

Call for Papers

Virtual ICA Pre-Conference 2021

“Visions of Change: Communication for Social and Environmental Justice”

27 May, 2021

Organizers: *Hanna E. Morris*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA, hanna.morris@asc.upenn.edu; *Rebecca Venema*, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, Switzerland, rebecca.venema@usi.ch; *Christine Gilbert*, University of Connecticut, christine.gilbert@uconn.edu; *Liisa Sömersalu*, Sodertorn University, liisa.somersalu@sh.se

Contact: hanna.morris@asc.upenn.edu

Division/Interest Group Affiliation: Visual Communication Studies Division, Environmental Communication Division, and the Activism, Communication and Social Justice Interest Group.

A key challenge for representing environmental crises such as climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and toxic pollution is contextualizing the crises through a diversity of accounts and timescales. Candis Callison (2020, 2017, 2014) stresses how accountability and justice are impossible without recognition of the particular harms perpetuated by long-standing political, economic, and cultural systems of oppression. The ongoing violence of imperial capitalism are consistently removed from view through cultural processes of erasure whereby ecological crises are “decoupled from its original causes by the workings of time” (Nixon, 2011: 11). Take, for instance, the differential response to recovery and aid given to the richest and withheld from the poorest, predominantly Black and Brown communities of color

in the New York/New Jersey region following Hurricane Sandy and, moreover, the absence of sustained public attention and reporting on the long-term, “slow violence” impacts of the storm (Superstorm Research Lab, 2013; Nixon, 2011). Women in the Global South are also disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and yet, continue to be excluded from journalistic institutions, academia, and government (Shiva, 1988; Bonilla and LeBrón, 2019). Scholars and advocates of environmental justice (e.g. Bullard, 2011, 2009, 2000; Mascarenhas, 2020, 2012; Sze, 2020, 2006) demand recognition of the recurrent and consistently overlooked disparities of environmental risk as well as the inequities of political and economic response. This entails the centralization of historically marginalized perspectives, experiences, and knowledges at the local, national, and transnational level. Visuality and visual politics play a particularly important role for making perspectives, experiences, and knowledges visible and to advocate for resistance and change (e.g. Doerr, Mattoni, & Teune, 2013; Mattoni & Teune, 2014; Uldam & Askanius, 2013). Human rights violations and environmental disasters are phenomena often brought to the attention of a larger public through visual representations in, for example, news reports or on social media. Visuals are particularly powerful, memorable, and hold strong potential to attract attention, trigger emotions and impact perceived legitimacy of activist movements (e.g. Kappas & Müller, 2010; Poell & van Dijck, 2015). They are thus important tools for expanding visibility and fostering movements and activism for social justice. But visuals can also perpetuate hierarchies, stereotypes, and sensationalist representations.

It is within these contexts of current social and ecological crises and struggles for social and environmental justice that that we invite **extended abstracts** (of no more than 1,000 words) pertaining, but not limited to, the following topics:

-- *representations of environmental risks and justice*: How are issues of social and environmental justice visualized in or across different media contexts? What are recurring motifs and interpretation patterns? How do different actors (e.g., journalists, activists, artists) use visual media to draw attention to environmental risks and/or to

envision responses and actions for change? How do affected communities themselves—through bottom-up initiatives—visualize issues of equity and justice?

-- *logics of environmental and social justice*: How can journalism, photography, visual art, film, and other communicative modes centralize the experiences of the most vulnerable, impacted, and frontline communities? How can images and texts negotiate, contest, and resist asymmetrical relations of power as opposed to entrench them further?

-- *economies of media production and environmental / social justice*: How do political economies of media influence and/or impede the ability for journalists, filmmakers, and photographers to conduct deeper and longer investigations of “slow violence” (Nixon, 2011)? What media systems (e.g. co-ops, trusts, etc.) are better able to foster more robust and dynamic coverage of ecological crises? What are the advantages and challenges of local journalism in covering issues of environmental justice?

-- *democratization of knowledge production and methods*: How can researchers of media centralize issues of power, equity, and justice? What methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks are capable of fostering a more democratic exchange and synthesis of knowledges? How can universities and academic departments transform research agendas and priorities in order to centralize issues of equity and social and environmental justice? How can scholars learn from and partner with environmental justice organizers and advocates without exploiting or further marginalizing vulnerable individuals and communities?

-- *practices of data collection and analysis: opportunities and challenges*: Digitization has brought new methodological and ethical challenges for finding, collecting and sampling images while also presenting new opportunities for their analysis. Projects that highlight emerging techniques for working with metadata, “big” data, reverse image search, social media analytics, automated analysis and machine vision, and other digital tools in the study of social justice / environmental justice are also encouraged. We also welcome reflections regarding ethical implications of such tools or regarding ethical

dilemmas and questions with respect to power, positionality and implications of visibility in activism and social justice research practices.

The pre-conference is co-sponsored by the Visual Communication Studies Division, Environmental Communication Division, and the Activism, Communication and Social Justice Interest Group. The pre-conference will be held virtually on 27 May, 2021 and will encompass a mix of both synchronous and asynchronous presentation and workshop sessions, including a keynote address by a distinguished scholar of communication and environmental justice (TBD) who will address the multifaceted questions, aspects and challenges of visual and environmental communication research pertaining to issues of environmental and social justice. Registration is required. There are no prerequisites and there will be no registration fee. A link and further details regarding the virtual platform and schedule will be sent to registered participants ahead of the pre-conference date (registration will open through the ICA website on 13 January, 2021 and close 5 May, 2021). All participants and presenters will be grouped according to time zone for the live paper workshopping sessions. Please visit the accompanying website <https://icavisualcommunicationstudies.com/> for updates and further information on the pre-conference schedule during the coming months.

Pre-conference submission instructions

Upload an extended abstract of no more than 1,000 words (excluding references) [through this Form](#) by **1 February, 2021**. Outcomes will be communicated by 1 March, 2021. Full-length manuscripts (for discussants to provide feedback on) are due to pre-conference contact, Hanna E. Morris (hanna.morris@asc.upenn.edu), by 1 May, 2021.