

SAYING NOTHING TO SAY

SENSE, SILENCE, AND IMPOSSIBLE TEXTS IN THE 20TH CENTURY
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

13TH MAY 2023

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

"————!"

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

SCHEDULE

10:00 - 10:30 Registration and Opening Remarks

10:30 - 11:20 **The 'Missaid': at the limits of language**

Chair: Tabina Iqbal

Julia Jaulimo, University of Helsinki and Justus Liebig University Geissen
An Impossible Experience: Kathy Acker, Samuel Beckett and the Poetics of *Sous Rature*

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Imogen Free, Kings College London

'It was the low thick almost guttural sound of the voice that she meant, rather than the horror of what was being said': resounding vocal relations in Rosamund Lehmann's *The Echoing Grove* (1953).

11:20 - 12:10

Keynote Address

Dr Maria Balaska, University of Hertfordshire

Encounters with nothing: objectless wonder in Wittgenstein and Heidegger

12:10 - 13:00

Lunch

13:00- 14:10

The Silenced: the politics of the voice

Chair: Dr Mantra Mukim

Ella Flavell, University of Warwick

Silent or Silenced: The Author's Voice in the Psychiatric Art of Art Brut.

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Aman Sinha, University of Warwick

Against Revelatory Gestures: Silence, Ambivalence and Sensuality in Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf* (Quilt) (1942)

Owain Burrell, University of Warwick

'Three Cheers for Mute Ingloriousness!' – Tony Harrison's *The School of Eloquence* and working-class silence

14:10 - 14:30

Break

14:30- 15:40

The Unsaid: absence, sound, technology

Chair: Dr Michael Pigott

Jarkko Tanninen, University of Nottingham

Silence after Violence: Photographic Absence in Joel Sternfeld's *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam* (1996)

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Misha Zakharov, University of Warwick

A quiet actress of disquieting presence: The restless spirit of Yekaterina Golubeva

Dr Sebastiane Hegarty

Silence on Loan: listening to silence and the unheard

15:40 - 16:40

Keynote Address

Dr Thomas Gould, University of East Anglia

Erasure before erasure: on the silence of the line

16:40 - 17:00

Closing Remarks

Session One
The 'Missaid': at the limits of language

Chair: Tabina Iqbal

An Impossible Experience: Kathy Acker, Samuel Beckett and the Poetics of *Sous Rature*

Juulia Jaulimo

Can one speak of impossibility in the context of fiction; is anything that can be imagined impossible, and are there limits to what can be expressed? The relationship between the concepts of impossibility and fiction has been recently debated in the field of possible worlds theory of fiction (e.g. Abler, Ryan, Ashline) relying on analytic philosophy and the definition of impossibility based on logical contradictions. William Ashline (1995) names *sous rature* as a way fiction can defy logical laws: "An event might be described by a narrator as having taken place in a fictional work, only to be asserted subsequently as not having occurred" (216). Ashline suggests that introducing events in narrative and then erasing them transgresses the law of non-contradiction and hence presents an impossibility.

However, the concept of *sous rature* is rooted in discussions other than analytic philosophy before Ashline's use. Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) was the first one to name the practice of overlining unreachable concepts as *sous rature*: the concept is both present in the text, since the word is still legible, and simultaneously absent since it is overlined, which mirrors the way the concept is simultaneously necessary and unresolved. I claim that in Samuel Beckett's *All Strange Away* (1976) and Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* (1980), the fictional language itself is placed *sous rature* in Derridean sense in order to demonstrate how fictional language is both a necessary and faulty tool when it comes to conveying bodily experience of being (in time). These narratives show how *sous rature*, or a contradiction, is a technique quite easily utilized, and it seems that what one truly means when discussing fictional impossibility rather lies elsewhere. The ineffable experience *All Strange Away* and *Great Expectations* aim to convey could be closer to what we mean when we discuss impossibility than the contradictions used to express it.

'It was the low thick almost guttural sound of the voice that she meant, rather than the horror of what was being said': resounding vocal relations in Rosamond Lehmann's *The Echoing Grove* (1953).

