

Call for Participation

Diversity on Screen?! Materials, Categories, and Methods of Analyzing Representation in Film and Media

Symposium | 13 June 2026 | University of Zurich

The Department of Film Studies at the University of Zurich (UZH) invites advanced MA students, doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, as well as scholars at all career stages to participate in the symposium *Diversity on Screen?! Materials, Categories, and Methods of Analyzing Representation in Film and Media*.

Recent debates on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) – here framed through historically situated and methodologically operationalized categories such as gender, race, class, disability, sexuality, and age – have increasingly relied on empirical measurements and categorizations to render discrimination in film production and representation visible and intersubjectively analyzable.¹ Many of these approaches – often loosely inspired by formats such as the Bechdel-Wallace test² – focus on relatively small film corpora within specific national or economic contexts. Examples include Martha M. Lauzen's *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World* (2024),³ the Austrian Film Institute's *Dritter Österreichischer Film Gender Report* (2024),⁴ and the German study *Audiovisuelle Diversität? Geschlechterdarstellungen in Film und Fernsehen in Deutschland* (2017).⁵ In Switzerland, these discussions have been intensified by the studies *Gleichstellung im Schweizer Filmschaffen* (2021)⁶ and the pilot study *Diversity on Screen of Swiss Films* (2025),⁷ both published by the Bundesamt für Kultur (BAK), Section Film.

While such initiatives provide important insights into structural inequalities – such as the persistent underrepresentation of women in the professional film industry despite gender parity in film education – they also expose fundamental methodological and epistemological tensions. By translating audiovisual representation into measurable categories, these approaches risk stabilizing historically contingent concepts of diversity while flattening cultural complexity, ambiguity, and specificity. At the same time, they raise the question of how diversity is not only analyzed but also produced through the methods, categories, and analytical frameworks applied – and to what extent the repeated circulation of such quantitative findings translates into sustained changes in institutional practices, rather than merely reaffirming existing modes of evaluation.

Taking these developments as a point of departure, the symposium asks how film and media studies can critically engage with and expand current approaches to analyzing diversity on and off screen. Rather than treating categories such as gender, race, class, disability, sexuality, or age as given, the symposium seeks to interrogate how they are constructed, operationalized, and made comparable across different contexts. How can diversity on screen be analyzed in ways that remain sensitive to historical conditions, aesthetic forms, and cultural differences? How stable or transferable are analytical categories across different film cultures and media environments? And how can empirical and computational approaches be meaningfully combined with the critical, context-oriented, and interpretive perspectives central to film and media studies?

Building on film and media studies' long-standing expertise in analyzing audiovisual media in relation to representation, perception, and in/visibility, the symposium invites participants to explore these questions in relation to their own research projects. Particular attention is given to

the interplay between methods and knowledge production: how different analytical approaches shape what becomes visible, measurable, and knowable in the study of audiovisual media.

Contributions may address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- analytical categories for studying diversity and representation on screen
- the possibilities and limits of empirical or computational approaches (e.g., automated analysis, audiovisual Bechdel-Wallace tests, annotation practices)
- aesthetic and formal dimensions of representation in film and media
- visibility and invisibility in audiovisual culture
- diversity in relation to media technologies, apparatuses, and formats
- archival gaps, incomplete traces, and speculative approaches in media historiography as well as curatorial practices in (academic) film collections
- the role of (digital) archives and digitization in shaping historical representation and memory
- theoretical and methodological foundations drawing on film and media studies, cultural studies, gender and queer theory, feminist theory, disability studies, postcolonial studies, and related fields
- recommendations, challenges, and limitations of diversity-oriented film research
- relationship between questions of diversity on-screen and off-screen

Rather than proposing fixed taxonomies, the symposium aims to foster an open exchange on materials, categories, and methods of analyzing representation in film and media, exploring how film and media scholars can contribute to more nuanced, historically grounded, and critically reflective approaches to studying diversity on screen.

The symposium is part of a two-day event (12–13 June 2026) organized within the framework of the doctoral program *Film, Photography and Other Visual Media*, a joint initiative of the Department of Film Studies at UZH and the Section d'histoire et esthétique du cinéma at the University of Lausanne (UNIL). It follows a **half-day workshop with doctoral students at UZH on 12 June**, led by **Prof. Joshua Yumibe (Michigan State University)**, which explores the entanglements of aesthetics and technology in relation to representation, as well as questions of materiality and archival practices. Yumibe is currently working on a book, provisionally titled *Chromatic Blackness: Color, Race, and the Moving Image*, examining how color functions both as a material and technical property and as a means of delineating race, thereby foregrounding the interplay between aesthetic form, material conditions, and processes of categorization. The workshop invites participants to reflect on diversity as an analytical, methodological, and epistemic challenge in film and media studies. It is part of the doctoral curriculum at UZH, but **participation is also open to others** interested (please indicate your interest by email).

Submission and Format

Participants are invited to give **short presentations (10 minutes) in English** as a basis for discussion with respondents and other symposium participants. Contributions should be connected to ongoing research projects and serve as nodal points for collective reflection.

Please send the following materials:

- Title of your presentation
- A concise abstract (approx. 250 words)
- A brief biographical note (approx. 150 words)

Deadline: 10 April 2026

Submission email: josephine.diecke@uzh.ch

¹ See for instance Marsha Berry et al., “Fostering Diversity On and Off Screen,” *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 24 (December 2022): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.24.00>.

² Alison Bechdel, *Dykes to Watch Out For* (Firebrand Books, 1986).

³ Martha M. Lauzen, “It’s a Man’s (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2023,” 2024, <https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-Its-a-Mans-Celluloid-World-Report.pdf>.

⁴ *Dritter Österreichischer Film Gender Report*, with Österreichisches Filminstitut (ÖFI) (Österreichisches Filminstitut, 2024), https://filminstitut.at/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/GenderReport2024_220x297_FINAL_Web.pdf.

⁵ Elizabeth Prommer and Christine Linke, “Audiovisuelle Diversität? Geschlechterdarstellungen in Film und Fernsehen in Deutschland,” Studie, Institut für Medienforschung, Philosophische Fakultät, Universität Rostock, July 12, 2017,

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/672b6a7044080f328d01a3f9/t/673dc64222ed2c7d0a8a571a/1732101699494/Kurzversion+der+Studie+%2522Audivisuelle+Diversita%CC%88t%3F%2522.pdf>.

⁶ Franziska Müller et al., “Gleichstellung im Schweizer Filmschaffen,” Schlussbericht zuhanden des Bundesamts für Kultur (BAK), Interface Politikstudien Forschung Beratung GmbH, July 29, 2021, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/672b6a7044080f328d01a3f9/t/673dc64222ed2c7d0a8a571a/1732101699494/Kurzversion+der+Studie+%2522Audivisuelle+Diversita%CC%88t%3F%2522.pdf>.

⁷ Matthias Bürcher, *Diversity on Screen of Swiss Films. Pilot Study*, Pilotstudie (Bundesamt für Kultur BAK, 2025), 13, https://www.bak.admin.ch/dam/bak/de/dokumente/kulturschaffende-film/merkblatt_hinweis/diversity-on%20screen-ch-2024.pdf.download.pdf/diversity-on%20screen-ch-2024.pdf.