Reading McLuhan Reading Ulysses

Alan Galey
University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

Background Marshall McLuhan was not only a prolific reader but also an expert annotator of his own books. Taking as a case study McLuhan's copies of James Joyce's Ulysses in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto, this article asks what we can learn about McLuhan's reading from close analysis of his own books.

Analysis The article begins with a discussion of McLuhan's media theory as “applied Joyce,” with particular reference to Ulysses, and then turns to an overview of the annotation techniques and strategies visible in McLuhan's copies of the novel.

Conclusion and implications The conclusion considers McLuhan's own books as hybrid artifacts that challenge us to rethink rigid distinctions between print and manuscript cultures.

Keywords Marshall McLuhan; James Joyce; Annotation; Media theory; Book history

RÉSUMÉ

Contexte Marshall McLuhan, en plus d’être un lecteur assidu, était un annotateur expert de ses propres livres. Par exemple, McLuhan a annoté des exemplaires d'Ulysse de James Joyce qui se trouvent maintenant dans la Bibliothèque de livres rares Thomas Fisher à l'Université de Toronto. Au moyen d'une étude de cas de ces exemplaires, l'article actuel examine ce qu'on peut apprendre à partir d'une analyse attentive du processus de lecture de McLuhan.

Analyse L'article commence par envisager la théorie des médias de McLuhan comme étant du « Joyce appliqué », mettant un accent particulier sur l'influence d'Ulysse sur le penseur. L'article continue par un examen des techniques et stratégies d'annotation utilisées par McLuhan dans ses exemplaires de ce roman.

Conclusions et implications La conclusion considère les livres de McLuhan comme des artefacts hybrides nous invitant à mettre en question les distinctions rigides entre culture de l'imprimé et culture du manuscrit.

Mots clés Marshall McLuhan; James Joyce; Annotation; Théorie des médias; Histoire du livre

“Applied Joyce”: McLuhan, Ulysses, and media

Marshall McLuhan's intellectual debts to James Joyce are well known, and he described his own methods of cultural and media analysis as “applied Joyce” (E. McLuhan, 1996,
p. 157; Theall & Theall, 1989, p. 46). The presence of McLuhan’s annotated books at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto, and the occasion of the collection’s addition to the UNESCO Memory of the World register (UNESCO, 2017), invite us to consider how McLuhan racked up those debts through the process of reading. Reading experiences are notoriously elusive as objects of study, despite or perhaps because of reading’s ubiquity in everyday life (Hammond, 2015; Lynch & Ender, 2018). Whatever else reading may be—mundane, mysterious, or revelatory—reading is also work, especially when undertaken by a scholar with interests as broad as McLuhan’s. The material signs of that intellectual labour may be recovered, even partially, when we have access to the books themselves, which is now the case with McLuhan’s personal library held at the Fisher library.

This article attempts to follow some of McLuhan’s footsteps as he made his way through Joyce’s 1922 novel *Ulysses*, in different iterations and in different copies. The purpose here is not to map McLuhan’s intellectual debts to Joyce in comprehensive detail—that has already been done by others, including McLuhan himself. As Donald Theall and Joan Theall (1989) describe, “Without our being conscious of it, Joyce has been a major contributor in shaping the ways we speak and think about communication. McLuhan borrowed, though he also changed and adapted, many of his insights from Joyce, who is far more central to McLuhan’s work than Innis or Mumford” (p. 58). McLuhan’s influence on the study of print culture is likewise well-trodden ground.

The more modest goal of this article is to scratch the surface of the rich veins of evidence that his books hold for understanding McLuhan as a reader at work. What can we learn by taking McLuhan and his books not only as guides or probes, but also as objects of inquiry themselves into the nature of mediation? What difference does it make not just to read McLuhan on Joyce, but to read McLuhan reading Joyce?

My own approach to the study of books as material artefacts originates not with McLuhan, for the most part, but rather with more recent scholarship at the intersection of book history and media studies. As a book historian, I tend to approach media studies in the spirit of scholars whose work reflects the turn toward historical particularity and the close study of specific examples, often through a materialist lens, in contemporary media studies. In fields like book history and bibliography, we study texts in their material forms as highly particularized cultural artefacts—and not just as printers and binders made them, but also as readers have remade them over time by annotating and otherwise modifying them. By 2019, the field’s interest has moved on from the book as an object of generalization (as it appears in much of McLuhan’s work) and has become more nuanced and contextual. Book historians today tend not to focus on the book as such, but rather on this book and her book and their book. Indeed, the pronouns have expanded to encompass readers and other agents as well as authors, printers, and publishers (Adams & Barker, 1993; Darnton, 1982, 2007; Squires & Murray, 2013). This approach has opened up new understandings of the history of books and the history of reading—which are related yet distinct fields—thanks to pioneers in the study of marginalia and other readers’ marks such as H.J. Jackson, Lisa Jardine, Anthony Grafton, and William Sherman. Their work and the work they have inspired tends to put the general and the particular into close conversation with each
other, much as Lisa Gitelman, Jonathan Sterne, and others have been doing in media
studies more broadly (e.g. Sterne, 2003; Gitelman, 2006).

