

EXPLORATIONS

STUDIES IN CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

VOLUME 8

*Edited by Edmund Carpenter and
Marshall McLuhan*

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Explorations 8
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By Carpenter, E S and Easterbrook, W T
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EXPLORATIONS . . .

is designed, not as a permanent reference journal that embalms truth for posterity, but as a publication that explores and searches and questions.

We envisage a series that will cut across the humanities and social sciences by treating them as a continuum. We believe anthropology and communication are approaches, not bodies of data, and that within each the four winds of the humanities, the physical, the biological and the social sciences intermingle to form a science of man.

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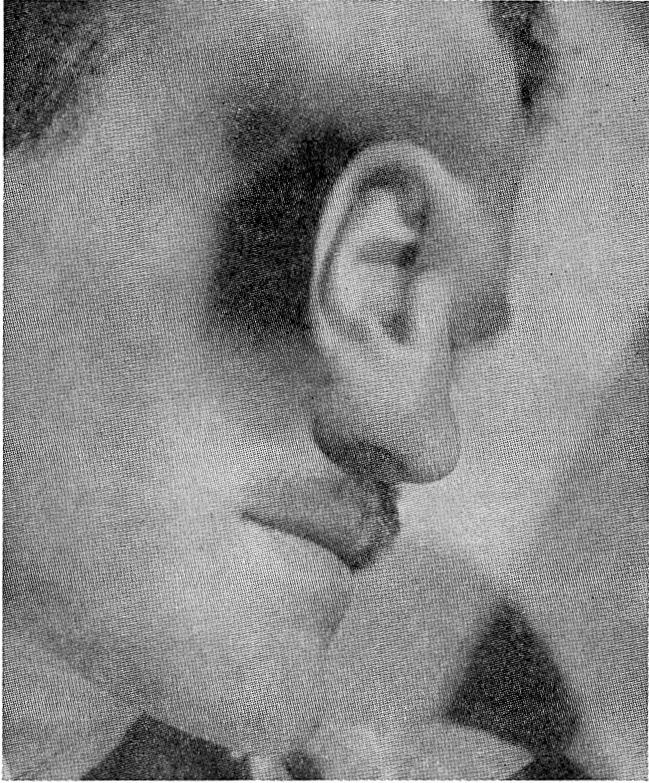
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Explorations, 1953–57

Foreword to the Eight-Volume Series of the 2016 Edition, Volumes 2–8

(The main Introduction to this series is in Volume One)

Michael Darroch (University of Windsor) and
Janine Marchessault (York University)

Explorations was an experimental interdisciplinary publication led by faculty and graduate students at the University of Toronto in which the media theorist Marshall McLuhan and the radical anthropologist Edmund Carpenter formulated their most striking insights about new media in the electric age. The journal served to disseminate some of the insights and experiments of the Culture and Communications graduate seminar (1953–55), an innovative media think tank of the 1950s. The eight coedited issues of *Explorations* are republished here for the first time since their original printing in the 1950s.

The *Explorations* research group aimed to develop a “field approach” to the study of new media and communication. While inspired by a postwar, modernist discourse of universality, no single mode of research was dominant. By their own account, the team sought “an area of mutually supporting insights in a critique of the methods of study in Economics, Psychology, English, Anthropology, and Town Planning.”¹ *Explorations* published writings by group

1. Herbert Marshall McLuhan Fonds, held in Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa. Further references to the McLuhan Fonds will be identified as LAC followed by the call number MG 31, D 156, the volume number, and the folder number (here: LAC MG 31, D 156, 145, 35).

members along with contributions on topics ranging from ethnolinguistics to economic theory, from art and design to developmental psychology, from psychoanalysis to nursery rhymes and bawdy ballads, from urban theory to electronic media. The journal treated culture, and cultural studies, as a landscape of experiences and knowledge. An experimental space in its own right, *Explorations* counted among its more than eighty contributors both established and emerging scholars, scientists, and artists.

