

Call for Papers

Cultures of In/Visibility and In/Audibility

Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam, 23-24 April 2026

Conference organizers:

Dr Alice Borrego (EMMA Research Unit)

PD Dr Gero Guttzeit (LMU Munich)

Dr Héloïse Lecomte (Sorbonne Université)

Prof Dr Esther Peeren (University of Amsterdam)

Invisibility and inaudibility, and their corollaries, visibility and audibility, have become impactful concepts and metaphors across media and disciplines in recent years. This conference aims to take stock of the role they play in shaping and understanding culture in different contexts and historical periods, including, perhaps most urgently, in our current conditions of political polarization and surveillance capitalism.

With regard to invisibility we take up both ideas of invisibility as marginalisation or *social invisibility* (LeBlanc 2009, Král 2014), comprising, for example, lesbian invisibility (Lecomte 2024, 23) or “subaltern invisibility” (Chemmachery 2019), and ideas of invisibility as a site of power or *hegemonic invisibility* (Guttzeit 2025), comprising, for example, billionaires’ invisibility (Peeren 2024, 86–88) and the power of “decorporation” (Borrego 2024, 37). In this field of tension, a key issue we want to explore is how social, political, cultural, literary, filmic, televisual and online texts can explore the potentials and limitations of an “agency of invisibility” (Peeren 2014).

Inaudibility – as silence – has predominantly been explored as resulting from marginalization. Far from a “passive state of understanding” (Santos), silence can be part of a potent mechanism to create a monopoly of narrative (Le Blanc) that erases cultural, social, and political dissonances. In this regard, inaudibility not only raises the question of how one can make oneself heard, but of how the multiplicity of narratives, of stories, of shared experiences, is muffled by imbalances of power. Silence, the “currency of power” (Achino-Loeb), partakes in the construction of the spectral. Much like being seen requires one to be actually perceived by the other, being heard entails being actively listened to. Inaudibility, however, can also be recuperated as a form of agency: choosing to refrain from speaking, like claiming the right to opacity (Glissant), can be a form of empowerment.

What constellations of the in/visible and in/audible can be distinguished and what perspectives and social groups do these constellations privilege and ignore? How are in/visibility and in/audibility culturally, socially, politically and economically mobilized? How do in/visibility and in/audibility impact attention and circulate within attention economies? What are the affective dimensions of in/visibility and in/audibility? How do they link to other logics of marginalisation and power dynamics? The conference sets out from the assumption that our understanding of political and social in/visibility and in/audibility needs to be sufficiently complex to answer these questions and related ones.

The conference marks the culmination of work on invisibility and silence that started with the “Invisible Lives, Silent Voices” conference in 2020 (planned for Montpellier but held online because of the pandemic) and has continued through a five-year online lecture series and the publication of a special issue of *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* on Contemporary Literature and Social Invisibility in 2024. In seeking to be a forum for interdisciplinary exchange on in/visibility and in/audibility, the conference also marks the beginning of a new phase for the emerging field of *invisibility studies* (see Král 2014, Steiner and Veel 2015, Guttzeit 2025). While “Visibility” was chosen as the Presidential Theme for the 2025 MLA Convention, there was little visibility of European research on invisibility. With this conference we would like to remedy this and explore in/visibility and in/audibility from a broad interdisciplinary perspective.

Topics and issues to be addressed include but are not limited to the following:

- how are visual/audible constellations - and their specific ways of distributing visibility/invisibility and audibility/inaudibility - constructed and what effects do they have?
- how can dominant/hegemonic ways of distributing and oscillating between visibility and invisibility or audibility and inaudibility be contested?
- what forms of agency are associated with visibility and invisibility in different visual constellations such as those defined by spectrality?
- what is the relationship between invisibilisation and silencing?
- how do ways of valuing and devaluing in/visibility and in/audibility differ historically and culturally?
- how have in/visibility and in/audibility been theorized in different disciplines?
- how do in/visibility and in/audibility appear in different media, and what affordances do different media have for thinking through the complexities of the cultural, social, political or economic mobilization of in/visibility and in/audibility?
- how do in/visibility and in/audibility operate in cultures of surveillance and attention economies?
- what patterns of invisibilisation and silencing can we distinguish under neoliberal rationality?

We are particularly interested in case-study based papers.

Please submit a 250-word proposal with a 50-80 word bio sketch to the organizers at e.peeren@uva.nl

The deadline is 31 October 2025.

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