Imogen Free

In 1946, Rosamond Lehmann declared the most 'rare and essential' technique for the post-war novelist to be 'a live ear for dialogue.' 'Above all', Lehmann argued, 'the novelist must listen accurately to what people say and to the way they say it' (1946). Interestingly, then, Lehmann's post-war novel, *The Echoing Grove* (1953) is replete with a vocality that produces ineffability, a dialogue preoccupied with mishearings, and a silence haunted by the echoing voices of others. This paper argues that the novel's sounding out of the limitations and repressions of bourgeois social structures (in particular the gendering of the post-war preoccupation with reconstructing the familial and marital 'home') is produced by the difficulties and limitations of speech it incessantly creates, as the characters struggle to speak and to hear one another. If, as Mladen Dolar argues, 'we are social beings by the voice and through the voice' (2017), then this paper argues that the bind of the voice that Lehmann creates - between inauthenticity and expression, repression and relation - represents the bind of the social

relationships that preoccupy the novel. In this paper, I wish to explore how Lehmann posits vocality as channelled less successfully through language as speech (and logos) – which becomes radiogenic, a site of unhearing, or a site of ventriloquism – than through vocality as an embodied sonic relation, what Anna Snaith describes as ‘the pulsing and patterning “heard” before meaning’ (2020), found in the ‘syllabic friction’ (Stewart, 2020) of tone, laughter, animal cries and a resonant telepathy or embodied morse code. Lehmann’s writing towards an embodied materiality of voice, that goes beyond and before speech, thus sounds out the repressions demanded by the social relationships that are being discursively ‘reconstructed’ in the post-war moment of the novel.

Keynote One
Dr Maria Balaska

Encounters with nothing: objectless wonder in Wittgenstein and Heidegger

In my talk, I will draw on certain remarks by Heidegger and Wittgenstein to examine the phenomenon of objectless wonder, a profound mood that lacks a specific object. I will differentiate between ordinary forms of wonder, which are directed towards a peculiar entity, and objectless wonder, which is directed towards everything and nothing in particular. Although Wittgenstein expressed concerns regarding the paradoxical nature of the expressions that accompany objectless wonder, I will argue that we should not view this paradoxicality as a cause for worry but rather as a validation of the underlying ontological insight.

Biography

Maria Balaska is a research fellow at the University of Hertfordshire and at Åbo Akademi University. Her publications include *Wittgenstein and Lacan at the Limit: meaning and astonishment* (2019) and the edited volume, *Cora Diamond on Ethics* (2020). Her forthcoming monograph focuses wonder and anxiety as encounters with nothing that can offer us a valuable insight about the kind of being that we are.

Session Two
The Silenced: the politics of the voice

Chair: Dr Mantra Mukim

Silent or Silenced: The Author's Voice in the Psychiatric Art of Art Brut.

Ella Flavell

Silent or silenced? This question, when posed in relation to patients within European psychiatric hospitals of the twentieth century, is compounded by considerations of medication, the understanding of mental health, and the physical space of the psychiatric hospital itself. This paper seeks to explore this question in relation to two examples of 'psychiatric art,' both of which were subsumed into Jean Dubuffet's concept of Art Brut, art made beyond the bounds of mainstream culture. Aloise Corbaz (Swiss, 1886-1964) and Carlo Zinelli (Italian, 1916-1974) spent the majority of their adult lives in psychiatric hospitals. Both received diagnoses of schizophrenia, and both were reported to have been largely introverted, rarely engaging in verbal communication or else, in Zinelli's case, using a vocabulary consisting largely of a language of his own invention.

It is through their visual work, however, that both Corbaz and Zinelli sought to communicate their emotions, ideas, and complex worldviews. These works employed both images and the written word, the latter of which is again adapted and transformed to suit the needs of its author. Produced frequently in secret, the art made by Corbaz and Zinelli stand as testament to members of society otherwise 'denied their own voice.' Under Art Brut, however, these authors once again find themselves silenced, their own voices replaced by that of Dubuffet and his co-option of their works for his own ends. Can we therefore recapture their voices through a study of their work, and if so, what would their voices tell us?

