**Call for Panels, “Voices, Sounds, Noises, Silences”, AFEA 2023, University of Burgundy**

**Popular Cultures Workshop:**

**« In space no one can hear you scream, or can they? »**

**A Science fiction panel**

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“In space no one can hear you scream”. The iconic tagline from Ridley Scott’s *Alien* underlines the role “Voices, Sounds, Noises, Silences” has played in science fiction. For Nis Gron “William Whittington has documented the importance of *Alien* (1979) as a critical stepping-stone in the development and importance of the soundtrack especially in the expressionistic use of sound effects, ambient sounds and foley sounds in Sci-Fi movies.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

If *Alien* changed the face of horror science fiction, it followed a long-lasting tradition that has used sound and silence to create and increase tension or fear, or/and divert the audience’s attention from the real danger. Yet, it is interesting to note the dual use of silence: it can heighten stress, when the absence of sound and noise can be interpreted as heralding some form of danger, yet it may also protect from danger, when remaining silent prevents the characters from being located and discovered (*a Quiet Place*). Not to forget that it is in natural surroundings, devoid of human sounds, that some can find peace, strength and rest (*Star Wars*).

Science fiction plays with the complexities and contradictions of sound and silence through soundtracks (intensifying fear with silence and with extradiegetic sound, *A Clockwork Orange*) and within plots when survival depends on the ability to refrain from making any sound.

No matter the format and the media (visual, print, sound, text and image), what is underlined in science fiction is how being deprived of voice/sound, reduced to silence or confronted to excessive sound entail situations and/or feelings of danger: it can mean hearing danger coming, but also hearing the call of a power or a force, being controlled by them, endangered by them (use of the Force in *Star Wars*, Viktor converting sound waves into physical force and Allison-The Rumor controlling people’s mind by uttering a sentence in *The Umbrella Academy,* or super-heroes like Black Bolt or Black Canary).

Sound and silence are deeply linked to cultures and to human societies. It seems that as technology develops, the modern technological worlds are more and more noisy, and sounds invade the environment and the minds leaving no space to silence and thoughts (*Blade Runner*). Thus, it is significant that even space becomes “noisy”: most science fiction stories, at least on the screen, show space as full of sounds and noises when it is in fact silent. If this can be linked to the format and the wish not to cut the audience off from sounds, this also shows how silence is linked to culture: the lack of noise, sound, or voice can lead to isolation and madness, and is to be fought against (*Flinch,* *I am Legend*, *The Last Battle*).

Sounds can also take the form of noises expressing joy, celebrations, and nostalgia. Some science fiction stories try to imagine what the languages of peoples from altogether different cultures and worlds could be and what use of sound and silence they would have (*Solaris*, *The Shape of Water*).

The different formats use different means to express sounds and silence. In comic books, silence may be represented by wordless scenes, panels of silence on which no dialogues or words are written. This, moreover, compels the reader to focus only on the images that hold or are supposed to hold all the information. Silence can be strengthened by a play on colors. When in visual and audio media, sounds and silence can grab straight away the audience attention and are traditional gimmicks, in the text and image media the audience sees sound instead of hearing it. Thus, the size and shape of the word balloon or speech bubble can be used to highlight the auditory effects, in the same way, onomatopoeias are used to represent actions and the sounds that go with them (“Splat”, “Pow”, “Bang”, “Aaargh”, etc.) Onomatopoeia has even become the name of a villain (DC Comics, 2002).

These are some of the aspects that can be tackled, but many more questions can be raised and issues dealt with.

All approaches (historical, stylistic, philosophical, etc.), and all formats and media welcome (games, RPG, comic books, series, movies, novels, songs, etc.)

Papers can deal with, but are not limited to:

-“voices, sounds, noises, silences” in science fiction over the centuries

-major science fiction works tackling the topic and their perspective

-narrative means used to represent pauses, silence and how the different formats impact the reception by the audience

- impacts of SFX on the use and representation of sounds and silence in SF

-SF stories and plots focusing much more on silence and sounds as modern societies become noisier

- specificities of the genre when dealing with “Voices, Sounds, Noises, and Silences”

- SF as a genre voicing or silencing societal issues

Michel Chion, *Des sons dans l’espace. À l’écoute du space opera*, Bordeaux, Éd. Capricci, 2019, 112 pages

K.J. Donnelly, Philip Hayward (Ed.), *Music in Science Fiction Television  Tuned to the Future*, Routledge, 2013

Trace Reddell, *The Sound of Things to Come An Audible History of the Science Fiction Film*,

University of Minnesota Press, 2018

Erik Steinskog, *Afrofuturism and Black Sound Studies: Culture, Technology, and Things to Come* (Palgrave Studies in Sound) (English Edition) 1st ed. 2018 Édition

William Whittington, *Sound Design and Science Fiction*, University of Texas Press; 2007

Paper proposals (300-500 words approximately) may put forward different fields of study and

theoretical frameworks and approaches. They are to be sent, along with a short biography, to Danièle André (daniele.andre.univ.larochelle@gmail.com) and Gwenthalyn Engélibert (gwenthalyn.engelibert@univ-brest.fr) by January 16 th, 2023.

Please note that to present a paper, it is necessary to be a member of the AFEA (The French Association of American Studies, for which the membership fees are about 60 euros) and to register for the symposium (the register fees are about 60 euros as well).

1. Grøn, N. “The Sound of Horror - Silence & Sound Contrasts in Sci-Fi Horror Movies”. *Tidsskrift for Medier, Erkendelse Og Formidling*, bd. 1, nr. 1, juni 2013, https://tidsskrift.dk/mef-journal/article/view/28578. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)