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Writing on the Walls of Paris: Graffiti and the Body in French Literature, Film, and Photography

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

by

Danielle Mae Hanzalik

2026

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Writing on the Walls of Paris: Graffiti and the Body in French Literature, Film, and Photography

by

Danielle Mae Hanzalik

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor Lia Nicole Brozgal, Chair

This dissertation constructs a comparative analysis of photographic, filmic, and literary representations of political graffiti in Paris during the second half of the 20th-century (1954-2000). I propose that political graffiti is textual, spatial, *and* corporeal. In other words, graffiti is conceived of as a *text* that is anchored in an urban *space* and that implicates the individual *body* of the passerby in order to incorporate this passerby into a greater political body. Through graffiti's inscription in public space, I argue that the passerby's physical body becomes an allegory for a greater metaphorical political body. Each of the four chapters is organized around a key political moment: the Algerian War, May 1968, the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, and protests in the Parisian banlieues in the 1980s and 1990s. In each chapter, I analyze both historical graffiti, captured by photographers, and fictional graffiti, represented in literature and film, producing a trans-medial analysis that echoes the trans-medial nature of graffiti itself.

Via this cross-disciplinary focus, this dissertation contributes a new perspective on graffiti to the emerging fields of urban humanities and graffiti studies, as well as to traditional

French and Francophone Studies. While the field of French and Francophone Studies has historically concentrated on literary analysis, scholars, in the last three decades, have embraced the study of visual media, particularly that of film. This research, which unites graffiti, film, *and* literary studies, pushes this trend even further to include objects of ephemera, an object of ephemera that is both visual and textual, and its mediatic representations. Within the field of graffiti studies, my project also breaks new ground. Since the 1980s, graffiti scholarship has predominantly interrogated graffiti from either a sociological or historical angle, whereas my project seeks to link the historical and sociological to graffiti's cultural and literary impact. Thus, my analysis of graffiti bridges the gap between the humanities and urban studies.

The dissertation of Danielle Mae Hanzalik is approved.

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Dominic R. Thomas

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University of California, Los Angeles

2026

DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad,

For the countless sacrifices that you've made for me, so that I could fly.

I love you both dearly.

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This dissertation has been a long and winding road, a labor of love and patience, one in which every small encounter with the French language has, like a sculptor's chisel, chipped away to reveal the statue beneath. This chisel has been held by so many mentors in my life, people without whom I would never have finished this project. I would like to take some time to thank those wonderful people here. When I was eight years old, I heard someone speaking French on television and thought it was the most beautiful language I had ever heard. Luckily for me, my Oma, a native speaker of German, purchased me a French language CD that I would play from time to time on my parents' desktop computer. While this brief introduction did not teach me much actual French, it did foster a fascination with the language that would continue to light my personal and professional trajectory for decades, culminating in this very Ph.D. at UCLA. Thank you, Omi, for this unassuming gift that has paid off in dividends.

Some five years later, I met Madame Karen Ransom at my high school language fair, whose enthusiasm for French was exuberant. Her classroom was the very first place where I was "immersed" in French, and I loved every day that another puzzle piece of the language fell into place. Thank you to Madame Ransom for your encouragement, *joie de vivre*, and support for my French studies all these years. There are countless other teachers and mentors who have nurtured my love for learning from elementary through high school: thank you to all of you for cheering on a young girl who found school endlessly fascinating. In particular, I want to thank Mrs. Gibbons who taught me to let go of perfection and embrace progress, Madame Messer who also stoked the French fire, Wendy Pierce and Fynn Carroll who taught me how to write, and Kenna Warrick, who reminded me that what was important to me mattered.

My four years at UC Berkeley were personally and intellectually transformative; they allowed me to discover the world of academia and spend my days reading books. In both the French and English departments, I encountered excellent professors whose lectures showed me the myriad of ways that literature can teach us things about politics, history, and culture, lessons that I have carried into my own research. In French, I want to thank Professor Nelly Timmons, Professor Mairi McLaughlin, and Professor Rick Kern for their warm support. I also want to thank Carole Dolcini who always championed her students with aplomb. In English, I want to thank Professor Scott Saul, whose course on the 1970s inspired my own interdisciplinary research approach and Dr. Catherine Cronquist-Browning whose seminar on Victorian literature allowed me to close-read to my heart's content. I would be remiss if I didn't also thank my roommate for all four years at Berkeley, Addie Clarke. Thank you for all the late nights at Free Speech Movement Café or Café Milano, the dancing and laughter in our Ellsworth Apartment, and the cherished friendship that has carried me through these last fifteen years of life all around the globe.

This dissertation is also a product of the sojourns that I have been lucky enough to undertake in France. From Lyon, to Toulon, to Paris, my time in France has undoubtably shaped this dissertation. In Lyon, I want to thank Christine Ebnother, who helped me navigate my first-time experiencing culture shock, and, especially, Bernadette and Marguerite, who welcomed me into their home like family. Thank you for always telling me when something "wasn't French" and encouraging me to "try again." In Toulon, I want to thank all the professors who I worked with at Collège Marie Curie and Collège Paul Éluard. Sitting in the teacher's lounge was excellent language practice. In particular, I want to thank Natacha for her open heart and hospitality. Finally, I want to also thank all of the friends who supported me, laughed with me, and navigated French culture with me: Amber, Berenike, Emma, Steven, Ara, Alyssa, Maggie R., Allison, Hope, Maggie K., Luna, Rob, and so many more. I

have been the luckiest to have met so many smart, funny, and capable people who also love exploring France like me.

Finally, these last seven years at UCLA, I have been surrounded by so many wonderful mentors, professors, and friends who have made this time in the Ph.D. intellectually rich and just plain fun. First, I want to thank my committee members who have supported me as this project found its way onto the page: to Laure Murat, Michael Rothberg, and Dominic Thomas. Thank you for all the ways in which you have introduced me to new ideas, helped me refine and grow this project, and supported me in word and deed, through the various stages of this degree. To my committee chair, Lia Brozgal, you have been the best mentor I could have ever asked for. Your dedication to your students—reading countless drafts, writing letters of recommendation, giving insightful feedback, emanating warmth and care—is bar none. Thank you for who you are and all you've done for me. This dissertation project would not be what it is without your careful eye. I am also indebted to my fellow ELTS graduate students for all the phone calls, coffees, and frantic emails as we navigated this brave new world together. In particular, I want to thank Jodie Miller for her constant companionship. I am so lucky that you ended up being my cohort mate. I also want to thank Rebecca Glasberg, Lena Trüper, Damjan Rakonjac, Alex Shassetz, Megan Tomlinson, and Sonia Gonzalez. You all know the ways in which you have come alongside me in this process.

This dissertation required a significant amount of archival research in Paris, and I have been lucky enough to be supported by several different funding sources. Thank you first to my department, European Languages and Transcultural Studies, who have supported me as a scholar through both summer and year-long fellowships, as well as selecting me as a Visiting Scholar at the École normale supérieure in 2022-23. I want to thank the UCLA Graduate Division for supporting my research through the Graduate Research Mentorship,

Graduate Summer Research Mentorship, and Summer Mentored Research Fellowship. I also thank the UCLA Humanities Division and the Center for European and Russia Studies for supporting several summer research trips to Paris, with which I culled the photographs that make up this project. Finally, I want to thank the Société des professors français et francophones d'Amérique for awarding me their Jeanne Marandon fellowship which allowed me to complete my dissertation research in Paris in 2024-2025.

Finally, I must thank my family without whom I would not be where I am today. To my siblings: James, Bridgét, and Sydney, thank you for your love, support, and silliness. I am so grateful that we get to go through this life together. To my father, for always cheering me on and for reminding me to keep going even when things get tough. To my mother for being my sounding board throughout this entire process; your patience and love never ceases to amaze me. Thank you for making reading such an important part of my life; I am a reader because of you. To Majd, thank you for loving learning as much as I do and for always, always wanting to talk about it.

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Hanzalik, Danielle, Rebecca Smith, Doga Tekin, and Olivia Arena, editors. *Season 3: [Dis/re/mis/em]placement*, Urban Humanities Digital Salon Podcast. UCLA cityLab, 9 February 2024, https://digitalsalonpodcast.org/Home.

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"[Graffiti] Writing the Female Body in Agnès Varda's *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* (1977)." Conference Presentation, Pacific Ancient and Modern Languages Association 2025 Conference, November 2025.

"Terrorist Geographies" of the Algerian War: Reading Cities Transhistorically through Photography and Fiction." Conference Presentation, American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) 2025 Annual Meeting, May-June 2025.

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"Towards 'Collective Action': Alterations in Time and Space in May 1968." Conference Presentation, Cambridge University French Graduate Conference, February 2023.

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Introduction: Graffiti: A Heteroclite History of the City

Walking down the streets of today's modern city, the passerby is greeted by a litany of images and words, many of which we have learned to disregard unless perhaps we are looking for an address: street signs, media advertisements, posters for municipal events, and more. This omnipresent signage helps to construct a certain urban environment; the walls become an effective medium for marking out the temporal and spatial bounds of public space and for reminding inhabitants of those bounds. But what happens when an illegal writing makes its way into this regulated space? Moreover, what happens when this writing draws attention to some history of oppression or violence that has occurred in the city, an event which, perhaps, some do not want unearthed? In Marseille in 2021, Élodie Sylvain and Charlotte Ricco captured such a graffiti writing in their documentary *J'irai crier sur vos murs*. It reads in simple black spray paint: "Ici il y a eu un viol" ["A rape happened *here*"].[1] This sentence, written on a small concrete compartment in the middle of the streets of Marseille, is surrounded by other "permissible" writings: a large advertising poster, a newspaper kiosk with several magazine covers on its side. And yet, the other writings fade into the background as the camera centers on the graffiti inscription, lit up by the adjacent streetlight. This sequence, which opens the documentary, brings to life how we, as passersby, are drawn to graffiti, particularly graffiti with an unsettling or startling message. We are drawn to graffiti because it breaks with the norms that regulate public space through its lack of regard for the law and its taboo content. Graffiti writings that challenge the passerby are, as Richard E. Innis suggests, "forms of semiotic resistance," and "instances of opposition, of provocation" (75). For Innis, these inscriptions are not meant to merely signify some sort of static resistance; rather, they are meant to drive forward some change, to "move experience

[1] All sentence-length quotations in French have been translated into English by me. I indicate the English translation via brackets.

beyond its normal threshold and lead to action or to a change of feeling" (75). In this dissertation, I propose that we read graffiti in Paris in the late 20th century as ephemeral instances of "resistance," part of an alternative political history of the city that hints at larger hidden histories. We, as graffiti readers, must "scratch" at the walls to reveal what is hidden *behind* these small and unassuming inscriptions, what is hidden in the very stones of the city itself. By stringing together these disparate messages, a radical history of the city is revealed.

In the example in Sylvain and Ricco's documentary, the graffiti inscription, "Ici il y a eu un viol" ["A rape happened *here*"] refers to a past event; it is making visible a history of violence that has been concealed at that site. As Georges Brassaï proposes in his photographic study of graffiti, there is an inherent connection between graffiti and the past. The wall can never throw off its "telluric attachments," to pre-history, to magic (12, my translation). In their introduction to graffiti scholarship, urban scholars Konstantinos Avramidis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi remind us also of graffiti's ability to speak about the future. The idiomatic expression "'seeing the writing on the wall'" comes from the Biblical story of Daniel who predicts the future for King Belshazzar of Babylon based off his reading of writing on the wall. Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi suggest, then, that graffiti can "work as prophecies inscribed on the urban surface," predicting the political, societal or even cultural future.[2] David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky suggest something similar: "'today's graffiti are

[2] "'Seeing the writing on the wall' is an expression originating from the Biblical story of Balthazar's feast, where supernatural writing on the wall works as a prophecy for the forthcoming demise of the Babylonian Empire (Tsilimpounidi 2013; cf. Mieszkowski 2010). Therefore, to attribute to someone the capacity to see the writing on the wall implies the ability to know that something is about to happen, usually an inevitable decline or an end. Is this the purpose of graffiti and street art in our postmodern urban environments? To work as prophecies inscribed on the urban surface and to project images and information from the future, or as David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky argue in a similar line of thought, 'today's graffiti are tomorrow's headlines' (1974:491). We move away from the notion of prophecy and fortune telling as we claim that graffiti and street art are valuable research lenses through which to unpack some of the tensions and contradictions of urban life. In this sense, they might work as indications of the tensions that people are facing on the ground, and thus provide insights into a variety of potential futures. After all, surrealism has taught us that the culturally marginal and/or the urban quotidian have the capacity to reveal the unexpected. Turning our focus on the walls and the marks they host is not without dangers, but definitely rewarding. French surrealist poet Léo Malet could not have put it more aptly: 'the walls of the city [is] the unlimited field of poetic realisations' (Phillips 1990: 140). Graffiti writer Boom offers a similar definition of graffiti in his famous tag: 'graffiti is a poem the city writes to itself'" (Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi 2).

tomorrow's headlines'" (qtd. in Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi 2). With this in mind, graffiti, those ephemeral writings that are inscribed on the rocky "telluric" surfaces of the city, reveals an almost mystical connection to the everyday, the distant past, *and* the emerging future. It is this productive tension that gives the walls of the city their power to shed light on the political, societal, and cultural transformations and tensions brewing within any urban environment.

Furthermore, the walls of the city have the capacity to reveal the concerns of those who have been ignored, repressed, or silenced. Turning to yet another Biblical story, this time in the book of Luke, it was Jesus who said that if the people are "kept quiet, the stones will cry out" (*Bible*, Luke 19:40). By giving space to these voices, the "stones" of the city play an integral role in resisting (and possibly even recording) state violence and oppression—in "crying out" for those who are "kept quiet." Brassaï also notes the wall's ability to "speak" for those who are censored: "[a] wall gives voice to that part of man that would otherwise be condemned to silence" (142, my translation). In other words, the wall reveals itself as the "subconscious" of the city, of graffiti writer, and, I would argue, those that encounter the graffiti. [3] Brassaï's comments about graffiti largely ignore its collective power in favor of its freedom for individual expression, and his psychoanalytical reading problematically reduces graffiti to a "primitive" and "male" art form (64-5, 123, my translation). However, he still highlights that graffiti is an integral part of the conversation between the city's multiple actors: the city's material form, its inhabitants, and its existing power structures.

For a clear example of interaction, we can look to a graffiti written in Paris in November of 1961, the month after Parisian police forces violently attacked Algerians during

[3] In the essay "Cy Twombly: ou *Non multa sed multum*," Barthes makes a passing comment about graffiti that seems to reproduce some of Brassaï's ideas about the importance of the wall in graffiti art. He talks about the artist TW (Twombly) in the following way: "c'est en somme un écrivain qui accéderai au graffiti…On sait bien que ce qui fait le graffiti, ce n'est à vrai dire ni l'inscription, ni son message, c'est le mur, le fond, la table…" ["in short, he's a writer who practices graffiti…we know that what makes graffiti isn't really the inscription or the message, but the wall, the background, the table"] (154).

a peaceful protest. This graffiti, written on the quays of the Seine where police officers drowned several Algerians, reads: "ICI ON NOIE LES ALGÉRIENS" ["Here we drown Algerians"].[4] Police forces quickly went to work to erase this inscription, which was decidedly critical of the State's unbridled violence that evening in Paris—all the more evidence that writings on the walls of the city possess a capacity to reveal hidden histories of violence and, therefore, unsettle governmental powers in doing so. What's more, the French word for a "spray-paint can" is "une bombe," which is the same word used for an explosive. The verb used to describe writing graffiti is "bomber," strikingly close to the French verbs, "bombarder" or "lancer une bombe," which both mean "to bomb [with an explosive]." These similarities in vocabulary reveal a certain resonance between the act of writing graffiti and the act of committing violence, certainly the act of revolution.

In his seminal essay on graffiti tagging in New York subway culture in the 1970s, Jean Baudrillard uses war-like language to describe the act of tagging, a type of graffiti in which a tagger spray paints their pseudonym all over the city in as many places as they possibly can. He says that tags "invade" the city, creating a "riot of signs" (31). When graffiti tagging began in earnest in Paris a decade later, French authorities categorized tags as acts of "graphic violence."[5] For many of these young French "writers" disillusioned with their situations in France, the spray can did replace the bomb, and graffiti became a form of destruction needed to begin some sort of revolution.[6] Although this dissertation focuses on graffiti that has an expressly political message, which excludes traditional tagging, understanding the theoretical underpinnings of this type of graffiti helps elucidate how political graffiti works. Just as "tagging" is described as "graphic violence," the political

[4] See Chapter 1 and "Ici on noie les algériens.' Fabriques documentaires, avatars politiques et mémoires partagées d'ïcone militante (1961-2001)" (Lémire and Potin 2002).

[5] See Chapter 4 and Alain Vulbeau's *Du tag au tag* (1990) for more on this term "graphic violence."

[6] For more, see *Writers :1983-2003, 20 ans de graffiti à Paris* (Marc-Aurèle Vecchione 2004).

graffiti we analyze is also read through the same lens, in particular because of its connection to political resistance and revolt. In both cases of graffiti, I question this characterization of graffiti as metaphorical "violence" because it elides the greater political situation into which graffiti inserts itself. In fact, throughout this dissertation, I argue that graffiti is that often situated within a larger history of *state violence* and is a response to that (often physical) violence towards the city's inhabitants rather than a spontaneous expression of anger in destruction. For example, in New York, the graffiti movement emerged from the "ghettos," where "ethnic minorities," namely Black and Puerto Rican young people, had long faced oppression in the streets (Baudrillard 27). In Paris, graffiti emerged from the "banlieue," neighborhoods like American ghettos where low-income "ethnic minorities" resided and were becoming increasingly victims of police brutality.[7]

With these ideas in mind, this dissertation examines interconnections between historical moments of political resistance and cultural productions in late 20th-century France (1954-1995) through representations of political graffiti in the city of Paris. Each of the four chapters is organized around a moment of political change: the Algerian War (1954-1962), May 1968, the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, and protests against police brutality in the Parisian banlieues in the 1980s and 1990s. In my reading, each act of political graffiti constitutes a complex act of political resistance undertaken by individuals or groups against the French State and its colonialist, capitalist, patriarchal, and xenophobic ideologies. Moreover, I argue that graffiti is a textual, spatial, *and* corporeal act; in other words, graffiti is a *text* that is anchored in an urban *space* and that implicates the individual *body* of the passerby in order to incorporate this passerby into a greater political body.

[7] This tension between violence and expression, between delinquency and creativity, is at the heart of all graffiti writing, as criminologist Jeff Ferrell points out in *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality* (1996).

This idea of reading graffiti like a text, comes from Roland Barthes' theory of urban semiology, which discusses how the city and its inhabitants speak to one another: "The city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it" (168). With this statement, Barthes situates urban semiology in the context of both language and the body, equating our existence in and movement through the city to a form of speech.[8] In the context of this dissertation, then, graffiti participates in this conversation. In a literal sense, graffiti is a text, or a speech-act performed by the city's inhabitants, but the mystery of this speech-act is that it appears to come from the walls, to emanate from the city itself. Beyond its textual nature, graffiti also implicates the body of the practitioner and those who encounter it. Many graffiti artists are more concerned with the process of writing, the connection between "la main et la bombe," than with the end product. Moreover, the passerby's body is always implicated in graffiti's reception; the graffiti intervenes in the passerby's physical trajectory in order to transmit its message. Furthermore, graffiti also exists within and helps to fashion the space of the city: it alters, augments, and infuses urban space with its presence. Although Barthes never proposed a methodology for urban semiology, noting the impossibility of "a full signification" for any semiotic process, he contended that the only way to practice urban semiology was to "multiply the readings of the city"—as opposed to studying the city's functionality or surveying its people ("Semiology" 170-1).[9] In this dissertation, I build on Barthes' semiology, fleshing out the multiple levels at which the city works on its inhabitants as I focus on these three paradigms of graffiti—the

[8] See also Michel de Certeau, *Arts de faire vol. 1*, as he makes a similar analogy of the speech-act between the pedestrian and the city.

[9] In Barthes' lecture, he leaves this process open-ended but does suggest some ideas. One suggestion he has is that the urban semiotician might break down the city into discrete parts, classify, and study them. In a way, he does this with his essay "La Tour Eiffel" in which he focuses on the Eiffel Tower as one discrete part of the city, going on to define it as "le signe pur, ouvert à tous les temps, à toutes les images et à tous les sens, la métaphore sans frein…" ["the pure sign, open to all times, to all images and all meanings, the unbridled metaphor"] ("Eiffel" 1400).

textual, corporeal, and spatial. Beyond the semiotic, I argue that urban graffiti works at a material and spatial level as well.[10]

Via this cross-disciplinary focus, the project contributes a new perspective on graffiti to the emerging fields of urban humanities and graffiti studies, as well as to traditional French and Francophone Studies. The field of French and Francophone Studies has historically concentrated on literary analysis; however, in the last three decades, scholars have embraced the study of visual media, particularly that of film. My research, which unites graffiti, film, *and* literary studies, pushes this trend even further to include graffiti, an object of ephemera that is both visual and textual, and its mediatic representations. Within the field of graffiti studies, my project also breaks new ground. Since the 1980s, graffiti scholarship has predominantly interrogated graffiti from either a sociological or historical angle, whereas my project seeks to link the historical and sociological to graffiti's cultural and literary impact. Thus, my analysis of graffiti bridges the gap between the humanities and urban studies, in the interdisciplinary practice of urban humanities.[11]

Graffiti is not a careless or incidental urban intervention; rather it reveals political tensions, as well as the lived reality of the city's inhabitants. By examining four key political moments that shaped France during the 20th century, I suggest that graffiti, through photography, literature, and film, actually intervenes in these political movements and contributes actively to their aims. The centrality of graffiti as a form of political expression persists in the contemporary age, as protestors take up slogans of the past and re-inscribe them on the walls of the city over and over again. Moreover, with the rise of photojournalism

[10] This three-part analysis is also, in some ways, inspired by the work of urbanist, Edward Soja, who is known for being an influential part of the spatial turn in the social sciences. In his 1989 book *Postmodern Geographies,* he argues that social sciences have often ignored how space influences society on multiple levels. In particular, he argues for a three-pronged analysis of space: Firstspace (traditional conception of space and time as linear), Secondspace (spatial practices that shape our everyday), and Thirdspace (how representations of space affect our lived experiences of it).

[11] See *Urban Humanities: New Practices for Reimagining the City* (Cuff, Loukaitou-Sideris, Presner, Zubiaurre, and Jae-an Crisman 2020).

and, later, the internet, graffiti is immortalized through various forms of media. With each iteration, these inscriptions take on new meanings, influencing subsequent political movements and groups. This project reaches beyond a literary reading of graffiti in order to speak about French politics, culture, and urban space; it melds several different analyses of graffiti into one larger narrative. Moreover, it is a project that also takes the medium seriously, carefully underscoring not just the graffiti writing itself but its mediation through cultural productions. In this way, this project mirrors the "slippery" nature of graffiti itself. Illegal and ephemeral, both writing and art, graffiti operates between genres, between mediums, between the public and the private, and it is this ambiguous position that allows graffiti to speak to the passerby.

Graffiti and Urban Art Scholarship

The inscription of words or images on a wall, has been practiced since pre-history: the walls of the Lascaux caves in France, for example, contain paintings of animals dating back to the Paleolithic Age (Clottes). For other examples, we might think of the etchings on the walls of Rome and Pompeii, discovered in the mid 1800s, from which both the English and French word, "graffiti," gets its definition.[12] Despite its widespread existence, there was a general paucity of graffiti scholarship until the inception of the New York and Philadelphia style of "subway graffiti" in the late 1960s.[13] Even today, with an exponential increase in

[12] The word graffiti is derived from the Italian word, *graffito*, which means "a scratch," which is derived from the word *graffire* in Ancient Greek. In the 1863, shortly after graffiti was first discovered on the ruins of Pompeii, the word "graffiti" entered into the Oxford English Dictionary with the following definition: "[a] drawing or writing scratched on a wall or other surface; a scribbling on an ancient wall, as those at Pompeii and Rome. Also, a method of decoration in which designs are produced by scratches through a superficial layer of plaster, glazing, etc, revealing a ground of a different colour." In 1961, a new definition for *graffiti* entered the dictionary, likely in conjunction with the beginnings of the subway graffiti movement: "Words or images marked (illegally) in a public place, esp. using aerosol paint." In the *Tresor de la Langue française informatisé*, we see a similar progression in the French language, with the word's first appearance in 1856 concerning ancient graffiti ("inscriptions, desseins tracés" ["inscriptions, traced drawings"]) and then, again, in 1930, being used to describe illegal writings in public space ("Inscriptions ou dessins, de caractère souvent grossier ou ordurier, griffonnés sur des murs ou sur les parois de monuments publics" ["Inscriptions or drawings, often of a crude or vulgar character, scribbled on the walls or on the sides of public monuments"])

[13] The term "graffiti" often differs quite a bit between academic publications. I would say that the majority of early publications use the term "graffiti" as synonymous with the practice of inscribing one's personal signature

graffiti scholarship, a clear-cut definition of the term *graffiti* remains elusive. Specialists also often disagree about what separates graffiti from street art. In the *Routledge Handbook of Street Art and Graffiti*, Jeffrey Ian Ross outlines four categories that help define the practice amongst scholars: legality, content, creator, and location (2-3). Is the artistic expression carried out legally or illegally? What are its material conditions—written, painted, inscribed, scribbled, or stenciled on the wall? Is the creator viewed as a "perpetrator" (code for "criminal") or as an "artist"? Where is the expression located—on a storefront, in an alleyway, on a bridge? In this dissertation, I use the term "graffiti" to refer to illegal writings painted or written onto the walls of Paris. Due to their illegal nature, the writers analyzed are perceived of as "criminals" rather than artists. Moreover, I am interested in graffiti written in public spaces, particularly in the streets. While many graffiti scholars focus on "tagging," a subset of graffiti that refers to the inscription of the writer's personal signature throughout the public spaces of the city, I focus on graffiti with a political message related to the political movement being analyzed, graffiti whose authors are often anonymous. In other words, I am most interested in what Susan Stewart's calls "message-based" graffiti, which function as "anonymous messages to an abstract public" (212). [14][15]Although image-based graffiti will be mentioned, it is the language accompanying the image that provides the throughline of this dissertation. By focusing on language, I argue that that graffiti can and does fit into a larger

in a stylized form around the city. I tend to use "graffiti" as a catch-all term for all illegal writings and drawings on the walls of the city. For more information about the New York movement and its connections with the rise of hip-hop, see *Stations of the Elevated* (1981) and *Style Wars* (1983).

[14] I take the distinction between anonymous message and personal signature from Susan Stewart who studied the latter: "…it should be clear from the outset that I [Susan Stewart] am not concerned here with the more hidden forms of graffiti writing…whereas such forms are anonymous messages to an abstract public, the forms I discuss here are the personal signatures of an individual style, designed to be read by an audience in particular ways" (212).

[15] This anonymous type of writing could be read as the perfect example of both the "death of the author" and a "postmodern" text. In regard to the former, the author's history and intention is completely obliterated from all possible interpretations of this type of graffiti by means of its anonymity (Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 145). In regard to the latter, graffiti consists of fragments, refusing all interpretation, and is concerned with surfaces, like Henri Jameson's postmodernism (Jameson 14-15)

literary and visual economy and can be compared with films and literature in which graffiti features. While language-based messages may appear "readable" to a general audience, these inscriptions, due to their imbrication with public space; their fragmentary nature; and their inherent anonymity, still require sufficient work to "read" in their larger political, cultural, and societal situation.[16]

In their handbook on street art and graffiti, Konstantinos Avramidis and Myrto Tsilimpoundi outline three subsequent waves of academic scholarship. Before academics began discussing graffiti, photojournalists and non-academics were already documenting the rising trend of graffiti enacted on the subway cars of New York City. During this early "pre-scholarship" period, only one fundamental theoretical essay appeared: Jean Baudrillard's "Kool Killer, ou l'insurrection des signes" (1979). In this text, Baudrillard argues that the modern city, which was once the center of capitalist production, has become a space where production has overtaken all aspects of urban life, specifically through a proliferation of media and advertising. Through the inundation of signs, the contemporary city becomes a "zone of signs, the media and the code" (28). Within this urban context, graffiti tags (the graffitied anonymous pseudonyms, often borrowed from the comic book world, that peppered the New York City subway in the 1970s) are described as "*empty signifiers*, [that] erupt into the sphere of the full signs of the city, dissolving it on contact" (30).[17] In other words, by inserting "empty signifiers" into the overwhelmingly signifying city, graffiti writers practice a form of "guerilla" warfare against capitalism, segregation, and racial injustice, re-claiming the city as their own through these inscriptions. Baudrillard is quick to suggest that other

[16] Using Barthes' idea of the *scriptible* and the *lisible* in her 2020 book *Absent the Archive,* Lia Brozgal makes an interesting distinction between the city that is readable and one that is unreadable (116-7). For more on readability from an urban planning perspective, see Kevin Lynch's *The Image of a City* (1960).

[17] Once again, Baudrillard focuses exclusively on tags written by minority populations, specifically Black and Puerto Rican individuals, in New York City starting in 1972. In this way, he sees tagging as a community practice, which fights against the ghettoization of these minorities within the city of New York.

forms of urban intervention, such as murals and the urban art of the City Walls Inc., are not revolutionary because they reinforce the media's influence on the cityscape rather than disrupt it.[18] Graffiti must always break down the city's architecture and logic in order to participate in this subversion. Apart from Baudrillard's essay, graffiti scholarship was scant in the 1960s and 1970s, and any graffiti-related publications focused on documenting the unfolding art phenomena rather than analyzing it.

After this early stage, Avramidis and Tsilimpoundi assert that the first wave of street art and graffiti scholarship begins in the early 1980s, with the release of Craig Castleman's *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York* (1982). Early academic writings during this period were primarily concerned with charting the careers and practices of New York-based artists, with some academics branching out to study other cities near the beginning of the 1990s. The second wave of scholarly literature is marked by the publication of sociologist and criminologist Jeff Ferrell's *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality* (1993) and Susan Philips' *Wallbangin': Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* (1999), a study of graffiti by Los Angeles gang members. As the titles of these two works suggest, the second wave addresses societal discourse around graffiti and those who engage in it. Scholars begin to reflect on the role of race, class, and gender in relation to graffiti practice. Finally, the third wave begins in the mid-2000s. At this point, the "number of academic publications grows geometrically," and other forms of urban intervention, like street art and murals, begins to appear both in cityscapes and academic scholarship (Avramidis and Tsilimpoundi 9).[19] The third wave of texts are categorized as more "theoretical" than previous scholarship because

[18] According to Andrew Wasserman, City Walls was a not-for-profit artist collective in New York City in the 1970s which was commissioned to create a series of murals throughout the city (73). In this way, Baudrillard seems to take issues with the group's art aesthetics, which he sees as reinforcing the existing political and capitalistic structures and working with architecture rather than destroying it.

[19] For many, what differentiates street art from graffiti is a more explicit focus on image-based works rather than writing text (Jeffrey Ian Ross 2); still, most scholars agree that these categories are fluid.

they examine the general phenomenon of graffiti rather than studying specific instances in their contexts (9). Moreover, the question of medium arises as a topic of scholarly discussion, especially with the rise of the Internet and digital cameras that begin to capture and quickly disseminate what were previously ephemeral inscriptions. Still, during the third wave, most scholarly works continued to prioritize information about the artists over analyses of the material they produced.[20] In the last decade, there has also been a rise in scholarship that re-examines earlier time periods and their graffiti production.[21] As my project interrogates the materiality of graffiti and the way it is received by the passerby, it fits into what Avramidis and Tsilimpoundi's would call the "fourth" wave of scholarship, which prioritizes the material, social, and political elements of graffiti.

Most of these scholars, although not all Anglophone, write in English and see graffiti as a "global" sensation (Ferrell, "Graffiti," 27). In French scholarship, there is a similar scholarship trajectory starting about a decade later.[22] As the graffiti documentary *Writers: 20 ans de graffiti à Paris* (2004) demonstrates, the "graffiti" scene in Paris began to take shape in the early 1980s, thanks to international travel.[23] The writer, Bando, whose real name is Philippe Lehman, is credited as being one of the first to bring the New York style to Paris; he spent some years in the early 1980s learning from graffiti artists in New York and began

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[20] Avramidis and Tsilimpoundi do note two texts which are counterexamples to this trend: Alison Young's *Street Art, Public City* (2014) and Rafael Schacter's *Ornament and Order* (2014).

[21] For examples, see "Jaytalking in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris: Streets, Graffiti, and the Police" (Elizabeth Sage, 2016), *Graffiti in Antiquity* (Peter Keegan, 2017), *Understanding Graffiti: Multidisciplinary Studies from Prehistory to Present* (edited by Troy Lovata and Elizabeth Olson, 2015), and *Scribbling through History: Graffiti, Places and People from Antiquity to Modernity* (edited by Chloé Ragazzoli, Ömür Harmansah, Chiara Salvador, and Elizabeth Frood, 2018).

[22] There was graffiti documented in Paris well before this scholarship movement. In Paris, French-Hungarian photographer Brassaï was already photographing graffiti in the streets of Paris, as early as the 1930s. In *Graffìtis*, Brassaï wrote that "[p]lus qu'aucune autre expression de l'art, les graffitis sont tributaires de la photographie" ["more than any other artistic expression, graffiti is dependent on photography"] (8).

[23] I am putting "graffiti" in quotations to indicate that I mean the Parisian graffiti movement of the 1980s and 1990s that was based off of the New York City subway graffiti movement. Again, graffiti artists of these movements called themselves "writers" and created "crews," which each cultivated a different style of "writing" (*Writers* 4:12, 15:00-20:00).

practicing in 1983, creating the first crew with another graffiti artist, Scam, called *Bomb Squad 2* (later they would form the crew, *Crime Time Kingz*) (*Writers* 6:00-7:00, "Bando"). The Parisian movement quickly differentiated itself from the New York scene by way of a variety of artistic alterations (*Writers* 15:00-16:30). From the beginning, the Parisian graffiti scene was international, with writers from all over Europe and New York joining crews and developing graffiti writing into a "cosmopolitan practice" (Fieni, "Graffiti," 290). Soon afterwards, a series of sketchbooks, photography collections, and other collections were released throughout the 1990s and 2000s showcasing these works and interviewing the writers.[24] Much like the early work in the US, these texts were documentary, focusing on the history of graffiti, reproducing images of the works of writers, and tracing graffiti's connection to the rise of hip hop. Again, similar to the Anglophone scholarship, French scholarship began to focus on the class conditions behind the production of graffiti in a second wave of publications, as graffiti writers often hailed from the disadvantaged *banlieue* just as the Baudrillard's graffiti writers hailed from the American "ghettoes".[25] In many ways, French graffiti scholarship follows the trajectory of Anglophone scholarship, some fifteen years later; it also concerns itself primarily with the writers themselves, and, as such, the research skews particularly sociological or artistic.[26] My dissertation draws on this extensive corpus of sociological and historiographic scholarship about graffiti in order to produce something new. Instead of studying the sociological conditions for graffiti, I examine the

[24] See Le Livre de graffiti (1985), Paris Tonkar (1991), Kapital: Un an de graffiti à Paris (2000), and later books such as, Descente interdite: graffiti dans le metro parisien (2011), Y'a écrit kwa: le graffiti expliqué aux curieux et aux débutants (2008), and Nothing but Letters (2009)

[25] See David Fieni's article "What a Wall Wants." It seems important to note that there was a group of writers at this time who were from middle- or upper-class families, so it was not solely limited to the "disadvantaged populations," even though that was often how it was seen by the general population (Fieni "Graffiti," 291; "Bando").

[26] See texts such as *Gouverner les graffitis* (Julien Vaslin 2021), *L'étranger dans la ville: du rap au graff mural* (Alain Milon, 1999), *Du tag au tag* (Alain Vulbeau 1992), *Du tag au graff'art* (Martine Lani-Bayle 1993), *Anthologie du street art* (Magda Danysz 2015), *Paris de la rue à la galerie* (Nicolas Chenus & Samanthan Longhi 2011)

reverberations that the graffiti practice has within literature, film, and photography. As graffiti and street art production increases, it becomes an increasingly important part of daily urban life, and, as such, is represented more in cultural productions. While literary scholars have occasionally studied representations of graffiti in literature, much work remains to be done in this area.[27] Through its exploration of the connections between cultural representations of graffiti and actual examples of the practice, this dissertation seeks to add new perspectives to graffiti scholarship, literary studies, film studies, and cultural studies.

While textual analysis—a concern with the "language" of the graffiti to be analyzed—is at the core of this dissertation, my methods also draw on contemporary art history scholarship and visual analysis. In this way, I underscore the importance of the materiality of graffiti, as well as its status as text, for what is central to my reading of graffiti (and what differs from other work done on the subject) is this coalescence of the textual and the visual (and, eventually, the corporeal). Beginning in the 1960s, major changes in the art world led to the emergence of new art forms, such as participatory art and site-specific art.[28] These emerging artists sought to demolish the high modernist conception of art, which they believed idolized the art object, the role of the artist in its creation, and the greater art institutions.[29] Modern art prioritized the fabrication of universal art pieces that had the potential to be "transportable, placeless and nomadic" (Kwon 11). In this way, modern art eschewed connections to specific locations in favor of works that could be exhibited in the "pure

[27] For some examples, see Lia Brozgal's third chapter "Non-lieux de mémoire: Maps and Graffiti in the Scriptable City" in *Absent the Archive* (2020) and Laila Amine's final chapter "Embodying the City" in *Postcolonial Paris* (2018).

[28] See "Je participle, tu participes, il participle…" in Claire Bishop's Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (2012) and Miwon Kwon's One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational History (2004).

[29] For more information on site-specific art and shifts during the 1960s and 1970s, see Douglas Crimp's "Redefining Site Specificity" (1986), Hal Foster, Renée Green, et al, "Site Specificity," (1994), Andrea Fraser, "From Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," (2005), and Lucy Lippard's *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (1983)

idealist space" of the gallery (11).[30] In contrast, contemporary artists of the 1960s and 1970s began to prioritize the *site* (along with the ephemeral and the everyday) in their works. Art historian Miwon Kwon intimates how site-specific art grew out of this desire for emplacement; being "site-specific" meant that the artwork "gave itself up to its environmental context, being formally directed or determined by it" (11). Site-specific artists linked their artwork to a specific site and temporal moment, and their artwork "demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion" (12). [31] In other words, site-specific art relied explicitly on the "body" of the viewer in order to activate the art piece.

In a similar vein, art historian Claire Bishop demonstrates how the 1960s Parisian art scene prioritized participatory art, such as the Happenings by Jean-Jacques Lebel, the work of GRAV (Groupe de recherche d'Art visuel), and the *dérives* of the Situationist International. While all three were wary of participation in consumer society, they all saw participatory art as a way to harness the everyday, democratize art, and counteract capitalism.[32] The Situationist International was an avant-garde group active from 1957-1972 and led by Guy

[30] It should be noted that Kwon traces the changes in site-specific art from these 1960s and 1970s origins. According to her, as decades pass from its establishment, site-specific art became increasingly disconnected from site. With more contemporary artists, site-specific art focuses on a "discursive site" rather than a physical one. This transformation coincides with the re-valorization of the artist as author of the work (51).

[31] See this quote from Miwon Kwon's first chapter on origins of site-specificity: "In turn, the uncontaminated and pure idealist space of dominant modernisms was radically displaced by the materiality of the natural landscape or the impure and ordinary space of the everyday. And the space of art was no longer perceived as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, but a real place. The art object or event in context was to be singularly and multiply experienced in the here and now through the bodily presence of each viewing subject, in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration…rather than instantaneously perceived in a visual epiphany by a disembodied eye. Site-specific work in its earliest formation, then, focused on establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site, and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion" (11-12).

[32] It is essential to highlight the complexity of the participatory art question. Claire Bishop makes two important claims in this regard: one, that although participatory art (and the harnessing of the "everyday") was meant to cultivate democracy in a consumer capitalist society, it "rarely delved into questions of class difference and social inequality" (80). Furthermore, the word "participation" in and of itself was fraught with contradictions as DeGaulle's presidency was about "dependent participation" which DeGaulle saw as beneficial. As she notes, "[s]ome artists enthusiastically made participation a foundational principle of their artistic practice, while others vocally rejected it as a mode of artistic coercion equivalent to social structures. During May 1968, one could find graffiti proclaiming, 'To be free in 1968 means to participate,' while at the same time the Atelier Populaire produced posters showing a hand and a pen, conjugating the verb to more skeptical ends: '*Je participe, tu participes, il participe, nous participons, vous participez, ils profitent.*'"(79).

Debord. Guy Debord and the Situationists were concerned with the development of an international revolution against a capitalist society (Hemmens & Zacarias 3), and their strategy for jumpstarting this revolution was to create "situations" which would "engage this spectator into activity by stimulating their capacities to transform their own life" (Debord, "Rapport," 325, my translation). Some of these practices included *la dérive*, wandering through the city in order to experience its different "psychogeographic" atmospheres, and *le détournement*, the creation of art from existing forms of media in order to subvert the original message (Bishop 86).[33] According to Bishop, for this group, art was not about producing objects but about critiquing the commodification of life; accordingly, they were opposed to documentation, while participation, spontaneity, and play were central to their work (86). [34] While less central to my dissertation, it is important to note that other groups of the 1960s shared this drive to create participatory art. Bishop notes that the group GRAV used "polysensorial environments" and kinetic sculpture in urban spaces in order to engage the viewer's perception and activate their political agency (88). Jean-Jacques Lebel's European Happenings were controversial, often violent, social-political critiques of affluent consumer society that eliminated all distinction between viewer and performer (98). Through both site-specific and participatory art, contemporary artists were interested in making political work. They were concerned with making works outside of the gallery *space* (often in the streets) and outside of the gallery's *scope* (in an effort to critique the capitalism of the art world).

I see graffiti art as part and parcel of this art trend towards the everyday, the ephemeral, and the situated, particularly because of its temporal contingency with other

[33] It's important to note that the Situationist International claimed there was no Situationist art only Situationist "uses" of art (Bishop 83).

[34] For more information on the Situationist International, see Alastair Hemmens and Gabriel Zacarias' *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook* (2020), Guy Debord's *Société du spéctable* (1967) and his *"*Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l'organisation et de l'action de la tendance situationniste international."

aforementioned movements. Furthermore, groups such as the Situationist International (and their predecessors, the Lettrist International) actually practiced graffiti as a form of urban intervention (Daniel 3). Just like site-specific art and participatory art, graffiti art came to intervene in both urban space and the larger art world.[35] By the end of the 20th century, graffiti, once seen as vandalism,[36] even began to enter the space of the art gallery, such as when American artist, FUTURA 2000, held his first exhibition in 1983 at the Galerie Yvon Lambert. Over the next four decades exhibitions of graffiti continued to grow in popularity, much to many original graffiti writers' dismay, for whom this sort of collaboration with capitalism was considered treason. [37] In 2016, the annual Urban Art Fair was instituted in Paris by founder and president, Yannick Boesso. In 2019, the 13th arrondissement of Paris became an "open-air" museum of murals and street art.[38] In 2023, the City of Paris hosted an art exhibition dedicated solely to Parisian graffiti, "Capitale(s) : 60 ans d'art urbain à Paris."[39] Graffiti's transition from illegality to legality, its relationship to the art world and other forms of artistic practice, and the political transformations that the practice underwent in the second half of the 20th century are all important parts of this project.

Graffiti in Space and Place

Scholars have long been preoccupied with the notions of place and space, and, in this project, I am primarily concerned with how graffiti operates through both through its inscription in a specific place in the city and how it contributes to a more metaphorical

[35] See *Writers: 20 ans de graffiti à Paris* (Vecchione 2004) and "Street art and Graffiti in Paris" (Fieni 2016)

[36] See Hugo Daniel's article ("Où est la vandale?") for more about this transition from vandalism to art.

[37] The first collective exhibition of French graffiti and street art was in 1985 at the Espace Maurice Chauzy à Bondy. Before that the work of agnès b. was exhibited in 1984. It should be noted that this transition into the gallery space was very controversial for many graffiti artists who felt what made graffiti revolutionary was that it was outside the capitalist market (*Writers* 42:00-44:00).

[38] See "Urban Art Fair" and Boulevard Paris 13: le musée de street art à ciel ouvert (Ben Cheikh 2020).

[39] See Capital(e)s : 60 ans d'art urbain (Alternatives 2022).

"public space" of the city. In his philosophical work *The Fate of Place*, Edward Casey suggests that space denotes an extension or area, while place indicates a specific position or positionality in space. Furthermore, Casey also notes that, while early philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato prioritized the concept of place, the concept of infinite space became more important as the domains of science, mathematics, and theology expanded during the 17th century. In the middle of the 20th century, scholars such as Henri Lefebvre begin to think more critically about this conception of infinite space and its ramifications on social relations. In Lefebvre's understanding, space is a social product, resulting from the forces and relations of production ("Space" 286). Capitalism produces its own space, which he defines as "abstract space" (287). Abstract space may appear homogenizing but is actually fractured by the parcellation and separation that capitalistic practices enact on space and society (289).[40] It is also always produced through the violence of the State power. In this context, Lefebvre develops his idea of the "droit de la ville" ["right to the city"], in which he suggests that cities are common goods to which all individuals should have access and it is this "right" which will allow us to reorder power ("Droit 34-5").[41] In this dissertation, I adopt both Casey's precisions regarding "place" as a position and Lefebvre's critique of "abstract space." I argue that graffiti is a way for individuals to re-appropriate the public space of the city and transform this "abstract space" into something new. I also argue that the "place" where graffiti is written, its material location, is key to its message and impact.