Against Revelatory Gestures: Silence, Ambivalence and Sensuality in Ismat Chughtai's *Lihaaf* (Quilt) (1942)

Aman Sinha

In defending her short story at an obscenity trial held in 1944 at the Lahore Court, progressive writer Ismat Chughtai asks the prosecution to indicate a specific word or phrase that can be categorized as obscene, failing which, they shift the discourse by explaining how the issue of 'female sexuality' is inappropriate for a writer with familial ancestry as reputed as Chughtai's. That being more under the purview of social censure than of legality, Chughtai is acquitted of all charges. This paper seeks to explore the specific strategies she deploys, through which an apparent construction of non-heterosexual female sexuality is able to resist criminalisation in a structurally anti-queer ethos. In *Lihaaf* (Quilt), instead of freezing her characters' sexuality as consequential of their identities, Chughtai diffuses the 'sexual' onto a range of corporeal and material signifiers, which act as the sites at which the characters negotiate with the enforced boundaries of domesticity and chastity. Furthermore, in her autobiographical account of *Lihaaf's* reception, she recounts how the publishers wanted her to make the protagonist of her next story akin to the one in *Lihaaf*. The word she uses to signify that similarity is '*Lihaafzada*', loosely translating into 'covered with a quilt'. In a bold move, M. Assadudin translates this word, fraught with socio-temporal and literary specificity, to a global identity category 'lesbian'. How does this association interrupt the series of resignifications that Chughtai's narrative initiates? What are the ways in which this silence operates as a space of agency? Is it merely a matter of a lack of identity category available for the writer, or does it suggest something far more radical on the part of Chughtai? These are some of the key aspects this paper will focus on.

'Three Cheers for Mute Ingloriousness!' – Tony Harrison's *The School of Eloquence* and working-class silence

Owain Burrell

In his poem 'Hereditry', Tony Harrison answers a question about the origins of his poetic talent: 'I had two uncles, Joe and Harry - / one was a stammerer, the other dumb'. In stating this inheritance, Harrison stakes a claim to be the poetic voice of an otherwise voiceless working class. This poem opens his collection *The School of Eloquence* (1978), and throughout the collection Harrison's 'mind moves on silence' ('Study'). This has been read a riposte to the belief in the 'ineffable mystery of poetry' (Whale 2018) in favour of understanding silence as a material reality of a defeated working class.

Harrison figures himself as a worker-poet, with words as his raw materials. This figuring is supported by critical readings, notably Carol Rutter in her introduction to the anthology *Permanently Bard* (1995). Such a figuring positions Harrison's poetry as the authentic voice of the working class, breaking the silence. This figuring obfuscates the influence of the grammar school in Harrison's poetic development. Though Harrison claims his poetry stems from his silenced uncles, the classical influence of the grammar school is omnipresent throughout *The School of Eloquence*. The grammar school requires the framing of the world through a British lens, and though Harrison writes in the regional Leeds dialect that is normally silenced, this British framing remains. The grammar school has allowed Harrison a voice, and in using it, Harrison is not breaking working class silence but perpetuating it. Examining the anxiety within Harrison's poetry about the grammar school influence troubles the consensus of Harrison as worker-poet, and raises questions about working class voices and their mediation through British state-sanctioned institutions.

Session Three
The Unsaid: absence, sound, technology

Chair: Dr Michael Pigott

Silence after Violence: Photographic Absence in Joel Sternfeld's *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam* (1996)

Jarkko Tanninen

The landscape photographs in Joel Sternfeld's project *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam* (1996) depict 50 infamous sites of crime and violence across the United States. Covering domestic, public, and institutional settings, the apparent stillness of the American landscape in the project attests to the omnipresence of violence in the American sphere. By documenting the aftermath of violence and the empty landscape rather than the action itself, Sternfeld's project continues the tradition of 'late' photography, most often associated with war photography. The paper explores how Sternfeld uses photographic silence and absence to respond to the challenging task of commemorating the history of American violence from interpersonal acts to systemic injustices. Responding to the voluminous and varied record of violent acts throughout U.S. history, Sternfeld's project seeks to confront the commonplaceness of violence whilst exploring new methodologies for working through collective trauma. Through the act of *not showing*, his photographs test the limits of photographic representation and indexicality in relation to the depiction of atrocity and the study of historical amnesia. The melancholic reality behind the photographs becomes more potent through the unassuming nature of the photographs, pointing to the limited ability of the photograph, and the landscape itself, to convey history. The banality of Sternfeld's snapshots counteracts imageries of spectacular exceptionalism and hyper-violence, negating traditions of American mythmaking and national identity. Rather than providing explanations for the history of violence in the United States, the photographs point to the continuous presence of a national narrative that is often either sensationalised or forgotten. The paper analyses how the absence of the subject generates a photographic moment of silence, with the photographs and the project becoming a memorial object for a history of national tragedy.

