its ultimate aim and essence is the training of character." (Ibid., 203). Also like Plato, this ethical training occurs in an environment which is hostile to the development of virtue since institutional education is committed " . . . to avoid the major philosophical problems of Western civilization". (Ibid., 204). Innis therefore clearly supports the importance Plato attaches to dialectics as an effective instrument in the search for ethical truth. "The oral dialectic is overwhelmingly significant where the subject

matter is human action and feeling, and it is important in the discovery of new truth...." (Ibid., 191).

There is therefore a consistent train of thought which runs through Innis' work in which the concept of time, with its connection to the oral tradition, advances views that are very similar to that of Plato and the ancient Greeks with respect to the ethical development of the person and the importance of this type of training for the well-being of the state. However, in spite of the fact that neither this general outlook nor its assumptions and implications receive anything resembling a systematic analysis in Innis' work, the fundamental insights are present and inspire a great deal of what he says. When he maintains that: "The oral tradition implies the spirit . . ." (Ibid., 130), and: " We have neglected the philosophical problems of the West and have not realized that the Greeks were fundamentally concerned with the training of character", (Innis Essays, 385), he is revealing a general perspective which implies far, far more than he explicitly states. In supporting the general focus of Greek culture as an ethical environment in which: "Every individual was to be made a model example of his species. . . .", Innis in effect is offering an ethical solution to counteract the negative value structure flowing from our space-directed society in which "...thought has been paralysed". (Innis Political Economy, 129). The absence of this ethical content defines modernity and it is as a result of our refusal to

acknowledge the significance of the ethical that we have become a fanatical society in the truest sense of the word. (Ibid., 124). As a society "...we have all the answers and none of the questions". (Ibid; p. 128) because of our intellectual and moral narrowness and impoverishment. Therefore, the contemporary mind must be broadened, the epistemological horizons must be extended to include the social significance of the ethical.

The dialectics of the oral tradition results in an intense tension between the individual and society. As will be seen in the last chapter, Innis perceives the relationship between the individual and society in terms of a similar ethical conflict. From Plato's perspective, that which is of overriding importance is the well-being of the soul as it progressively grows and develops as a result of its dialectical inquiry into ethical questions. The individual must engage in this effort in spite of the problems and hindrances which society presents. Plato's use of dialectics is not primarily as a method to obtain data and verify the accuracy of propositions concerning the physical world but rather a procedure which permits the soul to grow in ethical knowledge about itself and its place in reality as a whole. The social manifestation of this ethical knowledge is the movement of knowledge from the soul of the philosopher king as an animating principle to both the individual and institutions which comprise society. While Innis has nothing resembling a

detailed analysis of this particular use of dialectics, he nevertheless recognizes the existence of a tension between the individual pursuing ethical understanding and the society in which this effort is undertaken. The predominant intellectual framework resulting from scienticism, commercialism and industrialism characteristic of our society is reflected in the basic purposes of its major institutions. Not only do these institutions not provide active assistance in the individual's personal search for ethical development, but, by their very purpose, actively oppose such an inquiry. Consequently, Innis concludes that steps should be taken to eliminate this hostile social environment. One of the most urgent needs of contemporary society is the development of institutions which assist individual citizens in their efforts to develop and enlarge their ethical consciousness and thus contribute to the well being of both the citizen and society as a whole. "A major problem of society emerges in the development of institutions which enlarge the capacities of individuals and enable them to use such enlarged capacities to the greatest advantage of the individual and the institutions." (Innis Bias, 204). Taking the reverse of the above quote, one comes very close to Plato's conclusion that the effort to expand the individual's epistemological scope to include the ethical is essentially a personal, lonely task since, as things now stand, the individual cannot rely to any significant extent on institutional assistance. In short, she

is on her own in a society which is indifferent at best, and hostile at worst, to the realization of her deepest needs and the development of her most important capacities.

Innis therefore clearly perceives dialectics in the Greek sense, that is, as a means of personal ethical growth. Though this interpretation of dialectics can be traced directly to his use of the concept of time and its attendant value system, one has to work very hard to make the necessary connections and understand the full implications. These issues are never explicitly discussed, yet their significance cannot be overemphasized if one is to understand the deeper meaning in Innis. This general difficulty is not made any easier by the fact that he does not contrast his social dialectic with this more personal and individual use of dialectics as a means of individual ethical growth. When such a contrast is identified, it is possible to see that Innis has a social dialectic, which is modern in its definition and application, and an ethical dialectic focused on the individual and which is closer to the classical, Platonic understanding of the term. Furthermore, it is clear that the social dialectic is more public than private, while the ethical dialectic is more private than public.

That this classical understanding of dialectics is fundamentally different from any modern interpretation requires little elaboration. For example, Carey points out that the advantage of dialectics " . . . resides in its

sensitivity to the contradictory tendencies within phenomena, the awareness it creates of the potentialities of any situation, and finally its necessary attention to the dynamics of social life and to qualitative changes in the nature of the social process." (Carey 1975, 52). This particular view of dialectics is an accurate interpretation of the type of social interaction which Innis saw as the locus of social change and the sphere in which a balance between time and space should be attempted. It could be described as the public sphere and it is within this public sphere that Innis' view of dialectics is normally situated. It is also as a result of this social level of dialectics that Innis has been interpreted as having a materialistic interpretation of history and social change.

However, the view of dialectics as an instrument to be used in the search for personal ethical development, while no doubt being manifested publicly, is essentially personal and this second level of dialectical activity is anything but materialist. Rather, in affirming one set of values in preference to others, this individual application of dialectical activity is ethical in nature and intent. Considered together, these two dialectics reveal that Innis has a very comprehensive position concerning change and development as they relate to both the individual and to society as a whole. This in turn expands and develops the traditional interpretation of Innis by recognizing an enlarged

core which expands the application of his discourse and unifies it into a more coherent whole.

A further point should be mentioned. Though Innis certainly derived his inspiration from the Platonic understanding of dialectics, there are very significant differences between classical dialectics and the ethical dialectics which he adopted. Within the Platonic tradition, the ultimate end of this process is true knowledge and this involves knowledge of the transcendent. To suggest that Innis was in agreement with such a view would be to go far beyond what is implied in his work. While he was clearly committed to the ethical content of the classical or Platonic view of dialectics, there is nothing to indicate that he was the least bit interested in the transcendent. Innis stopped at the level of the individual person, his ethical development and the relationship which exists between the individual and society, with a clear concern for the nature of the institutions which influenced this development. Consequently, though one may argue that his interest in Greek philosophy indicated a general intellectual curiosity in metaphysical questions, there is nothing in his work to suggest that he saw the necessity of metaphysics or the Platonic world of the Ideas as a necessary basis to explain any type of change.

The Epistemological Problem

Thus, we can see that an elaboration of the concept of time provides a much wider and deeper focus than an initial reading of Innis would suggest. Once this level of analysis has been reached, one can finally understand the heart of the problem that I believe Innis wanted to identify, explain, and warn us against. At first glance, he appears to be suggesting that modernity faces an ethical crisis with the purpose of the ethical values of time being to counteract the secular tendencies of space in order to restore the required social balance. It is clear that Innis was convinced that we were indeed faced with a very urgent ethical crisis. However, if the results of the analysis of the concept of time are linked to the importance Innis attaches to his notion of monopolies of knowledge, one discovers that the real issue to be resolved is at a deeper level than the ethical in that it is a pre-condition for the ethical. The root problem is in fact at the epistemological level. The ethical crisis is actually a social manifestation of a problem which is more basic than the ethical to the extent that the ethical proceeds from and presupposes the epistemological. Let me explain.

As has already been identified, Innis maintains that scientism, industrialism and commercialism establish the general epistemological parameters of modernity. He considers this intellectual framework to be excessively and dangerously

narrow since it prevents us from recognizing the significance of time-related values to both the present and future well-being of society. Since we cannot recognize or understand the importance of these values, we are obviously incapable of incorporating them into our society and thereby offsetting the secularizing process of space. If we were capable of understanding the significance of the ethical values he is advocating, Innis believes we would take the steps needed to include them as an integral part of our social context. In short, the epistemology of our contemporary age is limiting our intellectual horizons in relation to an understanding of the role of the ethical in social affairs. What Innis is in fact telling us is that modernity's so-called ethical crisis is actually a manifestation of a much deeper problem. The problem in question lies at the level of knowledge as we define and perceive it. We are therefore faced, says Innis, with an epistemological crisis of critical proportions. Such being the case, we must first address the epistemological level before the more obvious ethical crisis can be satisfactorily dealt with.

This general conclusion which Innis reaches with respect to our society is a modern manifestation of what he considers to be an historical truth possessing universal applicability. Based on his study of history, Innis concludes that all societies which failed to strike a balance between the secular and the spiritual exhausted themselves and eventually passed

out of existence. The main cause of this social disintegration was the definition and control of knowledge which an elite group imposed on their particular society via the main communications technology. Ours is a society which is repeating this historical pattern in its privileging of the secular at the expense of the ethical as a result of its overemphasis on space-directed technology. Therefore, says Innis, the disintegration of our society is in direct proportion to the disintegration of our capacity to understand the social necessity of the ethical. Unless modernity redefines knowledge in such a way that philosophy, ethics and an appreciation and assimilation of something resembling Greek values can become an integral part of society, Western civilization is doomed to go the way of countless others who rose to prominence only to fall into oblivion.

Such is Innis' perception of the problems which modernity must address, and his recommended solution. The practical applicability of his solution within the context of advanced capitalism will be considered in the following chapter. The issue at hand here is whether the conclusions which he reached on the basis of only two concepts, space and time, are analytically sound. Can they be satisfactorily defended or are they necessarily deeply flawed due to their inherent limitations? Can a satisfactory study of all of human history, including our own society, be based on only two concepts that exclude other social forces considered by some to be as

important, if not more important, than space and time. In " A Critical Review", Innis specifies that his project entails " . . . a critical review, from the points of view of an historian, a philosopher, and a sociologist, of the structural and moral changes produced in modern society by scientific and technological advance". (Innis Bias, 110). The question being considered here is the degree of success he met by relying exclusively on two concepts.