In many ways, Lefebvre shares ideas in common with his peer, Situationist Guy Debord, who through his practice of "psychogeography," sought to enact similar ideas to

[40] For more details on his theorization of space, see also Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace* (1974).

[41] For more on this concept, see *Le droit à la ville* (1968).

Lefebvre.[42] For example, Debord created psychogeographic maps in which he cut up Parisian metro maps, scrambled parts of them, and collaged them together with arrows indicating "ambiances" of feelings and desires. For Lefebvre, all "readable" or "legible" space equates to the abstract and homogenous space of the State, which crushes all heterogeneity in its absoluteness; for Debord, the Parisian metro map exemplifies the notion of abstract space because it articulates the space of the city from an impossibly exterior and theoretical perspective (McDonough 62-65). The Haussmannian boulevards are yet another example of "readable" space in the eyes of Lefebvre, a space which permits those in power the ability to "see" its populations better and thus have greater control over them.[43] When Haussmann replaced the windy medieval streets with open boulevards, it was done, at least in part, to help the French State quash insurrection more easily by preventing barricades (Benjamin, "Paris," 42). Debord's psychogeographic maps try to destroy these abstract conceptions of space in favor of a depiction of the lived, social experience of traversing the city. For both Lefebvre and Debord, individual actions, like the creation of these maps, are practices of taking back the everyday and, thus, are means of rebellion against the greater hegemonic power.[44]

Some thirty years later, Michel de Certeau built on these ideas, going even further in his understanding of urban space in his book, *L'invention du quotidien* (1990). While Lefebvre and Debord might say that the consumer is passive, de Certeau suggests otherwise. In fact, according to de Certeau, the consumer enacts his or her own practices on objects of consumption and, in turn, the market itself. In an act of "braconnage" ["poaching"], these

[42] Apparently, Lefebvre and the Situationists exchanged quite a bit between 1960 and 1963, until the Situationists accused Lefebvre of plagiarism in 1964. For more information, see "Une autre ville pour une autre vie. Henri Lefebvre et les situationnistes" (Simay 2009).

[43] For more on the discussion of legibility and readability in Paris, see the introduction to *La Capitale des signes: Paris et son discours* (Karlheinz Stierle 2001).

[44] See also *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (Henri Lefebvre 1946) and "Théorie de la derive" (Guy Debord, 1956).

small actions subvert the system (XXXVI). De Certeau also differentiates between two forms of action upon space: strategies and tactics. Strategies are actions undertaken by political and religious power; they separate, produce, and direct space. They also separate and isolate the subject (60) Meanwhile, tactics are sideways maneuvers of the everyday. Consumers who repurpose, rewrite, and create new trajectories that repurpose space for their own ends effectively engage in these tactics or, what de Certeau calls, "arts de faire" (XL). These tactics are always performed in the "space of the other" (60, my translation). So, while strategies delineate an Other (and facilitate an exterior), tactics do away with this differentiation. Strategies impose a readable or seeable environment, and they stop time. Tactics are always in part *unreadable* and are always situated in time and ephemeral. These "arts de faire" include a variety of "operations": walking in the city, reading, cooking, are among a few (65). In this dissertation, I extend de Certeau's idea to argue that "graffiti" is also type of "tactic"; graffiti inscriptions are ephemeral marks that individuals assert over and onto the "smooth" space of the city, breaking up its homogeneity through subversive action.[45] Through these writings, new cartographies of the city come to life for the pedestrian that reorient the walker to lived realities and attempt to return the "right to the city" back to its inhabitants.

Borrowing from the work of anthropologist James Clifford, I contend that graffiti are iterations of "everyday incongruities" present in urban space. In the 1990s, Clifford argued for a new kind of ethnographic practice, which he called "ethnographic surrealism." According to Clifford, humanism and surrealism are the two sides to "global modernity," which are constantly at odds with one another, in a "permanent, ironic play of similarity and

[45] The word "smooth" comes from David Fieni's article "What a Wall Wants," in which he borrows this term from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Just like "postfacist war aims at a global smoothing out of space" in Delueze and Guattari's conception, Fieni argues that the French state performs something similar on the space of the banlieue (76). In keeping with this theory, the graffiti writer is practicing a form of "nomad grammatology"; in other words, "[t]he grammatological critique performed by graffiti aims, in part, to locate the archaic, despotic, or colonial wall buried within the new smooth walls of capital" (77).

difference" (562-3). Humanism in ethnography "begins with the different…and renders it comprehensible," so that a universal statement can be made about an Other (i.e., another culture or people group), while surrealism begins with the familiar and attempts to provoke Otherness or difference (562). Ethnographic surrealism, then, is an ethnographic process which privileges a collage of the exotic and the familiar (564). If the "surrealist moment in ethnography is that moment in which the possibility of comparison exists in unmediated tension with sheer incongruity" (564), the surrealist moment in literary and cultural studies is one in which we study graffiti — instances of "sheer" everyday "incongruity," of non-hegemonic narratives, of messy writing on the city walls, of dissidence between urban space and individual desires.[46]

By counteracting traditional hegemonic narratives, I suggest that these graffiti inscriptions, these "everyday incongruities," actually help to facilitate the *public* nature of the street. I take this term from a brief essay by historian Alice Béja in which she suggests that the element which renders the street truly public is the freedom of movement; she says, "[d]ans la rue, il faut bloquer personne. Et c'est pour cela qu'il faut que les espaces publics ne soient pas bloquants, mais *laissant la place à l'incongruité du quotidien*, et restent 'ces lieux communs' qui ne nous protègent ni ne nous enferment" ["in the street, no one should be blocked. And that's why public spaces should not be obstructive but should *leave space for the incongruity of the everyday*, and remain 'these common spaces' that neither protect nor enclose us"] (italics are mine, 7). Streets, the "space" of graffiti, are spaces of the everyday. This centrality enhances their public nature; in other words, no one is "blocked" from the street because we must all utilize it in our daily lives. Consequently, the streets form a logical

[46] In his monograph on the history of Paris, Eric Hazan traces the historical walls of Paris, which he calls "borders" in a psycho-geographic fashion, suggesting that the city is modeled more by these walls than by the current arrondissement system (12-14, my translation). In his words, the history of the city of Paris is marked by "city walls" that "scan a discontinuous and subterranean time" (24). By analyzing Parisian graffiti, one can scan the "discontinuous and subterranean" currents that run through the city, shaping the quotidian trajectories of its inhabitants.

space for all sorts of identities and individuals to come into contact. In particular, the streets of the city of Paris, with their long history of barricades and revolution, are often seen as spaces of liberty. At the same time, these streets can also be a space of repression. This restrictive character is evident in the segregation between the *banlieues* and the city center, the violent policing of protests, and the harassment that women, LGTBQ+ folks, and people of color face every day. In this dissertation, I show how graffiti can "unblock" the street, allowing for the voices of those repressed to bubble to the surface, to find themselves on the walls. [47]

Finally, the space of Paris is essential to this project, not only because it is the capital of France with a rich history of protests, but because of its collection of eclectic urban practitioners. Here I think of Charles Baudelaire whose 19th century *flâneur* strolled the arcades of the city, activating the "crowd" of the modern city through his very body.[48] Like the *flâneur*, the interwar Surrealist *errant* bespoke a connection between the city's structure and one's bodily experiences of it. In *Le Paysan de Paris*, Louis Aragon wanders through the city, playing imaginative games with the signs that what he encounters and following the *frisson* of the city's Subconscious in search of mystical adventures. These early Parisian walkers were more concerned with one's individual experience of the street than that of the collective. After World War II, however, avant-garde and activist groups, like the Situationists and the student-worker groups of May 1968, actively harnessed Paris' urban landscape and these former artistic traditions towards a more collective and revolutionary practice of the city.[49] In addition to these creative explorations of the street, French revolutions have, for

[47] This dissertation is particularly situated within the context of both Lefebvre and De Certeau's work, as well as that of a host of others who suggest the importance of space to the post- or hyper- modern subject: Michel Foucault, Pierre Nora, Fredric Jameson, Marc Augé, Saskia Sasken, and Edward Soja to name a few.

[48] See Baudelaire's *Constantin Guys: Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (republished 1943) and Walter Benjamin's *Arcade Projects* (1999) and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (republished 2006).

[49] For more, see chapter 2.

centuries, happened in these same streets: from the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, to the four crucial moments that have shaped the city of Paris and its history of protest in the late 20th century: the Algerian War for Independence, the decolonization of Africa in a larger sense, the "cultural" revolution in France in 1968, the feminist movements beginning in the 1970s, and the rise of xenophobia and racial tensions in the 1980s and 1990s. Throughout the late 20th century, graffiti is used by various activist groups to chart pathways through the city for the wanderer, the protester, and everyone in-between. In this dissertation, I argue that the practice of graffiti is also an important component of this history of Parisian wandering because it engages the body and the imagination of the wanderer. Graffiti brings about an urban space that one can observe, experience, imagine, and tinker with—a space that is layered, complex, and alive. Writing and reading graffiti are both embodied practices, but, in this dissertation, my focus remains on the passerby: How is he or she implicated corporeally by the city's graffiti? How does his or her physical act of walking get interrupted, re-routed, and altered by these inscriptions, and to what end?

Structure and Methodology of Dissertation

Just as graffiti operates clandestinely in the "background" of the 20th century city, it is often marginalized in academic circles; my research mirrors this marginality as it is focused on under-represented histories, practices, and urban interventions. Moreover, just as graffiti exploits word *and* image, my research is diverse in its corpus and interdisciplinary in its methodology. In each of the dissertation's four chapters, I focus on one political movement: the Algerian War of Independence of the late 1950s and 1960s, May 1968, the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, and protests against systemic racism in the Parisian suburbs in the 1980s and 1990s. For each political moment, I compare photographs of historical graffiti to films and literature in which graffiti is represented. These photographs were culled during my research stays in Paris, taken from various archives including la

Contemporaine at Nanterre University, the French National Library, the Simone de Beauvoir Audiovisual Center, the History of Paris Library, and the Marguerite Durand Library. The historical graffiti is read through the prism of the "imagined" graffiti and vice versa, each perspective strengthening the other to reveal a more nuanced reading of the city of Paris. By comparing historical and fictional graffiti across different mediums, I examine the ways in which lived experiences of the city and metaphorical understandings of it mutually influence one another.

Due to the diverse nature of the works studied, I practice a multifaceted trans-medial methodology. I utilize three different analytical approaches depending on the cultural production being analyzed: literary, filmic, and visual analysis. These three methods of analysis share much in common, and I harness these commonalities in order to perform a comparative analysis of the ways in which graffiti is repurposed through a variety of mediums. In fact, due to the textual and visual nature of graffiti, my project demands this kind of pluri-disciplinary approach, and, though its deployment, the interdependence of these various methodologies comes to the fore in my subsequent analysis. Throughout the dissertation, I also employ three theoretical lenses that reflect my project's urban humanities focus: spatial theory (Edward Casey, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja), theories of the everyday (Michel de Certeau, Roland Barthes), and theories of embodiment (Paul Connerton, Henri Bergson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty). In this way, I analyze how graffiti operates, every day, *in* urban space and *on* the bodies of the passerby.

In addition to the practice of analysis, this project entailed an archival practice, honed during several research stays in Paris.[50] As graffiti is ephemeral, often anonymous,

[50] These research stays include a visiting scholar position at the *Ecole normale superieure* in 2022-2023 thanks to UCLA's Graduate Research Mentorship and the department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies' graduate student exchange with this institution; several summer travel grants through the UCLA Humanities Division and the Center for European and Russian Studies; and a year-long doctoral research stay in 2024-2025 in Paris thanks to the *Bourse Jeanne Marandon* awarded by the *Société pour les professeurs français et francophones d'Amérique* (SPFFA).

exceedingly site-specific, and a relatively new concern within academia, the difficulties in locating and consulting archives of graffiti are many. By spending extended time in Paris consulting a variety of archives, I was able to compile diverse collection of images, many of which are spread throughout different collections without an easily accessible search mechanism. In many ways, my archival process mirrored the serendipitous quality of encountering graffiti itself; only by wandering through the archives at length was I able to encounter the photographs that formed the core of this research project.

The first chapter of this project, "Tactics of 'Terrorist Geography' in Algerian War Graffiti: Reading Photography and Fiction Transhistorically," examines a selection of wartime graffiti photographed by French photographers (Marc Riboud, Elie Kagan, Marc Garanger, Jean Téxier) during the Algerian War (1954-1962) and a novella written by Franco-Algerian author Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge* (1999), in which a character writes graffiti that denounces police violence against Algerians on October 17th, 1961 in Paris. In this chapter, I argue that graffiti during the Algerian War forms a textual "terrorist" geography in the cities of Algiers and Paris that plots a counter-narrative to the State's narrative about the Algerian War, and does so through emotional appeals to the passerby.

The second chapter, "Graffiti as Collective Action: May '68, the Passerby and the Political Body," examines a selection of photographs from the May 1968 protests, along with two cultural productions featuring May 1968-related graffiti: the film, *La Chinoise* (1967), by Jean-Luc Godard and the play, *La théorie et la pratique* (1968), by Charlotte Delbo. In this chapter, I argue that the graffiti of May 1968 was conceived of by its practitioners as a practice of collective action that undermined the time and space of capitalism, effectively reordering public space.

The third chapter, "Writing" the Feminine Body into the Streets in the 1970s and 1980s: The *Mouvement des libération des femmes* and its Echoes" examines photographs of

feminist graffiti during the 1970s Women's Liberation Movement (MLF) from French photographer Catherine Deudon's collection, as well as from Swiss videographer Carole Roussopoulo's documentary *Debout! Une histoire du mouvement de libération des femmes : 1970-1980* (1999). These historical instances of graffiti are analyzed alongside Agnès Varda's feminist musical *L'une chante, l'autre pas* (1977) and a selection of photographs of graffiti stencils by French street-artist Miss.Tic (1985-2022). In this chapter, I propose that these feminist creators transform the female body, a body that is normally marginalized in public spaces, into a central feature of the streets of Paris, creating an insurrectionary form of urban writing out of the female body itself.

The fourth and final chapter, "Disembodied Bodies: Graffiti in the French Banlieue in the 1980s and 1990s," deals with the political unrest in the Parisian suburbs of the 1980s and 1990s and the graffiti culture that resulted. I analyze Mehdi Charef's novel *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1984), Matthieu Kassovitz's film *La Haine* (1995), and a selection of the protest photographs taken during the 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism and the 1983 protests against police brutality. Although, during this time period, Parisian graffiti became synonymous with the banlieue ("suburbs") and, often times, with youth violence due to a massive media campaign, I read this graffiti differently: namely, I read it as a way for these citizens to reassert their bodily agency against a French State that itself has become an agent of political violence towards its own citizens. Through these inscriptions, graffiti writers write political messages as a way to fight against the politicization and racialization of their own bodies.

Chapter 1: Tactics of "Terrorist Geography" in Algerian War Graffiti: Reading Photography and Fiction Transhistorically

Introduction

Lëila Sebbar's novella *La Seine était rouge* (1999) follows three young adults, Amel, Omer, and Louis in 1996, as they seek knowledge about an important event that took place during the Algerian War (1954-1962): October 17th, 1961, a night when thousands of Algerians protesting the war-time curfew in Paris were violently attacked (and many killed) by Parisian police forces, an event to which each of them has a familial connection. Amel is a French-Algerian teenager, whose mother, father, and grandmother protested on October 17th. Her father was subsequently deported to Algeria because of his participation. Omer is an Algerian journalist, whose family is close to Amel's in Algeria, and has recently arrived in Paris to escape political persecution during the Algerian Civil War (1991-2002). Finally, Louis is a young Frenchman whose mother worked with the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and is close friends with Amel's mother. When Louis interviews Amel's mother for a documentary about October 17th, Amel and Omer embark upon a pilgrimage throughout the city of Paris, revisiting her mother's trajectory as a child the night of the protest.

When Amel and Omer visit Nanterre, a suburb of Paris, they discuss the violence of the Algerian Civil War, which is happening contemporaneously with the narrative:

> [Amel et Omer] sont assis sur un banc du parc, à Nanterre. Omer feuillette un journal algérien…Amel frappe le journal d'un revers de la main : "C'est la page des massacres ? Tous les jours tu lis cette page-là ?... Tu peux plus t'en passer… Lis à haute voix, que je sache, comme si j'avais une carte sous les yeux : Tlemcen, Aïn Defla, Médéa, Tiaret, Aflou, Blida, Alger…Tizi-Ouzou…" "Tu es allée en Algérie ? Tu connais?" "Non. Mon père dit qu'on ira bientôt. Dans ma chambre, j'ai une carte d'Algérie. Je mets une épingle rouge pour marquer les massacres…" "Pour

quoi faire ? ” “Pour savoir. ” “Et qu’est-ce que tu sais de plus avec des épingles ? ” “Je sais la géographie terroriste.” (Sebbar 30)

[(Omer and Amel) are seated on a park bench in Nanterre. Omer is leafing through an Algerian newspaper…Amel strikes the paper with the back of her hand: “Is this the page about the massacres? Do you read that page every day?...You can’t do without it…Read aloud so I can follow, as if I had a map in front of my eyes: Tlemcen, Aïn Defla, Médéa, Tiaret, Aflou, Blida, Alger…Tizi-Ouzou…” “Have you been to Algeria ? Do you know the country?” “No. My father says we’ll be going there soon. I have a map of Algeria in my room. I stick in red pins to mark the massacres.” “Why?” “To know about them.” “And what else do you learn from the pins ?” “I’m learning terrorist geography” (translated by Mortimer 25).]

In this passage, Amel invents a term, “terrorist geography,” which I apply in this chapter as a transhistorical and transmedial framework for analyzing historical and fictional graffiti related to the Algerian War. By instructing Omer to read the names of the cities aloud, Amel formulates a simile, equating the hearing of the names of the cities with the act of looking at them on a map—situating them in space and thus “seeing them” as physical sites of these events. Just as she marks massacres onto a physical map of Algeria in her bedroom, Amel imagines that by hearing the names cited in the newspaper, she will “know” what is happening in Algeria. Even as her knowledge of Algeria remains speculative (she has never been there), the red pins she uses signify geographic “knowledge” about the terrorism and, by extension, about her familial land. In other words, Amel invents a cartographic practice in order to construct a kind of spatial knowledge about the violence.

Omer, however, with his first-hand, lived experience of Algeria, is skeptical: “‘Et tu crois que tu comprends mieux comme ça. Qui tue, pourquoi. Ça suffit de planter une aiguille sur des noms ?’” (Sebbar 30) [“And you believe you understand more that way, that you

understand who is doing the killing, and the reason why? Just by placing a needle on the names?" (translated in Mortimer 25)]. In his eyes, her focus on toponyms obscures both the identities of the actors and any motivations behind their actions. Omer's phrasing here transmits sarcasm, illuminating his disdain for Amel's practice, but it is also a subtle critique of the brutality of her method. Amel describes her practice as "putting a pin" on a map. Omer's language ("hammering a needle on some names," my alternate translation), ratchets up the intensity of this action; insinuating that Amel is the one enacting violence through her careless mapping. For Omer, Amel cannot "know" about the violence in Algeria simply because she pins locations on a map. It is this frustration that leads Omer to *take up* Amel's "terrorist geography," editing and refining her methods, and applying them to a different set of sites. By painting his own graffiti inscriptions in *red,* throughout Paris, Omer demonstrates how a terrorist geography can be made to address the two critical questions questions: "Qui tue, pourquoi".

By adopting the expression "terrorist geography," I take inspiration from Amel and Omer's emplotment of terrorist violence onto the space of the city and utilize this framework in order to analyze both historical graffiti written in the context of the Algerian War (1954-1962) and the fictional graffiti written by Omer in Sebbar's 1999 novella. The selected graffiti is diverse: it is historical and fictional, written both coeval with and posterior to the Algerian War. It contains messages that promote Algerian independence and others that dismiss it. It is found in several cities, in Paris and in Algiers, and is captured through different lenses—that of photojournalists, amateur photographers, newspaper correspondants, and novelists. I argue that, through comparison of these various examples, a larger terrorist geography of the Algerian War emerges—one that sheds light on the fugitive battles fought through graffiti writing in Paris and in Algiers.

In order to understand the components of this "terrorist geography," it is useful to begin with a definition of terrorism. According to Raphaëlle Branche, a French historian specializing in the era of the Algerian War, in an act of terrorism, the State is always the *addressee* of the terrorists' actions, and the civil population is the *instrument* through which the terrorists target the State (326).[51] Political scientist Jessica A. Stanton argues similarly: "Terrorism is strategic violence in which civilians are the target for violence, but civilians are not the primary target audience for violence; rather, the government opponent is the primary audience for violence or target of coercion" (355). This physical attack on civilians is accompanied by "the greater aim of producing *psychological reactions* among a larger target group" which will in turn "exercise pressure on power holders (typically a government)" (Frank 45). Terrorist groups also do not self-identify as terrorist (Frank 42). Instead, they regard themselves as "freedom fighers" or "resistants." Raphaëlle Branche notes that this is also the case for the two groups who were designated terrorist groups by the French government during the Algerian War—the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and the Secret Army Organization (OAS): "…ni le FLN ni l'OAS n'emploie ce lexique [de térrorisme] pour s'auto-désigner : ils sont des 'résistants', des 'combattants' et leur recours aux attentats n'est pas la fin ultime de leur action" ["…neither the FLN nor the OAS employed this lexicon [of terrorism] to define themselves: they are 'resistors,' 'combatants' and their recourse to [terrorist] attacks is no the ultimate end of their action"] (327). Despite many contemporary definitions focusing on non-State actors, historian Tim Wilson argues that all terrorism can actually be linked back to the State itself (333). These variable definitions demonstrate the mutability of the term, "terrorist."

[51] It is important to note that the term "terrorist" is always defined by the State, or by the power structure that is being "attacked," and the definition is contested even amongst scholars. For a variety of definitions from diverse scholars, see the *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism* (2019). See also *The Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism in Public Discourse, Literature, and Film: Narrating Terror* (Michael Frank 2017) and *States of Terror: History, Theory, Literature* (David Simpson 2019).

Although political graffiti does not always imply or enact physical violence against civilians, its logic operates in a similar way. It directs a message at those in political power, often condemning the State's actions, through the medium of the passerby (or the civilian population). Sometimes political graffiti even participates in psychological terrorism, which directs its message to the passerby, as I will demonstrate, with threats of or references to instances of physical violence.[52] Due to its illicit nature, this graffiti implants a "terrorist" narrative into material spaces of the city; it effectively *writes over* the inscriptions of the State and contests its claim to public space in order to present a differing narrative for those "on the ground." Returning to Amel's formulation, we note that "terrorist" here is an adjective that describes "geography," the spatial element of political graffiti. Graffiti is a form of "writing" ("graphy") that takes place in urban *space* ("geo" refers to earth or ground, but urban geography is a facet of the larger academic discipline concerning space). Therefore, borrowing from and building off of Amel's concept, I conceive of graffiti writing as a method of inscribing the city—be it Algiers or Paris—with a "map" of the Algerian War. As I will show, historical and fictional graffiti of the Algerian War can be read together as constructing a "terrorist geography"—a cartography of urban writings that reveal, to quote Jacques Rancière, the "dissensus," of public space.[53]

Although Amel's term refers to the violence of the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s, I apply it more broadly to the historical and fictional graffiti about the Algerian War of the 1950s and 1960s.[54] The historical graffiti in question was written by two main groups, the

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[52] Raphaëlle Branche shares this idea. In fact, she describes the OAS graffiti writings as "techniques of psychological warfare" (328, my translation).

[53] According to Rancière, politics is founded on dissensus, or a disagreement about the very nature of what constitutes the political. In this way, graffiti illustrates these fissures within a political body. For more on Jacques Rancière's idea of dissensus, politics, and aesthetics, see *La partage du sensible* (2000) and *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010).

[54] The Algerian War was not recognized as a "war" by the French State until 1999. Instead, it was referred to as individual acts of "terror" perpetrated by outside influences: "Pour la plupart des officiers, il n'y a pas de guerre, d'insurrection algérienne, mais action des 'terroristes' venus et dirigés de l'extérieur. Dans ce sens, la bataille

Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), who were fighting for Algerian independence from France, and the far-right Secret Army Organization (OAS), who were fighting for Algeria to remain a part of France. During the War, both the FLN and OAS were considered terrorist groups by the French State, and they both used graffiti as "tactics" of warfare, marking the walls of their cities with paint alongside their more traditional terrorist actions, such as bombings and assassinations.[55] The fictional graffiti in Sebbar's novella is also about the war, specifically about the Algerians in Paris who were imprisoned and killed by the French State. Although using Amel's term, which refers to the violence of the Dark Decade in 1990s Algeria, may seem anachronistic, Sebbar's novel is primarily concerned with the memory of October 17th, 1961, a key moment during the Algerian War. Omer does not write graffiti about the contemporaneous Civil War but about the past—about October 17th. Thus, I argue that transhistorical connections are already inherent in the logic of Sebbar's novella. Omer's use of red paint to write his graffiti shows that he himself is establishing a similar

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des idées a plus d'importance que la guerre des armes. Le programme est simple : éliminer les influences extérieures nocives, neutraliser 'les suspects' en les enfermant dans des 'centres d'hébergement,' et recréer partout un sentiment francophile grâce à des séances d'explication. L'action psychologique, jugée essentielle par l'armée, sert à dissimuler la guerre réelle" ["For most officers, there is no war, no Algerian insurrection, but, instead, 'terrorist' acts coming from and directed by the outside. In this way, the battle of ideas is more important than the war of arms. The plan is simple: eliminate dangerous outside influences, neutralize the 'suspects' by confining them to 'accommodation centers,' and reproduce a Francophile sentiment everywhere by means of training sessions. The psychological action, deemed essential by the army, helped to conceal the real war"] (Stora 20). This quotation demonstrates how the French State also engaged in "psychological warfare" throughout the war.

[55] Here I adapt Michel de Certeau's idea of "tactics" used to subvert the capitalist system and use it to describe "tactics" in this chapter, which refers to (terrorist) actions that subvert the French State's political agenda in Algeria. For De Certeau, the consumer can and does enact his or her own practices on objects of consumption, and these sideways actions effectively undermine the capitalist system. In *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, De Certeau differentiates between two forms of action that can be undertaken upon space: strategies and tactics (XLVI). Strategies are actions undertaken by agents of political and religious power; these actions separate, produce, and direct space. Strategies also separate and isolate the subject from space. Meanwhile, tactics are sideways maneuvers of the everyday that consumers practice. These tactics are always performed in the "space of the other," and they create new trajectories for the consumer (XLV). So, while strategies delineate an Other (and facilitate an exterior), tactics do away with this differentiation (57-63). Strategies impose a readable or seeable environment, and they stop time; we might think of Haussmann's transformation of Paris to make it more defensible against insurrection. Tactics are always in part "unreadable," and are always situated in time and ephemeral. One of de Certeau's "arts de faire" is, in fact, the practice of walking the city. In this way, he sees all pedestrians as having the capacity to invert capitalistic space through their individual footfalls in the city (139-155).

geography to Amel's red pins; he is marking "massacres" on the physical landscape of the city, just as Amel marks "massacres" on her map of Algeria. Despite the temporal disjuncture between these two periods, they are linked through their characters' urban inscriptions.

One aim of this atypical trans-medial analysis is to highlight the ways in which graffiti, a seemingly peripheral object of study, bridges mediums, such as art and literature, through its very nature, and it is my conviction that peripheral ways of readings graffiti, in this case, reading across geographical and historical lines, can reveal new insights into historical moments and their representations. This chapter builds upon the work of numerous literary and historical scholars who have explored the Algerian War, and, in particular, the night of October 17th, 1961. First, I consider Lia Brozgal's key claim in *Absent the Archive*: that we can learn about the hidden history of October 17th, 1961 through its cultural productions. While Brozgal examines an extensive corpus of cultural productions as it relates to questions of the archive, I focus on how graffiti both in real life and in cultural productions "writes" not only the history or memory of October 17th but also actively labors to shift spatial realities in the physical streets. Second, I invoke the scholarship of Jim House and Neil MacMaster, whose historical and archival engagements with October 17th, in their *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory,* are essential to this chapter. According to House, the events of October 17th were acts of colonial violence must be situated within a longer *durée* of colonial violence in Algeria prior to and during the War.[56] Put another way, the "event" of October 17th extends beyond the punctual time and place of the police massacre. It is one event in a chain of many violent acts perpetrated by the French State against the Algerian people, and it consists of, as Léopold Lambert suggests, a "multiplicity of temporalities and spatialities" (Lambert, "A Night"). [57] Just as October 17th is situated within

[56] This chapter is also one iteration of the "longue durée" that is graffiti's resistance to colonial violence.

[57] See the following quotation from House's article: "Any explanation for the Paris massacre has to come to terms with several overlapping time scales in order to understand how the effects of colonial ideology were

a larger context the Algerian War, I maintain that its graffiti also transcends the spatial and temporal context of October 17th. By aggregating these varied examples of graffiti, I propose that the stakes of the Algerian conflict, especially its effect on the everyday citizen, become more evident.

Tagging the Wartime City: Historical Graffiti of the FLN and the OAS

In spite of ample photographic evidence of graffiti written during the Algerian War, there is limited academic research on the use of graffiti as a wartime tactic.[58] Architectural historian Sheila Crane is one of few scholars to examine the use of urban ephemera (graffiti, posters, tracts, and even radio broadcasts) during the Algerian War.[59] According to Crane, the FLN, the OAS and the French government all "embraced ephemera as crucial instruments of battle," creating "competing topographies of persuasion" within the city of Algiers (399, 389). The OAS used ephemera, such as posters and graffiti, "to threaten its detractors and to assert its authority over the city"; in other words, the OAS ephemera evoked fear. The FLN, and its sympathizers, also used ephemera to mark its territory but to different ends—first, to transmit information about upcoming political actions, and second, to indicate solidarity with the Algerian population. In particular, several instances of graffiti appeared in low-income housing projects in Algiers, which "served as a tool for mobilization and as visible testament of a given neighborhood's support of Algerian independence" (396). Crane deploys Henri

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reworked into the French decolonising context. From this perspective, the exceptionality of the Paris massacre was simply that it took place in metropolitan France. The wide-scale killing of French colonial subjects and citizens in the colonies and dependent territories (often in the context of political opposition to French rule) was a well-established feature of French colonial governance, as attested by Sétif (1945) and Madagascar (1947), to name only postwar examples. From the 1920s onwards, French fears that the growing numbers of Algerian migrants would be attracted to Algerian nationalism and/or Communism, had given rise to police surveillance, political repression involving mass round-ups, and, in the press, a discourse of criminalisation" (356).

[58] See photographic collections of Algeria during the war by Marc Garanger (*La guerre d'Algérie: Vu par un appelé du contingent*), Marc Riboud (*Algérie indépendance*), Elie Kagan (*Le Reporter engagé: trente ans d'instantanés*), Nicolas Tikhomiroff (*Agence Magnum*), and Raymond Depardon (*Son oeil dans sa main*, Agence Delmas), most of which include several examples of OAS and FLN graffiti.

[59] There is, however, according to Crane, sufficient research into how the architecture and spatial politics of the Algerian city was used to fight the Algerian War, in particular during the Battle of Algiers.

Lefebvre's idea of the "ephemeral" to argue that graffiti was a method that enabled the FLN to re-appropiate their own city, and this act of reappropriation created "an oppositional space in Algiers, one that had, at least symbolically, already been liberated" (405).[60] One could argue that the OAS also "re-appropriate" space through their graffiti inscriptions. While Crane does not directly address this possible equivalence, she implies that there exists an important difference between the FLN graffiti which aims to "mobilize" support for Algerian independence and the OAS graffiti which "threatens" those who disagree with their vision of Algeria.

Keeping in mind the notion of graffiti as a tool for spatial appropriation, in this section, I analyze photographs depicting historical graffiti written in Algiers but also in Paris, another "front" of the Algerian War, by the FLN and the OAS. [61] Each photograph features both an urban inscription and a pedestrian—a mise-en-scène that permits us to speculate about how these graffiti writings impacted individuals in their daily lives.[62] My concern here is to explore the ways in which the OAS and FLN graffiti create "oppositional" spaces in the streets: What is the relationship between these oppositional spaces and the term, "terrorist geographies"? Like Crane, I contend that the OAS and the FLN graffiti operate differently in urban space. First, I assert that the OAS graffiti uses what I call an "anti-tag" to assert authority over public space, and, thus, produce an impression of surveilling the public that

[60] In her article, Crane draws on Lefebvre's idea of the "ephemeral," which comes from his sociological work on the Paris Commune and their appropriations of the city during that time. According to Crane, Lefebvre's "ephemeral" is the way in which each "place becomes multifunctional [and] polyvalent" through users' "concrete appropriations [of the place] no matter how momentary" (399, 405). In other words, each inhabitant can perform ephemeral actions that allow them assume control over the place in which they perform it.

[61] Historical graffiti is the term I use to describe graffiti that actually existed in a city and was captured by a photojournalist or photographer. It is also graffiti that is coterminous with the political movement described. Jim House, Neil MacMaster, and Benjamin Stora all speak to how the Algerian war was fought on metropolitan France soil as well as in the territory of Algeria.

[62] My personal research file contains a meta-data list of photographs that I have discovered in my archival research, many of which did not make it into this chapter. However, cataloguing these objects have allowed me to better understand the makeup of OAS and FLN graffiti inscriptions.

passes through that space. In graffiti culture, a tag is a pseudonym selected by an individual and written in spray paint, in a certain style, throughout the city.[63] The tagger's goal is to get their tag "up" or in as many locations as possible. The tag is also intended to be unintelligible to the general public, leigible only to other taggers. Jean Baudrillard theorized that this unintelligibility was central to the subversive quality of the tag. By being "unreadable" or "insignifiable," the tag undermines the capitalist space of the city, one which is overflowing with signs and media (30-31). Like subway graffiti writers, the OAS *did* tag the city with a pseudonym, as the initials OAS represent the group but do not indicate their "real" names. However, their tags depended on widespread recognition by the public, which is why I have labelled their signatures an "anti-tag." Furthermore, rather than opposing capitalism and colonialism like tags do, the anti-tag participates in the greater system of capitalist and colonial oppression, by promoting the belief that Algeria should remain "French." This anti-tag functions by cultivating an emotional environment of fear. It reminds the passerby of the presence of the OAS, and, in doing so, destabilizes a sense of security in public space. While it "attacks" the passerby, the OAS tag simultaneously communicates a message to the French State—namely that it should not capitulate to the Algerians fighting for independence. This graffiti is a metaphorical act of "terror," and its occupation of public space can be understood as producing a "terrorist geography." In other words, the OAS graffiti etches messages of intimidation onto the material of the city, and these messages are encountered by the passerby, who become vehicles for the OAS' political ambitions.

[63] For more on the New York subway graffiti movement, see the following documentaries: *Stations of the Elevated* (1981), *Wild Style* (1982), and *Style Wars* (1983). For more on the international graffiti movement, see *Banksy's Exit through the Gift Shop* (2010), *Writers: 20 ans de graffiti à Paris* (2004), and *Bomb It!* (2007).



Image 1.1 *Algiers*, November 1961
Photograph by Marc Garanger, AFR Photography

The first photographic example of OAS graffiti, was taken by Marc Garanger during his time as an army photographer in Algeria from 1960-1962 (Image 1.1, pp. 37).[64] Taken in Algiers in November of 1961, the photograph is an eye-level long shot, with a left tilt. In it, a man passes in front of the display window of a pharmacy. Behind him, on the wall of the pharmacy appears a graffiti inscription: "OAS VEiLLE." The foreground of the photograph shows a piece of the street, suggesting that Garanger is taking the photograph from the opposite sidewalk. The location of Garanger's camera (on the other side of the street), the framing of the shot (askew), and the forward movement of the man all indicate that this photograph was taken spontaneously. The spontaneity of the image demonstrates the ubiquity of these inscriptions in Algiers; the man is unfazed by the inscription. This graffiti itself, spray-painted on the front of a pharmacy, is an ironic reminder of the harm done by the OAS' terrorist attacks on civilians. The inscription is explicit: it states that the OAS is "standing watch," presumably paying close attention to the general society, the city, and the passerby, alert to their each of their movements. Raphaëlle Branche notes that the OAS used "inscriptions of slogan-signatures on assassination sites," such as *OAS veille*, as part of a strategy of "psychological warfare" against the Algerians (328, my translation). Therefore, this location may have been a site of an OAS assassination, giving a twisted spin to the use of the verb "veiller," as if the graffiti marks a vigil for the "enemy" the OAS has slain.In this way, the act of "standing watch" over the Algerian people is linked with the act of killing them. The passerby's posture also reflects the psychological terror of this inscription. His hands are behind his back; we can read this innocuous stance in light of the inscription as an illustration of the physical restraining of Algerians carried out by the OAS, through their

[64] Marc Garanger is most known for his photographic work, *Femmes algériennes*, which consists of collections of photographs taken by Garanger during his army service in Algeria from 1960-62. He was required to take these images of Kabyle men and women moved from their villages into "camps de regroupement" during the war. For more on this, see article, "Women as Battleground: Marc Garanger's Identity Photographs from Algeria and their Long Afterlives" (Falekca). Leïla Sebbar also incorporated these photographs into her fictional *Shérazade* trilogy.

surveillance of and physical violence towards the poulation. Furthermore, in the image, the graffiti "follows" behind him. It is literally "standing watch" over him. In an act of doubling, Garanger's camera also surveils the man as he passes by. The street photograph is transformed into a surveillance image, implying that the OAS is both "standing watch" (veiller) and "standing watch" (surveiller) *over* the people and streets of Algiers. On an another level, the photograph "surveils" the OAS surveillance, capturing the how their graffiti surveils the general population of Algiers.



Image 1.2: *Dans les rues de Paris, diverses affiches et graffitis : l'OAS*
Photograph by Elie Kagan, Paris, 1960s

The OAS did not only surveil over Algiers. They also sought to "watch over" the streets of Paris. In this second example, a photograph taken by Elie Kagan in Paris in the 1960s shows how they did so through the very same practice of graffiti (Image 1.2, pp. 39).[65] Kagan was a French photographer, known for his photographs of the October 17th protest, which were some of the only images that testified to the bloody repression of that night.[66] Beyond October 17th, Kagan documented numerous protests in France and abroad from the 1960s through the 1990s, and, in addition, he was an avid street photographer, practicing most often in the streets of Paris.[67] The photograph is taken at eye-level, with a Dutch angle, like Garanger's. The foreground contains cars, suggesting that Kagan is positioned in the middle of the street. In the bottom left quadrant of the frame, a person, dressed in dark pants and shoes and a light-colored coat, lays on a street bench, arms crossed. On the right side of the frame, a woman with a long coat, walks away from the graffiti. Like Garanger's photograph, Kagan's belies a spontaneous execution (tilt, location, framing). Despite the spontaneity, Kagan has centered the graffiti in the shot, and the OAS initials, written in white on a dark wall, are the focal point of the image. The letters are outlined twice: one iteration is written in smaller font and appears to have been erased; the second is in larger font, as if the writer decided to enlarge his or her writing after the first attempt. These two "drafts" highlight the rapidity of the writing; it was likely written in haste and covertly by members of the OAS. Moreover, the two drafts produce both a literal and figurative doubling of the message. The sense of fear intensifies as the OAS letters expand larger. It is as if the writer is shouting the letters at the passerby, amplifying them through the dilated writing.

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[65] This photograph was found in the Contemporaine Library archives at the University of Nanterre, which contains many photographs taken by Elie Kagan, called the Fonds Kagan and organized by Audrey LeBlanc and Cyril Burté. The title of this photograph is listed as follows: Dans les rues de Paris, diverse affiches et graffitis : l'OAS, années 1960, Tirage numérique récent, 20 x 30 cm. It was also reproduced for an exhibition curated by Leblanc and Burté available in a printed collection, *Elie Kagan: Photographe indépendant* (1960-1990) (136).

[66] See *17 Octobre 1961* (2001), written by Jean-Luc Einaudi, for Kagan's photographs of October 17th.

[67] See Audrey Leblanc and Cyril Burté's introduction to *Elie Kagan: Photographe indépendant* (1960-1990).

In addition to the doubled writing, the photograph includes two individual passersby whose body language communicates the environment of fear induced by the OAS graffiti, even in Paris. Neither individual is "reading" the graffiti nor appears to notice its presence. The man faces away from the graffiti and the woman walks away from it. A cursory reading of this photograph implies that the passerby is unaffected by or unaware of the OAS in Paris. Despite the passivity of these figures with respect to the graffiti, I assert that Kagan's photograph demands a different reading. In this image, both passersby, although not interacting directly with the graffiti, are affected by it. The man, apparently distressed, shrinks from the letters, while the woman seems to "flee" the scene. Their bodies are also relegated to the "frame" of the shot, as if the graffiti writing is expelling them to the periphery. The composition of the photograph demonstrates how the OAS writers occupy the walls of the city and, by extension, the daily lives of those who pass them by. Through these rogue inscriptions, the OAS remind the civilian population of their presence but also of their actual terrorist attacks, the bombings and assassinations which accelerated towards the end of the War.[68] This practice, which inserts the group's name into the built environment of the city and into the daily lives of its residents, was repeated frequently in both Paris and Algiers.[69] Through "anti-tagging," the OAS marks and thus "captures" various sites in the city for their war front. By reading these photographs through the lens of Amel's term "terrorist geography," I suggest that OAS graffiti participates in a network of "terroristic" inscriptions that mark the physical space of the city. This "terrorist geography," through the production of an environment of "terror," utilizes the passerby in order to address a message to the French State concerning the Algerian War.

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[68] For more information on the escalation of OAS attacks near the end of the Algerian War and even after the armistice, see *La gangrene et l'oubli* (Stora 1991) and "FLN et OAS: Deux terrorismes en guerre d'Algérie" (Branche 2007).

[69] See Branche and Crane.

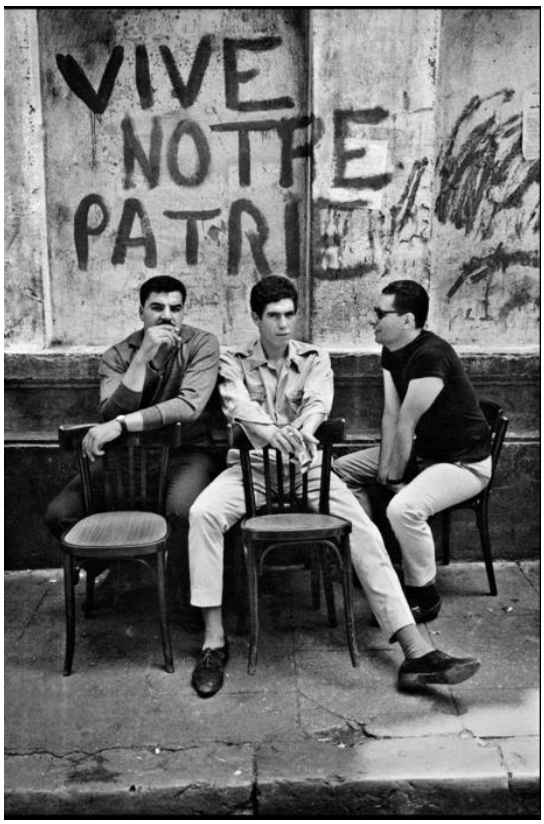


Image 1.3 *ALGERIA. Algiers. July 1962.*
Photograph by Marc Riboud, Magnum Photos.



Image 1.4 *ALGERIA. July 1962. Algerians voted on July 1st…*
Photograph by Marc Riboud, Magnum Photos.

In contrast with the OAS graffiti, I argue that the FLN graffiti seeks to implicate the passerby, in a constructive fashion, encouraging him or her to play a role in the process of independence. These inscriptions were often longer and used language that replicated French republican ideals in order to project an image of a united people in the face of French oppression.[70] Marc Riboud, a French photojournalist who covered the Middle and Far East, documented Algerian Independence from Algiers in July of 1962.[71] Riboud's photographs highlight the agency of the Algerian people, such as in these two images (Image 1.3, 1.4, pp. 42). In both images, the "passersby" (in the first, three men, and in the second, three women) stand in front of the graffiti, with their countenances facing the camera. In the first, three men are seated on chairs in the street in front of a graffito that reads "VIVE NOTRE PATRIE" ["LONG LIVE OUR FATHERLAND"] (Image 4.3, pp. 42). Two men look to the camera and the third provides his left profile. The serious expressions of the men contrast with their more relaxed body language (leaning over the chairs), and this combination indicates both strength and composure in the face of independence. By facing the camera, the men also indicate their openness to Riboud's lens and, thus, their solidarity with the message written behind them. In what Susan Sontag has called "the normal rhetoric of the photographic portrait," frontality denotes the "disclosure of the subject's essence" and their cooperation with the photographer (30).[72] In borrowing Sontag's idea, I qualify it by acknowledging that some French military

[70] I should note here that the selected pro-independence inscriptions are not explicitly written by the FLN. They most likely were (or at least were written by sympathizers), but they did not always "sign" their writings like the OAS did. The FLN also "tagged" the city with their initials as we can see in other photographs that are not analyzed in this chapter. Because these photographs are taken by photojournalists, there is often not a clear trace of authorship behind the graffiti.

