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NYSCA Reports

Newsletter of the New York State Communication Association

2008 Conference Highlights

by Valerie Swarts

Our 2008 conference has come and gone. But its memory has left me with a great sense of pride in our organization, our members, and our discipline. The program offered something for everyone. The large turnout of student presenters was exciting. And the student town hall session was a productive innovation with a good number of proposals for the 2009 conference being discussed. The keynote speakers were inspiring. There was plenty of food. By all accounts, the homemade chocolate chip cookies were a hit. The jam sessions were relaxing and fun. The line dancers were, well, not in our immediate meeting area of the hotel. The weather was mild and the trees made an effort to give us a rich display of autumnal colors. I left feeling invigorated and looking forward to the 2009 conference that Donna Flayhan will be planning for us.

Our 2009 conference will be held on a different weekend, October 23-25, and at a different venue, the Honors Haven Resort in Ellenville, just minutes away from the HVRS and also nestled in the Hudson River Valley and the Catskills. Donna Flayhan has already begun planning a great conference theme focused on the late James W. Carey, who was both an exceptional scholar and leader in the field of communication.

As we look ahead to the next conference, I would like to strongly encourage each of us to solicit new members for our organization. Each of us should try to bring one new member or one member who hasn't attended the conference in a few years. Perhaps there is a colleague from another department who would find a professional outlet in NYSCA. Or perhaps you know community college or high school faculty member who would be interested in submitting a proposal. There were panels at this year's conference that had either little or no audience, yet many quality panels had fewer concurrent panels that might reduce attendance. As Bill Petkanas said in a previous *NYSCA Reports*, it is "the small conference that makes me a better, more self-aware, scholar and teacher." He continued to say that the small conference "better reflects the ideals of the academy and the tradition of thought,

discussion and debate." NYSCA has so much to offer through its membership and its conference!

Numerous past presidents and other longtime members of NYSCA have offered some wonderful ideas to help inject new life into our organization. During the year to come, I will be asking various individuals to assist me in the process of helping NYSCA to grow and nurturing the new members that will be the outcome of that growth. Please consider how you can best contribute to helping NYSCA become stronger. With this spirit in mind, let's all adopt the slogan, "Each one, bring one."



Photo of Hudson River Valley by Ari Kissiloff

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Professor Terence Moran Presents Keynote Address to 66th Annual Conference

By James C. Morrison



The Keynote speaker following the Saturday night dinner at this year's conference was Dr. Terence P. Moran, Professor of media ecology in the Department of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University. Dr. Moran addressed this year's theme—Disciplinary Detachment in a Fragmented World? Seeking Coherence, Continuity, and Connection—with a presentation titled “Understanding Communication History: A Media Ecology Approach.”

Dr. Moran's speech began by placing the foundation of communication in the natural human endowment of language—structured symbolic thinking that stretches the boundaries of our senses to make inferences about how the world works and to design and construct communication techniques and technologies that provide more information than our senses normally provide. “Language allowed humans to move from biological evolution to cultural evolution, defining our species not only in terms of our physiology but also in terms of our mediated extensions through technology.”

Whereas our basic communication problem in the past has been trying to survive with too little information from too few sources conveyed by too few media, today our challenge for survival is to cope with too much information from too many sources conveyed by too many media. Human history is a story of our trying to achieve increasing degrees of command and control over ourselves and our environments through language, narratives, and rituals, as well as the making of tools, images, and written symbols. The history of human communication is one of slow evolutions leading to abrupt revolutions that themselves encouraged more evolutions and revolutions, of which Dr. Moran noted six he considers key.

First, we became human through evolution from ape to hominid to homo sapiens, culminating in the development of symbolic language. Second, we became literate through writing and reading, which made possible civilization, history, literature, and the beginnings of scientific inquiry. Third, we became typographic with the development of the printing press, which facilitated a permanent revolution in scientific thought. Fourth, we became hypergraphic when the evolution of drawing, painting, and sculpting in ancient

and subsequent societies was revolutionized by photography, cinematography, and digital imaging. Fifth, we became electrographic and electrophonic through the electromagnetic techniques and technologies embodied in the telegraph, telephone, wireless telegraphy, radio, and television. Sixth, we become cyborgs (cybernetic organisms) through the techniques and technologies of the cybernetic age—the digital computer, communication satellites, fiber optics, the Internet, and the World Wide Web.

