

Introduction



IMEN YAAKOUBI

Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, CIRLEP, Reims, France



MARGAUX COLLIN

Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, CIRLEP, Reims, France

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8483-5367>



This issue is the outcome of a one-day conference organized by the Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherche sur les Langues et la Pensée at the Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne on 13 June 2025. The conference revolved around a central concern in media studies and the history of representation: the ways in which power is staged, negotiated, and contested on screen. By examining the movement of marginalized voices, identities, and narratives from the cultural margins to the mainstream, we sought to explore the processes through which certain narratives become visible, legible, and culturally authorized, while others remain at the edges of representation. Indeed, far from designating a neutral cultural center, the mainstream must be understood as a shifting and deeply ambivalent space, structured by institutional power, commercial imperatives, ideological norms and historical struggles over representation. If mainstream visibility can offer recognition to marginalized subjects, it can also neutralize dissent and reproduce dominant hierarchies under the guise of inclusion.

The one-day conference was therefore conceived as a space for reflecting on the tensions that structure the passage from marginality to cultural centrality in film, television, and visual media more broadly. Drawing on scholarship in cultural studies, critical race theory, feminist and queer theory, we invited participants to interrogate how representation is produced, controlled, and circulated; how dominant narratives absorb or resist counter-hegemonic voices; and how visual culture mediates the relationship between visibility and power. Such questions resonate

with the work of thinkers including Michel Foucault (1972), Stuart Hall (1997), Homi Bhabha (1994), John Fiske (1989), Judith Butler (1990), bell hooks (1996), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), and Angela McRobbie (1991, 2009), among others, whose interventions have shown that representation is never merely descriptive, but always implicated in the making of norms, identities, and social hierarchies.

In what has now become this issue, several questions have been addressed: how do marginalized voices move from the periphery to the center of media narratives? What political, aesthetic, and economic forces enable or obstruct that movement? And when such voices enter the mainstream, does this transition open up transformative possibilities, or does it more often lead to form of co-optation that leave existing structures intact? These interrogations were addressed in relation to race, gender, class, and geopolitical conflict, since each of these categories reveals how the politics of representation can operate both as a site of domination and as a space of resistance.

The contributions gathered in this issue approach these questions from a wide range of perspectives, while all remaining attentive to the complex relation between visibility and power. Several articles examine how dominant institutions regulate belonging, produce exclusion, and shape subjectivity from within. In “Split Selves, Alienated Subjects: Mr. Robot and Severance Against Corporate Capitalism,” Juliette Devaux explores how contemporary television represents the corporation as both an external structure of domination and an internalized force that fragments the self. Through the divided subjectivities of Elliot and Mark, the article shows how capitalism operates not only as an economic system but also as a mode of subject formation, turning the self into a productive resource while exposing the psychic costs of alienation.

In “‘I’ll Be a Teacher, Just Like Mama’: Miss Vera and the Politics of Racist Education in Little Marvin’s *Them*,” Imen Yaakoubi similarly turns to institutional power, but through the lens of race and pedagogy. Her analysis of Little Marvin’s TV series *Them: Covenant* reads the figure of Miss Vera as an illustration of a white supremacist school system in the U.S., revealing how the classroom becomes a site of surveillance and exclusion. By situating the series within the tradition of Black horror, the article also highlights the ambivalent movement of the genre into mainstream culture, showing how visibility does not necessarily dismantle the structures of racial domination it depicts.

Questions of mediation, legibility, and the mainstreaming of marginalized narratives are at the core of Margaux Collin’s paper, “Negotiating the Mainstreaming of a Long-Silenced Testimony in John Ridley’s *12 Years*

a Slave.” Focusing on the screenplay as a crucial yet often overlooked site of negotiation, the article argues that the passage from Solomon Northup’s testimony to cinematic form is carefully constructed at the level of writing. The article shows how the script works to make a historically marginalized narrative both accessible to mainstream audiences and resistant to simplification, thereby foregrounding the screenplay as a space where the politics of representation are actively reshaped.

The issue also broadens the reflection on margins and mainstream by looking at the spatial, geopolitical, and transnational configurations of visibility. In “Mapping Heterotopias: Looking Beyond the Security-Obsessed Aesthetics of the Border Discourse on The Turkey-Syria Border,” Mustafa Can Günay examines the security-centered aesthetics imposed by Turkish mass media narratives and proposes a counter-mapping methodology to challenge them. Drawing on fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, and GIS mapping, the paper reconstructs the dominant discourse of the border while identifying heterotopic spaces that exceed or disrupt its official representation. In doing so, it reveals how bordering functions not only through territorial control, but also through visual and discursive regimes that organize public perception.

A related concern with visibility and its limits informs Sudipta Karki’s article on queer representation in mainstream Nepali cinema. Focusing on commercially oriented films from the early 2000s to the present, the article traces the movement from invisibility to increased queer visibility, while showing that such visibility often remains constrained by dominant codes. Indeed, queer identities become more present on screen without necessarily escaping the stereotypes and commercial conventions of mainstream cinema. The article thus offers a nuanced account of visibility as both a political gain and a representational trap.

Finally, Kaouther Douzi’s article on the Tunisian revolution shifts the focus from representation in fiction to the politics of appearance in moments of historical upheaval. Drawing on interviews with participants in the events of December 2010 to January 2011, the article argues that the revolution transformed not only the political order but also the very condition under which individuals and groups could appear in public space. By tracing the uneven shift from the visibility of actions to the visibility of actors, the article offers a reflection on how political transformations reconfigure the terms of public legibility and self-representation.

These contributions show that the movement from margins to mainstream cannot be reduced to a simple narrative of inclusion. Rather, it designates a complex process through which subjects become visible under conditions they do not fully control, and through which representation

remains bound to institutions, markets, ideologies, and struggles over legitimacy. Whether addressing racialized institutions, capitalist alienation, slavery's afterlives, queer visibility, border aesthetics, or revolutionary appearance, the articles in this issue all demonstrate that the visual field remains a crucial site for narrativizing power and for interrogating the fragile and often ambivalent passage from the margins to the center.

Bibliography

- BHABHA, Homi K., *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994.
- BUTLER, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge, 1990.
- CRENSHAW, Kimberle, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1991, 1241-1299, DOI: [10.2307/1229039](https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039).
- FISKE, John, *Understanding Popular Culture*, London, Routledge, 1989.
- FOUCAULT, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York, Pantheon Books, 1972.
- HALL, Stuart (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London, Sage Publications, 1997.
- HOOBS, bell, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies*, New York, Routledge, 1996.
- MCROBBIE, Angela, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1991.
- MCROBBIE, Angela, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, London, Sage Publications, 2009.