



**Current
Issue**

Archives

**Editorial
Info**

Search

Interact

Convictions, Conventions, and Convergences: More on Conversations with Michael Calvin McGee [\[1\]](#)

Joy L. Hart

Department of Communication
University of Louisville

Joy.hart@louisville.edu

Printer-friendly [PDF version](#)

[copyright](#) 2003 ACJ

Conviction

“The act or process of convincing.
The state of being convinced.”

Convention

“A formal meeting of members, representatives, or delegates, as of a political party, fraternal society, profession, or industry. ... General agreement on or acceptance of certain practices or attitudes ... A practice or procedure widely observed in a group, especially to facilitate social interaction; a custom.”

Convergence

“The occurrence of two or more things

coming together ... A representation of common ground between theories or phenomena.”

Conversation

“The spoken exchange of thoughts, opinions, and feelings; talk. ... An informal discussion of a matter by representatives of governments, institutions, or organizations.”

Introduction(s)

It is likely impossible to describe comprehensibly the contributions of any scholar with a long, productive, and interesting career in one, relatively short article—and anyone who knew Michael Calvin McGee well knows that in his case that task would especially be impossible. So, instead of striving for comprehensiveness, I’ll strive to describe a few of his key contributions across many areas of scholarly work. To structure this discussion, I’ve chosen convictions, conventions, convergences, and conversations as “fragments,” [2] as these in part reference for me much of what Michael stood for as well as some of the key areas of his contributions.

Although I’d, of course, heard of Michael McGee and read some of his writings, I was first introduced to him in the 1990s at a convention of the American Communication Association (ACA). And it was through our work with that organization that I came to know Michael. Sometime after that convention introduction, we began exchanging emails, some as part of various email lists; others on separate topics, including some discussions on narrative. Through these conversations, some face-to-face and the vast majority via email (which certainly fit with one of Michael’s interests--digitally mediated communication—and became necessary as Michael’s health made travel more difficult for him), I came to know him both as a scholar and a person and to appreciate him on both counts. Given Michael’s commitment to the American Communication Association, which he helped to found, and the countless hours he devoted to this organization, especially working on behalf of the American Communication Journal, it is especially fitting that this association and its journal sponsor this Festschrift honoring him.

Beyond ACA, Michael left a legacy in several professional associations. For

example, I recently returned from the 13th Alta Conference on Argumentation, a conference Michael regularly attended before travel became too strenuous for him and one at which he delivered a keynote address not too many years ago. In virtually every panel I attended, Michael's work was cited and a new graduate student award in his name was announced. At the Miami meeting of the National Communication Association (NCA) in November of this year, the Rhetorical and Communication Theory Divisions are co-sponsoring a group of papers honoring Michael and his work. And in earlier years, NCA recognized Michael's scholarship with several awards (e.g., the 1994 Douglas Ehninger Distinguished Rhetorical Scholar Award, two Golden Anniversary Monograph Awards—1978 and 1980, and the 1976 James A. Winans/Herbert A. Wichelns Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Rhetoric and Public Address) and a 1997 "spotlight" panel. In addition, he delivered a number of other convention presentations, conference papers, keynote addresses, invited lectures, and public lectures. Michael used these "conversations," and their written equivalents, to share his ideas as well as to refine them, through commentary from others.

Convictions

"The quintessential revolution is that of the spirit, born of an intellectual conviction of the need for change in those mental attitudes and values which shape the course of a nation's development. A revolution which aims merely at changing official policies and institutions with a view to an improvement in material conditions has little chance of genuine success. Without a revolution in spirit, the forces which had produced inequities of the old order would continue to be operative, posing a constant threat to the process of reform and regeneration. It is not enough merely to call for freedom, democracy and human rights. There has to be a united determination to persevere in the struggle, to make sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill will, ignorance, and fear." --Aung San Suu Kyi

Conventions

"A mind that is stretched by a new idea can never go back to its original dimensions."
--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Convergences

"The purpose of life is to leave one's mark upon the cave. The meaning of life is revealed at the point where all our marks converge." --Lois Gould