[71] See *Algérie: independence* (Marc Riboud, Malek Alloula, Seloua Luste Boulbina 2009).

[72] This statement comes from her essay "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly," in which she discusses the work of Diane Arbus, an American photographer whose photographs in the 1970s focused on "victims, on the unfortunate." As Sontag argues, "[h]er work shows people who are pathetic, pitiable, as well as repulsive, but it does not arouse any compassionate feelings" (26). Arbus' was known for connecting with her subjects before photographing them: "in Arbus' photographs, frontality also implies in the most vivid way the subject's cooperation. To get these people to pose, the photographer has to gain their confidence, has to become 'friends' with them" (30). I extend this reading to the works of Riboud on the days of Independence.

officers were instructed to use their camera to monitor Algerians, and, therefore, the fact that these men and women were looking at the camera does not automatically imply willing colloboration. For instance, Marc Garanger took hundreds of "front-facing" images of Algerian women, so that the French government could "identify" those they sent to relocation camps. However, on the day of Algerian independence, I believe that this colonial strategy was at least temporarily suspended.[73]

The graffiti inscription supplements this interpretation of the photograph. The phrase "VIVE NOTRE PATRIE" ["LONG LIVE OUR FATHERLAND"] uses the grammatical imperative ("Vive") to mimic the common French expression, "Vive la France" or "Vive la République." [74] However, the writer replaces "La France" with "notre patrie," and this choice distinguishes Algeria from France, despite the French government's claims, since colonization, that Algeria was a part of France. It also equates the Algerian struggle for independence with the French Revolution of 1789, inscribing the sovereignty of Algeria within a larger narrative of "French" Republicanism. Finally, the use of the possessive adjective "notre" ["our"] foregrounds the ownership of the Algerians over their own land (and, in the case of the image, over the streets). By facing the camera and allowing themselves to be "seen," these men reveal their complicity in the independence project, in the construction of their own nation. And yet, these men signify more than just their individual subjectivities. If this photograph is a portrait, the graffiti serves as its caption (or, possibly, a speech bubble above their heads), and, thus, the portrait signifies that these men are a synecdoche for their budding nation. Put simply, the image of their masculine bodies standing

[73] Riboud, as a photographer, was known for capturing anti-colonial resistance movements.

[74] Although "Vive la France!" had been used since the French Revolution, Charles de Gaulle gave a famous speech ("je vous ai compris") to the Algerians in 1958 which ended with "Vive la République ! Vive la France!" (De Gaulle). This speech, intentionally vague, seemed to be asserting that Algerians had the same rights as the French and recognized their efforts at self-determination. Two days later on June 6th, 1958, Charles de Gaulle mdae another speech that included phrase "Vive l'Algérie française!" seemingly siding with the anti-independence activists. I posit that this graffiti is responding to De Gaulle's ambivalence towards French independence.

in front of the graffiti stands in for the entire Algerian "fatherland" or political body. In this way, the photograph embodies the newly acquired sovereignty of the Algerian nation and its people.

Riboud's second photograph replicates the composition of the first—three individuals standing in front of a graffiti writing (Image 4.4., pp. 42). This time, however, the individuals are three women (and perhaps a fourth cut off by the framing), wearing all-white haiks, a traditional Algerian outfit. [75] They stand in front of the graffiti, "OUÏ" ["HEARD"], two of them looking directly at the camera and the third looking to the left of the frame, like the men. The word is underlined by a graffitied arrow pointing towards the number eleven; underneath the inscription, the erasure of another arrow and the number one is visible. As in the men's photograph, the graffiti acts as a caption or speech bubble above the women's heads. The word "ouï" is the past participle of the verb, ouïr, meaning to "hear"; moreover, the word ouï resembles closely the word "oui," which refers to the desired vote on the July 1st, 1962 referendum for Algerian independence (vote "OUI" ["YES"] for independence from France). These women, thus, have "heard" the "yes" vote, and, as such, are positioned as supporters of Algerian independence. The arrow pointing towards the number one likely reminds the passerby of the date of the referendum: the first of July. The arrow indicates the new orientation that the Algerian nation will take on the first of July, when they vote for freedom from French rule. If these two photographs are read together, the graffiti inscriptions function as call, response, and action: first, a celebration of a free Algeria (Long live our fatherland!); second, an agreement with this celebration (Heard!); third, an implied "yes vote" for independence (Aye!).

[75] Haiks were traditional clothing worn by Algerian women; they were a long white tunic at the waist and wrapped around the head normally paired with a white face veil called an ajar. For more on this, see "Hijabs and Hats in Interwar Algeria" (Sara Rahnama 2020) and "Culture in Rebellion: The Appropriation and Transformation of the Veil in the Algerian Revolution" (Rick Fantasia and Eric L. Hirsch 1996).

Just as in the image of the men, the women become the *porte-parole* for the graffiti caption above them. In addition, their haiks are a visible testament to their "difference" from the French. The traditional white hue of the haik suggests an innocence and purity, which represents the new Algerian nation that is casting off the darkness of the colonial past. By wearing their traditional garments, they also physically demonstrate their connection to Algerian culture. In colonial Algeria, the female body was frequently a point of contention; Frantz Fanon notes the French colonialist obsession with conquering Algeria through its women.[76] According to Fanon, the French population longed to "unveil" the Algerian woman so that she would appear more European (Fanon 25, my translation). [77] The Algerian who refused to unveil herself refused a certain "reciprocity" of desire demanded by European men (26). Therefore, the colonizer forcibly unveils the Algerian woman, so that he can see her, possess her, and ultimately conquer her. During the Algerian War, Algerian women who worked with the nationalist movements began unveiling themselves so they could enter into European quarters easily in order to plant bombs or gather intelligence.[78] The French military soon realized this strategy and began inspecting Algerian women dressed in European clothes more closely. Then, Algerian revolutionaries donned the haik in order to hide their arms and explosives and pass, once again, undetected. This conflict regarding unveiling created the conditions for the haik to become a tactic to undermine colonization: "On se voile par tradition, par séparation rigide des sexes, mais aussi parce que l'occupant veut dévoiler

[76] See chapter 1, "L'Algérie se dévoile," from Franz Fanon' Sociologie d'une revolution : L'an V de la révolution algérienne (1959)

[77] See Fanon: "The aggressivity of the occupier, whose hopes increased ten-fold after each face was uncovered. Each new unveiled Algerian woman was a sign to the occupier of an Algerian society whose defense systems were in the process of disruption, open and collapsing. Each veil that fell, each body that was liberated from the traditional grip of the haik, each face that offered itself to the brazen and impatient gaze of the occupier, expressed in a negative way that Algeria was beginning to renounce itself and accept the rape of the colonizer. The Algerian society with each abandoned veil seemed to accept sending herself to the master's school and deciding to change her customs under the direction and the patronage of the occupier" (24-5, my translation)

[78] In The Battle of Algiers, there is a scene in which Algerian women "Europeanize" in order to pass unnoticed into European quarters.

l'Algérie" ["One veils herself because of tradition, because of the rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier wants to unveil Algeria"] (Fanon 43). The haik, then, is a symbol of resistance to the colonial male gaze and to colonial oppression more broadly. In this photo, I contend that the women are allowing themselves to been seen by Riboud's camera but are refusing to be seen through the colonialist lens. Instead, by wearing the haik, these women refuse Riboud (an European man) access to their bodies, and they don a powerful symbol of Algerian resistance, which will transmit a message of defiance to the ex-colonizer. By being "hidden," these women get to be seen on their own terms. With this context in mind, the graffiti, "OUÏ" ["YES"] is an affirmation of independence, a return to local tradition, and a protest against the colonial oppressor: the French State.

In the photographs of the OAS graffiti, the pedestrians are depicted as peripheral to the graffiti writings, and they are also "terrorized" by said writings. However, in these two photographs of FLN graffiti, the pedestrians are the subjects of the image, and, therefore, control how they are sen. Although the graffiti supports the FLN, an organization that was characterized as "terrorist" by the French State, the writings do not propagate a climate of "terror." Instead, the inscriptions are positive and focused on messages of solidarity, and they welcome the passerby into a vision of Algerian nationalism. The ouï/oui in the second photograph also enjoins this exclamation, representing a joyous affirmation of an independent future for Algerian. If this graffiti is not an act of "terrorist" violence like the writings of the OAS, why include the FLN graffiti inscriptions in this conceptualization of a "terrorist geography"? I integrate the OAS and the FLN graffiti into one larger "terrorist geography" for two reasons: to challenge State designations of "terrorism" and to demonstrate how these inscriptions speak to each other despite their ideological differences. If, according to Branche, the "terrorist" instrumentalizes the civilian population in order to communicate a message to the State, both the OAS and the FLN graffiti qualify as metaphorical terrorist actions. For the

OAS, this message is one that contradicts the French State's desire to end the war and instead works to perpetuate French colonialism on Algerian soil. The FLN, on the other hand, writes messages that refuse French colonialism and express a desire for independence from French rule. Both OAS and FLN graffiti writings inscribe a narrative onto the walls of the city that controverts the power of the French State over Algeria, and it incorporates the pedestrian into that narrative, whether through surveillance or solidarity.



Image 1.5 *Algerie, Alger, juillet 1962*
Photograph by Marc Riboud, Magnum Photos



Image 1.6
Graffitis "Vive notre liberté," "Un seul héros le peuple," Algérie, 1963
Photograph by Elie Kagan

To conclude this first section, I analyze two more images of graffiti written by FLN sympathizers. These writings share the same inscription, which was a popular slogan of the FLN: "UN SEUL HÉROS LE PEUPLE" ["Only one hero, the people"]. [79] The first photograph was taken by Marc Riboud in Algiers on July 2nd, 1962 and the second in 1963 also in Algiers by Elie Kagan (Image 1.5, 1.6, pp. 48). In Kagan's photo, there is a second graffito, which is cut off by his framing, with the words "VIVE NOTRE LIBERTÉ" ["Long live our liberty!"]. This inscription reproduces the language of Riboud's photograph of the three men with the graffiti: "VIVE NOTRE PATRIE" ["Long live our fatherland!"] Like in Riboud's other photograph, this phrase (vive notre liberté) suggests that the revolution belongs to the people writing and reading the inscription—the revolution is conceived of as a ***collective*** liberation. The phrasing of the second inscription, "UN SEUL HÉROS LE PEUPLE" ["Only one hero, the people"] reinforces this idea; it both essentializes and unifies the people into a singular unit. In other words, there is "*un seul* héros," the singularity being highlighted by the use of the number one ["un"] and the adjective "only" ["seul"]. The second part of the phrase "le peuple" [the people] has the same effect; it employs a singular, collective noun "le peuple" [the people] to highlight the consensus and indivisibility of the nationalist struggle. Through this inscriptions, the writers project an unified (although somewhat deceiving) vision of an inclusive independence. [80]

The "passersby" captured in the photographs are transformed into revolutionaries by means of their co-existence with the revolutionary graffiti; rather than represented as targets of terrorist surveillance by the OAS, these pedestrians are imagined to be part of a triumphant

[79] See the book*, Un seul héros le peuple* by Mathieu Rigoste, which treats the history of the FLN and the Algerian War. Benjamin Stora also mentions this phrase as being associated to the FLN in *La gangrène et l'oubli. La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie*.

[80] Despite the FLN's unifying rhetoric, there was significant discord between groups fighting for Algerian independence. For example, violence and infighting between different groups for independence, especially the FLN and MNA, occurred throughout the war, especially during the early years. See the work of Benjamin Stora and Jean-Luc Einaudi, among others. In this way, the graffiti itself "hides" the terrorist attacks between groups.

political body, which has achieved its freedom. This is particularly manifest in Riboud's photograph in which a young woman and two boys are passing by the inscription, moving towards the left. In the image, their bodies intersect with the word "peuple" ["people"], aligning, then, *even* women and children, with this singular (masculine) heroic people.[81] The woman is wearing an Algerian haik with a Western dress and high heels underneath. Her haik marks her as an Algerian woman, while her European dress marks her concomitant Westernization. She is revealed to be a product of a colonial system, a woman who is both "Western" and "Eastern." In public, her haik acts an armor, one which symbolizes her allegiance to Algerian nationalism. By wearing both types of clothing, she can move more easily through neighborhoods, which were segregated by ethnicity, and, by extension, through the two worlds, the French and the Algerian. In addition, her Western dress, hidden beneath the Algerian haik, suggests a concordance between Algerian's fight for independence and the French Revolution. Like the French Revolution, which also foregrounded the seizure of power by the "people," the woman belongs to "a single [Algerian] people" fighting for their own, very similar, popular revolution.

In Kagan's photograph from 1963, the passerby is not walking but lounging between the two graffiti writings. His pose is nonchalant, in contrast with the cowering figure in the earlier OAS photograph taken by Kagan. This individual too is one who belongs to "the people," but his curious stance and the dilapidation of the scene behind him is not immediately "readable." Is the man satirizing the inscriptions, calling into question the freedom of independence, or is he unwinding, enjoying the post-war period? He is not like Riboud's subjects; neither is he moving forward in revolutionary fervor, like the young woman and two boys, nor is he posed for a revolutionary portrait, like the groups of men and

[81] The women and children are conceived of as part and parcel of the "people," and this may suggest that the women's role in independence is at least in part, due to their education of the household and propagation of children. See Fanon for more on this.

women. He also lies between two different colored walls (the one on the left darker, the one on the right lighter), as if lying between two different ages: the old, darker stage being the weight of colonial oppression against which the Algerian people fought prior to 1962 ("un seul héros le people") giving way to the new, lighter Algeria of "liberty" in 1962 ("vive notre liberté"). The walls behind the man also demonstrate signs of deterioration: the graffiti seems older and may have been written the year prior during independence. The man, too, appears alone in this decaying environment, which implies that he may be out of work or unhoused. Taken the year following independence, this photograph hints at the uncertainty of the political moment, especially as various actors struggle for power in Algeria. As in Riboud's photographs, the graffiti is part of the "background"; it operates as captions for the individuals, who are the focal point of the photograph. In this image, the man is literally "a single man" positioned underneath a graffito. His body becomes, in turn, a representative of the graffiti; he becomes a "single hero" that constitutes the Algerian population as a whole. The man is surrounded by the "shouts" of his compatriots, their graffitied words like speech bubbles around his head. Perhaps, in 1963, the Algerian hero has achieved the "liberty" to "rest" in his own country and in the city's streets, buoyed up by "one single" heroic people.

In conclusion, the historical graffiti written by opposing sides of the conflict (the FLN and the OAS) and captured by French photographers form a "terrorist geography"of the Algerian War in both Algiers and Paris. While the OAS graffiti surveils civilians who oppose them, the FLN graffiti welcomes the passersby who support them, envisaging them as fellow resistants in a larger political battle. The FLN graffiti, then, is not terrorist in the way that the OAS graffiti is; in other words, it does not target civilians with violence or violent rhetoric as the OAS graffiti does. However, it is still defined as "terrorist" according to Branche's definition: it disseminates a counter-narrative *to* civilians that contradicts what the State is propagating and encourages "terrorist" action through participation in the FLN. By weaving

together these two different types of graffiti into one larger "terrorist geography," I interrogate the nebulous nature of this designation. What is deemed "terrorist" is always decided by the nexus of State power rather than the desires of the people. I also suggest the importance of the mediation of graffiti through photography. Only through photographs, which immortalize the historical moment, do we have access to images of these graffitis. Only through this preservation can we *see* visually and *read* metaphorically the formulation of the "terrorist geography." Thanks to this remediation through photography, I haved traced how these urban writings assert themselves in opposition to the other and how they relay information to those on the ground through their material presence in urban space. Although deriving from opposite fronts of the War and through opposite methods, this geography remains united in its opposition to the French State and its attempts to incorporate the passerby into this opposition.

Encountering Historical Graffiti in October 17th Fiction

The first French novel to depict October 17th, 1961, Didier Daeninckx's *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984), *also* depicts Algerian War graffiti that bears a striking resemblance to the historical OAS graffiti. [82] In a short scene at the beginning of the novel, two Algerian siblings living in Nanterre, on the outskirts of Paris, ride a moped into the city in order to join the October 17th protest. On their way, this pair, Aounit and Kaïra, encounter a graffiti inscription written on a watertower:

> Aounit patientait au bout de la rue. [Kaïra] parvint à sa hauteur en courant au bout des pieds sans toujours réussir à éviter les flaques d'eau et de boue. Elle serra un foulard sur ses cheveux, s'installa sur la mobylette derrière son frère et s'accrocha à sa taille. Ils traversèrent les rues de Nanterre vidées par la pluie. Au passage, elle reconnut

[82] For more on Daeninckx's novels and their connection to historical events, see "Didier Daeninck: Raconteur of History" (Donald Reid 2010) and the France Culture podcast, "Didier Daeninckx, fou d'histoire."

> l'usine de sable avec son tapis élévateur et bien après les jardins ouvriers, le château d'eau juché sur ses quatre pieds de béton. Trois jours auparavant, une équipe venue de la cité de transit avait osé, en plein jour, escalader l'édifice pour ajouter aux trois lettres peintes en blanc O.A.S. le I et le S qui faisaient de la réserve d'eau une OASIS (25).
>
> ["Aountit was waiting at the end of the street. [Kaïra] caught up to her, running on her tiptoes, although she couldn't avoid all the puddles of water and mud. She wrapped a scarf around her hair, got on the moped behind her brother and held on to his waist. They crossed the streets of Nanterre, empty from the rain. Along the way, she recognized the sand factory with its conveyor belt, and, past the workers' gardens, the water tower perched on its four concrete legs. Three days before, a crew from the transit housing project had dared, in broad daylight, to climb the building to add the letters I and S to the three letters painted in white O.A.S., turning the water reservoir into an OASIS"]

This fictional OAS graffiti is a literary representation of the historical OAS "anti-tag," which, I have argued, marks the city in order to maintain control over it. The graffiti's location, in the *bidonville* of Nanterre (with its large population of Algerian immigrants) and on top of the water tower, which looms over the city, insinuates that the OAS is montoring the neighborhood, searching for FLN sympathizers. Furthemore, the characters' encounter with it on October 17th, 1961 situates this tag in its historical context, which highlights how Daeninckx intermingles historical fact and fictional representation in his novel. [83] In other words, this anti-tag, although imagined by Daeninckx, could have been modeled after an actual graffiti inscription, like the one captured in Kagan's photograph of Paris.

[83] The tower is an embodiment of Foucault's ideas about discipline and punishment, namely that modern power exerts control by hierarchical observation.

In addition, this passage proposes a re-writing or editing of the graffiti inscription. Fighting against the "terrorist geography" of the fictionalized O.A.S. in Paris, a team from the bidonville ("une équipe de la cité de transit") scaled the water tower and adds two more letters (25). This group "dared" to challenge the supremacy of the O.A.S. through two actions: first, by climbing the water tower in the middle of the day ("en plein jour") and, thus, making their challenge visible to all, and second, by transforming the O.A.S. tag into the word, "OASIS." This "edit" alters the emotional charge of the urban landscape—from one of fear, where the O.A.S. is watching the inhabitants from the tower and possibly enacting violence against them, to one of tranquility. If the water tower is a physical "oasis" because it contains water in the middle of the city (a "desert"), it becomes a figurative "oasis" through the graffiti inscription. [84] The writing itself produces an oasis, or a "refuge," from the violence of the OAS.[85] Despite the irony that Aounit and Kaïra pass by the OAS(IS) graffiti on the way to the October 17th protest, where they will eventually be killed, the initiative of the graffiti writers to alter the OAS graffiti in broad daylight speaks to both the boldness of the taggers to transgress geographies of terror, as well as the fictional siblings' audacity to participate in the demonstration. Unfortunately, the peaceful protestors of October 17th will soon be terrorized by the Parisian police, just like they were by the OAS and their urban inscriptions. All the same, the creative inscription impinges upon the OAS' terror tactics in much the same way that the October 17th protest impinges upon the machinations of the French State.

[84] For more on this topic, see Brozgal's Absent the Archive: Cultural Traces of a Massacre in Paris (2020), Chadia Chambers-Samadi's Représsion des manifestants algériens : la nuit meurtrière du 17 octobre 1961 (2016), and Michel Laronde's Résurgence de l'histoire dans la fiction : les massacres du 17 octobre 1961 (2021)

[85] These two definitions come from the Oxford English Dictionary. The first is "originally: a fertile place in the Libyan desert. Now: any fertile spot in a desert, where water can be found." The second is: "A place or period of calm or pleasure in the midst of a difficult or hectic situation; a place of relief, a refuge."

The OASIS example in *Meurtres pour memoire*, then, falls in line with Crane's understanding of the FLN's graffiti within Algiers; it is as a way to carve out a "space of projective hope" for the Algerian people, this time in Paris. In *Les Caves de la Goutte d'Or,* another fictional novel concerned with the memory of October 17th, the protagonist, Chloé, a young researcher in the 1990s, who publishes a 1961 anonymous police manifesto denouncing the violence by police officers on October 17th, is subsequently stalked by the former police chief who participated in the massacre.[86] Following a near-death encounter with the chief, she is contacted by another man called Roland who claims to have authored the manifesto. Chloé arranges a meeting with him, despite her fears regarding his intentions, and she encounters a graffito on the way to this meeting: "En chemin, elle vit un signe prémonitoire — et encourageant — dans un tag, rue Doudeauville, à la hauteur des numéros 25-31, sur le mur d'un imposant immeuble aux allures prétentieuses et pourtant à l'abandon. Il était simplement écrit : 17 OCT 61" ["En route, she saw a prophetic—and encouraging—sign in a graffiti tag, rue Doudeauville, written near the street numbers 25-31, on the wall of an imposing building, pretentious and yet abandoned"] (Streiff 148). The function of this "tag" in the story is evident, at least to her: it assures her that she is justified in pursuing the truth about October 17th, despite what it has cost her thus far.[87] The graffiti in both these novels serve as inspirations to the passersby during moments of civil disobedience, to Kaïra and Anouit on October 17th and to Chloe in her encounters with the police.

Trans-historical Terrorist Geographies in Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999)

[86] This police manifesto is a historical manifesto released anonymously by police officers in 1961 after October 17th 1961.

[87] If we consider this inscription another point on the "terrorist [graffiti] geography" in the context of Ocotber 17th, it would be point that could not be "read" by a general audience. So, it seems to be something specific for Chloé. Still, it leaves a trace, even for the reader who knows nothing, that encourages the passerby to research this event.

These two examples demonstrate how the "terrorist geography" of Algerian War graffiti transcends the historical and actual walls of the city, installing itself in fictional representations of the city as well. In this next section, I focus on perhaps the most famous literary work that addresses both graffiti and October 17th 1961—Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999). In the novella, an Algerian journalist named Omer writes three graffiti memorials commemorating those who were murdered on October 17th by the Parisian police and, in this way, he too contributes to the historical and fictional "terrorist geography" of the Algerian War. Although belated, Omer's graffiti implicates the passerby (the civilian population) and utilizes them as an instrument to target the French State and highlight their dangerous attempts to control the Algerian population. The modus operandi of Omer's graffiti differs from the historical examples because of its memorial nature and its explicit "correction" of existing memorial sites. Instead of using graffiti to directly influence participants in the Algerian War, Omer's graffiti demands that the passerby share, *in his or her body*, the experience of Algerians on October 17th. This second part of the argument is, in part, derived from the research of social anthropologist Paul Connerton, who argues that memory is a social phenomenon that is passed down through performative bodily practices. The body's capacity for recording memory is especially evident in habitual practices, such as walking and writing: "[i]n habitual memory, the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body" (72). Like the sediment at the bottom of a wine bottle, our habitual past "sinks down" into the bottom of our bodies and engrains itself therein. This same past is then activated through national, social, cultural and familial (bodily) practices, such as religious rituals of bowing in prayer or culturally specific ways of eating at the dinner table. In keeping with Connerton's ideas, I argue that, in Sebbar's novella, graffiti is a "performative" bodily practice of

memory—one that urges not just the graffiti writer but the walker (the passerby) to actively "remember" past events.[88]

In *How Societies Remember*, Connorton identifies two kinds of social practices associated with memory: incorporating and inscribing. An "incorporating practice" is an ephemeral action that persists only as long as the action is being performed. An "inscribing practice" sustains memory longer through various forms of media, such as writing, filming, and drawing. Graffiti, as it were, engages with both incorporation and inscription.[89] Writing the graffiti is an incorporating practice, as are encounters with the passerby because walking is an incorporating practice (Connerton 77). However, the writing itself is an example of an inscribing practice, one which literally inscribes a memory onto another medium. The photographer who captures graffiti through a lens further inscribes this memory. Graffiti derives its power from its double nature: both lasting and fleeting, corporeal and textual, inscribing and incorporating. With Connerton's theory in mind, I argue that Omer's graffiti is an embodied memorial practice. Just as monuments establish a physical site where an individual can revisit a memory through their bodily presence, Omer's graffiti does something similar. By marking the wall, it invites the pedestrian to remember something that occurred at a particular location *through their bodies*. The body of the pedestrian, then, experiences the place where the tramautic memory occurred, incorporating it (in Connerton's sense) into their own bodies and, by extension, their own memories.

This argument is also derived from the work of two other theorists of the body—Henri Bergson and Dylan Trigg. In 1896, Henri Bergson wrote *Matière et mémoire* in which

[88] In her research on early modern graffiti in Italy, Veronique Plesch makes a similar argument that graffiti enacts an embodied form of memory. The writing of graffiti on the walls of the Italian frescos served as a way of re-living and inscribing the memory through both the act of the writing and the trace of the writing itself. See "Memory on the Wall" (2002).

[89] Connerton notes that most practices contain some elements of both inscription and incorporation. However, it seems to me that graffiti relies on the interplay of both types of practices for its power.

he argued that, memory is inseparable from bodily perception. Perception is defined by Bergson as the range of infinite possibilities that a body can take in response to any outside stimulus. In order for the body to imagine these possibilities, it must remember what has happened to it before: "[l]a mémoire, pratiquement inséparable de la perception, intercale le passé dans le présent, contracte aussi dans une intuition unique des moments multiples de la durée…" ["memory, pratically inseperable from perception, interleaves the past in the present, contracts also multiple moments of duration in an unique intuition"] (114). It must also look towards the future; memory is the "synthèse du passé et du present en vue de l'avenir…" ["synthesis of the past and the present with a view to the future…"] (270). Thus, for Bergson, memory transcends the past and encompasses the present and future. Hence our body is the tool through which we access memory, through which we access this past, present, and the future.

Drawing on Bergson, phenomenologist Dylan Trigg adds a third factor to the body-memory equation. He argues that the body actually acts as the intermediary between memory and place (10). He writes: "we can thus speak of memory in terms of its being as much bound with subjectivity as it is the materiality of objects in the world. In a word, *the places in which we live, live in us*. More precisely, those places live in our bodies, instilling an eerie sense of our own embodied selves as being sites of a spatial history that is visible and invisible, present and absent" (33). This relationship also goes the other way. If the body holds these places within it, these places that our body encounters can also reveal the hidden "sites" of history contained within our own bodies. What I want to suggest with the words of Connerton, Bergson, and Trigg is the following: by encountering (and reading) a piece of memorial graffiti, the passerby is experiencing at once both the coterminous relationship between past, present, and future (Bergson) and that of body, place, and memory (Trigg).

The final theoretical thread connecting body, place, and memory in Sebbar's novel is that of Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which Michael Rothberg (and others) have attributed to Sebbar's novel. For Hirsch, post-memory is a "structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience…a consequence of traumatic recall but…at a generational remove" (106). In other words, post-memory is the transmission of a tramautic memory to a generation that did not experience it. In particular, she uses it to describe memoirs written by the "second-generation" or children of Holocaust survivors. A central element to post-memory is that, rather than transmitted through traditional narrative means, it is often transmitted through the "language of the body," or bodily symptoms like illness or nightmares (112). Due to the tramautic nature of events like the Holocaust, survivors avoid speaking directly about the horrors witnessed, and yet they still manage to transfer the weight of the traumatic memory (and the emotions associated) to their children. Through this logic of embodiment, the unprocessed trauma of the first generation, is "passed down" to the second-generation, and it forges the latter's desire to "reembody" the past—a past which they cannot access because it does not truly belong to them (111).[90]

Although Hirsch's work concentrates on the Holocaust, Catherine Brun makes use of Hirsch's concept of postmemory to describe the phenomenon experienced by the children of those affected by the Algerian War (71). Like Hirsch, Catherine Brun proposes that the creation of post-memory gives the second-generation the ability to write themselves back into the "chain" of "memory transmission" when it comes to the Algerian War (69, my translation). According to Brun, creation is a key element of postmemory, especially as it

[90] "Postmemorial work….strives to reactivate and reembody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (Hirsch 111).

relates to the Algerian War—because "this past is not available: it must be (re)found, (re) constitutied, fabulated" (69, my translation).

In *La Seine était rouge*, all three of the main characters (Louis, Amel, and Omer) belong to the "second-generation" of the Algerian War, and they all seek to bring knowledge about October 17th back into their lives. All three connect to the event through alternative methods (graffiti, film, and map-making); in their own ways, each character accesses a history that has been largely eliminated from the traditional modes of remembrance, such as education, memorials, and public discourse.[91] In addition to Omer's graffiti-writing, Louis films a documentary about the events, while Amel becomes a "revisionist cartographer" through her ambulatory trajectories with Omer, which "reconfigure the map of Paris in a way that charts an invisible spatial and historical reality" (Brozgal 150). Through graffiti writing, revisionist cartography and documentary filmmaking, Omer, Amel and Louis (to a lesser extent) re-embody their parents' memories of the Algerian War and practice a form of postmemory (Rothberg 299). [92] Moreover, Omer's graffiti advances the postmemory practice of embodiment further by asking the public to also *re-embody* the memories of October 17th through their physical engagement with the place of trauma (i.e. by passing by and reading the inscription).

The plurality of mediums undertaken by the fictional characters is reflected in Sebbar's own complex literary construction. Sebbar weaves together the story of October 17th from a variety of perspectives, from *harki* to FLN militant to café owner, and does so by

[91] It is widely agreed upon by scholars of October 17th that the French government actively worked to obscure this event from public knowledge.

[92] Although all three of the young protagonists search for the memory of October 17th, it is Omer and Amel's methods (graffiti writing and mapping through walking) that "reembody" the past while Louis' filming keeps the history at a remove from his own body. Perhaps this is beacuse Omer and Amel, as Algerian and Franco-Algerian, are more "bodily" connected to the event than Louis, "Français de souche." As historian Ahmed Boubeker argues, Algerians are "porteurs de l'héritage de la guerre d'Algérie"; therefore, they are corporeal carriers of both the "expérience de la domination" as well as the "lutte pour la reconnaissance" (103).

intertwining narrative chapters with testimonial chapters that are meant to replicate clips from Louis' documentary. Jonathan Lewis suggests that Sebbar uses a "plurality and complexity" of voices to "fill in the blanks" about October 17th, or to do exactly what Amel, Louis and Omer seek to do: understand what exactly *happened* on that night (312). Because of this profusion of voices, Sebbar's novella highlights the "gaps and blanks" of memory demonstrating its "incompleteness, fragmentation, and silence" (309, 314). Similarly, Lia Brozgal asserts that Sebbar's novel reveals the "complexities and inadequacies of retrieval and representation"; however, she argues, in contrast with Lewis, that Sebbar's text still manages to "establish[es] new paths" to memory (146). Michael Rothberg has also commented on the "'inter-medial'" nature of Sebbar's novel which, he argues, lends itself well to a "multidirectional" reading (304). In a similar vein, Dawn Fulton contends that the novel represents a "palimpsestic mapping of memory and narrative," which has "an asymmetrical, prismatic quality that insists on the interpenetration of apparently incompatible voices" (28-29). Notwithstanding subtle differences in approach and vocabulary, Sebbar scholars all affirm that the novella performs a complex memory of October 17th, one which challenges the reader both because of its plurality of perspectives and its conflicting memories. Omer's graffiti, then, participates in this polyphony of voices that remember October 17th 1961. His writings, in particular, contest State-sanctioned memories of the event (and of the Algerian War more generally), foregrounding the violence of the Parisian police, which was not officially recognized until 2012 with a statement from President François Hollande.[93]

[93] The contents of this declaration are rather sparse. Hollande recognizes the event but is not specific about the State's role in this tragedy: "Le 17 octobre 1961, des Algériens qui manifestaient pour le droit à l'indépendance ont été tués lors d'une sanglante répression. La République reconnaît avec lucidité ces faits. Cinquante et un ans après cette tragédie, je rends hommage à la mémoire des victimes" ["October 17th, 1961, Algerians that were protesting for the right to independence were killed during a bloody repression. The Republic recognizes with lucidity these facts. Fifty-one years after this tragedy, I pay homage to the memory of the victims"] (Hollande).

Omer writes graffiti on three different historical sites in Paris—the Hôpital de la Santé, the Hôtel de Crillon, and the Saint-Michel fountain—all connected to the Algerian War and October 17th . At the Hôpital de Santé, he notes that Algerian resistants were imprisoned and guillotined during the war. At the Hôtel de Crillon, he writes that Algerians were massacred by Parisian police on October 17th, and, at the quay near Saint Michel fountain, he states that Algerians were killed for independence on October 17th. Each of these locations are also sites related to World War II: the hospital where French Resistants were imprisoned in November 1940, the hotel which was transformed into an Axis headquarters during the war, and the fountain where French Resistants fought the German occupants in the August 1944 insurrection. These sites demonstrate the "multidirectional memory" of various conflicts, revealing interconnections between World War II and the Algerian War, and the "palimpsestic" nature of the city in relation to these memories.[94] Just as Omer's graffiti layers spray paint onto the wall, it also layers the Algerian War onto the Second World War. Furthermore, these sites are what Trigg would call a "ruin": "a location of memory, where trauma took place and continues to be inextricably bound with that location in both an affective and evidential manner" (262).Omer's graffiti inscriptions are, to quote Laïla Amine, "traces" of the historic past, or, a trace of a "ruin" (164). By positioning themselves near landmarks related to World War II, these writings also challenge the "sanctioned Parisian mnemonic landscape" (160).[95]

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[94] For more on the city as a palimpsest of memory, see Andreas Hussyen's *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (2003).

[95] "As a medium of expression, graffiti has been 'historically represented as peripheral and subversive and (related) to contents (such as characters, narratives, sceneries) that exhibit criticism or dissidence.' By deploying graffiti, Sebbar calls attention to forms of representation deemed illicit and illegitimate. She does not seek to insert censored voices of the past into a national narrative that would thus become more pluralistic. Their presence does not celebrate the nation. Instead, graffiti represents unequal access to the public sphere and a tenacious collective desire to publicize conflicting stories of the past. Through its use, the author calls for a model of commemoration that is participatory, risk-prone, and dissonant. By contrast, the sanctioned Parisian mnemonic landscape appears as an institutionalized consensus of the past achieved through exclusion." (Amine 160).

In this way, the graffiti that Omer performs is both the same as, and different from the Algerian War graffiti "terrorist geography." On one level, his writings plot locations of State violence onto the walls of the city and urge the passerby to confront them. On another level, these sites of tramautic memory (or "ruins") are transformed into sites of contestation by Omer's graffiti; in an a perhaps unwitting recuperation of Amel's concept, his own writings become "pins" that trace a "terrorist geography." Rather than commemorating French resistance to oppression, Omer comments on the violence perpetrated *against* civilians *by* the Parisian police—in other words, he comments on the oppression of the French State. By suppressing the peaceful protest with violence, the State used the civilian population to send a message to the Algerian nationalist movement. The State enacted its own terrorism against its civilian population, and the graffiti maps that terrorism onto the geography of the city. In this way, by charting the State's terror, Omer's graffiti itself *is* a "terrorist geography"; like the writings of the OAS and FLN, it challenges the State's own narrative associated with October 17th, and it targets civilians in doing so.

A narrative peculiarity around these graffiti writings is that Omer's act of writing is never actually described by the narrator. Instead, the reader must "read" the graffiti through a secondary medium—that of Louis' film camera. The first graffiti appears early in the novel. Amel, Omer and Louis all cross paths on the Rue de la Santé near Louis' apartment in the 14th arrondissement. Omer, leads the trio to the corner of the street and reads "outloud" the marble plaque fixed to the nearby Prison de la Santé:

'EN CETTE PRISON

LE 11 NOVEMBRE 1940

FURENT INCARCÉRÉS

DES LYCÉENS ET DES ÉTUDIANTS

QUI À L'APPEL DE GENERAL DE GAULLE

SE DRESSÈRENT LES PREMIERS

CONTRE L'OCCUPANT' (Sebbar 20).

['ON NOVEMBER 11 1940

IN THIS PRISON WERE HELD

HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

WHO, AT THE CALL OF GENERAL DE GAULE,

WERE THE FIRST TO RISE UP

AGAINST THE OCCUPATION'

(translated in Mortimer 14).]

After his reading, Omer sarcastically introduces the idea of writing graffiti here to Louis:

> [Omer] se tourne vers Louis : 'Tu sais ce que je vais faire ? Tout de suite, là, chez toi, puisque tu habites en face de l'entrée d'honneur ? Tu as des feuilles de papier blanc et un feutre ? Sinon on peut bomber sur le mur, c'est peut-être mieux, ça partira pas, incrusté dans la pierre…Tu as une bombe rouge ? Je le ferai cette nuit' (20-21).
>
> [[Omer] turns to Louis : "Do you know what I'm going to do ? Right away, over there, at your house, since you live in front of the main entrance? Do you have white paper and a felt tipped marker? If not, we can spray bomb graffiti on the wall; that's probably better. It won't come off, etched in the stone…Do you have red paint? I'll do it tonight" (translated in Mortimer 14)].

By repeating the pronoun "tu," by deciding to write *in front of* Louis' apartment ("chez toi, puisque tu habites en face de l'entrée d'honneur"), and by posing a series of questions to Louis about the graffiti production ("Tu as des feuilles…tu as une bombe rouge ?"), Omer expresses his willingness to incorporate Louis into a collective graffiti practice, even if he does so to provoke Louis. Omer also subtly sollicits Louis' (and Amel's complicity) in the act by using the third person pronoun "on": "on peut bomber sur le mur." However, by the end of

his monologue, he settles taking control of the writing himself: "je le ferai cette nuit." Just as Amel asked Omer to read "aloud" the newspaper's recounting of the massacres so she could envision the resulting "terrorist geography," Omer reads "aloud" the plaque which will form the basis of his own terrorist geography.

In this monologue, Omer envisages a method for his graffiti writing that will plot the events of October 17th onto the walls of the city. Although he suggests a collage at first, he edits his plan by stating that spray painting the wall would make more sense because of its longevity: "ça partira pas, incrusté dans la pierre" ["it won't come off, etched in the stone"]. Somewhat naively, he suggests that his graffiti is permanent and that it will become a fixture of the wall as if carved into the stone. Like a parasite, his inscriptions will, effectively, become integrated into the city's walls.[96] Normally conceived of as ephemeral, graffiti is reconceived of here as eternal, a part of the stone walls of the city—as well as the history of said city. Perhaps this statement, rather than being serious, is one of stubborn hope that this history might persist in the public space of remembrance. Finally, Omer chooses the color red for his spray paint. The French verb for spray paint is "bomber," a word which carries connotations of violence, and which seems to be used here, along with the color red, to allude to the novella's title, *La Seine était rouge,* a phrase that is repeated by different witnesses throughout the text, as they discuss the bloodshed by the Parisian police on October 17th. Interestingly enough, like Omer's bloodred graffiti which is never "shed" for the reader but is, instead, passed to us through Louis' camera, the witnesses who claim the Seine was "red" with blood in Sebbar's novel admit to never actually seeing the bloodshed with their own

[96] According to the Larousse dictionary, the verb "incruster" has several meanings: to enhance an object with an additional material, to inlay, as well as to replace a defective stone in a wall. When it relates to minerals, it can mean a process by which certain waters cover a body or object with a deposit of minerals or how minerals deposit themselves by adhering to a surface. All of these definitions are particularly interesting in relationship to graffiti. Graffiti, then, is "incrusté dans la pierre" ; it is not just superimposed but inlayed into the wall itself, becoming a part of it. Moreover, it replaces a "defective stone" or a false history about France's past with a solid story, one built on truth. Finally, graffiti is portrayed as a mineral process of layering over the body of the city.

eyes. In much the same way, Amel never actually sees the bloodshed of the Algerian Civil War but still marks it in her pins on her map. Omer's graffiti, like Amel's mapping, illuminates the hidden violence that occurred in Paris, through indirect reports of these moments of bloodshed. In a city, the color red marks places where one must stop (stop signs and lights, indicators on a map); similarly, Omer's graffiti operates as stopping points to the passerby, places where they might halt their trajectory and read about the blood that was shed in that location. Hence, Omer's graffiti is an insurgent inscription, tracing the blood that has dried in the stone walls of the street; these "terrorist" writings become points on a "terrorist geography" calling out the State's terror and, effectively mapping it for the civilian.

Omer, himself, does not claim to be writing a terrorist geography. Instead, he states that the graffiti is about remembering: "Je veux juste *rappeler* ce qui s'est passé entre ces murs" (20, italics are mine) ["I just want to acknowledge what happened inside these walls" (translation 14)]. Furthermore, the graffiti that he writes later replicates the grammar and content of the commemorative plaque that he read "aloud" for Louis and Amel:

> Louis filme le mur de la prison, à l'angle de la rue de la Santé et du boulevard Arago, la plaque commémorative fixée sur la pierre et à droite, les lettres rouges bombées :
>
> '1954-1962
>
> DANS CETTE PRISON
>
> FURENT GUILLOTINÉS
>
> DES RESISTANTS ALGERIENS
>
> QUI SE DRESSERENT
>
> CONTRE L'OCCUPANT FRANÇAIS .'
>
> ["Louis films the prison wall, at the corner of Rue de la Santé and Arago Boulevard, with the commemorative plaque fixed to the stone, and on the right of it, red graffiti letters:

1954-1962

IN THIS PRISON

WERE GUILLOTINED

ALGERIEN RESISTERS

WHO ROSE UP

AGAINST THE FRENCH OCCUPATION" (translation 15)]

Several scholars have highlighted how Omer uses his graffiti to both memorialize the victims of October 17th and draw parallels between France's actions during the Algerian War and Germany's actions during World War II. Just as Nazi Germany ("l'occupant") committed acts of violence against members of the French Resistance ("des étudiants et des lycéens"), the French Republic ("l'occupant français") committed acts of violence against members of the Algerian Resistance ("des résistants algériens"). Omer's graffiti writing equates the French Resistants with Algerian Resistants for both having stood up ("se dressèrent") against their occupiers.[97] Laïla Amine explains how this inscription "challenge[s] hegemonic French collective memories through juxtaposition and mimicry" (161). Brozgal notes that "the tag creates an implicit adequation between the German occupation of France and the French colonial forces occupying Algeria" (152). Rothberg observes that the graffiti is written "alongside" of the original plaque, rather than on top of it, which suggests its "multidirectional" nature; in other words, Omer creates a memory of October 17th that is not in competition with memories of October 17th, but, rather, connected to them (299). Omer's graffiti is both a point his own "terrorist geography" *and* a rogue memorial. Like the historical examples, it is a terrorist tactic of war, but one that fights for the past to infiltrate the present, one that battles for an accurate memory of the Algerians during the war.

[97] The use of the verb "stood up" invokes a visual image of the body of the resistants, that both metaphorically and literally "stands" up to oppression of the French State.

By mediating Omer's graffiti through Louis' camera's lens and the written word of the novel itself, Sebbar layers mediatic forms and suggests that graffiti (and October 17th memory) operates in this same layered fashion. Omer's graffiti is only "incrusté" in the novel because of Louis' film camera. Just as Omer layers the graffiti physically on top of the walls, Sebbar layers the graffiti on to multiple forms of media (graffiti captured by film captured by the novel). This textual overlay recreates the metaphorical overlay of Omer's graffiti, which superimposes memories of colonial violence on a wall that speaks of German occupation and its violence.[98] Louis' filming also gives itself over to a logic of graffiti : it reproduces a type of layering of temporalities, allowing past to come to the present. This disjuncture between past and present is highlighted even more by Sebbar's conflation of time: "Louis filme le mur de la prison…La voiture de police qui passe ne remarque rien. Amel et Omer regardent le film de Louis. Plusieurs fois" (21-22) ["The police car passing by doesn't notice anything unusual" (translation 15)]. All three sentences use the present tense, which suggests that they are happening within the chronology of the text. However, we know that, at this point in the narration, Amel and Omer have already seen his film, and that this present tense is referring to a past moment. These tenses, like the graffiti itself, show the ways in which temporalities (past, present, future) always infiltrate one another, like Bergson suggested. This fluid temporality also reflects how Omer's graffiti writing brings the bloodshed of the past into the present so that the passerby can encounter it (and move towards a different future).

