“The Specter of Abnormality: Deaf Education and the Poetics of Contestation at the Turn of the Twentieth-Century”

While tracing the scope of the French Republican project promoting speech in Deaf education, this paper will analyze how the spread of oralism coincided with the development of new categories to classify children, especially as “backward” and “abnormal.” It will examine the responses by Deaf people, who, far from being mere spectators of the change, developed a radical critique of the repercussions of the new pedagogical methods, employing irony, sarcasm, and critical analysis. This paper will show how these years of struggle were also years of emancipation, in which the acquisition of language became a poetical and political act.