Conversations

“When scholarship is computer mediated and linked into an Internet, it has the productive potential of being constantly ‘under construction.’ You can stretch the time you originally invest in an essay over a theoretically infinite span. If each piece is properly marked as a ‘latest revision’ instead of a ‘finished product,’ you can easily see what parts of the text are persistently problematic for its writer, and understand that the concepts are still ‘live’ in ways that print publication can never match. Further, in terms of postmodernity’s illusions, writers and readers all have the constant reminder that in postmodernity no text is ever ‘finished’ in the same way books were ‘finished.’ So long as authors are alive, their minds can change, and they can respond to criticism. Only death forces us to hold still long enough to endure the sort of ‘gotcha’ critique that too often passes for scholarship.”

“The difference is the element of orality new technology adds to communicative interactions. If you and I were in conversation and you said of something I had written, “You contradict yourself on page 23, saying something opposite to what you wrote on page 74,” I could reply ‘Thanks, I’ll fix that.’ ...”

“Finally, for me at least, the desire to tinker, to get it right no matter how long it takes, to find the poros, the pathway of wise and right action, is now an imperative.” --Michael Calvin [McGee](#) (2001a)

Scholarship: Convictions, Conventions, Convergences, and Conversations

It’s presumptuous to think that one could detail McGee’s scholarly contributions. And, in fact, these contributions range across a variety of areas and types of academic work. For example, in a [CRTNET post](#), Michael Osborn (2002) noted that “I don’t know how many dissertations and published articles have made use of the ideas that flowed from him ... but there are many apples on that rather large tree.” And numerous other commentaries describe the influence that McGee had on graduate and undergraduate students. In addition, his ideas and feedback reverberate throughout the community of scholars. Also in a [CRTNET](#) tribute, James Klumpp (2002) asserted that “Michael’s positions were reasoned, challenging, and taught me much. My scholarship will be the poorer for missing his incisive intersection with it.” The posts of many other scholars echo these views—that Michael, through his published scholarship, classes, electronic communications, and face-to-face conversations, shaped and refined the thinking of many and thus his influence has a reverberating effect on the discipline. And I think that most people who spent any time conversing with him, whether face-to-face or electronically, would agree that they were subtly or directly (and more often directly) challenged to explain, defend, or push the boundaries of their views.

His scholarly work, traditional and non-traditional, both builds upon and breaks

conventions and the “fragments” converge in interesting and thought-provoking ways. For examples of his less traditional scholarly work, see the [Scholar’s Web](#) (McGee, 2001d) and [\(f\)ragments](#) (McGee, 2001a), two of Michael’s more recent projects. In the pages of each of these Websites are indexed resources, essays, and links to other useful sites designed to assist scholars in their pursuit and integration of knowledge. In part, these Web-based projects were ways to begin or continue conversations with other academics, where both his convictions and his openness are evidenced. Some examples of his traditional, published scholarship can be found posted on the (f)ragments Website and listed on his [CV](#), and [Lucaites](#) (1998a) provides a helpful bibliography of McGee’s work from 1970-1993.

Across these writings, McGee is perhaps best known for several lines of work. One of these is his integration of rhetoric with political and social theory and material practice (for example, see [Lucaites](#), 1998b; [McGee](#), 1975, 1980c, 1982, 1983, for discussion of this convergence). A second is his development and use of the concept of ideograph (e.g., see [McGee](#), 1980a). In this work, McGee established an ideograph, a “figure of thought, a one-term summary of one aspect of a people’s historical ideology,” as a signifier used to represent particular meanings in conflict situations and illustrated how these meanings change during negotiation (see [McGee, 2001a](#), for discussion). In short, such terms embody the full narrative history and emotional thrust of particular concepts and are appropriated in different ways by conflicting parties; thus, as disputes transition between phases, ideographic meanings are drawn upon as resources and shift over time. A third is conceptualizing rhetorical analysis as the study of power (e.g., how communicators achieve their goals). In such a view, formal speeches and texts are important, but equally or perhaps more important are casual conversations, television shows, advertisements, electronic communiqués, and so forth (see, for example, [Lucaites](#), 1998b; [McGee](#), 1980b, 1985b, 1998). It is through rhetoric that the everyday communicator, whether tailor, bricklayer, trucker, or clerk, as well as the politician or manager exercise power and marshal defenses.