The think tank and the journal were supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation's newly established interdisciplinary research and study program in behavioral sciences (most likely cowritten by McLuhan and Carpenter and assisted by the then doctoral student Donald Theall). The group obtained \$44,250 for a two-year research project devoted to studying the "changing patterns of language and behavior and the new media of communication."² Within North America, the Toronto group's proposal can be counted among the very first attempts to combine explicitly the study of culture *and* communication. The timing of this grant is significant given the scope of contemporaneous studies of media underway in the United States and Europe: functionalist and critical cultural studies of mass communications, theories of cybernetics, studies of social interaction, as well as psychological studies of the effects of media on human perception. Carpenter, initially the driving force behind *Explorations*, acted as editor of the first six issues before becoming coeditor with McLuhan for issues 7 and 8, which were sponsored by the *Toronto Telegram*. A ninth and final issue, entitled *Eskimo* (1959), combined Carpenter's writings on indigenous art and culture of the Aivilik juxtaposed with images from filmmaker Robert Flaherty and drawings by Frederick Varley. After Beacon Press published a selection of *Explorations* contributions in 1960, coedited by Carpenter and McLuhan as *Explorations in Communication*, McLuhan later resuscitated the spirit of *Explorations* as a "magazine within a magazine," a publication inside the University of Toronto's alumni magazine, the *Varsity Graduate* (1964–72).

2. *Ford Foundation, 1953, Ford Foundation Annual Report 1953*, New York: Ford Foundation: 67. The Ford Foundation's Behavioral Sciences Program had the stated goal of "improving the content of the behavioral sciences" by specifically supporting "interdisciplinary research and study." Launched in 1952, the program aimed to help the "intellectual development of the behavioral sciences" by "improving their relationship with such disciplines as history, social and political philosophy, humanistic studies and certain phases of economics" (67).

The group's proposal to Ford's Behavioral Sciences Program is revealing of the central assumptions that would underpin the graduate seminar and *Explorations*. The proposal's point of departure is not yet an assumption about the power of media forms to shape content, but rather the understanding that methods for studying new media required recognition of new patterns emerging across technological, cultural, and urban life. Underpinning the proposal is a conversation that McLuhan in particular had started with advocates of cybernetic theories. Carpenter was also of course conversant with the writings of anthropologists who were deeply involved with developing cybernetic models and metaphors within the social sciences, among others Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead. Cybernetic theories also came to the group through Donald Theall, who would complete his PhD dissertation in 1954 on "Communication Theories in Modern Poetry: Yeats, Pound, Joyce and Eliot" under the supervision of both McLuhan and Carpenter.

"Well aware of the brilliant new developments in communication study at Massachusetts Institute of Technology," the Ford grant explains, gesturing both to Norbert Wiener's cybernetic conferences and to Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's mathematical theory of communication, "the undersigned propose to utilize these insights but to employ also the technique of studying the forms of communication, old and new, as art forms," an approach already "implicit in the very title of Harold Innis' *Bias of Communication*."³ The Toronto group proposed to study the effects of new media forms on patterns of language, economic values, social organization, individual and collective behaviour, always keeping in mind accompanying changes to the classroom and the networks of city life. In their eyes the central problem consisted of two aspects. First, "the creation of a new language of vision" that "arises from all our new visual media and which is part of the total language of modern culture." Second, the Toronto group proposed to study "the impact of this total social language on the traditional spoken and written forms of expression." These two core objectives they would pursue in the pages of *Explorations* through numerous contributions. As clearly indicated in an early draft of their Ford proposal, the core research group

3. Edmund S. Carpenter, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, H. M. McLuhan, W. T. Easterbrook, and D. C. Williams, 1953, "University of Toronto: Changing Patterns of Language and Behavior and the New Media of Communication." Ford Foundation Archives. Grant File PA 53-70, Section 1, 1-11. Rockefeller Archive Center, New York: 4.

represented the five key disciplines that would supplement each other: anthropology, psychology, economics, town planning, and English.⁴