Based on my understanding of Innis' work, I would suggest that his success must be qualified in several important respects. In terms of diagnosing social problems, relying on two conflicting concepts associated with communications technology clearly establishes a general paradigm in which social policy must respond to opposite tendencies. For example, the technological must be balanced against the humane, the secular against the spiritual, so-called progress with an intelligent understanding of tradition. Generally speaking this seems to be a wise course to follow and I doubt if there would be significant opposition to this conclusion. However, it should be recognized that this is a conclusion expressed at the most general level possible. Difficulties would no doubt arise when one left this level and focused on the specifics of what, precisely, one meant by words such as "spiritual", "humane" and "tradition". Though Innis makes reference to the oral tradition of ancient Greece, he does so in terms which are really too broad to convey an adequate

understanding of what this tradition actually is. The basic insight is there. However, it is necessary to extend and develop it to a significant extent and this is something Innis did not do. It must also be recognized that one has to work very hard to do so. Therefore, the social analysis which results from space and time, as it exists in Innis, requires substantial development and elaboration if it is to compete for our serious consideration with the many other alternative historical and social perspectives.

Though Innis advocates the urgent necessity of introducing the values of the oral tradition into contemporary society, he does not provide any detailed discussion about how we should go about doing this. Given his general pessimism concerning the social direction in which we are heading, it is difficult to know where this healing process is to begin. Since it is a social problem which extends throughout society, one has to assume that our social institutions must play a major role in this process of social rehabilitation. However, Innis does not seriously discuss whether our liberal democratic institutions have the capacity or even the inclination, to play any part in transmitting these values into society at large. He assumes, or perhaps hopes, that contemporary technological capitalism is a social system which has both the desire and the flexibility to correct the serious social mistakes it has made in the past and, according to Innis, continues to make to this very day. This could well be

the case. However, it remains an open question if one does not go beyond the limitations of his work.

In assessing the general effectiveness of the concepts of space and time in terms of the problematic which Innis undertakes, one can acknowledge their effectiveness in identifying both a general approach and in providing an outline of the problems to be resolved. For most commentators, one should expect nothing more from Innis. For example Godfrey, the editor of Empire And Communication, forewarns the reader that he must be satisfied with general areas of study rather than specific answers. " Innis does not provide answers but he does delineate patterns of the forces and metaforces of political history that are well worth examining." (Godfrey, Introduction to Empire, 142). Similarly, in Culture, Communication, And Dependency, we are told that together, all of Innis' works in communications " . . . attempt to explore a new field of research, not to frame and hand down to subsequent generations a specific theoretical perspective." (Melody et al 1981, 109). While it is true that Innis does not attempt to provide a closed- ended, inflexible theoretical framework, it seems to me that he does provide a perspective which is more precise and substantial than these interpretations indicate. This is particularly true with respect to his concept of time. If properly understood, this initial insight is remarkably fecund. If not, then a very significant part of what he really means will simply be lost.

It should also be emphasized that any requirement for further development should not be viewed as a shortcoming. Rather, it is fully compatible with Innis' belief in the importance of dialectical inquiry and his general rejection of any perspective which could be interpreted as completed and hence closed to further consideration. Indeed, it is fair to say that any interpretation of Innis which does not recognize the need for constant development and reconsideration is a perspective which cannot be faithful to the entire Innis enterprise.

The analytical capacities of space and time become less problematical when they are related to Innis' position concerning monopolies of knowledge. He expends more analytical energy discussing the relationship which exists between new technologies of communication and the role of elite groups in shaping epistemological perspectives which are directly translated into social reality and cause profound social changes. One need not fully support Innis' conclusions concerning these issues to recognize that the analytical strength of the two concepts of space and time are here both significant and fruitful. In effect, he uses them as foundational concepts which relate technology to questions of epistemology, the exercise of social control by elite groups, and the resulting social changes which these groups impose on society in general. As Watson maintains: "The point which Innis was making revolved around the concept of power more

than it did the bias of the media." (Watson 1977, 59). In addition, an assessment is made of the ethical environment which results from these interrelationships. Thus, one gets the impression that in this area of his work, Innis felt compelled to focus more closely on the implications of his two basic concepts and provide a more detailed account of their social repercussions. In so doing, he provided a perspective which is both more precise and less problematical.

From the preceding considerations, the conclusion one reaches concerning Innis' reliance on only two major analytical concepts as a method of historical and social analysis is somewhat mixed. As noted at the very beginning of this study, the lack of detail in Innis' work makes such an assessment very difficult. In light of the findings discussed thus far, it is necessary to recognize that too many commentators are excessively generous in their overall interpretation of Innis. Lacking a critical perspective, they seem to take his analysis at face value and in so doing overlook some very serious problems. In coming to grips with these difficulties, it is helpful to divide Innis' work into two general categories. Firstly, that of explaining the relationship which exists between technological and social change. Secondly, that of offering a solution to the problems which result from this relationship. The concepts of space and time are fundamental to both. As a methodological approach to explain social change, space and time can be reasonably

defended provided they are developed and expanded well beyond the level that is found in Innis. However, things become very problematical with respect to the suitability of space and time to provide a solution to contemporary problems. As mentioned earlier, Innis equates time with the values of the oral tradition and the latter as the sole means of contemporary social salvation. In addition to not specifying what these values really are, the only justification he offers for this recommendation is his particular interpretation of history and his assumption that modern capitalism has the capacity to absorb the values of the oral tradition as an integral part of society. Neither explanation is convincing in itself. This aspect of Innis' work is not well developed and has been virtually ignored by his commentators. To say that something should be done is obviously not to say that it can be done. The key question concerning Innis' solution to the problems of modernity therefore becomes one of 'can it be done'? In other words, can our modern industrial society absorb the values of the oral tradition, without changing its fundamental structure? This is the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5 -INNIS, CAPITALISM AND THE UNIVERSITY TRADITION

An initial problem presents itself in discussing capitalism due to the very nature of the concept. There are substantial difficulties in considering this notion in the abstract since what actually exists are different manifestations and various forms of capitalism. The capitalism of the United States is different from that of Canada while that of Great Britain is not the same as the capitalism of Germany, Japan or Saudi Arabia. There is therefore a danger of providing an analysis which disregards these differences and which thereby becomes highly generalized and imprecise. In addition, the various stages of capitalist development must be taken into account such as monopoly capitalism, advanced capitalism and, to use our current terminology, post-capitalism. To ignore the specific form of capitalism being analyzed is to run the risk of falling into a study which, in attempting to apply to all forms of capitalistic societies, may in the end to apply to none.

The evolution of capitalism within the liberal democratic framework has been very ably presented by authors such as Alvin Gouldner in The Dialectic Of Ideology, C.B. Macpherson in The Life And Times Of Liberal Democracy and The Political Theory Of Possessive Individualism, Robert Heilbroner in The Nature And Logic Of Capitalism, and Daniel Bell in The Cultural Contradictions Of Capitalism, to name but a few.

There are countless others who have made equally valuable contributions to the study of this question. There is no advantage in repeating the arguments presented in these works for the purpose at hand. However, in terms of understanding Innis' perspective on this issue, the point which is of relevance is the following.

Regardless of either the particular type of capitalism which may characterize any society or the specific stage of capitalism in which a society may find itself, there is a constant, common and essential characteristic which must exist at any stage or within any manifestation of capitalism. That is private profit. Without private profit no form of capitalism can exist. Profit, in turn, is dependent upon the production and consumption of goods and services by private enterprise. When closely examined, the basic function of most major institutions in a capitalist society and the objective of a great deal of society's general activity has profit as its ultimate objective. The pursuit of profit is a never-ending one by the very nature of the objective itself. This, in turn, implies ever increasing economic growth. Ellul focuses on this point as he notes that growth " . . . is thought to be good in itself. No one asks why, or for what, or whether it is useful or who it serves, or what will be done with the excess. The lack of interest in such questions is a sign of unreason. Growth is self-justified." (Ellul 1990, 224). The realization of this objective requires a constant

increase in the production and consumption of goods and services and in contemporary society, technology is one of the most important factors enlisted in the attainment of this end.

As a system, capitalism has several theoretical perspectives which serve to explain the purpose of the state and the role of the individual within the state. A theme which is common to the representative works cited above, and in most others, is the tendency of perceiving individual members of society within the general parameters of being potential or actual producers and consumers of goods or services. Their importance and essential function is seen in this light. It should not go unnoticed that this particular interpretation of individuals implies very definite assumptions concerning both the purpose of the individual and the function of the state and society itself. It assumes, to quote C.B. Macpherson: "That man is an infinite consumer, that his overriding motivation is to maximize the flow of satisfaction, or utilities, to himself from society, and that a national society is simply a collection of such individuals." (Macpherson 1977, 43). Furthermore says Macpherson, within any capitalist context there necessarily exists a limited view of human excellence in that this particular social interpretation " . . . is a vision that is inextricably linked with the market society." (Macpherson 1965, 38).

The very real danger in this type of theoretical position is that it often results in what can only be described as a

monolithic perspective of any capitalist society. The theory homogenizes social reality to such an extent that it eliminates from consideration what are actually very real and very powerful contradictory social forces. The result is that complicated social questions are not only oversimplified, but, in many instances, seriously misrepresented. For example, there is a great deal of evidence to support Macpherson's conclusion that individuals in a capitalist society are perceived in terms of producers and consumers. It is not necessary to wander too far afield to see that this is in fact true. The ubiquitous presence and influence of the advertising industry with its emphasis on consumerism, the social status accorded the wealthy and their ability to instill emulative behaviour in large segments of society, and the preoccupation with equating happiness with the purchase of various products are only a few examples of the social realities which lend credence to Macpherson's interpretation of the influence the market exerts in a liberal democratic society. There are many other examples that are there for all to see. There is also ample evidence to indicate that a market perspective exerts a very powerful influence in shaping the prevailing social standards of excellence. The social importance attached to various displays of conspicuous consumption and its attendant superficialities is evident. However, there is also a great deal of social evidence to suggest that one should be very cautious in applying these conclusions to an entire society,

which really means to the diversity of individuals which comprise that society. One need not spend much time or effort in attempting to prove that social reality is much more complicated and diverse than many theorists of modern capitalism suggest. Society is constituted of individuals who are thinking, acting people possessing all sorts of concerns beyond producing and consuming. Many contemporary social movements clearly attest to this fact. A very significant number of people attempt to participate in the political process for the very reason that they insist on being considered as something other than mere cogs in the economic machine. Some of these individuals are part of the traditional political process while others, while perhaps marginalized, are often more determined to have their views considered. Others, attempt to lead lives which reject the market definition of the individual and, in general, reflect more individuality than that allowed by the limitations of a market definition of the individual. Consequently, being grounded upon a monolithic theoretical foundation, it is not unusual for much of the discussion of capitalism to be a very selective discourse which, in its selectivity, ends up demonstrating the soundness of the assumptions that frame the study.

