

5th Annual MEA Convention

June 10-13, 2004

Media Environments and the Liberal Arts

Sponsored by

The Department of Communication and

The William A. Kern Professor in Communications

College of Liberal Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology

Sue Barnes is planning an exciting convention which will be very different from earlier MEA Conventions. There will be tours of the Rochester area, sections on video gaming, and other unique attractions.

“This conference explores the various ways in which past, present and emerging media environments influence human life in general, and its self-examination via the liberal arts disciplines. These include the subjects of inquiry and the way research is conducted, changes in human and mass communication, policy-making and evaluation, individual expression and representation, formation and change in cultural attitudes, media representations of natural environments, emerging digital expression (hyperfiction, digital poetry, electronic music), and the social impact of media.”

You are invited to submit papers, panels, workshop proposals, and short film and video works related to the

conference theme. Complete papers may be entered for the Top Paper Award or the Linda Elson Scholarship Award (Top Student Paper). Please indicate entry on submissions.

Submission deadline December 1, 2003

Send submission to: Dr. Sue Barnes
Department of Communication
College of Liberal Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology
92 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, New York 14623-5604
(585) 475-4695 or (585) 475-6649
email: sbbgpt@rit.edu

Conference Blog:

www.rit.edu/~sbbgpt/mea-rit/

The latest conference information is being posted on the MEA Website, which also carries maps to get to RIT. MEA may co-sponsor a bus from New York City. So keep checking the Website for the latest developments.

Nominations for 2004 MEA Awards

Nominations for the MEA Awards are due by Dec. 1, 2003. See MEA Website for details. Entries should be sent to Lance Strate, Dept. of Communication & Media Studies, Fordham University, Bronx, NY 10458-9993.

In Medias Res is a benefit for MEA members. Inquiries about and/or contributions to this newsletter should be addressed directly to its Editor. The images used herein were obtained from IMSI's MasterClips (c) Collection, 75 Rowland Way, Novato, CA 94945. Convention photos (c) 2002 by Robert Francos. This newsletter was supported by a generous grant from Thomas Bohn, former Dean of the Park School of Communications, Ithaca College.

Editor

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Newsletter Editor Back

Newsletter editor Ray Gozzi spent the first part of September 2003, in the hospital, having an aneurysm capped. This put a lot of his life on hold, including this newsletter. He is now out and about, walking freely but slowly around his neighborhood. Thanks for all the cards and calls from MEA folks.

President's Message

Cycles

**Lance Strate, Fordham University
Walter Ong's Death**

Media ecologists everywhere mourned the passing of Walter Jackson Ong, SJ on August 12th, 2003. Walter Ong was one of the great intellectuals of the 20th century, an outstanding and inspiring scholar whose influence is felt in dozens of disciplines. He was a great thinker, a great writer, a great teacher (University Professor Emeritus at Saint Louis University), and a great leader (past president of the Modern Language Association). Moreover, he was a great Jesuit, and if I may take a page from Thomas Cahill, I would characterize Ong as one of the *gifts of the Jesuits*, for he embodied and exemplified the illustrious intellectual tradition of the Society of Jesus. In losing Father Ong, we have lost one of media ecology's seminal scholars.

I know from my correspondence with him that he was very much encouraged by the founding of the Media Ecology Association, by our determination to carry on and extend the work that he pioneered. Even though infirmity kept him from traveling to meet with us, he was very much involved with the MEA, serving on the editorial board of our journal, *Explorations in Media Ecology*, and writing the lead article for our first issue. In all our communications, he never referred to the MEA as *it*, *they*, or *you*, but as *we* and *us*. He was one of our own, and we are diminished by the *absence of the word*.

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4th Convention, 2003

While our cup is not full, we still celebrate our cycles of renewal. (cont. p 3.)

President's Message, Continued

Our Fourth Annual Convention, hosted by Hofstra University on June 5th-8th, was a great success, and we are all deeply grateful to convention coordinators Susan Drucker and Barbara Kelly, and Dean George Back for their hospitality and hard work. James W. Carey delivered a brilliant keynote address, and we enjoyed marvelous featured presentations from Camille Paglia, Leonard Shlain, and Marvin Kitman.

