gender<ed> thoughts

Friederike Nasstold

**Introduction to the Special
Issue "Queering Minoritarian
In_Visibilities in Art & Visual
Culture Renegotiated".**

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Queering Minoritarian In_Visibilities in Art & Visual Culture Renegotiated

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Queering Minoritarian In_Visibilities in Art & Visual Culture Renegotiated. A Plea for Multiple Strategies of In_Visibilities

Visibility, invisibility, and political agency have developed into a solid triad in the recent past. My long-time accomplice in science and art Thari Jungen and I were thinking a lot about this and the associated ambivalences of visibility (Schaffer 2008) again in summer 2023. The reason for this revisit was the conference *Sichtbar machen – werden – sein: in queer_feministischer Perspektive von Kunst und Design* (June 2023), taking place at the Muthesius Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Kiel.[1] I would, therefore, like to share some introductory thoughts from our engagement with the affirmation of visibility and, in particular, highlight the ambivalences of visibility that go hand in hand with this. This serves

as a basis for the introduction of the present Special Issue entitled "Queering Minoritarian In_Visibilities in Art & Visual Culture Renegotiated" and at the same time as an invitation to interweave the various contributions of it.

Firstly, Thari Jungen and I asked ourselves why the paradigm of visibility not only opens up a dichotomy between invisible powerlessness and powerful visibility, but may also reproduce the ambivalences of the dominant, marginalizing logic of representation. Secondly, we asked ourselves what exactly the political nature of visibility is if the production of visibility is to become effective as a political act. And finally, which accomplices require visibility to become political? (Jungen; Nastold 2025).

The Conference "Renegotiating Minoritarian In_Visibilities" (2019)

Similar questions were posed by organizers Jana Tiborra, Katharina Wolf, Cathérine Ludwig-Ockenfels, and Oliver Klaassen at the conference they organized, which gave this Special Issue its name: "Renegotiating Minoritarian In_Visibilities," held from November 12 to 14, 2019, at the GCSC at Justus Liebig University Gießen, Germany. The organizers ask:

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[1] The article by Thari Jungen and myself entitled „(Un)Sichtbarkeit als ästhetische Strategie mit politischer Wirkung?!" has been published in the following anthology on the conference: Kruse, Christiane; Schuch, Sven Christian; Pascalau, Ileana; Behfeld, Mona (Ed.). 2025. *Make - Get - Be Visible: A Queer_Feminist Perspective on Art and Design*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

"How do strategies of in_visibility in art and visual culture produce and reinforce political agency for minoritarian subject positions? How can minoritarian subjects become visible in art and visual culture but avoid subsequent re-discrimination and stereotyping due to their recently acquired visibility? How are forms of in_visibility modified by processes of imaging, image formation and mediality?"[2]

The goal of the conference was to approach visibility and invisibility as two mutually entangled and interdependent concepts. This was shown by using the underscore in the orthography: in_visibility. On the one hand, the underscore indicates the processual continuum between the two concepts. On the other hand, Jana Tiborra, Katharina Wolf, Cathérine Ludwig-Ockenfels, and Oliver Klaassen want to approach the conceptual gap between visibility and invisibility as a discursive space for the negotiation of ambiguity, vagueness and indeterminacy (ibid.). Furthermore, they write, that the use of the term "minoritarian", moreover, points towards context-specific processes and situations of structural discrimination due to categories of difference, thus, it highlights the process of becoming-minoritarian (ibid.). However, without reducing subjects to this position, they ask how a seemingly minoritarian status can be transformed into political agency (ibid.).

The conference as well as the present Special Issue investigate how minoritarian strategies in art and visual culture can undermine hegemonic regimes of representation and challenge the dominant patterns of visibility, assimilation and intelligibility.

The History of the Special Issue

Following questions about making visible scientific and curatorial issues surrounding the inter-

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2 Klaassen, Oliver; Ludwig-Ockenfels, Cathérine; Tiborra, Jana; Wolf, Katharina. Call for Papers. Renegotiating Minoritarian In_Visibilities. Interdisciplinary Conference, November 12-14, 2019. https://arthist.net/archive/20301 (last accessed 26.02.2026).

section of in_visibilities and Gender Studies, Oliver Klaassen initiated this Special Issue in the aftermath of the conference. In keeping with the dialogical format between contributions and comments, Oliver Klaassen asked me to serve as critical friend for the entire Special Issue. In the process and over time, the critical friend became the editor. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Oliver Klaassen warmly for their energy and initiative. Without their fundamental work and initiative, this Special Issue would not have come about. Further thanks go to the authors of the contributions: for their nuanced discussions and their patience. I am therefore very pleased that this long-standing work is now gaining visibility—since questions of in_visibilities have always been important questions in queer_feminist art and its history.