There is no explicit theoretical discussion of capitalism in Innis' work. Nor does he make distinctions between concepts such as capitalism, industrialism, commercialism or modernity.

To Innis, they are essentially the same social phenomenon. One gets the impression that distinctions of this kind held little importance for him. His primary concern was the social impact of the total contemporary phenomenon that he called 'modern science' which is essentially characterized by a general tendency to privilege various manifestations of an epistemology of quantification at the expense of the ethical. The primary task, says Innis, is to free ourselves from the influence of the intellectual narrowness exerted by this totalizing social environment and the restricted interpretation of reality that it forces upon an unsuspecting society.

> The first essential task is to see and to break through the chains of modern civilization which have been created by modern science. . . . Oral and printed words have been harnessed to the enormous demands of modern industrialism and in advertising have been made to find new markets for goods. Each new invention which enhances their power in that direction weakens their power in other directions. (Innis (Political Economy, vii).

In effect, what Innis is chiefly concerned with is the relationship between the epistemology generated by the totality of our modern industrial society and the question of social power and control. He thus views society from a truly holistic perspective in which the examination of one aspect of social existence such as the profit motive plays a secondary role in terms of analytical importance. From Innis' point of view, to privilege one social force such as profit is to do so at the expense of the whole and thereby obtain results which necessarily misrepresent that whole. Therefore, the focus must

be directed toward understanding the nature and the social effects of the industrial epistemology which flows from the entire social fabric. This approach is called "ecological" by DiNorcia.

> Innis' approach was . . . ecological, meaning broadly multifactoral rather than narrowly economic, technological or geographic. It assumed a complex socio-technical model of the space and time interplay among competing groups (elites, states, empires or cities) and diverse social factors (centres/ margins, markets, religions, cultures . . . and technologies, especially communications). (Di Norcia 1989, 349).

One of the very difficult problems to overcome in attempting a synthesis of this magnitude is the epistemological handicap we suffer due to the unrecognized power of industrialism to shape both individual and social thought. Industrialism's impact on knowledge has " . . . weakened the possibility of a sustained philosophical approach. Machine industry has made impacts on knowledge which have not been realized because it has influenced ways of thinking and left little energy to appraise them." (Innis Political Economy, xvi). Much like Plato in the oral tradition, Innis warns us that from an intellectual point of view, we are very poorly equipped to undertake this task. We simply have not been provided with the intellectual resources to see it through. Also like Plato, Innis concludes that this problem must be considered within a society that has created a very hostile environment in terms of providing assistance or even sympathy to the important epistemological issues to be addressed.

Having recognized that Innis is interested in the totality of social forces, it is not surprising to discover that the role and the various social effects of the profit motive are not well developed. The result is a substantial degree of theoretical imprecision which, one must conclude, was not problematical to Innis himself. This lack of theory has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is the elimination of any problems associated with reconciling concrete social reality with a predetermined theoretical position. A possible disadvantage is the failure to consider the structural imperatives and limitations of capitalism. Innis clearly hopes that capitalism is infinitely flexible in terms of its ability to absorb any epistemological or ethical perspective as its predominant social paradigm. However, in reality this type of flexibility is far from being a certainty. One can argue that this assumption is itself a theoretical position and this could well be the case. However, this does not tell us very much. Since the core of Innis' recommendation to resolve our social problems is the incorporation of the values of the oral tradition into contemporary society, it is necessary to determine whether this act of incorporation is actually feasible within the general parameters of modern liberal democracy. To do this, one must have some appreciation of the way in which Innis perceived the role and influence of profit. As it is with many other issues, one has to extract from his writings something

which is important but which remains unstated. It should also be mentioned at this point that it is beyond the scope of this study to enter into a detailed examination of the many interpretations of the concepts of modernity or contemporary capitalism. While these issues will be discussed, their relevance will be limited to providing an evaluation of Innis' recommendation of striking a balance between the secularizing influence of space and the ethical influence of time-directed technologies within our modern industrial society.

As is well known, prior to about 1940, Innis wrote and studied as an economic historian, providing a brilliant analysis of Canada's economic development in which his intellectual scope and depth of understanding commands the reader's admiration. His ability to make the many complicated connections in this history is extremely insightful. His work is characterized by penetrating observations into the realities of Canada at particular historical times and he does not hesitate to critically evaluate the inequalities which existed between various groups and regions within the country. He not only presented facts but also evaluated those facts with respect to the impact they had on the people of Canada and on Canada as a nation. He was clearly sensitive to the injustices and hardships that the less privileged members of society had to endure.

In spite of his critical approach to economic history, Innis never seriously questioned the essential assumptions of

capitalism itself. In articles such as "The Newspaper" and "The University Tradition" he employs the concept of class but never uses it as an analytical perspective in the Marxian sense of the term. (Innis Political Economy, 33, 69). Drache concludes that any connection between Innis and Marx is entirely coincidental since the focus and purpose of their work is fundamentally different. In referring to this difference, Drache notes that " . . . the essential difference between Marxists and himself was that Innis was a theorist of the superstructure, that is, communication and culture, and not the base of society, the means of production." (Drache 1969, 9). While recognizing its shortcomings and structural problems and inequalities, Innis nevertheless accepted capitalism as the only economic, political, social and cultural framework for Canada. Parker notes that ". . . Innis (despite his reference at various points to the process of "exploitation") did not explicitly make the extraction of surplus value central to his analysis of capitalist development, as Marx had." (Parker 1977, 553). He goes on to define Innis' perspective on capitalism in the following way:

> At the outset, it is important to recall that Innis' political stance was that of a radical conservative, whereas Marx's was that of a radical revolutionary. . . . The phenomenon analyzed in the conclusion of Innis' 'Plea For Time', which was a plea simultaneously for historical consciousness, the oral dialectic, and the university tradition, in response to the increasing mechanization and commercialization of thought, for example, would likely have been regarded by Marx as a necessary concomitant of the expansion of capital and of the extension of capitalist relations of production, while at the same time Marx would likely have

> acknowledged their significance as manifestations of the contradictions of advanced monopoly capitalism." (Ibid., 560).

The concept of contradiction, as understood by Marxists and others of different persuasion, is therefore not part of Innis' understanding of capitalism. To Innis, any social system, by its very nature, is defined by social tensions. Capitalism is similar to any other social system to the extent that it is comprised of a series of social tensions that exist in a dialectical relationship and cause social change as a result of mutual interaction. Yet these tensions are not considered to be contradictions in either a theoretical or a practical sense. In reading Innis one gets the impression that he has little or no interest in focusing on the theoretical assumptions and effects of profit maximization and then relating social reality to this theoretical base. Rather, he is chiefly concerned with the practical, inner dynamics of any society, particularly with respect to the identification of the sources of social power and control. In this sense, Innis views the modern industrial, capitalist society in the same general light as any other society. However, the locus of social power and control, as well as the resulting epistemological and ethical framework, will be unique to each particular social structure.

While recognizing the absence of a theoretical foundation in Innis' discourse, one can nevertheless obtain some insights with respect to his understanding of some of the dangers

inherent to liberal democracy. Since profit-related activity characterizes a significant percentage of the institutions and general power structure of society, Innis believed that a very real danger was the natural tendency to frame far too many social issues within an economic perspective. The result was an intellectual restriction in our understanding of social issues and a corresponding limitation in most solutions we advance to resolve them. "Obsession with economic considerations illustrate the dangers of monopolies of knowledge and suggests the necessity of appraising its limitations. Civilizations can survive only through a concern with their limitations, and, in turn, through a concern with the limitations of their institutions. . . ." (Innis Empire, 1).

Innis here warns us that the real danger of privileging the economic is a narrowing of the epistemological perspective within which social activity and social problems are perceived. To over-emphasize the economic is to remove it from a wider social whole which is the precise context which provides the economic with its essential meaning and purpose. And this error, that Innis perceived as being ingrained in our modern liberal democratic society is the continuation of a mistake which can be traced to the very beginnings of capitalism.

> Smith's doctrine that economic phenomenon were manifestations of an underlying order in nature governed by natural forces, gave to English economists for the first time a definite trend toward a logically consistent

> synthesis of economic relationships toward system building. . . . But the followers of Adam Smith lost the great concept of society as a whole. Ricardo and the utilitarians destroyed it in the interests of a market economy with its sale of land and labour. (Innis Political Economy, 114-118).

The privileging of the economic was the result of the efforts of some of the most powerful and self-interested groups in society.Innis was of the view that such attempts should be vigorously resisted.Indeed, his general perception of those who seek to couch the public good in these restricted terms is far from flattering. "Adam Smith might have said of capitalists as he said of merchants: 'The government of an exclusive company of merchants is, perhaps, the worst of all governments for any country whatever.' I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good." (Innis Essays, 268). Innis is well aware of the necessity and importance of economic activity. However, in spite of the passing of time and the development of various enlightened social policies, the rule of the economic mindset still predominates. What Innis is suggesting, as he does with most of his opinions, is that a balance, or a sense of proportion be struck, between a necessary social function and the larger purpose which that function is to serve. He was firmly convinced that the economic priorities of capitalism should be integrated into the greater social whole to a much greater extent than was actually happening.These economic objectives should be at the service of social priorities which were defined in non-economic terms. As he notes. "Perhaps economic

history can begin from this point to make its contribution in the building up of spiritual, intellectual, and material capital, since it is not concerned with the belief in the common man but with the common man himself." (Innis Political Economy, 102). It is clear that Innis looked upon economics as an instrument and not as and end in itself. Mindless economic growth, or growth for its own sake, was not something which he would endorse. Rather, it was a social function which should be intelligently guided and directed to achieve positive social goals and thus be harmoniously integrated into the larger social context.