So, while I am neither a McLuhanite nor a Joycean, and cannot claim expertise
with either writer's corpus, I find considerable sympathy with McLuhan as a non-spe-
cialist who nonetheless found inspiration in Joyce. As John Durham Peters notes else-
where in this special issue, McLuhan's gnomic style (at least in his published books)
and frequent ahistoricism can bewilder and frustrate many readers, and I readily admit
to being one of them. However, having ready access to McLuhan's own books at the
Fisher has introduced me to McLuhan the reader, a different and more humanized fig-
ure than McLuhan the pop culture icon. To observe McLuhan navigate a novel like
Ulysses—one of the most complex literary achievements of the twentieth century—is
to watch an expert reader at work on a challenge, exploring a literary labyrinth crafted
by someone else. Although McLuhan was, in many ways, influenced more by Joyce's
Finnegans Wake, such that Understanding Media and The Gutenberg Galaxy both carried
the working title “The Road to Finnegans Wake” during their composition (Theall &
Theall, 1989, p. 46), I focus on Ulysses for other reasons.

One reason is simply that I find the novel enthralling, and, in a happy Joycean co-
incidence, I happened to have reread it while visiting Dublin just before the Many
McLuhans symposium in September 2018, which occasioned this special issue. More
substantial reasons for focusing on Ulysses may be found in its qualities as a “news-
paper epic,” as it is dubbed in From Cliché to Archetype (McLuhan & Watson, 1970, p. 38;
cf. McLuhan, 1954, pp. 50–53). The novel's deceptively ordinary main plot—in which
the curious, intelligent, and sympathetic Leopold Bloom wanders around Dublin and
reflects on the ordinary and extraordinary details of everyday life in his encounters—
mirrors the reading experience Joyce appears to have crafted. Jeri Johnson dubs him
“Bloom the Curious” in her introduction to the Oxford edition: “[His] mind is replete
with the detritus of popular culture—clichés, aphorisms, advertising slogans, half-re-
membered bits of knowledge acquired at school or on Dublin's streets or from his
eclectic reading—and he calls on it constantly in his humble attempts to make sense
of the world around him” (in Joyce, 1993, p. xxi). Likewise, McLuhan in The Mechanical
Bride comments on the same tendency: “[Joyce] was a man who took an intelligent
interest in everybody and everything. ... To write his epic of the modern Ulysses he
studied all his life the ads, the comics, the pulps, popular speech” (McLuhan, 1951b,
p. 59; cf. Cavell, 2002, p. 35). Joyce was one of McLuhan's strongest early influences as
a critic of popular culture, but there is something of Bloom the Curious, specifically,
in McLuhan the annotator. Bloom notices; so does McLuhan. Bloom wanders, yet re-
members where he’s been and where he's going; so does McLuhan. The details of
Bloom's experiences stay with him, and register in his memory; so do McLuhan's, and
they also register on the pages, endpapers, and even dust jackets of his books.

Ulysses offers a rich imaginative workshop for media history as “applied Joyce,”
taking place as it does in a European metropolis at a time when the ubiquity of media
was especially apparent. As Johnson notes, “Ulysses itself is situated at the height of
the age of print, just at the beginning of the rise of those modern machines the tele-
phone, radio, and television which will once again promote the voice” (in Joyce, 1993,
pp. 884–885). Characters visit newspaper offices, receive telegrams, notice advertisements, hear and recall advertising jingles, consume and casually dispose of newsprint, and generally exhibit a shared sense of contemporaneous events, from concerts to funerals to horse races, within the same urban space. Bloom himself works in a field close to home for McLuhan: advertising. Bloom makes his living as an ad canvasser for The Freeman’s Journal, and he also reflects on advertising as a mode of communication. McLuhan takes notice of this and records a reminder on the dust jacket flap of his 1961 Random House edition of Ulysses. His penned note “Ad 720” points to a page in the Ithaca episode, where Bloom is described as meditating on the properties of some one sole unique advertisement to cause passers to stop in wonder, a poster novelty, with all extraneous accretions excluded, reduced to its simplest and most efficient terms not exceeding the span of casual vision and congruous with the velocity of modern life. (Joyce, 1961, p. 720)

In pencil, McLuhan sets off this paragraph with half square brackets, underlines the phrase “simplest and most efficient terms,” and writes the word “icon” in the margin; in pen, he underlines “unique advertisement.” Whether he made these marks in this order, and whether he made all of them together or years apart, and whether all of the marks are indeed his, are not things this book can tell us.

