

1st Circular — October 2018 — Call for Papers



XI CIHCE

XI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE HISTORY OF WRITTEN CULTURE

Scripta in itinere

Discourse, practice and use of writing in public spaces
(16th-21st centuries)

UNIVERSITY OF ALCALÁ, 18th-20th June 2019

* * *

1. Conceptual and methodological framework

Building upon the rediscovery of how urban spaces were used for civil and political purposes in the late Middle Ages, what Simon Franklin has called the “graphosphere” emerged in the 16th century. By the term “graphosphere” he meant a system of communication where the written word appeared in public places and took many forms such as inscriptions, lampoons, graffiti, edicts, posters, and advertisements. From that time onwards writing colonised European cities, albeit not always at the same rate. Its public presence increased, sowing the seeds of its subsequent growth in the Modern Age as wars or a series of ritual, cultural, terrorist, etc., events unfolded that gave rise to massive “acts of writing” (Béatrice Fraenkel), all this in the context of growing literacy and an economy increasingly geared to consumption.

One of the main examples of this graphosphere is “public writing” defined by Armando Petrucci as “any sort of writing intended to be seen in open or closed spaces and meant to be read by groups or crowds standing at some distance from a written text displayed on a wall, etc.” Although, Petrucci’s principal focus was on monumental inscriptions, he included other more modest material such as libellous written denunciations in the Early Modern period or graffiti from the last third of the 20th century. However, the category “public writing” can and should be further broadened to include all kinds of material displayed on walls, etc. and aimed at informing readers: official notices and regulations, announcements of festivals and public occasions, commercial advertisements and political propaganda.

Much of this writing is typically read *in itinere* (on the move). This has been recognised as a characteristic of modern graffiti, but it is also true of other writing intended to inform and circulate publicly. For example, it was quite common not only to post lampoons and pamphlets on walls but also to pass them from hand to hand and even to read them out loud in the streets to groups of listeners. This is why we should examine all kinds of material displayed in public spaces and not just texts posted on walls, and why we should think about the people who, in different contexts, have acted as intermediaries between a text and its recipient (town criers, peddlers, blind men, players, etc.). We should also consider the spaces in which those people operated (streets, squares, theatres, schools, etc.) and the sites where historically such mediation took place (fairs, stalls, bookshops, travelling libraries, itinerant presses, etc.). As we do so, we should not forget that the act of communication, irrespective of the form it takes and the period, involves more than one medium and that, accordingly, writing should not be thought of as something different in kind from other media and forms of communication (oral, visual, digital, etc.).

Such a broad approach necessarily entails a consideration of the public space as a potential site of disagreement and confrontation (Isaac Joseph). Depending on the particular context, in written communication this takes the form of competition between contradictory messages: some emanating from the authorities (political, academic, religious, economic, etc.) who determine and regulate the use of such spaces to convey their own message and who dictate whether they are allowed to be displayed or are removed, while other actors subversively appropriate such spaces to disseminate protest, and spread dissent, complaints, and accusations.

In this context, communication acts involving writing that is public are not merely a way of conveying messages and information but also have to be appreciated for their performative impact, in other words their ability to produce socially significant meaning. This approach makes it vital to reflect on the way writing is integral to the “culture of presence” (Rudolf Schläg) and, by the same token, we must examine public spaces that,

as far as communication goes, function as an echo chamber, as Daniel Bellingradt has suggested is the case in the Early Modern city. Always understood, of course, that inequality — social, racial, of gender, or of any other kind — has a direct influence on the ability to engage with the public space through writing.

Writing that is either displayed or circulated is part of the ecology of public spaces that are sites for communication peopled by a wide, culturally and socially mixed audience. Whether temporary or permanent, a written text displayed on a wall (be it an epigraph, painted, stuck up, scratched out, etc.), distributed in streets and squares, or temporarily posted in different places, takes on particular characteristics because everybody can see and read it. It provokes a variety of responses conditioned by the social, cultural, political, religious, and economic context in which it is created, conveyed and consumed. Groups are sometimes responsible for a particular act of writing, and so forge real “emotional communities” (Barbara H. Rosenwein) of writers and readers that we must also take into account.

2. Presentation of papers

XI CIHCE marks the culmination of a research project that SIECE-LEA (Interdisciplinary Seminar of Written Culture Studies/Research Groupe Reading, Writing and Literacy) has been carrying out in recent years in the Historiographical Sciences and Techniques Area of the History and Philosophy Department of the Philosophy and Letters Faculty of the University of Alcalá. The project’s title is “*Scripta in itinere*”. *Discourses, forms and appropriation of written culture in public spaces from the Early Modern period to the present day* and it is financed by the Science, Innovation and Universities Ministry, and the National Research Agency (HAR2014-51883-P). Those who would like to participate in the Conference are invited to present a paper in one or more of the following subject areas, always bearing in mind the project’s main lines of research:

- The ecology of examples of public writing (where, when, conservation, etc.).
- Materiality, categories and meanings of writing that is displayed or circulates.
- Writing on display and public memory.
- Monumental writing and propaganda.
- Writing and funerary memory.
- Public writing and official notices (proclamations, edicts, speeches, etc.).
- Writing and protest (libels, slanders, graffiti, banners, etc.).
- Regulations and written transgression in public spaces.
- Ephemera in the city (posters, advertisements, notices, handbills, literary broadsides, etc.).

- The readable city (street maps, signage, commercial advertising, etc.).
- The text on view (book fairs, bookstalls, bookshops, libraries and itinerant presses, literary cities, book or reading events, etc.).
- Intermediaries (blind men, town criers, preachers, players, salespeople, etc.).
- Communities of writers and readers in public spaces.
- Emotional communities (associations, collective celebrations, etc.).
- Women and written culture in public spaces.
- Subaltern classes and writing displayed or circulating.
- Multimedia and communicative interactions (written, oral, visual, digital).

Papers may be given in **Spanish, French, English, Italian or Portuguese**. Proposals, should consist of a **summary** and **curriculum vitae** (each one not exceeding 2,000 characters including spaces), and a **basic bibliography** of five items on the proposed topic. Proposals should be submitted by **25 January 2019** at:

<https://scriptainitinere.weebly.com/comunicaciones.html>

The speakers' registration fee for XI CIHCE (100€-PDI or 75€-students, retirees and unemployed) will entitle speakers both to a participation certificate, and to one copy of the published conference proceedings.

Once proposals have been assessed by scientific committee, the Conference's organisers will inform you before **18 February 2019** about the outcome and will send successful applicants the style sheet for papers; they must be submitted by **30 June 2019**.

ANTONIO CASTILLO GÓMEZ-Director
VERÓNICA SIERRA BLAS-Coordinator

Research Groupe SIECE-LEA
UNIVERSITY OF ALCALÁ
Philosophy and Letters Faculty
History and Philosophy Department
Colegios 2, 28801 Alcalá de Henares (Madrid, Spain)
Telephone contact: +0034 91 885 4186 / 4428
<https://scriptainitinere.weebly.com>; scriptainitinere@gmail.com