

CONFERENCE PROGRAM



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SEIT 1386

ETHICS OF QUEER IN/VISI- BILITY



KEYNOTES

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30 September — 02 October 2026

Marsilius-Kolleg, Universität Heidelberg

Organized by

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Organization

Contact

For any questions regarding the conference, please reach out to us via email: queerinv@as.uni-heidelberg.de

Starting point

Concepts of in/visibility have played an important role in queer activism and gender studies for a long time. Being seen and being heard, having a voice and a place at the table have been manifest political goals but also powerful metaphors of representation through decades of feminist and queer movements and academic debates. A vocabulary of in/visibility informs many ways of talking about gender, from the metaphor of the closet (Sedgwick 1990, Kibbey 2023) with regard to sexual orientation, to the notion of passing (Goffman 1963) for gender presentation and gender identity. Many aspects of feminist and queer practice rely on becoming visible in public space: women's marches and pride parades, trans and lesbian days of visibility, material objects such as rainbow flags and pronoun buttons. And in media-saturated and digital contexts, being visible has become an omnipresent metric of the self.

At the same time, visibility has been identified as an ambivalent mechanism with risky implications (Foucault 1975, Schaffer 2008, Beauchamp 2019). Representation and exposure can lead to gender-based surveillance, discrimination, and violence. The very notion of safe spaces, a topic of ridicule in some public discourses, is borne from the notion that visibility may entail vulnerability. While queer visibility has been marketed and commodified under the guise of visibility politics for a long time (Hennessy 1994), many individuals and communities are not able to become visible in their plurality, e.g. people on the move and undocumented migrants (Luibhéid & Chávez 2020), people in war-ridden parts of the Global South (Puar 2007), or disabled and chronically ill people (Hedva 2022). For queer people of color, being visible can also mean being subjected to a colonial, orientalist or white gaze (Ferguson 2003), and visible disabled bodies are often reduced to 'inspiration porn' (Grue 2016). Remaining opaque (Glissant 1990), resisting through invisibility (Alloa 2023), and refusing research (Tuck & Yang 2014) have been put forward as productive objections to the white imperative of visibility.

In current political climates, the risk of visibility has become a matter of broad societal attention. Symbols of queer visibility such as pride flags are removed or prohibited; moral panics about gendered access to public bathrooms, gyms and saunas prompt forms of gender surveillance; political initiatives promote name registers of trans individuals; scientific freedom is under threat as DEI mechanisms and queer research paradigms, programs, and individuals become subjected to erasure.

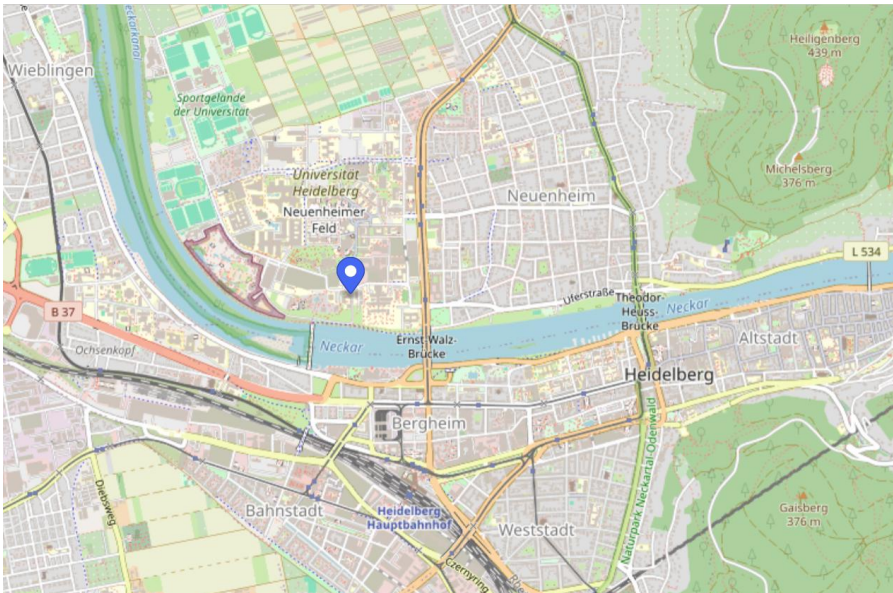
Matters of queer in/visibility thus hold implications for the dignity, identification and well-being of the individual, but they are also embroiled in some of the most conflictive dynamics in ongoing negotiations of our societal fabric. Queer in/visibility is of the highest relevance for ethics in academia—from data and research ethics to teaching and self-expression—and it affects many areas of human development and agency, including education, political participation, job market access, sports, healthcare, and cultural representation.

In this conference, we aim to bring together scholars across disciplines who are interested in the ethics of in/visibility from a queer perspective at a time of societal turbulence and moral backlash against feminist and queer existence. We wish to advance interdisciplinary insight into implications of in/visibility, control, and representation; and to foster interaction across academic disciplines and epistemologies.

Conference organizers: Theresa Heyd, Miriam Neuhausen, Vroni Zieglmeier

Student assistants: Sam Gaugele, Lea Luhr

Location



The conference takes place at *Marsilius Kolleg*, Im Neuenheimer Feld 130.1.

Lunch options

- Central University Canteen (Zentralmensa), 5min walk, card payment only
- University Cafeteria (Café Botanik), 5min walk, card payment only
- Restaurant Bellini, 2min walk (across the street)
- Restaurant Tati, 15min walk or 6min bus 31, not vegan friendly
- uuuhmami, 17min walk or 8min bus 31

Program Overview

Wednesday, September 30, 2026

- 13:15 Opening
- 13:30 *Session 1: Representations* (Chair: Neuhausen)
- Menger:** The Ethics of Showing Violence: Queer In/Visibility and the Display of Historical Visualisations
- Schmitt:** Between Category and Fluidity: Annotating Queer Gender in Kim de l'Horizon's *Blutbuch*
- Jenzer:** 'Vampiric' Aesthetics in Jack Smith's Film(s): A Critique of Queer/Trans Representation
- Crea:** Regimes of Visibility: Félix González-Torres and the Curatorial Production of Queer Meaning
- 15:30 *Break*
- 16:00 *Session 2: Histories* (Chair: Zieglmeier)
- Kölbl:** Faux Amis Ou Deux Amies: Sapphic Painting and Feminist Art History. The In/Visibility of Tamara de Lempicka as a Queer Artist in the History of Interwar Parisian Painting
- Nolte:** "Lesbian Women Are Included, but at Least Worth a Marginal Note...": Conflicts about the Visibility of Lesbians in the Feminist Therapy Community in the 1980s and 1990s
- Del Din:** Fighting to Stay Hidden, Shouting to Come Out: Navigating In/Visibility in the Early Response to the AIDS Pandemic in Japan
- 17:30 *Break*
- 18:00 **Keynote Hájková:** Lesbian Chimeras: Jewish Women Kissing in the Holocaust (Chair: Heyd)
- 20:30 Dinner and Drinks, Location tba (optional, self-paid)

