

5th Annual MEA Convention held at RIT**Sue Barnes**

On June 10-13, 2004, the Rochester Institute of Technology sponsored the fifth annual Media Ecology Convention. The 2005 convention theme was “**Media Environments and the Liberal Arts.**” This all-inclusive theme attracted scholars from around the world. Making this year’s convention a truly international event. For instance, a large contingent of Canadians crossed the boarder to participate in this convention, including Twyla Gibson, Paul Heyer, Mark Lipton, Alex Kuskis, and Robert Logan.

Of special note were **featured lectures** by David Olson, University of Toronto; Douglas Rushkoff, New York University,; and Denise Schmandt-Besserat, University of Texas. Also there were **plenary sessions** that featured Majorie C. Lusesbrink, Electronic Literature Organization; Mary Madden, Pew Internet & American Life Project; Gary Gumpert, Communication Landscapers; Liss Jeffery, University of Toronto; Susan Drucker; Hofstra University; and Marla Swebpe, Rochester Institute of Technology.

Panels at this year’s convention

included the subjects of Weblogs and Cross-Disciplinary Communication, Visual Media Environments, New Approaches to Media Ecology, Digital Poetry and Poetics, Globalization and the Media, Community Building and Media Environments; and Media Ecology and Education. **Special tributes were also held for Neil Postman and Walter Ong.** We were especially delighted by the attendance of Shelly Postman and Maddy Postman for the luncheon and tribute to Neil on Saturday. Special thanks goes to Diane Hope, The William A. Kern Professor in Communications, for her kind support of the luncheon. The weather held up and we all had a delightful outdoor picnic, which included one of Neil’s favorites—tuna fish.

The vast range of panel subjects sparked conversations in a wide range of areas and exemplifies the interdisciplinary nature of media ecology. As a result of the convention, media ecology is a topic that will be discussed long after the convention here at RIT. Thanks goes to all of the people at RIT from the Dean of Liberal Arts to the support staff that helped to facilitate this exciting event.

Notes from Members

Casey M.K. Lum (Associate Professor, William Paterson University and Vice President of MEA) gave a speech on "Understanding Media Ecology as a Theory of Mind, Communication and Culture" at Huazhong University of Science and Technology's School of Journalism and Communication in Wuhan, China, on June 24, 2004.

Douglas Rushkoff's new *Frontline* documentary about the replacement of our roles as citizens with roles as consumers - tentatively entitled, "The Persuaders" - will be aired in November on PBS.

Peggy Cassidy's (Chair, Communications Dept., Adelphi University) book: BookEnds: The Changing Media Environment of American Classrooms, is out--the latest in the Media Ecology Series of Hampton Press.

Brian Cogan recently signed a contract to write The Punk Rock Encyclopedia for Greenwood Press, date of publication estimated early 2006.

Call for nominations to the Board of Directors

Each year, there are four positions available on the Board of Directors of the Association. The Board of Directors consists of 12 members elected by the Association's membership. The Executive Committee (President, Vice-President, Executive Secretary, Treasurer, and the Historian) are elected from among and by the 12 members on the Board of Directors. The term of office is three years.

To nominate a member, or volunteer yourself as a nominee, please contact Bill Petkanas no later than September 30, 2004. Nominees must be members in good standing of the Association. Nominees are asked to provide a brief statement (100-200 words) about themselves for the election material.

Email (preferred): Petkanas@wcsu.edu

Phone: 203-837-8255

Mail:

Bill Petkanas

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Global Network Of Media Ecologists Lance Strate, Fordham University

Before we settled on the Media Ecology Association as the name of our organization (choosing a conservative name for a revolutionary paradigm), we discussed a number of different alternatives. One that I proposed, and that I am still fond of, is the **Global Network Of Media Ecologists**. I have a penchant for acronyms, and GNOME conjures images of folkloric creatures, guardians of esoteric knowledge, and it invokes the concept of oral tradition ("gnome" is also a synonym for proverb or aphorism). Apart from the acronym, one of the things I like about this alternate name is that it **emphasizes the fact that we are an association of individuals, media ecologists, rather than some abstract institution**. Moreover, "network" is a good way of describing the social relations among MEA members, and emphasizing the importance of interpersonal interaction in the construction and maintenance of our organization.

And calling ourselves a "Global Network" would resonate with McLuhan's famous phrase, the "Global Village," while accurately reflecting the landscape of our field. At the time that we formed the MEA, we knew that there were media ecologists (whether they called themselves by that name or not) outside of the United States and Canada, in Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, and France; in Brazil and Mozambique; in Israel, Egypt, and Turkey; and in Japan, Korea, Australia and elsewhere. Over the past few years, word of the MEA has spread through this network,

and while the process of diffusion is far from complete, it is gratifying to see awareness of media ecology and membership in the MEA also spread to places like Mexico, Venezuela, and Columbia; Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, and the Ukraine; to the United Arab Emirates, India, China, and New Zealand, and the list goes on.