Ambivalences of In_Visibilities

When reading the contributions to this Special Issue for the first time, it seemed striking that questions of in_visibility manifest themselves in different methodological approaches: in writing, in artistic work, and in curating. These practices (re)produce a making visible, a melting, a becoming invisible. The strategy of making visible ties in with the paradigm of visibility, which has been present in philosophy, art, visual cultural studies, and particularly in feminist and aesthetic-political theorizing in connection with political agency since the 1980s. This connection between in_visibility and agency arises from the fact that political power is linked to the existence of an identifiable subject, which must be represented and visible to be able to act politically (Jungen; Nastold 2025). The cultural scientist Johanna Schaffer even speaks of the fact that in the 1980s an "often unreserved affirmation of the idea of visibility prevailed in anti-racist, feminist and, at the time, lesbian/gay contexts" (Lorenz; Schaffer; Thal 2012: 286), which was based on the assumption of a seemingly direct connection between visibility and political agency.

In addition, the organizational team of the conference "Renegotiating Minoritarian In_ Visibilities" observe, that in recent years, the relation between visibility and invisibility of minoritarian subject positions has been renegotiated and led to a preliminary re-assessment of the political potential of the concept of visibility.[3] Thereby, invisibility and imperceptibility are subject to significant revaluation. Furthermore, they point out:

"Especially from activist, cultural and political points of view and in the contexts of queer or non-racist politics of migration, attempts have been made to question the topos of visibility and its positive connotations. However, the debate about a possible end of the critique of representation often disregards that politics of becoming imperceptible or invisible can indeed develop new modes of presentation and perception and therefore cannot unfold beyond representation." (Ibid.)

These considerations represent the interplay in which the scientific and artistic-research contributions collected in this Special Issue are located, which are briefly presented below. At this point, I would like to emphasize that the Special Issue consists of two parts: The first part comprises academic articles, each accompanied by a commentary from critical friends. The second part brings together curatorial, artistic-research, and essayistic contributions.

The Contributions

In her contribution, Sylvia Sadzinski devotes herself to the visualization of queer curating and the associated strategy of making visible: With regards to José Estebán Muñoz – "What is queer today, might not be queer tomorrow." (Muñoz 2009) – she discusses strategies of queer curating that also include curating as care. The aim of queer curating is to make (hetero)normative structures visible, to criticize, and to change them. According to Sadzinski, one of the potentials of queer curating is to work in-

creasingly with disturbances – in perception, in the exhibition display, and much more – and to include affect as an actor in curatorial processes:

"The important question in processes of queering exhibitions is thus not only what is presented but also how it is presented – and how it is conceived or, more precisely, how it affects people."

The article of Sadzinski is accompanied by a commentary from Jennifer Tyburczy. Tyburczy points out the following:

"Sadzinski's article encapsulates both the potentials and the risks when curating queerly. Based in a long tradition of feminist and queer disruptions in the public sphere, the article outlines the continental discussion on queer curatorship to foreground how affect plays an indispensable role in the creation and reception of museum display."

Contrary to the affirmation of visibility, art history and philosophy discuss from very different perspectives and motivations why the connection between visibility and identifiability can also generate numerous stumbling blocks that not only complicate political agency, but can also produce its opposite. The aforementioned scholar Johanna Schaffer asks: "How can minoritized subject positions be visually represented without repeating minoritization in the form of their representation?" (Schaffer 2008: 161).

In Magdalena Kallenberger's work, the collective body of *MATERNAL FANTASIES* as an artistic strategy also advances to become a writing collective body – and emerges over time from its minoritarian status without repeating it. As Kallenberger writes, this strategy positions itself within the field of tension between the desire for visibility and the desire to disappear. It should be emphasized that *MATERNAL FANTASIES* critically question the roles of the mother with their collective practices, making them negotiable and at the same time practicing the possibility "of being in-between" or "of being in_visible" as a collective.

Inspired by Kallenberger's writing, at once autotheoretical and collective, Elke Krasny re-

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[3] See https://arthist.net/archive/20301 (last accessed 26.02.2026).

sponds to her thoughts with the following questions in her commentary: "What makes a mother a mother? What makes a mother other? What makes (m)others maternal?"