**Figures 1 & 2: McLuhan notes a reference to advertising on p. 720 and adds a pointer on the dust jacket flap**

![Image of dust jacket flap with annotation](source: Joyce, 1961. Manuscript notes reproduced by permission of the Estate of Marshall McLuhan.)
We do know that when McLuhan encountered this passage in his Random House edition, sometime after 1961 (the year of its publication), he likely would have recognized the passage as one he had quoted in his 1953 article “James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial” (1953, p. 81), one of his two sustained discussions of *Ulysses* (along with “Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press,” 1954). We cannot know whether McLuhan’s acts of annotation in his Random House edition lead in a straight causal line to his quotation of the passage again in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (published in the year after this edition of *Ulysses*), where he writes of Bloom the ad salesman as embodying the “Homeric world poised between the old sacral culture and the new profane or literate sensibility” (McLuhan, 1969, p. 94). But does it matter? Marginalia studies is forensic in its approach only in the service of bigger questions, and attempting to sort out the precise order of annotations often misses the point. Rather, the resonance between this annotated passage in *Ulysses* and its quotation in “James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial” and *The Gutenberg Galaxy* calls us to imagine McLuhan’s library as a workshop, with its unfinished thoughts and connections not made in print. For example, McLuhan does not mention the idea of the icon at this point in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*—perhaps this annotation in his new copy of *Ulysses* was made after the fact, marking a missed opportunity? (His copy of the 1968 Penguin *Ulysses*, which postdates *The Gutenberg Galaxy* by six years, contains only a quick vertical squiggle pencilled next to this point in the Ithaca episode, as if in passing recognition of words that resonated in earlier writing but need no further elucidation in this copy [Joyce, 1968, p. 641].)

McLuhan’s marginalia, like *Ulysses* itself, thus sets up an epistemic fantasy: the promise that one might understand McLuhan’s reading experiences with the same encyclopedic detail that Joyce apparently knew Dublin. But the marginalia frustrate that fantasy at the same time, leaving us searching for epiphanies amid fragmentary traces that add up only sometimes. Our purpose should not be to reconstruct McLuhan’s reading as though it were a crime scene, but rather to understand how his reading, annotating, thinking, and writing all happened together within the same intellectual workshop. What follows is an attempt to illustrate what we can learn about that workshop by following McLuhan on his textual travels through Joyce’s Dublin. As I tell my students when we visit the Fisher library and confront the aura of the rare book on the table before us, no book stands alone. Even as we delve into the particularity of the artefact in front of us, we must also see the ways it points beyond itself. This brief article can barely scratch the surface of McLuhan’s reading around Joyce’s novel, but that is exactly the point: McLuhan was a single reader but his library invites exploration by many other researchers yet to come. The next section offers an overview of McLuhan’s annotation practices and strategies, as found in his copies of *Ulysses*, and surveys the techniques McLuhan brought to his work as an active, annotating reader.

“Signatures of all things I am here to read”: McLuhan’s annotated copies of *Ulysses*

The McLuhan library at the Fisher contains four editions of *Ulysses*:

- the 1933 two-volume Odyssey Press edition (third impression);
- the 1948 French translation published by Gallimard in Paris;
• the 1961 Modern Library edition published by Random House;
• the 1968 Penguin edition.

In addition to these four editions, which may or may not be all of the copies McLuhan owned or used in his lifetime, the Fisher also holds several of his duplicated extracts from the novel and critical books on Joyce. The 1961 Random House edition of *Ulysses* was not necessarily McLuhan’s favourite or most important working copy—his articles on Joyce in the early 1950s predate its publication—but I will begin with it, somewhat arbitrarily, because this edition is a touchstone for Joyce studies. A detailed account of the editing of *Ulysses* is well beyond the scope of this article (see Johnson’s introduction to the 1993 Oxford edition as well as McGann, 1985; Mahaffey, 1991; and Groden, 2010, pp. 81–104), but some context will help to situate McLuhan’s copies within the broader history of *Ulysses* as a book that was edited, published, owned, and read in the twentieth century.

The 1961 Random House edition, when first published, was hoped to be the long-awaited corrected version that had eluded Joyceans since 1922, and yet was discovered to be rife with errors, prompting even more controversial *Ulysses* editing projects in the 1970s and 1980s (Johnson in Joyce, 1993, pp. xlix–lvi). The 1961 Random House edition is also notable for its most prominently advertised paratext: the text of *Ulysses* is prefaced by the 1933 U.S. District Court decision that overturned its classification as pornographic and made it legal to publish in the United States for the first time since

**Figure 3: McLuhan’s notes on the opening of Proteus**

1921 (this paratext first appeared in the 1934 Random House edition). The allegedly obscene Nausicaa episode was published in 1920 in the American literary journal *The Little Review*, which had been publishing the novel serially since 1918, and a New York court declared the novel obscene in February of the following year. Curiously, McLuhan seems not to have taken an interest in this particular paratext; at least he did not annotate it.