The Media Ecology Association is an international organization. Of course, we are not international in the sense of the United Nations or the Olympic Games, which are based on the representation of nation-states, and the interaction that takes place among them. Rather, we are transnational, extending above and beyond borders and regions. **Our mission is to promote media ecology anywhere and everywhere, and to support media ecologists wherever they may be found**. Our goal, then, is to be as open as possible to individuals and institutions interested in our perspective, field, and intellectual tradition.

We are not confined geographically, but neither are we free from constraints. As much as we might theorize about being virtual and discarnate, with centers everywhere, margins nowhere, and no sense of place, in practical terms the MEA does have a base of operations, a command center (to use one of Neil Postman's favorite phrases). Legally speaking, the MEA is incorporated as a nonprofit in the USA, specifically in New York State with our "corporate headquarters" in New York City. **(Cont. on p. 4)**

President's Message (cont.)

Economically, the MEA's finances are based on American currency. And while Douglas Rushkoff made the case for open source money in his recent keynote address to the MEA (which led to some wild speculation about printing our own bills with McLuhan on the one dollar, Postman on the five, Walter Ong on the ten dollar note, etc.), the reality is that we need to collect our dues in US dollars. But because we want to remove barriers to membership whenever possible, some time ago we instituted an online PayPal option so individuals outside of the US can pay in their local currency.

As the MEA's Awards Coordinator, I am often asked if the competition for our awards is open to entries from other countries, and the answer is yes. In fact, this year, Scott Eastham won the Lewis Mumford Award for Outstanding Scholarship in Technics for Biotech Time-Bomb, a book published in New Zealand. And while there may be limits to our ability to deal with entries that are not written in English, we will do the best that we can to accommodate them. Whenever it is within our means to overcome linguistic obstacles, we will do so. It is true that our annual conventions have been held in a fairly limited geographical area so far. Our first three meetings were held on a little island by the name of Manhattan, our fourth on a slightly larger neighboring island by the name of Long. This means that the first time we met on the mainland of the United States was just this past June, when our convention was held in the city of Rochester. And I should take this opportunity to once again thank Convention Coordinator Sue Barnes, and her colleagues at the Rochester Institute of Technology, for

their hard work and hospitality in hosting a highly successful MEA meeting. It was wonderful to see so many of our Canadian members come south of the border to participate in the convention.

Next year, we return to New York, New York, and to the site of our first meeting, Fordham University's Lincoln Center area campus. Our Sixth Annual

Convention will be held on June 22-26, 2005, and I hope you will make every effort to join us. A call for papers can be found on page 5 of this newsletter, and on our website, www.media-ecology.org.

Manhattan is certainly an appropriate meeting place for a global network, but we remain open to other sites outside of New York City and State, and outside of the United States as well. As always, I invite inquiries and proposals for future convention sites for the Board of Directors to consider (e-mail me at Strate@Fordham.edu). The bottom line is that we need a host institution to provide facilities, equipment, personnel (including a local coordinator) and other forms of support, as we do not yet have the size or resources to hold our meetings in hotels or convention centers. Accessibility to travelers is a factor, but so is the presence of a local population interested in attending and participating in an MEA convention.

I also ask for your help in spreading the word about the MEA. The more new members we can bring in, the sooner we can reach the point where we can make our own convention arrangements, and not have to depend on the kindness of strangers. I welcome your suggestions, and your help, in enlarging our membership, and in making the MEA a fully Global Network Of Media Ecologists

Notices of Interest

**The Sixth Annual Convention of the Media Ecology
Association
June 22-26, 2005
Fordham University, Lincoln Center Campus, New York City**

Send papers, proposals, inquiries to:

Janet Sternberg
Communication & Media Studies
Fordham University
Bronx, NY 10458-9993
netberg@compuserve.com

Lance Strate
Communication & Media Studies
Fordham University
Bronx, NY 10458-9993
strate@fordham.edu

Submission deadline: December 1, 2004

Call for Nominations for the 2005 MEA Awards

Please see website, www.media-ecology.org, for complete list of awards.

Entry requirements: Letter of nomination or self-nomination and five copies of supporting materials.

Send all entries to:
Lance Strate, President, Media Ecology Association
Department of Communication and Media Studies
Fordham University, Bronx, NY 10458-9993

Submission deadline: November 15, 2004

MEA at ECA

The 96th Annual Meeting of the **Eastern Communication Association** will be held April 27–May 1, 2005 at the Omni William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. See detailed call for papers at website, www.media-ecology.org. Send all entries to:

Marc Leverette
Department of Journalism and Media Studies
School of Communication, Information, and Library Studies
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1701
marclev@scils.rutgers.edu

Submission deadline October 15, 2004

ECA President is an MEA Member

Donald Fishman (Ph.D., Northwestern University) is the President of the Eastern Communication Association for 2004-2005. Fishman is the recipient of the 1998 Haiman Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Freedom of Expression as well as the Phifer Award for Outstanding Scholarship in Parliamentary Procedure. He also received the 2001 and 2003 Robert M. O'Neill Award for the Outstanding Paper in the Freedom of Expression Division at the National Communication Association. Fishman is a member of MEA and NYSCA.