A fourth line of work centered on technology and its effects on rhetorical practice. More recently, McGee devoted attention to rhetoric and the composition and interpretation of digital messages. McGee illustrated how “truth” was differently seen and constructed in print-oriented versus oral cultures, and his interest extended into the means by which truth is constructed electronically and the role that rhetoricians can serve in interpreting and critiquing mediated messages. For example, he asserted that although “no one wants to read criticism anymore,” “people ... do want to read books, essays, cereal boxes, anything that can help them make sense of the cacophony that is postmodernity” ([McGee](#), 2001c). As with oral communication, much electronic communication allows for openness in revision and a negotiated and less objectified truth (for discussions on technology, see, for

example, [Corbin](#), 1998 [especially chapter 3]; [McGee](#), 1997). Another involves inverting rhetorical criticism in favor of critical rhetoric—an approach blending critique and action, where scholars take action, based on their critiques, to right society’s wrongs and create a better life condition. An example of such work is his presentation at the Southern Speech Communication Association’s convention from the pulpit of Birmingham’s 16th Avenue Baptist Church, a pulpit from which Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke and a church where a 1963 bombing ended the lives of four young African American girls and injured many other congregation members. In this public address, [McGee](#) (1990) “extends” King’s “I Have a Dream” speech and interweaves it with Spike Lee’s “Do the Right Thing.” [McGee](#) (1998) then analyzes Lee’s use of Michael Jordan to promote Nike tennis shoes through advertisements and the social effects of this association, including killings over tennis shoes, such as depicted in an episode of “Gabriel’s Fire,” and calls for a halt to exploitative obsessions.

If one can consider publications a type of scholarly conversation—a form of circulating one’s ideas to a wide group of potentially interested parties—then Michael’s writings clearly began, continued, and shaped many such conversations. Furthermore, they continue to do so. His recent work with electronic communication especially emphasizes his interest in continuing and learning from such conversations. And across these conversations, his voice was a unique and influential one. But as [Charland](#) (1998) notes, “his [McGee’s] significance cannot be reduced to his written work. It is as a teacher, critic, and conversational partner that he has had the most influence” (para. 1).

Convictions

“What convinces is conviction. Believe in the argument you're advancing. If you don't you're as good as dead. The other person will sense that something isn't there, and no chain of reasoning, no matter how logical or elegant or brilliant, will win your case for you.” --Lyndon B. Johnson

Conventions

“Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.” --Martin Luther King, Jr.

Convergences

“I intend to demonstrate in this essay that Anglo-American culture lies broken in fragments, shards of discourse that represent idealess ideals and bogus values.” --Michael Calvin McGee (1985b)

Conversations

“Many can argue, not many converse.” --A. Bronson Alcott

Mentoring and Teaching: Convictions, Conventions, Convergences, and Conversations

That Michael Calvin McGee mentored many individuals is evidenced in the tributes to his life and his work—as is the importance of this mentoring. For example, likely most, or even all, members of the Board of Directors of ACA would say that Michael mentored them in one or more ways. [ACA’s Webpage tribute](#) to Michael’s life states:

“Michael Calvin McGee used his intellect, and passion to transform the very nature of professional communication associations by helping to found the American Communication Association. His vision led to the creation of an association that was born digital and would exist virtually. At the time, this was considered an outrageous idea that most people thought could never work. But that made Michael love it all the more. And with his nurturing and mentorship the ACA grew into a scholarly organization that included an online peer reviewed journal and an annual convention.

Throughout the years, Michael was active in all aspects of ACA governance. It was his steady hand, clear-headed analysis and critical assessments that guided the association's development and helped define its boundaries. He always took up the challenge when he felt the association was headed down the wrong path, and never shied from calling things the way he saw them.

Michael was very special to all of us on the BOD. He saw the potential in each of us, and found ways to help each board member develop as a scholar, a leader and perhaps most importantly, as a person. He strove to keep the BOD energies on-track, even if it meant stepping between members with polarized opinions. Most remarkably, even though his failing health kept him from attending ACA conferences, he was always a presence in all BOD meetings. It is a rare man who can have influence even in his absence but Michael could do just that.

