

***On the Margins of Perception:
Toward a Theory of Invisuality***

James J. Kimble [from an ongoing research project to be co-authored with Trischa Goodnow]

Over the last several decades, scholars in numerous disciplines have increasingly adopted a vocabulary that privileges terms such as visual culture, visual studies, the visual turn, or simply the visual. The accompanying emphasis on the notion of visibility in their scholarship has, quite naturally, led to work that studies and analyzes appearances, spectacles, images, depictions, performances, and whatever else the human eye can see in a given artifact.

Yet almost all of that scholarship appears to overlook what we take to be a crucial element of visibility in specific circumstances: that which we do not see in an artifact. In this project, we propose the term invisuality as an initial way to begin conceptualizing the notion of absence in visual artifacts. We will suggest that invisuality can manifest in at least three ways, which we term accidental invisuality, covert invisuality, and overt invisuality.

In theorizing that which is invisible, our aim in this project is to emphasize the rhetorical possibilities inherent in visual absences, and to offer a way to develop further explorations into artifacts that adopt such a strategy. In this exploratory talk, Kimble will offer some initial definitions, examine several examples, propose some principles of invisuality, and discuss some potential weaknesses of the developing theory.