Thursday, October 1, 2026

- 9:00 *Session 3: Architectures* (Chair: Neuhausen)
König: In/Visibly Remembered: The Queer Codes of Figurative and Abstract Monuments
Heithoff: Institutionally Embedded Empowerment in Public Spaces: TGD-only Saunas as Spaces for Negotiating Agency, Resistance and Belonging
Rellensmann, Strasser: Listed Monuments and Queer-Feminist Care: K12 and Tunttenhaus as Contestations of Heritage Visibility
- 10:30 *Break*
- 11:00 *Session 4: Platforms* (Chair: Zieglmeier)
Domnick: The Patriarchal Complicity of Social Media Platforms in the Algorithmic Mediation of Queer In/Visibilities Online
Bănoiu: The Governance of Queer Visibility in Platformized Public Spheres
Canjura: Riding the Bionicle-to-Trans Pipeline: Trans Belonging and Cisheteronormativity within a “Non-Political” Facebook Group
- 12:30 *Lunch (self-organized)*
- 14:00 *Session 5: Repression and Resistance I* (Chair: Heyd)
Haider: Making Queerness Visible: Visibility, Opacity & Epistemic Injustice in Queer Asylum Governance
Bezbaroa: Un-gendering ‘Transgender’ Subjectivity in Indian Legal Discourse
Tarantino: Beyond Safe Spaces: Queer Sanctuaries and the Negotiation of Queer In/Visibility in Jordan
- 15:30 *Break*
- 16:00 *Session 6: Repression and Resistance II* (Chair: Zieglmeier)
Durmaz: Performing the ‘Third Space’: Queer Diasporic Resistance and the Ethics of In/Visibility in Berlin
Xing: Penumbra Politics of Chinese Queer Diasporic Activism at UK Pride
Laila B.: Racialized Butchphobia: The Limits of Queer Visibility
- 17:30 *Break*
- 18:00 **Keynote Calder:** The Transnormative Perceiving Subject in the Perception of Speech Sounds (Chair: Heyd)
- 20:00 Conference Dinner (Café Regie)

Friday, October 2, 2026

- 9:00 *Session 7: Interaction* (Chair: Heyd)
 Wüstenberg: Butch Cut: A Decade of Queer Worldmaking
 Sawall: “Oh No, Everyone Is Sharing, and I’m Not Sure About Mine”: Creating In/Visibility Through Pronoun Sharing Practices
- 10:00 *Break*
- 10:30 *Session 8: Style* (Chair: Neuhausen)
 Han: Conditionally Visible: Sajiao, Queer Stylisation, and the Ethics of Platformed Visibility on Douyin
 Fromm: “Too Cute to Stay in the Closet”: On Cuteness and Queer Visibility
 Woolley: Queer Selfies Culture: Glitch, Camouflage and Entanglement
- 12:00 Closing
- 12:30 Lunch, location tba (optional, self-paid)

Abstracts

September 30

Session 1: Representations

The Ethics of Showing Violence: Queer In/Visibility and the Display of Historical Visualizations

Anja Menger | Universität zu Köln | Public History

My research focuses on historical visualizations of so-called 'hermaphroditism', including medical photographs, drawings and preserved genitals from the 19th and early 20th centuries. These images were produced in violent contexts, often without consent and under asymmetrical power dynamics. Using this material as an example, I want to explore a broader ethical question: What should we do with images produced through violence?

Queer activism has long fought for visibility. Being seen, having a voice and occupying space have been powerful political goals. However, not all visibility is beneficial. Susanne Regener refers to the creation of images in which people are reduced to mere objects of scientific curiosity as 'visual violence'.

This creates an ethical dilemma for queer scholarship today. On the one hand, displaying these images could perpetuate the original violence. On the other hand, refusing to show them risks making that violence invisible.

In my talk, I will examine the legacy of these images and objects. Where are they today? How are they displayed? I will consider how different contemporary contexts address this ethical dilemma in relation to research, preservation, public display and activism.

In recognition of this history of violence, I will argue for a middle path: 'curated opacity.' Images should not be shown automatically just because we can. Instead, we ask: who benefits from seeing them?

The central ethical question is: under what conditions do we make something visible, and who decides? In academia, queer visibility does not simply mean: the more visible, the better. The real challenge lies in finding a way of working with violent images that respects the dignity of those depicted, while ensuring that the violence is neither repeated nor rendered invisible.

Between Category and Fluidity: Annotating Queer Gender in Kim de l'Horizon's *Blutbuch*

Verena Schmitt | Independent Researcher, Halle (Saale) | Computational Literary Studies

“[W]hat is not counted—like being nonbinary—becomes invisible” (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p. 97). Gender in literary studies is frequently conceptualized as binary. This bias leads, within Computational Literary Studies (CLS), to classification systems producing a systematic blind spot for gender representations beyond the binary norm (Borek et al., 2023; Illmer et al., 2022). When such data is used to train machine learning models, gender differences are operationalized along normative lines, reproducing binary assumptions.

Based on an analysis of Kim de l'Horizon's *Blutbuch* (2022), the potential and limitations of computational methods for making queer gender representations visible are examined.

Following the SiNG project methodology (Flüh, 2025; Schumacher, 2025), nominal references to characters are annotated for gender specificity, using a tagset that extends the binary categories “male” and “female” with the categories “genderneutral” and “diverse.” The resulting character profiles reveal how individual characters are linguistically constructed.

This process is shaped by a fundamental tension between gender as a theoretical concept and as an annotation category. While feminist and queer theory conceptualizes gender as fluid and dynamic (Babka & Posselt, 2024; Butler, 1991), annotation instead requires discrete, clearly defined categories that can be applied consistently across a corpus (Fileva, 2023; Pagel et al., 2020). This tension is productive rather than merely problematic (Hatzel et al., 2023, p. 2).

The analysis shows how every decision about classification, such as how to annotate gender-inclusive forms, whether to treat metaphorical self-designations as character references, and which expressions count as nominal references, directly shapes what becomes visible in the data and what remains invisible. The analysis of *Blutbuch* traces how such decisions accumulate into distinct patterns of visibility, illustrated through selected examples.

Making queerness legible through data requires sustained ethical reflection on what classification systems make visible and what they render invisible by design.

‘Vampiric’ Aesthetics in Jack Smith’s Film(s): A Critique of Queer/Trans Representation

Maré Tullio Jenzer | Inter-University Organization Arts & Knowledges, University of Salzburg and University Mozarteum Salzburg | Film and Media Studies, Art History, Cultural Studies, Queer Theory, Trans Studies

Building on the discourse around the efficacy of representational justice (see deLire 2023, Koch-Rein et al. 2020, Billard et al. 2020), I examine the extent to which the analysis of aesthetic strategies for depicting a queer/trans ontology of fugitivity can contribute to a critique of queer/trans representation in film and media studies. To this end, I present an interim report on my dissertation project, in which I analyze Jack Smith’s film *Flaming Creatures* and Andy Warhol’s film *Batman Dracula*, made in co-operation with Jack Smith. I aim to define what I call ‘vampiric qualities’ in these works and—following Jed Samer’s concept of “trans retrospectatorship” (Samer 2022, 176)—explore their implications for a resistant trans-aesthetic reading. While representational justice often serves the goal of inclusion, it struggles to bring about fundamental changes to structural conditions and even carries the risk of reinforcing violent structures and falling into the trap of neoliberal appropriation. Looking back on an earlier anti-assimilationist queer/trans imaginary, especially one that deliberately engaged with aspects of the mythical and the fantastical as a form of resistance (Lewis 2017, 61, 65), proves to be highly productive in this regard.

