

Call for Papers

International Conference 'Urban Writings, Exposed Writings'

Paris, Marseille
11th & 18th October 2019

Recent developments about 'urban writings' such as social movements and May 1968 remembrances have highlighted the important role they play in the media and public spheres. This international and interdisciplinary conference aims to examine their inscription in the street as an over-semiotised space, saturated with writing and images. As a graphic mode of expression and a platform for multiple voices, 'urban writing' - and, more widely, 'exposed writing' - produces discourses whose political, cultural, social and aesthetic stakes interest various disciplines, notably history and history of art, the anthropology of writing, semiology, aesthetics, geography, urbanism, sociology, political theory and science, information and communication science, and, more widely, cultural and visual studies. Like slogans, graffiti has the distinctive nature of being located at a crossroads of various questions, whether it is considered as a low technology medium (information and communication science), as a tool for raising awareness, a watchword or tool in a repertoire of contention (sociology, political science), as an urban aphorism (literature), a sign of urbanisation (geography) or as a plastic creation (history of art).

Nevertheless, studies carried out in various research sectors sometimes present communication difficulties due to disciplinary and linguistic barriers. Furthermore, although the academic world often emphasises graffiti as artistic (whether 'vandal' or 'legal') and sometimes associates it with wider practices of disorder, there are insufficient studies on graffiti defined as defiant or illegal, anonymous or pseudonymous - although these are most present in the news and shared on social media. Interest in the graffiti movement as it has developed since the early 1970's must not obscure other writing practices in the urban space that pre-exist it or exist concomitantly, thus contributing to drawing up contemporary urban landscapes that are both plural and dialogical.

This conference thus invites scholars from all horizons to decentralize their gaze and observe the way in which graphic discourse is publicised on walls, in France or in other countries. By setting up a dialogue that we hope will be interdisciplinary, we will build a basis for common reflection on the categorisation stakes in this heterogenous and diffuse mass that makes up 'urban writing'. What agendas underlie the possible (and effective) diverse delimitations of these writings? What are the implications of the various attempts at historical genealogy and classification? Between territorial and identity marking, political inscriptions, artistic practices, exposed writings are indeed deployed into sub-genres that often correspond to as many locales (prison graffiti, rural graffiti etc.), actors (activists, professional or amateur artists, tourists, etc.) or other circumstances, in which collective events - demonstrations, occupations or wars and attacks - become 'writing events' (Fraenkel; 2003).

In this sense, analysing urban writings engages another series of questions regarding acts and actors: what do the techniques and materials used (aerosol canister, stylus, felt tip pen, personal recipes...) reveal about their actors? What intimate life stories (detentions, migrations...) lead to an act of inscription? What is written on the walls? What subjects are thus made public through this specific mode of communication, this territorial marking that is both discrete and omnipresent in cities nowadays? Are any particular political leanings visible? What do these writings say about their (identified or more often anonymous) authors' relationships to power?

Examining the political dimension of urban writing equally implies reintroducing the receiver into the frame of analysis. Like practices mixing publicity communication, mourning writing, collective and individual expression, these anonymous messages are left in the care of the reader's cooperation. What kind of reception do they engage? Can we discern their movements? How do these messages interact with other forms of writing (advertising posters, logos, signage) in the public space? How do these forms merge with local traditions of public display, all the while nourished by a world-wide reference (graffiti)? How are they received by users and authorities of thus branded spaces? And what do these forms of reception reveal about the position accorded to these writings in social and political life in a given context? Erased, hidden, or, on the contrary, tolerated, photographed and highlighted (in some cases even created in response to public demand), graffiti is at the heart of the complex process of legitimization and delegitimization, which contributes to the even further blurring of their boundaries and study.

Finally, how should we consider phenomena that go beyond these specific objectives? Acts, performances are also a physical engagement and are not void of risk. Which pragmatic relation do they sketch out at the other side of the spectrum? What links are established with sound, oral and visual culture? How is the idea of an 'act of writing' articulated with an 'image act' (Bredenkamp, 2015) and, more widely, the considerable theoretical extension that the idea of 'performativity' has witnessed during recent years?

We thus hope to study both the authors of these urban writings and their practices, the actors engaged in telling a story with these exposed writings, their form and materiality, their perception and reception in the public sphere, their symbolic and economic value, as well as the methodological difficulties involved in studying and recording them (making up coherent bodies, investigation practices that are complicated by their often ephemeral, anonymous or illegal quality). Attention will also be paid to the militant, archivist and editorial use of these exposed writings, from their conservation as memorials to their theoretical exploitation, such as the photo-texts that constitute the last manifestoes of the *Comité Invisible* (2014; 2016).

This conference thus aims to bring to light the varied emerging researches in human and social sciences on urban writing and exposed writing, whether within or outside of the academic context. This research is innovative, both in terms of the methods used and the fields that are investigated. Proposals of up to 5000 characters should be sent along with a short biography and bibliography **before May 15th** to ecritures.exposees@gmail.com. Although theoretical reflections are not excluded, proposals with an empirical background will be appreciated. When applicable, please present the investigation methods and tools used (onsite investigation, statistics, text analysis, archival research etc.)

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Organisational committee:

Anne-Sophie Aguilar, Lecturer, History of Art, Université Paris Nanterre (HAR)

Maxime Boidy, Lecturer, Visual Studies, Université Paris-Est, Marne-la-Vallée (LISAA)

Éric Brun, Post-doctoral fellow, Sociology, Curapp-ESS

Zoé Carle, Post-doctoral fellow, LabexMed-MUCEM

Sabrina Dubbeld, Postdoctoral fellow, MUCEM

Wenceslas Lizé, Lecturer, Sociology, Université de Poitiers, researcher at GRESCO, associate researcher at CESSP

Julie Vaslin, PhD, Political Science, Triangle UMR 5206.



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