The question of care-work can act as a connecting factor between Kallenberger's contribution and that of Iz Paehr. While Kallenberger's care-work still presents itself in the context of the collective, Paehr continues to engage with it in the form of the disclosure of the methodological approach: care-work around the visualization of text-image relationships that are free of discrimination. Paehr shows precisely that "'Infections' and diseases are not neutral metaphors, but above all lived realities for sick and disabled people of whom many, particularly trans*, queer, and BIPOC disabled people, experience ableist discrimination." The paper incorporates the crip method of image descriptions into a method for analyzing contemporary memes. Furthermore, the article thus proposes writing and speaking otherwise about the sharing of images online. Paehr's contribution is interesting against the background of the sociological studies of Michel Foucault and the postcolonial writings of Gayatri Spivak in that visibility also provides occasions for subjectivization, discrimination, and disciplining – as the article exemplifies. At the same time, it formulates a call to develop other crip-queer sharing terms and practices to counteract the (re)production of discrimination.

Paehr's article is accompanied by a commentary from Simon Strick. He states: This contribution

"provides a brilliant starting point for further necessary critiques of how information systems operate, are operated by eugenic, military, and fascist agents, and how critical strategies of slowing-down, de-jamming, and making legible should put disability studies at their center."

Against the background of these different approaches and criticisms of the paradigm of visibility, I will discuss the other contributions in the Special Issue below. On the one hand, I will discuss how some concepts and phenomena

cannot be perceived in one context but can be read in another. On the other hand, the focus will also be on artistic practice as such, which provides other tools for acting beyond discursive cognitive strategies.

The three contributions in the EXTRA section of the special issue by MELT (Ren Loren Britton and Iz Paehr), Sarah Held and Sylvia Sadzinski, as well as William J. Simmons, multiply the political aspect of in_visibilites: The EXTRA section, according to my reading, ties in with Iz Paehr's approach, discussed in the first part of the Special Issue, by presenting the visualization of academic, artistic, and curatorial approaches as mutually dependent sites of knowledge production. The relationship between text and image provides a counterpoint to the previous contributions. Artistic practice becomes effective as a further central site of meaning production and thus also as a site of the production of societies and their orders. In "Archiving the Unstable" by MELT, the central question, for me, is the in-between and/or the ambivalence of in_visibilities:

"What can we learn from the ways melting structures evade capture by staying in-between categories, thereby enfolding queer(ing) potential?"

The queer(ing) potential mentioned here is, according to my thesis, the disruption in the sense of melting that needs political visibility/visibilization to become politically effective. The process of visibility mechanisms becomes perceptible and visible – and melts. And thus, in its temporality, turns into invisibility or eludes a fixed form.

Sarah Held and Sylvia Sadzinski's contribution addresses the visualization of non-heteronormative discourses in the exhibition context: The exhibition *pornotopia revised* is presented as an example of queer curating. Visual disturbances and challenges are actively woven into the exhibition display and the empowering potential of joint porn-watching is highlighted. The exhibition concept operates within institutional logic in that the paradigm of visibility aims to make minoritized topics such as sexuali-

ties and pornography visible within existing museum structures.

I am, therefore, very pleased with the thoughts of William J. Simmons in his discussion of Catherine Opie and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, as he concludes his text with the following sentence:

"For a mirror reflects everything before it, be it one or a multitude, and so too does the camera."

The reference to the fact that what is queer, or what 'we' think should be queer, is always also the result of projection space brings me back to Muñoz – "What is queer today, might not be queer tomorrow."

Conclusion

I would, therefore, like to conclude with a plea for the ambivalences of visibility and invisibility: We must change and challenge heteronormative structures from within in the Foucauldian sense.

However, we must not forget that different strategies of in_visibility are required in art and science – depending on the context in which we operate. Because something may become invisible in one context, but be legible and capable of action in another.

And this is precisely what the present Special Issue shows – in writing, in artistic work, in curating. Or in making visible, in melting, in becoming in_visible.

This Special Issue thus makes an important contribution to the ongoing debates surrounding in_visibilities. I would like to thank the authors, reviewers, critical friends, the editorial team at gender[ed] thoughts, and in particular Oliver Klaassen for their fundamental preparatory work and collaboration, as well as Lucia Toman for the proofreading, and Philipp Wix for the final layout and support with the graphic design.

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