This was the first year that the MEA gave out Top Paper Awards, due to the efforts of Vice-President Casey Man Kong Lum, and our congratulations go out to Art Hunt III, winner of the Top Paper Award, and to Lisa Hanson, winner of the Top Student Paper Award, which makes her our first Linda Elson Scholar. The student award is named in memory of Linda Elson, a media ecology scholar who passed away on November 15, 2001.

Our Fifth Annual Convention will be held on **June 10-13th in Rochester, New York**, hosted by the Rochester Institute of Technology, and coordinated by Sue Barnes. **I hope you all will make every effort to attend and participate** in an event that provides renewal both for our organization and for its members.

* * * * *
MEA 5th Anniversary Celebration

We marked another milestone on September 4th, 2003, when the MEA

celebrated the fifth anniversary of its founding with a special event at Fordham University. We began the evening with a tribute to Walter Ong, and it was only fitting that his memorial was followed by a panel discussion on media and religion, featuring Cheryl Anne Casey, Paul Levinson, Douglas Rushkoff, and Read Mercer Schuchardt. We then were treated to a short video by Margot Hardenbergh and Michael Grabowski, "And Now This: A Media Ecology Retrospective." Neil Postman was the guest of honor at the event, and he was presented with a plaque as a founder of the field by the MEA's founding members, Sue Barnes, Thom Gencarelli, Paul Levinson, Casey Man Kong Lum, and myself. Special thanks go out to Douglas Rushkoff, Janet Sternberg, Thom Gencarelli, and Paul Levinson for helping to make our fifth birthday party possible. In the future, we plan to hold more such events in a variety of locales.

* * * * *

It is a sign of the MEA's coming of age as a scholarly organization and as a community that we are becoming increasingly more cognizant of our seasons and our cycles of life and renewal. Ecclesiastes tells us, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven." This is media ecology's time, as a discipline, and the MEA's time, as a society.

Book Publication by Katherine Fry, Dept. of Tv& Radio, Brooklyn College, CUNY
"I've just published a book in the Media Ecology Series through Hampton Press titled **"Constructing the Heartland: Television News and Natural Disaster."**

>> The book uses the Great Midwest Flood of 1993 as a case study to examine how television news reports natural disaster. I combine ideas from media ecology, television aesthetics, cultural geography and critical theory to examine how we understand nature and place via television's coverage of natural disaster."

MEDIATING THE MUSE

A COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH TO MUSIC, MEDIA, AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Robert Albrecht

Selection 1

During a seventeen-month period in 1988-90, I conducted a field project in a small town in Brazil called Abadiânia. This remote town in the interior of Brazil has

only had access to electrical power lines since the 1960s and even at the time of my study, only 30 percent of the rural homes had access to electrical current. The result was an ethnography that described the musical life as it is currently experienced within the town combined with an oral history that sought to reveal the multiple layers of change as they were experienced by different generations over time. The

main goal of the study was to provide an ethnographic description of musical change in a small town community in Brazil, focusing not on the content of music but on the social experience of it. The principal objective was to clarify the effects that modern technological forms of communication were having upon the ways in which music had been traditionally experienced, perceived, and collectively understood. In other words, I sought to describe the experiential changes in music as it gradually evolved from a direct form of

face-to-face communication into a mass mediated electro-mechanical one.

The findings of my study reveal a much deeper relationship between music, technology and cultural practice than is

*"The first time I experienced radio was in '36 but we didn't have a radio until '53. Today all the music comes from the radio. Back then we used to make up our own songs. There was a João Peleco who used to invent songs."
Judite (75 years old)*

normally considered or seriously evaluated. While modern mediated forms opened the town to a wider diversity of musical ideas, it also eliminated many of the practices had glued the community together and gave it a shared sense of meaning. Most of the traditional forms of musical experience, within a few decades or even less, were either made obsolete or greatly reduced in terms of power and prestige. As I shall describe in much

greater detail later, religious observances, serenades, parties, feasts, and other cultural practices of a ritualistic or secular nature, have been steadfastly challenged by the presence and the appeal of electro-mechanical technologies.