While no one discipline was privileged above the others, anthropology played a special role in creating a strong comparative framework from the start. In addition to anthropological discussions of cybernetics, the Sapir-Whorf theory was an important intellectual foundation. As with Innis, Edward Sapir (a German-born American who spent fifteen years in Ottawa working for the Geographical Survey of Canada) offered a multifocal habit of vision, working between linguistics, anthropology, and psychology. For the grant applicants, Sapir “brought together European attitudes towards psychoanalysis (emphasis on socially-situated personality) and North American attitudes towards social structure (culture).” Moreover, Sapir “fused the European concern with philology with [the] North American concern with dynamic patterns in language.”⁵ The anthropologist and ethnolinguist Dorothy Lee was arguably one of the group’s “most influential force[s],”⁶ contributing six articles on language, value, and perception. Her insight that peoples such as the Trobrianders perceived lineal order differently from Western cultures had already been cited by Bateson and Ruesch (1951), and was central to the delineation of acoustic and visual cultures undertaken by the Explorations group, and in later studies by both McLuhan and Carpenter.

In developing their methodologies, seminar faculty and graduate students undertook a number of critical media experiments on changing patterns of perception resulting from new media. The CBC and the then Ryerson Institute placed studio space and media equipment at their disposal. The experiment tested their central hypothesis that different media (speech, print, radio, television) lend themselves to different kinds of pedagogical experiences.⁷ It is surprising that such findings have never been fully taken up by educational media researchers. Hopefully, the republication of these early studies will

4. “Changing Patterns of Man and Society Associated with the New Media of Communication.” Draft of Ford Foundation Proposal, likely 1953. LAC MG 31, D 156, 204, 26.

5. Carpenter et al, 1953: 2.

6. Edmund Carpenter, 2001, “That Not-So-Silent Sea,” in Donald F. Theall (Ed.), *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (p. 240), Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

7. Edmund Carpenter, 1954, “Certain Media Biases,” *Explorations* 3:65–74; Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, 1956, “The New Languages,” *Chicago Review* 10(1): 46–52; Edmund Carpenter, 1957, “The New Languages,” *Explorations* 7:4–21.

renew interest in the cognitive studies of media which have focussed too narrowly, according to Carpenter and McLuhan, on attention and inputs and not enough on the creative and critical aspects of perception.

What is clear in reading through the *Explorations* issues is that Carpenter and McLuhan were most interested in the new kinds of learning made possible through the media. McLuhan, in particular, was influenced by research into human perception as part of his approach to media studies since he believed that these media were altering our senses, our forms of attention and knowledge production. Carpenter and McLuhan would assert that the media are transforming the human sensorium, an idea captured perhaps most playfully in the final coedited issue, *Explorations* 8, an ode to James Joyce devoted to the oral, to the new “acoustic space” of the electric age: “Verbi-Voco-Visual.” The issue features seven essays, including one by McLuhan, that explore different aspects of oral culture—mostly concerned with a transition to a new orality. Twenty-four non-authored “Items,” which include some previously published essays by McLuhan and Carpenter, appear as humorous intellectual sketches exploring topics like “Electronics as ESP,” car commercials, bathroom acoustics, dictaphones, and of course wine. The final “Item,” number 24, entitled “No Upside Down in Eskimo Art,” reiterated McLuhan and Carpenter’s core assertion that “after thousands of years of written processing of human experience, the instantaneous omnipresence of electronically processed information has hoicked us out of these age-old patterns into an auditory world.” In the history of media studies in Canada and internationally, the *Explorations* journal is an important starting point for defining the rich new insights around new media cultures that the Toronto School helped inaugurate.

