

## **An Interdisciplinary Scheme for Assessing Transformation in Public Climate Visualization Projects**

*Birgit Schneider and Lynda Walsh*

Our short-term collaboration at the Rachel Carson Center seeks to develop an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for assessing the transformative aims of the Climaps (EMAPS) visual atlas outreach project. Assessing transformation is critical, but it is hardly simple. Previous assessments of the “impact” of climate images on viewers have tended to imagine transformation as an arrow traveling from image producers to image receivers. Meanwhile, research in the rhetoric of science and in art studies has discovered that the vectors of transformation are more complex—that the notion of “influence” must be balanced by evidence of coproduction of images by their viewers; that the ways in which viewers recruit images for their own political purposes must be accounted for.

Accordingly, we propose to generate a more comprehensive and nuanced theory for assessing transformation in climate visualization outreach by combining expertise from art studies and rhetoric. Birgit Schneider is a scholar in art history and media studies at Potsdam University who has authored two edited collections and numerous articles on the history and social-aesthetic effects of scientific images, and climate images in particular. She is a member of the groundbreaking FIGO research network, which seeks to promote interdisciplinary approaches to the criticism and mobilization of climate images. Lynda Walsh is a rhetorician of science from the University of Nevada, Reno. She studies the visual composition practices of scientific researchers and has published several rhetorical analyses of the arguments made by climate images presented in reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Over eight weeks, we aim to articulate a theoretical framework for assessing the transformations attempted by Climaps. Such an articulation must be done methodically and reflexively. Therefore, we will begin by investigating sympathetic notions between art history and rhetoric—such as the notion of Gestalt from art studies and the notion of *topos* or strategic perspective from rhetoric—with constant reflection on the roots of these theories and the consequences of combining them into a unified framework for analysis.

Throughout the process, we will use the Climaps atlases as a touchstone. The outcome of our collaboration will be a concrete theoretical rubric for assessing Climaps’ transformative efforts. The deliverable will be a journal article on our new framework submitted to *Science Communication*. The actual assessment of Climaps will be conducted in a follow-up project with the help of FIGO.

Specifically, this project will demonstrate the utility of the ancient discipline of rhetoric in managing our non-modern climate politics; and, through the resulting theoretical framework, it will demonstrate the synergistic—rather than merely additive—power of combining humanist approaches to assessing political action on climate issues. We look forward to the response of the fellowship committee and are happy to answer any questions that arise during the review process.