ACA has lost a mentor and a dear friend. We grieve for his loss, but

rejoice in the spirit that built this Association. His life was a cause for celebration.”

Further, his former students, colleagues, and email interlocutors speak of his helpful commentaries, sharp insights, prolific responses, and ability to “push and pull” toward growth. Weaving together the fragments of others’ electronic testimonies creates a collage of the many students and colleagues that Michael helped to mentor in one way or another. For example, consider the following acknowledgments—some from people who knew him for years and were close personal friends, some from people who’d never met him outside the electronic arena, some from students, some from colleagues, some with only positive stories to tell, some speaking of “bumps” in the narrative of life and how these bumps eventually made them appreciate Michael even more:

“I admired him as a thinker and as a teacher who never caved in to the pressure to ‘dumb down’ theoretical questions in order to be popular or easy. I remember that in every undergraduate lecture course (one of which I was privileged to TA), there was a cluster of groupies who really ‘got it,’ who understood the constitutive functions of rhetoric and ideology, who were willing to put together Sartre and Marx and Foucault and Burke. These were the people Michael taught, the ones he cared desperately about reaching. ... Michael taught me a great deal. He was a critic, above all else--a person who observes moments of crisis, judgment, and action so that actors may more fully understand the contexts of their discourses. He knew rhetorical criticism can be, itself, a form of engaged rhetorical action. This was his most important lesson to me and, I expect, to many others. ... Ironically, given his suspicion of inducements to collectivity, Michael during my time at Iowa enacted community routinely and as a matter of principle. Thanksgivings with Michael, Gina, and all the dislocated graduate students are among my fondest memories of friendship and intellectual camaraderie that marked my days at Iowa.” [Dana Cloud](#) (2002)

“Michael was passionate. He was passionate about his opinions, and he was passionate about the quality of scholarly debate. He never minded people who disagreed with him. He always minded if others didn't share his love of a high-quality argument.” [Bill Eadie](#) (2002)

“I never had the chance to study formally with Michael Calvin McGee, but there is no one that I felt more vital to my community of scholars. No one who knew or read Michael will be surprised that I

found his voice unique. When I would float an idea into print, and more recently into the cyber-world, a note or an email from McGee was eagerly awaited to see how well I had done. More times than not Michael and I agreed about whatever was in our projects, but at other times we were at different places. But my place was always better understood after his good solid critique that told me where I had ‘gone wrong.’ Michael's comments were always compelling because they had such depth.” [James F. Klumpp](#) (2002)

“At the University of Memphis, ... His nearby home quickly became something that combined the qualities of a haven for the unwanted, an ongoing seminar class and houseparty, and an intellectual commune. McGee was obviously a charismatic teacher, and he was laying the research foundations for what would soon become a nova of startling, influential essays. Over a period of a few productive years, beginning with his brilliant essay on "The People," and climaxing perhaps with his essay on the ideograph, McGee would shape the thinking of a generation of scholars. ... he would remind us that all of our memories of him are but fragments of the text of his life. We struggle to form from all these shards a mosaic that will better explain what he meant to us. We do know that we contemplate a most rich and satisfying life. The most fulfilling part of his story is told in the personal histories of those whom he provoked into new conceptions of themselves in relation to the communication environment in which they lived. McGee was such an imposing teacher that it was easy to fall under the spell of his dominating intellect. The McGee "groupies," as Dana Cloud has lovingly called them, developed naturally around him wherever he taught. These students were invariably gifted, and often just a bit off-center. They were interesting outriders in the academy, but the very fact that they were un-disciplined and sometimes even anti-disciplined attracted McGee to them and them to McGee. It is not surprising that many of these students would later join him in making distinctively creative contributions to the field of rhetorical studies. On a personal level, I think it will take some time before I can grow accustomed to a universe in which there is no Michael. In the world of rhetorical studies he occupied much space, and with his passing that world seems to have shrunk.” [Michael Osborn](#) (2002)

