

International Conference  
Aix-en-Provence, 7-9 October 2026

Aix-Marseille Université with the University Toulouse Jean-Jaurès

## Inscriptions in Contexts and Situations. Intermedial and Interdisciplinary approaches

Call for Papers (deadline: 28 February 2026)

Can we really consider that *inscribing* differs from *writing*?<sup>1</sup> We hope to explore what distinguishes these two acts during an international conference bringing together scholars from different disciplines and taking into consideration different fields, mediums and arts.

Undoubtedly, talking about “writing” leads one to abstract words from their materiality while talking about “inscribing” makes one consider words in their concrete actualisations. But the difference between *writing* and *inscribing* does not lie merely here. Inscriptions rest on interactions between texts, mediums, materials, sites or landscapes, and the behaviours of those who could be called the “actors of the inscription:” the authors who compose the texts; the crafts-persons or artists who make them come to existence; and finally, the viewers and decipherers. The meanings of inscriptions are derived from the convergence of all these different parameters. In other words, inscriptions cannot be separated from the contexts and situations in which they are produced and found

Some remarkable books study inscriptions from specific periods and contexts, shedding light on ancient or medieval times, the Renaissance, the classical age, the 18th century, etc. However, apart from the pioneering work of Armando Petrucci,<sup>2</sup> very few studies endeavour to span the centuries. And yet, the recent revival of the practice of artistic inscription (which can be traced back to the 1970s and which has been expanding since the 1990s) makes necessary to reconsider inscriptions *dans la longue durée*. If contemporary poetry and art so frequently resort to inscription, as it seems to be the case, is it because our relationship with the written word is challenged by digital technologies and recent means of voice communication? Is it because books, printed on paper, are no longer the place by default for the written words?

This is why this conference proposes to take a collective look at inscriptions situated in all kinds of specific contexts across time. Not only does this approach allow to identify milestones in the long history of inscriptions, but it also leads to take into account both the creation and reception of the arts as well as the evolution and renewal of traditions over time, throughout centuries and millenaries. To this end, participants are invited to study a variety of contexts (sites, objects and architectures displaying inscriptions; inscriptions found *in situ* and appearing on paper; situations described or imagined in literature or cinema), without geographical restriction. We hope that some papers will discuss examples from sign systems beyond the Greek and Latin alphabets. Depending on the area and period, a

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<sup>1</sup> Sandrine Hériché-Pradeau et Maud Pérez-Simon (dir.), *Inscriptions : une matière en toutes lettres*, Paris, Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2023, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Armando Petrucci, *Jeux de lettres. Formes et usages de l'inscription en Italie, 11<sup>e</sup>-20<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris, Éd. de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1993 (1<sup>re</sup> éd. 1980).

multiplicity of examples can be examined: religious, funerary and legal inscriptions, ceremonial lettering, expressions of power and authority, texts intended for monuments, memorial and didactic formulas, political messages, protest writings, prisoners' graffiti, poetic texts displayed in gardens and landscapes, and, since the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, artworks taking the form of short or long texts, placed outdoors, in cities and outside them.

**Proposals for papers may address the following topics, among others:**

- The process of making inscriptions, whether legal or illegal, whether being commissioned, expressing anger or challenging an established order.

- The ambivalences of inscriptions in context. Inscriptions are defined by their relation to time. Traditionally, they aspire to permanence and yet, they undergo erasure. The very term "inscription" means both the process of inscribing and the result of this very process. This ambivalence manifests itself in relation to space (the mobility of the inscribing gesture vs. the fixity of the word; words fashioned in the thickness of a material vs. words perceived as displayed on the surface). How to tackle these different modalities?

- What are the fortunes and misfortunes of inscription throughout time? Most often, when literature and arts report the discovery of an inscription, it appears as an anonymous text, suddenly emerging by surprise and presenting an enigma in an environment that has become foreign to it. The inscription forms an anachronistic object, appearing in a time that is no longer its own. It gives rise to new processes of reading, unpredictable when it was installed. How, then, can we understand an inscription when it has lost its original context? What hermeneutic fictions does it allow to create? And to what misreadings and misunderstandings does the discovery of an inscription lead to?

- What scenes of decipherments? Just as "inscribing" is different from "writing", one does not simply *read* an inscription: one discovers it, unearths it, encounters it, reconstructs it, transcribes it, make rubbings of it, documents it, translates it, misreads it, distorts it, reuses it, quotes it, comments on it, collects it, anthologises it, etc.

Who are the readers which a given inscription seeks to address? How do the concrete materialisation and the laying out of the words shape and model the act of reading? What are the postures adopted by the readers' bodies? Should an inscription be read aloud? Alone or collectively? Is its reading part of a ritual? Can we compare the ideal, intended readings of inscriptions with their actual readings? How does the reception of a given inscription evolve over time, as it erodes and as its landscape transforms?

- How to transcribe inscriptions to the page? What strategies do books invent to contextualise three-dimensional inscriptions when they are transferred to the flat surface of paper? How do they suggest, despite different constraints, the size, shape and configuration of the letters? How can the typography, ornamentation, images and layout of the book create new situations? And above all, what conventions can be invented to transcribe and restore something of the experience evoked by the

engraved words? And vice versa, what changes happen when inscriptions quote from texts printed in books?

- Are we currently living a new age of inscriptions? Contrary to what one might think, the practice of inscribing remains very much alive today, among other reasons because many conceptual artists take language and text as their mediums and materials. Words are inscribed in all kinds of landscapes, in remote places difficult to access, in rural environments, or in the centre of cities. Inscriptions of all kinds keep the memory of events, people and things; they create surprise; they convey meaning, anger or hope; they redefine and reclaim places.

- Some papers may focus on the practical fieldwork involved in studying inscriptions in their contexts. We hope that these presentations will address ways of recording, documenting, photographing, transcribing and understanding both the inscriptions and their contexts. We invite archaeologists, epigraphy specialists, and various researchers carrying out fieldwork, such as sociologists interested in the role played by ephemeral inscriptions in social protest, to participate. Parallely, another question arises: how can archives be used to understand inscriptions in their contexts?

- Approaches pertaining to **research-creation**, combining study and practice. What kinds of creations, textual and situational, can inscriptions spark? How can one read aloud inscriptions, how can one *perform* them? Does one need *re-inscribe* in new situations the content of inscriptions in order to bring them back to life and reactualise them? How to display and exhibit inscriptions, which have also been described as “écriture exposée” (“exposed writing”) by Armando Petrucci, Beatrice Fraenkel and other scholars.

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### **Conference Location: Aix-en-Provence**

Proposals for papers in French or English of **approximately 500 words max** should be accompanied

by a short bio-bibliography.

**Oral communication : 30'**

Submission deadline: **February 28<sup>th</sup>**

[inscriptions@sciencesconf.org](mailto:inscriptions@sciencesconf.org) : **Only**

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