

# Get to Know Julia Sonnevend

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For Julia Sonnevend, Assistant Professor of [Communication Studies at the University of](#)

[Michigan](#), success looks like the opportunity to explore and create. In her words, "Success is dedication and freedom. The possibility that with passionate work you can fly to new 'planets.' I feel the happiest in settings where there is a lot to learn and a lot to reach. I cannot imagine a life without ambitions and I have a hard time handling intellectual spaces that are limited; where there is no place to 'move'."

To reach the success Sonnevend has achieved, she has traveled the world and adopted a global perspective throughout her work. Sonnevend studied German literature, aesthetics, law and communications in Budapest, Berlin, New Haven and New York before starting teaching at the University of Michigan in the fall term of 2013. After completing her Master of Laws degree at [Yale Law School](#), Sonnevend went on to earn her PhD in Communication Studies at [Columbia University in the City of New York](#).

"Exploring new spaces and especially spaces of 'in-betweenness,' I believe, are essential both for me and for my work. Frequent intellectual and geographical travels or relocations strongly shape my thinking," said Sonnevend. As a result of these academic and geographic shifts, Sonnevend's research has emerged as focused on the cultural aspects of globalization with a special interest in media events, rituals, icons and performances.



Sonnevend in Jerusalem

Sonnevend's approach to research connects disciplines and institutions from multiple countries in order to achieve a unique global perspective. Sonnevend expanded on this idea, explaining, "For the first half of 2014, I was in Israel as a [Lady Davis Postdoctoral Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem](#), working on a book entitled *Stories Without Borders: The Making of a Global Iconic Event*. My book examines how we can tell the story of a news event in a way that people remember it internationally and over time. Focusing on the fall of the Berlin Wall as central case study, I show how the confusing events of November 9, 1989 gradually condensed into a simple phrase ("fall of the Berlin Wall"), a short emotional narrative of freedom, and a recognizable visual scene. I argue that this "package" of phrase, narrative and image now travels across multiple media platforms and has currency from China to Hungary to the United States, providing us with a contemporary myth."

It seems only fitting that with Julia Sonnevend's interest in intellectual cross-pollination, the inspiration for some of her best work comes from some unexpected sources. Sonnevend explains, "Somehow, I get the best ideas when walking around in art museums because the visual representations from various centuries speak to me. I think the best ideas come when you do not focus on finding them. For instance, a few months ago I was walking around in Jerusalem and suddenly saw a digital sign at a bus station: "Communication Failure." And I thought: what if I write a book on why communication (often) fails in families, in international relations and in media? Well, will this playful idea become a book, an essay or a paper? I am not sure yet, but I have certainly found this project at the least expected moment."



When not working or traveling, Sonnevend enjoys much of what Ann Arbor has to offer. Her favorite aspects of to town include, "The vibrant classical musical scene – I have just received an email about the fantastic [2014/2015 season](#)! And conversations with friends in *The Last Word* also add to my Ann Arbor experience... The city quickly felt like home. I find the place culturally exciting and whenever I have to be abroad at a conference, in half an hour I can be at the Detroit airport. I also like visiting the [Detroit Institute of Arts](#) and the [Art Institute of Chicago](#)."

When asked what advice she would give to incoming Communication Studies students, Sonnevend bequeathed some very valuable advice, "Do not go with the trend! Try to find your own interests, your own niche. I strongly believe that if your ideas are exciting, the world and the job market will be interested in them. This advice, I believe, is useful for all disciplines, but especially for communication studies, which tends to focus only on things that are happening right now. But the past and the future are just as important as the present. A successful academic discipline has to include careful historical writings and imaginative grand theories of the future."