“I was stunned to read of Michael's death on CRTNET this afternoon. He passed away Sunday morning, October 27. What made this very unwelcome news so jarring is that my last e-mail message from Michael came at 1:24.08 on Sunday morning, October 27. He was

giving me information and implicit advice on a matter in a most friendly and paternal fashion. Michael and I had had a falling out on this very list two or three years ago. He found something I had written, some things I had written, so obnoxious--he probably had that right--that he said he wasn't going to debate or communicate with me any more. Lo and behold, within another half year or so, we had made up, mostly, as I recall, because of marked graciousness on his side, and we became fast friends on the internet. I found him so kind, charitable, and supportive over the past couple of years, and, ... unfailingly thoughtful and passionately engaged.” [Ed Appel](#) (2002)

“It was Michael's course on Hitler and Fascism that spurred me to continue studying, writing, and working in that area. My fond memories of Michael could fill many pages. He was passionately committed to challenging all of us who were fortunate to have him as a mentor. The challenge was not only intellectual, but moral. I think Michael leaves a legacy larger than his scholarship. He instilled in us a commitment to strive for social justice, to make ourselves and our scholarship active forces in crafting a better world. Michael always amused me by his deliberately polemical style, designed to sharpen our acumen rather than wound our hearts. I noticed he played his role as provocateur to signify respect; it was an honor to engage in spirited repartee with him.” [Roy Schwartzman](#) (2002)

“I am compelled to write to add a note of personal sorrow about the loss of one of the most egalitarian voices to grace this list ... he wrote with honest compassion for the subjects he chose to engage and his silence of non-engagement spoke volumes. I never had the privilege of meeting or discussing face to face even the lightest of subjects with Michael --- but reading and digesting his writings on this list has been one of the greatest pleasures of my academic life.... one of the first notes I discovered upon subscribing to this list was one of Michael's and from that moment I knew that reading his commentary upon the research of communication, the society we've created for ourselves, and the struggle to achieve our potential as human animals would be the highlight of my day, week, month, or quarter (as his contributions diminished in number).... never would I delete a CRTNET post that had a McGee headline!! For someone I never met, talked to, or engaged in dialogue Michael was one of those truly rare and cherished persons that make a life whole and fulfilled.... I would have loved to have known him other than through words upon a computer screen.... to his family (and I suspect that is all of us who he touched with his intellect) MAY he whisper gently (from time to

time) in your ear, float lazily across your vision, and challenge your grey cells to function!!” [Michael Taylor](#) (2002)

I remember a professor saying while I was in graduate school that most scholars would be lucky to be a footnote in 50 years. This claim is likely a true one, but there are other methods of influencing work in the discipline. One of those ways is the reach that comes from influencing the lives and educations of others, through not only one’s scholarly publications but also one’s teaching and mentoring—all areas in which Michael McGee excelled and to which the quotes above attest. Whether in expected ways, such as forging relations with students one teaches, or novel ones, such as creating ongoing positive relationships from what began as heated debates on discussion lists, it is clear that many scholars benefited from McGee’s mentoring. And it is clear how much they appreciate it.

Convictions

“The university is being transformed from a place of thought, contemplation, curiosity, and wonder into a training ground for the next generation of worker. The taxpayer is paying to subsidize corporations, asking universities to provide training instead of education.” --Michael Calvin McGee ([2001d](#))

Conventions

“Regimes are modes of self-discipline, but are not solely constituted by the orderings of convention in day-to-day life; they are personal habits, organized in some part according to social conventions, but also formed by personal inclinations and dispositions.”

--Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 62)

Convergences

“I hope to see an argumentation practice that self-consciously aims to avoid an oligarchy of expertise which would condemn our students to the sad occupation of greasing organizational procedures. I aspire to contribute to a theory of argumentation aimed at understanding the cultural materials which we must use to carve out the best possible life-world. Above all, I hope to live in a community where reality is lived, truths are made, and facts are used.” --Michael Calvin McGee ([1985a](#), p. 12)

Conversations

“The pith of conversation does not consist in exhibiting your own superior knowledge on matters of small consequence, but in enlarging, improving and correcting the information you possess by the authority of others.” --Sir Walter Scott

Service: Convictions, Conventions, Convergences, and Conversations

An African proverb asserts “I am because I participate.” Through his participation and service, we learned much about who Michael Calvin McGee was, came to know him and see the beliefs for which he stood, and had a model of how to effect political and social change. Whether or not you agreed with him, you saw commitment, energy, and passion directed toward the goals he pursued. And you saw someone who could both argue, which would, of course, be expected from a former champion collegiate debater, *and* converse, which is essential to serving and mentoring—a vastly important and underdeveloped skill, as pointed out in an earlier quotation.