While it must be acknowledged that Innis does not have a well-developed theoretical position of the fundamental nature of capitalism, one cannot help but recognize his deep belief that capitalism should be humanized to a much greater extent than it actually was. This lack of theory need not be viewed in an entirely negative light. Indeed, one may question the benefits of having a detailed theoretical position. It is possible to argue that while a theorist such as Macpherson does have an elaborately thought out theoretical perspective, his theory culminates in a very limiting view of capitalist society in general and of the individuals who function within it. "A system which requires men to see themselves and to act, as consumers and appropriators, gives little scope for most of them to see themselves and act as exerters and developers of their capacities." (Macpherson 1977, 61). This particular

theory is monolithic to the point that it automatically excludes many possible solutions to our contemporary problems. It also restricts the interpretation that can be given to both the individual person and the social system in which he lives. For example, Macpherson's theoretical position automatically excludes Innis' recommendation that the values of the oral tradition be incorporated into contemporary society for the very compelling reason that the essence of these values revolves around the ethical relationship which exists between the individual and the state, and Macpherson's theoretical position makes no allowance for such an ethical relationship. The possible solutions to various social problems must be compatible with the theory and Macpherson's theory is necessarily limiting. Innis never subscribed to this restricted view of capitalism or of the individuals who functioned within its social framework. The absence of a confining theoretical perspective allows him, perhaps inadvertently, to examine modern liberal democracy within much wider social and intellectual parameters; parameters which do not theoretically exclude a variety of possible approaches to social and individual development. It is entirely possible that this openness actually reflects the reality of capitalistic development. Perhaps this is the view which faithfully reflects both its complexities and its possibilities. Such an interpretation is offered by Kroker: "In his thought, liberalism and socialism . . . were brought

together in an eloquent, comprehensive, and powerful synthesis. Innis' perspective on technological realism is the understanding of the inner workings of advanced capitalism. . . . (Kroker 1984, 106).

As he did not privilege the economic at the expense of the social whole, so Innis did not privilege a concept like capitalism at the expense of the entire society that had evolved. Thus, the essence of the inner workings of capitalism was not the conflict between different social classes or the structural inequalities in the distribution of wealth. Rather, the essence of capitalism was the creation of a total society and that society produced an epistemology which was so intellectually limiting that it was incapable of satisfactorily ordering the technological world it had created. Industrialism and commercialism, scientism in the form of the privileging of quantification and data gathering, the transformation of the university into a servant of the marketplace, were just some of the social influences characteristic of modernity that combined to narrowly focus the exercise of human reason as it contemplated the social reality in which it lived. The result was that a whole range of insights that should be interjected into society were systematically excluded from serious consideration. To Innis, the most significant social element to be eliminated in this manner was the ethical as a counterforce to the secular. He was deeply pessimistic concerning modernity's chances of

reversing this trend. In effect, he is saying that the development of ethical consciousness that characterized Western history has not simply come to a stop. Rather, we have lost something that we cannot do without. We have lost the sense of the ethical. Thus, we are at a stage in our history when the only thing that can save us is that which we are incapable of understanding.

This is a very harsh position. There are no doubt many who would reject the conclusion and the reasons upon which it is based. Yet, the central issues which so concerned Innis some forty years ago continue to haunt much of modern thinking. A contemporary scholar such as Charles Taylor shares many of Innis' preoccupations concerning the epistemological impoverishment of our age. In the 1991 Massey Lectures, recently published under the title The Malaise Of Modernity, Taylor maintains that modernity's most fundamental problem is a use of human reason that he defines as instrumental reason. Its roots go back to Descartes and Bacon. As he notes:

> This is one of the most prestigious forms of reason in our culture, exemplified by mathematical thinking, or rather types of formal calculation. Arguments, considerations, counsels that can claim to be based on this kind of calculation have great persuasive power in our society, even when this kind of reasoning is not really suited to the subject matter, as the immense (and I think undeserved) saliency of this type of thinking in social sciences and policy studies attests. (Taylor 1991, 102).

He goes on to point out that "...the thrust behind this new science was not only epistemological but also moral." (Ibid., 104)

It is interesting to note that like Innis, Taylor is not concerned with the definition or implications of capitalism as a distinct concept of analysis. Rather, he pursues Innis' insight of considering society from a holistic perspective and, as Innis did, Taylor considers the epistemology that this social whole produces as the essential issue which modernity must address. He calls the prevailing contemporary epistemological perspective, an instrumental use of reason. Although Innis did not employ this specific term, it does capture the essence of his meaning. According to Taylor, this instrumental use of reason has framed most of our general interpretations of contemporary society. In particular, it constitutes the enframing of the development and use of technology. According to Taylor, we must expand our intellectual horizons in this regard. In his opinion it is of vital importance that modernity identify " . . . an alternative enframing of technology." (Ibid., 106). To do so would result in a very different perspective that would allow us to use and, therefore live, our technology very differently. He believes that in spite of the predominant influence of instrumental reason, options are open to us. "Although there is a bent or slide towards the stance of dominance . . . nothing says that we have to live our technology this way. The other modes are open. The prospect we face here is a struggle, in which these different modes of enframing contend." (Ibid., 107).

Taylor here clearly rejects Innis' concept of the bias of technology. He obviously believes that human agency has the potential to shape and direct the technology which it has created. However, this is contingent on active human intervention and this can only happen if our intellectual horizons are substantially expanded. We must look at technology in a new manner. For Taylor this entails a very difficult and prolonged struggle which he terms a work of "retrieval". By this, he suggests that modernity would move from an instrumental use of reason to a use of reason which would provide a life and an attitude of "authenticity". The task facing modernity is for a " . . . complex, many-levelled struggle, intellectual, spiritual, and political . . . where these disputes in turn both feed and are fed by the various attempts to define in theoretical terms the place of technology and the demands of authenticity, and beyond that, the shape of human life and its relation to the cosmos." (Ibid., 120).

The struggle identified by Taylor has an ethical dimension to it which is, in his opinion, of critical importance for modernity. Essentially, it is the same struggle that Innis advocated several decades ago. However, Taylor does not go into a detailed explanation of the nature of this difficult task, whereas Innis did. If Innis was able to evaluate our contemporary ethical debates, he would undoubtedly view them as being of major importance. However,

he would also identify something of basic significance being absent from this ethical dialogue. He would say that we were not going deep enough: that we were not debating, or even considering, the foundational questions which were of such importance to the Greeks in relation to the polis. We were not considering these same ethical questions as they relate to contemporary society. What is the purpose of a human being? What sort of relationship should exist between the individual and the state? What kinds of institutions are required for the individual to realize her greatest potential? What role does economic development play in society? Who develops technology and for what purpose? What kind of educational system should our society have and for what purpose? It is these very basic questions which Innis believed should be reconsidered in light of reason unshackled from its confines of instrumentality. It was in light of this requirement that Innis saw the urgency of applying reason dialectically with an ontological focus; that is, with the full needs of human beings as the focus of inquiry. Given the nature of such questions, the answers must, of necessity, be characterized by a high degree of uncertainty when measured against the standards of instrumental reason. But this imprecision simply reflects the inherent complexity of the issues under consideration.

It is for this reason that Innis believed that modernity's prevalent definition of epistemology must be broadened. It must be expanded to accommodate a wider

conception of truth in which the degree of precision is dependent upon the subject matter under consideration. In understanding the implications of such a significant shift in the truth paradigm of contemporary society, Innis, while agreeing with Taylor that a difficult task of retrieval was needed, could nevertheless not share Taylor's optimism concerning the success of such an undertaking. The reason for Innis' pessimism was his understanding of the extent to which the use of reason that Taylor defined as instrumental reason had permeated all of society including, with rare and relatively minor exceptions, all of our institutions.

Taylor notes that " . . . this battle of ideas is inextricably bound up, part source and part result, with political struggles about the modes of social organization. Given the importance of our institutions in generating and sustaining an atomist and instrumental stance, it could not be otherwise." (Ibid., 107-108). While Taylor identifies the importance of his project of retrieval, he is rather vague concerning where this struggle is going to take place. He also does not identify its form. Furthermore, while he acknowledges the influence of our contemporary institutions in encouraging the use of instrumental reason, he does not consider the power of these same institutions to work against the efforts of retrieval, whether they do so intentionally or unconsciously. Unlike Taylor, Innis did consider the role that institutions might play in introducing the values of the oral tradition

into contemporary society and it was his opinion that the general thrust and inherent self-interest of the major contemporary institutions militated against the introduction of these values into modernity. His concept of monopolies of knowledge expressly recognized the institutional power behind the perpetuation of a particular definition of knowledge that was in direct opposition to the type of epistemology that both he and Taylor believe modernity so desperately needed.

From Innis' perspective, there were only two institutions capable of resolving this crucial problem. One was the state and the other was the university. However, both were so deeply committed to the values and basic philosophy of the marketplace and the exercise of instrumental reason that they would have to undergo fundamental changes in purpose and outlook to introduce the epistemological changes required to interject the ethical perspective required by modern society. In considering the state, Innis concluded that the possibility of significantly changing its approach was very slim indeed.

> The state has been interested in the enlargement of territories and the imposition of cultural uniformity on its peoples, and, losing touch with the problems of time, has been willing to engage in wars to carry out immediate objectives. Printing has emphasized vernaculars and divisions between states based on language without implying a concern with time. (Innis Bias, 76).

As far as Innis was concerned, the last, and only institutional hope modernity had rested with the university. It held more promise as a result of its historical role of

pursuing truth. However, in his opinion, the real problem to be addressed was what we understood truth to be.

The University Tradition

It is helpful to recall the gravity of the problem which Innis believed had to be addressed in the most urgent manner. Western civilization was not simply in the process of collapsing. It had literally collapsed with the beginning of the 20th century. (Innis Political Economy, 94). Consequently, what is now at issue is what Taylor would call a program of retrieval. Innis is of the opinion that the university has a very special social responsibility. It has an obligation to extend itself beyond the confines of a sheltered academic role and reach out into society in order to rescue a social order which the university itself had a direct responsibility in initially destroying. "The university must play its major role in the rehabilitation of civilization which we have witnessed in this century by recognizing that western civilization has collapsed. It is the duty of those of us who have participated in that ceremony to discuss the strategy of recovery." (Ibid., 73). It should not go unnoticed that Innis is here levelling a very grave accusation against those people who have staffed our universities in the past and continue to do so at present.

A logical question is, what have our universities done that could justify such a harsh judgement?

According to Innis, they have done several things. The first is a deliberate pandering to the self-interest of the corporate sector of society.

> The impression that universities can be bought and sold, held by businessmen and fostered by university administrators trained in playing for the highest bid, is a reflection of the deterioration of western civilization. To buy universities is to destroy them and with them the civilization for which they stand. . . . It is to yield to the essential bias of a civilization based on commerce and not to realize that the university is older than modern commerce. (Ibid., 75).

