

The background of the entire slide is an abstract composition of numerous vertical strips of color. These strips, which vary in width and height, are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement. The colors range from deep blues and purples on the left to warm oranges and yellows on the right, with various shades of red, green, and brown interspersed throughout. The overall effect is a vibrant, textured wall of color.


Enacting Conscience and Communicating Presence Crafting NCA's Future

ROSEANN M. MANDZIUK



NCA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, NOVEMBER 18, 2022

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NCA PRESIDENT ROSEANN M. MANDZIUK, Ph.D.

ROSEANN M. MANDZIUK is a University Distinguished Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, Texas State University. She earned her Ph.D. in Rhetorical Studies from the University of Iowa, her M.S. in Communication from Illinois State University, and her B.A. in Speech and in English from Wayne State University. She has been a member of the faculty at Texas State University since 1987.

Roseann's research focuses upon images of women, the rhetorical uses of history, and the construction of public memory in museums and monuments. She has co-authored a scholarly book about the rhetoric of Sojourner Truth, published numerous articles and book chapters examining historical and contemporary rhetoric, and served as Editor of *Women's Studies in Communication*. She has received two Fulbright Scholar Awards, in India and in Poland, and has presented numerous international research lectures. She also was selected as an American Council on Education Fellow.

Roseann's extensive professional service contributions include currently serving as Vice President of the National Communication Association, and she will ascend to President of NCA in 2022. She also has served as President of the Southern States Communication Association, two terms as Finance Board Chair and twelve years as a member of the Affirmative Action/Intercaucus Committee for the National Communication Association, and fifteen years as Chair of the Presidential Work Life Advisory Council on her campus. She has served on numerous editorial boards including *Quarterly Journal of Speech* and *Women's Studies in Communication*, as well as regional and national association publication, nomination, and award committees. Her contributions have been recognized with national and regional professional association awards for teaching, mentoring, and research, including the 2020 Distinguished Service Award from SSCA, the 2017 Francine Merritt Award for Contributions to Women in Communication from the NCA Women's Caucus, and the 2014 Michael M. Osborn Teacher-Scholar Award from SSCA.

Enacting Conscience and Communicating Presence Crafting NCA's Future

THANK YOU TO THE MEMBERS of the NCA Executive Committee, the Legislative Assembly, and all of you who so generously give your time and expertise to our Association. I especially wish to acknowledge the talented and dedicated staff in our National Office, and in particular, to express my gratitude to Dr. Shari Miles-Cohen, our Executive Director. We embarked on our journey in NCA leadership together at the start of this most transformative year, and I so very much have valued her counsel and commitment.

Also, I know that I would not stand here today without the support, and faith, of so very many people, including my family, my colleagues, generations of students, and especially, those long-time friends who have sustained me through the hardest of times and also shared my joys. Although they are no longer with us, at each stop in my academic travels I also was so very fortunate to have had a significant mentor, and I wish to acknowledge them today: George Ziegelmueller, Craig Cutbirth, Bruce Gronbeck, and Suzanne Fitch.

As I begin, I am humbled by this responsibility of serving as NCA President, but I also have been exhilarated by this opportunity to make what I hope has been a significant contribution to an Association that has given so much to me, and indeed, to all of us. We have much to celebrate this year! Our first comprehensive Strategic Plan in over a decade was approved by the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday. Our first Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access plan was endorsed by the LA overwhelmingly. We launched our first NCA member survey. We initiated our first steps toward significant IDEA actions in concert with external consultants. And we signed a testamentary agreement with Dr. Karen Foss and Dr. Sonja Foss for a significant future gift to NCA to fund fellowships for mid-career women-identified members.

We also have weathered an extraordinarily challenging time in our personal and professional lives. The global pandemic has transformed our teaching, research, and service pursuits and wrought lasting effects in our everyday lives, while division, disinformation, and discrimination threaten to erode our fundamental rights and democratic systems. Yet it is in the most difficult times that we often find our greatest resolve and realize our greatest strengths. I believe that is true of each of us as individuals and it is true of this Association, the driving force that brings us together now, at this time and in this place.

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Our histories shape us, our choices define us, and our actions become our legacies. When I chose last year's Convention theme of "Renewal and Transformation," I was inviting us to reflect on this dynamic of, at once, looking backward to understand what is of value from the past, as well as casting our view forward to envision the paths toward meaningful change. For the next few minutes, I invite you to join me in considering the prospects and promises facing us as we chart the path to NCA's future within two guiding concepts: Enacting Conscience and Communicating Presence. We have created the plans; now pursuing the question of what lies ahead for NCA is essential and imperative.