So, what did McLuhan do with this book? Let us begin with one of the most famous passages in *Ulysses*, the opening of the episode Proteus. Prior to Bloom's introduction into the story, Joyce places the secondary hero Stephen Dedalus (the novel's Telemachus to Bloom's Odysseus) at Sandymount Strand, contemplating the relation between knowledge and sensory experience—the “ineluctable modality of the visible” (Joyce, 1961, p. 37). Here in Figure 3 we can see McLuhan the annotating reader fully engaged with a passage so deeply relevant to his work, and so infamously difficult for many first-time readers. (See McLuhan, 1953, p. 90 for his discussion of the passage.)

As with the first example of the passage on advertising in the Ithaca episode (Figure 2), we can see clear thematic connections to McLuhan's interests as well as several different techniques of annotation present in the same space. To understand annotation as technique—as an application of readerly skill, not just spontaneous scribbling—it helps to organize instances into categories, as follows:

- **Underlining.** Joyce's sensory variant on his opening phrase, “ineluctable modality of the audible,” is underlined in pen, and other sense-related words, “diaphane” and “dark,” are underlined in pencil, along with “mallet” and “money.”

- **Glossing.** McLuhan's most prevalent and interesting notes tend to be glosses, where he draws a linguistic or thematic association out of a word or passage. In the upper-left, he teases the Latin word *lux* (light) out of “ineluctable.” Above, he appears to play with the sounds of the near-homonyms “knot,” “nut,” and “not”—possibly working out the punning possibilities in the first syllable of “snotgreen,” just below. (In his article “James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial,” McLuhan describes Joyce's puns as “crossroads of meaning in his communication network” [1953, p. 75].) Following the margin around clockwise, we see him write media/sensory glosses: “rear-projection”; “touch”; “visual time”; “visual space.”

- **Intertextual cross-references.** The breadth of McLuhan's reading is evident in the many references to other texts found in his notes, e.g., “Lear” written next to Joyce’s phrase “open your eyes,” likely a reference to the blinding of Gloucester and blindness as a theme in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. At many other points in *Ulysses*, a single name like Aquinas or Swinburne will be pencilled in the margin, whether in recognition of Joyce's highly associative thinking, or marking an association of McLuhan's own.

- **Intratextual cross-references.** Likewise, the depth of McLuhan's reading of *Ulysses* is evident in the many internal cross-references he creates, much in the spirit of Joyce's intricate self-referential details in the novel (about which more below). Here, the page reference to “560” in the top margin points to Stephen Dedalus's repetition of the phrase “ineluctable modality of the vis-
ible” hundreds of pages later, in the Circe episode, when he and Bloom visit Bella Cohen’s brothel. Next to the repeated line in Circe McLuhan adds a “37,” pointing reciprocally back to its first use in the opening of Proteus.

- **Abbreviations referring to McLuhan’s own concepts and works.** McLuhan had his own shorthand system of self-reference, here visible in the three stacked “EOM” (“Extensions of Man”) notes on the lower right, and the “c/m” and “c-m” notes to the left and bottom, which the Fisher library finding aid glosses as “Center Margin (i.e., fragmented)” and “Center Without Margin (i.e., inclusive),” respectively (see note 5 on the finding aid, which provides a list of McLuhan’s common abbreviations).

Even in this small space of a half-page, we can begin to catalogue a range of McLuhan’s annotation techniques, including his use of a systematic vocabulary to connect his reading to his thinking and writing.

These examples also call attention to McLuhan’s awareness of blank spaces in his books, and to his economic and often creative repurposing of them as writing space. The *mise-en-page* of the first edition of *Ulysses*, published in Paris in 1922 with Joyce’s involvement, is minimalist; there are no chapter numbers or episode titles, just white space and a page break to signal a transition (often accompanied by a modulation in prose style, as with the opening of Proteus). In these graphically quiet spaces between episodes, McLuhan frequently pauses to record notes that are more synoptic or comprehensive than his incidental glosses and cross-references. Another of McLuhan’s annotated copies of *Ulysses*, the 1933 two-volume Odyssey Press edition, shows McLuhan using the white space at the end of the Proteus episode (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: McLuhan’s notes in the blank space at the end of Proteus**

![McLuhan’s notes in the blank space at the end of Proteus](source: Joyce, 1933, vol. 1, p. 55. Manuscript notes reproduced by permission of the Estate of Marshall McLuhan.)
Again, we see McLuhan writing thematically associative notes: “Wheel = Despair = Buddhism” and a reference to a “word hoard” on p. 308 (in the Cyclops episode, where Joyce parodies Anglo-Saxon orality; the word-hoard in this case may be the list of births, deaths, and marriages read aloud by a pub-goer from a newspaper); “Man = Hope”; “These 2 symbols embrace cosmos”; “Eliot had this before / he wrote W.L. [probably Wyndham Lewis].” Yet this form of annotation is different from what we saw at the opening of Proteus in the 1961 Random House edition. Here McLuhan appears to step back and write closing thoughts on the episode as a whole, not just the text proximate to his notes.