The MEA Newsletter asked Fishman several questions about his involvement in the recent ECA convention, the planning process for that convention, and his outlook on the field of communication.

Why were you the principal planner for the 2004 ECA convention in Boston?

In 2002, I was elected ECA President, to assume office in 2004-2005. ECA has a rite of passage that requires all incoming presidents to be the chief planner for the association's convention in the year prior to assuming the presidency. As the chief planner of the convention, you become familiar with the interests and objectives of each of the interest groups, and you are better prepared later to handle policy questions related to the overall welfare of the organization.

What is involved in the planning for the convention? Is there software? Is there politics?

We anticipate that 650-800 people will show up at the convention. We have competitive programs, invited panels, spotlight series programs focusing on a prominent figure

or concept in the field of communication, short courses, business meetings, and a keynote address.

Unfortunately, there is no common software. Each ECA vice president develops a template and a distinct format. In large part, program planners are using different types of computers (PCs and Macintoshes) and different software programs. I had to put a lot of material submitted to me into Simple Text. I hope in the future that a software program or common set of protocols emerges. Gary Gumpert has been a strong proponent that everyone in ECA should not have to re-invent the wheel each year. But we are not there yet.

As for politics: In any volunteer organization of 1,000 members, there will be political considerations and politics. Individuals are usually organized interest groups that provide their association identity. They have loyalties to certain goals, and they want to promote their own interests. There is a good side to this focus on self-related interests. Adam Smith's invisible hand theory predicts that if everyone attempts to maximize their own interests, that an organization as a whole will profit from the energy and enthusiasm that the members will bring to the table. Fortunately, ECA has had a group of past leaders who have worked hard to create a collegial atmosphere for discussion. Different perspectives enrich the organization. The proof of our success has been the strong attendance at our conventions, and the prestige of our three research journals where we publish some of the best scholarship in the field of communication.

Did you have any special problems in organizing the 2004 convention?

We lost our convention site in Hartford six months before our convention was to occur.

(Continued next page.)

(Fishman, contd.)

The hotel was sold to a new group of owners, who promptly shut it down for a year for renovations.

As of November, 2003, we had no site for our April 2004 convention. Normally, that is the kiss of death. Fortunately, our crisis management team (which included Sue Drucker, the ECA legal counsel) went into high gear. We were able to obtain a site in a Boston hotel for the same weekend that we were originally scheduled for Hartford. And we negotiated room rates that were superb for a major city. The downturn in the economy worked to our advantage. We attracted nearly 700 people to the convention.

What issues is ECA working on that may be of interest to MEA members?

MEA is an affiliate organization within ECA. MEA maintains its own identity, but it has business meetings and sponsors panels at the ECA convention.

ECA is working on three major issues. First, we are trying to finalize a contract with a new vendor to publish the three ECA journals. In addition, we are examining proposals to digitize the three journals so that our members will be able to access current and all past articles online. This kind of access would be a major step forward for scholars in our field.

Second, we are working on an Interest Group Reconfiguration Initiative. Many of our Interest Groups were created during the 1970s. As the millennial decade proceeds, we are trying to encourage new interest groups and to reconfigure of our interest groups to reflect current and future issues. For instance, we have not had a public relations interest group; one may emerge from our discussions. Gary Gumpert, a principal in Communication Landscapers and a member of MEA, has been one of the

leaders in spearheading the campaign to create new interest groups. We are making progress.

Third, we are involved in Bylaw reform, requiring all groups to have an updated set of bylaws. This may seem mundane, but interest groups need to identify a chain of succession of officers so that someone is in a leadership queue who is familiar with the group and the larger association.. Also, bylaws should reflect the emerging reality that decisions may not require a face-to-face meeting: That they can be made via an Internet discussion and voting procedures that safeguard the interests of the minority but allow the majority to conduct necessary business.

We have updated our webpage (www.ecasite.org) and I suspect that we will be tackling online elections in the immediate future.

Is MEA a good fit as an affiliate in ECA?

I think it is an excellent fit. Many of the leaders of MEA are also active in ECA. MEA bring two important conceptual assets to ECA. First, its emphasis upon the contributions of the leading social theorists to communication, several of whom have been neglected, e.g., Lewis Mumford, Walter Lippmann. And its emphasis of the relationship to people to ideas and the interplay of the environment on the structure of the communications system provides a very fertile area for research--especially as the Internet unfolds and as new paradigms emerge for communication.

Any closing thoughts?

I thought that the spotlight tribute at the ECA convention in Boston to Neil Postman was one of the best programs at the convention. It was a powerful program reflecting public discourse at its best.



...FROM A THEORY OF
COMMUNICATION AS
TRANSPORTATION...



...TO A THEORY OF
COMMUNICATION AS
TRANSFORMATION....

--H. MARSHALL MCLUHAN

R. GOZZI, JR.
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