How, though does the fictional passerby actually interact with Omer's graffiti? Louis, the first passerby, captures the graffiti on his camera. But, what about pedestrians who do not already know the origin story of the graffiti? In this first example, the lone "passerby" is the

[98] Lia Brozgal: "In a bid to make readable a story that has no textual presence in the city, [Omer] gives himself over to the renegade act of tagging, inscribing Algerian history onto the existing moments of Paris" (150). Laïla Amine: [Omer's inscriptions] identify sites scarred by colonial violence and bloodshed as they superimpose the postcolonial vision onto a republican one" (162).

police car (literally, "the police car that *passing by*"). The police car, a metonym for the police and for the State as a whole, is personified; it is not the officers that "pass" without "noticing" anything but the car itself. In this way, the police car is a passerby *without a body*; as such, it cannot "encounter" the memory of October 17th corporeally. Without being "on the ground" like a pedestrian, the police cannot (or refuses to) confront the historical reality, the lived experience of October 17th. Therefore, the police car and its ignorance of the graffiti operate as an allegory for the governmental silence surrounding October 17th. As House and MacMaster have uncovered in their historical research, police officers who participated in the massacre received amnesties when the Algerian War ended in 1962, as did military officers who participated in torture and other unlawful acts of war.[99] Despite the knotty nature of this event's obfuscation, there is one benefit to the "ignorance" of Sebbar's fictional police. In her 1990s Paris, where graffiti has become commonplace, the police do not notice it, and, therefore, do not see it as a threat.[100] In this way, Sebbar illustrates the possibility for the renewal of memory about October 17th, through the materiality of graffiti. Perhaps another passerby will have the opportunity to encounter the memory before it gets erased.

Halfway through the novella, Omer and Amel visit the Crillon Hotel at the Place Concorde, where Omer's writes his second graffiti inscription. They visit this hotel because Amel's mother mentions it in the documentary:

> On a rencontré Flora par hasard, elle nous a dit que la Concorde c'était dangereux. La police matraquait des Algériens. Les flics avaient des mitraillettes. Son ami photographe lui a montré des photos de la station Concorde, quelques semaines plus tard, je les ai vues. Sur le quai du métro, des hommes, des Algériens, sont parqués, les

[99] For more on police amnesty during the Algerian War, see the works of Benjamin Stora, Jim House, and Neil MacMaster.

[100] For more on the explosion of graffiti in the 1990s, see chapter four of this dissertation.

> mains sur la tête, c'est une rafle…Juste devant un hôtel fameux, je l'ai jamais vu, Flora m'a dit son nom, ça ressemble à 'Grillon,' demande-lui, les flics ont raflé des Algériens (Sebbar 65-66).
>
> ["We met Flora by chance, and she told us that Concorde was dangerous. The police were clubbing Algerians. The cops had machine guns. Her photographer friend showed her photos of the Concorde station, several weeks later. I saw them. On the metro platform, men, Algerians, are being held with their hands on their heads. It's a roundup…They are brought as far as a famous hotel, one I had never seen. Flora told me the name of it; it sounds like 'Grillon.' Ask her; the cops rounded up Algerians" (translation 65-66).]

Although she is not physically present at Concorde on the night of October 17th, Amel's mother remembers hearing that the "Grillon" hotel (a mispronounciation of the Crillon Hotel) was the site of police violence against Algerians. Her mispronounciation of the name of the Hotel indicates her lack of knowledge about the elite centers of Paris. Those who come from Nanterre, like Amel's mother, are shut out of the city center, where the "French" citizens live, and relegated to the periphery of the city, where the "immigrants" live. This small comment reveals the historical spatial segregation of Paris that House and MacMaster discuss in their work on October 17th and which the FLN protestors were trying to combat by entering the city centers. Moreover, in French, a "grillon" is a cricket. Her mistake also highlights the dehumanization of the Algerians at this particular site: attempting to speak for themselves through the protest (i.e. chirp like a cricket), the Algerians were crushed underfoot by the Parisian police. On another level, it foreshadows the "chirping" of Omer, or the writing to come, which will reveal the lies of the French police. Although she has also "never seen" the

hotel, she has "seen" and can testify to the photographs of men being arrested at the Concorde metro station, which is a reference to a real photograph taken by Elie Kagan.[101]

Following in her footsteps, as they have been since the start of the novella, Amel and Omer visit the hotel:

> Omer et Amel entrent dans l'hôtel de Crillon. Les deux chasseurs les suivent. Omer dit qu'il a réservé une chambre. Les chasseurs les accompagnent jusqu'à la réception. Omer tend la main : "Chambre 7."
>
> Sur le chapiteau de l'hôtel, on peut voir, en levant la tête, une statue d'une femme, allongée en odalisque, entourée des enfants nus, des Cupidon. De chaque côté du chapiteau, une cuirasse en pierre, vide.
>
> Un employé de l'hôtel sort du métro Concorde. Il reste un long moment debout devant la façade de l'hôtel. Il lit les lettres rouge fluo :
>
> ICI DES ALGERIENS ONT ÉTÉ MATRAQUÉS SAUVAGEMENT
>
> PAR LA POLICE DU PRÉFET PAPON LE 17 OCTOBRE 1961. (Sebbar 67-8)
>
> [Omer and Amel enter the Crillon hotel. The two door men follow them in. Omer says that he has reserved a room. The doormen accompany them to the front desk. Omer puts out his hand: "Room 7."
>
> On the hotel cornice, you can see, if you look up, the statue of a woman, lying like an odalisque, surrounded by naked children, little Cupids. On each side of the cornice, there is an empty stone shield.
>
> A hotel employee leaves the Concorde metro. He stands for a long time in front of the hotel façade. He reads red inked letters:
>
> ON THIS SPOT ALGERIANS WERE SAVAGELY BEATEN

[101] See Kagan, *Le 17 octobre 1961* (La Contemporaine at Nanterre). When Noria uses the verb "rafler" (to round up, to raid) to describe the police's actions towards Algerians on October 17th, she draws an implicit parallel between WWII and the Algerian War, with Vichy's regimes "rounding up" of Jewish Parisians for deportation to concentration campus under German occupation.

BY PREFECT PAPON'S POLICE ON OCTOBER 17 1961 (translation 67)].

As with the first graffiti, the omniscient narrator does not narrate the act of graffiti writing, only provides us with the completed graffiti. One must infer that Omer (and maybe Amel) are the graffiti writers based on context clues: their entrance into the hotel, the use of red spray paint, and the content of the graffiti. This second inscription is more targeted than the first: it specifies the perpetrators and victims, the location, and date. The strong connotations of the words "matraqués" and "sauvagement" indicates the severity of the crime (the police "savagely beat" the Algerian protestors). Moreover, the inscription turns colonialist language back on the colonizer as it is the French police and not the Algerian protestors who are the "savages." Finally, the writing also "activates" the memory of another important piece of historical graffiti, written in 1961 on the quai of the Seine by J.-M. Mension (Brozgal 153). This historical graffiti, which reads ICI ON NOIE LES ALGERIENS, utilizes the same formulation as Omer's graffiti, beginning with the deictic, "ici," as do many Parisian commemorative plaques. By indicating the site of the violence ("here"), both the historical and fictional graffiti draw attention to the *place* where the violence happened. In addition, both graffiti examples highlight the violence enacted *on the body* of the Algerian protestors; they were drowned and beaten. Thus, both graffiti inscriptions ask the passerby to stop at a location where physical violence occurred. By enjoining the physical body of the passerby to the site of the massacre, Omer's graffiti opens up a space where the "uncanny body" can reveal its hidden histories.

Despite the narrative "silence" concerning Omer's writing of the graffiti, I argue that the text speaks through the bodily movements of the characters in this passage rather than through spoken dialogue. These movements embody the graffiti writing process (and, in some ways, the massacre itself). Omer and Amel arrive at the Hotel, and two doormen greet them. Omer "tend la main," stating that they have a room booked "Chambre 7" (67). He

holds out his hand, perhaps indicating the general direction of the room. He might also be holding out his hand to the doorman to shake theirs, implying their complicity in this act. Similarly, Omer, as graffiti writer, will later "hold out" his hand to trace the red inscription on the hotel's face. Next, instead of narrating Omer's plan to tag the Crillon Hotel like in the first example, the omniscient narrator shares an ekphrasis of the sculptures on the hotel's façade:

> Sur le chapiteau de l'hôtel, on peut voir, en levant la tête, une statue d'une femme, allongée en odalisque, entourée des enfants nus, des Cupidon. De chaque côté du chapiteau, une cuirasse en pierre, vide. (67)
>
> [On the hotel cornice, you can see, if you look up, the statue of a woman, lying like an odalisque, surrounded by naked children, little Cupids. On each side of the cornice, there is an empty stone shield (translation 67)].

The reader assumes the form of the passerby; via the pronoun "on," the reader is positioned in front of the hotel, looking up at the statues and, presumably, the graffiti. By raising his or her head, the reader can "see" the façade of the hotel. In other words, in this example, the passerby and the reader of the novella become one.

Again, before describing the graffiti, the narrator describes "une statue d'une femme, allongée en odalisque, entourée des enfants nus, des Cupidon" ["the statue of a woman, lying like an odalisque, surrounded by naked children, little Cupids"]. This statue of an European woman reclining surrounded by cherubim dates to the building's construction in the eighteenth century. Sebbar's narrator metaphorizes the statue into an Orientalist "odalisque," a popular nineteenth century image, of an Eastern woman, reclining in a harem. Through this comparison, Sebbar's text draws connections between French and Algerian history; the European figure is equated to an Eastern one, popularized by painters such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and, later, Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Both the reclining European and the

reclining Eastern woman have the same bodily posture ("allongée") and are similarly in a state of undress; they are parallel images. And yet, as Omer's graffiti argues, the Parisian police positioned themselves against all Algerians on October 17th, even women and children, rather than identifying these individuals as more similar to them than different. On October 17th, in spite of their French citizenship, Algerian men, women and children were "savagely beaten" by the Parisian police, fallen just like the statue.[102] The statue of the woman is also surrounded by "iron breastplates" that are "empty"; this armor, without its corresponding body, metaphorically represent the Algerian men who were disappeared that night. Instead of imitating a commemorative plaque like he did in the first example, here Omer takes inspiration from the statue on top of the hotel. His graffiti describes the scene on October 17th, when women and children were beaten and men were murdered and deported, and the statue "embodies" it. First, Omer stretches out his hand to write the graffiti and, then, the reader-passerby lifts their head up to "read" his writing, and then re-read the sculpture with the new context that the graffiti provides.

In addition to the reader, this example includes another passerby: the employee of the hotel who exits the Concorde metro and stops in front of the hotel. The narrator does not disclose much about this passerby nor provide any dialogue, but one can infer that he *reads* the graffiti based on the description of his actions: "il reste un long moment debout devant la façade de l'hôtel" (68) ["He stands for a long time in front of the hotel façade"]. He lingers in front of graffiti, "standing up," like the Algerians that Omer wrote about in his first inscription, who "stood up" against the French occupier. Although we do not know the employee's thoughts about the graffiti, the word "debout" subtly connects the employee to the Algerian resistance. Like the statue above the graffiti inscription which replicates the

[102] The question of French citizenship for Algerians during this period is complicated. See Patrick Weil, "Le Statut des musulmans en Algérie coloniale: une nationalité française dénaturée" (2005).

fallen Algerians, the passerby replicates the resistance of said Algerians. Omer's hand raised in writing, brings the reader's head up to the reality of October 17th (graffiti and statue), which, finally, produces a reader who remembers the injustice and stands up, at least momentarily, against it.

The third and final graffiti, written on the quai near the Saint-Michel fountain, is even more detached from the writing process than the previous two examples. Whereas the first inscription was discussed by Omer and the second was introduced after Omer entered the hotel, the third example's only connection to Omer is the fact that he and Amel visited the fountain prior to the graffiti's writing:

> [Omer et Amel] bavardent au bord de la Fontaine Saint-Michel. L'épaule d'Omer cache en partie l'inscription sur la plaque de marbre, au-dessous du griffon en bronze, cracheur d'eau. On peut lire un texte incomplet :
>
> À LA MEMOIRE
>
> DES SOLDATS DES FORCES FRANCAISES
>
> DE L'INTERIEUR ET DES HABITANTS DES Ve ET
>
> ARRONDISSEMENTS QUI SUR CES LIEUX
>
> LA MORT EN COMBATTANT
>
> Sur un rocher, saint Michel un guerrier ailé, l'épée à la main, terrasse le dragon, un homme avec une tête de diable.
>
> Louis a filmé la fontaine.
>
> Amel entend la voix de sa mère. (Sebbar 85)
>
> [[Omer et Amel] are chatting at the Saint-Michel fountain. Omer's shoulder is covering part of the inscription on the marble plaque, below the bronze griffin, spitting water. One can read an incomplete text :
>
> IN MEMORY

OF THE SOLDIERS OF THE FRENCH FORCES

OF THE INTERIOR AND THE INHABITANTS OF THE VTH AND

ARRONDISSEMENTS WHICH ON THIS SITE

DIED IN BATTLE.

Perched on a rock, Saint Michel as a winged warrior, with his sword in his hand, defeats the dragon, a man with a devil's head.

Louis filmed the fountain.

Amel hears her mother's voice [translation 88].

The graffiti appears five pages later, after Amel's mother describes how she was saved by a bookseller working near the Saint Michel fountain on the night of the protest. After Amel's mother's testimony, Louis' documentary shows the bookstore : "Le camera s'arrête un moment sur une boutique vide, désaffectée, sur Saint-Severin, à côté de l'hôtel de l'Europe dont les lettres sont creusées dans la pierre" (88) ["The camera stops for a moment, films an empty store on Saint-Sévérin, next to the Hotel Europe whose letters are etched in stone" (translation 91)]. [103] Following a line break, the next paragraph catapults us back into the present, as Amel and Omer visit this same street, looking for the bookstore that her mother referenced, arguing about French and Algerian singers, and finally leaving for an undisclosed location (89).[104] The next line break indicates yet another shift forward in time:

Quelques jours plus tard, Louis filme sur le quai Saint-Michel, les lettres rouges :

ICI DES ALGÉRIENS SONT TOMBÉS

POUR L'INDÉPENDANCE DE L'ALGÉRIE

[103] This similarity to the first two graffiti examples is interesting and highlights the centrality of the stone walls to Omer's graffiti. The letters of the bookstore's name are "creusées dans la pierre" just as Omer describes his first graffiti, "incrusté dans la pierre." The statues on top of the Hotel de Crillon are also made of stone.

[104] Omer gets up from the bar where they are having a drink near Saint Michel and Amel asks where they are going to which he responds vaguely: "Tu verras" (90). It is hard to tell if this means he is going to show her how he writes his graffiti, especially considering the graffiti appears directly after these words, or if he means they are going to move to another location, which we find out later is Orly airport to travel from Paris to Egypt.

LE 17 OCTOBRE 1961 (90)

[Several days later, on the quai at Saint-Michel, Louis films the red letters:

ON THIS SPOT ALGERIANS FELL

FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF ALGERIA

OCTOBER 17, 1961 (translation 93)].

Like the first two examples, the reader assumes that Omer wrote this inscription based on the contextual clues of the location, the content and Louis' filming of the quay.

Also like the previous examples, this graffiti is written in red, like the bloodshed on October 17th, and filmed by Louis, the first, and, in this case, only passerby. Like the 1961 "ICI ON NOIE LES ALGERIENS" ["HERE WE DROWN ALGERIANS"] and the Omer's Crillon Hotel graffiti, the location of the violence is foregrounded. However, both of Omer's graffiti inscriptions, in contrast with the historical "ICI ON NOIE LES ALGERIENS" graffiti written by J.-M. Mension, position the Algerians as the subjects of the sentence and, thus, as the protagonists of October 17th. This time Omer takes inspiration from the "incomplete" plaque commemorating French Resistants who were killed while fighting German occupation in August of 1944, by writing a graffiti memorial to those who lost their lives "for Algerian independence." In this way, his graffiti likens French Resistance to Algerian Resistance, although it remains differentiated from the plaque by the grammatical construction and location (on the quay rather than on the fountain). As in the previous example, the narrator describes a statue: « Sur un rocher, saint Michel un guerrier ailée, l'épée à la main, terrasse le dragon, un homme avec une tête de diable » ["Perched on a rock, Saint Michel as a winged warrior, with his sword in his hand, defeats the dragon, a man with a devil's head"]. The image of Saint Michel defeating a dragon, that looks like a demon, is inverted by Omer's inscription. If, in the context of World War II, Saint Michel (an angel of God) represents the Allied Powers and the dragon (a devil aligned with evil) represents the Axis Powers, then, in

the context October 17th, Saint Michel is the Parisian police and the dragon are the Algerians. However, Omer's graffiti upends this binary. The Algerians who "fell" (like the dragon) are actually doing so for freedom from oppression, and in this way are more aligned with Saint Michel than the evil dragon. The Algerians have fallen, just like the odalisque supine on the Hôtel de Crillon and like those guillotined in the Prison de la Santé. Omer's three inscriptions remind us that all of those who "stood up" were knocked down by the French State; his inscriptions urge the passerby to reconsider their vision of the Algerian War, and, in doing so, chart an alternate path of memory for the pedestrian (and the reader).

Despite the absence of a body writing or reading this graffiti, the body as a motif remains ever-present in Omer's graffiti writings. Why this occlusion of Omer's body writing the graffiti? Would that not be a repudiation of the "absence" that the French police made of Algerian bodies during both the Algerian War and October 17th? As we already know, Sebbar eschews traditional narrative structure in favor of a narrative of absence, gaps, and layered timelines. This absence of Omer is another diversion, requiring the reader to pay closer attention to the narrative in order to understand what is happening. Through Omer's absence, Sebbar draws the body of the reader to the graffiti; instead of Omer's writing, our reading of his writing is prioritized. In this way, the absence of Omer's writing creates the conditions for the passerby-reader to encounter the graffiti. It makes the graffiti "real" to us as readers. It draws the passerby to the site of the violence; it brings together *body and place* to force the pedestrian, and, by extension, the reader to encounter the occulted memory through invocations of the body itself ("fallen," "beaten," "stand up"). Moreover, if Omer's graffiti writing "stands" alone from his body, it both exists within the confines of the book itself and separate from it. It becomes a historical account that rivals Louis' documentary. Therefore, the absence of Omer's body is not the absence of embodied memory, but rather an invitation to the passerby to embody the memory themselves.

In different ways, Omer's three graffiti writings denounce the violence of the French State and champion the independence of the Algerians. Hence, the inscriptions function as commemorative plaques presenting an "alternate" history to that of the French State—plaques which bring the pedestrian's body into contact with the violence of the historical past. They also denounce the "terrorist geography" of the French State and constitute a "terrorist geography," like the OAS and FLN graffiti against that same State. In other words, Omer's red graffiti writing makes visible the terrorism of the State and reminds the pedestrian (or the civil population) of occulted oppression carried out by that State. By marking these locations and histories, he performs an act of "terror" against the State, one in which he uses graffiti as a weapon to "attack" the locus of power by means of its civilians. Just as Amel "knows" the terrorist geography by marking her map with red pins, Omer transmits his knowledge of terrorism through these red graffiti inscriptions. In conclusion, I contend that reading Sebbar's novel back through the lens of the Algerian War graffiti helps us to see Omer's "bloody" writings as tactics of a certain kind of terror. These writings, however, are not acts of violence, like traditional acts of terror, but are reminders of the State's own violence. In this way, the "bloody" graffiti is an act of metaphorical violence against the State's narrative surrounding October 17th.



Image 1.7 Photograph by Jean Téxier.
1961, Paris, L'Humanité / Keystone/ Gamma.

Memorializing October 17th through its Graffiti: J.-M. Mension's Seine Graffiti

Just weeks after October 17th 1961, C. Angeli noticed a graffiti inscription along the Seine (on the quai du Conti facing the Institut de France) on his way into work at the newspaper, *Avant Garde.* When he arrived at the office, he informed his friend and colleague, Jean Téxier, a correspondant for the communist newspaper, *L'Humanité*, and together they returned to the Seine to take a photograph of it (Lemire and Potin 155) (Image 1.7, pp. 80). Despite its relevance to this historical moment, this photograph was not published by *L'Humanité* until 1985.[105] Then, the militant group "17 octobre contre l'oubli" began utilizing the photograph as icon of remembrance, particularly following the installation of a commemorative plaque about October 17th by Parisian mayor Bernard Delanoë in 2000

[105] Instead of being published in 1961, the photograph was first published two decades later, as a part of a 1985 article written by Claude Lecomte called "Les noyés du 17 octobre," and then, once more, in 1986 on the front page of the newspaper to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the October 17th (Lémire and Potin 150).

(142).[106] Lemire and Potin call the photograph a "contre-plaque militante" because its language is more biting than the language of the plaque, which, in the eyes of many activists, obfuscated the responsibility of the State for the massacre (142). According to Lemire and Potin, Téxier's photograph has immortalized this anti-colonial graffiti, unintentionally creating an icon of memory politics with reverberations throughout other cultural productions.[107]

In addition to the history of the photograph, Lemire and Potin also uncovered information regarding the graffiti writer. According to their research, a few weeks after October 17th, an "anti-facist committee" called the "Comité pour la paix en Algérie du quartier Seine-Buci" planned a series of actions to condemn the police massacre: writing the graffiti "ICI ON NOIE LES ALGERIENS" ["HERE WE DROWN ALGERIANS"] at various locations around the Seine (161). Jean-Michel Mension, who belonged to this group, claims to have written this particular inscription, although there is also another man named Binoche

[106] The militant organization "17 octobre 1961 : contre l'oubli fighting for the memory of October 17th was formed in 2000 but no longer holds regular actions. According to their website, their goal was three-fold : "obtenir la reconnaissance qu'un crime contre l'humanité a été commis par l'Etat les 17 et 18 octobre 1961, "obtenir que soit créé un lieu du souvenir à la mémoire de ceux qui furent assassinés," and "obtenir le libre accès aux archives concernant la période de la guerre d'Algérie" ["obtain the recognition that a crime against humanity was committed by the State on October 17th and 18th 1961," "obtain a memory site dedicated to those who were murdered," "obtain the free access of archives concerning the period of the Algerian War"] ("Présentation de l'association").

[107] There are various cultural productions which invoke this same graffiti, such as Yasmina Adi's 2011 documentary *Ici on noie les algériens*. See Lia Brozgal's *Absent an Archive* for a more complete list.

who is attributed with writing the same inscription (155, 159).[108] [109] These inscriptions were swiftly erased by the police, as evidenced by police logs (161).

This photograph has become an icon because of the language of its graffiti, which displays a connection, like Omer's, between body and place. The words "ICI ON NOIE LES ALGERIENS" are painted in black in all capital letters on the stone quay of the Seine: in the background, the other side of the Seine, and, in the foreground, the cobblestones of the street. Like the other historical photographs, this composition, camera positioned in the street, suggests the candid nature of this "street" photograph, which is corroborated by Lémire and Potin's article. The phrasing of the graffiti links the massacre of October 17th to the site on which it is written (and implicitly to the Seine itself). The quay becomes a metonym for the Seine as a whole, where several Algerians were drowned on October 17th, and this location becomes an unofficial *lieu de mémoire*.[110] Like Omer's graffiti, Mension's graffiti mimics the language of State-sanctioned commemoration.

Mension's sentence, however, subverts traditional memorial language by highlighting the perpetrators as the subject of the sentence (ici on noie..) rather than the victims (ici sont tombés…). The alternate commemorative inscription becomes, like Omer's graffiti, a point on the Algerian War "terrorist geography," calling out the French people for their violence towards Algerians. The pronoun, "on," renders ambigious the perpetrators, while

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[108] French actress Juliette Binoche posted a copy of Téxier's photograph of the "Ici on noie les algériens" graffiti on her Instagram on October 17th 2018. In her post, she explained that her father wrote this graffiti with his friend, Jean-Michel Mension. The caption of her photograph is as follows: "Ceci a été écrit à Paris le 17 octobre 1961 par mon père Jean-Marie Binoche et son ami Jean-Michel Mansion [sic]. Mon père est allé acheter la peinture, ils sont venus en 2 chevaux et ont inscrit cette phrase sur ce mur. Adamov a eu l'idée mais n'est pas venu au rendez-vous. Mon père et son ami y sont allés. 'HERE, WE DROWN ALGERIAN PEOPLE' This was written by my father Jean-Marie Binoche and his friend Jean-Michel Mansion on the night of the 17 of October in 1961, after the terrible kill [sic] of 200 Algerian people during the war [skull emoji]."

[109] Several iterations of this graffiti were written around the Seine-Buci neighborhood by a number of anti-colonial activists. See the Lémire and Potin's article for a reproduction of the map they made of confirmed graffiti inscriptions.

[110] Pierre Nora defines a lieu de mémoire as a "site of memory" that we cultivate as a society because we have lost our connection to memory ("Between History and Memory" 7). For more on this see, *Les lieux de mémoire*.

simultaneously including everyone who reads it in its purview. This ambiguous antagonist ("on") destroys the Algerian people as a whole, highlighted by the use of the definite article ("*les* Algériens").[111] The verb "noyer" is written in the present tense; therefore, the violence is not delimited to to the punctual event of October 17th but instead persists into the present (and the immediate future). As House suggested, the drowning of the Algerians in the Seine on October 17th by the French police is just one instance in a long line of metaphorical "drownings" of Algerians perpetrated by colonial France .[112]

Art historian Hannah Feldman suggests that the FLN used the manifestation to make manifest or make visible the Algerian presence in the metropolitan city (175, 179). By targeting main boulevards and areas of leisure, the FLN leadership manufactured a "spectacle" intended to draw attention to the Algerian War and the unequal nature of French citizenship for Algerians (172, 186).[113] The demonstration's power came from Algerians (often "invisible" to a French population) being *seen* in the city center.[114] This is also why

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[111] See this quotation from Lemire and Potin for a similar argument about the definite article "les" : "Déroulé sur une dizaine de mètres de quais, comme sur une banderole, le slogan 'ICI ON NOIE LES ALGÉRIENS' ne désigne pas seulement un acte de répression mais bien une politique de disparition systématique. Les noyades y sont dénonancées à la fois comme instrument de terreur et comme stratégie de dissimulation de la terreur. Toute la puissance d'évocation et de dénonciation du document repose donc sur la formulation et la syntaxe même du slogan, inscrit in situ, 'en préseence du lieu même' ; l'article défini révèle la sigfication masquée du massacre : ce sont bien 'LES' Algériens, c'est-à-dire l'idée d'une nation algérienne indépendante, que la repression entendait supprimer" (143).

[112] "Any explanation for the Paris massacre has to come to terms with several overlapping time scales in order to understand how the effects of colonial ideology were reworked into the French decolonising context. From this perspective, the exceptionality of the Paris massacre was simply that it took place in metropolitan France. The wide-scale killing of French colonial subjects and citizens in the colonies and dependent territories (often in the context of political opposition to French rule) was a well-established feature of French colonial governance, as attested by Sétif (1945) and Madagascar (1947), to name only postwar examples." (House 356)

[113] "The call was thus issued for a three-pronged event to be made deliberately and exaggeratedly visible. It was to begin with a boycott of the curfew, which the Fédération leadership specifically specificed must ineed be "spectaculaire" and which would involve the mass demonstration of all Algerian men, women, and children living in and near the Paris area. These masses were to assemble in multiple points around the city, and the to circulate in carefully orechestrated paths…These routes were choreographed to pass by the citu's entertainments —its movie theaters, its opera houses, and its grandest cafés—as well as the editorial offices of its major news organs…thereby assuring that the demonstration would take place 'in plain sight,' and that people would be there to see it both as it happens and as it would be reported in subsequent days—as indeed it was" (Feldman 172-3).

[114] "A key objective of the FLN organizers was through an 'invasion' of the city centre by three massive columns, to break the spatial segregation imposed on the immigrant workers, a segregation that had been

Algerians were asked to sport their best clothing: so that Algerians would appear dignified to the greater French public. With this in mind, Feldman critiques the use of images of violence on October 17th (such as Elie Kagan's photographs) or images lacking any Algerian bodies (such as the image we are analyzing now) in order to commemorate the event.[115] In her eyes, these images, by showing either wounded or absent bodies, negate the power of the demonstration and promote a politics that identifies with the colonizer (162-3). While I agree that commemoration efforts can revictimize the Algerian population, I want to suggest that this particular image of graffiti is different. What Feldman overlooks is the logic behind graffiti and its connection with the body and place.[116]

By designating the place where the violence occurred and suggesting that this violence is ongoing through the use of the present tense, the graffiti brings the past into the pedestrian's present in a specific place. The memory of October 17th comes into being, essentially, as the individual "passes by" the inscription. If, as Bergson suggests, all bodily perception is interwoven with our memories of the past and oriented towards a future, the passerby, as they encounter the graffiti in the present, develops a connection between the historical past and their present experience—a connection which can then open towards a future. As one passes the spot where the graffiti is written, he or she effectively also shares the *place* with the *bodies* of those who drowned. Although the photograph is devoid of

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reinforced by violent police repression and, since 5 October, by a discriminatory night-time curfew imposed uniquely on Algerian workers" (House and MacMaster 1).

[115] The graffiti also highlights what Lemire and Potin call the "politique de disparation systématique" of Algerians during the war (143).

[116] "It bears repeating that all of the recent and better-known, book-length texts that aim to 'recuperate' or restore the 1961 demonstration to its historical significance feature on their covers images of police coercion or violence. The eclipse of images of the marchers' confirmation of their 'right to the city' in favor of their victimization encourages the sense that the most important aspect of the demonstration remains its suppression, thus continuing to place the question of history and its narrative outside the hands of those Algerians who protested. Hardly active agents in their catastrophe, the marchers are divested of their very agency that they did demonstrate when they took to the streets of Paris" (Feldman 193). Feldman does not analyze the Téxier photograph in detail; she uses it as an illustration of an effort that ends "by recuperating the memory of the demonstration in terms of absent or missing bodies" (162).

passerbys (and thus any physical bodies), we know that there were police officers standing guard over the graffiti writing, officers which Téxier cropped out of the photograph (Lemire and Potin). Therefore, the bodies are both present and absent and, therefore, the memorialization takes place through the real-life embodiment of the passerby. When reading the graffiti, the pedestrian is grouped together as a perpetrator, and they must interrogate their own complicity in October 17th. The graffiti is also a physical monument that stops both time and place to bring the past into the present.[117] To quote Trigg, the graffiti-monument arrests the pedestrian's movement, calling their body into contact with this place, and pulling the past into the present. The "presence of the now" shows that the past is no longer "spatially and temporally in the elsewhere" but located within the space and time of the urban inscription itself.

Through this almost mystical connection between body, place, and memory, Mension's graffiti also participates in its own interior "terrorist geography," à la Omer and the graffiti writings of the war.[118] As Lemire and Potin point out, sentences with similar wording were written along the Seine around this same moment and erased by the police forces. Pedestrians assuredly encountered these writings, of which we have an example with Angeli and Téxier's story. This inscription, encountered in the present by Angeli, produced a future action, an action that would have ripple effects into present day, as the photograph that Téxier captured and its representations are used to "remember" the event. In a way, the photograph itself unmoors the writing from its physical location (the "site" of the ruin). This unmooring is a double-edged sword; it is both necessary for the study of this graffiti and also

[117] Concerning monuments and their connection to the body, Dylan Trigg says: "in stopping to remember [at a monument], attention is not drawn toward the past, as though the past were located spatially and temporally in the elsewhere. Rather, the presence of the now is shown to be constituted by the persistence of an event that has already occurred" (82).

[118] In their article, Lémire and Potin construct showing the location of several graffiti "Ici on noie les Algériens" writings around the Seine. This, in and of itself, is a "terrorist geography" of this particular sentence.

counterinituive to the logic of graffiti, which is meant to be encountered while physically moving through the city. That being said, this graffiti writing, in particular, becomes "itinerant" through its reproduction; in a way, it *becomes* a passerby as it passes through the hands of many "readers." In a double action, the one who is seeing the photograph divorced from the street also becomes a passerby to this reading and can decide how this inscription will affect their future.

Mension's graffiti also transcends the space and time of its writing through its reproduction in newspapers as well as activist circles. Furthermore, this writing has actually engendered contemporary activist graffiti writings. One such example is the re-writing of this graffiti on the October 17th, 2019 by the militant feminist group, Les Colleuses. The activists used a map that was created by Léopold Lambert, in order to mark locations in which violence happened on October 17th, 1961 (Lambert, "A Night"). Lambert's map, which marks times and places where Algerians were brutalized before, during and after the 17th of October, rewrites the city of Paris to depict the "multiplicity of temporalities and spatialities" of this event (Lambert, "Chrono"). The graffiti written by the feminist collective are actually mixes of traditional graffiti and collages that reproduce this multiplicity. They marked several locations from Lambert's maps, with the names of Algerians killed ("Ait Larbi Larbi, tué par la police" and "Saadadi Tahar Tué par la police") or with messages that replicated the language of Ménsion's graffiti ("ici la France a noyé des algériens!, "Ici on noie les algériens," and "ici la France a noyé des algérien.ne.s") (Lambert, "A Night"). While the Ménsion graffiti was written in the heart of Paris, the Colleuse-Lambert graffiti were mapped throughout the city of Paris. Furthemore, the multiplicity of formulations and the inclusion of the names of those killed reflects an expansion of the knowledge of October 17th. This expansive mapping visibly demonstrates and fights back against the power that the Parisian police exerted over the city that night. It reveals the terrorist geography of the French State,

which has expanded to include more knowledge about the violence of October 17th. Through the action of rewriting the historical graffiti, Lambert and the Colleuses made possible, in the present day, the contact between pedestrians and the spatial knowledge of this event.[119] With these iterations, the remembering continues through the present and well into the future.

Conclusion



Image 1.8
Algérie, Alger, 2 juillet 1962.
Photograph by Marc Riboud, Magnum Photos

[119] There are differences in grammatical formulations in these reproductions ("nous sommes les descendantes des algériens que vous n'avez pas noyé," "ici la France a noyé les algériens !" and "Ici la France a noyé des algérien.ne.s") which multiplies significations of this sentence.

On July 1, 1962 President Charles de Gaulle called for a final independence referendum to be voted on by the Algerian people. An overwhelming majority voted in favor of independence, and most French settlers fled for France shortly afterwards, fearing violence with the change of power.[120] This final photograph was taken by Marc Riboud the day following the referendum in Algiers (Image 1.8, pp. 87). In the photograph, a bus full of young Algerian boys, waving Algerian flags, passes behind a handful of pedestrians. In the center of the photograph a young blond woman, wearing a cross, walks to the left of the frame. Some of the young men in the bus are looking in the direction of the camera and appear to be looking, by extension of the camera's framing, at the young woman. The movement of this photograph is particularly striking.[121] Meanwhile, the bus and, thus, the independent Algerians (mostly young men) are moving to the right. Even the young Algerian next to the blond woman is walking towards the right of the frame in contrast with the other two pedestrians. These two directionalities (Europeans to the left and Algerians to the right) can be read as metaphors for the change in the government. The Europeans, moving "backwards," are moving back to France, while the Algerians, this "young" nation, are moving "forwards," towards the future, towards their own freedom.

This reading is further supported by the graffiti writing in the photograph. The bus is graffitied multiple times with the word "OUI" ["YES"], which was likely an encouragement to voters to vote yes on independence. To lend even more credence to this reading, the bus is crossing the "finish line" to independence with this referendum (we can read the word "FIN" ["END"] at the crosswalk). Just as we saw in Riboud's photograph of the three Algerian women standing in front of the graffiti writing "OUÏ," this simple word is an expression of

[120] It should be noted that "Muslim French" Algerians accounted for 90 % of the Algerian population at this point. So although that meant there were still 1 million pieds noirs, they were far from the majority (Stora).

[121] The man on the far right is also walking in the same direction as the blond woman. His ethnic background is harder to parse; despite this, the photograph suggests a strong directional contrast between the blond European and the Algerian boys in the bus.

positive exuberance towards a future. This final photograph, through the situation of its graffiti and passersby, illustrates the historic shift in power occuring in the city of Algiers. The Europeans will disappear, fleeing to France, and the Algerians will have rule over their country for the first time in over a century. The long battle on Algerian soil has come to an end, and they are moving victoriously into a future in which colonization has ended and the "oui" of independence reigns. This photograph uses the passerby and the graffiti to represent the end of the Algerian War—or, the schism of two political bodies (France and the Algeria) as they head in opposite directions but remain, for the moment, intermingled.

As we have seen throughout this first chapter, FLN and OAS graffiti written during the Algerian War expresses the aims of these two groups who were fighting for different visions of Algeria. The *Organisation de l'armée secrète* used an "anti-tag," or a proliferation of their initials, throughout the cities of Algiers and Paris, as a form of psychological warfare against the Algerian people and the French who did not support them. These writings insert an element of fear into the environment that is experienced both spatially and bodily. In other words, as the OAS asserts authority over public space through their graffiti, the passersby become esconsed in the terrain of this "terrorist geography"—which monitors their bodies and thus their political body. The *Front de liberation nationale* also used the « walls » to disseminate political messages; however, their writings demand unity from the Algerian people, encouraging them to see see themselves as heroes of their own liberation. Through messages invoking the French Revolution, these graffiti writers make use of French republican ideals in order to justify their desire for Algerian independence. In these photographs, the passerby is not being attacked but is a tool through which the Algerian population finds its own path and attacks the colonizer in turn. The OAS and the FLN, both "terrorist groups" designated by the French state, use graffiti to interface with each other and with the French government. Therefore, the writings of these two groups can be layered into

one larger terrorist geography, both attacking the French State through the civilian population, albeit in different ways.

Leïla Sebbar's novel, *La Seine était rouge,* imagines another type of Algerian War graffiti, one which commemorates the death of Algerians in Paris on October 17th, 1961. This fictional graffiti is written in 1996 by Omer, an Algerian national, and it demarcates a third arm of active terror during the Algerian War—that of the French State itself. Omer's fictional graffiti, painted in red like Amel's map, marks out a geography of terror that the State enacted against its own civilians, in particular on October 17th. This graffiti, in its commemorative fashion, along with the Ménsion graffiti, invokes the power of the body of the passerby to activate the memory of the past and bring it into the present. In this way, the "terrorist geography" of the Algerian War is trans-historical; it includes both the wartime inscriptions as well as those that commemorate it. The map of these terrorist writings demonstrates the alternative narratives that were being actively repressed by the French government.

Albeit written by disparate groups and both real and imagined, each instance of graffiti from this period operates within the logic of "terror" because it charts dissent from the State's narrative about Algeria and targets civilians while doing so. To borrow a term from the Situationists, who will figure heavily in the following chapter, this war graffiti creates a new "terrorist (psycho-)geography" of the city. Psycho-geography is an exploration of urban space, one which studies the effect of urban space on the attitudes, behaviors, and desires of the individual. The "terrorist (psycho-)geography" relies on emotion to make its presence felt, whether that be fear (OAS), excitement (FLN) or anger and disgust (Sebbar, Ménsion).[122] It is through these emotional appeals that the body is targeted and through this fusion of place and body that the "terrorist geography" is created. This analysis also transgresses historical and

[122] For the Situationists, "psychogeography" was study of the way in which urban space has certain effects on the attitudes, behaviors, and desires of the individual, and the Situationists suggested that each city had psychogeographic zones, contours and even vortexes one could follow. For more on this concept, see Situationist Gilles Ivain's "Formulaire pour un nouveau urbanisme."

spatial boundaries (i.e. the specific dates of the Algerian War and the specific location of Paris) to demonstrate the ways in which graffiti, although anchored in time and space, comes to be emancipated from these constraints through its representation in different forms of media. In summary, by tracing the representations of these graffiti writings, their political potential comes to life—namely, their capacity, despite their ephemerality, to influence the lives of the passerby and, consequently, to impact the War and its subsequent memory.

Chapter 2: Graffiti as Collective Action: May ’68, the Passerby and the Political Body

Introduction

During May and June 1968, amidst discontent with French colonialism following the Algerian War, America’s war on Vietnam, the rise of capitalism, and the Gaullist government, France experienced one of the country’s largest recorded protests. Almost nine million workers went on strike and many universities, especially in Paris, were shuttered (Ross 8). [123] Meanwhile, several large media agencies, such as Agence Gamma and Paris Match, used photojournalists’ work to construct a “mediatic narrative” of May 1968; this process contributed to the iconization of the political movement in the collective French imaginary (Leblanc, “Histoire visuelle” 12, my translation).[124] Despite its iconic status, however, May ’68 was one iteration of many revolutions that occurred following the conclusion of World War II. It was part and parcel of “a global contestation of the established world order,” another facet of the “*same* questioning of the political and social status quo” that occurred in many different countries simultaneously (Dreyfus-Armand 26, my translation). Situated within this moment of trans-national discontent, May ’68 drew strength from and influenced, in turn, several other contemporary political and cultural movements thanks to media

[123] Historian Genevieve Dreyfus-Armand has argued that the United States’ participation in the Vietnam War was a key generator of May 1968 (27). Both she and historian Robert Franck assert that concomitant third-world struggles for independence, led by political actors such as Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, and Mao Ze Dong, were also highly influential to the May 1968 movement (Franck 35). In this way, May ’68 was situated in a global network of anti-government activism, as well as an interest in the rise of Communism abroad.

[124] For more on the ways in which photographs were selected and edited by these agencies, see Audrey Leblanc’s “Fixer l’événement: Le Mai 1968 du photojournalisme” in *Sociétés et représentations* (2011). In this article, Leblanc proposes that French photojournalists in the 1960s generally conceived of their photography as a way to document history, as a way to “fix the event,” as “news” itself (“the image single-handedly fixes the event’s narrative, for which it is the documentary evidence, or even, the symbol; [the image] can become the permanent historical representation”) (4, my translation). However, as she notes in her edited volume, *Icônes de Mai 68: Les images ont une Histoire*, media agencies did not see photojournalism the same way; instead of utilizing photographs as documentary evidence, they used them to create their own “narrative” about the events (13).

dissemination and international collaboration between activists (Ross 10).[125] These global movements shared several characteristics: a critique of State power, of imperialism, of capitalism, of racism, and of governmental repression. In France, the movement was intense but short-lived, lasting no more than a month, before the unions ended their strike and the collective actions ceased, but it left its mark on the societal and cultural milieu for decades to come.[126]

If, as Kristin Ross suggests, May '68 was "the largest mass movement in French history," a movement which has been studied extensively, what interest might we have in re-examining it (3-4)? May 1968 has been recorded, described, critiqued, and scrutinized at great length, but, as Ross argues, this deification of May has *often* reduced the event into a simple instance of naïve youth rebellion. [127] In *Les Années,* when recounting her experience of May '68, Annie Ernaux writes:

> Et la télévision, en diffusant une iconographie immutable avec un corpus réduit d'acteurs, instituerait une version ne varietur des événements, imposant l'impression que, cette année-là, on avait tous entre dix-huit ans et vingt-cinq ans et on lançait des pavés aux CRS un mouchoir sur la bouche (106).
>
> [And the television, by broadcasting an unchanging iconography featuring a limited corpus of actors, would establish a fixed version of events, giving the impression that,

[125] For instance, several *soixante-huitards* spent time in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) and Free Speech Movement (1964-65), all which, in turn influenced May 1968. Moreover, many militants during May 1968 were also influenced by anti-colonial activism during the Algerian War.

[126] As Mathilde Larrère has pointed out, May 1968 has been transformed into a political emblem and a point of reference for subsequent protests, in much the same way that the Paris Commune of 1871 and the French Revolution of 1789 has. For more on the recycling of May '68, see "Citations et circulations révolutionnaires dans les graffitis contemporains" (Larrère 2022).

[127] May 1968 has been extensively researched from historical and sociological perspectives. See *La pensée 68* (Ferry and Renaut 1988), *Mai 68, l'héritage impossible* (Le Goff 1998), *Mai 68: L'irruption* (Lefebvre 1998), *Les Années 68: Le temps de la contestation* (Dreyfus-Armand, Franck, Lévy, Zancarini 2000), *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Bourg 2007), *68: Une histoire collective [1962-1981]* (Artières and Zancarini-Fournel 2008), *Mai-juin 68* (Damamme, Goville, Matonti, Pudal 2008), *May 68: Rethinking France's Last Revolution* (Jackson, Milne, Williams 2011), and *Mai 68, un pavé dans leur histoire* (Pagis 2014).

this year, we were all between eighteen and twenty-five years old and were all throwing cobblestones at the riot police with a handkerchief over our mouths.]

Rather than elucidating the event's realities and repercussions, the media painted an inaccurate or, at the very least, incomplete picture of the events, "broadcasting an unchanging iconography with a reduced corpus of actors." In much the same way, to quote Ross again, the memory of May '68 and its various iteartions, constructed by the very same media that Ernaux references, has actively "render[ed] obscure the history of May" (3).[128] [129] All things considered, *how* can we discover something new about May '68? I propose that we can do so by re-examining the historical graffiti produced by the movement and putting it in dialogue with fictional representations of May '68 graffiti in film and in literature. Although this graffiti has been studied, particularly in sociological circles, it has either been read, by its detractors, as youthful and individualistic indiscretions undertaken by bourgeois students in the Sorbonne or, by its supporters, as brilliant and poetic "prises de parole." [130] In this chapter, I complicate these dichomtomic readings by drawing attention to the ambiguity of May '68 graffiti and also by analyzing the graffiti in its spatial context. While the graffiti inscriptions were expressions of discontent that can be read from a purely textual perspective, they were also revolutionary practices of an embodied and spatial nature that were intended to restructure both the capitalist city and its politics.