On a formal level, I describe as “vampiric” Smith’s interest in the unfinished as well as his thematic engagement with undead “creatures” and ‘vamps.’ Particularly relevant to a critique of queer/trans representation is the presence of the vampire in the twilight and mist, which Sue-Ellen Case describes as an “atmosphere of proximity” (Case 1991, 13)—a central diegetic force in the literary and cinematic vampire genre. From this, one can derive a queer/trans aesthetic based on an embodied experience of non-teleological openness to *transformation*, that does not necessarily converge on a final state of representable and legible identity and thus corresponds with a liminal vampiric logic and transcends conventional politics of visibility. Case also refers to the trope of the vampire without a reflection (1991, 15)—in terms of trans representation, the vampire motif thus offers a potential solution to the problem of indexicality in trans theory as described by Eliza Steinbock (2022, 172).

The aspects of the vampiric explored in Smith’s films unfold within the tension between fear and fascination that characterizes both the filmic medium (Metz 1985, 87–88) and the figure of the vampire, while simultaneously engaging with cinema’s own (un)dead condition. Smith subverts these media-aesthetic qualities through an artistic strategy of incompleteness, in which film itself emerges as an undead body: perpetually in transition, never fully complete. By conceiving of film as performance and performance as film, he foregrounds processes of fluid (media) transition as the very subject of his work. This aesthetic practice opens up the possibility of a form of trans

representation that resists the imperatives of visibility and legibility underpinning conventional notions of representational justice.

Regimes of Visibility: Félix González-Torres and the Curatorial Production of Queer Meaning

Luigi Crea | The Pennsylvania State University | Art History

A white platform framed by light bulbs becomes a stage for a solitary dancer: a body that appears, performs, and disappears. Félix González-Torres's *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* (1991) stages visibility not as a stable condition, but as a fleeting and mediated event, suspended between exposure and absence.

This paper asks how queer visibility is produced, negotiated, and transformed through curatorial and institutional dispositifs. Focusing on the reception of González-Torres at the Castello di Rivoli in two exhibitions—*Post Human* (1992) and *Quotidiana* (2000)—it argues that visibility is not an inherent property of the artwork, but a contested condition shaped by exhibition contexts, curatorial narratives, and modes of spectatorship.

Through a comparative and archival analysis of exhibition materials, curatorial texts, and media reception, the paper examines how González-Torres's works—*Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, *Untitled (A Corner of Baci)*, and *Untitled (Billboard)*—operate through absence, relationality, and affect, foregrounding queer experiences of intimacy, loss, and vulnerability in the context of the AIDS crisis. Drawing on José Esteban Muñoz's queer of color critique, I suggest that these works negotiate visibility through displacement, partial legibility, and disidentificatory strategies, resisting both full disclosure and normative frameworks of representation while remaining exposed to their institutional capture.

In *Post Human*, curatorial and media discourses recode the work within a framework of sexual spectacle and "sexual consumerism," displacing its affective and relational dimensions into a regime of hypervisibility aligned with heteronormative and posthuman narratives. In contrast, *Quotidiana* offers a more situated curatorial framework, allowing the works to unfold as open, relational dispositifs where meaning emerges through interaction and ambiguity.

By comparing these exhibition contexts, the paper demonstrates how queer visibility is continuously negotiated, redirected, and transformed. It thus reframes the exhibition as a critical site where the ethics of queer in/visibility are actively constructed and contested.

Session 2: Histories

Faux Amis Ou Deux Amies: Sapphic Painting and Feminist Art History. The In/Visibility of Tamara de Lempicka as a Queer Artist in the History of Interwar Parisian Painting

Antonia Kölbl | SNSF Project “Modern Painting and the Lesbian Gaze: Queer Women Artists in Europe, 1900–1950”, University of Basel | Art History

This presentation addresses the in/visibility of queer women* in the history of Parisian modern painting. Unlike their contemporaries who formed the city’s sapphic literary circles, these artists have received little scholarly attention, and their work has primarily been analyzed in feminist art histories which often prioritized questions of gender. Using Tamara de Lempicka’s (1898–1980) interwar work as a case study, I consider the sapphic dimensions of her paintings and how they have been received in both contemporary and historical accounts. After looking at how her work first appeared in Paris after her arrival in 1918, I demonstrate how feminist art history struggled to do justice to the openly queer aspects of Lempicka’s oeuvre. Her first canvas publicly exhibited in 1922 was a portrait of her lover Ira Perrot (1900–1975). In the following year at the Salon d’Automne, she showed *Perspective*, two nudes described in contemporary art criticism with terms denoting sapphic representation such as “amazones” and “deux amies.” But while Lempicka’s queer desires are too present to be completely overlooked, feminist art historians have focused on her self-fashioning as a modern woman instead. Taking up the notion of ‘sapphic modernity’ developed in literary studies (Benstock 1986; Doan 2001; Doan and Garrity 2006) and recently introduced into art history (Rault 2011; Silveri 2023), I argue that for this woman, to be modern also meant to be queer—and vice versa. In this, I consider how her class background and her status as an expatriate offered certain safeguards. As the contemporary reception of Lempicka’s art reveals, understanding her life and work as modern *and* queer is not an anachronistic interpretation but a historically grounded understanding of what the artist herself already made visible and what prompted an art critic to see her images as “pervers” (Alexandre 1928).

“Lesbian Women Are Included, but at Least Worth a Marginal Note...”: Conflicts About the Visibility of Lesbians in the Feminist Therapy Community in the 1980s and 1990s

Karen Nolte | Institute for Medical History and Ethics, University of Heidelberg | Medical History

In her 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (Rich 1980), Adrienne Rich addressed a dimension of the marginalization of lesbian women that had been largely invisible in the women’s movement until then. The thesis of “Compulsory Heterosexuality” was quickly taken up by the German community of feminist therapists. Lesbian activists drew attention to the previously largely invisible multiple forms of discrimination and the resulting lived reality of lesbian women. Until then, lesbians had not been visible either as feminist activists or as a client group of feminist therapy with specific needs. Encouraged by Rich’s essay, lesbians made themselves visible and pointed out this previously invisible dimension of patriarchal domination. This paper aims to historically reconstruct the conflicts surrounding the visibility of lesbian women in the women’s health movement.

It focuses on the political activism of lesbian therapists within the feminist therapy community. On the one hand it examines the documentation from feminist therapy conferences and, on the other, the collection of personal papers from Munich-based activists housed in the Munich City Archives. Additionally, the lecture examines the first handbooks on feminist therapy, which were specifically aimed at lesbian clients as well as lesbian therapists.

In fact, the invisibility of the social situation of lesbian women in the 1980s had also led to inadequate therapeutic care for lesbians, who were subjected to conversion therapy in conventional psychotherapy and psychiatry and who, out of fear of losing their jobs, led psychologically stressful double lives. Therefore, making their specific social situation visible was also an ethical issue within the therapeutic setting.

Fighting to Stay Hidden, Shouting to Come Out: Navigating In/Visibility in the Early Response to the AIDS Pandemic in Japan

Marco Del Din | Heidelberg University; Ca’ Foscari University of Venice | Asian and Transcultural Studies

The early stages of the AIDS pandemic in Japan were dominated by silence and invisibility. After the first HIV diagnosis in 1985, the disease was framed by the media and the government as strictly linked to Japan’s social minorities. First male homosexuals, and then women and foreigners were thus depicted as hypersexual, unregulated individuals, and became the target of discriminatory policies and public discourse. Especially within the marginalized gay community, the response was one of strategic invisibility, meant to ensure homosexual men’s social survival and the continuation of their

underground lifestyle. At the same time, voices emerged attempting to break the silence. Among these, Kyoto-based artist Furuhashi Teiji (1960-1995) shared his experience living with AIDS through both an initially private coming-out and performances that challenged the forced and strategic invisibility of marginalized communities in Japan.

