



DOCTORAL WORKSHOP @ INSTITUT d'ÉTUDES AVANCÉES 17 QUAI D'ANJOU 75004 PARIS | 18.04.2019

Organisers: Pushpa Arabindoo, University College London/Paris IEA | Alexis Tadie, Université Paris-Sorbonne | Sara Thornton, Université de Paris | Estelle Murail, Institut Catholique de Paris

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# WRITING THE CITY: AN EXPERIMENTAL PRACTICE

For most writers, the city can be an important muse, indicating not just a simple reading of the city-as-text but offering instead an impressive urban vocabulary through which one can summon the city into their writing explicitly. The resulting mode of 'writing the city' is more than a literary formation as its epistemic tropes can encourage a decisive rethinking of the urban across humanities and social sciences. This workshop engages with this process of writing the city, an exercise spanning from urban to literary studies and extending across realms from fact to fiction in an effort to unpack crucial material that may provide new registers for urban theory through and beyond cultural modes of analysis. It seeks to particularly address two objectives:

1. Uncover the scene of writing, i.e. the city, as a discursive field for analysing the urban, not unlike that undertaken in social theory, infusing new meanings into the way we approach this task through a striking array of textual and non-textual formats.
2. Probe the act of writing as an experimental practice that can reconcile the creative and the critical, where in writing the city as a creative fiction complements the factual writing of the urban as a critical text.

In this sense, this workshop will consider contributions from those who view writing the city as an epistemologically and methodologically radical exercise through tactics that might involve practices of defamiliarization as well as hybridisation: What opportunities does writing the city in non-generative terms provide beyond the textual parameters of familiar forms and habitual processes? What kind of collisions and collusions does this entail and what are its outcomes?

The notion of writing the city as an experimental practice will be explored through the three sub-themes of PERIPHERIES, SENSORIALITY, and SPATIO-TEMPORALITY, to draw out provocative narratives that embed and embody the city within our writings. We encourage participants to present your own experience of and engagement with:

- Writing the city as an experimental practice, destabilising normalized modes of academic writing and unsettling text used in the process of writing the city. As this disrupts assumptions about fact and fiction by simultaneously writing across and over one another, could you reflect on how the resulting process of urban storytelling is punctuated and punctured by uncertainties and incompleteness as well as new possibilities?
- A deliberate unevenness that is unavoidable in writing the city, given the entanglement of different sub-texts requiring us to continually cross the lines in terms of writing the city. How do you cope with this unbecoming process of writing that does not yield to normative assumptions of form or linearity?
- Making space for 'original' languages while writing the city without resorting to translations, thereby making overt not just the messy representation of cities but writing itself with clumsy untranslated phrases and our resulting tendency to impose layers of explanations. This raises the question of can we write the city without the 'affect of translation', and whether a distinctiveness of language might force us to write the city as a collage rather than a seamless narrative that we normally aspire to?

SCHEDULE: [ 18 APRIL 2019 | 09.00 – 19.00 ]

09.30 – 09.45	INTRODUCTION: Dr. PUSHPA ARABINDOO UCL/IEA PARIS
09.45 – 11.00	FIRST KEYNOTE: PROFESSOR MATTHEW BEAUMONT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON Beware of Buildings: Looking at Cities Looking at Us
11.00 – 11.15	COFFEE BREAK
11.15 – 12.45	CREATIVE/CRITICAL INTERROGATIONS 01: PERIPHERIES CHAIR/DISCUSSANT: Dr. PUSHPA ARABINDOO  MARIANNE HILLION, UNIVERSITÉ PARIS-SORBONNE Mapping Peripheries: The Critical Imagination of 21st Century Delhi in Indian Writing in English  MARION MARCHET, UNIVERSITÉ PARIS-SORBONNE Black Space/White Memory: Personal Reflections on Writing the (Transitional) City
12.45 – 14.15	LUNCH
14.15 – 15.45	CREATIVE/CRITICAL INTERROGATIONS 02: SENSORIALITY CHAIR/DISCUSSANT: PROFESSOR ALEXIS TADIE, UNIVERSITÉ PARIS-SORBONNE  AMINA LUDMILLA TOUALBIA, UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS Counter-mapping in Dickens' and Rushdie's Urban Narratives  MARIELLE LIPPMANN, UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS 'Thinking Machine' and 'Shilling Paint Box': Reimagining the City in the Works of Patrick Geddes and G.K. Chesterton.
15.45 – 16.00	COFFEE BREAK
16.00 – 17.15	SECOND KEYNOTE: AMIT CHAUDHURI COLUMBIA INSTITUTE FOR IDEAS AND IMAGINATIONS, PARIS Calcutta and Bombay: Two experiences of the unhomelike?
17.15 – 18.45	CREATIVE/CRITICAL INTERROGATIONS 03: SPATIO-TEMPORALITY CHAIR/DISCUSSANT: PROFESSOR SARA THORNTON, UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS  JEAN-BAPTISTE LANNE, ECOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE Writing as Waiting? Using Poetry as a Tactic to Engage in the Space-Time Experience of Watchmen in Nairobi  MANON BOUKHROUFA TRIAUD, UNIVERSITÉ PARIS-SORBONNE Dilip Chitre and the Breakfast Poems: Writing Bombay at Dawn
19.30	DINNER @ LES FOUS DE L'ÎLE, 33 RUE DES DEUX PONTS