Since humans are fallible and limited, our mediated extensions are limited as well, and all human history can be seen as a struggle to overcome the limitations of the media we have inherited from nature as well as those we have created ourselves. The best approach in resolving the conflict between technological determinism and Utopian conceptions of free will is to steer a middle course that sees them in a dialectical relationship. A dialectical model in examining the evolutionary and revolutionary changes in human communication would be based on four fundamental principles.

First, such changes are ecological, in that they have profound effects in most, if not all, areas of our communication environments, though their impacts are not necessarily uniform in all areas. In addition, these impacts may be either evolutionary or revolutionary, depending on their speed or magnitude. An example is the revolutionary impact of the phonetic alphabet on traditional writing systems in the Levant, which took command and control over communication out of the hands of established hierarchies and placed it in the hands of the people.

Second, all changes in communication techniques and technologies need to be observed within specific cultural environments, and changes in media may have different effects in cultures that have differing social, economic, political, and geographic characteristics. An example would be the differing ecological impacts of the cell phone on developed, developing, and underdeveloped societies.

Third, all changes in communication techniques and technologies can be observed as responding to perceived problems, needs, or desires relating to their limitations. However,

some of these changes have stimulated uses that people did not recognize they needed or wanted before the changes occurred. While writing may initially have been considered an aid to memory of traditional oral performances, it aided in much more than this, facilitating the creation of bureaucracy, accounting, higher mathematics, science, civilization, literature, and history itself. The development of typography in Fifteenth Century Europe did not just facilitate the work of biblical scribes but created a revolution of new ideas spread through myriad copies of transmuted and newly created forms—books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, and other genres. This habit of misprediction of the effects of new media has extended to all media since then.

Fourth, a number of scholars, most notably Neil Postman, have noted that all changes in communication involve what they consider Faustian bargains, with both positive and negative impacts on different human senses, social actors, ideas, ideologies, values, beliefs, customs, and lifestyles, in different cultures and societies. Thus, there are both costs and gains in the increased efficiency in gathering, storing, and retrieving information, and we need to determine what they will be in the near, middle, and long term.

Dr. Moran went on to emphasize that there is a temptation to consider all changes in history as progress, and this is especially true in studying human communication systems that seem to exceed older systems with respect to increased efficiency in overcoming limitations in time and space and in use of energy and matter. But we should take note of Norbert Wiener's caution in *The Human Use of Human Beings*: “Our worship of progress can be discussed from two points of view: a factual one and an ethical one . . .” He thus urged modesty in recognizing the fallibilities in both our communication systems and in his or any other model for examining the history of human communication.

Finally, he noted his experience in the U.S. Marine Corps as providing useful advice in taking our models of communication as guides for better understanding, instead of rigid dogma to be obeyed. To that end, he concluded with a dictum from the Corps that serves as a basis for planning and survival: “Adapt, Improvise, Overcome.”

Photo by Ari Kissilof

Disciplinary Detachment in a Fragmented World? Seeking Coherence, Continuity, and Connection

by Diana B. Carlin

[Following is an edited retrospective text prepared by Diana Bartelli Carlin, Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas, recent Dean-in-Residence for the Council of Graduate Schools in Washington, D.C., and the presenter of the Saturday Keynote Address to the 66th Annual Conference. —Ed.]

I was asked to address the following questions based on the conference theme: Is there too much separatism among areas of study? Does specialization affect our ability to make a contribution to broad social problems? How do we integrate specialized areas? Is there a common core? How should we structure graduate/undergraduate education programs in order to promote more common ground?

The first two questions are the most important for us to ask, and if the answer is “yes”—which I believe it is—then answers to the next three questions provide the means for correcting the problem.

Coming from Kansas, an agricultural state, I approach these questions and the underlying problem through the metaphor of a silo. Each sub-discipline within our discipline is a type of silo, and the major problems with silos are that when you look up all you see is sky—you have no idea of what the landscape surrounding your silo is like. And, when you move, you are likely to be going in circles.

If we are going to get out of our silos, we need to understand how and why they were constructed before we can find the means of escape. There are six explanations that I can identify, and there are undoubtedly more.

First, because communication is so complex and occurs in a multitude of contexts, we tend to create a new subfield for every one of the contexts. Simply look at the number of divisions and interest groups in NCA and you will see what I mean.

Second, the academy places emphasis on individual achievement. We have to have solo-authored articles to get tenure. In other disciplines, larger research teams and multi-authored articles are the norm. Because our discipline is rooted in humanistic traditions, the model of the sole researcher is common.

