

Message or Noise? The Readability of Images (Paris, 12–13 Sep 23)

DFK Paris, 45 rue des Petits Champs, 75001 Paris, Sep 12–13, 2023

Charlotte Maxin, DFK Paris

Annual Congress: Message or Noise? The Readability of Images.

As part of the bi-annual theme 23/24 “The Visible and the Sayable”, the German Centre for Art History (DFK Paris) is organizing a colloquium from 12th to 13th September 2023 in French and English.

Under the direction of:

Peter Geimer (DFK Paris),

Georges Didi-Huberman (EHESS, Paris),

Élodie Vaudry (DFK Paris).

Conception:

Guillaume Blanc-Marianne, Max Bonhomme,

Georges Didi-Huberman, Sarah Flitti, Peter Geimer,

Francesca Golia, Louis-Antoine Mège, Marie Schiele,

Anna Siebold, Élodie Vaudry.

RÉSUMÉ:

Do images convey a message, or do they merely create noise, and that in itself is good enough? This alternative, formulated by Michel Foucault in relation to medical knowledge, implicitly addresses the question of readability, that of an extended, non-textual readability. It also raises the question of the uncertainty and ambiguity of images, the inability to read them.

While the notion of noise is often conceived in contrast to silence or to the unambiguous transmission of messages, its application to images is not to be understood merely metaphorically in this context. On the contrary, considering the photographic image and its granularity or accidents, the graphic noise generated by data visualizations (“chart junk”) or, in terms of information and media theory, the alteration of an image during its transmission, one could argue that in this technical sense, noise itself constitutes a more or less intended component of images.

Setting aside the use of sound in visual arts or the model of synaesthesia, the conference focusses on the noise of images, in order to question the relationship between what is visible and what may be expressed with words.

From rustling to roaring, from whisper to rumble, a broader conception of noise also refers to ele-

ments of images that may be perceived as accessory at first glance.

Ornaments, details, the background of an image or its materiality are in fact often easily dismissed, as if looking at something depended on reading the contours of forms we already know, casting aside marginal elements, which are vague or undefined and thus impossible to decipher. Noise, however, also concerns how we experience images, from sensing them to searching for an interpretation. The latter is often accompanied by the desire to transform what is seen into intelligible code, to something that can be read.

Finally, noise interferes with the judgment of historians, art historians, or anyone attempting to read an image, since that judgment is inevitably structured by biases and gaps that constantly challenge our thinking. Recent computational approaches in the humanities are not immune to this type of noise: despite the ideal of transparency and accuracy, in some cases data selection, algorithmic processing, and visualization techniques have shown to generate further bias and confusion.

PROGRAM

12.09.2023 – DFK Paris

13:45 Welcome

14:00 Introduction – Peter Geimer et Marie Schiele

1er Panel : Visibilité du bruit

Introduction et modération – Max Bonhomme et Francesca Golia

14:30 Bruit, diffusion et espace latent. Les nouveaux liens algorithmiques entre le dicible et le visible

Antonio Somaini (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle / Paris III)

15:30 Excès et inaperçu. Les bruits sur l'image médiévale de la transfiguration

Vincent Debiais (CRNS / EHESS, Paris)

16:30 Break

16:45 Drawing with and against the grain. Notes on Goya's Bordeaux albums

Wolfram Pichler (Universität Wien)

17:45 Break

18:00 Evening Lecture

Lu sur le fil

Georges Didi-Huberman (EHESS, Paris)

19:30 End of the first day

Cocktail at the DFK Paris

13/09/2023 – DFK Paris

2e Panel : Seuils de lisibilité

Introduction et modération – Sarah Flitti et Anna Siebold

9:30 « S'il fallait les nommer une par une, cela dépasserait la mesure ». Une esthétique du trop dans les images tibétaines

Jean-Baptiste Georges-Picot (EPHE – Université PSL, Paris)

10:30 L'hypothèse du bruit ou l'apparente lisibilité des dessins de cinéma

Emmanuelle André (Université Paris-Cité) et Joséphine Jibokji (Université de Lille)

11:30 Break

11:45 Data Opacity. Translation, Meditation, Transparency and other Vizualization Myths

Johanna Drucker (University of California, Los Angeles)

12:45 Lunch

3e Panel : Interférences visuelles

Introduction et modération – Guillaume Blanc-Marianne et Louis-Antoine Mège

14:30 Visual Noise from Wire Photography to "Cognitive Automation"

Jonathan Dentler (German Historical Institute, Washington DC)

15:30 Quels bruits le flou produit-il ? Le mot et la forme

Pauline Martin (Photo Elysée, Musée Cantonal pour la photographie, Lausanne)

16:30 Break

16:45 L'image-rumeur

Peter Szendy (Brown University, Providence)

17:45 Break

18:30 Evening Lecture – INHA, auditorium Jacqueline Lichtenstein

Hito Steyerl (Universität der Künste Berlin)

Followed by a round table discussion with Peter Geimer and Georges Didi-Huberman

Reference:

CONF: Message or Noise? The Readability of Images (Paris, 12-13 Sep 23). In: Arthist.net, Jul 20, 2023 (accessed Jul 7, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/39835>>.