

GLOBAL FUSION 2014
PANEL PROPOSAL

**SELFIES AND ZOMBIES:
CONFRONTING OUR MEDIA, CULTURAL, AND COSMIC CONDITIONS**

PAPERS & PANELISTS:

Visual Culture and Our Online Zombie Baggage

Angela Cirucci, Temple University

Distorted Humans: Selfies and Zombies

Genevieve Gillespie, Temple University

Selfies and Zombies: Cultural Responses to Nihilism and Nothingness

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NOTE: All three presenters will be attending the conference.

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SELFIES AND ZOMBIES: CONFRONTING OUR MEDIA, CULTURAL, AND COSMIC CONDITIONS

Selfies and zombies — two of the most viral images proliferating in the global media environments. Psychologists and social scientists link selfies to an epidemic of media-inspired narcissism, while cultural critics see zombies as metaphors for war, pandemics, ecological destruction, Darwinian capitalism, and consumer culture run amok. While there truth is in these observations, this panel will explore other meanings in selfies and zombies, meanings that directly connect social media to global media and the prevailing cultural and cosmic conditions.

On one hand, humans are using the internet and social media to link up everyone and everything on the planet, supposedly as reflections of a “cloud,” “global brain,” and a “smarter planet” — a networked planet on which we are the center of everything. On the other hand, the media technologies of satellites and space telescopes have revealed we inhabit a small planet in a vast and ancient cosmos, where we are newcomers with no self-evident meaning for our existence — in a universe in which we are the center of nothing. In between these two existential conditions, humans participate in a global media system and consumer society that is supposed to provide the means for each of us to craft meanings and micro-narratives for our lives, economies, and societies. At least that what we are told.

This panel will explore how selfies and zombies reflect responses to these conditions, focusing on the roles of the photograph, internet and social media, and the prevailing loss of grand narratives, all existing within the viral and global media environments.

PAPER 1

Visual Culture and Our Online Zombie Baggage

Photographs functioning as proof of self-existence dates back to the 1880s. Though also not new, the selfie is experiencing a resurgence in our photo-laden global media environments. Similarly, zombie culture has experienced a rebirth. This presentation will show we are immersed in selfie-zombie culture because of the current shifting economic and cultural climates. Zombies are uncanny in that we know them, yet they are mere shells of who they once were. Similarly, the selfie is an attempt to grasp on to a specific place in time that exists forever in our digital footprints, becoming “zombie baggage” that arguably holds us back from the traditional growing process.

PAPER 2

Distorted Humans: Selfies and Zombies

In films and TV shows, the zombie is disfigured and disconnected from its once-human identity, no longer living, but somehow still “alive.” This stands with powerful likeness to digitized humans in mediated society — forever online and connected in hyperreal space but dislodged from themselves corporally, seduced by pre-structured social media spaces and grossly distorted in self-image by two-dimensional representation. Perhaps we fear the zombie less because it is dead and more because it is our future if we are overtaken by what the zombie has — the endless pursuit of self-desire absent reason. An idol of the human, the zombie is a god we both fear and revere.

PAPER 3

Selfies and Zombies: Cultural Responses to Nihilism and Nothingness

Selfies and zombies might well be symbols of narcissism and socioeconomic destruction, but they also represent responses to the breakdown of “grand narratives” in philosophy, the entropy of the space age, and the vastness of the universe revealed by media technologies. Drawing from Sartre, Baudrillard, and Lyotard, this paper shows that selfies and zombies are two sides of the same existential condition, for they are how pop culture confronts fears of nothingness and the philosophical apocalypse — is there might be no cosmic or universal meaning to our media, products, nations, and our existence as a species?