

Sound and Permutation in the Poems of Brion Gysin (Gif-sur-Yvette, 11 May 26)

Amphithéâtre 1B26, ENS Paris-Saclay, 4 avenue des Sciences, 91190 Gif-sur-Yvette,
11.05.2026

James Horton, Ecole normale supérieure

"word beginning the in the was": Sound and Permutation in the Poems of Brion Gysin.

This workshop will focus on the Permutation Poems that British-Canadian artist Brion Gysin produced from the 1950s until his death in 1984. While these poems have been variously revisited through their visual forms, this one-day conference will focus in particular on their sound versions. Bringing together art history, discrete mathematics, contemporary artistic creation and American studies, its questions will be twofold. It will seek to assess the part played by combinatorial analysis in the make-up of Gysin's "machine poems", the recitation of which has been recorded with a reel-to-reel tape recorder. This electroacoustic method will then be examined in line with Bryon Gysin's social and political stance, as a gay man struggling to find his place in a shared language.

Programme

9h30 : Accueil des participants

Introduction :

- Pierre Thévenin (Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique CNRS / ENS Paris-Saclay)
- Gabrielle Adjrad (Centre d'histoire culturelle des sociétés contemporaines / Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines)

Matinée sous la présidence de Mica Gherghescu (Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou)

10h-12h

- Caitlin Woolsey (Clark Art Institute) « All the Edges are Lost »: Brion Gysin's Tape Voices
- James Horton (Institut d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine, ENS PSL) "Sex is shutting down everywhere »: Politics of Desire and Desubjectivation in Brion Gysin's Work

Après-midi sous la présidence d'Hélène Aji (République des Savoirs / ENS PSL)

14h-16h

- Jean-Paul Allouche (Institut de Mathématique Jussieu Rive Gauche, CNRS) : « Permutations: a possible mathematical tool for poetry and music »
- Vincent Rioux (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts) : « The helium balloon problem »

16h30-18h

Discussion d'ouverture

- Ramuntcho Matta, artiste et musicien, auteur de « Ce que Brion m'a dit de Gysin » (Marcel le Poney, 2025)
- Oana Avasilichioaei, poétesse canadienne, récipiendaire 2025 du Prix international de littérature Bernard Heidsieck du Centre Pompidou

This workshop functions as a satellite event to the exhibition "Brion Gysin: The Last Museum" that the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris devotes to the artist, alongside to the evening "Listening session : Brion Gysin's Machine Poems", at IRCAM on May 12th.

Further details and sign-up:
<https://msh-paris-saclay.fr/agenda/son-et-permutation-chez-brion-gysin/>

Organisation

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Chargé de recherche CNRS

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Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines

Centre d'histoire culturelle des sociétés contemporaines (CHCSC)

Institut d'Etudes Culturelles et Internationales (IECI)

Quellennachweis:

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