Selection 2 -- The Elders

Electro-mechanical technologies that make possible the indirect experience of musical interaction entered the youthful years of the elders of Abadiânia only very indirectly if at all. For this group, music meant, and only could mean, (continued on p. 5)

Mediating the Muse (cont.)

live performance. As the first generation in Abadiânia to experience what Brazilians call "mechanical sound," that is, music which is mechanically produced, I found their comments especially interesting and, at times, comical. The respondents remind us of the fascination and excitement that new technologies inspire. Not only did they bring the outside world into the local environment, they also provided a greater variety and more constant source of music. Music would now become a daily event rather than a special occasion.

Selection 3-- Interview

The first of the music machines I remember was the victrola. It was a long, long time ago. It had an apparatus and a big cone. Wasn't it like that? I wasn't married yet and I took a trip to another town called Corumbá. Monsignor Chiquinho went on a trip, he went to Rome, it was Italy where he went, on the way back he brought diverse novelties, things that he could bring in the large trunk he had. He brought a victrola, a few records that weren't crummy like the ones they have today. They were shaped like a tube or a reed, looking like those bamboos or taquara (cylindrical shaped plant) in the fields. He'd wind up the victrola-it didn't have no energy, you had to wind it up. And like that it produced the sound. It could play any kind of music. And then slowly it went out of style. Today nobody knows what this thing is. It's a very old antique...He had records of catira that the people liked to dance to, others told about what was going on in the outside world, what was going on here in Brazil. I still remember very well a record about the life of a farmer. They brought that record

from the outside, I don't know if it was Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, but they grabbed that record and brought it here. They thought this record was great, you could say that everyone here in the rural zone was blind and deaf but that they were all eyes listening to that record. It sang the life of the farmer, beginning in the morning at dawn grinding cane. Do you know what a cane grinder [moedor de cana] is? I don't mean the turbines that they have in São Paulo and in other places. It was a mill made of wood and pulled by an ox. There wasn't any energy then.

Before, the music was more. I don't know how to explain it, but it was more.

Joaquim Agosto (90 years old)

Selection 4

...(I)nhibition of participation in musical practice is even more pronounced in the behavior of adults. In fact, we are often terrified at the thought of actually participating in song or dance. Why are we so reluctant to be intimate with that which we love most dearly?Why is it that our ancestors felt so at home with singing while we have become so alienated from participation in the creation of song? Lewis Mumford (1952),...offered this insightful remark almost a half century ago...: "the very growth of mechanical facilities has given people a false ideal of technical perfectionism so that unless they can compete with the products of the machine or with those whose professional training qualifies them for such a public appearance, they are all too ready to take a back seat"(pp.6-7).

Member News

Lance Strate, Associate Professor of Communication and Media Studies gave the **Keynote Address at the Finnish Conference for Communication Research** of the Finnish University Network for Communication Sciences, held on October 18-19, 2002, on the topic of "Digital Dialectics, Electronic Ecologies." He also gave the conference's Concluding Address on "McLuhan and Popular Culture Analysis." He co-edited **the second edition of Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment** with Ron Jacobson (AAVP) and Stephanie Gibson of the University of Baltimore (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2003); published "No(rth Jersey) Sense of Place: The Cultural Geography (and Media Ecology) of The Sopranos," a book chapter for "This Thing of Ours: Investigating the Sopranos", David Lavery, ed. (London: Wallflower Press and New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

Susan B. Barnes new book "**Computer-Mediated Communication: Human-to-Human Communication Across the Internet**" was published by Allyn and Bacon in 2003. This book is an upper division textbook written from a media ecological perspective that introduces students to the terms, concepts, and social issues relating to how people communicate with each other through the Internet.

Jim Morrison writes: "I'm pleased--no, thrilled--to let you all know that in the fall I will be assuming a new position, as Scholar-in-Residence at Emerson College. My residence won't be changing, for those of you who have my home address, but here's my new school contact information as of September 1:

Department of Organizational and Political Communication

Emerson College

120 Boylston Street, Room 813

Boston, MA 02116-4624

617-824-8723

James_Morrison@emerson.edu

My current e-mail address will work until further notice, but I can always be reached at jcm46@comcast.net."