Innis is not suggesting that a wide and unbridgeable gulf should separate the corporate sector from the university. He was too pragmatic and holistic a thinker to advocate such an extreme position. The importance which commerce and the corporate sector play in contemporary society necessitates a close, co-operative relationship between the university and business interests. What he is suggesting however is that the corporate sector has come to dominate the relationship to the point that it has not simply nullified, but also perverted, the legitimate purpose of our highest academic institutions. The university, in not only refusing to resist this subservient position, but actively seeking and developing it, thereby willingly rejected its historical mission, namely the search for truth. This search inherently rejected being comfortable in final answers. Rather, the emphasis was placed on the search itself. In willingly abandoning this

responsibility, the university created an epistemological vacuum within our society which no other institution could possibly fill. Our social structure was thereby deprived of something that is essential for its well being in the deepest and most important sense of the word. This institutional failure happened very gradually and was never publicly acknowledged or discussed. It transpired without the knowledge or consent of those who are not part of the university community but who depend upon it for the transmission of knowledge. Thus, says Innis, the university has not only abandoned its social responsibilities but in so doing has deceived the majority of citizens who do not know better. Thus: "The descent of the university into the market place reflects the lie in the soul of modern society." (Ibid., 76).

The second reason, which is related to the first, is the fracturing of knowledge into narrow areas of specialization that remain unrelated to one another. These specializations result in restricted perspectives which breed a type of intellectual arrogance in which narrow certainties, and the methodology that provides them, are both mistakenly projected far beyond their limitations. Innis warns us of " . . . the limits of specialization and a recognition of the necessity of perspective . . ." and goes on to reject " . . . the disease of specialization." (Ibid., viii). He considered the great danger of specialization to lie in the fact that its narrow definition of truth created a false sense of confidence and

security that led its practitioners to conclude that they could take refuge in this intellectual narrowness and end the search for truth. "We must beware of those who have found the truth." (Ibid.). As Innis notes in "The University Tradition": "The University lent her ear to those who on all sides told her that they had discovered truth, and she forgot that her existence depended on the search for truth and not on truth." (Ibid., 65).

The emphasis on the needs of the market place, coupled with the move towards specialization, resulted in a university curriculum that focused on satisfying the short term information requirements of the business sector at the expense of its historical mission of developing the entire human being. Innis criticized the university for succumbing to popular opinion in its choice of courses, sacrificing demanding intellectual standards in favour of practical usefulness as defined by current whims and tastes. Courses are added or maintained " . . . because they will be useful to people after they graduate and will enable them to earn more money. These tendencies reflect a concern with information. They are supported by the text-book industry and other industries which might be described as information industries." (Innis Bias, 83). This preoccupation with the popular, coupled with an unhealthy degree of pragmatism and utilitarianism was quite literally destroying the role of the

university in both searching for truth and in transmitting an intellectual tradition to our contemporary society.

It would be a mistake to conclude that Innis is suggesting that the contemporary university should be isolated from the concerns of its social environment. He recognized that the university should not only avoid a posture of splendid isolation but, on the contrary, should be intimately and vigorously involved in resolving society's most pressing problems. To put the matter in familiar concepts, the university has legitimate concerns with the totality of problems that characterize the social structure in which it must function. Of necessity this implies a responsibility to address both space and time-related issues and to strive to achieve the required balance or synthesis of these opposing forces. Indeed, the university is unique in that it is the only institution which possesses both the responsibility and the epistemology to do so. It is in this sense that the university is <u>the</u> mediating institution of contemporary society. He was of the firm opinion that: "Society must regard the university as a community of scholars concerned with its vital problems." (Ibid., 210). In so concluding, he recognizes the university's responsibility to be actively engaged in solving the many concrete, practical problems of daily living, whether they be in the marketplace or concerned with the pragmatism of what he would term "information". Nor is he suggesting that universities should exclude courses related to

these issues from their curriculum. Rather, he is reiterating a theme which runs throughout his work: things are seriously out of balance and, therefore, out of control. Rather than helping the marketplace resolve its problems, the university is in fact the slave of the marketplace. Rather than providing a proportionate percentage of what could be called "utilitarian" courses, it is dedicated to providing little else. As in society generally, the university has lost a sense of time and is devoted almost exclusively to space-related activities and values. It over-emphasizes values which are positive only on condition that they be properly balanced with other values. Without this balance, they cease being positive and become harmful. Therefore, modern education, " . . . sets a higher value than it should on a range of concrete knowledge in comparison with a general aptitude for knowing-- on productive specialized labour in comparison with the free exercise of all the powers-- on professional effort working in a groove in comparison with an interest in human relations generally." (Ibid., 209).

Innis in fact maintains that the modern university has a two-fold purpose. The first could be called pragmatic and utilitarian in that its purpose is to actively participate in resolving the immediate problems of the social milieu in which it exists. This first function varies according to social circumstances and is thereby an active response to the society in which it finds itself. However, the second role is much

less a response to the requirements of social existence, and is more concerned with transmitting an intellectual perspective towards human existence and its problems that is not determined by, nor focused upon, the specific problems of a particular society. It is rather the development of a capacity to understand social reality in a certain way. It is a method of understanding change itself. The university ". . . should produce a philosophical approach which will constantly question assumptions, constantly weaken the overwhelming tendency, reinforced by mechanization, to build up and accept dogma, and constantly attempt to destroy fanaticism." (Ibid., 210). Although the word "fanaticism" is not generally applied to our society because of our belief that our commitment to egalitarian principles automatically excludes such radicalism, Innis used the word with deliberation. We are a truly fanatical society as a result of our modern obsession with quantification, unrelated data and what may be generally called instrumental reason. We are fanatical in our refusal to acknowledge the validity and relevance of ways of reasoning which do not conform to the requirements and presuppositions of instrumental reason. The use of "fanaticism" is therefore not accidental or imprecise with respect to conveying Innis' meaning. However, such is not the case with the word "philosophical". One can well question Innis' meaning when he says that the university should produce

a philosophical approach, in light of the many philosophies one can choose from.

There are references in the text which answer this question. Essentially, Innis is convinced that education, in the true sense of the word, is education as understood by the Greeks. It is a concern with the formation of character rather than imparting facts, and it is the only type of education which can produce citizens who can ensure that the state acts responsibly. (Ibid., 203). The current preoccupation with meeting the various needs of the marketplace is not education. It is training, and Innis drew a very sharp distinction between the two. Training is concerned with meeting immediate social needs, usually dictated by the marketplace. Training fulfils a need which is exterior to the individual and since it does, it is possible to be well-trained but very poorly educated. On the other hand, education is focused on the needs of the individual as a person. It is concerned with providing an intellectual perspective which serves the individual for an entire lifetime Rather than changing as social circumstances vary, these principles are the very means by which the individual perceives and evaluates those changing circumstances. In being concerned with principles that can be applied to any historical period, education is dedicated to transmitting principles of living that are universal in character. It is on the basis of these principles that the individual in particular and society in general pose questions

and seek a balance between the secular and the ethical, the very balance that history has proven any society must have if it is to flourish regardless of the various historical periods in which societies exists. It is here that the connection between the individual dialectic as a form of intellectual resistance to the imperatives of a society dedicated to the advancement of space directed values is located. It is at this point that the university should serve as a mediating institution in the transmission of the required epistemology and, in Innis' opinion, is clearly failing to do so. Not providing this type of education has been the great failure of the modern university. "This mania for special research in place of philosophical principle, for tabulated facts in lieu of demonstrable theorems and creative generalizations, attenuates the intelligence and installs pedantic information about details, where what man wants are working principles for social life". (Ibid., 206). Thus, says Innis, universities are very wide of the mark in terms of meeting their responsibilities and this failure has been a major contributor to the very serious social problems we now face. Rather than producing graduates with a sense of philosophical principle, who evaluate social problems and the behaviour of the state with a balanced perspective, the university has fostered the disappearance of the ethical and replaced it with an excessive emphasis on the secular. In so doing, our highest levels of education have fostered a method of perceiving social

existence which is dangerously out of proportion. "We have seen the effects of the disappearance of the Platonic tradition in the necessity of appealing to force as the unifying and dominating factor." (Innis Political Economy, 79).

Thus, says Innis, the essence of the contemporary dilemma is a failure to grasp the significance and relevance of philosophy as practised by the Greeks. "We have neglected the philosophical problems of the West and have not realized that the Greeks were fundamentally concerned with the training of character". (Innis Essays, 385). Instead, our contemporary universities, in their emphasis on quantification, data gathering, and preparing students for a career, have instituted an educational approach designed to " . . . avoid the major philosophical problems of Western civilization." (Innis Bias, 204). It is in this sense that the universities have failed society and themselves. They have failed society by neglecting to instill the philosophical, dialectical perspective of the oral tradition and thereby impoverished the social capacity to resist the vast influence of space-directed technology and its accompanying values. They have failed themselves to the extent that they have betrayed their sacred historical trust of both preserving an intellectual tradition and striving to develop that tradition in light of contemporary circumstances.

It is apparent that Innis attaches a great deal of importance to the intellectual tradition of the West. However, his view of this tradition is rather unique and it is interesting to note how he viewed it and the uses to which he believed it should be put. Unlike many, Innis did not understand our intellectual tradition to be a particular body of knowledge defined by specific scholarly works. Tradition was not something homogeneous or exclusive in this sense. Nor did it consist of a body of knowledge which should be memorized and uncritically accepted by succeeding generations of students. Rather, he viewed our intellectual tradition as being a philosophical interpretation of social reality in which critical intelligence would evaluate current events in light of the need to maintain a sense of balance and proportion between the secular and the ethical. This involves constant discussion, debate and re-examination in the effort to establish a cohesive link between the past and the present. Innis believed that the dialectical process that brings this about does not simply result in social stability but is also the practical expression of rationality. This is why he notes that: "The oral as compared with the written transmission of tradition was inherently more consistent and logical in its results because of the constant sifting, refining, and modifying of what did not fit into the tradition." (Ibid., 102). To Innis, tradition is, in effect, the oral tradition of ancient Greece whose defining characteristic is its inherent

openness. It is this openness which suggests alternatives to the present; it tells us that things do not have to be the way they currently are. It offers a core value system that is flexible enough to be modified and made relevant in light of current social realities. Sadly, says Innis, the failure of the universities to impart this intellectual perspective to the thousands of students who have passed through their classrooms, illustrates the extent of their complicity in the destruction of our civilization. In neglecting this knowledge of the past in favour of an unjustified preoccupation with the present, the universities have ensured that the oral tradition cannot serve as guidance for either the present or the future. The result is that an interest in the values of time have completely disappeared in favour of those of space. (Ibid., 61). Thus, the importance of the link Innis establishes between the individual dialectic as an epistemology of resistance to a space-oriented society, in which the university acts as the critical mediating institution, has been consciously and categorically rejected by the universities themselves. As a result of this rejection, any possibility of a significant and meaningful synthesis between the demands of space and those of time become extremely problematical, if not entirely impossible.

