

President's Address:

Juggling for the MEA, and the Value of Volunteerism in Support of Scholarship

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Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. The title of my President's Address tonight is this: "Juggling for the MEA, and the Value of Volunteerism in Support of Scholarship." Let me start with the first part of my title: juggling for the MEA. What does juggling have to do with the MEA? Well, as some of you know, there is at least one expert juggler in the MEA—Corey Anton, who unfortunately could not join us at this convention. If you have not yet seen Corey juggle, by all means check out his juggling videos on YouTube. But although Corey might be the most expert juggler among us, literally managing to keep as many as six balls moving at the same time, Corey is not the only juggler in the MEA. Other people in the MEA may not literally juggle balls in the air like Corey does, but many of us figuratively juggle responsibilities and tasks on behalf of the MEA. We juggle our MEA duties with the rest of our lives—our families, our jobs, and the countless other commitments we all have. So when I think about the MEA and our activities in the past, the present, and the future, what most often comes to my mind is this metaphor of juggling.

And now, let me say something about the second part of my title: the value of volunteerism in support of scholarship. What do I mean by volunteerism? As the dictionary explains it, volunteerism refers to the practice or policy of volunteering one's time, services, or talents for charitable, civic, educational, or other worthwhile activities, especially to benefit one's community. Well, to put it simply, the MEA depends on volunteerism. We rely on people who volunteer their time, their services, and their talents to support our media ecology scholarship. Without volunteers, the MEA would not exist. So as I report to you here on the MEA's activities, please keep in mind throughout that we owe all our accomplishments to the valuable efforts and energy of those who volunteer to work for the MEA.

This year, we are fortunate indeed that the work of MEA volunteers has brought our eleventh annual convention to the University of Maine here in Orono. There could hardly be a more appropriate location for a convention about ecology and natural environments than the state of Maine, known as the Pine Tree State, and the University of Maine, whose teams are known as the Black Bears. As the premier educational institution of this state, the University of Maine has over a century of involvement with agriculture, forests, and water. In addition, this year's convention theme of media ecology and natural environments is especially timely, given the recent ecological catastrophes involving oil spills, earthquakes, and extreme weather, to name just a few. How we communicate about the conditions in the physical world is a critical ingredient in allowing us to address environmental issues such as these. Thus, our convention theme of media ecology and natural environments brings us together to discuss topics of the greatest importance at the intersection of two domains of environmental studies: on the one hand, media environ-

ments and studies of the symbolic world of culture and communication; and on the other, natural environments and studies of the physical world. So in this magnificent natural environment, surrounded by all these green things that New Yorkers like me now recognize as trees, we are absolutely delighted to convene the MEA group here in Maine.

We owe many thanks to many people for this environmentally-oriented multifaceted convention. First and foremost, we thank our convention coordinators, Paul Grosswiler and Ellen Rose, along with Paul's assistants, Jeremiah Miner and Kurt Klappenbach. Most certainly, we thank our host, the University of Maine, particularly the Department of Communication and Journalism, the Office of the Vice President for Research, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Nathan Stormer, the Mark and Marcia Bailey Distinguished Professor of Speech and Theatre. We also thank Marlene Charron and Debra Wright of the University's Conference Services Division, as well as the various student workers and campus staff whose names we may not know, but whose efforts on our behalf we definitely appreciate. In addition, we express our gratitude to the co-sponsors of this year's convention: the University of New Brunswick (which is Ellen Rose's home institution), the Institute of General Semantics (led by Lance Strate), and Peter Lang Publishing. And obviously, we offer special thanks to our illustrious guest speakers and to every one of our convention participants for coming all the way to the northeastern tip of the United States to share their ideas with us.

As we gather here in Maine among the pine trees, the black bears, and the black flies, it is wonderful to see so many newcomers joining so many oldtimers to celebrate the MEA's eleventh annual convention. In looking through the program booklet and at the name badges people are wearing, I am just as delighted to see names and affiliations that are completely new to the MEA as I am to see names and faces of familiar old friends whose ties go back many years. From undergraduate students to professors emeriti to independent scholars and professionals, this marvelous mix of people demonstrates some of the key traditions of media ecology as well as of the MEA. In our intellectual perspectives as well as in our social interactions, media ecologists strive to be inclusive rather than exclusive, and collaborative rather than competitive. We prefer to build things together instead of picking things apart. We are interdisciplinary through and through, a characteristic which is reflected at this convention in the rich diversity of our plenary speakers, our individual panelists, our MEA award winners, and our MEA members and officers, past and present.