This presentation investigates the complex responses to the early AIDS pandemic in Japan, elucidating how invisibility was simultaneously welcomed and resisted. First, it shows how, in the initial stages, this was the primary means to guarantee the survival of infected individuals, as well as of their communities at large. Fearing social suicide, especially the male homosexual avoided contact with medical and governmental authorities, thus safeguarding their lifestyle but hindering an effective response to the pandemic. Second, through an analysis of both the 1992 coming-out letter and of performances such as *S/N* (1994), this study investigates the radical stance of Furuhashi Teiji. Furuhashi openly denounced the silence fostered by Japanese society and the invisibilization of non-conforming bodies and individuals, framing AIDS as a countercultural agent able to unveil Japan's hypocrisy and erase the differences between individuals. Thus, this presentation shows how invisibility entailed both survival and resistance, further complicating our understanding of this theme in relation to late 1980s-early 1990s Japanese society.

Keynote

Lesbian Chimeras: Jewish Women Kissing in the Holocaust

Anna Hájková | University of Warwick, UK | Modern European Continental History

Among the iconic photos of Mendel Grossman from the Lodz ghetto, two young women are kissing over a chain link fence. They are surrounded by onlookers, some grinning, some observant. What is the occasion of their kiss? Who were these two women, and why did Grossman take their picture? We do not know.

This not knowing about striking photos of female Holocaust victims kissing is the point of departure for this essay. When in 2015 I started thinking about queer Holocaust history, I thought I would be documenting an archive of loss. But I decided to stick my nose where it was not wanted, and over the years that followed I found real stories, people, and started writing a history that was long unwanted. Still, some stories will never be told, and among the homophobic shadows that most frequently stand in queer Holocaust archive, photographs of women kissing stand out. Alongside the Mendel Grossman photograph, I also consider the two women survivors of Ravensbrück kissing as they arrived with the White buses to Malmö in April 1945, as well as two lovers in the Radom AVL camp who inexplicably show up in the hit TV series “We Were the Lucky Ones.” These women remain chimeras, and as such manifest the love, desire, and choices among the Holocaust victims who as “deviant homosexuals” were not allowed to bear witness.

October 1

Session 3: Architectures

In/Visibly Remembered: The Queer Codes of Figurative and Abstract Monuments

Laura König, M.A. | Universität Hamburg; Akademie der Bildenden Künste München | Art History

In October 2021, Düsseldorf unveiled a monument dedicated to the Memory and Acceptance of Gender and Sexual Diversity, a bronze sculpture by local artist Claus Richter called “Ein seltsam klassisches Denkmal.” It joins an ever-growing number of queer monuments world-wide but stands out as one of the rare figurative works. Formally reminiscent not only of heroic victory monuments but also of anti-fascist and socialist art, the sculpture aims to recode the traditional figurative monument from the point of view of people experiencing violence and discrimination, occupying the visual language of male heroism in a display of a struggle for human rights.

In contrast, most monuments dedicated to queer people and their his-, her-, and hirstories seem to favour abstraction as their form of choice. The “Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism” (Berlin, 2008), the “New York City AIDS Memorial” (New York, 2016), or “ARCUS (Shadow of a Rainbow)” (Vienna, 2023) skirt the line of readability—and therefore, visibility—by using established symbols, codes, and forms, like the rainbow, the Pink Triangle, or (in the case of Berlin) the neighbouring Holocaust memorial, to convey meaning.

All of this poses the question how abstraction and figuration are used in movements where representation and visibility are deciding factors in the fight for rights and recognition, but also safety. By placing Richter’s work into the larger queer monumental landscape, I want to explore the limits and possibilities of figurative and abstract art. I am particularly interested in the visibility of the body in art in the public space and want to consider the roles of figuration and abstraction as visual languages of representation.

Institutionally Embedded Empowerment in Public Spaces: TGD-only Saunas as Spaces for Negotiating Agency, Resistance and Belonging

Freddie Heithoff | Institute of Geography, Heidelberg University | Human Geography & Trans* Studies*

In recent years, a remarkable increase in trans* violence, discourse, and institutional exclusion has been observed in Germany. The visibility of trans* and gender diverse (TGD) people in public spaces, particularly in contexts, in which sexed bodies

are heavily regulated, such as saunas, is increasingly marked by insecurity and exclusion. Previous research has focused on self-organized counter-spaces, while institutionally embedded empowerment initiatives—such as the monthly TGD-only day at a Cologne sauna—have scarcely been empirically studied (Grenz 2023). This sauna serves as a unique case to explore how TGD empowerment spaces emerge within public infrastructures and what forms of exclusion, visibility, and invisibility they produce

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate: What spatial practices of resistance, agency, and belonging are made possible in the institutionally embedded TGD-only sauna? Theoretically, the project situates itself at the intersection of Henri Lefebvres spatial theory (1991), Doreen Masses relational space conception (2005), and Theodore Schatzkis practice theory (1996, 2002), while integrating Susan Strykers critical analysis of trans* resistance (2017) to examine how power, materiality, and everyday practices shape TGD spaces.

Methodologically, the study combines:

- Qualitative interviews with sauna-goers
- Event-Based Diaries (EBD) with sauna-goers to capture embodied experiences
- Qualitative Interviews with stakeholders of self-organized TGD-only saunas
- Focus Groups with cis employees that support the TGD-only sauna

Fieldwork is conducted in collaboration with the sauna's organizing structure, ensuring ethical considerations and participant consent. By interweaving individual experiences, collective patterns of interpretation, and institutional discourses, the project demonstrates how the sauna functions as a site of negotiation between community-based resistance and institutional responsibility.

The study highlights how institutionally supported TGD empowerment spaces not only foster agency and belonging but also serve as practices of resistance in the context of rising transmisia and the increasing invisibility of trans* lives.

Listed Monuments and Queer-Feminist Care: K12 and Tuntenhaus as Contestations of Heritage Visibility

Luise Rellensmann | Munich University of Applied Sciences | Contextual Design, Preservation and Building Research; Cultural Studies

Lukas Strasser | Munich University of Applied Sciences, TU Berlin, independent architectural practice | Architecture

The discourse on monuments has long been shaped by male values and the social and cultural experiences of Europe's educated upper-middle and upper classes, who dominate the professional field of heritage conservation. As a result, the canon is not

only framed by professional concerns, but also by specific class- and gender-related aesthetics and worldviews (Smith, 2008, 162; Hayden, 2003). Queer and feminist sites may appear in heritage inventories, yet are rarely read as such. In Berlin, the Sieges-säule is officially described as a “richly equipped Gesamtkunstwerk of late-classical architecture and sculpture” yet in everyday practice it functions as a central stage for CSD and Pride parades and as the symbolic namesake of the queer city magazine Siegestsäule. Similarly, Berghain is recorded in the monument register as an ensemble element of the Karl-Marx-Allee with its socialist classicist architecture, while its globally renowned queer nightlife remain outside the official heritage narrative.