First, "conscience" resides in all of us, as our personal sense of principles that guide our choices. The word "conscience" comes from Latin, *conscientia* (knowledge within oneself, sense of right, a moral sense), and from *consciens*, (to know, to be mutually aware). In the best sense, conscience leads us to engage in actions that accord with our fundamental principles, both individually and in concert with the values we share in our communities. But what does it mean to act with conscience?

I would like to introduce you to Mary Frances Zomkowski. She is 18 years old; it is 1943. Mary was born in 1925 in Hamtramck, Michigan, the first-generation daughter of Polish immigrants. Like many women from working-class families, she did not see a future in education for herself. As the youngest of six children, she sought work to help support her parents, rather than finish high school. Then, the world around her exploded as the exigence of World War II called for common citizens to make extraordinary choices.

Mary answered that call by going to work in an airplane factory – yes, my mother was a true "Rosie the Riveter." Actually, she told me that she was a rivet catcher, which sounds like the more difficult job. That is the photo that I wish I had, of course, the one of Mary in the iconic denim overalls and red bandana, bravely riding the streetcar down Woodward Avenue in Detroit to her midnight shift. I have told you my mother's story because, for me, her actions define the essence of conscience: Choosing to act according to the needs of your community and in concert with your principles.

How can NCA act with *conscience*, in accordance with *our* principles, to best serve our members while also engaging with the multiple communities in which we live and work? As we chart our future course, our efforts must be grounded in the prospects and lessons that our past offers to us. In the decade since our last comprehensive strategic planning process in 2011, our Association has undergone significant changes and profound challenges. NCA is a substantially different Association.

We have added six new divisions and three new caucuses. In 2017, the Affirmative Action and Intercaucus Committee became the Diversity Council, subsequently renamed the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Council, which provided Executive Committee representation for its chair. Next year, we will add a new Mentorship and Leadership Development Council to our governance structure.

NCA also has expanded its external outreach including our public programs series, podcasts, enhanced social media presence, and the creation of the NCA Center for Communication, Community Collaboration, and Change. Our First Amendment Studies journal has transitioned to become Communication and Democracy, and we soon will launch our twelfth academic journal, Communication and Race.

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In the past decade, our Association also has enjoined significant conversations about its exclusionary practices. Particularly marked by the publication of the article “#Communicationsowhite” in the *Journal of Communication* in 2018 and the “#Rhetoricsowhite” forum in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* in 2019, we faced a reckoning around issues of discrimination, racism, and coloniality. These conversations reached a nexus in 2019 with the controversy over how our Distinguished Scholars were selected. Subsequently, NCA initiated a series of efforts to address these critiques, including changing how award committees are constituted and expanding efforts to open access to Association leadership, editorship, and governance roles. As we look to NCA’s future, these significant reflexive conversations must continue as we act with conscience to center IDEA in all of our choices.

Twenty-five years ago, in her 1997 Presidential Address, Judith Trent noted that. “Over the years, a number of my predecessors have focused their presidential addresses on equality, diversity, and multiculturalism, and now I extend that challenge. More than it has been in many years, the threat is real.” Twenty-five years later, NCA is called again to answer that same challenge and address an intensified threat. We have the extraordinary opportunity to marshal all of our resources and energies to realize the transformative change that is possible. Carefully considering our legacy and implementing our vision and goals with conscience will require us to communicate “presence.”

In *The New Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca describe “presence” as the rhetorical process of “the displaying of certain elements on which the speaker wishes to center attention so that they may occupy the foreground of the hearer’s consciousness.” The term “presence” also encompasses several other definitions: the choice to occupy a place, a protective or enabling force, and a lasting spirit that invite us to think about how NCA will need to *create* presence, *ensure* presence, and *honor* presence. In essence, we have to choose what we believe is most important in the future of NCA, just as we also make difficult choices in our personal lives.

To illustrate, let me briefly return you to Mary’s story. In her next chapter, she meets Chester in 1947. Although this is *her* tale, his path notably was one of conscience and choice as well. Also a first-generation child of Polish immigrants, he chose to leave college to enlist in the Army. Amidst fighting in Germany, Chet was injured and imprisoned, but was one of the fortunate who returned home from the war. Mary and Chester married in 1948, had their first son in 1950, the same year that they moved to the Detroit suburb of Berkley; had their second son in 1953; and then that’s where I enter the story, as Mary’s youngest child and her only daughter, in 1959.