The social scientists among us have broken from that path, but even they have to demonstrate some work that is solely authored or at least first-authored. So we continue to produce more and more journals because we all have to publish and each journal has a slightly different focus, because the current journals simply don't publish enough of X type research. The specialization may cause both those of us in the field and, especially, those outside, not to recognize that there is some central focus or theory that holds all of this together.

Third, because of the emphasis on individual work and the need for us to be seen as a separate discipline, we discourage interdisciplinary collaborations because it may suggest that we are not a unique discipline. The need to preserve our discipline's identity fosters the notion that interdisciplinary research is a bad thing and such studies are not appropriate for graduate research in our discipline.

Fourth, there are far fewer grants available to our discipline. Grant research typically produces research teams and moves us away from the solitary researcher model. Researchers in our discipline do get grants, but many don't even apply because the size is nothing like that for the sciences and the effort does not seem equal to the rewards.

Fifth, applied research is often denigrated. In order to make a broad contribution to social problems, we have to do applied research. We have a journal devoted to this research through NCA, but this type of research is often confused with outreach or service activities, and its scholarly content is questioned by those who do more traditional humanistic research.

In my own experience, I had to convince a committee looking at my promotion file that my work on DebateWatch was research and not service, because the results impacted something in the real world. No one raises that question about the pharmaceutical chemistry professor who develops a life-saving drug, the engineer who develops ways to make bridges stronger so that they don't collapse, or the computer scientist who develops new software to make our work easier. We reward what we value, and if we don't value research that has real-world applications then we lose in a very



significant way. Those outside our discipline do not see the value to society of our work and they accuse us of existing only to provide an easy major for athletes or others who can't make it through other majors.

Finally, we each like to teach what we research, so we create narrower and narrower subjects for our courses, which often makes us appear to have no common theoretical framework for our discipline. I realized this when my step-daughter worked on a master's degree in a humanities discipline and every course she took—whether it be research methods, theory, or content—focused on a central set of theories and emphases. I cannot imagine most of our departments finding a common core that is repeated throughout every course, undergraduate or graduate. Thus, to an outsider we may look like a collection of courses that reflect the idiosyncrasies of the faculty at the time, rather than something more universal as a discipline.

I believe that we can identify a series of issues around which we as a discipline can come together to attack from various sub-disciplinary perspectives that will result in a whole. DebateWatch is an example. When I did the pilot work that led to its formation in 1992, Mitchell McKinney and I published an edited volume with contributions from individuals who had organized and conducted focus groups. Out of that common set of data we had chapters that focused on argumentation and debate theory, on focus groups as a research method in political communication research, and on interpersonal communication as it manifested itself in disagreements within the group and their resolution. Out of those various perspectives came recommendations for how best to produce debates that serve the public as an educational tool.

All of my comments suggest that we need to look at forests more than trees. To answer the challenge of your conference theme we need some individuals who are willing to be daring and question what we do. It will take leadership from professional organizations. We need a good model for how to do it, and I suggest that perhaps you are the ones to provide it.

Examining Ritual, Technology, and Community in This New Century: A Global Discussion in New York State NYSCA Conference, October 23–25, 2009

by Donna Flayhan, Vice President



As Vice President in 2009, I am excited to announce that NYSCA's 67th Annual Conference, "Examining Ritual, Technology, and Community in this New Century: A Global Discussion in New York State" will be held from October 23–25, 2009 at the Honor's Haven Resort in Ellenville, New York. It is shaping up to be an exciting conference, with speakers including Lance Strate, John Durham Peters, and Michael Lang.

The conference theme (further described in the Call for Participation, p. 6) is a tribute to the life and work of the late James W. Carey, former NYSCA member, Columbia University Professor, and mentor to many who study culture, communication, community, and ritual.

The Friday evening opening keynote address will be delivered by Fordham University Professor Lance Strate, a past president of NYSCA, currently the Executive Director of the Institute for General Semantics. A co-founder of the Media Ecology Association, for a decade he was its President. The MEA has helped to build a global community of scholars interested in media ecology, centered in New York but connected from Norway to South Korea to Brazil and Mexico. Dr. Strate is a witty public speaker and was a good friend of the late James W. Carey. He has worked to build intellectual communities in physical places and electronic spaces throughout his career, and we are honored to have him open the conference.

