

Call for Papers
Conference
(In)visibility:
The aesthetic dimension of political participation

University of Zurich (Switzerland)
June 30 – July 2 2022

Confirmed speakers

Christine Abbt (Graz)
Emmanuel Alloa (Fribourg)
Tina Chanter (Newcastle)
Josef Früchtl (Amsterdam)
Liliana Gómez (Kassel)
Hana Gründler (Florence)
Jonathan Havercroft (Southampton)
David Owen (Southampton)
Davide Panagia (UCLA)
Danielle Peterbridge (UCD)
Ludger Schwarte (Düsseldorf)
Cecilia Sjöholm (Stockholm)

Description

Contemporary democratic subjects are participants in ocularcentric societies that privilege vision and are characterized by the ubiquitous availability of images, driven by technological and cultural changes on a global scale. Contemporary citizens, then, are viewing subjects; they use languages and technical objects that are imbued with metaphors and practices of seeing and visibility. But what does it mean to be a viewing subject in a democratic society, and what does it mean to be visible to others? What are the aesthetic, social and political presuppositions and implications of seeing and visibility in today's democracies?

Our vision, our ability to see, is, as Marx noted, a disposition that is a product of our historical circumstances. The production and presentation of images and our corresponding habits of seeing are culturally, economically, politically, and aesthetically mediated and can never achieve anything like total visibility: our ability to see is always aspectual (Wittgenstein) and partitioned (Rancière) and therefore prone to blind spots and aspect- or soul-blindness (Cavell) to other people and the nonhuman world. This is what the unnamed narrator in Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* speaks of when he speaks of his own social invisibility as an effect of the blindness of the "inner eyes" of those with whom he comes into contact, those eyes with which they view reality through their physical eyes. If one follows this metaphor of the inner eye, then making a person or the non-human world socially and politically visible does not consist in perceiving them more acutely or observing them more closely, but depends fundamentally on people's individual and collective aesthetic-moral disposition – their *inner eye* – which guides their ways of seeing.

This metaphor of the inner eye suggests that questions of social and political participation and belonging – questions of social justice and democratic participation – are not adequately addressed when theorized in terms of distribution of resources, rights, or opportunities, or in terms of epistemic, moral, and legal recognition and representation alone, but that they must also

be theorized in terms of (in)visibility and its aesthetic, social, and political conditions. But what does it mean for a critical political philosophy to think about questions of social justice and democratic participation in terms of visibility and invisibility?

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in such questions in practical philosophy and political theory. The aim of this conference is to present new work on such questions, by bringing together political and social philosophers, political theorists and scholars from cultural studies pursuing diverse approaches to such questions. The conference includes contributions on questions and topics including:

- What does it mean in aesthetic, moral, or political terms to say that someone/something is socially or politically invisible or visible, and how do the aesthetic, moral, and political dimensions of visibility or invisibility intersect or differ?
- Does invisibility constitute a failure of recognition or acknowledgment by others?
- Can we distinguish different conceptions of seeing and visibility, based on which we can discern a possible democratic “ethics of seeing”?
- How does the mediation of seeing in the medium of images and its conditions of production affect our political dispositions to see?
- What can we learn from the history of philosophy and the history of political ideas about the concept and practice of vision and visibility?
- What are the distinct character and distinctive socio-cultural and political functions of vision in the modern democratic age? To what extent is ocularcentrism a political and social problem in our modern culture?
- Contributions that map the ambivalent relationship between political philosophy/democratic theory and aesthetic questions and aesthetics/*aisthesis*

Submission

Proposals must contain an abstract of 300–500 words (including footnotes and appendices but excluding references) prepared for blind peer-review and, in a separate file, a brief CV of 100–200 words. Co-authored abstracts are admissible for submission.

We particularly encourage proposals that foster gender–equality and diversity, from researchers at diverse stages of their professional careers, with different geographical origins, and from underrepresented groups.

Please email proposals to michael.raeber@philos.uzh.ch by **March 13, 2022**. Decisions will be communicated by March 31, 2022.

Accepted contributors will be allotted 45 minutes for presentation plus 15 minutes for Q&A.

Funding: Support for travel and accommodation may be available for contributors without institutional funding. Please contact the organizer about travel support once your abstract has been accepted.

Organization: This event is hosted by the Center for Ethics (University of Zurich) and organized by Michael Räber (Zurich). It is funded by a Scientific Exchanges Grant of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Currently, we plan for this event to be held in person, but if circumstances dictate, it may be held partially (hybrid) or fully online.

Contact: Please direct any queries to: michael.raeber@philos.uzh.ch

Important dates

Deadline for abstract submission: **March 13, 2022**

Deadline for notification of acceptance: **March 31, 2022**

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