

**INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION 2012**  
**PHOENIX, MAY 24-28**  
EXTENDED SESSION PANEL PROPOSAL  
INTEREST GROUPS: VISUAL COMMUNICATION STUDIES, POPULAR COMMUNICATION

**WHOLE EARTH, FRAGMENTED CULTURES, APOCALYPTIC FUTURES:**  
VISUALIZING COMMUNITY AND DESTINY ON SPACESHIP EARTH

Social Media and Facebook: Fragmented Communities, Virtual Tribes, and Video Games at the Center of Everything  
Angela Cirucci, PhD Candidate  
Temple University

Reclaiming Earth after the Apocalypse  
Jarice Hanson, Professor  
The University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Spaceship Earth in a Violent Universe: Apocalypses in Science Documentaries  
Genevieve Gillespie, Student  
Temple University

Art, Media, and Cosmology: Visualizing Our Place and Destiny in the Universe  
Barry Vacker, Associate Professor  
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## ICA 2012

EXTENDED SESSION PANEL PROPOSAL — VISUAL COMMUNICATION STUDIES, POPULAR COMMUNICATION

### **“WHOLE EARTH,” FRAGMENTED CULTURES, APOCALYPTIC FUTURES: VISUALIZING COMMUNITY AND DESTINY ON SPACESHIP EARTH**

#### **PANEL ABSTRACT**

2012 marks fifty years since JFK’s famed “moon speech” and forty years since the Whole Earth image was captured in the last journey to the moon. This panel looks at the evolution of community and communication since these iconic moments and images. Using an extended panel session and multimedia, this panel will focus on how popular media have been used to visually represent community, ecology, science, and our place in the cosmos.

#### **RATIONALE**

The 2012 ICA Call For Papers opens by highlighting the profound challenges facing the global community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: There have been “unparalleled efforts at community building and resilience” amidst “community devastation, decline, and dissolution.” The Call for Papers later poses several questions central to communication and community, including:

- How have our conceptions of community evolved over time?
- Under what conditions is a community ideal? What role do interpersonal, environmental, economic, organizational, political, technological, cultural and ethical factors play in defining this utopian community?
- How can we better understand the relationship between the globalization of communities and the contemporary information environment?

This panel will embrace the challenge of these questions, which are particularly relevant for the current moment in global culture. 2012 marks fifty years since President Kennedy’s famous “moon speech” at Rice University in 1962, which not only exclaimed that America would win the space race, but that the “new knowledge of our universe” would help bring “peace” and “progress” for “all people.” 2012 marks forty years since Apollo 17 — the last mission to the moon — took the photograph of the “Whole Earth” in 1972, the famed visual image of the Earth floating against the black of the cosmic void. Fulfilling Kennedy’s vision of “new knowledge” discovered in space, Earthrise and Whole Earth held the world in awe and generated utopian hopes and dreams for an ideal community — the emergence of a global consciousness and global ecology for a global community living on “Spaceship Earth.”

What has happened to communication and community the forty years since Whole Earth? Earthrise and Whole Earth helped inspire the contemporary global ecological movement, including the “Gaia hypothesis” from space by James Lovelock. Since Whole Earth, the internet has spread around the planet to generate new forms of utopian and dystopian discourses, while redefining the meaning of community and communication in an age of Facebook, social media,

and the 24/7 global information environments. At the same time, apocalyptic scenarios are proliferating in culture and science, while cities rethink nature and sustainable living in the aftermath of real apocalypses. Drawing from the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, Jean Baudrillard, Stephen Hawking, and many others, this panel will explore these phenomena in light of the questions posed by the Call For Papers. Embracing the “extended session” vision, this panel will combine multimedia with scholarship and provide feature roles for professors and graduate students.