A quiet actress of disquieting presence: The restless spirit of Yekaterina Golubeva

Misha Zakharov

Yekaterina Golubeva (1966-2011) was a Russian-born actress whose spectral screen presence, at once ethereal and ferocious, continues to fascinate cinephiles—even more so after her untimely death at the age of 44. An unconventional muse to the directors associated with the New French Extremity, Golubeva was notable for her portrayal of largely silent, quite often nameless, mysterious characters who are always on the move. In Claire Denis' *I Can't Sleep* (1994), she plays Daiga, a Lithuanian immigrant and an aspiring actress, who moves to Paris with almost no knowledge of French. In Leos Carax's *Pola X* (1999), she's again in Paris, a self-destructive war refugee of possibly Romanian origin by the name of Isabelle. In Bruno Dumont's *Twenty-nine Palms* (2003), she's Katia, a Russian photographer on her way to the titular town in the American desert. Neither definitely Russian nor Lithuanian nor French, she's an embodiment of the post-Soviet "Other"; despite the very intimate nature of her films, her screen persona, which has begun to take shape in the late 1980s, can be seen as a symptom (and a byproduct) of a much broader picture—that of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Golubeva, whose career has been associated with ghosts, decay, migration and extreme sexuality, continues to haunt the films of her ex-partner, Leos Carax, whose meta-love letter to

cinema, *Holy Motors* (2012), closes with a dedication to her, while Kylie Minogue and Marion Cotillard's characters in *Holy Motors* and *Annette* (2021) can be seen as stand-ins for Golubeva in Carax's densely autobiographical narrative. This paper aims to examine Golubeva's unique screen persona, both during her lifetime and posthumously, through the lens of Derrida's hauntology and Hamid Naficy's notion of an accented cinema.

Silence on Loan: listening to silence and the unheard.

Sebastiane Hegarty

Silence is often seen as a lack of agency, an anti-social and possibly suspect unwillingness to participate. In his book *Giving Way* Steven Connor notes that: 'Most academic writing about silence [...] tends to assume that the imposing of silence is an impediment or violation, meaning that silence should ideally in all circumstances be broken' (Connor 2019: 115).

But as a sound artist working with field-recording, I am aware that silence, withdrawal and holding back can be a form of listening practice, a method of *being with sound*. I also know that in the act of field recording, I segregate and disrupt the sounds I listen to. Since 2004, my sounding practice has included a series of silent releases: unheard, unwritten works, performed, transmitted and lost to the ear. One of the more recent of these works, *Silence on Loan* (2019), is an artists' book published in the form of a 10" singled-sided dubplate. Cut with a silent groove, this unrecorded silence is held without protection or cover in the *Artists' Book Collection* at Winchester School of Art Library (WSA) and in the requisite 'closed stacks' of the Legal Deposit libraries. Once a year *Silence on Loan* is taken from its library shelf and performed to a dwindling audience of listening and non-listening library users.

The stacked pages of 'hushed-up' Libraries (Plotnick, 1972) have a physical and cultural correspondence with silence. Their supposedly moribund shush has become a signal of exclusion and inactivity (ibid.). This performed paper draws on *Silence on Loan* and other silent works, to question this supposition. In a montage of voice, text, image, and including a performance of *Silence on* [inter-library] *Loan*, the paper will listen in on the unsaid conversation of telephone pauses and closed paragraphs of library shelves, exploring silence, as a potential and communal space: an *act of inaction* which invites both listener and non-listener into unheard congress.