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[128] In her introduction to *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Kristin Ross states: "[i]n the case of '68, an enormous amount of narrative labor—and not a shroud of silence—has facilitated the active forgetting of the events in France…Discourse has been produced, but its primary effect has been to liquidate—to use an old '68 word—erase, or render obscure the history of May" (3).

[129] Memory scholars have noted that remembering can, paradoxically, actually engender forms of forgetting, especially when certain elements are prioritized in the remembrance process. For instance, Aleida Assman, writing on the archive, suggests that the creation of an archive (in itself a form of remembering) always presupposes some sort of forgetting, i.e. some things are excluded from the archive and, as such, forgotten ("Canon and Archive" 97).

[130] For more on this idea, see Michel De Certeau's reflections on May '68 graffiti in *La Prise de paroles, et autres écrit politiques* (1994).

At the heart of this dissertation project is the assertion that the *physical body* of the passerby is implicated in a particular way by Parisian graffiti in order to activate a *political body* for revolution; in other words, political graffiti instrumentalizes the material body in hopes of affecting a greater metaphorical body. The reciprocity between the material and metaphorical body at the theoretical level can be mapped onto my methodological choice to examine the historical graffiti (a locum for the material) alongside the representational graffiti (a locum for the metaphorical). In the case of May '68, in contrast with the Algerian War, the interplay between the physical body and the configuration of urban space is actually theorized at length by the actors of the events themselves. I argue that May 1968 graffiti harnesses the physical space of the city in order to reorient the physical body of the passerby, which, in turn, reorients the greater political body. For many philosophers and activists at this time, urban space became an environment in which one could materially affect political outcomes.

I also differentiate my analysis from previous scholarship by comparing photographs of historical May'68 graffiti with fictional representations. To this end, I consider two lesser-studied cultural productions: Jean-Luc Godard's film *La Chinoise* (1967) and Charlotte Delbo's play *La théorie et la pratique* (1968). This trans-medial interrogation of May '68 graffiti allows me to explore the ways in which the historical and the fictional co-produce and co-constitute political change both on the ground and in collective imaginaries.[131] All three sources, the photographs, the film, and the play, indicate the ubiquity of political graffiti before, during and after May '68. Similarly, they all, through their use of graffiti, call attention to the passerby's bodily relationship to public space and to the metaphorical

[131] All intensive studies of May '68 graffiti have been either photographic collections of graffiti and other ephemera or historical accounts of the events with graffiti photographs to compliment those accounts. See *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (Vienet 1968*), Les murs ont la parole* (Besançon 2007), *Beauty is in the street: a visual record of the May '68 Paris uprising* (Kugelberg and Vermès 2011), and *Imagination au pouvoir* (Lewino 2018).

revolutionary body. Godard's film challenges the efficacity of such writings to engage the passerby and criticizes the possibilities of the May '68 political body. In contrast, the photographs of the historical graffiti and Delbo's play are much more optimistic about the power of graffiti; both suggest that graffiti is a powerful tool to unite mind and body, theory and action, the material and the metaphorical.

May 1968 and Public Space

In this chapter, I build off of Kristin Ross's central assertion that May 68 was primarily a *political* movement, rather than a cultural one, one that emerged out of a surprising union between students and workers (9).[132] According to Ross, many academics who theorized about the movement, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, misunderstood May '68 in two ways: first, they argued that May '68 championed an ultra-individualism, which in turn strengthened capitalism rather than upending it, and, second, their studies focused primarily on bourgeois students. Ross argues against these readings in her book, *May '68 and its Afterlives.* First, she asserts that, contrary to bourgeois-centered analyses of May, the "political subjectivity that emerged in May was a relational one, built around a polemics of equality" between student and worker struggles (11). May '68 was not a vehicle for self-gratification but powered by a desire for political collaboration. This idea that that May was fueled by self-indulgence actually contradicts what those involved in the movement felt, desired and experienced; for them, May 1968 was about giving up the personal in pursuit of communal goals (100).[133] Ross also contends that this radical idea of equality between workers and students, who were both experiencing different forms of oppression, is what

[132] René Vienet, a member of the Situationist International who participated in May 1968, corroborates the collaboration that occurred between students and workers in his account of the events, *Les enragés et les situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (1968).

[133] The text that Kristin Ross references in detail is Luc Ferry and Alain Renault's La pensée '68 (1985). Jean-Pierre Le Goff's text Mai 68: l'héritage impossible suggests something similar, particularly, that the paradox of May 68 is that the movement destroyed its own ideals of equality and freedom from capitalism.

differentiated the movement from others and allowed it to grow quickly in numbers. This ideal of equality was represented in various political structures, such as the "action committees" created on university campuses, which abolished all hierarchies in their meetings (77).[134] Albeit idealistic and contentious, the community that many *soixante-huitards* envisioned was a revolutionary overturning of the capitalist and imperialist status quo— one in which both work *and* exams were traded in for "play" and the pursuit of desire.

This preference for the community over the individual coincided with a practice of anonymity by artists involved with the movement. For example, the Atelier Populaire, a collective of art students from l'École des Beaux-Arts who produced the iconic posters associated with May '68, refused to sign their artwork.[135] This anonymity was a "essential point" for the group who saw it as a way to present a united front in their radical messaging (Geveraux 162). May '68 graffiti, which both predated and influenced the slogans used on the posters, is also predicated upon anonymity (164). In both instances, anonymity reinforces the communal nature of the movement, one in which no artist dominates, but in which all artists share rights to the art and, thus, the revolution. Art historian Hugo Daniel notes something similar in his study of French graffiti from 1945-1968. He argues that the anonymity of graffiti, particularly during 1968, served a political purpose; it worked to diminish individual differences in opinions in favor of a collective response to the tensions on the ground (47). By trafficking in anonymity, graffiti writers and other artists during May '68 exercised the ideal of radical equality through their art practice. The language in several of the Atelier

[134] This non-hierarchal structure would also be replicated in the meetings of early feminist movements of the 1970s (Duchen 8-9). See Chapter 3 for more information.

[135] The Atelier Populaire was a spontaneously-created group of students from L'École des Beaux-Arts who began producing the iconic posters (lithographs and seriographs) that we often associate with May 1968. They occupied the École and then produced the posters using the school's materials. They also taught factory workers how to use these machines and helped them to produce their own posters. For more on this see Laurent Gerverau's article "Les affiches du mai 68" (1988).

Populaire posters speak directly to this equality between worker and student, such as the poster "Usines. Universités. Unions" (Kugelberg and Vermès 23).

Just as the anonymity of May '68 art exemplified the movement's commitment to equality, graffiti, as a method of political action, also replicated larger shifts in the art world. As contemporary art historians such as Lucy Lippard, Miwon Kwon, and Claire Bishop have noted, artists of the 1960s and 1970s endeavored to demolish the modernist conception of art, which they believed idolized both the art object and the artist themselves. Instead, artists during this period produced artwork that prioritized the ephemeral, the spontaneous, and the participatory. In this new context, the audience, rather than the artist, dictated an artwork's meaning.[136] In *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop argues that this shift reveals itself through various forms of participatory and kinetic art in Paris in the 1960s, such as Leben's Happenings, the practice of the derive by the Situationists, and street interventions performed by the group GRAV. [137] Likewise, Jean-Louis Violeau calls this shift away from traditional forms of art and the art gallery in general, in the context of May 1968, the "disintegration" of

[136] Miwon Kwon notes how this trend crystallized in site-specific art. In contrast with modern art, which was made to circulate globally in museums and, as such, be "placeless," site-specific art was completely imbricated with a specific site and in a temporal moment. One important artist that pioneered this work was Richard Serra, whose large-scale sculptures were created to be walked through by the public. In site-specific art, the viewer's body is transformed into the site of the art (Kwon 11-12).

[137] While all three groups were wary of participation in consumer society, they all saw participatory art as a way to harness the everyday, democratize art, and counteract capitalism. The Situationist International was an avant-garde group active from 1957-1972 and led by Guy Debord. Guy Debord and the Situationists were concerned with the development of an international revolution against a capitalist society (Hemmens & Zacarias 3), and their strategy for jumpstarting this revolution was to create "situations" which would "drive this spectator [i.e. the passive consumer] into action by arousing his capabilities to disrupt his own life" (Debord "Rapport," 325, my translation). Some of these practices included la dérive, wandering through the city in order to experience its different "psychogeographic" atmospheres, and le détournement, the creation of art from existing forms of media in order to subvert the original message (Bishop 86). According to Bishop, for this group, art was not about producing objects but about critiquing the commodification of life; accordingly, they were opposed to documentation, while participation, spontaneity, and play were central to their work (86).While less central to my dissertation, it is important to note that other groups of the 1960s shared this drive to create participatory art. Bishop notes that the group GRAV used "polysensorial environments" and kinetic sculpture in urban spaces in order to engage the viewer's perception and activate their political agency (88). Jean-Jacques Lebel's European Happenings were controversial, often violent, social-political critiques of affluent consumer society that eliminated all distinction between viewer and performer (98). Through both site-specific and participatory art, contemporary artists were interested in making political work. They were concerned with making works outside of the gallery space (often in the streets) and outside of the gallery's scope (in an effort to critique the capitalism of the art world).

the art world (263). In order to critique both the art gallery as an insitution and its complicity in global capitalism, artists started to create art that was more egalitarian, democratic, and inclusive of the public. Art of the 1960s and 1970s was designed to transcend the gallery, and often, move into the street or, at the very least, into a more public space. The importance of graffiti during the May '68 protests is a logical effect of this new theorization of art. In many ways, graffiti's form shares many parallels with the artworks being produced in the traditional art world at this time.[138] Graffiti is ephemeral and spontaneous; constructed *sur-le-vif*, it is meant to disappear. Because of its illegal nature, it is quickly erased by police officer or by private business owners; because of its location outside, it is also easily deteriorated by the elements.[139] Finally, it is participatory; anyone with a paintbrush or spray-can can write graffiti and, moreover, any passerby can encounter graffiti, written in public space. Therefore, graffiti fits into surrounding paradigms of both the art and activism world during May '68.

In addition to its anonymity, according to art historian Hugo Daniel, several other characteristics of graffiti made it essential to the movement of May 1968. Its iconic quality permitted the "amplification" of the movement via the media and photojournalism. Its inscriptive nature delineated the protestors' territory within public space, and, finally, its palimpsestic quality encouraged "the creation of a sense of participation in a shared culture and movement" (47, my translation). In other words, the graffiti of May 1968 overtook public space through physical and mediatic repetition and reproduction, which, in turn helped spur

[138] Scholars often debate if graffiti can be classified as "art." The early subway graffiti writers called their work "writing" rather than art, even though it incorporated design elements. However, this began to change as graffiti moved into the art gallery, as early as the 1980s and 1990s. Graffiti has now become commercialized through social media and commissioned works. In the context of this chapter, several groups who practiced graffiti were avant-garde artists; therefore, May '68 graffiti is, at least tangentially, connected to the contemporary art world.

[139] There are several important differences between site-specific art, participatory art, and graffiti. Site-specific art, like that of Richard Serra, is installed temporarily at a site or physical location, but it often imposes itself upon that site, through its large size, inciting observers to interact physically with it. Graffiti, while also temporary, leaves a much smaller mark on the space of the city, transforming the two-dimensional walls of the city rather than its three-dimensional space. Participatory art necessitates the action of a passerby or spectator in order to create the art piece; graffiti constitutes an art piece without the action of the spectator but it does rely on a passerby in order to activate it.

the creation of a shared movement.[140] If May '68 was concerned with achieving "complete contemporaneity" with the political moment, graffiti certainly replicates this temporality (Ross *May '68*, 15); it is a form of immediate expression and can be disseminated widely via photojournalism. Because of this immediateness, graffiti changes swiftly with political sentiment. Both Laurent Gervereau and Walter Lewino in his book, *Imagination au pouvoir,* observe how the graffiti at the beginning of May was markedly less political than that which was written near its end.[141] As more political actors became involved in the movement, the graffiti reflected this shift in real time. With graffiti, accessible to all, two key aspects of the movement come together: the equality of its participants (students and workers) and the celerity of the movement.[142]

In addition to its anonymity and spontaneity, the graffiti of May 1968 was also esconsced in public spaces, such as the Sorbonne University. Its public nature was associated with yet another objective: to attack the spatial organization of the capitalist city and, as such, the French State. Various thinkers prior to May postulated about the effects that urban

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[140] In his article "Kool Killer," Jean Baudrillard suggests that the graffiti of May '68 destroyed the medium of the wall itself: "restoring to the walls a savage mobility, a suddenness of inscription that equated to abolishing them" (12). In contrast with Daniel's positive view of media's power to circulate graffiti inscriptions during May '68, Baudrillard argued that it was the media that actually wrested the political power from these inscriptions by circulating them away from the walls.

[141] Laurent Gervereau notes the following: "Des graffiti, les premiers, avaient popularisé l'impertinence ou la parole différente. A Nanterre d'abord, puis le 6 mai à Paris, étaient apparues des inscriptions, comme 'vivre sans temps morts, jouir sans entraves' ou 'vive les émeutiers de Caen.' Ces inscriptions frappaient dans la mesure où les graffiti, d'origine ancienne, n'étaient pas souvent politiques ou alors d'une classique conception partisane. Des débats eurent d'ailleurs lieu sur le fait de savoir si 'salir' les murs ne déconsidérait pas le mouvement. Mais, rapidement, la force des slogans écrits devient une arme, et après le 10 mai, 'CRS=SS,' ou 'libérez nos camarades' prennent aussi place sur les murs" ["The first graffiti writings popularized impertinence or a different sort of speech. At Nanterre first, then on May 6th in Paris, appeared inscriptions, like 'live without downtime, enjoy without restraint' or 'long life the rioters of Caen.' These inscriptions were striking in the sense that ancient graffiti was not often political or, if it was, it was of a classic partisan nature. Debates took place, for that matter, concerning if 'dirtying' the walls was not undermining the movement. But, quickly, the power of the written slogans becomes an arm, and after May 10th, 'CRS=SS' or 'free our classmates' also took up space on the walls"] (163-4)

[142] The Atelier Populaire posters share common themes with the graffiti inscriptions. See Kugelberg and Vermès' collection of May 1968 posters and graffiti. Lewino notes that the graffiti prefigured the posters (137), as does Gervereau (164). Gerverau adds, though, that the graffiti and posters inspired one another as the protest continued.

environments had on their inhabitants, in particular how new reconfigurations of urban space might liberate workers in their everyday lives.[143] One such example is the work of the avant-garde group, the Situationist International, active from 1957-1972. The Situationist International, originally the Lettrist International, was led by Guy Debord, who penned his manifesto, *Société du spectacle,* right before May 1968, in 1967. [144] In this manifesto, Debord condemned modern society, what he called "society of the spectacle," in which, he argued, social relationships between people had become mediated by images rather than reality, creating false realities and alienating people from their lives (9, 19). Laboring towards an international proletariat revolution, Debord's Situationist International used a variety of "actions" called "situations" ("the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior, passional quality") in order to transform this experience of alienation into one of "participation" (Debord, *Oeuvres* 322-325; Bishop 86).[145] Some such examples include the practice of the dérive (a "technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances" of the city) and the theory of unitary urbanism ("defined first of all as the use of all arts and techniques as means contributing to the composition of a unified milieu" or the coordination of behaviors and desires with the urban environment itself) (Debord "La dérive", "Reportage"). The target of these practices was the city itself, where Situationists

[143] For more on the theory of the everyday, see the work of *Henri Lefevre: Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1948), *Le Somme et la reste* (1959) *Le droit à la ville* (1968), and *La Vie quotidienne dans la monde moderne* (1968).

[144] For more information on the Situationists, see *Société du spectacle* (1967), the complete collection of the International situationniste (1958-1969), *Situationist International Anthology* (Knabb 2006), *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook* (Hemmens & Zacarias 2020*), Les Situationnistes et Mai 68 : Théorie et pratique de la révolution* (1966-1972) (Dumontier 1990), *and Les Situationnistes : Une Avant-garde totale* (Brun 2014).

[145] For more on the "international proletariat revolution" envisioned by the Situationists, read Anthony Hayes article,"The Situationist International and the Rediscovery of the Revolutionary Workers' Movement" and Sopie Dolto and Nedjib Sidi Moussa's article, "The Situationists Anti-Colonism: An Internationalist Perspective" in The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook (Hemmens and Zacarias 2020).

maintained that individuals should learn to "play" again in order to wrest control of their lives and their cities from the capitalist State.[146]

A lesser known practice of this group is that of graffiti. Daniel states that both the Lettrists and Situationists envisioned graffiti as coterminous with the pursuit of equality and a critique of capitalist consumer culture. Guy Debord's 1953 graffiti "Ne Travaillez Jamais," written on the rue de Seine during a Lettrist dérive, is one such example.[147] Throughout the Lettrist and Situationist history, graffiti was conceived of in a number of ways: a "'subversion'" in keeping with the practice of psychogeography, an act of "political vandalism," an avant-garde "deconstruction" of old art forms, a practice of "détournement," an "imitation" of "demolition," and a "graphic insurrection" (Daniel 173-4, 180-184). In each Situationist theoretical iteration, graffiti reshapes the space of the city. Although the Situationists were not the primary instigators of May 1968, the commonalities between the

[146] Debord spoke often about the role that "games" had to the SI movement. In his "Report on the construction of situations," he explains his conception: "Notre action sur le comportement…peut se définir sommairement par l'invention des jeux d'une nouvelle essence. Le but le plus général doit être d'élargir la part non médiocre de la vie… On peut donc en parler comme d'une entreprise d'augmentation quantitative de la vie humaine…Le jeu situationniste se distingue de la conception classique du jeu par la négation radicale des caractères ludiques de compétition, et de séparation de la vie courante. Par contre, le jeu situationniste n'apparaît pas distinct d'un choix moral, qui est la prise de parti pour ce qui assure le règne futur de la liberté et du jeu" ["Our effect on behavior…can be broadly defined as the invention of games of a new type. The most basic goal must be to expand the non-mediocre part of life… We can therefore speak of it as an endeavor to quantitatively increase human life…Situationist play differs from the classical conception of play through the radical negation of the playful elements of competition and the separation from everyday life. On the other hand, Situationist play does not appear distinct from a moral choice; it takes a stand for that which ensures the future reign of freedom and play"] (*Œuvres* 324).

[147] Ironically, a photograph of Debord's graffiti was being used and reproduced as a postcard by a "Mr. Buffer." When Debord used the photograph in the International situationniste, he was fined for using Mr. Buffer's reproduction of his (Debord's) own work. Debord was not happy with this use of his graffiti, as he felt that it trivialized the inscription by giving it a title "Superfluous advice." In a letter in response to this fine, he argued that his graffiti represents a larger theoretical framework which is essential to the Siutationist International and threatens to assert his rights as an artist to stop Mr. Buffer from reproducing it (Debord, *Oeuvres*). In his autobiography Le temps gage, J.M. Ménsion, who was a member of the Lettrists and wrote the graffiti "Ici on noie les algériens" in 1961, disputes Debord's claim, asserting his own authorship over the graffiti: "Je sais que dans ses *Mémoires*, Debord s'attribue à la paternité de ce graffiti, et prétend l'avoir inscrit à la craie. En fait, c'est moi qui ai fait le travail. Peut-être, un jour, un troisième participant s'attribuera-t-il cette oeuvre ? Qu'importe, l'essential reste que nous étions tous d'accord avec ce mot d'ordre simple, net, intelligent, et parfaitement rimbaldien" ["I know that in his *Mémoires*, Debord claims to have created this graffiti, and claims to have written it in chalk. Actually, *I* was the one who did the work. Maybe, one day, a third participant will claim this work? Whatever happens, the essential thing remains that we were all in agreement on the simple, clear, intelligent, and perfectly Rimbaldian word order"] (131).

group's philosophies and that of May 68 cannot be denied, neither can their work within the movement.[148] Moreover, their revolutionary theories seemingly permeate the language of the May '68 movement, and, certainly, its graffiti production. As evidence, the walls of the Latin quarter were filled with "Situationist slogans" during the group's existence and even more so, during the protests of '68 (Hemmens and Zacarias 4).[149] Some examples include: "jouir sans entraves!" and "vivre sans temps mort !" which are direct quotations from the Situationist-authored brochure, *De la misère en milieu étudiant* (1966). In this manifesto, the writers bemoan the plight of the university student, who is impoverished, treated like a child, and at the mercy of the French State and the traditional family structure. Many other phrases found inscribed on university walls during 1968 come from another text written by Situationist Raoul Vanegeim in 1967, *Traité sur le savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*.[150] While the graffiti of May '68 may not have all been written by Situationists, its language borrowed heavily from their theoretical works.

The Situationists were especially influenced by the work of Henri Lefebvre, a French sociologist working in the Marxist tradition (Dumontier 38). Lefebvre himself collaborated with the Situationists until 1963 when Guy Debord cut ties with him (Simay 17).[151] In works

[148] Scholars are divided on this issue. Kristin Ross suggests that the importance of the Situationists to the movement was overexaggerated, while Pascal Dumontier argues the opposite, namely that scholars have largely ignored the Situationist role in May 1968. For other connections between these groups and the May '68 revolution, see *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (René Viénet 1968) and "The Shadow Cast by the Situationist International on May '68" (Anna Trespeuch-Berthelot 2020).

[149] This idea of the presence of Situationist slogans during the occupation of the universities is echoed in other writings. In René Vienet's history of the Sorbonne occupation, he states: "the majority of these [Situationist] theses occupied the majority of the walls" (22). The theses he mentions come from Debord's *Société du spectacle* and Vanegeim's *Traité*. In her introduction to Walter Lewino's book on May '68, Michèle Bernstein also states : "what the walls were saying was most often of Situationist inspiration" (7). Both Bernstein and Vienet were ex-Situationists, which may skew the perception of reality. Walter Lewino also writes that the Situationists were practicing graffiti : "le graffiti, bien connu des surréalistes et des situationnistes, est une pratique aussi simple qu'efficace comme agitation politique" ["graffiti, well known amongst the Surrealists and Situationists, is a practice that is as simple as it is efficient as a form of political agitation"] (138).

[150] For more examples, see Pascal Dumontier's *Les Situationnistes et Mai 68 : Théorie et pratique de la révolution (1966-1972)*.

[151] This was a common practice of Debord to cut ties with thinkers who disagreed with him, which ultimately ended in the collapse of the SI.

such as *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1946, 1961, 1981), *Le droit à la ville* (1968), and *La production de l'espace* (1974), Lefebvre argues that space is a social "product," taking form based on the forces and relations of production. Capitalism, as an economic system, produces its own space, defined as "abstract space," a space which is instituted through the physical and metaphorical violence of the State, While this abstract space *appears* homogeneous, it is actually fractured by the parcellation and separation that capitalistic practices enact on space and society, leading to a fractured populace ("Space" 187). The city becomes a truly "socialist" space, one in which revolution is possible, when abstract, homogenous space has been rendered heterogenous and complex again through the use of the city by its inhabitants, through a radical reappropriation of space for common use ("Space" 191-2). While Lefebvre rarely addressed creative means of reappropriating spaces, the Situationists thought this reclamation could be accomplished through new forms of interaction with the city and, in particular, through a reclaiming of the "everyday" (Debord, "One More Try"). [152] The abstract space of capitalism annihilates all differences, so much so that time in a capitalist society essentially disappears as space (especially the space of work) destroys time.[153] For Lefebvre and the Situationists, destroying the distinction between work and leisure, between their separate times and spaces, would allow people accces again to the present moment, or lived time, rather the regimented time of capital.

For the Situationists, then, graffiti was more than a scribbled message on the walls of the city; it was a spatial and temporal insurrection against a society of capitalist dimensions.

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[152] One such demonstration of this practice is Debord's psychogeographic maps, in which he cuts up traditional maps of Paris and collages them back together with arrows indicating flows of "psychogeography." Situationist psychogeography was the study of the effects of geography on people's behaviors and desires. These maps suggest, like Lefebvre might, that the creation of "readable" space in the form of the Parisian metro map, is an abstraction of space. One must reappropriate space like Debord does in order to change it and the power structures that undergird it.

[153] "[Abstract space] rejects time as an abstraction—except when it concerns work, the producer of things and of surplus value. Time is reduced to constraints of space: schedules, runs, crossings, loads" (Lefebvre "Space," 187).

Writing on the wall, something any number of individuals can encounter every day in the streets, acts as a psychogeographic mapping tool, unsettling the abstract nature of space. Its presence heterogenizes the space, allowing for new perspectives to surface, creating a socialist space in which society is transformed, where there is a possibility for the "possession and collective management of a space by a permanent intervention of 'interested parties' even with their multiple and sometimes contradictory interests" (Lefebvre "Space," 195). When graffiti demands that the passerby stop moving to read its message, it reorders the pathways that he or she takes, and thus, reshuffles the abstract nature of the city into one that is of a manifold nature, permitting new pathways to emerge and abolishing the distinction between capitalist times and spaces. In other words, through this reorientation, graffiti claims time and space from capitalism *for* the experience of the revolution of May '68. In this chapter, I read graffiti as an example of Michel de Certeau's "arts de faire" because it subverts the capitalistic status quo through its ephemerality. Graffiti, like walking, is a "tactic" that undoes the abstract nature of the capitalist space of the city; just as the "trajectories [of the pedestrian] form unpredictable sentences," the writings of the graffeur inscribe those unpredictable trajectories onto the walls themselves (De Certeau XLV). With this in mind, I argue that the graffiti of May 1968 emerges from these theories, its power emanating from its entanglement with the passerby, calling them into a revolution through direct appeals to "live" in present moment.

Before May '68: Godard's Graffiti in *La Chinoise*

In 1967, after being refused a visa to shoot a film in Hanoi about the Vietnam War, Jean-Luc Godard wrote and directed the film, *La Chinoise*, in a small apartment in Paris (De Baecque 58).[154] In this pseudo-documentary, a "cellule" of five young Maoist enthusiasts,

[154] On Godard's political background at the time of filming: "[Godard] quickly became alert to what he saw and heard on the Nanterre campus when he drove his new young partner and student Anne Wiazemsky there for classes. For in France, as in other Western countries, Maoist cells had been slowly forming since 1966. The Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes (UJCML) sought to transform into Marxist rhetoric and

who call themselves "Aden-Arabie" after the novel by communist Paul Nizan, spend the summer together in a Parisian bourgeois apartment, whose walls they line with copies of Mao's little red book, inscribe with graffiti, and plaster with pages of the *Cahiers marxistes-léninistes*, a political journal released by the Maoist Rue d'Ulm group led by Louis Althusser at the École normale supérieure.[155] Véronique, played by Godard's partner, Anne Wiazemsky, is the most ardently militant of the group. A philosophy student at Nanterre, she is also, somewhat ironically, the daughter of bankers. Guillaume, Véronique's partner, is a theater actor, the son of a man who acted alongside Antonin Artaud. Henri is a scientist who is the most sympathetic to the French Communist Party (PCF), a fact which eventually results in his being banned from the cell and labelled a "revisionist." Kirilov, named after a character from Dosteovsky's novel *The Devils*, is a Soviet "nihilist painter" (Williams, "The Case for Revolutionary Agency," 209). Finally, there is Yvonne, an impoverished young woman from the French countryside, who came to Paris in 1964 and worked as both a maid and a prostitute. She often voices confusion about the Maoist theory they are practicing("C'est quoi

gestures the radical philosophy of Louis Althusser, who emphasized Marxism as a science and promoted a return to the doctrinal purity of early Marx. The group published a theoretical review, the Cahiers marxistes-léninistes, founded by militants of the Union des étudiants communistes (UEC) based at the École Normale Supérieure, where Althusser taught philosophy. Among the ranks of the UEC were Robert Linhart, Jacques Rancière, Pierre Macherey, Alain Badiou, and Étienne Balibar, all of whom endorsed in 1966 the Great Cultural and Proletarian Revolution in China. Affecting the same idealist fervor as the young officers of the Red Guard, they fancied that they were now the political new wave in France. In fact, by the mid-to-late 1960s Mao was seen by many on the left as the sole guarantor of Marxism-Leninism. Another dissident extreme left group, the Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste de France (also mentioned in *La Chinoise*), similarly called itself Maoist although claimed allegiance to Stalin and refused Kruschev-style détente. Godard was put in close touch with the UJCML by a young journalist working for Le Monde, Jean-Pierre Gorin, who, while not a Maoist himself, began to influence the tone and direction of Godard's new film and even inspired him to visit the Chinese Embassy while on tour in Algiers." (Williams, "The Politics of Violence," 22).

"According to the filmmaker, it would be the rejection from Hanoi that triggered the filming of La Chinoise and in turn the appearance of its images in the short film: 'This refusal from Hanoi proved to me that since I was living in Paris, there was no reason not to make films in Paris. So, I decided that in every film I made, I would talk about Vietnam, in one way or another, but rather through it'" (Ibáñez 20-21).

[155] For more on this group, see the article "Les Normaliens de la rue d'Ulm après 1945 : une génération communiste ?" (Sirinelli 1986).

une analyse?" is one such question she utters) and is routinely exploited by the other students, acting as their domestic servant throughout the film.

Taking place in three "movements," consisting of three "dialogues" and one "rencontre," introduced by intertitle screens with red or blue font characteristic of Godard's films, the film makes explicit its connection to and inspiration from the socialist theater of Bertolt Brecht. [156] At one point, Guillaume erases the name of every prominent artistic thinker, writer, or artist from a blackboard, except for that of Brecht.[157] Through both the explicit references to Brecht and the implicit techniques reminiscient of Brecht, Godard practices Brecht's "alienation effect" on screen, constantly reminding the spectator that this documentary-film is constructed by the filmmaker and not authentic, even going as far as to film the actors handling their own clapperboards and turning the camera around on the cameraman himself. Godard also uses various editing techniques to destabilize the line between reality and fiction in the film, as Anoine Krieger suggests, blending diegesis and the non-diegetic. Through a variety of techniques, such as montages of Marxist leaders and newspapers, dissonant music layered over documentary interviews, repeated references to

[156] This font has become so famous that the Atelier Carvalho Bernau created a font called "Jean-Luc" available to download.

[157] In his work, Antoine Krieger has highlighted connections between the film and Brechtian theater: "Marquées par une autoréférentialité se traduisant par l'inclusion d'extraits d'autres productions cinématographiques et la mise en scène de 'cinéastes' au travail, [*La Chinoise* de Godard et *La Troisième génération* de Fassbender] incluent aussi des montages sonores aussi bien que visuels, reflétant une multiplicité de citations d'œuvres préexistantes (radio, musique, photos). Ces deux tendances manifestent l'influence des théories de Brecht sur le théâtre. Et particulièrement, à travers l'écriture de 'fables,' la tendance à aliéner le spectateur à travers une rupture avec les conventions du théâtre traditionnel, telles que la linéarité de la narration et l'illusion dramatique." ["Characterized by an autoreferentiality which manifests through the inclusion of extracts of other films and the mise-en-scène of "filmmakers" at work, [Godard's *La Chinoise* and Fassbender's *La Troisième generation*] also feature both audio and visual montage, reflecting a multiplicity of references to pre-existing works (radio, music, photos). These two tendencies demonstrate the influence of Brecht's theories on theater. In particular, through the writing of 'fables,' the tendency to alienate the spectator through a break with traditional theater conventions, such as the linearity of narration and dramatic illusion"] (Krieger, "La Chinoise" 178). For more on this topic, see also Jan Uhde's article, "The Influence of Bertolt Brecht's Theory of Distanciation on the Contemporary Cinema, Particularly on Jean-Luc Godard."

Brecht, and scenes in which the fourth wall is broken, the film consistently destroys the logical connections between image, sound, and meaning.

Despite the eclectic filming and editing choices, the setting and plot of the film are simple. Most of the film transpires inside of a Parisian apartment. In this apartment, the five Maoists live together, giving each other lectures on the truest form of communism, being interviewed by Godard, and eventually plotting the assassination of a Soviet government official.[158] The film ends with the completed assassination of the Soviet official, despite Véronique's initial murder of the wrong man, and the dissolution of the cell. Véronique, chosen by "lots" to carry out the act, enters a hotel and accidentally kills the wrong man the first time by reading his room number backwards at the hotel front desk.[159] Upon realizing, she quickly returns to the hotel and murders the correct individual. Prior to the assassination, Henri was ex-communicated for opposing the political violence of the cell, and Serge committed suicide in the apartment, after signing a note falsely claiming responsibility for the assassination. Following the assassination, Véronique returns the apartment to her disappointed family members, Yvonne is mysteriously absent, and Guillaume continues his avant-garde acting pursuits in abandoned buildings and along the Seine. The film ends with a voice-over from Véronique, reflecting on how this cell was "the first timid step in a long march" towards revolution (1:35:51).

Although Godard's intentions were unclear upon release of the film, his depiction was generally despised by the students that he represented, who took umbrage with film's focus

[158] This assassination target depicts the tensions at the time between Maoist groups forming in France and the old guard of communism, Stalinism, which, as Guillaume argues in one of his lessons, was increasingly viewed as a "revisionism" of "true" communism (*La Chinoise* 39:00).
[159] The cell's focus on communist literature is ironically exemplified in the scene where she is chosen to commit the murder. Their definition of "choosing by lots" is to choose a random sentence from Mao's little red book and alternate candidates for each word. Because the sentence ends when Veronique is pointing to herself, she must undertake the assassination.

on the students' political terrorism rather than their solidarity with the working class.[160] After Godard's radicalization during May 1968, he lamented having made this film calling it, like Henri, "'revisionist.'" [161] James S. Williams asserts that after this reaction by the public, Godard tried to "redefine his orginal aims" for the film by labelling it as an attack on Western imperialist cinema (Williams, "The Case," 207). In any case, many scholars, such as Grace An, have noted the ambivalence of Godard's film towards student revolutionaries (282-83). In point of fact, the students depicted in his film are oddly domestic, devoting most of their militant energy to the decoration of and instruction within the apartment rather than performing political actions in the outside world. The characters' use of the word "cellule" to describe themselves exemplifies the insular nature of this small community, which defines itself by being the only truly revolutionary form of communism. This exclusion is reinforced by their limited (and bloody) interaction with the outside world and the dearth of scenes filmed in the city itself. Early on in the film, Henri returns to the apartment after a physical assault led by a "commando" of French Communist Party members who disagreed with his stance on the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The first scene outside of the apartment occurs over halfway through the film when Guillaume and Veronique distribute Mao's red book, in slapstick fashion, to passing cars (48:30). Later, Véronique discusses political actions on a train with Francis Jeanson, who is playing the role of her philosophy professor (1:07:54).[162] Finally, only the the assassination, which is undertaken "outside," and the subsequent

[160] For more on student revolutionaries disawoval of the film, see William's "'C'est le petit livre rouge / Qui fait que tout enfin bouge': The case for revolutionary agency and terrorism in Jean-Luc Godard's La Chinoise" and de Baeque's "La Chinoise de Jean-Luc Godard."

[161] In one of Godard's interviews in 1968, after his politicization following May 1968, he described *La Chinoise* and another film he made as follows: "They are just Hollywood films because I was a bourgeois artist. They are my dead corpses." (Carroll 233). Anne Wiazemsky also famously distanced herself from this film some time after its release; for more on this, see the book chapter, "*La Chinoise*…et après? Aging Against Tradition," in *A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard* (Grace An, 2014)

[162] In the film, Francis Jeanson plays the character of Véronique's philosophy professor at Nanterre, while simultaneously playing himself. Francis was known for his activism during the Algerian War as a key organizer of the porteurs de valises (the network of French people who undertook clandestine missions on behalf of the Algerian nationalist movement, the FLN), which is something Véronique discusses with him during this trip.

disbanding of the group, frees the camera to leave the confines of the apartment. During the last five minutes of the film, the camera accompanies Guillaume to different locations "outside" where he enacts theatrical skits, or what the intertitles call "the theatrical vocation of Guillaume Meister…on the way to a true socialist theater" (1:31:40-1:34:57). In summary, Godard's film portrays a group of young radicals who promote solidarity with the working class and a strict adherence to Maoist ideals, while doing very little to achieve change outside of their own apartment.

The members of the cell are so out-of-touch with the real world that they write political graffiti, normally written in the streets of a city, within this very same apartment. I argue that this film's fictional graffiti reveals a tension inherent in the historical May '68 graffiti: the graffiti, written to empower the passerby to take subversive action, often employs unclear and ambiguous language, which obscures this message for the general population. Godard's use of graffiti in the film also reveals a dissidence between the Maoist students and other groups participating in "revolutionary actions" at this time, which is important to bear in mind as we move forward in this chapter. The majority of scholarly analysis on this particular film has been focused on its political nature (such as its depiction of political "terrorism") or its aesthetic qualities (such as its use of montage).[163] In this section, I consider this previous research, but I focus my analysis specifically on the group's graffiti writing, which has heretofore not been examined in any detail. References to the film's graffiti in scholarship are infrequent and, when analyzed, scholars only examine the first instance of graffiti in the film: "Il faut confronter les idées vagues avec des images claires" (*La Chinoise*

[163] See "Le rouge de *La Chinoise*: politique de Godard" (Rancière), "C'est le petit livre rouge / Qui fait que tout enfin bouge': The case for revolutionary agency and terrorism in Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise*" (Williams), "The Politics of Violence and the End(s) of Art: Speaking for the Other in *La Chinoise*" (Williams), "Un tournant politique" (Farould), "Idées vagues/images claires: Image, Pedagogy, and Politics in the Films of Jean-Luc Godard, 1966–1969" (Cramer).

2:35). In this section, I consider the ensemble of graffiti writings in the film and also integrate analysis of these scenes with the historical reality of May 1968.

Graffiti's power comes from its form, location, and message.[164] However, graffiti, which is often written in the streets of the city or famously in the university during May 1968, does not follow this logic in Godard's film. Instead of marking public space with their messages, the students write the graffiti *inside* of the apartment. In this way, the students neutralize the revolutionary nature of graffiti, which necessitates a presence in public space in order to transmit its message. The group also teaches each other lessons on communism in this same apartment; they create a classroom, where they hold lectures, write on chalkboards, and read from Mao's little red book. In this way, the apartment functions as both as a quasi-street (graffiti written on its walls) and a quasi-university (classes given within its walls). If the "cell" acts as a representation of political activism on university campuses prior to May 1968, then the graffiti that they write inside the apartment acts as a representation of the graffiti that university students wrote within the Sorbonne before and during May '68. Therefore, I read the isolated nature of the cell (and its interior graffiti) as an implicit critique by Godard of the early student movement's ability to transcend the walls of the university.[165] Their inscriptions, written within the echo chamber of their own "university" walls, do not reach those outside of their community; their solidarity with the workers' struggle is similarly non-existent, despite their ideological concerns about the proletariat. If they are writing graffiti inside the apartment, they write only for themselves.

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[164] In the Routledge Handbook of Street Art and Graffiti, criminologist Jeffrey Ian Ross defines graffiti by four criterion: legality, content, creator, and location. All of these elemnts define a graffiti inscription and help determine its message (2-3).

[165] This skepticism is further underscored by Véronique's conversation on the train with Jeanson, who suggests the student movement does not have enough support to survive (1:20:00). Godard's own beliefs about political violence are hard to parse; he seems to be an advocate for violence in some spaces and nonviolence in others. James S. Williams argues repeatedly that Godard uses "aesthetic violence" to confront capitalism through his films.



Image 2.1 *La Chinoise* (15:26)

Unlike the working class, the young students in *La Chinoise* have unlimited time to pursue these endeavors, and they use this time to craft their graffiti. Compared to historical May 1968 graffiti which is written spontaneously and quickly in the streets and universities, *La Chinoise* graffiti is comprised of orderly, upright lettering in all capitals. These writings resemble typeface on a computer, emulating the title and intertitle screens that intersperse the film. The highly constructed nature of these writings is exemplified in the scene in which Véronique paints one of the graffiti inscriptions (15:18-15:44, Image 2.1, pp. 112). She does so carefully, standing upright in front of the wall and holding a paintbrush as if she is painting on canvas rather than scribbling an illicit writing in the streets. Moreover, the camera never captures the first iteration of any of the cell's graffiti writings. In this example, Véronique is filmed tracing over an already-written inscription, the others are already present in the apartment when the camera starts rolling. The graffiti writing of the Maoist cell, then, is one which is measured, planned and repetitious; it becomes almost a ritual, a bodily recitation of the ideas that this cell espouses rather than a spontaneous creation of any sort.[166] This reading is corroborated by the actions of Guillaume, who passes by the graffiti few seconds later, reciting lines from Mao's book. In a theatrical voice, he makes allusion to the words of the graffiti, stating that dictators must arrest "des voyous et des autres *mauvaises génies* qui troublent sérieusement l'ordre public" ["the hoodlums and other troublemakers who seriously disrupt public order"] (15:19, italics are my own). While reading, he also wanders back and forth through the room, as if integrating his bodily practice with his theoretical ideas. Like Guillaume's walking recitation, Véronique's graffiti tracing is a performative rendition of Maoism. One could argue that this interior graffiti is attacking the capitalist system, as it is

[166] With this in mind, the graffiti writing is similar to the as the dynamic exercises the group does while shouting communist manifestos on the balcony of the apartment later in the film (*La Chinoise* 30:03-30:35)

written “illegally” (without approval) on the walls of an anonymous bourgeois couple’s apartment. However, I argue that because its political power is circumscribed to the walls of the apartment, its attack on the capitalist system is nonexistent, nothing more than mere decoration for the set of the film. The graffiti they write does not disrupt the greater political and social spaces of the city and, as such, is not operating within the logic of Lefebvre’s spatial theory; it does not assert a right to the city nor does it permit a return to the everyday. Rather, the graffiti’s location and form evince its limited scope and its sterility as a political device.

Although different in location and form, the graffiti in the film recreates the content of revolutionary slogans that appeared prior to 1968 and anticipates the content of real-life inscriptions that appeared during May 1968. In other words, the graffiti writings in the film reflect avant-garde ideas such as those of the Situationists, which integrated Marxist ideology and anti-colonialsm into obscure and paradoxical statements. The aphoristic slogan at the beginning of the film: “Il faut confronter les idées vagues avec des images claires” sounds like it could have been pulled from Guy Debord’s *Societe du spectacle* (2:05).[167] A second graffiti in the film reads: “Une minorité à la ligne revolutionnaire n’est plus une minorité” [“A minority with a revolutionary stance is no longer a minority”] (4:22). This graffiti suggests implicit support of their cell’s radical ideas. However, it provides no concrete action to the passerby (or even specificity as to what is the correct revolutionary minority) and, thus, is nothing more than internal support for their own ideas. A third graffiti reads: “Mauvais Génies – Police et Yankees – Dragons de Pacotilles” [“Troublemakers — Police and Yankees — (15:26) This inscription reads like a poem, with each line ending in a rhyme. Moreover, its

[167] Debord’s aphoristic writing makes use of both chiasmus and negation that is reminiscient the film’s graffiti. Some examples of the repetition and quasi-chaismus in Debord’s text. (“Le spectacle réunit le séparé, mais il le réunit en tant que séparé. » (30) and “C’est pourquoi le spectacteur ne se sent chez lui nulle part, car le spectacle est partout » (31). This first example of graffiti in La Chinoise also exemplifies the arcane and abstract nature of Situationist slogans and resulting graffiti. How does one confront vague ideas with clear images? How can the spectacle be both everywhere and nowhere?

references bespoke the group's Maoist influence. Mao was famous for using the slogan "tigres en papier" ["paper tigers"] to describe his enemies, particularly the United States, and, as already stated," the term "mauvaises génies" ["troublemakers"] comes from his book.[168] In this statement, the police and Americans are labelled as bad influences or troublemakers ("mauvaises génies") as well as "dragons de pacotilles," which seems to be an altered reference to Mao's phrase, "tigres en papier" ["paper tigers"]; in other words, they are institutions that makes claim to power but are actually powerless. At the end of the film, we see a fourth and final graffiti: "Tous les chemins mènent à Pékin" ["All roads lead to Pekin"] (1:32:27). Once again, this inscription contains a rhyme (chemins/Pékin) and reworks the proverb "All roads lead to Rome," which is derived from the geographical construction of the early Roman empire road system in which all roads crossed through Rome. With this comparison, the graffiti de-centers the West and re-centers the East, namely China, as the hub of the communist future. The graffiti writings communicate communist ideology through abstract language and playful epigrams, which mirrors the graffiti that would later come to characterize May 1968.

[168] See "Socialism and Communism" and "Imperialism and All Reactionaries are Paper Tigers" from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* ("The Little Red Book") (1966).