This same pattern of in visibility persists within the Kastanienallee ensemble. Self-organized housing projects such as the Tuntenhaus and the K12 in Prenzlauer Berg are inscribed as parts of the ensemble, valued primarily for their role in the 19th-century transformation of the former Berlin suburb into an inner-city district. Within this framework, the queer-feminist significance of these houses as sites of housing struggles, collective care and forms of *counterpreservation* (Sandler, 2016) is rendered invisible. Drawing on a teaching and research project, this paper shows how architecture students, in collaboration with residents, documented K12 and K86 as lived cultural heritage: not only as protected Berliner Mietshäuser (tenements), but as political infrastructures and collective memory-spaces.

The project combines 3D-scans, room books/inventories, repair-maps, and contemporary archeological readings of graffiti and tags layering the buildings’ surfaces and DIY-additions with interviews and participatory documentation, foregrounding everyday practices and material improvisations as forms of *queerfeminist care* (Knosp et.al, 2026). The paper engages with the Faro Convention’s concept of *heritage communities* (Council of Europe, 2005), asking how visibility is produced in official heritage regimes and which forms of in/visibility emerge when queer-feminist ways of living and organising are excluded from the criteria of institutionalized preservation practice.

Session 4: Platforms

The Patriarchal Complicity of Social Media Platforms in the Algorithmic Mediation of Queer In/Visibilities Online

Johannes Domnick | IDEa_Lab, University of Graz | Computational Social Science; Complex Social & Computational Systems Group

Questions of queer visibility are always questions of the public spheres in which visibility is sought. At the beginning of the 21st century, these public spheres are increasingly algorithmically mediated. As providers of socio-technical infrastructure, Social Media Platforms (SMPs) have fundamentally transformed public discourse over the past two decades (Seipp et al. 2023). While they do not produce content themselves,

they mediate, curate and censor it (Gillespie 2018). Thereby controlling the conditions under which Queers struggle for online visibility and how anti-queer violence is mobilized to exclude them from democratic participation and fundamental rights. Since technologies are never neutral (Haraway 2016), these platforms have become patriarchal accomplices (Wagner 2024).

Since the internet's inception, the digital sphere has held great importance for queer communities as cyberqueer spaces (Wakeford 2000). As such, they foster queer visibility and offer community spaces where resource sharing, reassurance and resistance can occur (Brady et al. 2019). In recent years, these cyberqueer spaces have increasingly migrated to major SMPs such as Instagram or TikTok — gaining broader visibility while simultaneously becoming entangled in problematic dependencies.

Drawing on a qualitative pre-study with queer content creators in Germany, we demonstrate how this migration has fundamentally altered the conditions of queer visibility and exposure to patriarchal violence. Platforms increasingly governed by authoritarian and anti-emancipatory politics (algorithmically) determine if and which queerness may be visible, how inclusion and exclusion operate within communities, and what forms of violence queer creators face. In response, queer communities have developed subversive strategies, though these often remain limited to individual approaches.

My talk will examine how these dynamics have reshaped cyberqueer spaces and what affordances configure the conditions of queer existence online today. Building on our current research project, I will outline how democratic algorithms might be developed as structural responses within queer-feminist technological research.

The Governance of Queer Visibility in Platformized Public Spheres

Irina Bănoiu | Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) Vienna, Austria | Sociology; Digitalization and Social Transformation

(In)Visibility has long occupied a central place in queer and feminist thought, as a normative and political process that structures social recognition, material distribution, representation, and access to legal protection (Brighenti, 2007; Fraser, 1997). Functioning as both political goals and contested terrains of power, visibility has historically been linked to empowerment and rights claims (Creech, 2020; Hennessy, 1994). At the same time, queer and feminist scholarship has also highlighted its ambivalence, as exposure can entail surveillance, commodification, and vulnerability (Gailey, 2014; Hennessy, 2017). In contemporary digital environments, these tensions are intensified, as social media platforms have become key infrastructures of the public sphere.

Platforms do not merely host content; they embed normative assumptions and capitalistic incentives that selectively amplify, suppress, or modulate queer expression through the mechanisms of datafication, selection, and commodification (van Dijck et al., 2018; van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Bringing critical platform studies (van Dijck et al.,

2019) and social justice theory (Fraser, 2009) into dialogue, this article analyses how new regimes of queer visibility emerge and are shaped by social media platform mechanisms and considers their implications for representation, recognition, and redistribution. In doing so, it develops an analytical framework centered on three interlocking governance logics—quantification, normativity, and profitability—that organize visibility as both an object of control and a site of contestation. Finally, the paper introduces the concept of *platformized (in)visibilization* to describe the ambivalent role of platforms as both enabling and constraining environments for expression in contemporary digital cultures and affecting political legitimacy, social equality, and economic justice.

It further highlights how queer users navigate these conditions through practices of visibility labor, negotiating tensions between recognition and risk, and between assimilation and resistance (Abidin, 2016, 2018; Sandoval, 2000). In doing so, the paper advances an ethical critique of platformized public spheres and their role in structuring contemporary queer life.

Riding the Bionicle-to-Trans Pipeline: Trans Belonging and Cisheteronormativity within a “Non-Political” Facebook Group

Julian Canjura | The Pennsylvania State University | Applied Linguistics

This talk investigates the discursive negotiation of transgender in/visibility within a large public Facebook group dedicated to a 2000s toy line, LEGO Bionicle. Bionicles are biomechanical figures with interchangeable parts that undergo physical and spiritual transformations. Bionicles have been framed in popular discourse as a “trans allegory” (Anstett, 2022). Consequently, transgender-related topics are frequent discourse themes in the Session, particularly around International Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV). I explore how group members’ discursive practices regarding trans visibility in the group simultaneously regulate gendered subjectivities and challenge the cisheteronormativity of a space that, while ostensibly prioritizing hobbies over “politics,” nonetheless functions as a site of gender governmentality and moral regulation. Findings stem from a pilot data set of 32 meme-centered posts and 2,875 respective comments from the lead up to TDOV 2024. This talk presents select meme examples and closely analyzed interactional comment sequences to examine how members discuss whether visible digital artifacts (e.g., memes) representing trans subjectivities (and thus trans people) “belong” in the group.

This study employs an interdisciplinary qualitative analytical approach to social media interaction that combines sociolinguistic stance-taking (Du Bois, 2007), a linguistic anthropological lens on text and ritual (Agha, 2007; Silverstein, 2022), and Foucauldian social theory. Stance-taking is an intersubjective act where social actors evaluate objects, position themselves within a sociocultural field, and (dis)align with others. I connect this ritual to Foucault’s (1982) notion of subjectification: the ways human beings become tied to their identity through self-knowledge and subjected to another’s

dominance. Stance-taking via Facebook interaction is an interaction ritual to visibly (dis)align oneself with others while becoming known by others and by themselves. In this talk, I argue that social media interaction essentially functions as a technology of power and a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988), where visibility enables users to evaluate and discipline others, ultimately regulating which (gendered) subjectivities and ideologies are permissible, “normal,” and thus should be visible in digital life.