## ABSTRACTS

MATTHEW BEAUMONT  
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### Beware of Buildings: Looking at Cities Looking at Us

This talk explores aspects of the role that buildings play in reinforcing both the concrete and more abstract forms of the common feeling of not being at home in the urban environment. It thus constitutes a contribution to the discussion, across a range of disciplines, and in literature and the visual arts, of people's physical and existential experiences of architecture. To put it in phenomenological terms, in this talk I am interested not simply in how, as sentient beings, we relate to buildings, but in how buildings, as effectively animate entities, relate to us. To put it in psychopathological terms, I am interested not only in how we look at buildings in cities but, more significantly still, in how buildings look at us; that is, in how we internalize the gaze of the city.

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### Mapping Peripheries: The Critical Imagination of 21st Century Delhi in Indian Writing in English

At the intersection of literary criticism and urban studies, my doctoral research focuses on the representations of the city in post-1990 Indian writing in English. Reading across fiction and non-fiction on Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, this work seeks to show the multiple ways in which Indian Anglophone writers conceive the transformations of urban space in the context of its globalization, notably looking at the relation between scale and style. This paper will address the recent literary representations of Delhi and its peripheries, showing how the use of hybrid forms (literary reportage, essay, ...) and multiple scales (macro/micro) enables writers such as Aman Sethi, Rana Dasgupta and Arundhati Roy to trace the capital's material, social and cultural mutations. Their disruption of the mechanisms of erasure and exclusion at work in the aspiring global city invites us to read them as creative and critical engagements with the globalizing urban space.

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### Black Space/White Memory: Personal Reflections on Writing the (Transitional) City

Taking as a study case the suburb of Euclid, adjacent to the city of Cleveland, Ohio, my doctoral dissertation in African-American history focuses on black political inclusion into formerly white Midwestern suburban areas (1970s - 2010s). Extending the notions of power and representation that are at the core of my project from the socio-political arena to the realm of urban memory, I seek to reflect on my fieldwork experiences and the unanticipated challenges of researching and writing the history of what is today a majority-black space, but whose collected and preserved historical traces have remained until this day almost exclusively white.

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### Counter-mapping in Dickens' and Rushdie's Urban Narratives

In this comparative study, I aim to examine Rushdie's representation of Post-Independence Bombay and think about his affiliation with Dickens, whose counter-mapping practices in his writing of Victorian/Colonial London will constitute a point of departure. The two authors' polyphonic cities, where multiple voices and sounds overlap, are posited as constantly changing spaces where various trajectories intersect and cross and where unexpected networks can be traced. I will be looking at the ways in which their writings dispute and reconfigure the political and aesthetic boundaries and paths of the city and recreate the urban space outside of hegemonic discourse. In this paper, I propose to focus on the authors' representations of the aural as key to an understanding of urban complexity.

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### 'Thinking machine' and 'shilling paint box': reimagining the city in the works of Patrick Geddes and G.K. Chesterton.

In his 1904 work 'Civics: As Concrete and Applied Sociology', Patrick Geddes writes of the need for sociology to go beyond 'mere verbal statement'. This talk will explore his attempts to do so, to appeal to the senses (particularly sight and touch) in order to write the city as a complex set of interrelations between places, people and activities, as well as between past, present, and a potential utopian future. Moreover, I will endeavour to connect Geddes's efforts to see the city anew to those of G.K. Chesterton in his 1904 novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.

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### Calcutta and Bombay: Two Experiences of the Unhomelike?

Referring to my decisions and predilections as a writer, I compare the two cities in terms of the alienation of growing up on the one hand, and the estrangement of modernity, always subsequently desired and looked for, on the other.

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### Writing as Waiting? Using Poetry as a Tactic to Engage in the Space-Time Experience of Watchmen in Nairobi

In this talk, I propose to consider poetry writing as a creative methodology that offers a way to enliven the everyday space-time experience of subaltern security workers in an African metropolis: the watchmen of Nairobi, who keep waiting in front of gates and doorsteps at every corner. Acknowledging poetry as an act of « linguistic disobedience » (Kinsella 2004), I explore how regular poetic workshops with my interlocutors in the field allow to express their multi-layered and messy urban lives, escaping from the risk of reproducing normative, linear and coherent space-time frameworks to enclose their narratives.

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### Dilip Chitre and the Breakfast Poems: Writing Bombay at Dawn

In Dilip Chitre's work as a poet, the twenty Breakfast Poems stand out as the longest and most personal poetic exercise he perused for over two decades and in which he confronted his persona with the conflicting realities of his city and country. Unlike Arun Kolatkar in Kala Ghoda Poems who also chose the vantage point of a café at the crack of dawn and transformed the Kala Ghoda crossroad into a stage, Chitre chose the public space of a café at the interstitial moment of breakfast but with a completely different perspective. He stages these morning rituals as moments of confrontation with the inner contradictions he faces as an enlightened inhabitant of Bombay and India questioning the issues of tradition, modernity, and postcolonial heritage. Using the waiter as a silent partner of his morning ramblings, Chitre's Breakfast Poems explore the tragic irony of his predicament as a contemporary Indian poet in the city.