Image 2.2 *La Chinoise* (2:05)

At the very beginning of the film, following a crescendo of orchestral music, voice-overs, and title screens, the apartment's salon is framed in a medium establishing shot (Image 2.2, pp. 116). In this scene, the graffiti inscription "Il faut confronter les idées vagues avec des images claires" ["We should replace vague ideas with clear images"] is painted in black in the top left quadrant of the frame. The surrounding décor is simple: two red chairs, a red lamp, wood table, and an armoir. In the background, there is a blue door.[169] While the camera focuses on the salon, Henri and Yvonne, never shown on screen, converse about communism via voice-over.[170] This establishing shot is, then, followed by a litany of disjointed drums and horns (a sonic bridge which recurs throughout the film) and a montage consisting of close-ups of the film's characters and still photographs of communist leaders, such as Che Guevara.

[169] See Williams'book chapter "The Politics of Violence and the End(s) of Art: Speaking (for) the Other in La Chinoise (1967)" for more on the use of primary colors in the film.

[170] Only on the second viewing does it become obvious that it is Henri and Yvonne discussing the apartment they are spending the summer in. Godard often "delays" the spectator full understanding of a scene, through non-diegetic sounds.

This chaotic opening sequence sets up the general logic of the film and its Brechtian aesthetic, the graffiti functioning as one aspect of the cell's communist "décor." [171] This introductory shot also demonstrates that the apartment is both the setting and the "set" of the film. The graffiti is part and parcel of the young people's occupation of the bourgeois space, which is also conveyed through their wall collages, their color scheme of primary colors, and the classroom they have installed. The montage of communist figureheads and the cell's members that follows this establishing shot of the apartment further signals the constructed nature of the film (and, by extension, the contrived nature of the cell). In other words, the cell's "radical" graffiti writing is represented, from the first scene, as merely a background detail to their Brechtian play rather than central to their political actions in the world.

The second instance of graffiti in the film occurs shortly after the first, and it acts again as a set piece that corroborates the cell's political ideas (Image 2.3, pp. 118). Godard's camera captures, in a medium resetablishing shot, another room of the apartment accompanied by an another off-screen conversation, this time between Guillaume and Véronique regarding the name of their "cell." In this establishing shot, the graffiti "Une minorité à la ligne revolutionnaire correcte n'est plus une minorité" ["A minority with a revolutionary stance is no longer a minority"] on the wall behind two chairs (4:26). Just as in the first scene, the graffiti is merely a part of the décor, accuentated by the primary colors on the walls (this time those of the Italian flag, rather than the French one). The doorbell rings, Veronique goes to answer it and finds Kirilov helping Henri, bloodied from a physical attack by a "commando" of French communists. Henri then sits down directly below the graffiti, and it frames him, implicitly commenting on his situation. Roughed up by the majority of French (Soviet-inspired) Communists, Henri is shown to belong to the "correct

[171] This writing can be understood as a form of graffiti because of its illicit nature (written on the walls of someone else's apartment without their knowledge or approval).

revolutionary" minority— the Maoists. Guillaume then enters the room, reading the following lines from Mao's book: "Si nous sommes attaqués par l'ennemi, c'est une bonne chose car cela prouve que nous avons tracé une ligne de demarcation bien nette entre l'ennemi et nous" ["If we are attacked by the enemy, it is a good thing because it proves that we have traced a very clear line of demarcation between us and the enemy"] (4:55-5:01). With this reading from Guillaume and Henri's crumpled body below the graffiti, it becomes clear that, according to the cell, they may be in the minority, but they are justified in believing that they have the correct revolutionary mindset. In this case, the attack on Henri proves that they have traced "a line of demarcation" between themselves and the French Communist Party; in another way, through their graffiti writings, they have also traced a "line of demarcation" between themselves and the outside world.



Image 2.1 *La Chinoise* (4:11)

By beginning with these two examples, is Godard being facetious towards these students? Is he attacking the "vague ideas" of the students with the "clear images" of his film, drawing attention to inconsistencies in their thinking or is he suggesting a new form of cinema that eschews "clear images" in exchange for a complicated representation of reality?[172] In his analysis of the film, Jacques Rancière suggests the latter. He reads the tension between word and image in *La Chinoise* as central to Godard's creation of a form of Marxist cinema. He sees, then, the struggle between word and image ("idées" and "images," respectively), as one which is primarily a struggle between a "represented Marxism," that of the Maoism of the students, and the "principle of representation," or Althusserian Marxism. The Marxism of Althusser, Rancière argues, is a Marxism that is, like the film, "en train de se faire"; it is a Marxism that demands its adherents relearn how to "see, speak, and read"—that its adherents learn again the gestures of daily life through the lens of Marxist thought (188). For him, the ways in which the students "embody" their Marxism is most interesting, such as when Guillaume recreates a Chinese man's theatrical display for Western media. According to Rancière's reading of the first graffiti, the "vague ideas" to be confronted are those of theoretical Marxism, and these ideas must be confronted with the "clear images" of Godard's cinema. This dialectical relationship between idea and image is never fully explained by Rancière, but he suggests that the opening graffiti, which he calls the film's "epigraph," illustrates the film's goal to "rearrange the liaison" between Marxist theory (an "assemblage

[172] Kirilov: "L'art ne réproduit pas le visible ; il rend visible" Véronique: "Oui, mais quand même, l'effet esthétique est imaginaire" Kirilov: "Oui, mais cet imaginaire n'est pas le reflet de réalité; il est le réel de ce reflet. Il arrivent d'entendre des declarations comme: Employez seulement les trois couleurs. Les trois couleurs primaires: bleu, jaune, et rouge. Dans leur parfait pureté et dans leur parfait équilibre sous prétexte que les autres couleurs y sont déjà" [Kirilov: "Art does not reproduce the visible; it makes visible." Véronqique: "Yes, but still, the aesthetic effect is imaginary." Kirilov: "Yes, but this imaginary is not the reflection of reality; it is the reality of that reflection. One sometimes hears statements like: Use only three colors. The three primary colors: blue, yellow, and red. In their perfect purity and perfect balance, on the pretext that the other colors are there already" *(La Chinoise* 47:41-48:27)

of words") and reality (an "assemblage of images"). [173] Godard's film performs this "rearranging" not by transforming ideas into images, but by making both ideas and images more like each other:

> Le travail de l'art est de séparer, de transformer le continuum de l'image-sens en une série de fragments, de cartes postales, de leçons. L'appartement bourgeois sera donc le cadre de la représentation où seront disposés les éléments nécessaires et suffisants pour mettre en scène la question : qu'est-ce que dit le marxisme?...Le cadre pictural et théâtral est le lieu où mots et images peuvent être réagencés pour défaire le jeu métaphorique qui fait un sens de réalité en transformant les images en quasi-mots et les mots en quasi-images (192).
>
> [The task of art is to separate, to transform the continuum of image-meaning into a series of fragments, postcards, lessons. The bourgeois apartment will, thus, be the setting of the performance in which the necessary and sufficient elements will be arranged to stage the question: what does Marxism say ?...The pictural and theatrical setting is the place where words and images can be rearranged in order to undo the metaphorical play that makes a sense of reality by transforming images into quasi words and words into quasi-images.]

Therefore, the film's first graffiti is Godard's pedagogical description of his new form of Marxist cinema, one which reconnects theory and reality through the practice of embodiment.

While the representation of Marxism is central to Godard's film and its graffiti, I understand the graffiti to be more than just a symbolic statement on the state of cinema and

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[173] "Le marxisme, comme toute théorie, est d'abord un assemblage de mots— et faire voir vraiment la réalité qu'ils décrivent et projettent —et la réalité est d'abord un montage des images—, il ne s'agit pas de les traiter à part. Il faut réagencer leur liason" ["Marxism, like all theory, is, first of all, a collection of words — and to truly reveal the reality that they describe and project— and the reality is, first of all, a montage of images—, so we must not treat them separately. One must reorganize their connection." (Rancière 191). The dialectic of the film, then, is : "le chassé-croisé des mots qui se cachent en faisant voir et des images qui se rendent invisible en faisant entendre" ["the interplay of words that hide themselves by being seen and images that make themselves visible by making themselves heard"] (200).

its intertwining with social, political, and economic theory. Instead, I consider Godard's graffiti in its three forms (textual, spatial, and corporeal), as well as its participation in a greater dialogue with the historical events of the moment, the writings on the walls of the city, and the other instances of graffiti in the film itself. While I hesitate to argue that this film was a premonition of May 1968, I see the continuity between its graffiti and that written during events of May as something worth considering in closer detail. With this in mind, I will employ Rancière's argument about the film's embodiment of Marxist theory but leave behind his greater argument about the film being an incarnation of Marxism in its totality. Instead, I propose that Godard uses graffiti to highlight the paralysis of the Marxist political body in late 1960s France. Although there are no "passersby" in the traditional sense because the graffiti is written indoors, I suggest that the orientation of the characters' bodies in relation to the graffiti reveals the tensions and ambigiuity of the cell's theory and its political actions.



Image 2.4 *La Chinoise* (26:45)



Image 2.5 *La Chinoise* (1:22:50)



Image 2.6 *La Chinoise* (1:22:35)

The first graffiti reappears several times throughout the film, and the subsequent iterations illustrate this idea of the impotence of the political cell. Some twenty minutes into the film, Véronique and Guillaume sit across from each other in the salon, the first graffiti behind them on the wall (26:45-27:45) (Image 2.4, pp. 121). In this instance, the shot is tighter than the establishing shot at the beginning of the film, allowing us to only read the bottom of the sentence written on the wall at the very top edge of the frame. At the table, Guillaume practices a scene from a play aloud, and Véronique reads a book silently. Suddenly, Guillaume exclaims: "Je veux être aveugle!" Véronique asks why, and he replies that if he were blind, they could understand each other better because they could change the meaning of words. Then, they practice giving words alternate meanings by choosing random ones from their books and using them in a nonsensical conversation.[174] In this scene, the graffiti's message ("il faut confronter des idées vagues avec les images claires") is undermined both by the camera framing, which cuts off the graffiti, effectively destroying any "clear" image of it, and by Guillaume and Veronique's interaction. Guillaume's desire to be blind and the senseless words exchanged between the two of them manifests the vacuity of their interactions. In other words, the absurd and unintelligible conversation that they have echoes the unintelligibility of their graffiti and their politics in general.

At the end of the film, the camera returns to the same salon, and this third and final scene of the graffiti demonstrates the cell's inability to affect change as well as a disturbing nonchalance about the safety of their own militant community. In this scene, the camera moves left and right via a tracking shot between Guillaume and Véronique, exposing alternate fragments of the graffiti rather than the entire sentence (1:22:20 – 1:25:00). When the camera is centered on Guillaume (Image 2.6, pp. 122), the word "claires" is framed above

[174] Rancière reads this scene as an invocation of Diderot's Lettre sur les aveugles: "L'althérussime de l'a Chinoise est en somme l'actualisation de sa pratique diderotiste" (191).

him, and on Véronique, the words: “des images claires” (Image 2.5, pp. 122). Both Veronique and Guillaume are posed in the same way, smoking and leaning on an elbow. Their casual stances imply a detachment from the seriousness of the subject, which is if Sergei will sign a letter claiming responsibility for the assassination of the Soviet official and then commit suicide. The fragmented and unclear “images” of the graffiti replicates the lack of clarity of the scene and of their political plan. The irony of this scene is that their friend is going to commit suicide in the room next to them, and they are incapable of seeing the “clear” image in front of them or doing anything about it. Moreover, despite the bright lighting of the room, Véronique is reflected in the armoire in a distorted image. These elements—the segmentation of the graffiti, the pretentious posing of the couple, and the irony of the film’s “image” and the graffiti’s “ideas”—all produce an image of the Marxist cell as one reduced to “images” of itself, without any moral substance, clarity, or radical power.

As the gun goes off in the other room, communicating Serge’s suicide to them, they remain immobile in front of the graffiti, which further communicates their impotence as revolutionary leaders. Following the sound of the gunshot, Guillaume stands and enters the next room. There he discovers the confession letter and Serge’s body on the floor beneath a painting of a rainbow. Serge’s suicide is part of a greater plan to protect Véronique from persecution for her future crime of killing the Soviet official; he has sacrified himself for their political violence. Prior to the suicide scene, their plan was not clear to the viewer, as we enter Guillaume and Véronique’s conversation *in media res*. After the suicide, Guillaume and Véronononique’s passivity before the graffiti evinces their complicity in his death. Once again, Godard uses the graffiti to lampoon the incredulous tactics of this political group. By obstructing a “clear” view of the graffiti, Godard highlights the contradictory and vague nature of these activist’s political actions. Through two acts of political violence (Serge’s suicide and the murder of the Soviet cell), the “vague ideas” of the cell become a concrete

reality (or "clear images"). However, this reality is mere theatrics; it does not produce any practical outcome for the group's political ends. Moreover, the spectator never sees any of the instances of political violence *on screen*; these "clear images" are further obscured by the very walls on which they write, which hide the violence from the viewer. While the film begins with Henri's bloodied body "embodying" the cell's graffiti, it ends with Kirilov's dead boy, bloody, without an accompanying graffiti explanation. His death is effectively the death knell of the cell's vacuous ideas— a "clear image" of their ambiguous, violent, and aimless Marxism.

Another type of graffiti "writing" pervades *La Chinoise*: sporadic intertitles that make use of the same font as the graffiti inside the apartment and that of the title screen of the film, which is in full, *La Chinoise: Un film en train de se faire*.[175] These intertitles, interspersed throughout the film, compose one long sentence, which grows progressively longer each time that it reappears, in the same way that the title screen unfolds over multiple screens. The full sentence of this intertitle screen appears during the conversation between Francis Jeanson and Véronique in the train to Nanterre and only lasts a split-second on the screen. The screen passes so quickly that it is impossible to read, even to take a screenshot of, almost like graffiti you might catch in passing while looking out a train's window. The title screens, like urban inscriptions, are ephemeral, written on the putative "walls" of the screen, and only seen in fragments. For the disembodied spectator, these screens recreate the embodied experience of encountering graffiti on the street. Put differently, through this revelation process, the spectator becomes a passerby to the graffiti of the intertitles; their eyes "pass by" the graffiti as their body might pass by graffiti in the streets. However, there is one difference from traditional graffiti or the graffiti of the cell in the film. The apartment graffiti is written and

[175] In addition to the graffiti, there are several instances of "writing" on the chalkboards during the lessons that the students give to one another. More about these, see Michael Cramer's "Idées vagues/images claires: Image Pedagogy, and Politics in the Films of Jean-Luc Godard, 1966-1969."

"encountered" bodily by the individual members of the cell, but not by the outside world as traditional graffiti would be. The intertitle graffiti, however, is written by Godard and "encountered" directly by the spectator. In a film where the bodies of those in the cell are vehicles of staged revolution, the presence of graffiti writing without a "visual" body is striking. This "intra-film" graffiti, then, dissociates graffiti from its revolutionary context (i.e. being encountered in the streets through corporeal means) even more so than the apartment graffiti does. When the spectator "reads" the intertitle graffiti, their body is not activated as it would be in the streets. Instead, the "ideas" of the Godard's graffiti are drawn out through the progressive screens and disembodied from reality. [176]

Véronique's monologue, in which she is being interviewed about her introduction to Marxism at the University of Nanterre, explains the Maoist students' disconnection from the reality of the proletariat, and, hence, from Marxism in general:

> Au début ça m'ennuyait Nanterre parce que c'est une faculté au milieu des bidonvilles, et puis peu à peu quand même je trouvais que c'était bien, le, la philo en banlieue ouvrière, fin que c'est, que c'était sa place [interviewer mumbles]…bah oui, ils nous ont mis dans les mêmes cages à lapins que les ouvriers, et les lapins ça se multiplient. Puis les matins quand j'y vais je croise les enfants des ouvriers algériens et puis aussi les mécanos de Chez Simca…..[interviewer mumbles]….Oui d'accord, fin, oui, je croyais que je les croisais mais en fait on fait les mêmes chemins, c'est-à dire on a les mêmes bistros, on descend à la même heure de la même gare, on a la même pluie, on a presque le même travail, et c'est ça….c'est là-bas que j'ai compris les trois inégalités fondamentales d'un régime capitaliste et justement, fin, du régime gaulliste en France. (*La Chinoise* 22:50-23:55)

[176] Although this use of intertiles might be representative of Brecht's theory of alienation in theater, which was meant through dissociative techniques to incite the spectator to reflect on politics rather than passively accept it, Godard's film undermines this effective alienation through the use of graffiti.

> [In the beginning Nanterre annoyed me because it was a university in the middle of the bidonvilles, and then little by little, I started to think it was pretty good after all, philosophy in the working-class suburbs, I mean, that it belonged there [interviewer mumbles]…well, yeah they put us in the same rabbit cages as the workers, and rabbits, they multiply. Then, mornings when I go there I run into the children of Algerian workers and then also the Simca mechanics… [interviewer mumbles]…Yes ok, well, yes, I thought that I was running into them but in fact we took the same routes, that is, we have the same bistros, we get off at the same hour at the same station, we have the same rain, we have almost the same work, and that's it…that's where I understood the three fundamental inequalities of a capitalist system and, actually, uh, the Gaullist regime in France.]

In this interview, Véronique makes series of connections between herself and the workers in Nanterre. First, she notes that the university is located in Nanterre, which is where the working class lives, and that it is this shared space that led her to political activism (the students were "in the same rabbit cages" as the workers). However, she "erases" and re-writes her answer multiple times.[177] With the phrase "je croise les chemins des enfants des ouvriers" ["I run into the children of the workers"] the shared space is reconceptualized as a relationship of contingency, one in which the two groups only briefly cross paths through the *children* of the workers. A sentence later, she rewrites again : " je croyais que je les croisais, mais en fait on a fait les mêmes chemins" [I thought that I was running into them but in fact we took the same routes"]. She no longer speaks of continuous or contingent paths shared with the workers, but rather about separate trajectories in the same general vicinity. The open-ended imparfait ("je croyais") gives way to the completed and separate action of the

[177] It is as if she is "rewriting" her answer, like she retraced the graffiti in the previous example.

passé composé ("on a fait"). Towards the end of the interview, she concedes a final revision, which is not in the quotation above: "Oui je sais très bien que je suis coupée de la classe ouvrière" ["Yes, I know very well that I am cut off from the working class"] (25:02-25:04). What she first described as a shared space between workers and students is actually a segregated space, one in which she is cut off from the worker populations, not in harmony with them as she pretends to be. At the end of her meandering explanation, the interviewer responds with: "Tout n'est pas très clair", ["All of this isn't clear"], an indirect reference to the salon graffiti (25:16); again, their political ideas are not clear but are merely imagistic montages of third-world communism. Just as their graffiti is written inside rather than outside, their physical trajectories are separate from those workers with whom they declare solidarity.[178] Their political activism is divorced from any sort of physical reality, and this is further underscored by Véronique's continual "edits" in her interview.

When Francis Jeanson and Véronique debate on the train later in the film, Jeanson makes explicit this hitherto implicit critique of the student movements. Jeanson was asked by Godard to film this scene without a script, while Anne Wiazemky who played Véronique was being fed lines through an earpiece by Godard himself. In a way, Jeanson is speaking to Godard through Anne's character. At one point in their discussion, Véronique states that the students want to "borrow" lessons from China and implement them in France, in particular the use of violence to shut down universities. In response, Jeanson argues: "mais les leçons [que] vous voulez tirer…. sont terriblement abstraites…On ne tire pas une leçon en superposant" ["but the lessons that you want to learn…are terribly abstract. One does not learn a lesson by superimposing"] (1:19:31). This line echoes the epigraph from the beginning of the film: "il faut confronter les idées vagues avec des images claires" ["we must

[178] The only instance of graffiti written "in the streets" is shown at Nanterre's metro stop, where workers (dressed in blue) mill about in front of a graffiti that reads "Hubert Humphrey = Nazi."This scene is very disjointed from the rest of the film and feels like another "image" of a revolutionary working class, rather than an actual one.

confront vague ideas with clear images"]. Jeanson suggests, as Godard's treatment of the cell's graffiti seems to, that the students' lessons are too abstract and their ideas too vague to produce clear images of reality or any sort of revolution. Moreover, he argues that it is not feasible to superimpose Chinese ideas on an European society; in fact, by doing so, they are trying to "export" the revolution, turning communism into a *capitalist* product.[179] Here the spatial disconnect between the students and other revolutionary third-world populations takes on geographical proportions.

Jeanson's spontaneous use of the word "superimpose" evokes the conflicted relationship this film has to its graffiti. Graffiti is an inherently visual and textual superimposition; it is the act of layering writing on top of the walls. In his foundational essay on graffiti tagging, Jean Baudrillard argues that what differentiates graffiti from other forms of urban art, specifically murals, is its superimpositional nature:

> The graffitists themselves care very little for architecture ; they defile it, forget about it and cross the street. The mural artist respects the wall as he used to respect the limitations of his easel. Graffiti runs from one house to the next, from one wall of a building to the next, from the wall onto the window or the door, or windows on subway trains, or pavements. Graffiti overlaps, is thrown-up, superimposes (superimposition amounting to the abolition of the support as a framework, just as it is abolished as frame where its limits are not respected). Its graphics resemble the child's polymorphic perversity, ignoring the boundaries between the sexes and the delimitation of erogenous zones. Curiously, moreover, graffiti turns the city's walls and corners, the subway's cars and the busses into a *body,* a body without beginning

[179] The word "export" is taken from Véronique's own words when she is reading *Mao's Little Red Book.* The use of the word "export" instead of "transport" suggests they are gaining some sort of monetary profit from this exportation rather than a simple movement of ideas.

> or end, made erotogenic in its entirety by writing just as the body may be in the primitive inscription (tattooing) (35-6).

In other words, graffiti's excess and superimposition demonstrates its lack of respect for the architecture of the city. Through a personification, Baudrillard describes a wildness to graffiti: it "runs" from wall to wall, "straddles" the city, "vomits" on it. Like a child, it ignores the limits of the city, transgressing them every which way. However, this subversion leaves something in its wake: it transforms the city into a body—it "remakes the walls and parts of the city…a body, without end or beginning." The graffiti of the Maoist cell does not operate like Baudrillard's graffiti. It does not inundate or ignore the wall but rather respects it, like muralists do ("The mural artist respects the wall as he used to respect the limitations of his easel"), whom Baudrillard denigrates later in the article for reproducing capitalism. In other words, their graffiti is not revolutionary; it does not tear down the capitalist city. It reproduces capitalism; it is a piece of bourgeois art that Véronique writes as if painting on an "easel." [180] It stays in its frame, rather than "erogenizing" the city of Paris through its proliferation. *La Chinoise* graffiti upholds the wall's integrity and even integrates the wall into the apartment's political aesthetic. If superimposition is the mechanism of graffiti, then Jeanson's statements call into question the incapacity of this form of graphic insurrection. One cannot simply "superimpose" ideas onto another society and culture, just as one cannot superimpose words on a wall and enact a revolution. The superposition that the cell undertakes, then, is not one of revolutionary graffiti, but that of layering the Maoist ideas onto French society, a combination which is not compatible. This graffiti may mimic revolutionary language, but it is not revolutionary at the material, spatial, or societal level. It does not make the city into a revolutionary "body," like Baudrillard suggests about subway

[180] The only instance which contradicts this would be Kirilov's rainbow graffiti in the salon before he commits suicide. His graffiti is actually more in line with Baudrillard's definition, as it is looks like a rainbow drawn by a child. This grafffiti however, is without words and thus does nothing to further the revolution.

graffiti; it is simply a method for the characters to move their individual bodies in line with their own philosophies.

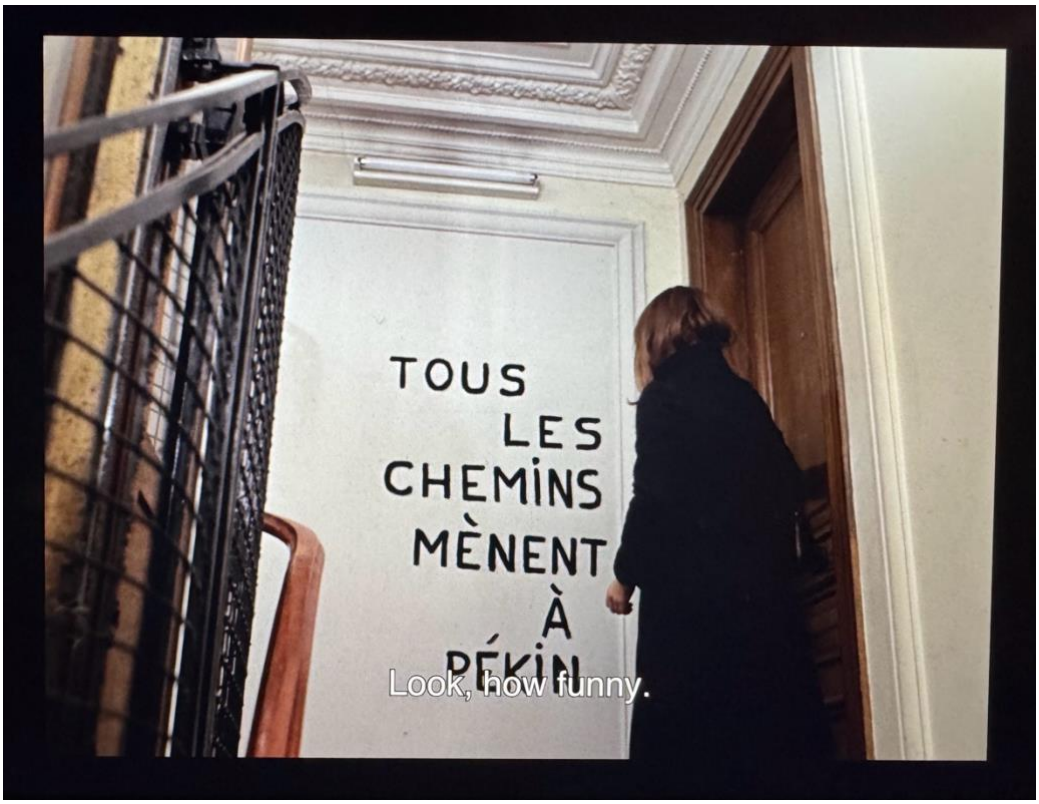


Image 2.7 *La Chinoise* (1:32:27)

La Chinoise thus, appears to code graffiti as impotent: it highlights the incapacity of this form of graphic insurrection to incite revolutionary insurrection—at least prior to May '68. By unveiling the film's constructed production, Godard derides, in turn, the constructed nature of the student's graffiti. Their writing, in contrast with real-life graffiti writing, is not dynamic but static, producing an echo chamber in which the students only speak to themselves. It is, then, this insular dialogue which ultimately reveals the cynical denouement of the film. The final "passerby" of the cell's graffiti is Veronique's cousin and her friend, coming to inspect the apartment after the summer. Next to the apartment door, the cell has painted the words: "Tous les chemins mènent à Pékin" ["All roads lead to Pekin"] (Image

2.7, pp. 131). One woman, filmed from the staircase at a low angle, turns to look at the writing and says, "C'est drôle" ["It's funny"]. Then, the other looks disgusted, and says "C'est dégoutant" ["It's disgusting"]. The alliterative reaction of the two bourgeois passerby and the low-angle of the camera demonstrates the perspective of the general public vis-à-vis these inscriptions. Those outside of the apartment see this graffiti as either parody or unpalatable. Once again, this final scene emphasizes the political impotence of this group. Their graffiti engenders no "passerby" because it is written indoors. When members of the cell do pass the writings by, their corporeal relationship to it demonstrates that it is written to fuel their own political ideas and practices rather than reach the outside world. When an outside passerby does arrive, the cell and their writings are not taken seriously, and then, as shown in the following scene, their graffiti is swiftly erased by the bourgeoisie. In both cases, the passerby is not mobilized or connected to the larger political body. Thus, the cell's graffiti, as portrayed in *La Chinoise* by Jean Luc Godard, loses its revolutionary power due to this disconnect between the body and the writings itself. Through this graffiti, Godard foreshadows a failed student revolution, but his conception of May 1968, as we will see in the following sections, was only partially correct. The graffiti that emerges *on the ground* during the events of May still retains its connection to the body, and, therefore, its political power.

Photographing the Passerby: Jo Schnapp, Claude Dityvon, and Jacques Buchholz

One year after *La Chinoise*'s debut, both workers and militant students, like those in Godard's film, took to the streets in Paris. These protestors deployed visual culture as an instrument of resistance; printed posters and scribbled graffiti peppered the city streets and the walls of the university.[181] Photojournalists then capitalized on the iconic nature of the movement's artistic expressions, barricade construction, and altercations with police forces to

[181] See *Paris '68 : graffiti, posters, newspapers, and poems of the events of May 1968* (Mark Rohan 1988) and *Beauty is in the street: a visual record of the May '68 Paris uprising* (Johan Kugelberg and Philippe Vermès 2011).

establish a lasting image of revolution of "May 1968."[182] This section focuses specifically on May 1968 graffiti as it was captured by the photographers on the ground. By contrasting Godard's filmic representation of student graffiti with actual photographs taken in May 1968, I will demonstrate how the latter derived its political power from both its occupation of public space and its ability to solicit and engage the bodies of those who passed it by. More specifically, I argue that May 1968 graffiti demands that the passerby's physical body activate its written message, and it is this active participation by the individual's physical body that mobilizes the greater political body for the revolution. By drawing on Henri Lefebvre's ideas about the homogeneity of capitalist time and space, I also argue that graffiti was conceived of as a tool to challenge spatial configurations of the city that promoted capitalism, and to redirect the steps of those who passed it by, urging them to stop and read, and, in doing so, to take time and space for the revolution—to effectively "heterogenize" the city.[183]

I have curated the collection of photographs for analysis from a variety of sources: *Mai 68: État des lieux* (Claude Dityvon 2018), Jacques Buchholz's photographs stored in the Bibliothèque de l'histoire de Paris archives, *Imagination au pouvoir* (Walter Lewino 1968, photographs by Jo Schnapp), and *Enragés et situationnistes dans les mouvements des occupations* (René Vienet 1968). These images were selected because they represent what I consider to be key aspects of May 1968 graffiti: simple, dark lettering, often in cursive or hastily written print, on the walls of the university and the street, with idealistic and somewhat disparate ideas about the revolution. These inscriptions range from the political and confrontational, for example, comparing the CRS police to SS, to the sensual or playful,

[182] For more on the construction of this image via photojournalism, see Leblanc, Audrey. "Fixer l'événement: Le Mai 1968 du photojournalisme." Sociétés et représentations, Editions de la Sorbonne, vol. 2, no. 32, 2011, pp. 57-76, DOI 10.3917/sr.032.0057

[183] In many ways, this idea of "heterogenizing" the city connects to Baudrillard's idea of graffiti "erogenizing" the city. Both are concerned with inhabitants of the city taking control of that city into their own hands, particularly when it comes to expressing themselves in that city.

such as “jouir sans entraves” and “demandez l’impossible.” On the one hand, these diverse graffiti messages (De Gaulle, police, general repression, sexual liberation) are diverse and, thus, rather indefinite in their goals, as Godard might suggest. On the other hand, graffiti writers attempted to restructure time and space for the pedestrian so as to undermine systems of oppression and encourage individuals towards a collective future. In this way, graffiti became a method of “collective” action that, despite its disparate aims, derives concrete political power comes from this restructuring of public space.



Image 2.8 Claude Raimond-Dityvon, *Mai 68: État des lieux*

The graffiti in the selected images share a common style: each one is photographed in black and white and depicts slogans, painted in black on the walls of some public (or semi-public) space. Because of its simplicity and the contrast between black and white (both in the actual writing and in its reproduction by the photographer), the graffiti catches the viewer's eye. [184] The selected graffiti is also written in hasty script which is mirrored by the movement of the bodies passing by the writings, all of which lends a dynamism to these photographs. Through the camera's lens, we *see* the interaction between individuals and the May '68 writings: how the writings shape the public space of the city, how different bodies cross these writings in their daily lives, and how the body actually brings to life the graffiti. In these photographs, the passerby essentially *activates* the dynamic energy inherent in the production and content of May 1968 graffiti through the movement of their bodies. Furthermore, May '68 graffiti are examples of Michel de Certeau's "tactics" or "arts de faire"; like walking, graffiti writing produces conditions for an inversion of capitalist space through these interactions and new trajectories. The photographers accentuate these theoretical ideas about graffiti by framing the passerby's body in such a way that the messages of the graffiti are incarnated in the passerby's body itself; in other words, in these photographs, the graffiti inscriptions function as commands to the greater political body of the city, whereby the physical bodies of the passerby are compelled to participate in its movements. When read back against Godard's film, these images help to challenge *La Chinoise*'s simplistic image portrayal of the student revolutionaries and their writings. At the same time, the film also provides a critical lens through which I cross-examine the photographers' optimistic (and perhaps idealistsic) view of the power of writing on walls.

[184] Audrey Leblanc argues that the black and white aesthetic that we associate with May 1968 photography is not actually how May 1968 was represented in the media at the moment of the protests. In fact, she notes that many magazines printed photographs in color but it is the black and white images that persist and create a specific "memory" of May 1968 which reinforces a certain nostalgia of the events.

Claude Raimond-Dityvon, born in 1937, captured the unfurling of the events of May as an amateur photographer. His retrospective released for the fiftieth anniversary of May, *Mai 68: État des lieux* (2018), contains several photographs of graffiti that appeared in the Sorbonne University. The first is a black-and-white photograph taken in a staircase at the Sorbonne by Dityvon during the occupation of the school in May 1968 (Image 2.8, pp. 134). Formally, the photo is split in two halves that mirror one another: the graffiti, which reads "...dans la perspective d'une vie passionnante" ["with a view to a passionate life"], and the staircase, leading up to the right of the photograph.[185] The photograph has a certain depth, which is established by the layering of the staircase in the foreground and the windows in the background. The backlight casts a series of disproportionate shadows of the staircase and windowpanes onto the wall with the graffiti. The grainy quality of the photography, the interplay of shadows, and the upwards, diagonal line of the staircase all suggest a certain dynamism and ethereality to the image. Finally, there is a strong contrast created by the black hue of the staircase and the black paint against the light-colored surroundings, which gives this image both its simplicity and striking quality.

This first graffiti writing urges the viewer to rethink what Henri Lefebvre might would call modernity's obsession with capitalist time. In a capitalist system, time is only important as it relates to work, all other forms of time are eliminated. The ellipses at the beginning of the phrase and the staircase at the end reject this segementation and destroys its regimented conception of time. The opening ellipses indicates the continutation of a previous sentence, while the staircase at the end of the phrase acts as a visual ellipses, suggesting the continuation of the sentence into eternity. Instead of a brief moment of rupture with the ways

[185] In *Imagination au pouvoir*, I found another photograph of the same graffiti that showed the entire sentence, which was on the connecting wall but not included in Dityvon's photograph. The full sentence read: "La liberté est le crime qui contient tous les crimes. C'est notre arme absolue !…dans la perspective d'une vie passionnante" ["Freedom is the crime that encompasses all other crimes. It is our perfect weapon!... with a view to a passionate life"] (88-89). This phrase is a citation from the 1966 SI pamphlet, *La Misère en milieu étudiant*.

of the past, May 1968 is portrayed, through this photograph of graffiti, as an eternal deconstruction of capitalist time in favor of a passionate and indeterminate future. Although there is a period at the end of the sentence, which could suggest the compartmentalization of capitalist time into "periods" of time for work and pleasure and, thus, relegate this revolution to a finite moment, the staircase at the end of the sentence contradicts this reading and instead describes a passionate future that occurs continuously in the present moment. Although art during May 68 was often coordinated and contemporaneous with the political moment, this does not mean that the effort of the movement was limited to a single moment in time. After all, two Atelier Populaire posters were: "À bas les cadences infernales" ["Down with backbreaking workloads"] and "La lutte continue" ["The fight continues"]. They demanded both an immediate end to capitalist time ruled by work schedules (les cadences infernales) and suggested that this fight was an endless, perhaps perpetual, one (la lutte continue). Moreover, for many who organized on university campuses during May '68, eliminating hierarchical structures, organizing in solidarity with workers, and reimagining new ways of being together was viewed as a practice of "pleasure" (Ross 103). So, "the "passionate life" is one in which work and pleasure go hand-in-hand—one in which the space of schedules does not rule time but in which time is experienced in its fullness. The passionate life, which the protestors are seeking, flows freely, just as the graffiti's composition suggests.

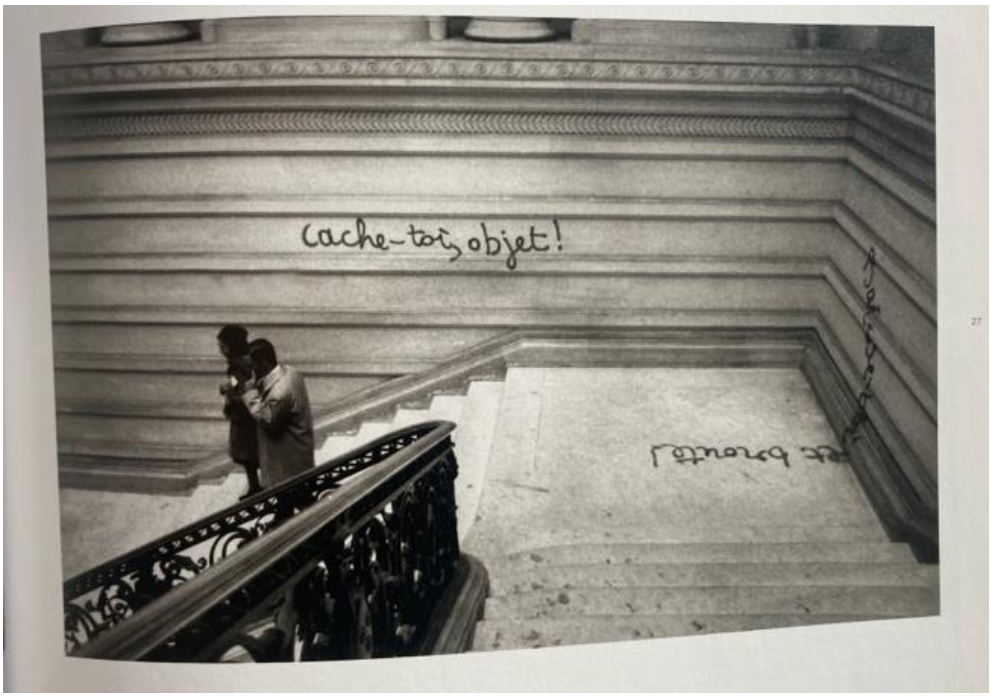


Image 2.9 Claude Raimond-Dityvon, *Mai 68: État des lieux*

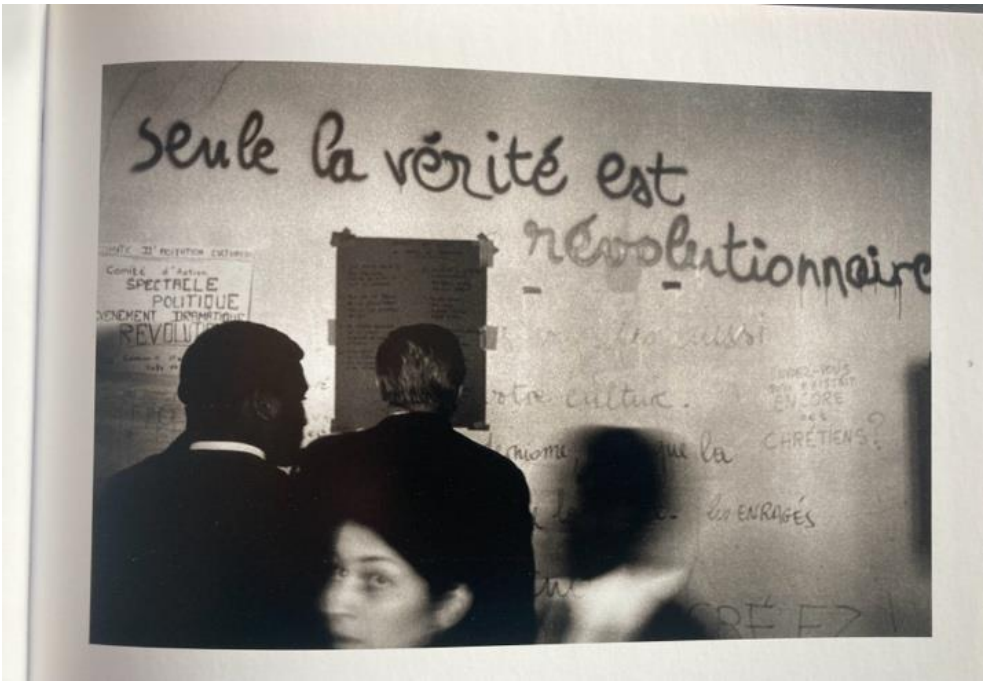


Image 2.10 Claude Raimond-Dityvon, *Mai 68: État des lieux*

The second photograph from Dityvon's collection demonstrates how graffiti made use of public space to transmit its message and encourage individuals to implicate themselves in questions surrounding the protests (Image 2.9, pp. 138). This photograph capturing another set of staircases in the Sorbonne includes two graffiti inscriptions: "Cache toi, objet !" ["Hide, object!"] and "Baisse-toi et broute !" ["Get down and graze!"]. The phrase "Cache-toi, objet !" ["Hide, object!"] is a critique of a consumer society, one which idolizes the acquisition of material objects, and which, effectively, turns people into objects. The command is addressed at the passerby, who has been transformed into an object by this society and warns them to "hide" from this society.[186] It can also be read as a play on words of the phrase "casse-toi, object!" further suggesting a destruction of the object-oriented consumer culture. "Baisse-toi et broute" ["Get down and graze"] is another command to the passerby: it "commands" him or her to act like a sheep (to put his or her head down and graze). Like Guy Debord argued, individuals in modern society (the society of the spectacle) become passive in their lives. By demanding the passerby ("toi") act like an animal, the inscription is demanding the passerby incarnate this passivity, in hopes that this ironic incarnation will alert the passerby to this state. These inscriptions go together: a consumer society objectifies people, manufacturing docile citizens rather than aware ones. They both also show how May '68 graffiti re-orients the individual's body in space in order to transmit its meaning. The horizontal lines of the stone walls encase the first graffiti, as if the words themselves are "hidden" within the walls, functionally reproducing the exhortation towards the object (the inscription "hides" itself in the wall). In the second, the writing "Baisse-toi et broute!" is written on both the wall and the floor. Therefore, the passerby must stop and alter their body position in order to read the graffiti fully, enacting its words ("baisse-toi"). While the first photograph of the graffiti, "dans la perspective d'une vie passionnante…" employs

[186] For more on this phrase, see Anne-Marie Fèvre's article "Cache toi, objet !"

the space around the graffiti to contest capitalist temporality, this second image encourages the passerby to rethink his or her relationship to capitalist space.

Like the preceding photos, this third photograph taken by Dityvon in the Sorbonne makes use of a sharp contrast between dark and light; this contrast helps the graffiti to emerge as a focal point to the image (Image 2.10, pp. 138). In the foreground, a woman looks back at the camera. In the middle ground, several men pass by the graffiti writing. One stares straight ahead at a poster, another's head is turned to the right, a third man is moving to the left, almost a blur. In the left part of the frame, yet another shadow is visible, possibly indicating the movement of a fifth individual. The blurriness of the figures in this photograph gives the image a ghostly quality, while the layering of posters, graffiti and individuals gives the photo depth. The largest graffiti, written again in black paint, is a phrase often attributed to Lenin which reads: "Seule la verité est revolutionnaire" ["Only the truth is revolutionary"].[187] On the wall there are signs for an action committee and a political spectacle, bits of poems and smaller graffiti inscriptions. In the bottom right corner of the image, the words on the wall are nearly layered on top of the blurry man.

In this image, the theoretical elements which constitute May '68 are made manifest. First, the inscription itself "Seule la vérité est revolutionnaire" ["Only the truth is revolutionary"] suggests the ties between the revolutionaries and Marxist communism (specifically that of the Soviet Union), as well as demonstrating the general distrust of the government and the media.[188] Second, the photograph's layering effect (human silhouettes, posters, and graffiti) suggests the immediacy of the artistic creations of the movement, its frenetic energy, and its continued vitality. The photograph's ghostly quality also suggests that

[187] This citation is often attributed to Lenin (Granjon). Trotsky was also recorded as writing in a letter: "la verité est toujours révolutionnaire" ["the truth is always revolutionary"] ("Lettre ouverte à la redaction de *La Vérité*")

[188] In the photograph, other graffiti writings can be seen. These include: "Savez-vous qu'il existait toujours des chrétiens ?" ["Do you know that Christians still exist?"] "Créez !" ["Create !"] and "Enragés" ["Enraged"].

the past, present, and future are superimposed within the image, which, again, highlights the rapid evolution of the movement and its desire to do away with temporal distincitons. Thirdly and finally, the wall of the university is represented as a *public* space, one in which many different individuals (women and men, as well as people of color) come together to read, learn from, and discuss the graffiti and other information concerning the occupation of the universities. The graffiti writings and their striking composition motivate the passerby to stop for a moment and reorient him or herself towards the information that is being presented. It is this small act of halting before the graffiti that brings these individuals together to reorder time and space for the revolution, even if for a moment, with the aim of undermining the violent parcellation of capitalist time and space.