The conclusion Innis reaches is nothing less than a damning indictment of universities and those who staff them.

> The results have been a systematic closing of students' minds. Initiative and independence have been weakened.

> Factual material, information, classification, reflect the narrowing tendencies of the mechanization of knowledge in the minds of staff and students. Professions become narrow and sterile. The teaching profession perhaps most of all. . . . The university graduate is illiterate as a result of the systematic poisoning of the education system. (Ibid., 208).

These criticisms were voiced some forty years ago. Yet, the issues which concerned Innis so much are not only of direct relevance to our own times, but can actually be located at the very center of a debate which is presently being hotly contested on most university campuses. In the quotation cited above, Innis mentions that the results of the efforts of the modern university has been " a systematic closing of students' minds." This general conclusion is used as the title of a highly controversial book written by one of the participants in the current discussion of the main problem of our universities originally identified by Innis. Allan Bloom is highly critical of our contemporary universities and chastises them for abandoning the intellectual tradition of the West in a work entitled The Closing Of The American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy And Impoverished The Souls Of Today's Students. Bloom reiterates what Innis said long ago concerning the grave dangers of focusing on specialization at the expense of transmitting an intellectual tradition aimed at producing a critical and intelligent population. Bloom echoes Innis by saying

> . . . the impression that our general populace is better educated depends on an ambiguity in the meaning of the word education, or a fudging of the distinction between liberal and technical education. A highly trained

> computer specialist need not have had any more learning about morals, politics or religion than the most ignorant of persons. All to the contrary, his narrow education, with the prejudices and the pride accompanying it, and its literature which comes to be and passes away in a day and uncritically accepts the premises of current wisdom, can cut him off from the liberal learning that simpler folks used to absorb from a variety of traditional sources. (Bloom 1987, 59).

In evaluating the intellectual skills and historical knowledge of present students in relation to those he taught several decades ago, Bloom notes that current students are noticeably impoverished. "The loss of the books has made them narrower and flatter. Narrower because they lack what is most necessary, a real basis for discontent with the present and awareness that there are alternatives to it. . . . The very models of admiration and contempt have vanished. (Ibid., 61). In short, and to use Innis' terminology, they have lost a sense of time and in so doing, have lost a sense of balance and proportion in their personal lives and in their understanding of the public sphere. Like Innis, Bloom concludes that the essence of the university's problem, and the vacuum that this creates in students and in society at large, is the loss of the philosophic spirit as practised by Socrates via the Platonic dialectic. "The essence of it all is not social, political, psychological or economic, but philosophic. And for those who wish to see, contemplation of Socrates is our most urgent task. This is properly an academic task." (Ibid., 312).

Though there are similarities between Innis and Bloom, there are also very significant and extensive differences. Though both locate the core of our social problem as the absence of a philosophical spirit, Innis advocates the dialectic and values of the oral tradition as a corrective to contemporary society. As already mentioned, the very essence of this tradition is intellectual openness and flexibility. Bloom is much more precise and definite with respect to the intellectual approach which should be followed. At the center of his discourse is the belief that the fatal error of contemporary education is the thesis that values are relative. For Bloom, " . . . relativism has extinguished the real motive of education. . . ." (Ibid., 34), and the failure of modern education is the failure to teach that there are objective standards of ethical behaviour and that those standards are rooted in the concept of human nature. (Ibid., 38). The questions of objective ethical standards and human nature are, of course, highly controversial matters that extend far beyond the bounds of this study. However, it is relevant to point out that, in his precision, Bloom comes very close to being dogmatic. From his point of view, some works are part of the intellectual tradition he supports and others simply are not and he makes no apologies for privileging certain intellectual achievements over others. He maintains that certain thinkers have provided answers to age-old questions which are clearly superior to that offered by others and that these superior

answers should be taught as standards against which contemporary issues should be measured. As a result of his traditional, historical and non-compromising view of these issues, Bloom has incurred the disapproval, if not the outright hostility, of a very sizeable proportion of contemporary scholars.

In the introduction to Debating P.C., which deals with the controversy over political correctness, it is mentioned that the scope of this debate was brought to the attention of the wider public due to " . . . Allan Bloom's oddball best seller of 1987." (Berman 1992, 4). In an article in the same book, John Searle wonders about the reasons for the " . . . hatred of Bloom." (Ibid., 95). In summarizing the reasons behind the acrimonious opposition to Bloom, Searle points out that: "Those who think that the traditional canon should be abandoned believe that Western civilization in general, and the United Sates in particular, are in large part oppressive, imperialist, patriarchal, hegemonic, and in need of replacement, or at least of transformation. So the passionate objections that are made by the critics to Allan Bloom often have rather little to do with a theory of higher education as such." (Ibid., 94). Henry Louis Gates Jr. begins his article Whose Canon Is It Anyway by identifying the nature and the extent of the opposition to Bloom.

> William Bennett and Allan Bloom, the dynamic duo of the new cultural right, have become the easy targets of the cultural left, which I am defining here loosely and generously as that uneasy, shifting set of alliances

> formed by feminist critics, critics of so-called minority culture and Marxist and postructuralist critics generally- in short, the rainbow coalition of contemporary critical theory. (Ibid., 190).

There is therefore a formidable group of contemporary thinking lined up against Bloom, many of whom take a rather liberal view of what constitutes fair game in terms of criticism. Katha Pollitt, for example, makes the following observation: "Take the conservatives. Now, this rather dour collection of scholars and diatribists-Allan Bloom, Hilton Kramer, John Silber, and so on-are not, to my mind, a particularly appealing group of people. They are arrogant, they are rude, they are gloomy, they do not suffer fools gladly--and everywhere they look, fools are what they see." (Ibid., 201-202). To say that one detects a note of annoyance in remarks such as these is understating things somewhat. Rather than advocating what they perceived to be the selectively homogeneous, gender-based, closed intellectual tradition advocated by Bloom, his opponents suppo. a multiculturalism and a focus on difference in order to " . . . bring dignity to the dispossessed and self-empowerment to the disempowered, to recuperate the texts and traditions of ignored groups, to broaden cultural history." (Ibid., 45).

It is not within the parameters of this study to become involved in the specifics of this highly controversial debate. The relevance of this contemporary issue to the purpose at hand is two-fold. Firstly, regardless of one's personal view of this question, it must be acknowledged that Innis' insight

into the gravity of the issue four decades ago goes to the very center of something which was of critical importance then and continues to be so today. Innis was clearly not dealing with peripheral matters. Secondly, the arguments which have been raised against Bloom do not, in the main, apply to Innis. Both men have a very different understanding of what constitutes the intellectual tradition of the West. Bloom identifies a specific body of knowledge containing very definite answers to questions which have been of interest to all societies in the history of the West. These answers, to Bloom, constitute very specific standards against which contemporary issues should be measured. However, in terms of searching for the truth of things, the finality which Bloom's position implies is something Innis has constantly denied and emphatically rejected. His entire discourse is focused on rejecting the notion that one had arrived at the 'truth' and could therefore rest content in that conclusion. Innis is consistent in advancing something very different.

Unlike Bloom, Innis is not advocating a specific body of knowledge, representing particular conclusions, as a standard against which contemporary social issues should be measured. Rather, he is suggesting that a particular process be utilized in the study of social issues in which a balance can be struck between the secular and the ethical. Since this equation is currently heavily skewered toward the secular, our efforts should be directed towards re-introducing the ethical. Like

Plato's spokesperson Socrates, Innis is saying we should use the process of dialectical inquiry with respect to those fundamental ethical questions which have been discussed throughout our intellectual tradition. In this inquiry, some of the answers contained within this tradition should be properly put aside since they cannot assist us in resolving some our most pressing social concerns. However, other insights could well be very relevant to contemporary issues and, as such, should be modified and applied to our society. It is our responsibility to make such judgements. "The university must deny the finality of any of the conclusions of the social sciences. It must steadfastly resist the tendency to acclaim any single solution of the world's problems at the risk of failing to play its role as a balancing factor in the growth of civilization." (Innis Political Economy, 141). Furthermore, this ongoing process should command the same intellectual status and respect as that accorded the more 'scientific' or utilitarian fields of study. In short, our epistemological foundations should be significantly broadened in scope and depth to accommodate ethical knowledge and thereby allow us to reach the required level of understanding. "The university must attack the problem of understanding." (Ibid., 270). Within these flexible epistemological parameters, there is no perspective which is automatically excluded, including those views expressed by what has come to be known as the cultural right or left.

Having made this important distinction between contemporary people such as Allan Bloom and Innis, the fact remains that in supporting the Socratic dialectic and the values of the oral tradition of ancient Greece, Innis would most likely be perceived as going against the grain of the contemporary position concerning the fundamental purpose of our universities. His condemnation of our educational objectives and preoccupations is unequivocal. It is his view that the education provided in our industrialized, commercialized society is much more than simply problematic. Rather, it is positively destructive. It actively prevents the development of the type of human consciousness from which could spring those ethical values capable of fostering alternatives to the existing trend towards ever greater commodification, quantification and de-contextualized fact gathering. Our universities are producing people who are morally and intellectually paralysed " . . . to the extent that an interest in duration is impossible or that only under the pressure of extreme urgency can we be indured to recognize the problem." (Innis Bias, 88). To Innis, this was not only a catastrophe for modern society, but, at the human level, a genuinely profound tragedy. He was convinced that the essence of human development and its manifestation in culture was the capacity to strike a balance between the secular and the ethical in order that the soundest social decisions be made. It is precisely the capacity to think in truly ethical terms

that has been lost, and the universities must assume the blame for this social calamity. In capitulating to the demands of the marketplace and forfeiting their true mission, our universities have simply become another part of the huge commercial wheel and, in so doing, have been abject failures in terms of their essential social role. And, according to Innis, there is absolutely no indication that this destructive process will reverse itself. As a matter of fact, it will undoubtedly become even more destructive in direct proportion to the further industrialization and commercialization of society and the accompanying demands of the market place on the university. In looking towards the future, Innis sadly notes: "It is probable that the university cannot bridge the gap between its level of intellectual training and that which characterizes the modern community under the influence of machine industry. It cannot yield to the obsession for information and instruction without neglecting education." (Ibid., 211).