Biographies

Owain Burrell

Owain Burrell is a PhD candidate in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. His thesis is titled *The Grammar School Ideal in British Literature 1945-1990*, which investigates the cultural history of the grammar school as an institutional tool of the British state to transform regional schoolchildren into British citizens. He is interested in regional literatures, post-British imaginaries, and meritocracy and productive logics in British cultural contexts.

Ella Flavell

Ella Flavell is a second year PhD researcher in the History of Art department at the University of Warwick. Her research concerns the intersection of Art Brut, art produced beyond the perceived bounds of the mainstream artworld, with 'Cultural Art,' art produced within these bounds. This research, which focuses primarily on the 1930s-1980s, places especial focus on the role of 'psychiatric art' within the development of Jean Dubuffet's term Art Brut, as well as how those makers have been mythologised within subsequent literature. This research is funded by Midlands 4 Cities (M4C, AHRC).

Imogen Free

Imogen Free is an AHRC funded PhD candidate in English at King's College London, writing a doctoral thesis entitled 'Resonant Resistance: Late Modernist Women's Writing and the Politics of Sound'. She has a forthcoming chapter on aural anxiety and rurality in Rosamond Lehmann and Jean Rhys's Second World War writing in the *Edinburgh Companion to Literature & Sound Studies* (2023) and her article "'Outside the Machine': Stasis and Conflict in the work of Jean Rhys' was published in *Women: A Cultural Review* in 2020. She is the co-organiser, alongside Professor Anna Snaith, of the 2023 conference 'Sounding Modernism' at KCL.

Sebastiane Hegarty

Sebastiane Hegarty is an artist, writer, and Senior Lecturer. As a visual artist working with sound his practice explores the materiality of sound through the haunted landscapes of listening, silence and the unheard. These works are formed and performed through the publication of flawed phonographic objects and pointless actions, the palpitation of typewriters, and useless weak espionage of lost FM transmissions. His work has been transmitted, exhibited, heard and unheard across the UK, Europe and Americas. In 2022, his text work, '*I am not imagining this...*' was nominated for 'Best Imagined Sound' in *The Sound of the Year Awards*.

Juulia Jaulimo

Juulia Jaulimo is a doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki and Justus-Liebig University Giessen and is part of the international PhDnet Doctoral Program. Her PhD thesis *Impossibility in Fiction? Fictional Affordances Beyond Logical Constraints* investigates the concept of impossibility in the context of fiction; can anything in fiction be perceived as impossible, and how can logical impossibility be used as a narrative tool.

Aman Sinha

My name is Aman Sinha, and I am a Chancellor's International PhD Scholar in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies, at the University of Warwick. My research interests revolve

around ideas of queer dissidence, life-writing, and post-colonialism. My project looks at queer autobiographers from the Global South, and the self-making strategies they use to question eurocentric ideas of queer identity, liberation and freedom. I also like to read and write poetry. My creative work has been published in a collection of artworks by queer writers called *Tilt*, brought out by Queerabad, and *Orinam*, an activist organization in India.

Jarkko Tanninen

Jarkko Tanninen is a PhD student in History of Art at the University of Nottingham. His research focuses on histories of American photography and visual culture, in particular the fictions and mythologies associated with the United States, and the development of popular iconographies. His thesis examines how regional myths and tropes are represented and challenged in recent photographic projects across the United States. Tanninen also holds an MA in Curating from Stockholm University. His most recent curatorial project, a photobook titled *The Mind is an Open Road* (2021), was an exploration of the American road trip during a global pandemic.

Misha Zakharov

Misha Zakharov is a Russian-Korean author, translator, film critic, and curator. Upon leaving Russia after the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Misha has embarked on a PhD project at the University of Warwick, as part of which he researches the potential of film to affect social change while simultaneously working at the Screening Rights Film Festival. His work as a translator includes Maggie Nelson's 'The Argonauts' (2020) and 'On Freedom' (2021) and Sarah Schulman's 'The Gentrification of the Mind' (2022). His first book, a collection of autofiction titled 'Doramaroman', has been released in 2022.