In these examples we begin to see McLuhan’s engagement with his copies of *Ulysses* as material books. Joyce’s intricate system of interconnected literary, symbolic, spatial, and temporal threads is both intellectual and material: for readers, it takes the material form of a codex book that one holds in one’s hands (or books, in the case of the two-volume Odyssey Press edition; on *Ulysses* as a book, see McKenzie, 1999, pp. 57–61). As Peter Stallybrass and many others have pointed out, the codex, unlike the scroll, is a medium that enables and even encourages cross-referencing, resulting in what Stallybrass calls *discontinuous reading* (Stallybrass, 2002). McLuhan’s own discontinuous reading of *Ulysses* is evident in his detail-oriented noting of threads that connect moments in the novel, sometimes hundreds of pages apart.

*Ulysses* is a novel of details, and one of the most well-known is the date on which it takes place: June 16, 1904, now celebrated by Joyceans as Bloomsday. The opening flyleaf of the 1961 Random House copy (see Figure 5) notes this date (in Eric McLuhan’s hand) under Marshall’s name in pen and also records two page references: to page 711 (in Eric’s hand) and to page 396 (in Marshall’s).

![Figure 5: The date of the novel's events confirmed and cross-referenced in Eric's and Marshall's hands](source: Joyce, 1961. Manuscript notes reproduced by permission of the Estate of Marshall McLuhan.)

Both of these internal references point to pages where Joyce specifies the day’s date, and page 711 is particularly interesting, not least because it contains Bloom’s reckoning-up of the day’s events in terms of financial transactions. Not unlike modern surveillance by means of credit card transactions and mobile apps, the reckoning enables the attentive reader to review this day in the life of Leopold Bloom as a sequence of monetary events—though the list includes some fabricated entries to conceal Bloom’s visit to Bella Cohen’s brothel. In the same spirit of list-making, McLuhan here uses the margin as a hub for radial cross-references to other pages that mention the date (see Figure 6).
The marginal notes here suggest the kind of readerly navigation associated with the codex, which one may read with fingers stuck into multiple places in the book (as mine were as I checked McLuhan's references in his copy). It is a healthy reminder that the sequentiality of reading in print can be overstated. On these pages we can see two readers, Marshall and Eric, collating the same detail scattered non-sequentially among the book's many pages, and mapping some small part of the labyrinth of *Ulysses* as an extraordinary document of an ordinary day.

If *Ulysses* can be likened to a labyrinth, Joyce himself provided a partial map in the form of a schema that he expressed as a table of correspondences between each of the novel's episodes and various other categories, ranging from the concrete to the abstract. These tables are the primary authority for the episode titles (Proteus, Nausicaa, Ithaca, and so on), but they exist in two partly conflicting versions that Joyce gave to different individuals in his lifetime. One was given by Joyce to Carlo Linati in 1920, and another, apparently a revision, made its way into the first major work of *Ulysses* criticism, published in 1930 by Stuart Gilbert (Johnson in Joyce, 1993, p. xv)—a copy of which is included in McLuhan's library. The Linati and Gilbert schemata, as they came to be known, agree on some points and disagree on others, but each offers a symbolic plan for the novel as a whole, mapping episodes to correspondences. For example, in the Gilbert schema the Proteus episode has a Homeric correspondence (the character Proteus from the *Odyssey*), a scene (Sandymount Strand), an hour (11:00 a.m.), an art (philology), a symbol (the tide), and a technic (monologue, by a male speaker). The Linati schema has slightly different categories and values, but the
idea of a schema is the same. Included among the various papers that came with McLuhan's copies of Ulysses are reproductions of the schemata. With his two 1933 Odyssey Press volumes, he went so far as to interleave the openings of episodes with slips of paper indicating the Gilbert schema's categories and values for the episode he was about to read (see Figure 7).6

These slips and the other ephemeral documents that came with McLuhan's library are reminders that readers' modifications of books are not limited to marginalia. Even an annotated book is not necessarily a self-contained object, and in this case,
McLuhan’s interleaved Odyssey Press volumes demonstrate that reading often happens within a material context of supporting objects, where print and manuscript materials form a system. Archives and rare book libraries can capture those systems in part, but not in their entirety. In this case, McLuhan’s awareness of Joyce’s symbolic system, as expressed in the Gilbert and Linati schemata, resulted in a makeshift book-modification system of his own.

Figure 8: McLuhan’s manuscript index on the back flyleaf and endpaper

Continuing on the trajectory of systematic annotation—and of annotation that exploits the physical form of the codex book, not just the blankness of margins—we arrive at McLuhan’s prolific use of flyleaves and endpapers. In these blank spaces, McLuhan does some of his most focused and systematic annotation in connection with the books themselves, and many of his books contain lists of references like the one shown in Figure 8. Here, McLuhan uses the endpapers to list references pointing back to a relatively narrow range of pages, beginning with page 427, running down the endpaper to page 493, then turning back to the flyleaf to continue with fairly regular references up to page 554, then jumping forward to page 656 and page 720 (the last being a reference to the advertising shown in Figure 2). Other references and notes are scattered here and there, but for the most part McLuhan’s customized index consists of pairings of page references with brief summaries or reminders.

