

## On the Rhetoric of Images and Power (Venice, 4-6 Oct 23)

CFZ - Ca' Foscari Zattere, Fondamenta Zattere al Ponte Lungo, 1392, 30123 Venice (Italy), Oct 4-06, 2023

Deadline: May 14, 2023

Giulia Gelmi

A Driving Force. On the Rhetoric of Images and Power (5th Postgraduate International Conference, Venice 2023).

### I. Call for proposals

Art is a powerful and non-neutral tool. Its forms and expressions can influence, entertain, educate, and manipulate the realm of the real. Throughout history, the artists' creative power was able to give form, substance, and meaning to otherwise inert matter, making them a demiurge. Images, however, once they have taken on their final form and are put into circulation, undertake a life of their own. Images can direct the spectator's interest toward their own content. The more this process is effective, the more a work of art captivates the spectator's attention. At the beginning of his well-known *The Power of Images* (1989), David Freedberg claims that not only images have their own power on us, but they are also, inevitably, related to 'power' itself.

The 5th Postgraduate International Conference aims to investigate the rhetorical nature of the intersection between image and power.

As conceptualized by Jurij M. Lotman in 1979, "rhetoric" consists of the displacement of the structural principles of a given semiotic sphere into another semiotic sphere. If the Tartu semiologist's approach is adopted, the "correlation with different semiotic systems gives rise to a rhetorical situation in which a powerful source of elaboration of new meanings is contained" (Lotman 2022: 220).

In exploring these meanings from a multidisciplinary perspective, the central questions of this conference are:

1. the power of the image, as an autonomous device, endowed with a pervasive and persuasive character;
2. the image as a form of representation of power.

The latter question addresses the sense of authority, as well as its opposite, namely the dissident and counter-narrative image.

Concerning the first point, as articulated by Andrea Pinotti: "[...] if the image eminently addresses the eye, its effects are far from confined to the optical sphere; on the contrary [...], its efficacy, its

power, its performativity, its ability to induce us to do things and to be affected by them, to turn our very existence, simply start from the eye and, then, soon invest our body as a whole, and extend rapidly from the sphere of sensibility to all those layers of meaning (affective, ethical, social, political, religious, ideological, and anthropological in its broadest sense) that intertwine and blend within our experience of images” (Pinotti, Somaini 2009: 19).

With regard to the second point, dwelling on the connection between image and politics, it is possible to investigate the image both as a form of representation of power and its visual counter-narrative. For example, if we take into account art patronage, it is therefore essential to consider the forms of power and control - political, social, or religious - that underlie the creation of the work of art. It is, then, necessary to be able to distinguish between images of persuasion and propaganda. The images’ power, historically used as a controlling instrument by kingdoms, empires, and regimes, can likewise explain the various forms of artistic dissidence and the censorship to which they have been subjected.

We seek contributions that can explore the ambiguous, complex, and undeniable relationship between “power” and “images”. The purpose is to describe and discuss different aspects of images and the visual rhetoric associated with power, whether through the philosophical, artistic, historical, scientific, or social lens.

Proposals will not be subjected to any chronological or geographical limit.

- What forms does power assume in connection with the content of images?
- In the age of image overproduction, in a state of constant communication, what is the power of images and, specifically, of the artistic image over us?
- How do images act on us as expressions and representations of systems of control and as signs of resistance and dissidence?
- Are politics, art, and power intertwined throughout history with defined and recurring schemes?
- If images are invested with some form of power, how do these processes occur?

## II. How to participate

The 5 th Postgraduate International Conference is open to all Ph.D. students.

If you are interested in attending, please send a proposal for a 20-min presentation in English to [infoveniceconference@gmail.com](mailto:infoveniceconference@gmail.com)

The applicant’s proposal should include the following details:

- Name and surname
- Contact details (including email address and telephone number)
- Academic affiliation
- Provisional title
- Abstract (maximum 400 words)
- Curriculum vitae (maximum 150 words)

Combine all information into a single PDF file with Surname\_Name\_Title (example: Dimmick-  
\_Lawrence\_Architectural elements of space identity).

The conference will be both on-site and online. The language of the conference is English.

Deadline: May 14th 2023.

Successful applicants will be notified by May 22nd 2023.

There will be no conference fees, but participants must secure their own transportation and lodging.

As a result of the conference, the proceedings will be published.

Successful candidates will be provided with detailed information after the selection.

Reference:

CFP: On the Rhetoric of Images and Power (Venice, 4-6 Oct 23). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 30, 2023 (accessed Apr 3, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/38929>>.