McGee served the profession in many ways. Several of these involve contributions that many of us would assume an established professor would make (e.g., serving on a number of committees for his university and professional associations, reviewing manuscripts for a variety of journals, directing several theses and dissertations, serving as co-editor of a book series). Other areas are equally important, though less expected. For example, to preserve the views of Kenneth Burke, Michael designed a project where graduate students interviewed and videotaped Burke. These conversations serve as the only visual archive of this type of Burke. Through the [Scholar’s Web](#) and similar projects, Michael attempted to integrate resources and build a place where graduate students and interested others could “converse.” He also conceived of and started the “Meet Your Footnote” section of the *American Communication Journal*. This section of the journal focused on:

“coming face to face with the scholars whose work informs your own. But more than that, meeting your footnotes entails an encounter with the human side of scholarship. As I recall this episode in my mentor's life, he comes alive again, and I see him in his seminar, his face bright red with passion as he demands - yes, demands - that I think carefully and quickly toward the right inference. ... I will never make my memories of him clear enough, powerful enough, to affect my readers as those memories affect me. All I can do is add a line to the lore of Douglas Ehninger, and in that to the lore of the field of communication studies.” ([McGee, 2001b](#), para. 10)

Through “Meet Your Footnote,” Michael illustrated the contributions and essence of other scholars. Michael also served the discipline through the creative use of technology. For these projects and their outcomes, he was recognized in 1999 with the Outstanding Contribution to Communication Technologies Award from ACA.

Despite holding committed positions, Michael valued and encouraged the contributions of all. On the Board of Directions of ACA, for example, he encouraged virtual discussion and debate—drawing out those who disagreed with him as well as those with whom he was in agreement. He sought to understand the rationale for positions with which he disagreed—sometimes rethinking his own view and sometimes using this knowledge to try to persuade the other(s). This approach to decision making greatly benefited the board, the association, and ultimately all of us. The [ACA Tribute](#) to Michael expresses deep appreciation for such service and the positive outcomes of it.

Marian Wright Edelman’s quote, “Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time,” is an often used one. It is one that Michael Calvin McGee exemplified in his life. Without a doubt, he generously paid more than his share of the rent.

Convictions

“We cannot act without risk, but we can act in the comfort of realizing that not even elephants walk everywhere all at once, nor will they crush all clumps of grass in their way. The ‘right thing’ may be evident only in such concrete cases as that represented in Do the Right Thing. But we can survive the risk of telling, and living, such stories. Furthermore, the capacity to interpret these narratives critically and rhetorically makes ‘the wrong thing’ generally clear. We can even see an imperative: For now, for a moment, for the time being, in the present circumstances, it is right to expose and resist all fetishes that exploit human hunger for a morally active identity.” --Michael Calvin McGee (1998, p. 186)

Conventions

“Insubordination may only be the evidence of a strong mind.” --Napoleon

Convergences

“My method of proceeding might be a bit scatter-brained and mirthsome—at least that was the first reaction of my friend and colleague John Lyne. He heard my title and crossed the line of chuckle right into giggle. When I asked what was so funny, he said “Sounds like you’re going to Utah to play ‘connect the dots.’” ... Because he

likely does not object to any of the parts of my discourse, I guess John must simply be reacting to the appearance that these subjects have nothing to do with one another.”