Haruki Murakami writes, in *Kafka on the Shore*: “And once the storm is over, you won’t remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won’t even be sure whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won’t be the same person who walked in. That’s what this storm’s all about” (5-6).

The experience of living through the war changed Mary, shaped her next set of choices, and clarified what was most important to her. My mother did not return to work, and instead embraced the tasks of raising her family and building a home. My father also made his own choices, never returning to college but instead working for the Chrysler Tank Arsenal until he retired in 1978.

NCA must foster an association culture and “presence” that is inclusive and ethically centered.

As was the case with my parents’ post-war decisions, NCA must recognize the inevitability of change and embrace the transformative opportunities that it presents. Indeed, as Murakami writes, while they are devastating, storms also evoke possibility. Our Association has emerged from our own challenges both different and stronger. Still, to move forward, NCA needs to decide our courses of action and what we will make *present* in charting our future.

First, “presence” entails influence. Particularly in this turbulent era of post-truths and fractured communities, NCA must take up the responsibility to defend the essential role of debate and dialogue, as well as the value of our research and the pursuit of knowledge. In the midst of disparate voices and resurgent anti-intellectualism, communication scholars, teachers, and practitioners must lead the efforts to defend the essential importance of informed critique and deliberative discussion. We also must be bold in serving the public good and ensuring that communication has presence as the essential component of a conscientious citizenry.

Second, “presence” is defined as the condition of being present, the actual person who is present, and as something present of a concrete or visible nature. NCA needs to be responsive and vigilant regarding who is “present” among our Association membership, leadership, and governance roles, journal editors, and published authors. We have made some significant strides, but this work must continue. NCA needs to pursue additional structural changes and launch new programs for leadership pipelines, student support, and member development.

Third, “presence” is defined as one’s bearing, carriage, or air, as well as a spirit that is felt. In this regard, NCA must foster an association culture and “presence” that is inclusive and ethically centered. We will need to be at once fiscally sound, yet also innovative; We will need to be creative and responsive to the needs of members amid the changing landscapes of higher education funding, technological advances, and the publishing industry, among the many shifting grounds that we will encounter.

Moreover, our Association must uphold the significant commitments to social justice, peace, and personal expression that are captured in our credos and public policy statements. How we will define our external engagements must be central in our deliberations about the future of our Association. For me, the way forward is clear. NCA should do much more to address the significant issues that we face and to express why Communication scholarship, pedagogy, and practice are essential in creating a better world.

As I conclude, let me interject one more chapter of Mary’s story, my favorite part of her tale of conscience and presence. Chester passed away in 2016, leaving Mary alone after their 67 years together, but she truly surprised everyone by choosing to sell their home and move into an independent senior apartment. At the age of 88, she finally had a room of her own! She embraced the life in her new community, made new friends, read virtually every book in the library, and positively blossomed with grace and good humor to the age of 96.

Mary and I had disagreed on so many things over the years. Through the rebellious 1960s in which I came of age, the culture clashes of the 1970s that marked my college years, and my feminist awakenings during graduate studies in the 1980s, I had rejected the very things that gave my mother’s life meaning.

As we make the difficult choices about how to advance our Association, let's commit to embrace the prospects for transformative change that truly will make a difference for our members and for the communities in which we work and live.

But in this last chapter, we found a way back to each other. Unexpectedly, it was a bond forged in widowhood, and then, facing together the health challenges of her last year before she passed away in August 2021. We both chose to grant *presence* to the time we had together and the love that we shared across our differences. The moral of Mary's story is a simple one: To act with conscience while holding fast to our principles, to grant presence to what we believe is most important, and to boldly embrace transformative change amidst challenge.

As we make the difficult choices about how to advance our Association, let's commit to embrace the prospects for transformative change that truly will make a difference for our members and for the communities in which we work and live. Even when we disagree about our desired directions, we are called to act in concert with our shared principles. Our core values must serve as the unifying force that guides our deliberations. As forthrightly expressed in NCA's Credo for Ethical Communication: "We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society." Our differences have and will continue to be the source of our strength and vitality.

When I began my term as NCA President, I hoped that many diverse voices would be engaged in formulating our future vision and mission. Now, as we prepare to boldly venture into that transformative future, we need your passion, energy, and commitment to assay our possible paths carefully and critically. By enacting *conscience* and communicating *presence*, we will lead NCA forward. I very much look forward to taking that journey with you.

Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Beach*, translation by Philip Gabriel (New York: Knopf, 2005), 5-6.

Credo for Ethical Communication, National Communication Association,
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