



Call for conference papers

Announcement Form

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Event name and topic*:

The Silences Of The Lyric International Conference in Paris, France

Host and date(s)*:

Université Paris-Cité & Université Paris-Créteil, March 3 to 5, 2027

Deadline for submissions*:

October 15, 2026

Event organised by (if different from the host): Université Paris-Cité & Université Paris-Créteil

Venue details (if necessary):

Event presentation*

Always already under threat, the voice is that object which, the moment it becomes manifest, reveals its problematic nature: it is a manifestation of corporeal presence as much as of a ghostly essence, its “vitality [proves to be] always already threatened by its disappearance,”¹ *phôné* (φωνή) constantly flirting dangerously with *phonos* (φόνος, meaning murder), bearing in itself the mark of transgression— literally meaning *murder of meaning*, but also self-effacement. The voice is therefore often understood within the paradigm of life and death. In *Phaedrus*, Plato notably opposes living speech to writing, which he places on the side of death. The voice thus constitutes an aporia, a paradox that the age of sound reproducibility has continually materialized and exacerbated the voice by transmitting it, alienating it, distancing it ever further from its source—not only in time, but also in space.

The lyric genre has always been in crisis, perpetually seeking definition, and the subject of debate since Plato and Aristotle.² Having emerged in modernity as a “representation of a feeling rather than as a feeling itself” (Jackson and Prins 12, our translation), lyricism later became the object of a theory of the “lyric” developed by the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). In this work, Frye identifies the differentiating factor among the three genres, which he calls the “radical of presentation,” that is, the mode of performance— “the relation between the poet and his audience” (Frye 247, our translation). Consequently, for Frye, the “lyric” is a mode of enunciation that is not limited to emotion but constitutes an “internal mimesis of sounds and images” (250), which he famously defines as an “utterance that is overheard” (249). Although this conception was later questioned by scholars such as René Wellek in the late 1960s and Ralph Cohen in the 1980s, it remains compelling to problematize this definition of lyricism in the era of sound studies.

Today, our ways of reading and listening to works seem more problematic than ever. Silence appears constantly threatened by our hyperconnected mode of life, in which everything must always be said, expressed, and heard— where nothing must remain unsaid, where having “the last word” seems to prevail. Yet, poetry continually reveals the failure of such logorrhea, showing that “nothingness” is something that persists, that obstinately remains— and that, like silence, haunts both language and speech. As Proust once wrote, “the silence of the world allows us to see better, or to see otherwise.” Poetry thus emerges as a privileged space, a language of predilection for

¹ Marie Olivier, «Introduction», *TIES* [En ligne], *TIES, La voix dans tous ses états*, mis à jour le 14/10/2019, URL : <http://revueties.org/document/751-introduction>.

² Since the “retrospective illusion” which Gérard Genette discussed in *L'Architexte* (1979) — namely, that the lyric genre was never presented by Plato or Aristotle as a “genre” in the same sense as the epic or the dramatic — lyric poetry has been a genre in search of itself.

silence—silence as the very condition of meaning’s creation, enabling us to transform our perception of the world around us.

This issue therefore seeks to explore poetic expressions whose modes of writing or enunciation challenge the very notion of lyricism. While performance, its technical and logistical conditions, and numerous sound-archiving initiatives have been increasingly studied,³ it also seems timely to question how the sonic, textual, visual, and typographic silences of certain poetic practices articulate a lyricism in which Mallarmé’s “elocutionary disappearance of the poet” resonates with an impossibility of both speech and reading.

We might think, for instance, of poets often deemed “unreadable,” in whose work the legible—or rather the illegible—flirts with the visible or even with asemia. Susan Howe’s visual poetry, for example, interrogates both reading and orality. Her collages and intertextual practice make the notion of lyricism problematic, particularly when we consider how stammering intrudes upon her poetry readings, or how David Grubbs’s “ambient soundings” have sonically rendered the intrinsic silence of her poetry. One might also recall John Cage’s silent lyricism, most famously his piece *4’33”*. The American composer conceived of silence as “the multiplicity of activity which surrounds us constantly” (*I Have Never Listened to Any Sound* 216) and declared that “poetry is having nothing to say and saying it; we possess nothing” (*M*, Foreword).⁴ The way his writing stages the transition “from language to music” on the page invites us to reflect upon how this transition operates in the suspended silence of scattered letters and mesostics in *Empty Words*—inviting us to think of writing as the process that binds music and silence, not only on the page but also through the letters themselves, which, though not mute, may seem to hold meaning back in the blackness of their ink.

Ecopoetics may also be explored, the way in which nature’s quiet lyricism exposes our own inability to listen—as in Rachel Carson’s *The Sea Around Us*, in Jonathan Skinner’s poetic and editorial work, or in the poems of Jack Collom.

This symposium will examine how silence becomes a scriptible and active force in American poetry and lyric productions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We will examine the various ways in which it shifts and transforms across time, literary forms, and media—embracing textual and visual expressions as well as performative modes that foreground the liminal nature of the lyric subject, whose embodied presence exists in a suspended space between voice and inscription, between orality and aurality.

Website address

<https://imager.u-pec.fr/actualites/appels-a-communications/appele-a-communication-colloque-les-silences-du-lyrisme-1>

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³ For a detailed discussion of these issues, see Vincent Broqua’s work on performance and Abigail Lang’s research on sound archives (see bibliography).

⁴ We refer to Isabelle Alfandary’s work on John Cage (see bibliography).