And now, let me tell you what has been happening with the MEA in the past year. Among our greatest accomplishments in 2009 was the successful transition to our new MEA Web site hosted at Tecnológico de Monterrey, Estado de México, guided by Fernando Gutiérrez and his colleagues. Our new MEA site has a redesigned interface, additional content, and improved features, including much easier and faster editing and updating, which has helped Jim Morrison's work on refining the content of the site. Using our new online system, we successfully conducted our 2010 membership drive electronically via email instead of postal mail, and we took advantage of email to distribute MEA announcements as well. We thank Fernando and Jim for their ongoing efforts, and we look forward to expanding our online facilities for MEA members as we develop the site further. Overall, the transition to the our new Web site is a tremendous improvement for the MEA.

Another great improvement fostered by our new MEA Web site is the ability to hold our Board of Directors elections online, which we did for the first time last October. Congratulations to Stephanie Bennett, Jim Morrison, and Lance Strate for being reelected to continue on the MEA Board, and a special welcome to Adriana Braga, our newest addition, who unfortunately

could not attend this convention. I hope you will be as pleased as I am to notice the growing diversity among our 2010 MEA Board of Directors. For those who like to count: six women and six men, and three members from beyond USA borders, namely, Brazil, Canada, and Mexico. Outgoing Board member Douglas Rushkoff deserves our thanks for his many years of service and contributions to the MEA. Although he no longer is on the Board of Directors, we still count on Douglas to support our MEA activities and to keep on spreading the word about media ecology. Thanks also to Ellen Rose for coordinating our 2009 election process. And our thanks are due as well to the other candidates for their interest, time, and effort in running for office. With a total of ten candidates, last year's election marked the richest slate ever in the MEA's history. We encourage last year's candidates to run again in the future, and we invite others to consider becoming candidates for future elections too. The last opportunity to nominate candidates for the 2010 Board elections will be this Sunday morning, at the MEA general business meeting, which is open to all, and I encourage you to attend.

The next stage in developing the MEA Web site is one of our major projects for 2010: we have begun converting our membership records from an offline database program to an online system that will eventually be available directly to individual members on our Web site. We are also working to integrate convention registration with online membership records, which we hope will streamline both processes and improve our record-keeping overall. We thank Executive Secretary Fernando Gutiérrez and Treasurer Paul Soukup for these developments, and we look forward to offering new features on our Web site in the coming years.

Another major project for the MEA over the past year has been to work on our journal, *Explorations in Media Ecology* (fondly known as "EME") to improve the production and distribution processes. As many of us know, the content quality of *EME* is already top-notch, with contributors from around the world, and we have been trying to bring the journal's publication process up to the same standards. We have made some progress in catching up with *EME*'s publication schedule, and an important goal in 2010 is to address the distribution problems we have discovered, especially with regard to international subscriptions. As we sort out these problems with *EME*, we are also preparing to move the journal to a different publisher, as well as exploring the possibility of publishing the journal in electronic form. In any case, we apologize to our contributors and to our subscribers for *EME*'s production and distribution problems, and I can assure you that improving *EME*'s overall publication process is a top priority for the MEA over the next several years. And on a positive note, I am pleased to tell you that the MEA Board has approved Peter Fallon as our next *EME* editor, who will take over from current editor Corey Anton starting in 2011.

Yet another significant accomplishment in 2009 was the creation of the Call for Hosts for our annual convention. Finding good convention sites poses a great challenge for the MEA, and Board member Sheila Nayar deserves our thanks for developing the MEA Call for Hosts. In addition to the obvious advantages of having a Call for Hosts to circulate, the process of developing this document also triggered other improvements related to attracting future hosts, namely, adding sections to our Web site with information for potential hosts. For everyone who considers hosting our annual convention, the Call for Hosts is essential reading, as is our Convention Planning Manual, both documents now available on the MEA Web site. With these documents providing information and guidance, our chances have increased considerably of attracting strong hosts who can present us with thorough proposals in timely fashion.

We have already benefited from the Call for Hosts in selecting our 2011 convention site. I am extremely pleased to tell you that next June, the twelfth annual MEA convention will be

held at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, our first ever MEA convention in Canada. Marco Adria and Catherine Adams of the University of Alberta will coordinate the event, and I encourage you to consider participating. The Call for Papers for the 2011 MEA Convention appears in your program booklet on page 25, and I am sure you will find the theme of “Space, Place, and the McLuhan Legacy” to be as thought-provoking as I do.