As the detail of Figure 8 shows, we can run down a list of things that McLuhan noticed in his reading over a specific span of pages in the Circe episode—things important enough to add to a running list at the back of his book. In this case, his endpaper index seems to be thematically focused on clothing references, for the most part. A sample is visible in the Figure 8 detail: beginning with page 436, he notes “clothes,” “metamorph,” “white duck,” “Bloom in purple Nap[oleon] hat,” “house jacket,” “interfered with my clothing,” “lascar’s vest,” “in court dress—gals ...,” “Rumbold ... Jerkin,” and so on. A more knowledgeable McLuhan scholar might be able to connect

Detail of Figure 8
Figure 9: Brown paper wrapper created for McLuhan's copy of vol. 1 of the 1933 Odyssey Press Ulysses

Source: Joyce, 1933. Manuscript notes reproduced by permission of the Estate of Marshall McLuhan.
this assembly of clothing references to McLuhan’s published work, but in any case we
can see him using the annotation technique of list-making to bring several connected
references together in a single visual field. Researchers do this all the time, and digital
technologies such as annotatable PDF files make it even easier to compile lists of in-
ternal references in the course of reading, yet it is interesting that McLuhan used the
physical book itself to record his list. Flyleaves and endpapers are a book’s boundary
zones, and yet McLuhan felt the need to include these notes within the physical com-
pass of the book, and not in separate notebooks. He appears to have done this habitu-
al. My final example is my favourite instance of McLuhan the book-customizer, and
takes the form of brown paper wrappers that McLuhan apparently fashioned as
makeshift dust jackets for his two volumes of the 1933 Odyssey Press edition (see
Figures 9 and 10). Again, as the detail of Figure 9 shows, McLuhan has created a list of
references that functions as an index. The subjects McLuhan notes on the inside back
flap of his homemade dust jacket are illuminating but not surprising: “Aquinas” (two
page references); “in the Library” (a page range); “Gregory and Yeats etc” (two page
references); “Rome – Cloaca”; “Sinn Fein”; and “Hamlet” (seven page references).
The “Hamlet” entry shows McLuhan constructing an index with more than a single
pointer, such that he could use the note to read discontinuously for Joyce’s numerous
references to Shakespeare’s most famous character.

McLuhan may have created these dust jackets as writing surfaces, especially for
annotations that do not merely record a passing thought in the moment, but function
as a system to lead him back to patterned readings of Ulysses. These wrappers would
also have served to protect the book: the 1933 Odyssey Press edition has ordinary paperback covers, similar to the Penguin paperbacks that would become popular as rail-way-commuter reading in the same decade (McCleery, 2007), and tougher parcel paper would be good protection for, say, a university student's working copy. I do not know when McLuhan acquired his Odyssey Press *Ulysses*, or whether it was a new book at the time, but if it was, then there is a good chance McLuhan owned it during his formative years at Cambridge University.8 If that is true, then McLuhan the Cambridge student was reading a banned book, at least until 1936, when its prohibition was relaxed in England (Vanderham, 1998), in which case his brown paper wrappers may have served a more clandestine purpose.9 In any case, the wrappers are a reminder that McLuhan's books were working objects that presumably travelled with him, thrust into pockets and bookbags, and circulated in a world of everyday uses, however exceptional or supposedly dangerous the novel may have been as literature. Whatever his reasons, there is something appealing about the thought of McLuhan himself sitting down to create these dust jackets, with brown parcel paper and scissors in hand, and thereby joining the material continuum that artefacts like books can create between readers over distance and time.
“Longest way round is the shortest way home”: McLuhan between manuscript and print

McLuhan’s manuscript annotations in *Ulysses* and other books sometimes mark a path leading from his workshop back into his published work, as we saw in the opening example of the advertising passage from *Ithaca* quoted in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. But marginal glossing as a rhetorical technique in printed works is something else that McLuhan learned from Joyce; for example, Donald Theall suggests that *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968) owes its marginalia and glosses to the influence of the “Triv and Quad” section’s page layout in *Finnegans Wake* (Theall, 2001, p. 281n16). That example, like McLuhan’s evoking of the *mise-en-page* of newspapers and magazines in his first book, *The Mechanical Bride*, reflects his career-long sensitivity to medium and deployment of his own works as artefacts of print culture. Quoting McLuhan’s most famous aphorism at this point might seem apt or merely predictable; perhaps the bibliographer D.F. McKenzie says it better for my purposes when he asserts that “forms effect meaning” (1998, p. 13).

