

## INSTALLATION

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## In One Ear & Out the Other

### *Installation at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3*

*"What we require is / silence; but what silence requires / is that I go on talking." -John Cage, Lecture on Nothing*



At the center of the grand rotunda of Paris' Galerie Colbert stands a statue of Eurydice, soon to die, a venomous snake wrapped about her foot. In that rotunda, there is no sign of her famous lover Orpheus, the musician who would subsequently descend into the underworld to woo the gods with his music, pleading for his lost love's return. In place of Orpheus, though, there was recently an unlikely substitute, another musician, the composer John Cage.

No, there was no statue of Cage, but a conference instead, "Transatlantic Cage: John Cage's Centennial in Paris", held there by the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, September 19-22. One can only wonder how the gods of the underworld would have responded to Cage's music, and whether Eurydice would be returned to her lover by the sounds created there.

For this conference, I was commissioned by its organizers to complete a site-specific and short-term poetry installation that would partially surround that statue of Eurydice in the Galerie Colbert. My poetry would be composed of words placed upon many of the windows of that historic

and glorious setting, a "writing on air" installation that would briefly inscribe upon that space varieties of language emerging directly from the work of Cage. Yes, this was to be a site-specific installation, however, as I was in Florida, in the U.S.A., it would be designed for a site that I had not seen, never having entered the Galerie Colbert (one of Paris' original shopping arcades from the 1820's, where the figure of the flaneur would be born, and where, many decades later, Walter Benjamin would stroll, imagining his own *Arcades Project*).

From the photographs sent to me by the conference organizers, it was clear that the Galerie Colbert, in all its ornate grandeur, was an overwhelming and impressive site to behold. One particular element, though, was lacking within that space and that was the presence of language — as if all of the filigreed architectural splendor of that rotunda was intended to silence anyone entering into it, taking your breath away.

However, taking John Cage at his word when he wrote that "There is no such thing as silence", it occurred to me suddenly that what that great space needed — if only for a few days, and if only as a brief marker of Cage's presence (alongside the dying Eurydice) — was language: big, bold words cross-hatched across the space, as if dancing from window to window, superimposed onto the setting and into the air. From a distance, then, across the Atlantic, and examining further the photographs sent to me, I designed an installation that would respond to the rotunda's absence of words, its architectural silencing of language; my installation would therefore involve a "writing through" of John Cage's *Song Books: Solos for Voice* and, from his book *Silence*, "45' for a Speaker".

In the first text, the *Song Books*, I located a number of Cage's more striking musical notations (which included as well a variety of curious and compelling words), scanning his handwritten score, and then enlarging those selected notations; in the second text, from *Silence*, I isolated a number of theatrical stage-directions that Cage had written as a part of a performed reading, directions to the reader to interrupt his lecture and, for instance, "blow your nose". The thirty bilingual selections were then printed onto large transparencies, rolled up into a tube, and transported by me across the Atlantic to the Galerie Colbert where they were then taped onto the thirty windows.

During the four days of the installation, Eurydice's back was (as instructed by the gods) turned away from the written windows, unseeing, but perhaps aware of Cage's words dancing just behind her, whispering in her ears.

For more pictures see:

<http://www.unf.edu/~clunberr/Lunberry/Home.html>





