

## Editor's Note

THE theme of the Media Ecology Association's 2005 convention drew upon one of media ecology's most fundamental ideas. Introduced through the seminal work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, "the biases of media" refers to the view that all media are embodied with innate tendencies. This is not to say that a particular medium *determines* specific outcomes. Rather, the phrase suggests that a given medium will inevitably function as an agent of certain developments while precluding others. For example, the medium you probably used to access the words you are now reading, the Internet, tacitly encourages the reader in search of information or knowledge to construct his or her own "text" by clicking from website to website, absorbing snippets of material from each of them along the way. On the other hand, the printed book implicitly invites the reader to digest a text, generally presented in one "voice," in a linear manner. Of course, neither activity is ensured—one could choose to read an article posted on a media company website from beginning to end, for instance, or skim through pages while hopping from book to book in a library or bookstore. Yet it is more *likely* that readers will, to a greater extent, use the Internet non-linearly than they will ink-printed texts. We can confidently make this prediction by evaluating the biases of each medium.

But this illustration is utterly rudimentary to scholars of media ecology. Fortunately, the authors of the papers in these e-published proceedings enable us to profoundly expand our understanding of the biases of media by offering insightful analyses of a set of topics that cover a broad spectrum while maintaining relevance to the field. Robert K. Blechman, for instance, explores the metaphor of the *heart* and its relationship to the media environment. Although the symbolic meaning of the heart has altered over time, certain core beliefs, he explains, have remained consistent, albeit through different metaphorical configurations.

While Blechman's work reinforces several guiding assumptions held by media ecologists, Twyla Gibson challenges one of their well-established positions. In "Epilogue to Plato," she argues that Plato's writings do not, as Eric Havelock and other foundational scholars of media ecology have claimed, represent a dramatic shift from orality to literacy in ancient Greece. Instead, through a comparative analysis of two of Plato's dialogues, she contends that the great philosopher's work signifies a translation of the oral tradition into written texts; indeed, it is our own print bias that prevents us from seeing a prolonged period of transition in which primary orality and literacy existed side by side. The next two papers center on a key figure in the media ecology pantheon, a person who fully characterized the implications of a shift from orality to literacy through his examination of their attendant biases. Sara van den Berg gives a personal account of the ways in which the legacy of Walter J. Ong is being preserved at Saint Louis University. Through conferences, archives, and the development of the Walter J. Ong Center, scholars will have the opportunity to research and elaborate on the topics, issues, and ideas that Ong spent his life investigating. Paul A. Soukup, S.J., probes the influences that Ong has had on media ecologists by presenting a series of themes that capture the essence of his thought and his emphasis on *method* rather than *system*.

The last four essays, three of them award winners, reveal how media ecology has the capacity to illuminate areas that are wide ranging in their scope. Faye Ran applies a media ecological perspective to the arts, explaining that as technologies change, so too do

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conceptions of time and space, resulting in different forms of art. As a case in point, she casts her lens on the emergence of *installation art* and how its creation was facilitated by recent technological innovations. Michael Zimmer (co-winner of the 2005 MEA Convention Linda Elson Scholar Award for Top Student Paper) seeks to expand media ecology's reach and demonstrate its compatibility with the field of *value sensitive design*. While media ecology has traditionally focused on intellectual, emotional, temporal, spatial, political, social, metaphysical, content, and, ultimately, epistemological biases, value sensitive design considers how media and information technologies also possess certain *ethical* and *value* biases. He declares that the two endeavors would mutually benefit by pairing with each other. Cuthbert F. Alexander (also a co-winner of the 2005 Linda Elson Scholar Award) proposes that modern societies need to reestablish the salience of the hero. Like several other media ecologists, he maintains that electronic media have transformed the hero into a mere celebrity. Yet, he posits, community journalism, rooted in print, can help to restore "true" heroes as symbols of inspiration and available models that people can choose to emulate. Finally, Ellen Rose (winner of the 2005 MEA Convention Top Paper Award) exposes the Western bias of media ecology, that is, the tendency of the field to mostly examine only modes of communication in the Western world, and convincingly demonstrates, through a case study of Bhutan, how media ecology can also be put to advantageous use in describing, predicting, and controlling media effects in a non-Western cultural context.

Lance Strate's presidential address sets the tone for the eight essays to follow. Together, they offer a representative sample of the invigorating inquiry, discussion, and debate that transpired at the 6<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the Media Ecology Association. I hope they provide insights you can incorporate into your own investigations and, if you are not already planning on joining us, inspire you to attend future conventions.

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