What medium, then, are McLuhan’s copies of *Ulysses*? Obviously they are printed books from the mid-twentieth century, but with their marginalia, copied extracts, and inserted slips, they are no longer just that. As we have seen, McLuhan reshaped the material forms of his reading by modifying books with his own marginalia and ephemeral paratexts, like the Gilbert schema slips inserted into his Odyssey Press *Ulysses*. In the books he owned, we can see McLuhan the annotating reader participating in something that takes us beyond the dichotomy of manuscript culture versus print culture that appears in many of his writings, as well as those of associated figures such as Elizabeth Eisenstein and Walter Ong. More recent scholars in the history of the book have shown how the supposed fixity of print was often more aspiration than fact (Gillespie, 2007; Johns, 1998; McKitterick, 2003); how annotating readers understood their own manuscript corrections to be completing the manufacture of printed books (McKitterick, 2003; McLeod, 1991; Sherman, 2008); and how print often functions as an incitement to written communication, not a replacement for it (Gitelman, 2014; Stallybrass, 2008). In other words, manuscript writing has had a long and thriving existence alongside print—sometimes literally, in the margins of annotated books. McLuhan’s library reveals that for him, reading, thinking, and writing went together, which turned his books into hybrid artefacts that mixed manuscript and print.

For example, the endpapers of McLuhan’s Odyssey Press volumes show him to be a practitioner of the ancient method of commonplacing: the copying of extracts from different sources into a single book, ordered by their thematic connections. Commonplacing is a readerly technique whose history spans the eras of manuscript and print in the West, and whose practice since the early modern period likewise spans the media of manuscript writing and printed books (Allan, 2010; Blair, 2010; Estill, 2014; McDowell, 2017; Moss, 1996). Beginning on the recto flyleaf facing the last page of the novel, McLuhan copies extracts of *Ulysses* criticism from Wyndham Lewis (see Figure 11), F.O. Matthiessen, T.S. Eliot, and Bonamy Dobrée, with each of their names noted at the ends of the passages (but no further citation details). As with his endpaper index in his 1961 Random House edition, McLuhan evidently thought these ex-
tracts integral enough to his understanding that they belonged between the covers of *Ulysses*, not just in a separate notebook. His use of endpapers in the two editions makes for an interesting contrast, as well: the younger McLuhan, reading his Odyssey Press edition in the 1930s (if my guess about the chronology is correct), compiled critically important extracts from the work of others; the older McLuhan, reading his Random House edition in the 1960s, instead made an index of his own noted passages, leading him not outward to the critical conversation but inward, back into Joyce’s novel.

It is worth remembering, too, that commonplacing was not simply the act of copying; it was a method of reading and of situating oneself as a reader in a world of texts. Commonplacing was as much about making books of extracts, which book historians...
might delightedly unearth centuries later, as it was about thinking systematically and synoptically as one read. A commonplacing reader regarded the world as commonplaceable. Perception, memory, writing, and information management worked together in the mind, hands, and books of a skilled commonplacing reader. It was *technē* in the Greek root’s sense of being simultaneously an externalized technology and internalized technique. How much of this entered McLuhan’s experience we cannot know with certainty from his annotations, but that kind of reckoning with the limits of evidence has been one of the purposes of this article.

Spending time with McLuhan’s annotated books also brings about—for this reader, at least—a reckoning with the limits of the language that communications studies has inherited from McLuhan and others in his tradition. Paradoxically, terms like *print*, *writing*, and especially the all-too-reductive modifier *Gutenberg* become more particularized in the presence of McLuhan’s paper workshop, yet also less easy to deploy in the broad, generalizing manner of much of McLuhan’s own writing. It is an interesting experience to go to the Fisher library, call up McLuhan’s annotated books, and set them beside copies of *The Medium Is the Massage* (2001) or *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968)—both being McLuhan’s experiments in book design with Jerome Agel and Quentin Fiore. How far does a concept like *print culture* get us with these books? As Marc Leverette (2007) points out, the lack of new writing by McLuhan in *Massage* is less important than its form, given that the book’s design “forced its readers into a new kind of reading experience: tactility over visuality, image over word, manifestos over erudition, erudition over manifestos” (pp. 350–351). Even the reprint-edness of McLuhan’s words in this book rehearses a core tenet of print culture: mechanical reproducibility. *Massage* and *Global Village*, like *Mechanical Bride* before them, thus stand as the most well-known examples of McLuhan’s (and his collaborators’) provocative reconfiguration of an information environment in book form. Readers are presented with print that wants to be television.

Yet, when set beside them, McLuhan’s own copies of *Ulysses* quietly exceed categories like *print* or even *book*. Their systematic manuscript notes, their inserted slips of paper and makeshift bookmarks, and their general remaking by McLuhan into new objects, beyond their original manufacture as mass-produced commodities, all point to McLuhan himself as an intellectual labourer within a hybrid, multilayered media environment. (Presumably that environment included typewriting and voice recording as well, not to mention the labours of other people.) The study of communication, which has tended to focus on mass media, all too often overlooks the acts of communication that individuals attempt with their past and future selves. McLuhan’s annotated books are replete with such attempts, just as Joyce’s novel depicts the inevitability of memory within the fabric of everyday experience. McLuhan’s copies of *Ulysses* may have begun their manufactured lives as instances of print as a mass medium, but their most useful lessons may be at the level of the personal, the particular, and the material. At this level, the impulse to categorize and generalize may be less rewarding than the impulse to look closer.