Session 5: Repression and Resistance I

Making Queerness Visible: Visibility, Opacity & Epistemic Injustice in Queer Asylum Governance

*Syed Muhammad Ihsan Haider | Georg-August University, Göttingen, RTG
2987, “Mobility Rights in the Global Context of Multiple Crises” | Philoso-
phy, Migration Ethics*

Queer visibility is often equated with political recognition and liberation. Yet visibility is ethically ambivalent: being seen can place individuals under surveillance and expose them to discrimination and violence. This tension becomes particularly pronounced in asylum governance, where individuals seeking protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) must render their identities visible and narratively intelligible to state authorities. This creates a normative tension: while asylum institutions must assess credibility under conditions of uncertainty, doing so in SOGI cases often requires applicants to present identities that conform to culturally dominant expectations of queerness.

Democratic asylum institutions must adjudicate claims under conditions of uncertainty, limited evidence, and significant moral stakes. In SOGI cases, however, applicants frequently face heightened evidentiary demands. They are compelled not only to demonstrate a risk of persecution but also to make their identities visible, coherent, and culturally intelligible to decision-makers. This paper argues that such institutionalized visibility requirements generate a distinct normative problem: they shape who can appear as a credible subject of protection and therefore require ethical limits.

Drawing on the concept of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007), the paper argues that credibility assessments in SOGI cases become problematic when they allocate epistemic risk through culturally narrow standards of identity intelligibility. This disadvantages applicants as knowers of their own lives. While credibility assessment is unavoidable in non-ideal asylum procedures, the expectation that applicants must present their identities through Western and linear models of queer identity formation raises important normative concerns that existing procedural frameworks do not adequately address.

The paper therefore explores whether a limited right to opacity is necessary within credibility assessments. This concept draws on Édouard Glissant's philosophical notion of the right to remain irreducible to dominant categorical frameworks. Rather than rejecting credibility evaluation altogether, the paper argues for reconsidering the ethical limits of institutional demands for visibility in the adjudication of queer asylum claims. The aim is an approach that understands queerness on the applicant's own terms rather than through culturally imposed scripts.

Un-Gendering 'Transgender' Subjectivity in Indian Legal Discourse

Ikshaku Bezbaroa | Central European University, Vienna | Comparative Gender Studies

In this proposed paper, I articulate a queer-feminist methodology of archival and ethnographic methods to critique the classificatory logic of law in India pertaining to transgender subjects. The emergence of trans-affirming laws since 2014 has often benefitted gender non-conforming individuals seeking socio-economic rights. Nonetheless, as Dutta and Bhattacharya have reflected, this makes visible a privileged representational political community that marginalizes life-worlds of hijra and kinnar, among others. Rooted in my positionality as a queer outlier carrying in/visible markers of caste, class and gender, my argument here is that legal framing of 'transgender' subjectivity perpetrates elisions of language that further obscure the realities of caste-d and class-ed minorities. This epistemic violence is apparent from the recent transgender legislation of 2026 that restricts transgender rights and denies self-declaration of identity. First, through findings from my research at queer archives in India, my paper features literate-community efforts to design a history-in-construction of terms and meanings; which I locate within scholarship by Hinchy and Arondekar on the intersections and silences of race, sex and gender in Indian common law. Second, I compare this emergent historical complexity with the colonial anxieties around 'transgender' persisting in contemporary legal discourse. The latter is exemplified in legal affidavits and NGO documents from archives which disparage sex work; traceable to Victorian moralities pervading criminal laws in British India. Finally, I incorporate my phenomenological reading against the archival grain by incorporating ephemeral sources, oral histories and ethnographies found outside archives proper. I argue that persistent colonial anxieties stumble the liberatory potential of human rights movements by a-historicizing hijra, jogappa and other communities. This paper shows how the colonial mores of 'transgender' framing in law might be epistemologically challenged through a creative, ethical travelling outside archives which self-consciously challenges the intersected racist genderisms of common law writ large.

Beyond Safe Spaces: Queer Sanctuaries and the Negotiation of Queer In/Visibility in Jordan

Marta Tarantino | University of Naples L'Orientale | History of Islamic Countries; Contemporary History of Women and Gender in the Mashreq | ERC Project "Mapping Emerging Gender Activism in the Mediterranean Arab Public Space" (MEGAMAPS)

In queer politics, visibility has often been celebrated as a pathway to recognition, empowerment, and political participation. Yet a growing body of scholarship highlights its ambivalent and potentially dangerous effects, particularly in Global South contexts marked by intensified surveillance and repression (Ritchie 2010; Chan 2018; Shadeedi 2025). Building on a decolonial approach that frames “queer theory as area studies” (Mikdash and Puar 2016), this contribution examines how queer people in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan navigate this tension by creating and inhabiting precarious socio-spatial infrastructures that foster belonging, care, and mutual support while strategically managing the risks of visibility. Drawing on Edward Soja’s concept of Thirdspace (1996), these environments—often inadequately understood through the universalizing notion of “safe spaces” (Roestone Collective 2014)—can be better captured as “sanctuaries”, foregrounding their relational, proximate, and generative character.

Although homosexuality was decriminalized in 1951, queer people in Jordan remain largely excluded from official political discourse and increasingly exposed to censorship and discrimination, both offline and online. Based on qualitative fieldwork in Amman (2021-2022), this contribution examines how informal networks, discreet physical spaces, and the digital realm function as hybrid environments of sociability and survival for queer, feminist, and non-heteronormative epistemologies.

Emerging through everyday practices of reciprocity and affective solidarity, sanctuaries enable queer individuals to temporarily carve out livable spaces across digital and material realms, from dating applications to queer-friendly homes, discreet health services, and supportive intimate communities. By weaving a cartography of discretion, these infrastructures challenge visibility-centered paradigms that equate emancipation with public recognition. Attending to these everyday experiences finally contribute to debates on queer in/visibility and can offer a more localized understanding of how safety, belonging, and agency are negotiated under renewed conditions of repression in the Global South.

Session 6: Repression and Resistance II

Performing the ‘Third Space’: Queer Diasporic Resistance and the Ethics of In/Visibility in Berlin

Ekin Durmaz | Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, Department of Political Science | Cultural Studies

This paper investigates how queer diasporic artists from Turkey and the MENA region in Berlin utilize performance art—specifically drag and community-based practices—as a tool for political resistance and cultural survival. In the context of a “moral panic” in Turkey, characterized by policies like the “Family Year” and the criminalization of queer visibility under “public morality” laws, many artists have relocated to Berlin seeking creative freedom. However, this transition introduces a new ethical paradox: navigating the tension between the promise of Western liberal visibility and the risk of being reduced to tokens of multicultural tolerance. Drawing on José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification and Jasbir Puar’s critique of homonationalism, this study argues that these artists do not merely seek visibility but actively craft a “third space”. This space functions as an alternative to both the state-sponsored erasure in their home countries and the conditional inclusion within host institutions. Through an analysis of collectives such as *Proud Haram* and *Kuir Lubun Berlin*, the paper explores how aesthetic strategies—such as irony, ritual, and the digital dissemination of censored performances—create “counter-publics.” These digital platforms (Instagram, YouTube) allow artists to remain “opaque” to the institutional gaze while maintaining vital transnational solidarities. Ultimately, the research suggests that queer diasporic performance is a form of “performative citizenship” that challenges dominant narratives of migration and nationhood. By prioritizing “care” and “solidarity” over mere “exposure,” these practices propose a new ethics of in/visibility that resists both authoritarian censorship and liberal commodification.

