

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS: ON VISUAL POETICS, ERROR, AND ABSENCE

EMILY MARIE PASSOS DUFFY

Universidade Católica Portuguesa
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3635-9077>
eduffy@ucp.pt

AMADEA KOVIČ

Universidade Católica Portuguesa
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7059-3281>
akovic@ucp.pt

What shapes can an absence take? With visual input saturating many aspects of digital and embodied life, this issue of *Diffractions* presents a prismatic approach to not only visual poetics but multimodal considerations of gender, absence, and error. With this issue, we were interested in possibilities born out of the intersection between the visual and textual language, and the potential that error and absence hold within those shared spaces – particularly, though not exclusively, in relation to gender.

We were also concerned with the affective dimensions of these intersections; from the formal qualities to the feelings they evoke. The submissions we received responded to our call with a wide array of topics, methodologies and approaches, which has led us to uncover unexpected connections and points of friction and genesis. We see within these works both a rejection of catharsis (as in Lea Breyer's “‘The Word – The Great Enigma’: Visual and Performative Poetics of Staging Traumatic Memory,”) as well as closure¹ (as in Zoë Antoinette Eddy's

¹ See Lyn Hejinian's essay on poetic theory, “The Rejection of Closure.”

autoethnographic essay, “*miskobagizi*: Presenting Absence in an Indigenous Art Installation”).

[*time presence absence redaction*
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Visual poetics can be an approach and a philosophy, with visual poetry being one of many possible genre outputs that engage with these themes. As noted by Elisabeth A. Frost, within the genre output of visual poetry—a genre umbrella that may include concrete poetry, asemic (“wordless”) poems, choreopoems, erasures, and redactions—there are countless examples of artists working on “visual compositions precisely to question the gendered politics of the history of poetry, material culture, and reading or performance” (2016, 339).

A more recent anthology, *Judith: Women Making Visual Poetry* (2021, ed. Amanda Earl), addresses gender imbalances in 20th century considerations of visual and asemic poetry and works to correct them through the inclusion of work from thirty-six women in twenty-one countries. The anthology also includes a list of 1,181 artists working in visual/textual mediums, demonstrating the breadth of possibility within this nexus.

[*absent time redacted present*]

In the Portuguese language, the word *género* carries the double meaning of gender and genre, pointing to a plurality present in this issue and, in particular, the ways that the authors and artists approach the topic in terms of language, structure, and visibility.

In “Memória Gráfica Urbana: Dinâmicas de Género em Letreiros Comerciais”/ “Urban Graphic Memory: Gender Dynamics in Commercial Signs,” this duality of gender and genre is explored by Rita Beça Múrias and João Paulo Martins, whose case study of neon signs, gender, and censorship under the Estado

Novo Regime in Lisbon examines how the visible features of a cityscape, in this case, its commercial signs, can be read as a text that reveals underlying power dynamics. Pamphlets and posters saturate a campus ahead of student elections in R. Harini and Aadya Jha's "Banners, Bodies, and Binaries: Subversive Textscapes and the Politics of Studenthood in Delhi University," emphasizing the visual and material dimensions of politicized student life.

In "Dreaming of the Pregnant Male Body. Maternal Absence in Three Manga by Moto Hagio," Mattia Cucurullo weaves psychoanalysis and Christian mysticism to consider the representation of the pregnant male body in words and images.

[*bodies time presence absence*
rejection of catharsis]

Mariana Bicudo Cunha recasts Maya Deren's work in light of archival material and biographical information in "'When a Goddess becomes a Woman she becomes a Witch': An Analysis of Maya Deren's *Witch's Cradle* and the poem 'Who is Lillith?'" delving into the afterlife of images and the power of refusal.

[*present absence*
time enigmatic]

In "'The Word – The Great Enigma': Visual and Performative Poetics of Staging Traumatic Memory," Lea Breyer explores layers of gendered violence, accumulated stories, symbols, and gestures in performance work by Carolina Bianchi Y Cara de Cavalo that "stages trauma's temporal rupture, its repetitions and absences, and in doing so it mirrors the survivor's psychic reality while offering audiences a way to engage" while image, text, and the implicated body of the performer enact the places that the verbal fails to touch.

Mickey Bourne's "Archive of Want" works from absent material as a referent, recalling Jenny Boully's *The Body: An Essay* and conjuring emotional resonance, queer desire(s), and memory and imagination through artist labels in a text-based installation. Similarly, Grace Holleran's "selections from oyster" frames

redaction in poetry as removing “the flesh around the pearl,” engaging with absence, loss, and the alchemy of poetic process. These works highlight the sensory quality of a visual absence. We feel and are affected by what we do not see.

[*absent or*

redacted]

The materiality of absence is further felt in Zoë Antoinette Eddy’s autoethnographic essay, “*miskobagizi*: Presenting Absence in an Indigenous Art Installation,” which reflects on absence as advocacy, mobilizing a “visual poetics of disruption, grief, and invocation” to create space around the subject of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people (MMIWG2S). In “Visual Poetry as Elegy in *Ghost Of*,” Maggie Warren articulates the possibilities for the visual to render absence and loss in Diana Khoi Nguyen’s poetics; “Only a visual poem, itself an assemblage of meaning-systems, could enable this conjuring, could navigate these imaginative territories of loss and retrieval.” A poem, and, in particular, a visual poem that engages with absence, may be a space of alchemical conjuring and a place where elegy, absence, and error convene.

[*absence makes*

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This possibility is again evident in Guest Artist Gabrielle Civil’s excerpt of an ongoing anti-translation titled “from *errances*: an essay of error (after Jacqueline Beaugé-Rosier),” which grapples with the friction, error, and negative space that emerge in attending to a project translating Haitian poet, Jacqueline Beaugé-Rosier’s long poem, *A vol d’ombre*.

[*rejection of*

time]

Lisa Jennings's poem, "The Verdant's Kin" addresses historical silences and speaks directly to perpetrators of colonial violence, responding to and grappling with John Donne's "Elegy 19" and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, rupturing absence with verse.

In "How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the ~~Bomb~~ Glitch," Elena Peytchinska and Thomas Ballhausen take us into speculative terrain with work inspired by Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), exploring embedded glitches through an imaginary atlas and an experimental literary text.

Moving through a range of critical and creative works, our hope is that these pieces on the visual, textual, the errant and the absent will inspire new perspectives and perhaps deeper dimensions of relationships to words and images and the silences they can point to or produce, tracing new shapes and relationships between the textual and visual.

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