

## **Silence: A Semiotics of (in)Significance** **University of Liverpool, 1-3 July 2015**

This conference aims to explore silence and meaning-making. Central themes are significance and insignificance, congruence and indifference, reticence and inarticulacy. We discuss how attention, knowledge, and oblivion are shaped by lack of communication or by presence of silence as communication. As such, the conference primarily concerns itself with silence in different narratives. To analyse the point of structural, social, and cognitive engagement, we read various historical periods. The conference, therefore, probes the anatomy of silence in construction and interpretation, be it intellectual or emotional, aesthetic or strategic, verbal or visual, subjective and objective. More broadly, we discuss silence and gender. How does silence historically manifest a taxonomy of femininity and masculinity with regards to narrative virtue, bravery, chivalry, and honour?

What are some connecting theories of silence and (in)significance in art and literature produced by individuals whose gender is the most plausible entity to offer their work impromptu significance? Are there contemporary examples or is this a “thing of the past”? In education and meaning-making, how do individuals connect with silence, with themselves and others through silence? To what extent is quiet time in teaching arts and humanities, social sciences, life and health sciences, a beneficial factor to retain attention? How do male and female recipients of silence develop in later stages of life and career? Or does silence infuse facts with insignificance, no matter how significant they may be? What are ethical implications of silence for works of art as well as for those who create or equip them with (in)significance?

On a more profound level, how does silence benefit the artist, writer, and educator? How does it affect observers in aesthetic and ethical spaces? “The triumph of monastic silence,” as Diarmaid MacCulloch (2013) put it, was morally embodied, suggesting that the silence of the cosmos fascinated “those meditating on Christian Scripture and its satellites for centuries to come (54).” Correspondingly, how is silence perceived and embodied in literature and theology, literature and art, literature and medicine around the world? How does silence communicate positive and negative emotions in connection with communicative tools in other disciplines, especially in psychology, history, and linguistics? Schools of English and Psychology at the University of Liverpool consider individual presentations of 20 minutes, panel proposals, and poetic art exhibitions for this conference. Topics may include but are not limited to the following:

- Rhetoric, symbolic grammar, metaphor
- Cognitive construction, development, (in)significance
- Fictive spaces of silence in works of art
- Sacrament, forgiveness, endearment
- Manuscripts and miniatures of grief, joy, and silence
- Nonverbal rejection, conflict, and dehumanizing through silence
- Iconography, portraiture, and silence
- Musical genius, rhapsody and recital of silence
- Argumentative silence, social psychology, and identity

Deadline for abstracts (of no more than 300 words) is 20 December 2014.

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A number of conference bursaries (Memorial of Dr. Wasfia Mhabak) will be available for PhD scholars in literary and comparative studies. To apply, send us a full CV, research statement, and your abstract for the conference. A selection of papers will be considered for publication in our project book series.

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