

“LET ME WALK TO THE EDGE OF GENRE¹”
BEN LERNER’S POETRY, FICTION, CRITICISM AND ARTISTIC COLLABORATIONS
June 28th – July 1st, 2023
Paris, France

GUEST OF HONOR: BEN LERNER

Keynote speakers:

Daniel Katz, University of Warwick, UK
Mary K. Holland, State University of New York, New Paltz, USA
Christine Savinel, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, France

With three volumes of poetry, three novels, a book-length essay on poetry, and collaborations with artists resulting in four artists’ books, Ben Lerner has established himself as one of the most important writers of his generation in the United States today.

While his poetry and collaborations with artists have been enthusiastically received, the author’s widespread and international success derives principally from his novels, which have generated a considerable number of reviews and scholarly articles since the publication of *Leaving the Atocha Station* in 2011. These novels are not only notable in how they disturb conventional notions regarding the distinction between the “factual” and the “fictive,” history and fable, on both formal and thematic levels. They additionally rupture generic boundaries in the most material way, often incorporating into fictional contexts poems, essays, prose fragments, or in one instance a short story that have previously been published under the name “Ben Lerner,” thereby repurposing and re-using writing in ways which trouble many conceptions of authorship and identity, and breaking apart the closed space of “fiction” as such.

Similar tendencies can be seen throughout Lerner’s work, which, as noted, often takes the form of collaboration with other writers or visual artists, and foregrounds the inclusion of generically different forms of writing, or visual art in collision with text. Lerner does not only work in *different* genres, he forces us to rethink the manners in which genres are defined, and the purposes these definitions serve.

Similarly, his speculations on poetry as “virtual” aim to trouble the conception of the poem as a discrete, finished, and total object in a manner that looks back to the “serial poem” of Jack Spicer or Robert Duncan, while the interwoven dialogues between poetry and prose he has established between his works can even be seen to constitute a kind of serial, autobiographical prosimetrum, in a manner which might recall the ambitious life projects that emerged in the late 19th century and flourished with modernism (with Baudelaire, Benjamin, Rilke, Proust, and Woolf among others). At the same time, Lerner’s work regularly insists on

¹ Extracted from *Mean Free Path* (2010) in *No Art*, Granta Publications, London, UK, 2016.

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the direct relation of what could seem to be formal or theoretical questions to sociality, friendship and therefore concrete constructions of community, and forms of activism or collective engagement.

This conference will address the full scope of Lerner's writing and aesthetic endeavors since the publication of his first volume of poetry, *The Lichtenberg Figures* (2004), so as to better observe the circulation between the different art forms as well the reflections they generate on creation in the contemporary world.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Intertextuality, influences
- Intermediality and generic porosity
- Literature and visual arts
- Relations between the fiction and the essays, between the fiction and the poetry
- Modern and contemporary poetics
- Serial poetry, poetic sequences
- Community, at once social, political, and artistic
- Commodification and exchange
- Rhetoric, persuasion, and political discourse
- Originality and translation
- Kinship, the family, and social reproduction

Proposals in English of about 300 words as well as a short biography should be emailed at benlernerparisconference2023@gmail.com with "Ben Lerner Conference Proposal" as a subject heading. For more information on the conference, please check the website: <https://benlernerparisconference2023.weebly.com/>

Post-Graduate workshop

The conference will feature a workshop for post-graduate and doctoral students working on Lerner, or topics related to 21st century with a clear link to Lerner's concerns (see above-listed topics). Participants will present current research projects (doctoral dissertation, article, book project, etc.) in a small-group setting, led by conference speakers or organizers. For this event, abstracts of about 300 words in English as well as a short CV should be emailed at benlernerparisconference2023@gmail.com with "Post-Graduate Workshop" as a subject heading.

Organizing committee:

Yannicke Chupin, Cergy Paris Université
Karim Daanoune, Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier 3
Daniel Katz, University of Warwick
Anne-Laure Tissut, Université de Rouen

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- Université de Rouen, ERIAC – Équipe de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les aires culturelles (EA 4705)
- Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier 3 et EMMA Études Montpelliéraines du Monde Anglophone (EA741)