Kimberly Eberhardt Casteline presented a paper, "Electronic Visual Media as an Agent of Change in Christian Churches" at the "Sacred Media: Transforming Traditions in the Interplay of Religion and Media" conference in Jyväskylä, Finland, 10-13 July 2003. She is a senior Media Studies major, Religious Studies minor in New York University's School of Continuing Education.

John Fraim's new book, "**Battle of Symbols: Global Dynamics of Advertising, Entertainment & Media**" has just been published by Daimon Verlag, Switzerland (2003). John has also created **Symbolism.Org**, a leading site on symbolism of popular culture:

<http://www.symbolism.org/>.

Teaching Media Ecology or Why My Students Love the Tetrad

Laura Tropp, Marymount Manhattan College

For the past two summers, I have had the refreshing opportunity to teach media ecology to undergraduate students at Marymount Manhattan College, in conjunction with the annual Media Ecology Convention. For most of them, this was their first experience with an academic conference and though nervous, they were enthusiastic. Finding a definition of media ecology became a central component of the course. What follows, are my key ideas on what media ecology is and how I incorporated these ideas into the classroom.

Key Idea 1: Media ecology is interdisciplinary. Media ecology incorporates ideas from other fields, such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Media Ecology is about understanding ideas within a context. Analyzing historical context surrounding subjects and events makes writing ecological because it helps scholars account for the relationships between people, places, technology, and events.

In the Classroom: Use Media Ecology to move beyond the study of “the media.” While embracing the diverging interests of your students, one can see media ecology’s interdisciplinary nature in action. My students write a semester long paper exploring any topic they want but the key requirement is that it has to use a media ecological perspective. It no longer mattered whether one was an education, dance, or communication major, each topic explored media in its own way.

Key Idea 2: An important part of media ecology is examining our symbolic environments. Media

ecologists recognize not only that language is used to communicate ideas between people but also that the language we use both reflects and informs the environment in which we live. I have always found interesting the way that media ecologists question traditional definitions of familiar terms or notice when our traditional terms are changing in society and in particular, when media play a role in changing them.

In the Classroom: Explore definitions of media and untraditional or unexpected communication technology. Allowing almost limitless selection in their topic led my students to fascinating papers on many subjects. One student explored changing concepts of gift-giving with the creation of bridal registries while another explored the changing conceptions of work and leisure with the creation of PDAs.

Key Idea 3: Media Ecology is a critical approach to examining media.

In the Classroom: Use the Tetrad. My students loved the McLuhan concept of the Tetrad (media enhance, retrieve, obsolesce, and reverse). (In fact, they talked about the Tetrad so often other professors came over to ask me about it and I began seeing four-dimensional tetrads in my dreams.) The tetrad became a tool that encouraged the students to see the cyclical and ironic patterns in the development of technology. For example, one paper explored yoga’s shift from a process to reach inner peace to a world full of yoga competitions. In studying not only what it enhances but also what it reverses, the tetrad directs students to be critical in their examination and to explore the implications of the medium from a variety of perspectives.

"TOO UGLY"

"POOR VOICE"



Abraham Lincoln

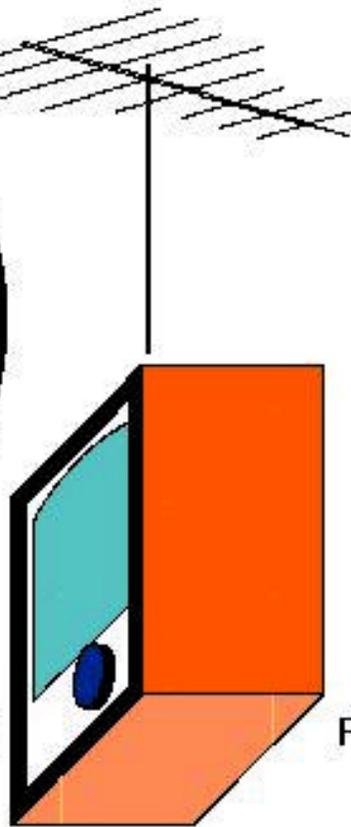
"TOO FAT"

"NOT QUICK ENOUGH"



William Howard Taft

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