Image 2.11 *5, rue de l'école de médecine, façade, 11 July 1968.*
Photograph taken by Jacques Buchholz
Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris

To close this section, I examine two more photographs of May '68 graffiti, which show that these historical graffiti writings transcended the walls of the university and appeared in the streets of Paris, unlike the fictional writings of Godard's characters. The first photograph, taken by Jacques Buchholz in May 1968 and kept in the muncipal archives of Paris, is one of four snapshots of the Rue de l'école de médecine in the Latin Quarter (Image 2.11, pp. 141). These four photographs show that walls of the street outside of the university, just as inside the university, were covered in posters and in illicit graffiti. In this particular image, two women are captured in front of the wall, one carrying an umbrella.[189] The graffiti inscription is: "Ce n'est qu'un début ! Vive la Révolution !" ["This is only the beginning ! Long live the Revolution !"] but the edges of the photograph and body of the woman cuts off parts of the phrase, leaving behind: "ébut! Vive la – évolut—" The woman in the foreground is blurred, and the second women is hiding behind her, again demonstrating the rapidity of the photograph and, subsequently, of any interaction with graffiti. The woman, however, still *embodies* the graffiti. She moves forward, in line with the words "VIVE LA REVOLUTION" [Long life the Revolution !] Her body covers the "R" leaving only the word, "EVOLUT[ION]" ["Evolut(ion)"] visible. Through this serendipitous visual rewriting of the graffiti, she is a part of the "evolution" of this "revolution." Whether she intends to or not, she is physically walking *in alignment* with the graffiti and, thus, carrying the revolution forward through her action as a pedestrian. The graffiti is also breaking with capitalist time, infiltrating revolutionary time into that of the everyday—opening up towards a "passionate" future in which this revolution is only just the beginning ("ce n'est qu'un début").

[189] I examine only the first photograph here but, when all four images are examined together, one can see the two women who pass throughout their entire "encounter" with the graffiti and posters. For instance, in another image, they stop to read the graffiti.



Image 2.12 Photograph by unnamed photographer
Vienet, René. *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations (1968),* p. 143

The last photograph comes from Situationist René Vienet's historical account of the Sorbonne occupation, *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (1968) (Image 2.12, pp. 143). This photograph appears without caption or author in the chapter of the book in which Vienet discusses the origins of the "crisis" of May (143). In this particular section, he notes that one "essential" element of May '68 was the "work stoppage" (or the strike), which allowed individuals free time for creativity; according to Vienet, spontaneous inscriptions, barricades, and art installations were the result of this free time, such as this particular graffiti writing (141-3). Once again, May 68 participants, particularly those affiliated with the Situationists, attacked the temporality of capitalist society—both through literally stopping work and through interrogating the separation of work and leisure time into separate categories. The graffiti in Vienet's image ("sous les pavés, la plage" ["under the cobblestones lies the beach"]) also demands the dismantling of these distinctions, suggesting that "vacation" can be brought into city life if work is suspended because the beach exists, simply right underneath the cobblestone streets. Moreover, this graffiti also suggests that the city itself, which has been shaped into abstract space by capitalism, must be dismantled in order for a truly "social" and "heterogenous" space to emerge, where each individual can re-appropriate the city for themselves, to reference Lefebvre again.[190] By taking apart the cobblestones, the beach will emerge. Just as in the previous example, the woman who is passing by the graffiti in Vienet's photograph amplifies the graffiti's message. Walking in front of a closed store on the street, she is looking down at the ground, with the graffiti "sous les pavés, la plage" written above her head to the right. Put another way, she is looking down

[190] From Vienet's book: "'Sous les pavés la plage' constatait joyeusement un poète de muraille, tandis qu'une lettre apparemment signée du C.N.P.F. conseillait cyniquement aux travailleurs d'oublier les occupations d'usines et de profiter de leurs augmentations de salaires pour passer leurs vacances au 'Club Méditerranée'" ["'Under the cobblestones lies the beach' a street poet was joyously proclaiming, while a letter apparently signed by C.N.P.F. was cynically advising workers to forget about factory occupations and use their pay raises to spend their vacations at 'Club Mediterranean'"] (142). This phrase was eventually transformed into an iconic slogan of May '68, perhaps due to one of the most famous photographs of a young man throwing a cobblestone ("un pavé") at police officers during a protest.

"under" the cobblestones for the beach, for the freedom and creativity of a world without work (and without capitalism and consumerism). Her body expresses the meaning of the graffiti itself. By leveraging the bodies of the passersby so that they embody the revolution, these five photographs demonstrate how May 1968 graffiti manifested the theoretical underpinnnings of May 1968 concerning urban space and capitalist time.

In the introduction to the photographic collection *Mai 68 : État des lieux*, Claude Dityvon's editor describes Dityvon's photography as follows: "[Dityvon] accumule les images des entre-deux, les temps significatifs mais peu spectaculaires" ["[Dityvon] accumulates images of the in-between moments, significant yet unspectacular moments"] (1). Dityvon, like our anonymous graffiti writers and the other photographers, harnesses, in his photographs, the "in-between" moments of May '68—or what we might call the "everyday," a theoretical conception which became central to the May 1968 movement. It is in these moments that theorists, activists, and artists during May '68 saw potential for rebellion and societal change. Graffiti, an everyday act, was one of many collective actions taken towards a more egalitarian future. Anyone could partake in it, and all pedestrians who encountered said graffiti would have to face their complicity in the system. In other words, this graffiti was an attack on the homogeneity of the capitalist (and neocolonial) city. Graffiti during May demanded that the passerby reevaluate their spatial, temporal, and, eventually, *political* orientation to the events that were transpiring on the ground. To borrow language from Debord's *Société du spectacle* once more, graffiti aimed to reverse the alienation that individuals experienced in their daily lives, turning them into active "participants" in the streets of the city, participants who carry out the words of the graffiti in their physical bodies.

Direct engagement with the urban space of the city and the body of the passerby is what Godard's 1967 graffiti in *La Chinoise* lacked. While the fictional Maoist cell wrote their graffiti inside a bourgeois apartment and did not engage with the world around them, the

students and workers in real life worked together (at least for some time) and wrote their graffiti everywhere, in the streets of Paris, as well as in public universities and private factories. Written in public spaces, the historical graffiti acts directly on the spatial power of the French State, while Godard's graffiti remains powerless to do so, limited to the walls of individual private property. Both Godard's fictional graffiti and the historical graffiti of May '68 rely on ambiguous slogans, often related to Situationist writings or Marxist theory, which may be difficult to parse for an non-specialist audience. However, the historical inscriptions are diverse, and this diversity signifies the multiplicity of ideas that were being exchanged at this time. Moreover, these real-life graffiti writings speak directly to the passerby, demanding an engagement on the part of their physical body, which is parlayed into an engagement of the individual into the revolutionary political body. This activation of the body of the passerby is at the heart of the power of the historical graffiti and is what is missing from the graffiti of the cell in *La Chinoise*. The cell uses the interior graffiti to "practice" corporeally and repeatedly their own wordy theories, such as in Veronique's tracing over the already-written graffiti. The graffiti of May 1968, as captured by the photographers, asks the passerby to "practice" the revolution through direct commands and appeals to his or her body. I propose that the graffiti writers of May 1968 conceived of these writings as integral to a Marxist re-imagining and re-structuring of urban space and time.

Graffiti as Integration of Theory and Practice: Charlotte Delbo's *La théorie et la pratique* (1968)

If Godard uses graffiti in order to highlight the potential inconsistencies of the student movement *prior to* 1968 and the photographers demonstrate graffiti's power as a political arm *during* 1968, Charlotte Delbo's play, *La théorie et la pratique,* uses graffiti to represent the integration of the theory and practice during May 1968 shortly *after* the events took place. Although the play, whose full title is: *La théorie et la pratique: Dialogue imaginaire mais*

non tout à fait apocryphe entre Herbet Marcuse et Henri Lefebvre was never performed on stage, it was broadcast once on French national radio on October 29th, 1970 by Jean-Jacques Vierne (Lachmann 35-36).[191] The playwright, Charlotte Delbo, is a French author who was sent to a concentration camp during World War II by Nazi Germany for her Communist views and her participation in the French Resistance. Having survived Auschwitz, Delbo later militated against French colonialism in Algeria during the Algerian War and participated in various other anti-colonial struggles. In comparison with Delbo's autobiographical works on her imprisonment in Auschwitz, which have been analyzed by several scholars, her two-act play, *La théorie et la pratique* has received very little academic scrutiny. [192] In this section, I forge new ground by undertaking an analysis of the play and its representation of May 1968 graffiti.

The play is divided into two acts: Act I, a lengthy "imaginary dialogue" between two real philosophers, Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre, set in April 1968 in Paris during an academic conference, and Act II, a short exchange between three young people in the streets directly following the events of May and June 1968. As mentioned previously in this chapter, Lefebvre was a French sociologist whose theorizations on space and his theories of everyday life were central to the ideas of the Situationists and the greater May 1968 movement. In 1968, he was also a professor at the University of Nanterre, where student protests in March of 1968 that motivated the events of May '68 took place (Dreyfus-Armand 28). Charlotte Delbo also studied under Lefebvre, collaborated with him, worked for him, and joined the CNRS with him (Lachmann 188). The first act of the play, then, is borne out of an extensive knowledge of Lefebvre's work and ideas. Herbert Marcuse, a German philosopher of the

[191] Because it was broadcast on the radio, the graffiti, which was supposed to be projected on the background of the stage, had to be spoken aloud, so that the words of the actors were layered over the words of the graffiti.

[192] For more on Delbo, see Michael Rotherg's chapter in Multidirectional Memory and Kathryn Lachmann's biography of Delbo.

Frankfurt School teaching in the United States, was also physically present in Paris during the May 1968 events. He had come to Paris to participate in an academic conference (just as in Delbo's play), and, while there, he witnessed various altercations between the police and students on May 10, 1968.[193] Despite his lack of direct participation in the protest, Marcuse came to be known as the "grandfather" of May '68. (Lachmann 48). This moniker was attributed to him even though he was generally pessimistic about the possibilities for revolution (as we see in the play as well), and his theoretical ideas only gained popularity in France *after* May 1968 (Dreyfus-Armand 28-29).

In the first act of the play, which spans nearly forty-five pages of text, Marcuse and Lefebvre argue about a variety of academic topics, such as Marxist critiques of capitalism, urbanism, and potentialities for a proletariat revolution, as if the play itself is part of a lecture series at a university. This acadmic "dialogue" is fictional, as the subtitle of the play intimates; however, it remains authentic ("pas tout à fait apocryphe" ["not completely apocryphal"]), due to the similarities between these two thinkers' actual ideas and the ideas espoused by their representations in the play. According to Kathryn Lachmann, Delbo chose these particular philosophers, whose ideas were associated with the May 68 movements but with whom many in the general public were not familiar, in an effort to inform the spectator of their ideas and then let them "be the judge" of said ideas (43). In this way, their dialogue is a dialectic and didactic embodiment of these two men's academic work. In the play, Marcuse and Lefebvre are represented as "opposites." Marcuse sarcastically refers to himself as the "pessimist," who believes a revolution impossible, and he refers to Lefebvre as the "optimist," who still believes in people's ability to enact change in society (Delbo 49).[194] The

[193] See both Henri Lefebvre's *Mai 68: L'irruption…* and "Herbert Marcuse and the Student Revolts of 1968: An Unpublished Lecture" from Jacobin.

[194] In the play, Marcuse's character does not think revolution possible: "Je ne le vois pas du tout, l'avènement de cette société libre ! Je sais qu'il est théoriquement possible. Passer de la théorie à la pratique, c'est une autre affaire. Pas la mienne, au demeurant…" ["I don't see this free society coming to pass at all! I know that it is

choice of protagonists (sociologists), the dense and lengthy content of their exchanges on sociology, and the verbal markers of debate indicate that this first act is a dialogue concerning theoretical concepts. It is carried out through dialectic practice of argumentation, with Marcuse representing one side and Lefebvre the other. Overall, however, the two philosophers agree on pratically every topic, with only slight differences in terminology or feasibility. Although the décor of the scene, a table with two chairs facing one another, might suggest an oppositional nature to their interaction, Delbo's stage directions to the actors contradicts this reading. She instructs the two actors to wander around the stage as they see fit, and this directorial decision permits the actors to embody a certain flexibility in their thinking. This first act, through disimpassioned debate, sets up Lefebvre and Marcuse as theoreticians of May '68.

One major theme that emerges throughout the first act is the importance of "play" to the May '68 movement. At one point, Marcuse suggests to Lefebvre that their ideas are similar to those of Friedrich Schiller, an 18th century German philosopher. For Schiller, the individual is composed of two parallel drives—the "form" and "sense" drive. The "form" drive is that which is concerned with the self, autonomous personhood, independence, and the constancy of the individual; the form drive "affirms the person as constant through change" (Stanford Encyclopedia). The "sense" drive is that which is concerned with the physical existence of man, embodiment, and sensation; it exists within time and thus within change. [195] When these two drives are working in harmony, a third drive comes to life, which is called the "play drive," allowing beauty and freedom to emerge. With this in mind, Lefebvre argues, in the play, for a return to the concept of play: "Pour en finir avec les separations, il faut

theoretically possible. Putting theory into practice, that's another matter. Not my concern, when it comes down to it…"].

[195] See *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Schiller. Schiller believed that art played the central role in the moral education of the individual and that beauty was defined by a sort of freedom.

restituer la fête en transformant la vie quotidienne. Retrouver le jeu en transformant le travail. La fête jaillit du jeu" ["To put an end to divisions, we must bring back celebration by transforming daily life. Rediscover play by transforming work. Celebration springs from play."] (Delbo 43). A few pages later the represented Marcuse suggests the same: that the freedom for which both sociologists are searching comes from the "liberty to play," which is crystallized in the "imagination" (Delbo 45).

These statements echo, once again, the ideas of the Situationist International, particularly those in the 1967 pamplet *Misère en milieu étudiant*, for whom play and celebration were at the heart of the proletariat revolution.[196] By tracing the thoroughline of theories from Schiller to Lefebvre and Marcuse, Delbo's play demonstrates the importance of the "everyday" and "play" to the theorization of May '68, which, in turn, illustrates graffiti's importance to the movement. Writing graffiti *is* a form of play. Just as children draw outside the lines and experiment with their imaginations, graffiti writers write what and where they are not supposed to, imagining new connections with urban space. By integrating graffiti into the dialogue through playful materialization, Delbo makes concrete this very theorization on play. According to the play's stage directions, the director projects May 1968 graffiti onto the background of the set in coordination with certain words, indicated in bold face in the script, that are said by either Marcuse or Lefebvre:

[196] See the following citation from the pamphlet: "Transformer le monde et changer la vie sont pour [le prolétariat] une seule et même chose…La critique radicale et la reconstruction libre de toutes les conduites et valeurs imposées par la réalité aliénée sont son programme maximum, et la créativité libérée dans la construction de tous les moments et événements de la vie est la seule poésie qu'il pourra reconnaître, la poésie faite par tous, le commencement de la fête révolutionnaire. Les révolutions prolétariennes seront des fêtes ou ne seront pas, car la vie qu'elles annoncent sera elle-même créée sous le signe de la fête. Le jeu est la rationalité ultime de cette fête, vivre sans temps mort et jouir sans entraves sont les seules règles qu'il pourra reconnaître" ["Transforming the world and changing life are, for the proletariat, one and the same thing…Radical critique and free reconstruction of all behaviors and values imposed by the alienated reality are its maximum program, and the creativity liberated in the construction of all moments and events of life is the only poetry that it will recognize—poetry written by everyone, the beginning of the revolutionary celebration. Proletariat revolutions will be celebrations or they will not be, for the life they herald will itself be created under the sign of celebration. Play is the ultimate rationality of this celebration, living without downtime, and enjoying oneself with constraints are the only rules it will recognize"] (56)

> Pendant leur conversation, on projettera sur le fond de la scène les mots ou les phrases indiqués en marge, qui sont des graffiti de la révolution de mai 1968. (Chaque inscription surgit sur le mot souligné dans le texte, passe vite ou demeure un instant, comme le décidera le metteur en scène). (Delbo 7)
>
> [During their conversation, words or sentences indicated in the margins—which are graffiti from the May 1968 revolution—will be projected onto the background of the stage (Each inscription appears over the underlined word in the text, either passing by quickly or lingering a moment, as the director decides)]

While Delbo's mise-en-scène resembles that of Godard's graffiti scenes (two characters are represented in an interior setting with graffiti on the walls behind them), Delbo's graffiti retains its revolutionary nature much more than Godard's. This dual practice of projecting the graffiti while speaking some words of it aloud engages the audience both "aurally" and "visually," manufacturing a "creative dissonance," which Lachmann argues "can spur the audience into critical thinking" (44).[197]

I develop Lachmann's argument concerning Delbo's graffiti in two ways: by proposing that the use of projection recreates graffiti's ephemerality and sponteanity and that its synchroncity with the words spoken by the sociologists embodies the nature of graffiti, as a concrete practice that puts into action the theories of both Lefebvre and Marcuse. Firstly, the graffiti's format replicates the ephemeral nature of passing graffiti on the street. Although Delbo indicates *when* the graffiti projection should begin by underlining a line in the script,

[197] From Lachmann's article: "Throughout Act I, Delbo engages the audience aurally (through the philosophical discussion) and visually (through the projected slogans that critique that discussion), exploring how the creative dissonance between these two dimensions of theatrical experience can spur the audience into critical thinking. The slogans seize upon a word or phrase and demand more radicality, more flexibility, more joy. They introduce word play and inversions to produce new meaning: "Non aux bidonvilles. Non aux villes bidons" (71) ; "Nous refusons d'être HLMisés sarcellisés" (92); "Tout pouvoir abuse. Le pouvoir absolu abuse absolument" (72) ; "Interdit d'interdire" (79); "L'art est mort, libérons notre vie quotidienne" (103). The irruption of radical popular slogans, word play, and poetic language into academic debate challenges the boundaries and hierarchical structure of knowledge; where, how, by whom, and to what ends is knowledge produced, categorized, and transmitted?" (44)

the director is given permission to decide *how long* the graffiti lasts on screen. In all cases, Delbo indicates that the temporality of the projected graffiti is meant to be brief. The writings do not remained projected throughout the play, but, rather, they appear and disappear, resulting in a succession of fleeting graffiti writings being projected onto the background of the stage. In this way, Delbo's graffiti retains the ephemeral nature of street graffiti in contrast with both Godard's film, in which the graffiti is curated, and the photographs, which, although capturing the ephemeral writings, immortalize them. The spectator can only catch glimpses of this graffiti, which leaves no visual trace, just as if they were passing it by in the street. Delbo uses the graffiti to transform the spectator into an active participant in the construction of the play.

Secondly, Delbo's decision to link the projections to the actor's spoken lines illustrates the coaelesncce of theory and practice during the events of May. To better instantiate this, we can turn to a quotation from Lefebvre's character:

> Le développement s'est fait aux dépens des individus qu'il a dépouillés de leurs possibilités personnelles, de leur vie personnelle. La technique a permis une très grande maîtrise de l'homme sur la nature. Mais alors que l'homme s'est approprié la nature, il s'est dépossédé de son être naturel : **le désir**, le temps, le sexe, le plaisir, la joie, l'espace — non pas l'espace cosmique, l'espace pour vivre sur la terre. Son corps même ne lui appartient plus, avec ses palpitations, ses besoins. Ni son âme, avec ses **rêves** ou des délires. (30)
>
> [Development has come at the expense of individuals that it has stripped of their personal opportunities, their personal lives. Technology has permitted humanity a great deal mastery over nature. But as man appropriated nature, he was dispossessed of his natural being : **desire**, time, sex, pleasure, joy, space—not cosmic space, space

to live on earth. His body no longer even belongs to him, with its heartbeats, its needs. Nor does his soul, with its **dreams** or delirium].

When the bolded word "désir" is spoken, the graffiti "Prenez vos désirs pour des réalités" ["Indulge in wishful thinking"] is meant to be projected on the background of the scene, and, when "rêves" is spoken, the graffiti to be projected is: "Le rêve est la réalité" ["Dreams are reality"]. The theoretical arguments being made by Lefebvre and Marcuse complement the graffiti that is projected, and these slogans come from the actual graffiti written during May 1968. As Lachmann suggests, "[t]he irruption of radical popular slogans, word play, and poetic language into academic debate challenges the boundaries and hierarchical structure of knowledge; where, how, by whom, and to what ends is knowledge produced, categorized, and transmitted?" (103). The play, which has already been presented as imaginary but not completely imaginary, integrates the "reality" of May 1968 into the fictional space of the theater.[198] In addition to the interconnection between reality and fiction, the graffiti also is a confluence of theory and practice. In other wotds, the graffiti is a reformulation of the spoken theory but put "into practice." This relationship is dialectic, like Marcuse and Lefebvre's conversation: the *practice* of the May revolution is grounded in its *theory*, and its theory is grounded in practice. In this way, *La Théorie et la pratique* reveals that graffiti is the site where theory and practice meet during the May 1968 protests.

After a particularly long first act, Act II is short. It takes place at the beginning of June 1968. There are at least three actors: a female student, a male student, and a worker. These three people speak to each other, jubilantly, in slogans, lauding the ways in which May 1968 has changed their lives, despite what critics have said about the events:

[198] There is very little research done on Delbo's intent in writing this play, particularly as it was never produced for the stage. There is more scholarship to be done on the genesis of the play, and, especially, her interest in including the graffiti in the play.

> Trois jeunes gens (un étudiant, une étudiante, un jeune ouvrier) ou davantage qui se partageront les répliques, bondissent sur la scène vide. On évitera le style 'chœur parlé' et déclamatoire. La scène se joue avec bonne humeur et simplicité (Delbo 51). [Three young people (a male student, a female student, a young worker) or more who will share lines, rush onto the empty stage. One should avoid a theatrical 'spoken chorus' style. The scene should be performed with good humor and simplicity].

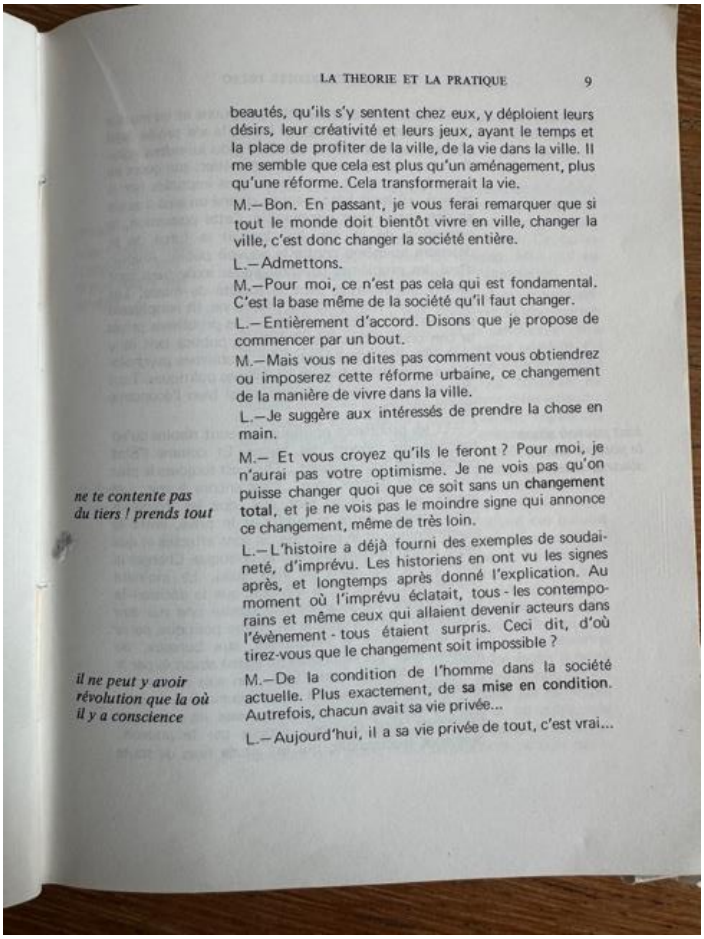
Although not specifically set in the "street," this act is, at the very least, a convergence of those who were active in the streets of Paris during May and June 1968. They discuss how the general public did not understand their desire and drive for revolution; however, they insist that May's events were important and that they were fighting for "bonheur" ["happiness"], "liberté" ["freedom"] and "justice" ["justice"] (55). The male student states the following: "Au mois de mai, tout est devenu intéressant, passionnant. Tout le monde avait envie d s'en mêler, de participer. La rue était en fête. Tout le monde parlait à tout le monde" ["During May, everything became interesting, passionate. Everyone wanted to get involved, to participate. The street was a celebration. Everyone talked to everyone"] (54). Just like Marcuse and Lefebvre discussed in Act I, the events of May were a revolution because "play" came to reign; the streets become a place of "celebration." While the first act is a primer for the revolution's ideas, the second act is a retrospective on the movement itself. Although the "street" is represented on stage, it is imagined in both acts through the graffiti in Act I, and then the memories of the three individuals in Act II.

In this second act, graffiti is no longer projected onto the background of the scene while the characters speak. Instead, the scene is described "empty," save for the three characters who speak to one another cheerfully. All the same, the repetitious and sloganistic dialogue replicate the language (and ideas) of the graffiti from the previous act. By the end of their conversation, their words even begin to rhyme. Just like the famous May 1968 slogan,

"la poésie est dans la rue" ["poetry is in the streets"], the poetic lines of the second act reveal the interpenetration of the graffiti of the street and the theater. Just as the title is divided into two halves, the play is divided into two acts which represent the two sides to May '68—theory and practice. Act I with its didactic exchanges about Marxist theory serves as the "theory" act, and Act II, with the student and worker "boots on the ground," is the "pratice" section. However, like Marcuse and Lefebvre's dialectical argument, these two acts are not as disparate as they seem. The graffiti writings undergird both acts, connecting the conversation between the theorists and the ones "in the street," linking the theory with the practice.

Charlotte Delbo's graffiti writings differ from Godard's fictionalized renderings of student graffiti and the photographer's replications of historical graffiti. These graffiti writings are projected on the background of the set, but the form of these inscriptions is not specified, whether they be photographic or hand-written reproductions is left up to the director. This projection supermimposes the writings onto the walls of the theater, much like traditional graffiti writing and, as such, hews closer to the corporeal experience that is central to graffiti writing. However, Delbo also practices a superimposition of the sonic and the visual because the sounds of the actors' voices occur simultaneously with the visual projections. This play, however, was never performed on the stage, so, when Vierne presented the play over the radio in 1970, he had to ask the actors to shout the graffiti at the same time that the other actor was speaking (Lachmann 45). In this second iteration, the superimposition is solely sonic, and, in a way, recreates the experience of a pedestrian *hearing* slogans shouted during a manifestation rather than Delbo's original intention, which would have replicated the experience of the passerby *seeing* graffiti written on the walls. Just as Godard uses fragmentation as an aesthetic in *La Chinoise*, Delbo uses graffiti to fragment the temporal and spatial nature of the play. In her original conception, the graffiti that is projected interrupts the scene, both on a temporal level (they occur at the same time as the spoken

lines) and on a spatial level (they interject into the physical space of the scene). In the radio version, the graffiti writings can only "interject" on the temporal level, by being "heard" simultaneously as the other lines.



LA THEORIE ET LA PRATIQUE 9

beautés, qu'ils s'y sentent chez eux, y déploient leurs désirs, leur créativité et leurs jeux, ayant le temps et la place de profiter de la ville, de la vie dans la ville. Il me semble que cela est plus qu'un aménagement, plus qu'une réforme. Cela transformerait la vie.

M.—Bon. En passant, je vous ferai remarquer que si tout le monde doit bientôt vivre en ville, changer la ville, c'est donc changer la société entière.

L.—Admettons.

M.—Pour moi, ce n'est pas cela qui est fondamental. C'est la base même de la société qu'il faut changer.

L.—Entièrement d'accord. Disons que je propose de commencer par un bout.

M.—Mais vous ne dites pas comment vous obtiendrez ou imposerez cette réforme urbaine, ce changement de la manière de vivre dans la ville.

L.—Je suggère aux intéressés de prendre la chose en main.

M.— Et vous croyez qu'ils le feront ? Pour moi, je n'aurai pas votre optimisme. Je ne vois pas qu'on puisse changer quoi que ce soit sans un **changement total**, et je ne vois pas le moindre signe qui annonce ce changement, même de très loin.

ne te contente pas du tiers ! prends tout

L.—L'histoire a déjà fourni des exemples de soudaineté, d'imprévu. Les historiens en ont vu les signes après, et longtemps après donné l'explication. Au moment où l'imprévu éclatait, tous - les contemporains et même ceux qui allaient devenir acteurs dans l'évènement - tous étaient surpris. Ceci dit, d'où tirez-vous que le changement soit impossible ?

M.—De la condition de l'homme dans la société actuelle. Plus exactement, de **sa mise en condition**. Autrefois, chacun avait sa vie privée...

il ne peut y avoir révolution que la où il y a conscience

L.—Aujourd'hui, il a sa vie privée de tout, c'est vrai...

Image 2.13 Photograph of page 9 of Delbo's *La théorie et la pratique*

By fragmenting or "heterogenezing" the time and space of the play through graffiti, Delbo incarnates the ideas of Lefebvre and Marcuse. She also deploys another of Lefebvre's ideas by playing with the margins of the text. It was Lefebvre who argued that, in a capitalist space, the center is the space of power while the margins are the space of the powerless. In the script itself, as reproduced in the accompanying image, the graffiti is physically written *in the margins* (Image 2.11, pp. 156). Additionally, the graffiti itself is projected *onto the background* of the scene, while the philosophers are seated in the center. On the one hand, then, graffiti is represented as marginal to the text and to the scene itself, suggesting that graffiti is an arm of the powerless. However, the photograph of the script also demonstrates how the graffiti inscriptions are situated in a large area of white space; therefore, the reader's eye is drawn to these graffiti inscriptions rather than the body of the text. In this way, the graffiti, in the script, re-centers the desires of the "powerless" and marginalizes the "powerful," or the theories and the theoreticians at the center of May '68. Through this complex use of space, the play uses the graffiti to depict a dialogue between the center and margins, between theory and practice, between images and ideas. In the play, Lefebvre himself states that the capacity for revolution lies in taking hold of the margins: "Oui, sans doute, mais malgré tous les efforts vers la rationalité accomplie, celle-ci n'est jamais atteinte. Il y a donc une marge pour l'action" ["Yes, without a doubt, but despite all efforts to achieve accomplished rationality, it is never attained. There is, thus, margin for action"] (41) Graffiti, then, written in the margins, slowly creeps into the center of the page; it is both relegated to the margins of society and reflective of the "margin" for action that existed during May 1968.[199]

[199] Thinking about the idea of a "margin" for revolution, Lefebvre speaks about May 1968 as an "event" which essentially bursts through the margins of the "normal": "L'événement déjoue les prévisions; dans la mesure où il est historique, il bouleverse les calculs…Conjectural, l'événement ébranle les structures qui l'ont permis. Les prévisions, les supputations, inévitablement fondées sur des analyses et des constats partiels, ne peuvent s'éléver jusqu'au caractère total de ce qui survient. En les bouleversant, l'événement réunit ce qui se dispersait sous les détails des faits et des appréciations. Alors et ainsi surgit l'élémentaire, et d'abord le connu, le reconnaissable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored three representations of May 1968 graffiti: the film, *La Chinoise* (1967), by Jean-Luc Godard; street photographs from May 1968; and the play *La théorie et la pratique* (1968) by Charlotte Delbo. These three representations demonstrate the omnipresence and import of graffiti during the events of May. These graffiti writings emerged from several theoretical sources, such as the academic work of Henri Lefebvre and avant-garde of the Situationists. Prior to May '68, philosophers, activists, and other thinkers were making anti-capitalist arguments against the French State, paying particular attention to the ways that urban space and daily life could be avenues for resistance. Graffiti can be interpreted an individual and collective practice in response to these ideas—a practice that can reorder one's lived experience of the city, urban space, and time. These inscriptions compelled the passerby to interpret, react, and alter their orientations in space, time, and politics in reaction to the ideas of the movement. While graffiti writings during the Algerian War marked territories of political violence for the passerby, May 1968 graffiti writings delineated urban spaces where the passerby could *play* instead of work. This focus on pleasure, enjoyment and celebration still necessitated a corporeal component, but it was not one of emotional engagement or memorial connection like during the Algerian War. Instead, May 1968 envisoned graffiti as a way to re-connect the passerby's body with their own desires and, by doing so, destroying the reign of capitalism.

Filmed prior to 1968, Jean-Luc Godard's film, *La Chinoise*, reveals a skepticism towards the political power of the surfacing student movements, and it highlights the

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Sur cette base se dressent, visibiles momentanément dans une transparence lumineuse, les nouveaux éléments de la vie sociale. ….l'événementiel restitue le mouvement de la pensée en même temps que celui de la pratique" ["The event defies predictions; insofar that it is historic, it overwhelms calculations….A conjectural instance, the event shakes the structures that allowed for it to happen. Predications and hypotheses inevitably based on partial analyses and conclusions, cannot rise to the total character of that which is unfolding. By disrupting them, the event reunites what was dispersed under the details of facts and assessments. Thus, and, in this way, the elementary emerges, first, the known, the recognizable. On this foundation rise, visible momentarily in luminous transparency, the new elements of social life…the event restores the movement of thought as well of that of practice" (*L'irruption* 3-4).

inconsistencies and contradictions of their sometimes naive graffiti writing. In contrast, the photographers of May 1968 took to the streets to highlight the vigor and joy of the writings and their political power over the passerby. In the photographs, one can see how the graffiti writers made use of the physical space to transmit their message, as well as how the writers idolized the present moment, desiring for the revolution to occur in the here and now. Delbo's play, written right after the events in which Delbo participated, exemplifies the ways that May 1968 graffiti embodied the intersection between May 1968 theory and practice. Graffiti was a backbone of the movement, as well as a part of its iconic foreground, and all three representations demonstrate that. Writing and reading graffiti were both collective actions to which each passerby was called during May and June 1968. The media presence of May ballooned in the subsequent years, as Kristin Ross notes, presenting an image of the events as carried out by juvenile and impulsive young people. The powerful theories behind the graffiti writings, which became one of the iconic images of May '68, often fades from collective memory. However, these graffiti writings marked an enormous shift in public demonstrations of politic disaffection. As we will see in the subsequent chapter, May 1968 prompted many groups of people to reflect on their estrangement from French society, using graffiti to do so.

Chapter 3: "Writing" the Feminine Body into the Streets in the 1970s and 1980s: The *Mouvement des libération des femmes* and its Echoes

Introduction

On December 7th, 2024, French historian Mathilde Larrère invited me to attend the opening of her photography exhibition, "Sur les murs et les pavés…'Des cris déchirent le silence,'" at the Marguerite Durand Library in Paris, a library known for its feminist archives and programming. Larrère's exhibition displayed her personal archive of photographs taken during feminist protests in Paris from 2018-2024. Alongside these photographs, the library displayed a selection of their own collection of photographs of feminist protests throughout the twentieth century with aim to situate Larrère's documentation within a larger history of feminist movements.[200] At this event, Larrère introduced me to the head librarian, Dr. Annie Dizier-Metz, with whom I discussed my budding work on this chapter, which focuses on the ties between graffiti and the MLF, the "Mouvement de libération des femmes" [Women's Liberation Movement], in the 1970s. I described to her how I had been searching for photographs of MLF graffiti in the 1970s but had found no concrete examples. While most photographs demonstrated a certain creative production on the part of protestors, this production was limited to posters, banners, or street performances, rather than actual graffiti. Had she ever heard of feminist graffiti in the 1970s? She thought for a moment and said that, while she can think of more contemporary examples of feminist graffiti, she was unaware of graffiti as a particular tactic of the MLF and unaware of any research on the subject, despite the prevalence of graffiti during the May 1968 movements only two years before.[201] This statement corroborated what I had already suspected: despite the instrumentalization of

[200] For more on this event, see this event page "Sur les murs et les pavés" from the Marguerite Durand Library website.

[201] During that same conversation, Dr. Metz did suggest looking at the photography archives of Catherine Deudon. Thanks in part to Dr. Metz's suggestion, Deudon's photographs of feminist graffiti figure into this chapter.

political graffiti during the May '68 protests, feminist activists in the 1970s relied much less heavily on this inscriptive practice.

What, then, might we make of this apparent "lack" of graffiti writing? MLF participants *did* write graffiti, as will be shown in this chapter, but it was not theorized as an explicit part of the movement nor was it as widespread in media representations as it was during May 1968. In an interview with feminist archivist Françoise Flamand, Liliane Kandel, French sociologist and feminist activist, describes the importance of "slogans" that were written on the walls of the city, on protest banners, and chanted during MLF demonstrations.[202] For her, these slogans were tools that brought humor (or what she calls "an extraordinarily liberating laughter") to the political situation, which has been noted by other MLF scholars and participants as a central tactic of the movement (Kandel 00:30-00:40).[203] In an interview with the creators of Mathilda, a collaborative platform that collates educational resources supporting gender equality in France, Cathy Bernheim, a writer and MLF activist, explains that the MLF was inspired by the slogans of May '68 and that these slogans floated freely between the walls, the mouths of the protestors, and the tracts they distributed.[204] In other words, the location or placement of slogans was secondary to the

[202] Bernheim's interview is part of a longer video of interviews called "Slogans et chansons" on the Matilda website.

[203] "Le Mai français est une référence pour les mouvements étudiants du monde parce que la crise y a été plus aiguë, plus spectaculaire, les mots d'ordre plus joyeux. Parce qu'il a entraîné un mouvement social et fait trembler le régime le plus autoritaire que la France ait connu depuis longtemps. Mieux qu'ailleurs il a exprimé le caractère festif de la contestation et -aidé par la tolérance sociale- il a pu gérer la crise, ne pas franchir le point de non-retour. Le MLF en a repris le style spectaculaire et provocateur, la transgression ludique, l'humour corrosif, l'insolence, la dérision pour défier les pouvoirs établis, de préférence sous l'œil des caméras de télévision. Le succès est venu couronner le rire." ["The French May is a reference for student movements around the world because the crisis there was more acute, more spectacular, the slogans more joyful. Because it started a social movement and made the most authoritarian regime that France had known for a long time falter. Better than anywhere else, it expressed the festive nature of protest, and, with the help of social tolerance, was able to manage the crisis without passing the point of no return. The MLF took up this same spectacular and provocative style, its ludic transgression, corrosive humor, insolence, derision in order to defy the established powers, preferably under the gaze of television cameras. Success come to crown the laughter"] (Françoise Picq, "Le MLF"). See also "Le rire et l'historienne" (Fraisse 2008).

[204] "Donc, la littérature nous a imprégné et notamment, par exemple, il y avait…on avait pris à mai 68 qui en a fait beaucoup l'idée de faire des slogans qu'on écrivait sur les murs, sur les tracts, sur tout ça…on avait une imagination formidable" ["So, we were steeped in literature and notably, for example, there were…we took the

language of the slogans themselves. Still, creative expression was central to the MLF movement. Several feminist newspapers, filled with cartoons, manifestos, photography, and poetry, were published, such as *Le Torchon brûle* (1971-1973), *Les pétroleuses* (1974-1976), *Elles voient rouge*, and *Des femmes en mouvements*. Handheld video cameras, which were produced for the first time in the late 1960s, were used by documentarians like Carole Roussoupoulos to create experimental feminist videos and film MLF protests**.** Street theater and spectacular disruptions, such as the co-opting of *Elle*'s Etats-Généraux des Femmes in 1971 by radical feminists, were also popular options of political engagement.[205] Despite this proliferation of creative production, MLF graffiti remains conspicuously absent from the archives and from the descriptions of the protestors themselves.

The absence of extensive feminist graffiti production and documentation could be influenced by several factors. At a production level, graffiti is typically written at night to avoid detection and police intervention; there is a distinct possibility that fewer women felt safe to be in the streets at night to write illicit graffiti than their male counterparts. Even in the 1980s and 1990s, when graffiti tagging became a more widespread cultural phenomenon, women remained in the minority on graffiti crews, perhaps due to the same reason (Pursley 56).[206] All the same, feminist activists may well have been writing more graffiti during the MLF years than we now can see. This would be, at least in part, due to a lacune in media coverage at the time. Although photojournalists were present at these protests, their gender

idea from May 68, which many did, of making slogans that we would write on the walls, on tracts, on all of that…we had a terrific imagination"] (Bernheim 4:22-4:47). Irene Corrandin, also interviewed by Mathilda, shares several examples of such slogans, noting in particular how slogans were also turned into "bulles" (posters that the women wore on their bodies) (5:11-5:50)

[205] See "Raised Fists: Politics, Technology, and Embodiment in 1970s French Feminist Video Collectives" (Murray 2016), "Parole(s) de Femmes: From Le Torchon brûle to Les Nouvelles News" (Allison 2019), "'Penser les prises de paroles féministes au théâtre en période de lutte' : Analyse d'une série des sketches du Mouvement de libération des femmes" (Thomas 2017), *Scènes féministes : Histoire du théâtre militant dans les années 70 (*Wiss 2026).

[206] Graffiti was and continues to be a male-dominated practice. For more, see *Graffiti Grrlz: Performing Graffiti in the Hip Hop Diaspora* (Pabón-Cólon 2018).

(especially if male) may have affected what aspects of the protests they focused on, leaving graffiti outside the purview of their lens. More importantly, the photojournalism selected for publication (and the larger narratives manufactured via those selected images) are largely dependent on the editor; these editors choose certain images to reinforce a cultural, political, or societal narrative, again perhaps preventing a larger public from "seeing" particularly virulent images of political feminist graffiti.[207] Finally, the dearth of graffiti may be incidental: the MLF feminists may have simply dedicated themselves to different creative outputs, and graffiti did not interest them. This argument seems most plausible considering the fact that much of the documentation that survives of the MLF was undertaken by those in the movement. If the MLF participants were not documenting this graffiti, there was certainly less of an emphasis on it, especially when compared with the wealth of other elements of visual culture that MLF participants engaged it.

These "reasons" behind the lack of graffiti remain speculative. Indeed, I do not intend to make an historical or psychological argument about *why* there was less graffiti during the MLF years, as that type of argument is outside the purview of this dissertation, but I do want to problematize this gap between graffiti production and feminist practice during the MLF. With this gap in mind, I propose that we expand our definition of "graffiti" when it comes to

[207] "Pourtant, le geste photographique ne suffit pas à faire exister une image dans l'espace public. Le trajet de l'image photographique s'avère long, du 'clic à la rotative' jusqu'au lecteur à qui elle parvient. La photographie passe, en effet, entre les mains d'acteurs nombreux qui, chacun, la soumettent à des processus de gestion et de sélection. En agence de photographies, photographes mais aussi éditeurs, rédacteurs et archivistes participent à la fabrication, à l'existence et au choix de l'image. Puis, au sein d'une rédaction presse, son utilisation est décidée à la suite de ce que Marion Fontaine a nommé un 'processus de négociation entre journalistes, maquettistes et iconographes, qui doit aboutir à la sélection de certaines représentations, du moins lors quelles questions techniques sont réglées.' Ces professionnels sont autant de maillons qui contribuent à l'élaboration et à la mise en forme de l'information." ["Yet, the act of taking a photograph is not enough to bring that image into the public sphere. The journey of the photographic image has proven to be a long one, from the "rotative click" all the way to the reader who receives it. The photograph passes, in fact, through the hands of numerous actors that, each of whom submits it to processes of management and selection. In a photography agency, photographers but also publishers, editors and archivists participate in the creation, existence, and selection of an image. Then, within a newsroom, its usage is decided according to what Marion Fontaine has called a 'process of negotiation between journalists, layout artists, and photo editors, which must result in the selection of certain images, at least once technical questions have been resolved.' These professionals are all links that contribute to the development and shaping of news."] (Leblanc "Fixer l'événement" 60).

feminist movements in France in the 1970s. What if feminist graffiti writing is less concerned with laying claim or ownership to the space of the city and is more concerned with making visible the female body in that space? In the 1976 feminist journal, *Les femmes s'entêtent*, Claude Enjeu and Joana Savé assert that the city itself participates in the repression of women: "La structure spatiale des villes reflétait la division des sexes, la domination masculine, qu'elle illustrait de façon très pertinente la situation faite aux femmes…c'est en fait toute la ville qui nous est interdite" ["The spatial structure of cities reflected gender division and male dominance, illustrating, in a very clear way, the situation that women faced …in fact, *the entire city* is forbidden to us"] (33). In other words, women are prohibited from the public space of the city or the "political 'scene'" of its streets (36). These women take up Lefebvre's idea that the space of the city itself reflects the social and political oppression therein; the subjugation of women is evident through their treatment in public space. In another essay within the same collection called "La Rue," Dominique and Josiane, two writers who identify only by their first names, argue that the street is "le lieu de l'apprentissage de la peur" for women, a place where one's body is consistently observed, harassed, and commented upon by men (319). The stakes of protesting in the streets was underscored by the "obscene" and "injurious" comments men made about women's bodies during these MLF protests; these attacks were proof that women had "made their own, invested, occupied a space that was forbidden for [them]" (324).[208] In other words, because

[208] This article is written in the form of a conversation between J (Josiane) and D (Dominique). See Josiane's full statement on the comments they received while protesting here: "D'ailleurs ça me fait penser aux effets que produit une manif de femmes; c'est-à-dire lorsqu'on s'approprie consciemment, collectivement et entre nous, l'espace-rue. Je me souviens de cette manif, fin 1972, qu'on avait faite à une centaine pour protester contre l'investiture de Nixon : on s'était baladées dans le XVe avec des bandes sur le visage et des pancartes…C'est fou, c'est incroyable ce qu'on a pu entendre d'obscène, d'injurieux de la part des hommes. Ils ne se demandaient même pas pourquoi on était là: 'Si vous croyez qu' vous êtes baisables, mais c qu'elles sont moches, t'as vu son cul, ses guiboles…' et toutes les parties de nos corps y passaient. Moi, j'avoue, ça m'a surprise. Il y avait bien eu la manifestation du 20 novembre sur l'avortement, mais on était plus nombreuses, et puis, c'était mixte. Il y a peut-être des propos semblables, mais j'avais pas entendu. Je crois que la violence, l'obscénité de ce qu'on a entendu était à la mesure de la transgression que nous avons opérée : nous avions fait nôtre, investi, occupé un espace qui nous était interdit" ["Come to think of it, that makes me think of the effect that a women's demonstration has: that is, when we together claim, consciously and collectively, ownership of the space of the

the patriarchy has designated the public sphere for men, a female body that is visible in the streets provokes a violent response from men who are socialized by that patriarchy and who therefore assume that they can make degrading comments towards women's bodies because they are "displayed" in this public space. Feminist graffiti writers face a double bind: they are writing in a space to which they have no "right," and they are subjected to extensive bodily scrutiny while writing and occupying that space.