One may question the extent of the influence which Innis attaches to the university. To cure social ills via a society's educational system is not a unique insight. He may also be criticized, as Bloom is, for advocating an elitist view. In our current social climate, there are few charges that warrant more severe censure. That there is such a current of thought in Innis is clear. The spirit of the oral tradition as it existed in ancient Greece is not something that an

interested society can obtain through the mass media or any other easily available source. Rather, it must be taught, read, discussed and reflected upon. The same point applies to the dialectical approach to truth and the particular definition of rationality which it implies. Therefore, it is obviously the case that the social plan of retrieval which Innis is recommending is not something that can happen as the result of unstructured thinking, directed and motivated by the more popular social concerns of the day. What Innis is suggesting cannot happen by accident. He was of the opinion that those who are exposed to this type of training are best equipped to understand and resolve the most important issues of the day. However, for all of the reasons discussed thus far, very few receive this intellectual training and the gulf between those who do and those who do not is growing ever wider. "The growing incompatibility between those who like to think, and those who do not has been described as characteristic of the Western world." (Ibid., 213).

In spite of the fact that Innis' elitism may offend the egalitarian sensitivities of some contemporary observers of the cultural scene, such is not the real issue. The real issue is whether what Innis is saying is, in its substance, true or false. And what he is saying is that the basis of social change is the development of human character and the type of development required cannot be obtained through the normal socialization process of family, friends, popular culture and

the many other influences that combine to form individual growth and development. What is required must be consciously added, and the only repository of this knowledge is the university. While this instruction should constitute the essence of university education, Innis clearly hoped that the influence exerted by this education would extend far beyond the relatively narrow confines of the university to society at large. However, he was not optimistic that this would happen. The relentless march of industrialism, commercialism, and scienticism, along with its devastating influence on our perception of reality, simply could not be stopped. No scholar, in Innis' definition of the word, could successfully compete against this overpowering social force. "The Industrial Revolution and mechanized knowledge have all but destroyed the scholars' influence." (Ibid., 30).

If interpreted in a certain way, one can conclude that Innis is very unfair to the modern university. Our universities are clearly not completely insensitive to the perpetuation of the values which he is advocating. There are hundreds of people, both instructors and students, who are deeply committed to the very process that Innis is advocating. Like most of his work, one has to be rather cautious in reaching firm conclusions on isolated texts. As mentioned early on in this study, his lack of precision and detail can be misleading. In fairness to both Innis and the modern university, I think that he is inclined to exaggerate in order

to make a valid point. He is concerned with identifying a predominant epistemological perspective concerning the future direction of society and the nature of any social force powerful enough to bring about a significant degree of social change. The point is not that the university is completely neglecting what Innis considered to be its historic responsibility. Rather, it is a question of the extent to which this is being done in terms of initiating any meaningful amount of social change. Innis believed that the university was far too preoccupied with meeting the utilitarian demands of the marketplace to really focus on providing the type of education necessary to redress the imbalance between the secular and the ethical.

There are those who would strongly defend the educational objectives of the university by arguing that not only is it responding to the needs of society, but that it has a solemn responsibility to do so. Many contemporary social critics maintain that the university has a responsibility to point out the many social injustices that exist and to translate this awareness into political activism with the view of redressing historical injustices. While not entirely disagreeing with this position, Innis would have certain reservations concerning the way in which it was brought about. He would most probably argue that while the university should not cut itself off from the wider social context in which it functions, it nevertheless exists to meet its primary

responsibility which is to safeguard and develop the great intellectual tradition of the search for truth of which it is the only custodian. Any type of social activism must necessarily be subordinated to this primary purpose. There would be times when the university could be aggressively at odds with the community. Indeed, we are living in such times. The university should vigorously oppose the demands of the marketplace and the effects of industrialism for the sake of its most important mission. Therefore, Innis believed that the university and the community should be integrated only on the very important condition that the intellectual integrity of the university not be compromised. And in this respect he was convinced that our universities were clear failures. While they will certainly influence many students in ways which Innis would approve of, the numbers involved will always be relatively insignificant and unlikely to be the originating agents of the extent of the social change necessary to reverse the direction in which space-directed values are inexorably leading society.

One should not lose sight of the basic purpose of Innis' work in communications studies. He believes that only the values of the oral tradition can bring about a major change in societal orientation by redirecting the current tendencies of our technological society. "In the absence of an oral tradition, technological progress in communication had been and would continue to be accompanied by wasteful conflict in

which the more efficient alternatives might not be the winners." (Neil 1987-88, 87). As just noted, the only institution capable of serving as a source of these values is the university. In view of this objective, and on the basis of Innis' entire discourse, one is truly hard-pressed to reach an optimistic conclusion. Industrialism, commercialism, and specialization have combined to produce a social structure and a related value system which are simply too deeply entrenched to be significantly modified. One has little option but to conclude that the nature and extent of the social change envisioned by Innis are problematical in the extreme.

The social fabric which Innis observed some forty years ago led him to conclude that ours was a society which produced citizens who were afflicted with a crippling ethical blind spot that prevented them from understanding the significance of some of the most important questions ever to occur to the human mind. All of the essential conditions which convinced him of this depressing and tragic conclusion have been magnified many times since his death. Some, such as the extent of industrialism and commercialization, have been developed to such an extent that Innis himself would no doubt be astonished. While it is certain that he would continue to advocate the urgent necessity of introducing the values of the oral tradition into contemporary society, it seems certain that he would yet recognize that as a society, we had gone so far along the path of space-directed technology that the

resulting social process was irreversible. Innis would consider our fate to be sealed. It would simply be a matter of time before our society would repeat the pattern of prior civilizations. To some, such a conclusion is both fanciful and far-fetched. We somehow cannot believe that the fate of our technological society would repeat the pattern of civilizations that came before us. Yet, when one considers the complex causes which result in the collapse of different social structures, there is generally some form of extremism that has been instrumental in the decline. Innis is warning us that this fatal social characteristic is present in our time. Our extremism lies in an epistemology which is excessively secular and therefore incapable of recognizing the significance of those critical ethical concerns which are at the heart of our intellectual tradition. Perhaps he is wrong. However, when one takes a serious look at the nature of our technological society and closely reviews the major themes of contemporary social commentary, one gets the uneasy feeling that it would be a grave mistake to dismiss Innis' warning without giving it very serious consideration.

CONCLUSION

It is often mentioned in the literature that Innis is a unique thinker; that we should view his work as a source of general themes to be developed rather than a series of firm conclusions. From one point of view, such is the case. However, considered from another perspective, a critical observer is forced to note that Innis' work is not only analytically incomplete, but often simplistic and unnecessarily confusing due to the adoption of a literary style which appears designed to render things problematical. Generally, such characteristics in a scholarly work are interpreted as being serious shortcomings and result in severe criticism. While Innis has been seriously criticized for his interpretation of economic development or in his capacity as an historian (Patterson 1990, 26) it is perplexing to discover that for the most part in communication studies, these generally accepted criteria of scholarship are casually dismissed as being almost, but not quite, both admirable and a source of inspiration. There is general agreement that a significant degree of analytical incompleteness, the assertion

of magisterial conclusions without supporting arguments, and the summarization of entire civilizations in one or two pages are the insights of an unusually gifted and insightful visionary. We are told that this is what we should expect, and accept, from Innis. The conclusion that this is something that must be accepted is obvious enough. We have no choice in that regard. However, I think that a few words are in order concerning what we should expect.

Generally speaking, the literature commenting on Innis' communication theory is highly positive. One searches in vain for anything resembling a critical perspective. If anything is found which could fall into this category, it is of such a gentle nature that it does not qualify as criticism in the usual sense of the word. Hugh Aitken reaches the following conclusion with respect to this phenomenon: "It is very hard to find in Canadian scholarship today any serious criticism of Harold Innis. There has developed a kind of cult of personality". (Aitken 77-78, 96). The general absence of a critical perspective toward Innis' work and the universally high regard he enjoys suggests that the standards of scholarly criticism which apply to others are significantly relaxed when his work is at issue. However, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, let me be clear about what I mean here.

This thesis has attempted to present a fair and balanced interpretation of Innis. In so doing, it has been argued that Innis has a great deal to say to contemporary society and that

he is indeed an insightful and visionary thinker. In reaching this conclusion, I join many others who express a similar view. However, the point I would like to emphasize is that we have reached this conclusion for very different reasons. Most base their opinion essentially on Innis' text itself. On the basis of my findings, I believe that the text does not support this optimistic and flattering conclusion. Rather, one must go far beyond what Innis writes, and in so doing explore the very serious problems that the text presents. For example, it is necessary to first consider the analytical adequacy of interpreting all of human history and every social structure on the basis of only two concepts, space and time. The next issue is to explore the implications of interpreting the concept of time in terms of the oral tradition of ancient Greece as expressed in the Platonic dialogues with the view of identifying the values involved, and their suitability to contemporary society. One must also consider how these values will actually become part of society from an institutional perspective. Very few of these questions are addressed by Innis to the extent required to seriously evaluate the soundness of his conclusions. The result is that to a very substantial extent, the real significance of Innis' discourse does not lie in the text itself. Rather, it lies in the implications of the text. Again, the text is unambiguous with respect to the importance of dialectics in bringing about social change and this is, of course, of primary importance to

the project Innis undertakes. However, we are never told in the text that there is a second level of dialectical activity which is necessarily implied by the concept of time and that this second level of dialectics has a direct bearing on the entire scope and analytical depth of the dialectical process as a whole. It is my view that these connections and implications must first be made before one can conclude with confidence that Innis does indeed have a great deal to say. Consequently, it appears very questionable to base a conclusion recognizing outstanding scholarly work if that conclusion is based solely on the text. It should also be noted that in order to make these connections and draw out the corresponding implications, it is necessary to be familiar with the history of philosophy, political economy, ethics, the philosophy of history, cultural studies, epistemology and communications studies. It seems to me that this interdisciplinary approach is mandatory, as is the amount of work required to achieve the required level of analytical insight. Therefore, though I am in agreement with most of the favourable conclusions pertaining to Innis, my agreement is conditional on a holistic approach to developing and supplementing the text to a greater extent than is generally acknowledged.

No doubt there are those who would argue that the above simply demonstrates the fecundity, richness, and relevance of Innis. To a certain extent this is true. That is precisely

what this study has attempted to show. However, there is something a bit disquieting in Innis that is not easy to verbalize and is therefore subject to misinterpretation. What is disquieting is centered on the following consideration. If our civilization is as threatened as he believed it to be, if his studies convinced him of our inevitable doom, it would seem that a man of his intellectual capacity, concern, and energy would see it as his responsibility to present this calamitous possibility in the clearest possible terms. It would seem reasonable to assume that he would make every effort to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what he wanted to say. If the survival of an entire civilization is at stake, why obfuscate, imply, gloss over, be imprecise, generalize to an excessive degree, and rely on a literary style which raises confusion to an art. In light of an impending social catastrophe, why proceed in this way? Why adopt an approach almost designed to be misunderstood? Why play what appears to be the worst type of intellectual game?