“And in that impression, John is not alone. Nearly everyone in the field would agree that rhetoric, organizational communication, and Western marxist theory a la Sartre are such separate discourses that they must be considered separately. I hope to persuade you that this appearance is deceiving. All three bodies of theoretical discourse require a similar concept to refer to human beings acting in concert. Rhetoric needs a theory of audiences, organizational communication needs a theory of groups, and social theory needs a theory of class. My claim tonight is that when Sartre theorized class as a special instance of groupness, he exemplified a strategy of thinking that will prove as useful in rhetorical theory and in organizational communication as it ought to have been in marxist social theory.” -- Michael Calvin McGee (1989)

Conversations

“Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause to tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending on the quality of your ally’s assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.” (Burke, 1973, pp. 110-111)

Partings

Fragments of convictions, conventions, convergences, and conversations involving Michael enter my memory, more often as I write this essay, but certainly not infrequently otherwise. Several are favorites that resurface—a convention conversation and laughs over pizza delivered to his and Gina’s hotel room, a different convention and a different conversation about a book project, a phone conversation late last September, several email debates, and more than a few chats about cats (yes, Michael was a “cat person”—and you’ve got to love that). They are fragments because they aren’t particularly integrated or whole, because they represent pieces of a relationship, and because, as Michael would say, we experience the world in fragments. Fragmented though these experiences and

memories may be, I'm pleased that we shared time in the "parlor" ([Burke](#), 1973). The conversation was made more interesting by your contributions and your ideas continue in the discussion.

Convictions, conventions, convergences, and conversations—all words with cv; all indications that contribution is measured by much more than what appears on a "CV." McGee's CV is lengthy, but his contributions are more enduring. Thanks, Michael, for connecting some dots, questioning the connections of other dots, and for connecting us. I'm convinced that you'll continue to influence us in these pursuits.

Convictions

"(f)ragments is a scholar's site devoted to advanced research in rhetorical and communication theory. ... a site that tries to stand on the shoulders of Kenneth Burke, and fails, perhaps because he [McGee] is too impious in his consistent critical attitude toward The Master. His is a site offered in a comic frame of dramatism; but as the photograph suggests, it is also as serious as a hooked fish suffocating." --Michael Calvin McGee ([2001a](#))

Conventions

"This essay has been published ... I am putting it back up on this site [(f)ragments], however, to change some things that criticism of that publication have made clear that I got wrong. And, of course, several points need pushing harder because I got them right." --Michael Calvin McGee ([2001a](#))

Convergences

"I think we should realize that the questions we ask are more important to the development of knowledge than the provisional answers we discover. I think we should take care about the way we ask questions in our field. The point of theory is to think-explanation is just a chance and momentary victory in a continual quest for knowledge that is valuable, mostly, for its own sake. Sartre's theory of practical groups, therefore, does not exist to be borrowed or merely applied in new contexts. It exists as an inspiration to find dots to connect, and then to connect them."

"If you are a rhetorician, I'd like you to think about Sartre's strategy of asking questions ... If you are an organizational communication researcher, I'd be pleased if you think about the advantages of Sartre's rich understanding of groups. ... If you are a social theorist, I'd like you to think about how well Sartre's strategy of radical empiricism responds to the problems of social order. ..."

“If you are none of these things, or, heaven help you, if you are all of them, I'd like you to understand that no matter how few articles appear in our professional journals under the heading of group communication, the study of group communication is nonetheless the conceptual center of any communication study. Understand groups and group communication, and you have mastered one of the most important elements of any communication or social theory.” --Michael Calvin McGee ([1989](#))

Conversations

“McGee would shape the thinking of a generation of scholars.” --[Michael Osborn](#) (2002)

Works Cited & Endnotes

[Back to Top](#)

[Home](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Archives](#) | [Editorial Information](#) | [Search](#) | [Interact](#)