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Summaries of All Eight *Explorations* Volumes

Explorations 1

Explorations 1 took an audaciously new approach to communications and cultural research “cutting across” studies in anthropology, literature, social sciences, economics, folklore, and popular culture. From Copernican revolutions (Bidney) to a seventeenth-century translation of Sweden’s Mohra witchcraft trials (Horneck); from senses of time (Leach) to the meaning of gongs (Carrington); from Majorcan customs (Graves) to a typography of functional analysis (Spiro); from Veblen’s economic history (Riesman) to contemporary stress levels (Selye), the issue also included one of György Kepes’s earliest drafts on fusing “art and science,” an essay on Freud and vices (Goodman), and a return to childhood in Legman’s work on comic books, before concluding with now classic essays by McLuhan and Frye. The cover of *Explorations 1* depicts a series of masks from the award-winning film *The Loon’s Necklace* (Crawley Films, 1948).

Explorations 2

Explorations 2’s mischievous spoof covers, both front and back, inside and outside, were labelled “Feenicht’s Playhouse,” a reference to the Phoenix playhouse of Joyce’s *Wake*. The key playful headline, “New Media Changing Temporal and Spatial Orientation to Self,” was accompanied by multiple hoax articles, including “Time-Space Duality Goes” and “TV Wollops MS,” a reference to television’s apparent power over manuscript culture as evidenced by the group’s media experiment at CBC studios. Exemplifying the playfulness of the core faculty’s discussions about new media and behaviour, it is not surprising the McLuhan would publish in this issue his now famous article “Notes on the Media as Art Forms” alongside essays by other seminar participants: Tyrwhitt resuscitated an unpublished article, “Ideal Cities and the City Ideal,” a historical survey of proposals for ideal urban

designs (originally drafted for the defunct journal *trans/formation: art, communication, environment*). Carpenter's "Eternal Life" is a first analysis of Aivilik Inuit concepts of time; then student Donald Theall's "Here Comes Everybody" offered a snapshot of his research on Joyce and communication theories in modern poetry; anthropologist Dorothy Lee, who would visit the seminar in March 1955, offered a review of David Bidney's challenge to scholarly traditions in his 1953 book *Theoretical Anthropology*. In addition, Carpenter fleshed out the contents with contributions from political economy, anthropology, psychology, and English: the second part of Riesman's Veblen study; Lord Raglan on social classes; Derek Savage on "Jung, Alchemy and Self"; the *New Yorker's* Stanley Hyman on Malraux's thesis of the "museum without walls"; and A. Irving Hallowell's extended essay on "Self and its Behavioral Environment"—the inspiration for the spoof cover.

Explorations 3

Explorations 3 was initially planned as a volume dedicated to Harold Innis. In the end, the issue would only include Innis's essay "Monopoly and Civilization," introduced by Easterbrook, and a series of reflections in "Innis and Communication" by seminar participants. In November 1954, the *Explorations* researchers attended the "Institute on Culture and Communication" organised by Ray Birdwhistell at the University of Louisville's Interdisciplinary Committee on Culture and Communication. A number of the contributions to *Explorations 3* are essays or early drafts of contributions related to this conference (Birdwhistell, Lee, Trager & Hall). The issue also includes the initial, and substantially divergent, assessments of the group's first "media experiment" at CBC studios (April 1954) in the contributions by Carpenter and Williams. The issue is rounded out with an excerpt on reading and writing (Chaytor), a new translation of Kamo Chomei's *Hojoki* (Rowe & Kerrigan), a study of utopias (Wolfenstein), a reading of *Tristram Shandy* (MacLean), reflections on Soviet ethnography (Potekin & Levin), a reading of Shelley's hallucinations as narcissism and doublegoing (McCullough), a critical reassessment of the science of human behaviour (Wallace), and "Meat Packing and Processing," an anonymous entry, likely by McLuhan, alluding to Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948). Like *Explorations 1*, the cover depicted an indigenous mask from the Northwest Coast also represented in the Crawley film *The Loon's Necklace* (1948).