Penumbra Politics of Chinese Queer Diasporic Activism at UK Pride

Ashley Xing | University of Edinburgh | Linguistics

Global LGBTQ+ politics have long centred visibility as both a political goal and an ethical imperative (Bosia et al., 2020). UK Pride stands as its institutionalized embodiment, however its rhetoric of inclusion often absorbs diversity while suppressing radical narratives and foreclosing critique of its own normative hierarchies (Conway, 2025). This study focuses on the linguistic landscape of Chinese LGBTQ+ diaspora at UK Pride to explore how their transnational activism situates within and responds to these structural tensions.

Based on a two-year ethnography at Pride parades in London and Edinburgh, the study employs Nexus Analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) drawing on interviews and fieldwork data. Findings reveal that the Chinese queer diaspora does not prioritize Western audiences' understanding in their linguistic choices and in-group cultural references on protest signs, but orients towards community bonding and cross-border solidarity. While some alignment with Pride's discourses appears, they question and disrupt normative hierarchies structuring both UK Pride and internal norms within Chinese LGBTQ+ communities.

To theorize these practices, I develop the concept of penumbra politics through a queer reading of the Zhuangzi parable, penumbra queries shadow (罔两问景), extended from Ding, Parry & Liu (2007), and bring it into dialogue with Glissant's (1990/2010) notion of opacity. The penumbra, meaning "shadow of a shadow", figures a doubly marginalized subject denied agency by the very framework through which it is articulated. In this sense, the Chinese queer diaspora occupies an analogous position: socio-politically constrained in China and intersectionally marginalized in the UK. Penumbra politics refuses assimilation but Qu(e)ries dominant frameworks and enacts semiotic strategies of "independent action" (特 操) not centred on Western recognition. Opacity further explains for such unintelligibility as a refusal of Western- and Anglo-centric epistemological frameworks of UK Pride. It also exposes epistemic violence of enforced transparency, evidenced in two observed conflicts between the group and audience, where Western illegibility reduces queer Chinese bodies and languages to symbolic representations that satisfies Pride's schema of inclusion through othering.

Racialized Butchphobia: The Limits of Queer Visibility

Laila B. | Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany | Gender Studies

There has been an inherent tension around the politics of queer visibility for several decades now (Sedgwick 1990; Foucault 1975). Moving away from a binary pro or contra stand, this paper argues that visibility is best understood as a material political technology, whose effects are differentially distributed through race, coloniality, gender, and geopolitical context. Focusing on Brown Butches, racialized transmasculine individuals, and trans men of colour in Europe, under interrogation is the unequal ethical and material consequences of queer visibility.

Refusing the border between Butch and trans as produced through Western taxonomies and identity politics, they are brought together through shared material precarity. In Europe, racialized Butches, transmasculine people, and trans men are pathologized through narratives that conflate their gender expression with deviant masculinities (Connell 1995), unsettling the feminist premise that masculinity is always privileged while femininity is devalued. Specifically, it considers their common exposure to

racialized gender policing, surveillance, and anti-immigrant discrimination across institutional and interpersonal settings.

This phenomenon can be understood by tracing a genealogy from second-wave feminism's construction of men as inherently oppressive (Daly 1978; Jeffreys 1990), through Butchphobic constellations within feminist and queer spaces, to post-9/11 securitization discourses framing men perceived as Muslim as threats to Western social cohesion (Puar 2007). This builds on older colonial histories through which racialized masculinities have been rendered dangerous, excessive, and sexually deviant (Gilroy 1993; Stoler 1995; Sayyid 2014). In this context, racialized Butches, transmasculine people, and trans men are read through the same securitized frameworks governing cis brown masculinities. Visibility de-queers racialized masculinity, rendering these individuals illegible as queer subjects and instead inscribing them as securitization threats to the nation.

Drawing on cultural materialism, postcolonial theory, queer studies, and masculinity studies (Williams 1977; Hall 1997; Connell 1995; Chiang and Wong 2017), this paper reframes "Butch" and "trans" as historically contingent sites through which the ethical limits of contemporary visibility politics become legible.

Keynote

The Transnormative Perceiving Subject in the Perception of Speech Sounds*

J Calder | University of Colorado | Linguistics

Experimental research has shown that cisgender speakers perceive speech sounds differently if they believe the speaker is transgender (Jessee & Calder 2025). This reflects larger ideologies that minoritized individuals are hypervisible—or hyperaudible—with trans voices being expected to deviate from cisgender norms. As a result, many trans speakers seek out voice therapy in order to aurally “pass” as their gender identity, suggesting that the ideological goal for many is to vocally blend in with cisgender norms and avoid being hyperaudible. This raises questions as to whether transpeople internalize ideologies of trans vocal deviance in perception as well: How do transgender listeners perceive voices they believe belong to transgender speakers, and what does this say about cisnormative pressures amongst transpeople themselves? A sociophonetic experiment with trans listeners reveals that they perceive speech sounds differently for the same voices, if they believe those voices belong to trans speakers. I argue that the transnormative perceiving subject carries ideologies that reproduces dominant ideologies around difference, deviance, and hyperaudibility related to transpeople. This study also illuminates that standards of normativity, and the relevant social distinctions involved in maintaining those standards, may manifest differently depending upon the social positioning of the perceiver, whether cisgender, binary transgender, or nonbinary.

* Based on work co-authored with Emmett Jessee, University of Chicago.

October 2

Session 7: Interaction

Butch Cut: A Decade of Queer Worldmaking. Building Community, one Haircut at a Time

Hank Wüstenberg | Universität der Künste, Berlin | Arts

This contribution examines visibility through a queer-feminist lens, grounding its analysis in artistic practice. The focus is the BUTCH CUT project, an everyday art initiative in Berlin that frames haircutting as care work, economic organization, and social infrastructure. In this context, visibility extends beyond mere appearance to encompass relationships, lived experiences, and material realities, thereby linking performance, social practice, and queer activism.

The analysis is situated within the tension between recognition and regulation. Drawing on Johanna Schaffer, visibility is conceptualized as a social negotiation that occurs not solely through public presence, but through the recognition of difference and action. Schaffer emphasizes that visibility is not inherently liberating; it is shaped by power dynamics and may oscillate between recognition, appropriation, or exclusion.

Another central concept is José Esteban Muñoz's notion of 'world-making.' Muñoz frames queer practice as the creation of new social realities, rather than mere responses to existing structures. Queer spaces emerge when individuals experiment with alternative forms of cohabitation, care, and belonging. In this framework, visibility is not limited to representation, but involves collective efforts to establish new relationships and envision alternative futures. For queer communities, visibility thus becomes a process of expanding possibilities for recognition and existence beyond normative frameworks.

These theoretical frameworks are applied to the BUTCH CUT project, which addresses structural barriers such as restricted access to familial support, traditional couple-based economic models, and limited welfare provisions. Within this context, visibility is redefined as the cultivation of relationships rather than mere representation. The act of haircutting generates temporary spaces in which queer identities are acknowledged and where social ties, solidarity, and collective visions for the future can develop. Consequently, BUTCH CUT functions as a form of everyday world-making, wherein care, interpersonal encounters, and mutual support contribute to the construction of tangible social structures.

However, this form of visibility is complex. Dean Spade's scholarship elucidates how the BUTCH CUT project attempts to enact mutual aid through resource sharing and community building. Nevertheless, the project's reliance on a single individual imposes significant limitations. In this context, visibility may also become burdensome;

when one person assumes responsibility for care, labor, and political engagement, it can result in burnout and highlight the constraints of solitary action.

