



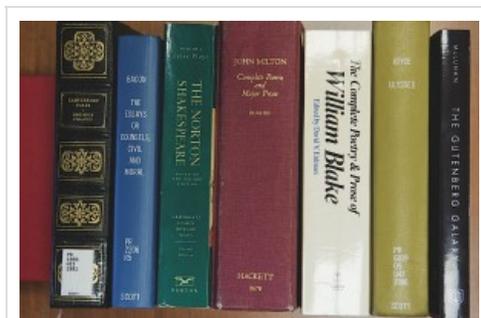
CONTACT VOLUNTEERS FAQ ADVERTISING CLASSIFIEDS EXCALIBUR BLOGS

Generation Y's Gutenberg galaxy

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Last week's launch of the new edition of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* brought the McLuhan classic to Generation Y. Speakers came from around Toronto and Canada to celebrate the book's 50th anniversary at the Gladstone Hotel.



York professor Dominique Scheffel-Dunard says this generation must study the past to create the future.

PIPPIN LEE

Published in 1962, Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* was incredibly successful and won the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction. In it, McLuhan argued that the invention of moveable type and the printing press transformed human consciousness. The printing press changed the way we thought about ourselves and our communities as we shifted from an oral tradition to a print one.

McLuhan's children attended the event and talked about their memories around the book. They brought artefacts from McLuhan's life and talked about what it was like to have an intellectual giant as a father. They also thanked U of T Press for involving the McLuhan estate in every step of the production process.

The executor of the McLuhan estate, Michael McLuhan, read a letter from [Elena Lamberti](#), an essayist for the new edition absent from the launch. She teaches American and Canadian literature at Italy's University of Bologna.

"*The Gutenberg Galaxy* is not only a classic of media studies," Lamberti wrote, "but also a literary classic, bearing witness to the fundamental fact that literature matters and it always will."

Lamberti was glad that the 50th anniversary was celebrated with a book.

"Congratulations for not having turned *The Gutenberg Galaxy* into one of the many digital books with hyperlinks and multimedia." Not that she is against digital books and hypertext, she says, "but in the case of the *Galaxy*, it would have led to an artificial and useless extension." Lamberti argues McLuhan's mosaic approach of aphorisms and short essays works much better on the page than any other technology.

Michael then cheekily proceeded to inform the audience that the book was available as a digital download.

Other luminaries including CBC Radio's Jesse Hirsh and poet George Elliott Clarke from U of T spoke throughout the night. Natalie Kertes, program coordinator at [Diaspora Dialogues](#), stood out. At 25 she was the youngest speaker of the night.

"Our generation is uniquely positioned to interpret McLuhan's work, particularly the *Galaxy*, because it points to our moment in time," she says. "We belong to this cross over generation when it comes to media and technology."

Kertes remembers when the Internet was still astounding. "I remember the sound of dial-up," she laughs.

"Because the information technology came of age at the same time as me," Kertes goes on, "I'm also part of a generation that relies on it entirely. It's very much an extension of us."

Our generation takes it for granted, she says, except when we're not picking at its parts like tonight.

Kertes was asked to break down a McLuhan aphorism from *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: "Schizophrenia may be a necessary consequence of literacy." When she showed the aphorism to her twenty-something friends she realized what's changed since the 1960s.

"We don't define literacy the same way anymore. It's not about how we navigate the printed word," she says. Instead, it's about how we navigate technology.

"If we go back to when McLuhan was writing this, when he was referring to the printed word, it meant it eliminated the need for public address or social gathering to spread information," Kertes explains.

Today, she claims, we don't need any human contact. "To my generation, that's totally normal," Kertes says. When we say it out loud it's not normal, she clarifies—but it's normal in our everyday lives. "We don't need any community. We don't need human contact. We've got this community inside our heads."

Kertes was curious about what then next generation thinks. She presented some of McLuhan's aphorisms to her 12-year-old cousin.

"She couldn't really talk about or define the words 'media', or 'technology', or 'medium'," Kertes said. She thought this was understandable. At the end of the conversation however, she mentioned she had a problem with her Blackberry. Without even looking at it, her cousin explained how to fix it, clearly and concisely.

"This is the next wave," Kertes argues. "Where [the next generation] can break down and explain what was wrong with my piece of technology but [can't] talk

about the idea behind it.”

Maybe that's because it might not be necessary. “The generation after [us] will never remember a time in their home without access to information technology,” Kertes says. “Maybe they're not going to be able to talk about, or think about it, but they probably won't have to.”

Dominique Scheffel-Dunand commented on Kertes' talk during the end of the ceremony. She is the director of the McLuhan Program for Culture and Technology and teaches linguistics in York's French studies department. Her new essay is one of three included in the new edition.

The younger generation, she urged, should remember McLuhan and read him—not only for his knowledge of what was coming, but for his knowledge of the past.

“What is missing in the young generation is that deep knowledge of what comes before,” Dr. Scheffel-Dunand says. “McLuhan had that amazing in-depth knowledge of what came before the 20th century. He could really play with the languages of the various centuries and their art forms.”

This generation is living the hybrid moment, she says. “Like the Renaissance fool, they are so aware of the two worlds and can be creative about them.” It's important to know what comes before to understand the present, she says, but also to be creative in the future.

Dr. Scheffel-Dunand hopes this generation is inspired by Marshall McLuhan and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. “They can still go back in time,” she says. By doing so, she hopes Generation Y will be proud of belonging to an intensely creative period of history.