The Saturday evening keynote address will be delivered by University of Iowa Professor John Durham Peters, author of *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The book is used at universities all over the globe at the graduate level of study. Dr. Peters knew James W. Carey well, and his work embodies the high level of thinking

combined with a high level of caring for community, ritual, and communication that was the hallmark of Dr. Carey's work.

The year 2009 marks the 40th Anniversary year of the Woodstock Festival, and I am excited to announce that Michael Lang (promoter of the 1969 Festival and co-founder of Woodstock Ventures) will speak to the NYSCA Conference on Saturday, October 24 in the afternoon, followed by music from Woodstock today, including children from Woodstock Elementary School (Peace, Love, and Learning) performing poetry and music. The Woodstock Historical Society will also have a presence to show the longer history of the community of the arts that has flourished through ritual and community for more than a century and gave birth to the creative forces that made the name and town "Woodstock" a symbol of peace and a generation of hope around the world.

In addition to these already lined-up events, I will be contacting senior scholars and past presidents of NYSCA soon to set up special roundtable in tribute to Carey's legacy. Student Top Paper Awards will continue to be a centerpiece of the conference, and student work will be highlighted in poster sessions rather than panel presentations so that the work is honored and seen by many conference attendees without being placed onto panels that compete for audience. Brian Cogan, author of *The Encyclopedia of Punk* and also past NYSCA president, will also make the Wilson Scholar Award and Neil Postman Mentor Award presentations.

Finally, Honor's Haven [<http://www.honorshaven.com/contact.aspx>] as a venue looks to be a wonderful new conference site for NYSCA and is just 15 miles south of the resort in Hudson Valley that had been the NYSCA site for many of the past years. Honor's Haven has agreed to keep our prices of rooms and meals the same as last year's at the previous location, while

providing a vast improvement in facilities—beautiful dining room views, wireless access throughout hotel and grounds, indoor meeting rooms in a variety of shapes, sizes, and uses, and an indoor pool, tennis courts, and surrounding nature trails. If you register by March 31, 2009 you can take advantage of a free upgrade from a Deluxe Package to Executive and Executive to a Suite. Suite numbers are limited and will be on a first come, first served basis. Please visit the Honor's Haven website for all rates.

All meals are included in the room rates and will be served in the dining room with fall foliage mountain views. Trails for hiking and walking, an indoor pool, courts for tennis and basketball, a yoga studio, and a family viewing room will all make the event wonderful for conference attendees and for their friends and family members who may accompany them. We will try to arrange some onsite childcare in public spaces; please send a note to me [flayhand@newpaltz.edu] if you think you may be interested so that we may gauge the need in advance.

From the amazing speakers, to the special location, to the conference theme, this 67th Annual Conference looks to be an exciting addition to a wonderful ritual in New York State.



Michael Lang (right) at the Woodstock Festival, 1969, with Wavy Gravy, Master of Ceremonies

Donna Flayhan's photo by Dion Ogust

Call for Papers for Online Proceedings of the 2008 NYSCA Annual Conference

by Roxanne O'Connell

Research papers presented at the 66th Annual Conference of the New York State Communication Association, "Disciplinary Detachment in a Fragmented World? Seeking Coherence, Continuity and Connection," October 17–19, 2008 at the Hudson Valley Resort, are being accepted for blind peer review for the conference *Proceedings*. Authors should upload a digital copy of the manuscript, no longer than 25 pages (including tables and figures), to <<http://www.nyscaproceedings.org/ojs>>.

Authors must register at the site as "Author." Manuscripts must conform to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed., 2001). Authors are responsible for obtaining permission to reprint copyrighted material. Formatting requirements are posted at the site on the Submissions page: <<http://www.nyscaproceedings.org/ojs/index.php/2008/about/submissions>>.

Manuscripts must be uploaded by May 1, 2009. Authors will receive an email confirmation from the website upon successful submission of their paper. The website is built using the Open Journal System created by Stanford University. Please contact Roxanne O'Connell, Roger Williams University [roconnell@rwu.edu] if you experience any problems with the *Proceedings* site.

The electronic publication of the *Proceedings* will be available on the NYSCA website, <<http://www.nyscanet.org>>.

2008 NYSCA Conference Awards and Executive Council Election Results

This year the New York State Communication Association was pleased to confer the prestigious John F. Wilson Scholar Award for exemplary scholarship and service to the organization to two recipients. This year's awards go to Susan B. Barnes, in the Department of Communication at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and Brian Cogan, in the Department of Communication Arts at Molloy College.