This article contends that a comprehensive understanding of visibility in queer-feminist art requires acknowledging its dual nature: it fosters supportive relationships, yet may also facilitate standardization, co-optation, and exploitation. The BUTCH CUT project serves as a case study that illuminates, rather than resolves, these tensions. Furthermore, the project demonstrates how everyday acts of care can generate new opportunities for recognition and contribute to the formation of queer communities and world-making practices.

“Oh No, Everyone Is Sharing, and I’m Not Sure About Mine”: Creating In/Visibility through Pronoun Sharing Practices

Hannah Sawall | European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder) | Queer Linguistics, Human-Animal Communication

Pronouns (in this case third-person singular) used to be conceptualized as referential indexes of gender, suggesting a direct link between the pronouns used for a person and their gender (*he* = male person, *she* = female person; see Ochs 1992). However, trans-epistemological views and practices disrupt this link between pronouns and gender by refusing to deduct pronouns and/or gender from a person’s appearance and centering their self-determination instead (see Nordmarken 2019). At least in theory, by participating in pronoun sharing practices, people challenge hegemonic power structures and open what Raclaw (in press) calls a “queer frame,” an orientation to a shared understanding that gender cannot be reduced to binary assumptions. In reality, the effect of pronoun sharing practices is more complex.

Using data from 29 semi-structured interviews in English and German, the present study explores the notion of in/visibility of trans and non-binary people and their identities more broadly. Pronoun sharing practices are reported to be central to questions of in/visibility as they concern people’s relationship to the space they are in and their safety. On the one hand, pronoun sharing practices are used with the intention to mark and create a “safe space,” one in which trans and non-binary identities are given space to be visible, to exist without a need for explanation or justification. On the other, the very pressure of being asked to share one’s pronouns renders invisible the struggles of those who are not safe or ready to come out in the given situation or whose identity cannot be neatly reduced to the response of a set of pronouns (see also Manion 2018). Therefore, pronoun sharing practices—meant to create safe and respectful spaces for trans and non-binary people—can be harmful if the ethical complexities of saliently displaying gender through pronoun sharing practices are not adequately considered.

Session 8: Style

Conditionally Visible: *Sajiao*, Queer Stylization, and the Ethics of Platformed Visibility on Douyin

Han Shutong | The University of Edinburgh | Sociolinguistics

In debates on queer in/visibility, digital platforms raise a central ethical tension: they can make queer styles publicly recognisable while also exposing them to commodification, surveillance, and normative evaluation. This paper examines this tension through a multimodal interactional sociolinguistic analysis of Douyin videos and audience comments, focusing on *sajiao*, a speech style associated with infantilized femininity and affective dependence (Yueh, 2016), as performed by popular Chinese gay influencers.

In China's digital spaces, *sajiao* and its association with a submissive gay male persona (Han, 2026) have gained considerable visibility despite conditions of heteronormative moral regulation, platform governance, and uneven queer recognisability. By analysing stylized *sajiao* performances alongside meta-discursive audience interactions, I argue that queerness becomes perceptible not only through performance itself, but also through commentary, evaluation, mockery, and reinterpretation. In this process, normative audiences do not merely observe queer styles; they actively participate in their indexical ratification and modification. The social meaning of *sajiao* is therefore co-produced by queer performers, platform affordances, attention economies, censorship constraints, and heteronormative audience uptake.

The paper conceptualizes Douyin as a site of conditioned queer visibility, in which queer expression becomes recognisable primarily when framed as humorous, exaggerated, feminized, or otherwise commodifiable. *Sajiao* emerges as a visible yet precarious semiotic resource for queer self-presentation—one that is enabled by platform infrastructures while simultaneously subject to regulation and/or trivialization.

This paper contributes to debates on the ethics of queer in/visibility by showing that platformed visibility is not straightforwardly emancipatory. In Douyin's regulated attention economy, queer style becomes visible precisely through the conditions that constrain it. The case of *sajiao* demonstrates how digital infrastructures mediate not only the emergence of new stylistic formations of queerness, but also the ethical limits of being seen.

“Too Cute to Stay in the Closet”: On Cuteness and Queer Visibility

Elias Fromm | University of Vienna | Media Studies

“Too Cute to Stay in the Closet” reads a woolen patch sold by the German company Rainbow Wool, which provides a sanctuary for gay sheep (Rainbow Wool, n.D.).

Inspired by this slogan, the aim of the paper presentation is a discussion of the ambivalent politics of visibility associated with the cutesification of queerness in digital media. From the perspective of media studies, researching queerness in a digital culture that is permeated by figurations of the cute necessitates interrogating certain modalities of “cuteness” as performative, mediated processes of making queerness visible.

This visibility is highly dependent on the media politics of cuteness: Following Sianne Ngai’s conception that the fabrication of the cute is something that ensures “one’s sense of power over it as something less powerful” (2012: 14) the connection of queerness with cuteness can result in visibilities drained of their agency—as scholars like Kat Köppert have pointed out (2023). Simultaneously, cuteness is also discussed as “a disarming surge of purely positive feelings” (Dale, 2017: 52), highlighting the potential of cute visibility as an affective strategy or “sentimental shield” (Steinbock, 2017: 163). Therefore, negotiating the ethics of cute queerness always means considering highly heterogenous conceptions of what “being cute(sified)” entails.

In the reconciliation of these two approaches, “cuteness” emerges as a mediated, performative process. Understanding and establishing “cuteness” as a specific form and process of making queerness visible thus requires attending to the affordances of its mediation. The paper presentation aims to analyse the processes of queer cutesification (or: cute queering) exemplarily by examining the aforementioned NGO Rainbow Wool regarding its advertising, product design and presence in documentaries, attending to the fact that discussing “visibility” often means discussing mediated, performative processes of “making visible.”

Queer Selfies Culture: Glitch, Camouflage and Entanglement

Dawn Woolley | Leeds Arts University | Visual Cultures and Socially Engaged Art Practices

Modes of address on social networking sites reinforce social hierarchies and inequalities because being visible can be experienced as empowering or disciplining depending on the individual’s social status and the type of body they possess. The prevalence of self-portraiture in the selfie era has exacerbated this issue. Research on selfies finds that negative feedback in comments and the currency of likes reinforce and police dominant feminine or masculine gender and beauty ideals. For example, Döring et al. (2016) analysed 500 Instagram selfies to explore if they conform to gender stereotypes as identified in Erving Goffman’s 1976 *Gender Advertisements*. The study revealed that gender stereotypical behaviours found in adverts are repeated in selfies, and that some of the behaviours featured in selfies more frequently than in magazine adverts.

Despite these well documented negative impacts, selfies are an important mode of self-presentation. Research on queer and fat activist selfies has highlighted their role in enhancing visibility, raising awareness of oppression and challenging stereotypes. In research with trans and gender-fluid Tumblr users, Vivienne (2017) found

positive comments on selfies helped promote body acceptance and that users viewed trans and gender-fluid selfies as defying industries that promote binary beauty ideals and capitalize on consumer's insecurities.

This paper will draw on my participatory and practice-based arts research into selfie taking practices to identify methods of producing creative selfies that enable selfie takers to negotiate their level of visibility in the image. It will draw on post-humanist notions of entanglement (Barad, 2014; Haraway, 2016) and imperceptibility (Braidotti, 2006) and queer feminist theories of the glitch (Russell, 2020). It concludes with speculative methods for creating queer in/visible self-portraits.