So with our next convention to be held beyond USA borders, and additional countries represented among MEA officers and members, the MEA is making excellent progress in expanding our international presence and connections. Last year in my President’s address, one of the personal goals I mentioned was international expansion, which I will continue to work on, in hopes of fostering even more international participation in the MEA. Another element in our international connectedness is our electronic discussion list, our listserve, which currently has more than 600 subscribers from over 37 different domains around the globe. The MEA list continues to attract newcomers and tie together oldtimers, with Jim Morrison and me managing the list together. If you are not already subscribed to the MEA list, I urge you to try it. Subscriptions can be tailored to once-a-day digest mode, the list is spam-free, and information about subscribing can be found on the MEA Web site and in your program booklet on page 30. Subscribing to our list is one of the best ways to keep in touch with us and to stay up-to-date with MEA activities.

And indeed, there have been many MEA activities in 2009. We continue to pursue collaborative ventures, sponsoring sessions at international, national, regional, and local scholarly organizations, including ICA (International Communication Association), NCA (National Communication Association), ECA (Eastern Communication Association), NYSCA (New York State Communication Association), and most recently CCA (Canadian Communication Association). Vice President Thom Gencarelli deserves our appreciation for coordinating these MEA-sponsored sessions at other conferences. We also continue to work with the IGS (Institute of General Semantics) on symposia and other events, such as last September’s international conference called “Across the Generations: Legacies of Hope and Meaning,” which was held at Fordham University in New York. And next October, the MEA is co-sponsoring another IGS symposium on the theme “New Languages, New Relations, New Realities,” also to be held in New York at Fordham. The exact dates and details of this event appear in the IGS Call for Papers on the inside front cover of your program booklet. There is no doubt that collaborations like these help enrich and expand the MEA’s scope and influence, for the benefit of all.

And now, as I move to the final part of my speech, let me return to my title and theme, “Juggling for the MEA, and the Value of Volunteerism in Support of Scholarship.” To be blunt about it, we need more volunteers to join the MEA juggling team. The same set of team members cannot juggle all the MEA duties forever. As the MEA has expanded and grown, so have our needs for people to help with all our activities. We need to recruit more members for the MEA juggling team. Of course, not everyone has the time or inclination to join a team that works as hard as the MEA jugglers do, especially when the team works for free on a purely volunteer basis. To those who find the prospect of unpaid intensive juggling attractive, I invite you to run as a candidate for the MEA Board of Directors. But even if joining the MEA juggling team seems too great a commitment, nevertheless every one of you can do something valuable to support the MEA and the scholarship we represent.

What can you do? Become a paid member of the MEA if you never have before; remember to renew, if your membership has lapsed. Subscribe to our discussion list, or re-

subscribe if you dropped off. Propose papers and panels for our annual conventions, and also for the sessions we sponsor at other conferences, and be sure to attend our sessions at such events. Tell people about this year's MEA convention here in Maine, and plan to attend next year's MEA convention in Edmonton. Suggest candidates for next year's MEA Awards (details about nominations appear in the program booklet on page 24). Submit contributions to our journal *EME*, and ask your institution's library to subscribe to *EME* as well. Volunteer to help as a paper reviewer for the journal and also for our various convention and conference sessions. Consider the possibility of your institution hosting an MEA convention in the future; we are always interested in talking with potential convention hosts. And a reminder to those of you presenting here at this year's convention: be sure to submit your paper to be considered for publication in the 2010 MEA Convention Proceedings. Articles will be selected through a blind peer review process, and guidelines for submissions appear on page 26 of your program booklet. And last but not least, please join us, if you can, this Sunday morning for our MEA business meeting, which is open to all.

So let me conclude my President's address with a request for you to support media ecology scholarship by helping the MEA juggling team. Even if you cannot volunteer as a fulltime MEA juggler, please do whatever you can to participate in and promote our MEA activities. Financial support is wonderful, of course. But so is moral support. Spread the word about the MEA: send people to our Web site, show folks our publications, pass along our calls for papers and hosts, and tell everyone what the MEA means to you.

In my remarks here, I have tried to give you a sense of how hard our juggling team works on the MEA's behalf, and how the results of the team's efforts are so valuable to us all. Those who volunteer to work on behalf of the MEA bring value not only to the Association, but also to the community at large, and even to themselves as individuals. I myself have reaped many rewards as an MEA juggler for over ten years, so I am quite sure others also will find value in volunteering for the MEA juggling team. With all our efforts combined, in an ongoing festival of juggling, volunteering, and scholarship, I have faith that the MEA will continue to grow stronger and to reach further in our quest to promote media ecology. As your MEA juggler-in-charge, I thank you all very much.

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