

Vacker, B., & Gillespie, G. (2013). Yearning to be the center of everything, when we are the center of nothing: The parallels and reversals in chaco, hubble, and facebook. *Telematics and Informatics*, 30, 35-46.

### **Synopsis:**

Vacker and Gillespie discussed the parallels between Chaco petroglyphs, the Hubble Space Telescope, and Facebook noting their similar ability to extend human consciousness, expand knowledge, and create and shape identity. They drew a parallel between the petroglyphs and Facebook, citing these media as spaces where humans map their place in a larger cosmos (real or digital) and represent reality back to the self. They discussed the human desire to situate the self at the center of everything when in actuality we are at the center of nothing, as demonstrated by the Hubble telescope. Vacker and Gillespie argued that humans compensate for this feeling of nothingness through electronic screens and social media where we map our existence and mirror the self's existence. In discussing technological advancements and Facebook, they use Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality and the McLuhans' idea that technology engineers its own reversal when it is overextended causing it to lose function and users to lose enthusiasm. They also suggested that like the failed Chacoan society, and due to "human hubris for imaging we have a destiny central to the cosmos," (p. 43) modern society is faced with civilizational challenges that will likely undo us.

### **Key Concepts:**

- **Theory of Hyperreality (Jean Baudrillard)** – "the idea that if the media functions as 'maps' for our lives and reality, then the maps have become so vast and dominant that they have overtaken or obliterated the territories they were supposed to represent (Baudrillard 1994)" (p. 41)
- **Mirroring and mapping** – The use of cosmic or social media to record our existence and place in the universe. This process in social media is about presenting carefully cultivated content in order to mirror back our own lives and reality to ourselves (p. 40-41).
- **First person paparazzi** – referenced in relation to Facebook – "users are writers, directors, and paparazzi for the 'star' of the show – their self" (p. 41).

### **Key Quotes:**

- "The Hubble Space Telescope shows no culture or people on Earth are at the center of the universe. And, it is because we are not the center of the universe that we must compensate for space telescopes with electronic screens and social media" (p. 38).
- "Facebook provides this free app in exchange for the panoptic power to surveil and archive every action taken in Facebook and provide that data for prying corporations and spying governments. In addition, Facebook is a celebration of narcissism, exhibitionism, and voyeurism" (p. 41).
- "Today, we have no plausible or reasonable excuse for believing we are the center of the universe, but we have ways to culturally and technologically console ourselves for this cosmic condition" (p. 44)

### **Essential Question:**

- In what ways could the Internet be utilized as a site of enlightenment and empowerment rather than as a space of self-indulgence and narcissism?