### **PAPER 1**

#### **Social Media and Facebook: Fragmented Communities, Virtual Tribes, and Video Games at the Center of Everything**

Some believe that social media and Facebook provide the opportunity for all users to be connected as one tribe in a utopian global community with a shared global consciousness. But the technology is not necessarily structured for such purposes. Facebook pushes users to ascribe to different networks, groups, and subcultures, all embraced by users in a quest for cultural and personal identities in the expanding information environments. While this can be seen as reclaiming distinct groups and cultures once lost through media homogenization, this paper offers a different perspective. Facebook users are forced to define themselves by stereotypes and clichés so that they can be marketed more effectively, suggesting Facebook is not just social media serving global community, but also surveillance media serving global capitalism. What is overlooked is how much Facebook is like a video game. Like avatars in a video game, users guide their online and real world personae through a simulated environment in which each user is at the center of their virtual universe, a universe created for them, starring them. If the stance of the Facebook technology is to place each user at the center of everything in cyberspace, then what might be the effect of Facebook on building communities in real space?

### **PAPER 2**

#### **Reclaiming Earth after the Apocalypse**

In several places on Spaceship Earth, an apocalypse of one sort or another has already taken place. In this presentation, efforts to take back space and reclaim earth in Detroit, New York, Bangkok, and Thailand will feature ways in which communities have responded to (a) the economy and the loss of jobs; (b) the lack of space for recreation; (c) response to flood; and (d) response to tsunami and the devastation of multiple family structures. In each case, the efforts to reclaim the earth for more sustainable living has provided new knowledge and new models for other cities and regions to aspire.

### **PAPER 3**

#### **Spaceship Earth in a Violent Universe: Apocalypses in Science Documentaries**

In Brussels, the planetarium next to the Atomium (on the former world’s fair grounds) currently features the Imax film, *The Violent Universe* (2011), which depicted Spaceship Earth facing a

barrage of deadly cosmic forces. Of course, theology and Hollywood have long had their apocalyptic prophecies, such as those featured in Revelations and Roland Emmerich films. But these end of the world scenarios are appearing with increasing frequency in science documentaries, such as *The Universe* (2007-2010), *Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking* (2010), *Through the Wormhole* (2010-2011), and many others. The scenarios include an endless array of apocalypses facing planet Earth — comets and asteroids wiping out all life, supernovas radiating the planet, black holes gobbling the planet, and so on. All of these scenarios are possible. But, is there a hidden message? Do these theories reflect the dissolution of human society on a planet in an impersonal and potentially dangerous universe? Or is this trend a strangely unifying force that both invigorates and re-centers the global community? Does the impending apocalypse mean dystopian destruction or utopian redemption, and how are local and global communities envisioning themselves within these end-of-the-world narratives? What do these scenarios say about our ability to imagine a future for community and civilization?

#### **PAPER 4**

#### **Art, Media, and Cosmology: Visualizing Our Place and Destiny in the Universe**

2012 marks the fiftieth anniversary of JFK's famous "moon speech" at Rice University, which is famed for its challenge to put humans on the moon and "measure the best of our energies and skills." Overlooked is his claim that the "new knowledge of our universe" would help bring "peace" and "progress" for "all people." Since 1962, artists and scientists using media technology have been visualizing the "new knowledge of our universe" — a cosmos of staggering scale in space and time. Efforts include *Powers of Ten* (Charles and Ray Eames, 1968), *Earthrise* (Apollo 8, 1968), *Whole Earth*, (Apollo 17, 1972), *Pale Blue Dot* (NASA, 1990), *Cosmic Voyage* (Bailey Silleck, 1997), and *The Known Universe* (American Museum of Natural History, 2009). *Earthrise* inspired the founding of Earth Day and, in combination with *Whole Earth*, led to the Gaia hypothesis and a rebooting of the global ecological consciousness. In contrast, films such as *Powers of Ten* and *The Known Universe* have had little impact on the global community or global consciousness. Why? This multimedia presentation will explore this question and its relevance for our ability to imagine an optimistic human destiny on Spaceship Earth.