McLuhan’s annotations at the end of his Odyssey Press *Ulysses* also happen to capture an important trait of marginalia studies and Joyce’s novel alike, and reward a
closer look. Here, below the most famous ending in all of twentieth-century literature (“yes I said yes I will Yes.”) appears Joyce’s own small addition of autobiographical metadata (“Trieste–Zurich–Paris, 1914–1921”; a reminder that the novel was written in exile), and below that Odyssey Press’s thoroughly unnecessary printed addition of “THE END.”

As if in contradiction of the closure imposed by this printed addition, McLuhan’s insistent page reference back to page 792 stands as a reminder that “THE END” is never the end. Whatever the printer may print, the reader gets the last word (or number), and here McLuhan has left an invitation to go back into the novel, and to keep exploring the labyrinth. In the same spirit, McLuhan’s library—whose books are more than just print—now sits waiting to be explored by other readers. While its arrival at the Fisher library is a beginning, not an ending, I trust that the books, like Leopold Bloom himself, have arrived somewhere they can call home.

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**Notes**

1. References to Joyce are scattered throughout Mc Luhan’s work; his more sustained discussions can be found in “Joyce, Aquinas, and the Poetic Process” (1951a), “James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial” (1953), and “Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press” (1954) as well as his short reviews of works of Joyce scholarship in the journal *Renascence*. See also Donald Theall and Joan Theall, “Marshall McLuhan and James Joyce: Beyond Media” (1989); Eric McLuhan, “Joyce and McLuhan” (1996); Richard Cavell, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (2002); and Marc Leverette, “Mutatis Mutandis: Writing (after Derrida [after McLuhan {after Joyce}])” (2007).

3. Cf. McLuhan’s comment on icons in *Understanding Media*, at the beginning of the section on advertising: “[C]ommercial artists have tended to develop the ad into an icon, and icons are not specialist fragments or aspects but unified and compressed images of complex kind. They focus a large region of experience in tiny compass” (1964, p. 201).

4. The detail of Figure 1 also shows that McLuhan made a note pointing to the discussion of John F. Taylor’s speech on the revival of the Irish language in the Aeolus episode. McLuhan discusses this speech in two of his articles on Joyce, in both cases noting that the speech is one of only two passages from his works that Joyce ever recorded for gramophone in his own voice (McLuhan, 1953, pp. 82–83; 1954, p. 53).

5. The Fisher library offers detailed finding aids for McLuhan’s books and the various manuscript and ephemeral materials found within them. (See the Fisher’s website at https://fisher.library.utoronto.ca, and look under Resources / A–Z Index – Manuscript Finding Aids / McLuhan, Marshall.) These finding aids were developed by Andrew McLuhan and Fisher librarian Jason Nisenson; they include a guide to the abbreviations and multiple hands—those of Marshall and Eric McLuhan—which appear in many of the books. See also Andrew McLuhan’s contribution to this special issue and his blog, Inscriptorium, https://inscriptorium.wordpress.com.


7. On the facing set of flyleaves that precede the ones shown in Figure 8, McLuhan begins another index on the recto, beginning with a reference on page 494 and ending on page 598. Given that this index covers more or less the same page range as the one on the next pages, but does not appear to have the same thematic focus on clothing, it is likely that these different indexes were created in different passes through the same parts of the novel. This is further supported by the notes on the facing verso flyleaf, which jump around in their page references, and are written in a combination of pencil and different inks.

8. The imprint on McLuhan’s copy claims it is the second impression, published in 1933, but it is more likely the mislabelled third impression released that year (Johnson in Joyce, 1993). In any case, it is less likely that McLuhan purchased the book during the brief interval between its publication and his move from Canada to Cambridge in 1934, given that Odyssey Press editions were not intended for sale in Canada, where *Ulysses* remained a banned work until 1949. Vanderham (1998) notes Canada’s dubious distinction of being the most belated country in lifting its ban on the novel.

9. The Odyssey Press was an imprint of the Albatross Press, based in Germany, which, according to Michele Troy (2017), “made its name not in the trade of mild classics but in edgy, modern British and American books” (p. 5). The Odyssey Press imprint was created solely to reprint *Ulysses* and, later, D.H. Lawrence’s novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, both banned in the United States and England; the ad hoc Odyssey imprint was a strategy to facilitate marketing of the book in England and to avoid lawsuits (McCleery, 2006. I cannot say with certainty whether a Cambridge student in the mid-1930s would have felt a need to conceal his reading of *Ulysses*. However, just a few years prior in 1926, McLuhan’s teacher F.R. Leavis was given stern warnings by the Cambridge police and the university’s vice-chancellor when he attempted to import a copy of *Ulysses* for his course Modern Problems in Criticism (Vanderham, 1998).

**Website**

Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library: https://fisher.library.utoronto.ca/

**References**


