



The 41st Annual Jean Gebser Society
Conference

**Coarseness in Communication and The
Rise of Meta-Debate**



October 13-15, 2011

Rice University

*Sponsored by the Department of Forensics and Speech Communication, School
of Humanities, Rice University*

Conference Theme

Coarseness in Communication and The Rise of Meta-Debate

As the amount of “communication” explodes, we are forced to ask what communication even means anymore. How has communication changed? Is the contemporary emphasis on communication as instrumental evidence of a deficient mental-rational outlook? How has the atomization of contemporary culture changed what we understand as communication?

So much of our communication has become an end in itself. The political process has become the campaign process. Deliberation has become stump speech. The 24-hour news cycle has created the need for “news” to fill the 24 hours, especially “breaking” news. Debate seems to be increasingly self-referential. Debates are rarely “resolved.” This is the case for political debates, cultural debates, academic debates, and intercollegiate debates. Meta-debate dominates. Rather than make the difficult choices, we opt for the debate about the debate. Who will win a given election is more about the contest than the outcome. Ideological debates are not about achieving an outcome but rather about the hypertrophic individualism of continuing the debate. In cultural matters, strategic moves are valued most. Who has the best move today is seen as the best for today. How various cultures are to live together is not as interesting as who has said what about the “enemy” or as making sure one shows one is on the bandwagon with his or her side. True engagement appears to be, well, boring.

Thursday, October 13

- 9:15** Opening Remarks, David Worth, School of Humanities, Rice University
- 9:30** **Keynote:** Considering the Grounds for Criticism in an Ever-Changing Semantic Environment
Philip Dalton, Hofstra University
- 10:15** Deficient Reason and Eternity
Algis Mickunas, Ohio University and
- 11:00** Break
- 11:15** Witnessing For and Against Godot: Inspired Dialogue and Instrumental Debate
Joanne Ford
- 12:00** Lunch
- 1:30** Transformations of Racial Awareness:
The Relationship Between Kids' Stories and Adults' Explanations
Charlton McIlwain, New York University
- 2:15** Integral Projection? The Non-Technological Self and World Wisdom
Michael Purdy, Professor Emeritus, Governors State University
- 3:00** Break
- 3:15** Challenging Gebser: Religion, History, Faith, Time and Consciousness
Rick Muller
- 4:00** Break
- Note: Conference moves to Miner Lounge, RMC, Rice Campus*
- 5:00** A Curated Concert of Electro-Acoustic Music; Acousmatic Music and Interactive Computer Music With Live Performance
David Gedosh, DMA
Academy of Contemporary Music
University of Central Oklahoma

Friday, October 14

- 9:15** Nietzsche, Gebser, and Debate
David Worth, Rice University and Aparna Bhaduri, Stanford University
- 10:00** Gebser's Portals
Donna Schill
- 10:45** Break
- 11:00** Gebser's Relevance To The Global Crisis
Peter Pogany
- 11:45** Lunch and Business Meeting
- 1:45** Assumption and Deficiency: The Brothers Karamozov, Rationality, Measurement, and Segmentation
Rick Muller
- 2:15** Integration and Pan-Evolution: Beyond Assimilation and Co-Evolution
Eric Kramer
- 3:00** Break
- 3:15** Roundtable Discussion: The Future of the Jean Gebser Society
David Worth, Facilitator
- 4:00** Waking Up Dreaming in the 21st Century
John Dotson
- 5:00** Break
- 5:30** Original Play: THUMPS
John Dotson

About The Jean Gebser Society

The Gebser Society is similar to European societies, or circles, pursuing the work of a particular philosopher. The philosopher here, Jean Gebser, was born in Posen, Germany in 1905. He studied and worked in Germany until the rise of the Nazi party in 1931. From Germany he fled to Spain where he wrote poetry (*Poesias de al Tarde*, 1936) and served in the Republican Ministry of Culture. When war overtook the country in 1936 he fled to Paris where he associated with the circle of artists surrounding Picasso and Malraux. He finally fled Paris as the city fell in 1939 and went to Switzerland. He became a Swiss citizen in 1951 and in 1967 assumed the chair for the Study of Comparative Civilizations at the University of Salzburg.

It was in Switzerland that Gebser completed his monumental work on the comparative study of civilizations, *Ursprung und Gegenwart* (1949/53). The English translation was undertaken by Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas and published as *The Ever-Present Origin* in 1985 by Ohio University Press. This massive effort of over 500 pages is a phenomenology of civilization. From a vast collection of work covering many fields, historical and contemporary, Gebser described the modalities of consciousness of historical cultures, as well as the extent and openness of human consciousness in general. His work is penetrating and offers an understanding useful to scholars from many fields of study.

When reviewing Gebser's manuscript for possible translation into English, the immanent Princeton historian encouraged publication, calling the book "a very important, indeed in some respects pioneering publication" that is "vastly, solidly, and subtly documented by a wealth of anthropological, mythological, linguistic, artistic, philosophical, and scientific material which is shown in its multifold and striking interrelationship."

Sponsored by the Department of Forensics and Speech Communication, School of Humanities, Rice University