Works Cited

- Appel, E. (2002, October 31). Michael McGee. Message posted to CRTNET, archived at <http://lists1.cac.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0210&L=crtnet&P=R9128>
- Burke, K. (1973). *The philosophy of literary form*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Charland, M. (1998). [Review of the book *Rhetoric in postmodern America: Conversations with Michael Calvin McGee*]. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 23(4). Retrieved March 3, 2003, from <http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwpress/jrls/cjc/BackIssues/23.4/charland.r.html>
- Cloud, D. (2002, October 28). Losing Michael. Message posted to CRTNET, archived at <http://lists1.cac.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0210&L=crtnet&P=R7958>
- Corbin, C. (Ed.), *Rhetoric in postmodern America: Conversations with Michael Calvin McGee* (pp. 159-188). New York: Guilford.
- Eadie, B. (2002, October 29). A scholar and a gentleman. Message posted to CRTNET, archived at <http://lists1.cac.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0210&L=crtnet&P=R8231>
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Klumpp, J. F. (2002, October 30). A tribute to Michael Calvin McGee. Message posted to CRTNET, archived at <http://lists1.cac.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0210&L=crtnet&P=R8701>
- Lucaites, J. L. (1998a). Bibliography of Michael Calvin McGee's works. In C. Corbin (Ed.), *Rhetoric in postmodern America: Conversations with Michael Calvin McGee* (pp. 189-191). New York: Guilford.
- Lucaites, J. L. (1998b). McGee unplugged. In C. Corbin (Ed.), *Rhetoric in postmodern America: Conversations with Michael Calvin McGee* (pp. 3-24). New York: Guilford.
- McGee, M. C. (1975). In search of "the people": A rhetorical alternative. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 61, 235-249.
- McGee, M. C. (1980a). The ideograph: A link between rhetoric and ideology. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 66, 1-16.
- McGee, M. C. (1980b). The origins of "liberty": A feminization of power. *Communication Monographs*, 47, 23-44.

- McGee, M. C. (1980c). "Social movement": Phenomenon or meaning? *Central States Speech Journal*, 31, 233-244.
- McGee, M. C. (1982). A materialist's conception of rhetoric. In R. E. McKerrow (Ed.), *Explorations in rhetoric: Studies in honor of Douglas Ehninger* (pp. 23-48). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- McGee, M. C. (1983). Social movement as meaning. *Central States Speech Journal*, 34, 74-77.
- McGee, M. C. (1985a). The moral problem of *argumentum per argumentum*. In J. R. Cox, M. O. Sillars, & G. B. Walker (Eds.), *Argument and social practice: Proceedings of the Fourth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation* (pp. 1-15). Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- McGee, M. C. (1985b). 1984: Some issues in the rhetorical study of political communication. In K. R. Sanders, L. L. Kaid, & D. Nimmo (Eds.), *Political communication yearbook: 1984* (pp. 155-182). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- McGee, M. C. (1989). Rhetoric, organizational communication, and Sartre's theory of group praxis. Second annual B. Aubrey Fisher Memorial Lecture. Salt Lake City: University of Utah. Archived at <http://www.mcgees.net/fragments/essays/archives/sartres.htm>
- McGee, M. C. (1998). Fragments of winter: Racial discontents in America, 1992. In C. Corbin (Ed.), *Rhetoric in postmodern America: Conversations with Michael Calvin McGee* (pp. 159-188). New York: Guilford.
- McGee, M. C. (1990, April). *Performance criticism: A response to the fragmentation of American culture*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Speech Communication Association, Birmingham, AL.
- McGee, M. C. (2001a). (f)ragments. Retrieved July 30, 2003, from <http://mcgees.net/fragments/index.html>
- McGee, M. C. (2001b). Meet your footnote: Douglas Ehninger. Retrieved June 15, 2003, from <http://www.acjournal.org/holdings/vol5/iss1/ehninger.htm>
- McGee, M. C. (2001c). On objectivity and politics in rhetoric. *American Communication Journal*, 4(3). Retrieved June 15, 2003, from <http://www.acjournal.org/holdings/vol4/iss3/special/mcgee.pdf>
- McGee, M. C. (2001d). The scholar's web. Retrieved July 30, 2003, from <http://mcgees.net/scholarsweb/About/index.html>
- Osborn, M. (2002, October 30). More McGee fragments. Message posted to CRTNET, archived at

<http://lists1.cac.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0210&L=crtnet&P=R8701>

Schwartzman, R. (2002, November 1). Michael McGee. Message posted to CRTNET, archived at <http://lists1.cac.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0211&L=crtnet&P=R388>

Taylor, M. (2002, November 1). Michael McGee. Message posted to CRTNET, archived at <http://lists1.cac.psu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0211&L=crtnet&P=R388>

Endnotes

[i] The subtitle was modelled after the one used by Carol Corbin in her 1998 edited book, *Rhetoric in Postmodern America: Conversations with Michael Calvin McGee*.

[ii] To borrow a favorite word of Michael's.