26th NECS GRADUATE WORKSHOP

Keynote Speaker: Jennifer O'Meara (Trinity College Dublin)

Hosted by University of Montpellier Paul-Valery

Deadline for submissions: January 28, 2026

Silence(d) and Silencing: (Un)heard Sounds and Voices in Audiovisual Media

Key words: noise, voice, silence, silenced, silencing, agency, music

The topic of the 2026 NECS conference—in-visibility—raises a parallel line of inquiry involving speech, noises, voices and silence. In echo to Gayatri Spivak and her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1999), this Graduate Workshop would like to explore the question: Can the silenced be heard and made audible? More precisely, to what extent can cinema and audiovisual media be used to counter various processes of silencing that have led to the erasure of certain peoples and communities, notably to reconfigure what Jacques Rancière (2000) calls the "distribution of the sensible", allowing another politics of aesthetics to emerge? Or, on the contrary, to redouble efforts to silence by claiming that it is the norm that is currently being silenced?

This Graduate Workshop is an invitation to approach the question of silence and silencing in terms of both aesthetics (including the distribution and organization of sounds and the underlying hierarchy they imply) and politics (the distribution of speech, the processes of silencing, or the foregrounding of previously unheard, discarded voices), and their intricate ethical relationships.

What cannot be heard is often what is silenced. How do cinema and audiovisual media in general work to reinforce or, on the contrary, to counter the inaudibility and invisibility of some people or topics? To what extent can the use of sounds and silences be reconfigured to create a space of emergence for the voices of those who are not heard or whom we refuse to hear? In short, who gets to occupy the auditive spaces? While silence can operate as an instrument of oppression, it can also be considered as a site of political resistance against rational speech and should not be equated with the absence of sound. Can films, TV series and other audiovisual productions make the unspeakable and inaudible heard?

Proposals may explore one of the following fields, though other avenues will be considered:

Memory and history: Can cinema and audiovisual media become a means to memorialize those who fought injustice and suffered as a result? How can film and sound archives be mobilized to restore the memory of these struggles? How can film historians position themselves ethically and politically in this process of un-silencing? What role do cinema and audiovisual media play in shaping new forms of oral history, and how are they received by audiences across different generational, cultural and embodied differences in listening practices?

Postcolonial: Postcolonial studies have tackled the distinction between sounds and voices to question and resist the authority of a single dominant voice. Spivak's critique was inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's exploration of minority languages (1986) and, in recent years, films and series have given a platform to minority languages, thus questioning how both the choice of language(s) and of silence can either be an instrument of colonial domination or a means to reclaim decolonial identities

and resist both ventriloquism and the "demand for narrative" (Derrida 1977). How do fragmentation and polyphony work? Can there be a hybridization (Bhabha 1994, Gilroy 1993) or blurring of the theoretical lines between music, sounds and voices as a means to counter the authority of a single voice? Can polyphony work on a model reminiscent of bell hooks' oppositional gaze (1992)?

Disability: How have film and audiovisual media addressed the issue of disability, and more specifically deafness or partial deafness? How can the use of silence and/or sound alteration enable (or prevent) audiences from feeling and/or understanding these disabilities?

Production and distribution, censorship: What role do production and distribution play in controlling what films, series, and creators have to say, and what audiences can hear? How do they contribute to silencing the racist, sexist, and sexual violence that underlies the film industry? The invisibility of certain filmmakers based on their race, gender or class, among other discriminatory criteria, is sometimes compounded by control over what they can say and how they can say it. Who exactly is being promoted (or not) in "world" and "minority" cinema and media? Who is listened to, and why? How does this relate to a wider context of censorship of the arts? On a more technical level, how do sound mixing conventions perpetuate cultural hierarchies, notably in terms of labour and hierarchy crediting?

Queer and gender: The issue of in-visibility and in-audibility has also been widely theorized by gender and queer theory –Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* (1981) and more recently Anne Crémieux's *Now You See Her* (2023) come to mind. How do women, non-binary and queer people navigate the aural space? The growing number of women, non-binary and queer directors, screenwriters and producers begs the question: Who gets to sit behind the microphone? And how does that affect representations? What impact does this audiovisual visibility have on the lives of women, non-binary and queer people in the real world? These burning questions, which have been asked repeatedly about the film and television industry in recent years would all deserve to be addressed at this conference.

History of techniques: The issue of in-audibility arches back to the history of sound and sound design in audiovisual media, from silent films to the "talkies" to the complex sound systems now available on-set, in post-production and in our cinemas. How do techniques such as dubbing play a significant role in transnational film production, profoundly impacting the global industry? How can these techniques also be used for erasure or manipulation on a national or local scale? The recent SAG-AFTRA strike has shown how technological progress and AI can destabilize the film industry both economically and ethically: AI can reproduce and steal human voices –bringing into a new era Walter Benjamin's critique of the reproducibility of art in light of the reproducibility of individual voices.

Ecocriticism: The theme of in-audibility can be extended to non-human voices: How can film, series and audiovisual media bring to the fore the voices of animals and complex ecosystems? How do they take into account the agency of the environment or, on the contrary, use it as a narrative ploy? How do they seek to de-center narrative and aesthetics away from the human in favor of the non-human?

SUBMISSION

Early-career researchers from cinema, visual and media studies are invited to submit proposals for contributions by January 28, 2026 to graduates@necs.org. The submission should include the name of the speaker, an email address, the title of the paper, an abstract (max. 300 words) and a short bio (max.

150 words). In addition to articles, scholarly film submissions are also welcome (max. length 15 minutes). Applicants are welcome to submit a proposal to the 2026 NECS Conference as well but will only be accepted to either Main Conference or Graduate Workshop.

Université de Montpellier 3 Paul-Valéry will not provide funding: participants are required to cover their own travel and accommodation expenses. Travel information, as well as a list of affordable hotels and other accommodation, will be provided on the conference website and program. The Workshop attendance is free, but valid NECS membership is required to participate. Participants must register with NECS (click here) and pay their fee. For the terms of NECS membership, please also refer to our website. Please address all inquiries to graduates@necs.org.

Graduate Workshop Organizers: Wendy Amiard, Guilhem Billaudel, Pablo Cabeza-Macuso, Apolline Dosse, Jonas Fontaine, Hadrien Fontanaud, Anissa Medjebeur.

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