I must confess that this element in Innis has always bothered me. It has led me, no doubt unfairly, to question the real seriousness and sincerity of his work. I have often experienced the disconcerting feeling that an academic game was unfolding before my eyes. Intellectually I realize that this was not Innis' purpose, yet this impression is too often not far beneath the surface. While recognizing the heresy of saying this, and fully understanding that I am inviting the

wrath of Innis admirers to fall upon me, I have read no commentator that provides a satisfactory answer. The quick, convenient, and usual reply is that Innis is not a linear thinker, with linearity understood not as a uniform progression in time, but as the type of discourse which proceeds according to the traditional rules of logical argumentation and exposition. However, this view is contradicted by the fundamental conclusions Innis reaches. The direct causal relationship he establishes between the bias of technology and the concepts of space and time is a clear example of linear thinking. The very definite causal connection between particular types of technology and the rise of related monopolies of knowledge is a second instance of linear thinking. A third is the close connection Innis establishes between what he considers to be a required epistemology and the realization of the social change needed to save our civilization. The latter is entirely dependent on the former. In addition, his very definition of rationality is the exercise of dialectics on both a social and a personal level. While the element of linearity as logical progression may be debatable in his social dialectic, it is clearly present at the level of his personal dialectic. The latter is an interpretation of dialectical discourse as practised in the oral tradition of ancient Greece. While Innis favoured this definition of rationality because of its openness and flexibility, a very significant aspect of its strength is the

fact that it proceeds on the basis of a strict adherence to the requirements of traditional logical discourse. Its openness is defined by and bound by this characteristic. Innis viewed the dialectical process in the same essential terms as Plato and this vision encompasses a method of proceeding without which there is no dialectic in the Greek sense. In my view, explaining Innis' general analytical approach, his writing style or his conclusions on the fact that he was not a linear thinker is totally unconvincing. So, I find a very basic characteristic of Innis deeply puzzling and I have no satisfactory answer to offer. Nor, as far as I can determine, does anybody else.

It has already been noted that Innis' purpose has never been to provide completed answers to difficult social questions. Rather, the intent has been to identify general themes which each generation of thoughtful social critics should develop in light of current circumstances. If this is in fact the case, it is possible to advance a reasonably convincing argument that the success of this objective can be questioned. The reality is that in the post-McLuhan world, the use of Innis' work as a source of inspiration for original and diverse social analysis has been rather modest. With the exception of Marshall McLuhan's, there has actually been very little progress in the development of Innis' thinking since his death. The interpretations of his work in communication studies have fallen within the context of a rather

predictable, non-controversial, standard interpretive framework in which the usual themes of balance and proportion, his social dialectic, and the issue of the bias of technology toward space and time have been discussed. There is virtually no controversy surrounding the interpretation of Innis. This is often a danger signal that should cause some reflection. Is it because he is poorly understood or is it because there simply is not much to act as a source of inspiration for original social analysis?

Perhaps this type of speculation is unfair to Innis. To those who disagree with my assessment, I would like to emphasize that I am not suggesting that Innis' writings in communication studies are trivial or should be ignored. Quite the contrary. This study has shown that his work is characterized by many valuable insights that are very relevant to our contemporary situation, provided they are carefully developed. I would go so far as to say that there is a great deal of wisdom contained in the writings of Harold Innis. However, the difficulty I have tried to express is that this wisdom is very, very difficult to extract from his writings. It lies far beneath the surface and my questions focus on the purpose motivating the burying of much of this wisdom so deeply that it runs the risk of not being recognized. In my opinion, this is precisely what many interpretations of Innis reflect. They fail to recognize some of the serious issues that must be resolved before this wisdom can be acknowledged.

Perhaps this is what Innis intended though, once again, I have a great deal of difficulty understanding why he would willingly proceed in this manner. Truthfully, I am not persuaded that such is indeed the case.

As paradoxical as it may appear, raising these questions should not detract from the very astute insights which are abundantly present in Innis' work. It must be remembered that he wrote about these issues some forty years ago. When his views of the social problems of his times are carefully considered in light of subsequent social developments, there is little doubt that he was deeply and genuinely prophetic. His fundamental perceptions identifying the nature of the problems which would afflict society, their wider social repercussions, and the steps which should be taken to resolve them are, in my opinion, very accurate. Though they require development, they are nevertheless present to be developed. Of particular and obvious significance in this regard is Innis' concept of monopolies of knowledge. This fundamental insight can be viewed as a source of inspiration for a great deal of research which has resulted in many different approaches to the question of the exercise of social power and control. Though credit may not always be given to Innis for providing the initial insight, he was certainly instrumental in first identifying this issue as a critical area of social research and analysis. Of equal importance is his insistence that societies invite very serious difficulties when they establish

epistemological parameters that systematically exclude a balance between the secular and the ethical. This fundamental insight is also one that provides rich potential for social research. Thus, like his general belief concerning the need for balance and proportion within a social structure, the same conclusion can be applied to Innis' works themselves. Any fair evaluation of his efforts must attempt to balance the positive and negative aspects of his efforts in order to reach an accurate understanding of the whole.

My own conclusion is that the positive heavily outweighs the negative in an overall assessment of Innis. However, this positive characterization is rather unique in terms of communication studies. Innis' conclusions, as they apply to resolving the problems of society, are open to debate. Some may be convinced that he has much to say that is directly relevant to our contemporary society, while others will find his general perspective highly problematical. Innis himself would not be disturbed in the least by this difference of opinion since it is precisely this exchange of views that establishes the social discourse that he believed in so passionately. He would consider this dialogue as a sign of an intellectual vitality which should be continuously encouraged. However, there is a further consideration of Innis that is usually neglected when an assessment is made of his overall contribution. It is an area where, I am certain, unanimity of

opinion would be reached. That concerns a study of his work as a source of personal development and growth.

This study has shown that Innis' humanism and his concern with the individual is very pronounced, far more than is generally recognized. In addition to a social dialectic, it has been shown that he has a very important personal dialectic which, it should be noted, is at the center of the value system of the oral tradition. In addition, it has also been shown that Innis' entire definition of the purpose of education is the development of individual character for the benefit of both the individual and the state. There is therefore a very important part of Innis' discourse that is centered on the individual and his personal and social developmental needs. I would suggest that though Innis has much to tell us concerning the social, he may have more to offer with respect to his interpretation of the type of human development needed to resist the values of what he would call a secular society focused on space-directed technology.

If approached seriously, one cannot study Innis without addressing questions which are as fundamental as they are significant with respect to both individual and social development. While it is possible to approach his work from different perspectives, the philosophical approach that I have followed has proven itself to be particularly enriching from a personal point of view. The text leads naturally to a study of questions dealing with such a diversity of issues as the

causes and definition of a society's epistemological perspective, the role of technology in bringing about social change, the exercise of social power and control, the purpose of education, the balance between the secular and the ethical, the type of ethical system required, the purpose of the state and the importance of individual character in bringing about social change. It is impossible to consider these matters seriously and not grow in understanding as an individual and as a responsible citizen. It is in this area that Innis' work is unquestionably of immense value.

Perhaps this is as much as one can or should expect from anybody's efforts. The complexities of social life suggest that it is unreasonable to assume that any single person can provide an unchallengeable social formula. The judgement of history has not been kind to those who have tried to do so. In Innis' view, one of the more important truths that he offers the modern mind is one that has been lost with the passage of centuries namely, the oral tradition of ancient Greece. Essentially it tells us that a healthy society must strive to find a balance between the secular and the ethical. It also tells us that the only way in which this can be accomplished within society is generally by means of the individual who has been educated to understand the importance of this balance. From this basic truth, many things naturally flow: the nature of the educational system, the relationship which exists between the individual and the state, the priorities of public

policy, the exercise of social power and the behaviour of the state with other states. The specifics of this balance, says Innis, must be discovered by each generation as it attempts to relate what is significant in our tradition to current social realities. This in turn requires a type of social discourse that recognizes the role to be played by both the secular and the ethical.

The significance of Innis' work should therefore be seen as a legacy of a process that is flexible, yet directed by certain fundamental guiding principles. This, I think, captures the essence of Innis' message to our contemporary society. From the point of view of the success of this process, it is necessary to make a distinction between its application to society and to the individual. Forty years ago Innis concluded that society was irretrievably lost. The social realities that led him to this depressing conclusion have only intensified with the passing decades. Therefore, it seems appropriate to conclude, with Innis, that the process he is suggesting will have a negligible social impact in terms of reversing a general social trend that appears to be moving forward at an ever-accelerating rate. However, for reasons that are more manageable, there is a much higher chance of success for individuals to recognize the importance of balancing the secular and the ethical in their personal lives and this effort can be made in spite of the fact that the

greater social context may be hostile to this type of personal development.

On balance, therefore, I would say that the success of Innis' work is at a much more personal level than most commentators acknowledge. Certainly, success at the personal level is automatically reflected socially as individuals go about their daily lives. The extent of the changes that this can bring about to society as a whole is, of course, very difficult to predict. To a very significant extent, it depends upon the definition of the concept of community one wishes to apply. If the definition focuses on the local, then this personal development can be more easily reflected within the social. If one emphasizes the national, the international, or even the global, then the results become progressively more problematic.

By way of conclusion, a brief comment is in order concerning the courage displayed by Innis. To invoke the general worldview that existed in ancient Greece as the fundamental solution to the social problems that exist in a highly technological society, requires a rare degree of courage. One runs the risk of incurring both the ridicule and the animosity of a very significant percentage of that society's intellectual elite. One also runs the risk of being casually and unfairly dismissed as an insignificant thinker since one is looking backwards rather than forwards in advocating a perspective which was rejected at the dawn of the

modern era. One would have to defend oneself against the charge of being a quaint though irrelevant intellectual dinosaur. No doubt, Innis was aware of these consequences and, in spite of them, elected to not simply persevere but recommend that we develop his analysis in directions which were deeper and broader than those he initially pursued. As one surveys the intellectual horizon of contemporary thought, there are many different points of view which can be selected as a general framework for social analysis. Without being unfairly critical of any of these many perspectives, it seems to me that the works of Harold Innis should take its place among those that deserve the closest consideration.

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