Explorations 4

According to McLuhan, *Explorations 4* was planned as an issue devoted to Sigfried Giedion. Published in February 1955, with a cover adapted from Kandinsky's *Comets* (1938), *Explorations 4* was devoted to issues of space and placed a strong emphasis on modes of linguistic and poetic thought across multiple media. Poems by e. e. cummings and Jorge Luis Borges mingle with essays by seminar leaders McLuhan on "Space, Time, and Poetry," Carpenter on "Eskimo Poetry: Word Magic," Tyrwhitt on "The Moving Eye" (regarding comparative perceptual experiences of Western cities and the ancient Indian city of Fatehpur Sikri), and Williams on "auditory space"—a notion that "electrified" the group, as Carpenter later recounted. Northrop Frye and Stephen Gilman's essays on poetic traditions were juxtaposed with Millar MacLure and Marjorie Adix's odes to Dylan Thomas, who had died in 1953. Case studies by then graduate students Walter J. Ong on "Space in Renaissance Symbolism" and Joan Rayfield on "Implications of English Grammar" were aligned with Dorothy Lee's contribution on "Freedom, Spontaneity and Limit in American Linguistic Usage" and Lawrence Frank's early draft of "Tactile Communication." Both Lee and Frank had presented their contributions at Ray Birdwhistell's "Institute on Culture and Communication" in Louisville, in 1954. A "Media Log" and the now famous entry "Five Sovereign Fingers Taxed the Breath," both largely replicated from McLuhan's 1954 *Counterblast* pamphlet, were published anonymously. In addition to "Our Enchanted Lives," a memorandum of instructions for television programming adapted from a Procter & Gamble memo, "The Party Line" offered a second alleged memorandum "To All TIME INC. Bureaus and Stringers." An "Idea File" containing insights on oral, written, and technological cultural forms was culled from writings by Robert Graves, Edmund Leach, Walter Gropius, and E. T. Hall, among many others. With *Explorations 4*, the group revealed its commitment to the belief that communication studies was deeply rooted in anthropological and literary-poetic traditions, but equally informed by studies of mechanisation, technology, and culture.

Explorations 5

The cover of *Explorations 5* returned to the playfulness of issue 2: the image of the famous Minoan “Our Lady of the Sports” figurine, held at the Royal Ontario Museum (the authenticity of which has long been disputed) was set in front of the *Toronto Daily Star’s* 8 April 1954 Home Edition front page, featuring the headline “H-Bomb in Mass Production, U.S.” This juxtaposition between ancient artefact, contemporary media, and technological production set the stage for the issue: starting with Daisetz Suzuki’s description of “Buddhist Symbolism”, the issue follows with McLuhan’s famous analysis of TV and radio in Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. Such contrasts of new media forms continue with a “Portrait of James Joyce,” an excerpt of a 1950 “Third Programme” BBC documentary edited by W. R. Rodgers, and the two-page “Anna Livia Plurabelle” section of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, set in experimental typography designed by Harley Parker and Toronto’s Cooper and Beatty Ltd. The issue further juxtaposes essays by E. R. Leach on cultural conceptions of time and Jean Piaget on time-space conceptions of the child; anthropologists Claire Holt and Joan Rayfield on interpenetrations of language and culture and Carpenter’s study of Eskimo space concepts; Rhodra Métraux on differences between the novel, play, and film versions of *The Caine Mutiny*; Roy Campbell on the fusion of oral and written traditions in the writings of Nigerian author Amos Tutuola, including an excerpt of his 1954 novel *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, and Harcourt Brown on Pascal; economist Kenneth Boulding on information theory and Easterbrook on economic approaches to communication; and an excerpt from Daniel Lerner and David Riesman’s work on the modernisation of Turkey and the Middle East. Tyrwhitt and Williams contributed reflections on the seminar’s second media experiment in “The City Unseen,” an analysis of students’ perceptions of the environment of the then Ryerson Institute. Anonymous entries included “Colour and Communication” and a transcription of satirist Jean Shepherd’s radio broadcast “Channel Cat in the Middle Distance,” likely courtesy of Carpenter. The issue is rounded out with a Letters File and an Ideas File, with contributions from E. R. Leach, Patrick Geddes, and Lawrence Frank.

