Diffractions, Issue 11: "Visual Poetics and Gender: Rendering Absence and Error"

Deadline: May 31, 2025

DIFFRACTIONS

Absences, both as a verbal phenomenon and textual/visual strategy, are evocative. They can convey even more than what is included in a work—pointing to the unsaid, the unexpressed, redacted, or censored. A space, an error, or an errant form can be seen as a collision between semiotic systems, lending itself to ekphrastic consideration, braiding together the verbal and the visual. History until this day is punctuated with gendered absences, and the visual mode has the potential to underscore them by making them visible; as noted by Elisabeth Frost (2016), there are "specifically feminist possibilities of a visually-oriented poetics" (339). Glitch feminism, for example, builds itself on the notion of the 'glitch-as-error,' a term seeping from the digital world to claim and embrace the fluidity of the material against the dominance and normativity of the binary (Russell 2020). This call finds itself at an intersection between visual poetics as an approach/ philosophy and visual poetry as one of its genre outputs, engaging with both the visual and verbal to explore gender and absence.

Visual poetics are defined through a number of perspectives: as an approach described by Mieke Bal (1988), it denies the "word-image" opposition and explores possibilities of a poetics of the visual and the visual dimensions of the written word, calling for mutual collaboration between and across mediums (178), while Frost (2016) defines it "as writing that explores the materiality of word, page, or screen" (339). 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" (Frost 2016, 339).

Within the context of this call, we are specifically interested in the potential of visual poetics to render visibility to absences, engage with error, and convey histories of silence, censorship and erasure. What happens when certain narratives lack visibility, and present blank spaces within public visual language? Works by 21st century women poets Anne Carson and Gabrielle Civil demonstrate a poetic engagement with absence, as well as the material and visual aspects of both language and translation. In a note following "errances: an essay of errors after Jacqueline Beaugé-Rosier," performance artist, poet, and writer Gabrielle Civil (2020) describes her ongoing work of translating A vol d'ombre by Haitian poet Jacqueline Beaugé-Rosier as "a trial of wandering," "a shadow lineage" and "a timeline of discarded choices." The essay´s visual dimensions—-namely, white space, brackets, and cross-outs—constitute an archive of doubt, possibility, absence, and trials.

Absences and errors can convey meaning and possibilities for reading and interpretation—in Civil's case, they indicate a grappling with the language itself, and the challenges translation presents with "false friends, language, meaning, and memory" (Civil 2020). In Carson's case, the brackets and white space in If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho perform and engage with the loss—an elegy for the missing pieces of the source text itself in its entirety, and an engagement with what remains.

This call is interested in how gender-based concerns can be expressed through visual language and its absences, resulting in visual poetics in their varied and multilayered manifestations—and how these intersections may illuminate the bounds and possibilities of genre, form, and semiotic system.

We invite explorations and examples of artistic productions which utilise the interplay between the verbal, visual, and gender—in particular, the use of visual poetics to highlight absence, invisibility and erasure, considering:

 How can visual language be used to convey narratives that are beyond the verbal?

 How might an absence be translated into visual language?

 What is the role of error in visual poetics, and how does it connect to gender?

Proposals for thematic articles in response to this call are welcome, including but not limited to the following topics:

 Visual poetics and gender

 (In)visibility

 Expressions of error in visual poetry

 Visual rendering/annotation of speech-based poetics

 Absence as evocative, absence as resistance strategy

 Ekphrastic writing—writing in response to visual art

 Collaborations between visual artists and poets

 Street art/graffiti as a form of visual poetics

 Intertextuality/Intersemiotic translation and gender

 The translation of visual or concrete poetry

 Visual poetics, AI and technology

 Visual poetics and theory

For artistic submissions, we are interested in the following:

⬚ Visual essays

⬚ Interviews

⬚ Graphic or visual storytelling

⬚ Memes (original or curated with attribution)

⬚ Poetry that engages with erasure or redaction

⬚ Translated poetry with a translator's note

⬚ Collaborations between text-based and image-based artists

As with thematic articles, the artistic contributions should not exceed the length of 9000 words, in English or Portuguese. With artistic submissions, authors may also include an optional short (150-200 words) synopsis of the work in lieu of an abstract.

Editors-in-chief: Emily Marie Passos Duffy, Amadea Kovič

Submissions and review process

Abstracts will be received and reviewed by the Diffractions editorial board who will decide on the pertinence of proposals for the upcoming issue. After submission, we will get in touch with the authors of accepted abstracts in order to invite them to submit a full article. However, this does not imply that these papers will be automatically published. Rather, they will go through a peer-review process that will determine whether papers are publishable with minor or major changes, or they do not fulfill the criteria for publication.

Please send abstracts of 150 to 250 words, and 5-8 keywords by May 31st 2025, to info.diffractions@gmail.com with the subject "Diffractions 11", followed by your last name.

The full papers should be submitted by August 31th 2025, through the journal's platform: https://revistas.ucp.pt/index.php/diffractions/about/submissions.

Every issue of Diffractions has a thematic focus but also contains special sections for non-thematic articles. If you are interested in submitting an article that is not related to the topic of this particular issue, please consult the general guidelines available at the Diffractions website at https://revistas.ucp.pt/index.php/diffractions/about/submissions. The submission and review process for non-thematic articles is the same as for the general thematic issue. All research areas of the humanities are welcome.

References

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