In addition, awards were given to three students for outstanding research. The Undergraduate Research Award winner is Kimberly Reeb, at the Rochester Institute of Technology, for "Parent–Teen Communication About Dating Behavior and Its Relationship to Teenage Dating Behaviors: From the Teen's Perspective." The voting for the Graduate Research Award resulted in a tie, and it was given to J. J. De Simone, at the University of Kansas, for "Blogs and Fauxtography in the 2006 Israel/Hezbollah War: Were Traditional Media Frames Rejected?" and Lin Khang, at New York University, for "Virtual Stories–Real Life: An Examination of Chinese Students' Acculturation in the U. S. Through Blogs."

At the General Meeting the following officers were elected to the Executive Council:

Vice President-Elect: Brad Crownover, College of Mount Saint Vincent

Director of Outreach and Promotion: Corey Jay Liberman, Marymount Manhattan College

Recording Secretary: Mary Ann Allison, Hofstra University

Member-at-Large: Maureen Minielli, Kingsborough Community College

Chair of the Nominating Committee: Susan Jasko, California University of Pennsylvania

Members of the Nominating Committee: Peggy Cassidy, Adelphi University; Laura Tropp, Marymount Manhattan College

Student Representative: Mary Nagy, Rutgers University

Editor of the *Proceedings*: Roxanne M. O'Connell, Roger Williams University

John F. Wilson Fellowship Nominations

by Susan Drucker

Nominations are invited for the John F. Wilson Fellowship of the New York State Communication Association. The Wilson Scholar Committee may, each year, award the Wilson Fellowship to a member of the New York State Communication Association who has established an exemplary record of scholarship and service to the Association. The fellowship carries the prize of life membership in the Association. To be considered for the award, nominees must (1) be members of NYSCA, (2) have contributed a significant body of research, and (3) have a record of service to NYSCA. Each nomination should include a letter of nomination and a current curriculum vitae.

Deadline for nominations is September 1, 2009.

Nominations should be sent to

Susan Drucker
Hofstra University
School of Communication
Dept. of Journalism/Mass Media Studies
Dempster Hall
Hempstead, New York, 11549
sphsjd@hofstra.edu

Call for Participation 67th Annual Conference New York State Communication Association

Honor's Haven Resort and Spa, Ellenville in the Catskills, New York
October 23–25, 2009

Examining Ritual, Technology, and Community in This New Century: A Global Discussion in New York State

Deadline for submission: June 1, 2009

This conference theme has everything to do with the life's work and lessons of former NYSCA member, Columbia University Professor, and definer and teacher of North American Cultural Studies, James W. Carey.

Space, time, communication, culture, technology, democracy, human decency, and ritual are all at the core of the work of Carey and are the roots from which many important papers and discussions and directions may spring for this 2009 Conference. Keynote speakers include John Durham Peters (*Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*), Lance Strate (Executive Director of Institute for General Semantics and co-founder of the Media Ecology Association) and Michael Lang (co-founder of Woodstock Ventures and Promoter of the 1969 Woodstock Festival of Peace, Love, and Music, held 40 years ago this year).

The ritual annual meeting of the New York State Communication Association is the physical moment of the coming together (to commune) in space and time of communities of scholars, students, educators, and citizens interested in questions of communication, community, technology, democracy, and legacy. In this 67th year, reflecting on ritual meetings (in physical places and electrified spaces) is at the core of the conference, as are community and ritual as the core of sustained culture. Ritual meetings—from traditions thousands of years old to reunions to Facebook and other social media networks—are areas of interest, past and present.

The 2009 conference will focus on, but not be limited to, questions and issues relating to these core matters. Papers and panels addressing these concerns and our roots, traditions, and common links are invited and encouraged. Proposals unrelated to the conference theme, from a variety of theoretical traditions, are also welcome.

We seek papers in all formats—formal and informal presentations, roundtables, participatory panels, demonstrations, media screenings, and other innovative ideas. Undergraduate and graduate student submissions must be marked on a cover page as “graduate student” or “undergraduate student” and will be considered for student research awards within those categories if submitted in entirety by the **June 1, 2009 deadline**. Please make all submissions electronically in Microsoft Word files to flayhand@newpaltz.edu.

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If you have any ideas for articles or topics you'd like to see in a future issue, please contact the Editor at j.c.morrison@post.harvard.edu.