Explorations 6

Writing to the Explorations Group in 1954, Carpenter worried about the funds from the Ford grant that were available for publishing this issue. *Explorations 6* was funded through the sales of issue 5 and possibly Carpenter's own funds. The cover image for this issue was a section of *The Great Wave*, by Katsushika Hokusai. According to Carpenter's letter, this issue summarizes the group's "ideas and findings," which though "not fully articulated" were "new and exciting." He saw the issue as "a full seminar statement." Indeed, the issue brings together the interdisciplinary reflections and comparative media studies that characterized the group's methodology: a brilliant essay by radical anthropologist Dorothy Lee on "Wintu thought" (Lee would ultimately publish six essays in *Explorations* and had a significant influence on the seminar) and two essays on television that were solicited to reflect upon different geographical differences that shaped the experiences of the new medium—one in the US (Chayefsky) and the other the Soviet Union (Sharoyeva, the "top man" in the USSR television system). Also included were Giedion's classic essay on cave painting; a reflection on the phonograph alongside a consideration of "print's monopoly" by C. S. Lewis; as well as essays by McLuhan on media and events; language and magic (Maritain); writing and orality (Riesman); color (Parker); the evolution of the human mind (Montagu); and the anonymous entries "Print's Monopoly" and "Feet of Clay," likely drafted by McLuhan and Carpenter, which take up conflicts between old and new media environments. This issue contains the full spectrum of the weekly seminar's research undertakings over a two-year period.

Explorations 7

Explorations 7 (1957), the only issue without a table of contents, was edited by Carpenter and McLuhan solely and, with issue 8, sponsored by the *Toronto Telegram*. Easterbrook and Tyrwhitt were away, and Williams wanted his name taken off the masthead, allegedly because of the publication of American writer Gershon Legman's infamous "Bawdy Song . . . in Fact and in Print," a history of erotic writing. McLuhan had contributed to Legman's short-lived but hugely influential magazine *Neurotica* (1948–52), so the two had a previous connection. But the tension between Williams

and the editors might have also been due to their different interpretations of the CBC/Ryerson media experiments which explored media sensory biases with a group of students discussed in issue 3 by Williams in scientific terms, and here again by Carpenter in his essay “The New Languages” in cultural terms. Carpenter argues that each medium (radio, TV, print) “codifies reality differently.” To accompany this opening essay, they each included anonymous entries: the essay “Classroom Without Walls,” later attributed to McLuhan, explores the ubiquitous mediasphere outside educational institutions, which teachers must begin to consider as an inherent and unavoidable pedagogical experience, followed by “Songs of the Pogo,” a reference to the popular comic and LP of the period, which pervaded the McLuhan home. McLuhan saw relationships between “Jazz and Modern Letters,” juxtaposed with Carpenter’s reflections on the acoustic character of ancient and preliterate symbols, masks, and traditions in “Eternal Life of the Dream.” Dorothy Lee contributed two essays to the issue on lineal and non-lineal codifications examined in the Trobriand language with responses by Robert Graves. The focus on educational matters also included a review of Riesman’s *Variety and Constraint in American Education* as well as examinations of the cultural specificity of the Soviet press, Soviet novels, and Soviet responses to Elvis Presley. The particularity of an oral and noncapitalistic culture had been an important point of comparison for the Explorations Group, especially Carpenter and McLuhan. Harley Parker designed the issue’s cover.

Explorations 8

Explorations 8 (1957) is perhaps the most famous of all the issues. It was devoted to the oral—“Verbi-Voco-Visual”—and was edited primarily by McLuhan and again published by the *Toronto Telegram* and the University of Toronto. The issue was filled with visual experimentation; framed by extensive play with typography in the spirit of the Vorticists and for the first time the extensive use of “flexitype” by Harley Parker, then display designer at the ROM. Seen throughout are Parker’s experiments with typography as well as color printing, the first time in the history of the journal. A photomontage from László Moholy-Nagy’s *Vision in Motion* (1947) depicting a man’s face with an ear juxtaposed over an eye is the frontispiece to the issue. The issue features seven essays, including one by McLuhan, that explore