That being said, I propose that this absence of feminist graffiti writing can be read differently, as a transformation of graffiti into a new form—that of the female body itself. As we will see in the following examples, both the historical and fictional graffiti written by women during the 1970s and 1980s castigate the commodification of the female body as both reproductive systems and sexual objects. The feminists who were active in the MLF speak time and time again about fighting *against* the general exploitation of the female body and fighting *for* the "reappropriation" of their own bodies both in their private lives and in public spaces.[209][210] In this chapter, I propose that the female body (and its image) becomes an

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street. I think of that demonstration, at the end of 1972, when about one hundred of us protested against Nixon's inauguration: we walked through the streets of the 15th arrondissement with bandages over our faces and signs….It's crazy, it's unbelievable what sorts of obscene, insulting things we heard from men. They didn't even ask themselves why we were there: 'If you think you're fuckable, but man, you're ugly, did you see her ass, her legs…' and every part of our bodies were commented on. I'll admit, it surprised me. There had been an abortion demonstration on November 20th, but there were more of us then, and it was both men and women. There may have been similar comments, but I hadn't heard them. I think that the violence, the obscenity of what we heard was commensurate with the transgression that we had performed: we had made our own, besieged, occupied a space that was forbidden to us"] (324).

[209] This word "reappropriation" comes from Rina Nissam's interview in *Debout!* : "Je crois que nos premières revendications tournaient autour de la contraception et l'avortement, mais surtout quand même autour de la réappropriation de notre corps" ["I think that our initial demands centered around contraception and abortion, but, above all, the reappropriation of our bodies"] (11:16-11:24). Odile Dhavernas says: "Je crois qu'on peut dire que c'est un grand mouvement de réappropriation des femmes. Réappropriation de leur identité, de leur liberté, de leur choix, leur destin et de certains pouvoirs aussi" ["I think that we can say that it was a huge movement of women reclaiming themselves. Reclaiming their identity, their freedom, their choices, their destiny, and certain powers too"] (18:20-18:40). Again, another woman says: "On a appris à se réapproprier, à réapproprier notre parole et à réapproprier notre corps" ["We learned how to reclaim ourselves, to reclaim our voices and to reclaim our bodies"] (35:30-35:35).

[210] "Sans doute la rupture la plus significative est-elle intervenue dans les années 70, quand différents interdits relatifs au corps des femmes ont été levés. Le mouvement féministe, alors en plein développement, a libéré la sexualité comme il a déculpabilisé l'avortement. Autonomes, les individu(e)s sont devenu(e)s sujets de leur propre personne, ce qui jusqu'alors était impensable" ["Without a doubt, the most significant rupture occurred in

unconventional type of graffiti "writing" on the walls of the city, transforming public space through its "subversive" presence. The visible presence of the female body in the streets of the city dismantles the gender divide between public and private space**.** Like graffiti, which "writes" an illicit narrative into the city's walls, these women write "writes" their bodies streets, challenging the status quo through their corporeal presence. While some of the "graffiti" writers of this chapter disseminate a physical image of the female body into the space of the city, others use the city walls to challenge metaphorical images of the female body. In both cases, by revealing that the female body is a site of political and social contestation, feminist "graffiti" writers re-enfranchise women's bodies in order to construct a city where women can move their bodies freely.

This chapter compiles four cultural productions featuring historical and fictional graffiti that engage with both images of the female body in the 1970s and 1980s. In the first section, I analyze examples of historical graffiti written and captured during the MLF protests in Carole Roussopoulos' documentary, *Debout !: Une histoire du mouvement de libération des femmes – 1970-1980* (1999), and in a selection of photographs taken by feminist photographer and MLF militant, Catherine Deudon. In the second section, I examine Agnès Varda's feature-length film *L'une chante, l'autre pas* (1976), which depicts a friendship between two young feminist women during the MLF years and contains a cinematic representation of MLF graffiti. Finally, I investigate selected works of Miss.Tic, a French street artist known for her *pochoirs* (graffiti stencils) of young women, who began her work in the decade following the MLF movement (1985-2022). While extensive scholarship has been done on Varda, her feminism, and her films (including her films on street art: *Mur murs* [1982] and *Visages villages* [2017])*,* no scholarship has reflected upon the graffiti (or protest

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the 1970s, when different restrictions on women's bodies were lifted. The feminist movement, then in its heyday, freed sexuality as well as destigmatized abortion. Individuals became autonomous, self-directed subjects—something which was previously unthinkable" (Riot-Sarcey 95).

imagery) in *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* (1976).[211] [212] Both Deudon and Roussoupoulos' work have received very little academic scrutiny, and, while Miss.Tic has received extensive coverage on social media, in news outlets, and in art gallery spaces, she is perceived as a popular artist and, thus, there are few serious academic studies done on her work.[213] Although Varda, Deudon, and Roussopoulos publicly declare themselves "feminists" and personally participated in the MLF protests, Miss.Tic rejected the label in relationship to her art practice (at one point, describing her work as "feminine" rather than "feminist") and more recently called herself "worse than a feminist" (Pursley 55, Revault). All the same, I am less concerned with how the practitioners define themselves and am more concerned with the ways in which passerby *read* this graffiti, as it is the passerby's interpretation of graffiti which mobilizes a larger political body, and Miss.Tic's graffiti certainly mobilizes a particularly clear critique of the patriarchal media representations. Therefore, I include Miss.Tic because the work that she does engages in the same debates that animated the feminist movement of the 1970s; moreover, like the other "graffiti" writers, Miss.Tic centers an image of the female body and participates in the discussion around women's rights to bodily autonomy.

A Short History of the *Mouvement de libération des femmes*

The second wave of feminism in France, with which this chapter is concerned, is intertwined with the May 1968 protests, with which the previous chapter was concerned; many women who participated in May' 68 were actually at the genesis of the feminist

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[211] For more on Varda, see *Agnès Varda* (Smith 2019), *The Sustainable Legacy of Agnès Varda: Feminist Practice and Pedagogy* (Kennedy-Karpatt 2022), *Agnès Varda: Interviews* (Varda 2014), *Agnès Varda: Between Film, Photography, and Art* (DeRoo 2017), *The Cinema of Agnès Varda: Resistance and Eclectism* (Bénézet 2014), *Agnès Varda: Le cinema et au-delà* (Fiant et al 2009).

[212] In general, Varda's film *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* been acclaimed by feminist scholars for its storyline, but scholars have also "criticized the structure of the film as an unwieldy juxtaposition of melodramatic and musical genres" (DeRoo "Confronting Contradictions" 250)

[213] The only academic book that I have found on Miss.Tic's work, outside of her gallery exhibition catalogues, is Chrisopher Genin's *Miss.Tic: Femme de l'être* (2014).

movement of the early 1970s (Greenwald 9).[214] As Anne Zelensky intimates in Carole Roussopoulos' documentary about the MLF, she and Jacqueline Feldman led their first "feminist" meeting in a hall at the Sorbonne during May '68 to a surprising number of attendees (*Debout !* 4:01-5:57). However, as the May 1968 protests continued, many female militants grew frustrated by the fact that the revolutionary work still mirrored traditional gender roles despite the movement's ideological desire to breakdown the family hierarchy. Women were expected to do the "housework" at meetings, making coffee and cleaning up, while men dominated the floor with issues and often dismissing women's concerns about gender inequalities in favor of focusing solely on class divisions (Greenwald 11).[215] Widespread disillusionment with these radical Left male revolutionaries led many women directly to the feminist cause. Some women, then, began to distance themselves from their previous collaborators by choosing to exclude men from meetings and political actions; as

[214] As with May 1968, French feminists were also inspired by similar movements in the United States, namely the Women's Liberation Movement. Mano de Lessops and Rosangela Gramoni speak about the American influence on the MLF in Debout! (6:15-7:00, 8:46-9:18). The "internationalization of conflicts" led to the international circulation of feminist ideas in the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, the NOW (National Organization for Women) which was formed in 1966 in the United States was in early collaboration with European feminist groups (Riot-Sarcey 97).

[215] In 2022, the Musée Carnavalet in Paris hosted an exhibition, tracing political protests for women's rights from the French Revolution to the end of the 20th century: Parisiennes citoyennes ! Engagements pour l'emancipation des femmes (1789-2000). In this exhibition, there was a section describing the role of May 1968 to the burgeoning feminist movement. On one wall, several photographs of May '68 were featured with a plaque describing the inequitable division of labor that occurred during these protests: "En 1968, la contestation éclate dans les milieux étudiants, ainsi que le monde du travail et de la culture. La grève générale transforme Paris en forum. Dans les assemblés générales, les manifestations, les affrontements de rue, les femmes sont partout. // Quelques réunions mixtes sur 'les femmes et la révolution' ont lieu, mais le sujet est périphérique. Les hommes occupant le devant de la scène médiatique, tandis que les femmes gèrent l'intendance. Un tract à l'Institut d'études politiques ironise à ce sujet : 'L'efficacité de la grève serait sans aucun doute plus radicale si toutes les femmes refusaient de faire la cuisine et laissaient s'empiler la vaisselle comme s'empilent les ordures de la rue […]. Souhaitons que les filles de Sciences Po, […] abandonnent au plus tôt leur situation privilégiée de monopole dans leur confection des sandwiches et le service de balayage et de nettoyage de l'école.'" ["In 1968, protests broke out in student milieus, as well as in the worlds of labor and culture. The general strike transformed Paris into a public forum. In general assemblies, protests, confrontations in the streets, women were everywhere. // Some mixed-gender meetings on "Women and Revolution" occurred, but the subject remained peripheral. Men dominated media appearances, while women dealt with the logistics. A tract at the Institute of Political Studies satirized this subject: 'The strike's effectiveness would be, undoubtably, more radical if all women refused to cook and let the dishes pile up like trash piles up in the streets […] Let us hope that the Science Po girls[…] abandon as soon as possible their privileged monopoly on making sandwiches and sweeping and cleaning the school'"] ("Mai 68").

historian Claire Duchen attests, the experience of May '68 for French feminists was "double edged":

> It acted as a catalyst, helped bring them to a new awareness of their needs and desires. Women glimpsed the possibility for change, but at the same time they realized that the kind of change they wanted to see would not emerge from a male-dominated revolution, and that they would have to take charge of it themselves (8).

Non-mixity, or the decision to exclude men from political actions, became a "strategic [political] choice" for the MLF—one that permitted women to "construct themselves in an autonomous way," building "a women's movement of for themselves with only women" (Deudon "Souvenirs," Picq and Delphy qtd. in "Pourquoi la non-mixité?", my translations).[216]

Even before 1968, women were forming organizations in order to discuss women's issues and fight against the laws that disenfranchised them. In 1960, the Mouvement français du planning familial, which worked to legalize and provide access to contraception, grew rapidly despite political pressure. In 1962, the Mouvement démocratique féminin (MDF) helped bring women's concerns into the public sphere, such as the legalization of abortion and the legal emancipation of women from their husbands (Sarcey 93). This group eventually produced a splinter group in 1967 called Feminine-masculine-avenir (FMA), led by Anne

[216] This decision to practice political action separate from men was called "la non-mixité. The educational platform Matilda created an instructional video about non-mixité in the MLF, with clips from the archives of interviews that Roussopoulos carried out for her documentary. These clips do not feature in the final documentary. Françoise Picq, the non-mixity was temporary ("Il était important que les femmes se construisent en autonomie" ["It was important that women shape themselves autonomously"]) (00:00-1:12). Before the MLF, the FMA was mixed; Jacqueline Feldman notes how she previously thought it was important to have both men and women working towards feminist ends, but, during the MLF, she saw the importance of the separation and the "creativity of women" (1:12-4:10). Christine Delphy was also of the same idea that it should be separate ("de faire un mouvement des femmes pour elle-mêmes avec seulement des femmes" ["to make a women's movement for women made up of only women"]), although she mentions how older generations of feminists could not understand this idea (4:10-6:00). For more information, see "La mixité choisie : usages, enjeux et objectifs pour les luttes féministes" (Gérardin-Laverge 2024), "Quand les lesbiennes étaient 'séparatistes': non-mixité lesbienne et résistances féministes (1970-1980)" (Eliot 2022), "Mixité et non-mixité dans les mouvements feminists des années 1968 en France" (Jacquemart and Masclet 2017).

Zelensky and Jacqueline Feldman-Hogasen. In 1970, Christine Delphy joined the FMA, and they changed their name to Féminisme marxisme action, which reflected the group's new vision of the women's struggle through a Marxist lens (Sarcey 97). According the FMA, women were a "proletariat" who were oppressed by the "bourgeoisie" class of men; the only way that women could experience authentic equality with their male counterparts would be to destroy the patriarchal system.[217] Around this same time, Antoinette Fouque, Monique de Wittig, and others began organizing meetings around the question of the "difference" between men and women, which would eventually lead to the Fouque's splinter group, Psychanalyse et Politique, and a fascination for some French feminists with a particular "feminine" identity (Sarcey 97).[218] The FMA and Psych-et-Po represent two major factions within the feminist movement: the former which saw the feminist revolution as a form of class struggle and rejected gender essentialism and the latter which embraced gender differences and hoped to discover a "feminine" identity and vision of the world. [219]

These smaller, diverse groups eventually coalesced into a larger movement which was called the *Mouvement de liberation des femmes* (MLF) in the year 1970. In May of that year, the first large meeting of feminists occurred at the University of Vincennes. Shortly

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[217] See Christine Delphy's article "L'Énemmi principal" (1970) and her subsequent book on the topic, *L'ennemi principal, tome 1, Economie politique du patriarcat* (1998).

[218] For more on the idea of a feminine "difference," see Duchen's chapter "The Concept of the Feminine" in her book, Feminism in France: From May 68 to Mitterand (1986).

[219] As Claire Duchen intimates, the MLF was composed many smaller factions, called "currents," with differing views on a host of topics related to feminism. Duchen outlines three main questions that led to the development of different currents: Are women considered a separate social class? Are women fundamentally different from men? How do women interpret their own sexuality in relation to their politics? (18-20). In other words, feminists disagreed over the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, the assertion that women were of a different nature than men, and if sexuality should be part of the political actions of feminism. As Duchen also notes, Psych-et-Po even proclaimed themselves to be "anti-feminist," believing that to use the term feminism was still to define women in relation to men. Eventually these internal differences destroyed the MLF movement, which culminated in a legal battle wherein Psych-et-Po trademarked the name "MLF", declaring themselves owners of the name and the "true" MLF. By 1980, the MLF as a political force had effectively been dismantled. With all of this in mind, I recognize the constraints of using the term "feminist" to describe the graffiti that we see in this chapter, but still find it important to label the graffiti as "feminist" in order to underscore its shared thematic elements.

afterwards, Monique Wittig, Gille Wittig, Marcia Rothenburg, and Margaret Stephenson published the article "Combat pour la libération de la femme" in *L'Idiot international* (97), which argued for the Marxist conception of feminism. Still, these ideas remained relatively obscure to the general public. However, on August 26th, 1970, a group of nine women, including Christiane Rochefort and Monique Wittig, marched on the Arc de Triomphe to place flowers on the Grave of the Unknown Solider. The flowers they placed were not meant for the Unknown Solider but rather to honor his wife who, according to their banner, was the only "lesser known" person than the solider himself. The media lambasted this event in the press, which ironically led to the movements' rapid growth in popularity.[220] The press also unwittingly coined the group's name, Mouvement de libération des femmes.[221]

Without ignoring the different ideas and goals of the various MLF factions, I focus here on the first few years of the 1970s, when these smaller groups worked together to organize protests, political actions, and legal change for the furtherance of the rights of women in France. Many women speak fondly of this time as one of solidarity, characterized by joy, laughter, and creativity, and several historians have noted that the groups consolidated around questions of the body, in particular fights for women's rights to bodily autonomy

[220] Two other highly mediatized events also galvanized the movement. First, on April 5th, 1971, the "Manifesto of the 343," published in the Le Nouvel Observateur, demanded the right to safe and free abortion for all women. The manifesto was signed by 343 women who claimed to have undergone illegal abortions themselves, many of whom were activists and actresses. Second, in fall of 1972, four women were arrested for assisting a 16-year-old girl, Marie-Claire Chevalier (also convicted), in procuring an abortion after she had been raped by a classmate. Her lawyer, Gisèle Halimi, an activist for abortion rights, was also known for having defended several members of the Algerian National Liberation Front during the Algerian War of Independence. Thanks in large part to public opinion which rallied behind Chevalier, the judges were lenient in their sentencing. Marie-Claire was acquitted, and her mother fined only 500 francs. This trial was a flashpoint which contributed to the public opinion shifting in favor of the right to abortion. For more on this trial, see *Avortement: une loi en processus* (Choisir 1973). In 1974, the right to abortion was secured by the Simone Veil law, which was a central accomplishment for the MLF. This law had its limitations, and, while it made it possible to get an abortion, it did not help with the cost of abortions, which meant that many women could still not afford abortions. Therefore, the MLF continued to militate for the right to an economically free abortion.

[221] See Christine Delphy and Anne Zelenksy in *Debout!* (6:50-8:37)

through access to abortion and contraception.[222] [223] As Lisa Greenwald puts it, Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième sexe,* published some twenty years before the MLF was founded, became increasingly relevant to the young revolutionaries of the 1970s due, in part, to its conceptualization of the female body; Beauvoir's "problematizing of the female body as a site of sociopolitical intervention resonated within the larger women's movement" (107).[224] Art historian Rakhee Balaram contends that this focus on the female body "acted as a shared 'corpus' which crossed class, politics and ideology (if not always religion) and created a unifying tendency not only amongst feminists, but also non-feminists" (146). While Balaram points out that connections between the MLF and the realm of 1970s "women's art" are tenuous (the MLF was not specifically interested in "women's art" and female artists did not credit the MLF as an influence in their own work), she still argues that the "female body" was a unifying theme for *both* female artists and the MLF in the 1970s.[225] With all this in mind, it is no surprise that the female body also became central to feminist graffiti written during the same time period.

Debout! : Historical Graffiti Captured by Catherine Deudon and Carole Roussopoulos

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[222] These two goals are exemplified in popular MLF slogans such as: "L'avortement gratuit et libre" ["free and legal abortion"], "Un enfant si je veux, quand je veux" ["A child if I want, when I want"]. For more on MLF slogans, see *40 ans de slogans feministes – 1970 – 2010* (Faure-Fraisse 2011).

[223] In a testimonial regarding her time writing for Le Torchon brûle and militating for the MLF, Catherine Deudon also reinforces this idea: "Nous sommes nombreuses à être plus ou moins issues de mai 68, il est de bon ton, surtout à droite, de cracher sur tout son héritage. Mai 68 ce fut comme l'arrivée en peinture de l'impressionnisme, et du fauvisme, l'irruption de la couleur, de la lumière…Le Mouvement de libération des femmes ça a été une explosion, d'énergie, de paroles, d'actions, de rigolades, mais avec des conformismes gauchistes encore très prégnants" ["Many of us are more or less products of May 68. It is fashionable, especially on the right, to spit on the entire legacy [of May]. May 68 was like the arrival of impressionist and Fauvist painting, an eruption of color and light…The Women's Liberation Movement was an explosion, energy, words, actions, laughter, but one still marked by deeply ingrained leftist conformism"] ("Souvenirs"). Throughout Roussopoulos' *Debout !*, several of the women interviewed speak about the joyous atmosphere of the early MLF years.

[224] Despite her writings on the inequalities between men and women, Simone de Beauvoir did not call herself a "feminist" for many years. She finally became convinced of the feminist cause in 1971 during the MLF years, which led more publicity to the cause (Greenwald 104).

[225] For more on these connections, see chapter three "Libération-création: MLF, women artists, and the militant body," of Balaram's *Counterpractice*.

In 1967, Carole Roussopoulos, a young Swiss citizen, moved with her husband Paul from Geneva to Paris. Two years later, Paul's friend, the playwright Jean Genet, suggested that she purchase a Portapak video camera; this technology was new, marketed as an inexpensive and more portable device to capture film than traditional film cameras (Fleckinger 98). She took Genet's advice and secured a video camera, becoming only the second person in France to own one after the Left-Bank filmmaker, Jean-Luc Godard (Murray 97). Soon after, Roussopoulos and her husband created an experimental video collective called "Vidéo Out," which produced films on social issues such as the right to abortion, the prevalence of incest, and the plight of the unhoused.[226] She also created a feminist video collective called "Les Insoumuses" with fellow activists, Delphine Seyfrig, Ioana Wieder, and Nadja Ringart, to capture the burgeoning MLF movement and more radical feminist ideas. [227] By the end of her career, she had made over one hundred and fifty experimental videos (Murray 94). Roussopoulos conceived of her videos, not as a form of art, but as a form of militancy; she created in order to "organize in neighborhoods, to speak about social problems" (Roussopoulos qtd in Fleckinger Interview 101). Her desire to "organize" for social causes transcended the local; she and her husband also taught activist groups internationally, such as the Black Panthers, how to utilize video to promote their respective causes.[228] For Roussopoulos, video was an medium that permitted people to film *themselves*,

[226] For more on Vidéo Out, see Fleckinger's interview with Carole Roussopoulos. See also the Association Carole Roussopoulos website for a list of productions.

[227] For more information on Les Insoumuses, see the documentary, *Delphine et Carole, insoumuses* (McNulty 2021), the academic article "From Muse to Insoumuse" (An 2019), and the Museo national Centro de de Arte Reina Sofía exhibition catalogue of *Defiant Muses: Delphine Seyrig and the Feminist Video Collectives in France, 1970s-1980s* (2019).

[228] "Quand nous sommes rentrés en France, nous avons montré le film, qui s'appelait *Hussein, le Néron d'Amman*, et tout s'est enchaîné très vite. Un jour, un Black Panther, légal, qui avait entendu parler de cette bande vidéo, nous a contactés car ils avaient gardé la machine NTSC d'une équipe de journalistes américains venue les interviewer et ils ne savaient pas s'en servir. Nous avons passé un mois à Alger pour donner des cours de vidéo aux Black Panthers, mais aussi à tous les mouvements de libération: aux Angolais, aux Vietnamiens, etc. La vidéo portable permettait de donner la parole aux gens directement concernés, qui n'étaient donc pas obligés de passer à la moulinette des journalistes et des médias, et qui pouvaient faire leur propre information" ["When we came back to France, we showed the film, which was called *Hussein, the Nero of Amman*, and

to be in control of their own image, and, therefore, video allowed political movements the ability to control their own narratives.[229] Other benefits of video were its "capacity for instant playback, which meant video makers did not need to process their material in order for their subjects to see what had been taped, unlike with film," and the "relative discretion of video, which took up less space and required less equipment than film." (Murray 96). Video was also a "virgin media," which Roussopoulos saw as an *atout* for her feminist work; with video, women had access to a domain that had not yet been touched or controlled by men (Roussopoulos qtd. in Fleckinger 110).[230] To quote Ros Murray, video "was a relatively new medium that had yet to be appropriated by the mainstream media and its patriarchal structures and thus stood in opposition to the male-dominated cinema and television industries" (96).

Catherine Deudon, like Roussopoulos, was a militant feminist who was active with the MLF. Similarly, she "captured" the feminist movement through a lens and saw her photography as imbricated with her militancy.[231] Unlike Roussopoulos, whose experimental medium was part and parcel of her feminist practice, Deudon's primary aim as photographer

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everything moved very quickly. One day, a member of the Black Panthers, who had heard about the videotape, contacted us because they had kept NTSC equipment from a group of American journalists that had come to interview them, and they didn't know how to use it. We spent a month in Algiers giving video classes to the Black Panthers, but also to all the liberation movements: to the Angolan people, the Vietnamese, etc. The portable video camera allowed us to give a voice to the people directly concerned, who were therefore no longer obligated to go through the grind of the journalists and media, who could produce their own news"] (Roussopoulos qtd. in Fleckinger Interview 101).

[229] "Some theorists even suggest that there is no image in video because it is an electronic medium made up of scanning lines in continual movement, whereas there is an image in a film, which is a series of photographed stills put into sequence to create the illusion of movement" (Murray 114). With this in mind, video can be conceived of as a medium without image and, therefore, one that refuses any image of the female body, or, at the very least, refuses a static image of the female body.

[230] "Je ne pense pas que ce soit lié au poids de la caméra, mais au fait qu'il s'agissait d'un média vierge. Il n'y avait pas d'école, pas de passé et pas d'histoire. Les hommes ne s'en étaient pas encore emparés. Quand les femmes ont découvert cette machine, comme moi, elles se sont dit qu'il suffisait d'essayer : on efface, on recommence, on apprend sur le tas. Les caméras ne coûtaient pas très cher." ["I don't think that it was about the weight of the camera, but the fact that it was a virgin media. There was no school, no past, no history. Men hadn't yet taken possession of it. When women, like me, discovered this machine, they figured all they had to do was try: we erase, we start again, we learn in the field. Cameras didn't cost very much."] (Roussopoulos qtd in Fleckinger 101)

[231] See interviews with Deudon recorded by Matilda Education and with Annie Metz.

was documentation of the feminist movement. She captures "collective" moments of the feminist movements, such as general assemblies and street demonstrations, constructing an image of the MLF through these photographs, producing an "archivage du mouvement" (Deudon *Télébout*). In an interview with curator Annie Metz, Catherine Deudon describes how she became both a photographer and a feminist at a young age: at 16, she began taking photographs and at 17, she read Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième sexe*. By the time she read Beauvoir's text, she had already become "politicized" against the OAS during the Algerian War and believed the fight against racism to be integrated with the fight against sexism. Soon afterward, May 1968 occurred. Deudon was skeptical of May 1968's "Stalinism," only enjoying the "most poetic or funniest slogans" that emerged during this moment but not getting politically implicated. Her political militantism began in earnest with the rise of the MLF. She participated in actions, marched in protest, and, most importantly, catalogued the déroulement of the movement. In addition to her photographs, some of which were purchased for publication by *L'Idiot international*, Deudon also wrote several articles in feminist newspapers or about feminist ideas including the MLF's *Le Torchon brûle*, *Les femmes s'entêtent*, *La revue d'en face*, and *Les temps modernes* (Metz Interview with Deudon). Although very different in their methodologies, Deudon and Roussopulos shared a commitment to contributing to and documenting the MLF through images.

Both women, some thirty years later, also produced cultural productions commemorating and representing this movement, and both of these productions contain a small selection of images of historical feminist graffiti, which I analyze in this section. In 1999, Roussopoulos filmed a documentary chronicling the MLF movement called *Debout !: Une histoire du Mouvement de liberation des femmes: 1970-1980.*[232] In 2003, Deudon

[232] This documentary was accessed thanks to head of archives, Peggy Préau, at the Simone de Beauvoir Audiovisual Center in Paris, co-founded in 1982 by Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig, and Ioana Wieder.

published a collection of photographs that documented her three-decade long commitment to the "women's movement": *Un mouvement à soi : Images du mouvement des femmes (1970-2001)*.[233] While Deudon's collection is focused on representing her own experience of the MLF ("of one's own"), Roussopoulos produces a video documentary in which she "edits" traditional documentary interviews with MLF activists by interspersing archival video footage and still photographs from the 1970s.[234] Despite their different approaches, Deudon and Roussopoulos demonstrate that women were active agents of their own revolution by centering the women in their camera's lens. Deudon's photographs capture groups of joyous women, singing, laughing, and protesting in the streets of Paris and during political meetings. In a similar way, Roussopoulos' documentary commences with a montage of close-ups of the MLF activists; her video camera hugs the faces of these women as they laugh and smile with a "subverted" version "J'aime les Filles" sung by Annie Cohen playing in the background (*Debout !* 00:00-00:43).[235] During the testimonials, she captures the women in medium shots, again keeping the women at the "center" of the frame. Beyond this "framing" of the women in the "center," I argue that both Deudon and Roussopoulos also feature images of feminist graffiti with messages that put the female body first. In other words, they showcase graffiti inscriptions that center the female body both physically and metaphorically in the streets of Paris. These graffiti writings denounce the ways in which the female body is "consumed" in

[233] The selected images were consulted at the La Contemporaine Library at the University of Nanterre, specifically their digitized collection of Catherine Deudon's *Un mouvement à soi: Images du mouvement des femmes* (1970-2001) (2003).

[234] In the documentary, Roussopoulos interviews Franceline Dupenloup, Anne Zelensky, Christine Delphy, Jacqueline Feldman, Mano de Lesseps, Rosangela Gramoni, Gabrielle Brodmann, Rina Nissim, Martine Chaponnière, Hélène Bregani, Marie-Jo Garldon, Diane Gilliard, Marianne Ebel, Annie Sugier, Marie-Jo Bonnet, Françoise Picq, Odile Dhavernas, Simone Iff, Claire-Lise Stehlé, Nadja Ringart, Doudou Denisart, Maya Surduts.

[235] Her documentary opens with "moving" still portraits of these women, like we will see later with Varda's film. You can see the women get uncomfortable when the camera is on them too long and many start to laugh. In the closing redits, the song is credited as such: "Annie Cohen interprète un extrait de la chanson détournée du Dutronc 'J'aime les Filles'" (1:29:24)

public space and, by drawing attention to this metaphorical violence, attempt to re-assert agency over the female body.

In Roussopoulos' *Debout !*, the documentary follows the development of the MLF from the May 1968 years to the end of the 1970s, but the way that Roussopoulos orders her footage resists any clear timeline. Instead, the film is ordered around several themes or events, such maternity, non-mixity, the release of the manifesto of the 343, among several others. Archival photographs and news media clips are inserted into the testimonial footage; these insertions often relate the theme that the women are speaking about or mark certain dates for the viewer. As Ros Murray explains, Roussopoulos' experimental videos often follow this format: montage-collages of archival footage, newspaper headlines, interviews, and media advertisements. It is through this practice of montage-collage that Roussopoulos challenges the "immutable, all-powerful structures of mainstream media representation," especially its representation of the feminist movement (Murray 109). This tool of montage also highlights both the fragmentation and unification of the MLF movement. For example, Roussopoulos often juxtaposes two testimonials of women discussing various perspectives of the same idea. For instance, she includes a five minute segment where several women discuss the divide that grew between MLF members who were heterosexual and those who were homosexual, each of which felt that the other women were ignoring issues that were important to them (27:30-32:40). Despite their differing perspectives, Roussoupoulos captures each woman in the same way, in the same light, in color, humanizing their experiences and not casting judgment on any of the perspectives presented. Creating her own conglomeration of media soundbites and integrated testimonials, Roussopoulos disrupts any clear, cohesive narrative of the MLF, presenting, instead, the MLF as a web of diverse and sometimes clashing perspectives. Moreover, she uses her editing process as a reflection of feminist action; she "exposes feminist activity as disruptive through the very forms of

interruption, rewinding, repetition and insertion offered by video technology" (114). In this way, Roussopoulos' use of video affords her work a certain performativity within the MLF movement.



Image 3.1 *Debout !* (37:46)
Photograph taken in Switzerland by anonymous photographer



Image 3.2 "1971. Prémière manifestation en faveur du droit à l'avortement."
Photograph taken by Catherine Deudon,
La Contemporaine Library

One important goal of the MLF was to redefine traditional gender roles at a societal level, particularly that of motherhood, although women in the MLF had different ideas about how to accomplish that goal. Radical feminists sometimes believed motherhood to be a form of "slavery in capitalist society" (Duchen 55). Being a mother, idealizing motherhood, or even desiring motherhood reinforced capitalism because maternity was a form of unpaid labor that reiterated the division between the female proletariat and the male bourgeoise. The "particularists," or those who felt women were essentially different from men, embraced motherhood as a mystical part of female identity. There was little moderation when it came to ideological ideas regarding motherhood: "childbirth is represented either as horror and violence, or as poetry" (Duchen 62).[236] Despite these differences, those who participated in the MLF universally agreed that women should have the freedom to decide if and when to have a child. This assertion by feminists in the 1970s—that women should have control over their decisions about motherhood—is represented by this still photograph which appears in Roussopoulos' documentary. This particular image of the graffiti inscription, "CHILD YES when *we* decide," appears during a series of still images of feminist graffiti. There is no accompanying information about these photographs in the documentary itself (no authors, locations, or photographers' names are listed), and it is not explained either by the interviewers or by voiceover. However, this strategy, of deliberately not explaining what is going on via voice-over, is part of Roussopoulos' typical style: "[Roussopoulos] ne recourt donc que rarement à la voix off, préférant utiliser des coupures de presse pour fournir les informations de dates et de lieux ainsi que le contenu des revendications des femmes en lutte" ["[Roussopoulos], therefore, only rarely employs voiceover narration, preferring to use newspaper clippings to provide details about dates and locations, as well as the content of the

[236] For more on this tension, see Duchen's third chapter, "French feminists and motherhood: destiny or slavery?" in *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterand*.

demands made by the women involved in the struggle"] (Fleckinger 57). Roussopoulos, then, simply inserts these still photographs into her documentary to illustrate some of the ways that these activists intervened in the streets. Instead of deploying the "voiceover," which is another tool of the traditional (male-dominated) media, Roussopoulos asks the viewer to connect the dots between these images and the words that are being shared by the activists. All of the photographs that are shared in this montage appear in black-and-white. When contrasted with the documentary footage, which is in color, the black-and-white quality of the photographs suggests that they are "of the past." In other words, the contrast between the still photographs in black and white and the live testimonials suggest that these photographs are chronologically before the testimonials, that they are illustrations of the 1970s movement that the women are discussing in 1999.

The first graffiti writing (Image 3.1 on page 178) appears on the balcony of an apartment complex, below an open window, as if the words are emanating from the inside of the house —from "the inside," the traditional foyer of the "woman" (Enjeu and Savé 44).[237] The graffiti writer aligns his or herself with women by using the personal pronoun "nous," making this graffiti a personal statement and not just a political one. Positioned between the apartment and the street, the graffiti breaks down the distinction between the interior and the exterior, between the private and public, the "domestic" and the political. It "speaks" from a private space, intercepting the passerby in public space and bringing an important discussion about the female body into the "political realm" of the street to quote Enjeu and Savé again. A no-parking sign acts as a frame to the graffiti of its left side, while to its right the wall is an open canvas, one on which another graffiti writer as already written something illegible. The

[237] "Globalement, la ville reproduit ainsi une division donnée pour naturelle. Il y a un dehors et un dedans. Le dehors de la ville est l'espace des hommes. Avec l'espace du dedans, le logement, les femmes sont censées avoir une garantie. En réalité, le logement est un moyen de réduire l'espace d'évolution des femmes" ["Overall, the city thus reproduces a division that is taken for granted as natural. There is an outside and an inside. The outside of the city is the space of men. With the space inside, the home, women are supposed to have security. In reality, the home is a way to limit the space of women's evolution"] (46).

no-parking sign designates a symbol of exclusivity (*No* Parking) which contrasts with the first line of the graffiti, "Child *YES*"; written in all capital letters for emphasis, this graffiti exclaims a positive desire for children rather than a negative one. Like an asterisk elaborating upon the first line of the graffiti, the second line of the graffiti, "when *we* decide" reiterates a key claim of the MLF: that women decide when and how they have children, that they "reappropriate" their own bodies in the private and public sphere. These three elements of the photograph (no parking sign, first line, second line) also illustrate the debate within feminism regarding ideas about motherhood. The "no parking" sign can be seen both the general perception of feminism due to its critiques of motherhood (that feminists do not want children) and also the perspective of some of the more anti-maternity feminists. The first line suggests a rebuttal of this perspectives (that [some] feminists do want and say yes to children). The final line tempers both of these extremes and demonstrates the central tenet of feminist thought regarding the female body and motherhood: that women should have the choice over their own bodies. Just as Roussopoulos integrates a variety of perspectives about the MLF in the testimonials and montage, even her selection of graffiti brings to life these tensions. Furthermore, by integrating these images of graffiti into the documentary, she illustrates the ways in which feminist graffiti dismantles the separation between the home and the street, between the "male" and the "female" realms, in order to place women's bodily autonomy at the center.

One of Catherine Deudon's photographs taken during a protest in 1971 illustrates another instance of feminist graffiti related to the access to abortion. In Deudon's photograph (Image 3.2 on page 178), three young children pose on top of a car with the graffiti, "free and legal abortion" written across its hood. Although mostly obscured by the body of the children, this graffiti inscription is easy to identity, as this was a common slogan of the MLF. Flags, balloons, and other protestors surround the children, lending an effervescence to the image.

One child holds a white flag down at an angle, which blurs towards the bottom of the image, as if waving it in surrender. To the left a woman, possibly their mother, is speaking to the children. The graffiti is decidedly less "readable" in both the literal and figurative sense than that in the first image. However, the location of the graffiti merits further attention. In contrast with the first image where the graffiti was written on a stable surface, this graffiti is written on a vehicle. Therefore, this graffiti has mobility. Like the bodies and flags of the protestors that surround it, it has the capacity to move through space, transporting its message to a larger audience. The inscription has the ability to travel, like Cathy Bernheim mentioned in her interview regarding MLF slogans. In this way, it is similar in nature to another practice that Irène Corrandin mentioned in her interview and that Deudon depicts via a photograph in her documentary—that of women wearing posters on their physical bodies as they walked (*Debout!* 24:48-53, Corrandin 5:11-5:50). By writing on a moving object, the graffiti writer de-territorializes the inscription, transforming it into a moving body, like that of the protestors.

While optimistic, the photograph ultimately highlights the ambiguity of this graffiti inscription's political power. The optimism of the image lies with the choice to frame the three children on top of the car. These children, surrounded by a carnivalesque atmosphere, are depicted as the next feminist generation. The children are looking "forward" to this future (one in which abortion is free and legal), as they look forward into the camera's lens. This image, however, does not question the capitalism that was inherent to sexism for many French feminists. On the one hand, the children, who appear to be young girls, ride atop the car. This positioning might be read as a subversion of gender and family roles. The children, rather than the parents, are "driving" the car, and the young girls master the car, a "male" object which epitomizes the consumer capitalism of the 1950s and 1960s.[238] Still, the

[238] For more on cars, consumerism, and modern France, see Kristin Ross' *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*.

instrumentalization of the car for political purposes, the white flag at the bottom of the frame, waving surrender, and the ambivalent expressions on the children's faces, lend an irresolution to the image. Perhaps this photograph actually "looking forward" to a more accurate future in which, despite the many protests of the 1970s, many of these issues have not been resolved.

This same graffiti slogan from Deudon's photograph ("avortement libre et gratuit" ["free and legal abortion"]) appears in Roussopoulo's documentary with a much more political charged message (Image 3.3, pp. 184). This image of graffiti is culled from clips that Roussopoulos borrows from a news broadcast of a 1974 MLF-affiliated protest. In this clip, the graffiti is written in careful cursive script with red spray paint on the back of an opaque glass wall that marks a Parisian bus stop. A young woman, with her back to the camera, passes the graffiti, her body being reflected in the opaque surface as she walks by. At first glance, the cursive writing appears juvenile – the cursive a child might learn in school and a red color which makes the writing appear decorative. On second glance, the use of red paint suggests something more sinister, as if that, by proxy of this blood-red inscription, the city's streets are bloodied with the aftermath of illegal abortions. The graffiti acts as a representative, then, of the thousands of women whose bodies are "bloodied" by these dangerous abortions. Finally, the body of the passerby further illustrates the message of the graffiti. As she passes, the female passerby is reflected and magnified in size onto the glass barrier and, thus, her silhouette is reflected onto the graffiti writing itself. In this way, the female passerby can "see" herself superimposed on the graffiti writing and, thus, through its message; she, too, might be someone who needs access to an abortion. Her reflection overlaid on the graffiti is a reminder that her body is politicized by the State.



Image 3.3 *Debout !* (1:24:15)
INA Archival Footage, October 6th, 1979



Image 3.4 "Annonce d'une idée de grêve des femmes"
Photograph taken by Catherine Deudon, 1974
La Contemporaine

In addition to the question of abortion, which touches directly on a woman's right to bodily autonomy, a second theme also appears in the historical graffiti captured during the MLF years: a critique of the representation of female bodies in advertising and media. The following two examples use graffiti to subvert advertisements that are visible in public spaces in the city. In these acts of *détournement*, the graffiti writers challenge the ways in which the media uses the female body a form of capital.[239] The first example is a photograph of graffiti in the Parisian metro taken by Catherine Deudon in 1974 (Image 3.4, pp. 184). In an interview, Deudon explains how she both participated in the creation of this graffiti and captured it on film. According to this interview, she and several other women wrote the graffiti to disseminate the details for La Grève des femmes [the Women's Strike], a general strike organized by the MLF in 1974 in which women were called to stop doing all labor, including domestic labor for an entire day ("Catherine Deudon, photographe" 19:30-21:30). Although she comments that the "strike" was not an initiative that was "very important" to the history of the MLF, she explains that she and the other women had fun practicing a "détournement" of the advertisement.[240]

In the metro advertisement that Deudon captures, a woman is laying on a carpet on her stomach, legs crossed in the air, a rotary phone to her ear and a magazine in front of her. She is facing the camera, but her eyes look off into the distance to the right of the frame. The advertisement is for a woman's apparel store called La Redoute, and the caption is "Nouveau: faites vos courses à plat ventre" ["New: Do your shopping on your stomach"]. The poster

[239] "Détourner signifie aussi bien : changer, dérouter, dévier, dévoyer, écarter, voler...D'autres fois, il consiste en la réutilisation de quelque chose d'existant dont on transforme la fonction, le sens, l'aspect, afin d'obtenir quelque chose de différent. C'est ce second aspect que l'on rencontre, entre autres choses, dans le domaine artistique" ["To divert (détourner) also means: to change, to reroute, to deviate, to lead astray, to set aside, to steal…Other times, it entails the reusage of something that already exist, transforming the function, sense, or appearance, in order to obtain something different. It is this second aspect is that which we encounter, among other things, in the domain of the arts"]. (Berthet 2019)

[240] While Deudon is discussing the unimportance of the Women's Strike to the greater MLF movement, it seems curious to be that the graffiti written also becomes inconsequential, which reinforces the perceived "marginality" of graffiti to the MLF movement but also to political movements in general.

announces a new service that the store offers, wherein women can do their shopping by phone rather than in the store (in other words, they can do their shopping "on their stomachs"). The insouciant body language of the young woman, "à plat ventre" with her legs crossed casually behind her, embodies the ease of this new service. This phrase "à plat ventre" ["lying on your stomach"] has a double meaning. The woman pictured in the advertisement is thin; she has "un ventre plat" ["a flat stomach"]. It is as if by using this new clothing service, one can be lazy, ordering from home rather than going to the store ("à plat ventre"), and also show off one's "flat stomach" ("un plat ventre"). Placed on this particular advertisement, the graffiti subverts these two meanings, subtly calling into question this link between Western beauty ideals and consumerism. By "advertising" a Woman's Strike on an advertisement that reinforces female domesticity, the graffiti challenges everyday examples of capitalism that reinforce patriarchical gender roles.

The women wrote two different graffiti inscriptions on this particular metro poster, both of which exploit the image of the woman's body in the advertisement to transmit their message. Firstly, "GREVE DES FEMMES" ["WOMEN'S STRIKE"] is written in all capital letters to the right of the image of the woman, on the same line as the brand name and its tagline. The size of the graffiti inscription dwarfs the writing of the advertisement itself. The dark paint spills down the side of the poster, almost like blood, demanding to be seen. According to Deudon, the graffiti was meant to play on the word "grève" by separating it into two parts: "Grrr [Deudon growls in the interview] et….rêve [dream]" (19:48-19:58). During a general worker's strike, Deudon had seen a similar graffiti, "[G]rêve Générale" ["General Strike]," and found the play on words between grêve and rêve clever, so she recreated it on the poster. Although the visualization of the graffiti, at least as captured in this photograph, does not make clear this distinction between "Grr" and "rêve," Deudon's comments after-the-

fact reveal a certain duality to the feminist movements: its frustration ("grr!") concerning the status quo and its hope ("dream") for a more egalitarian future.

The second graffiti inscription is less perceptible; it is written with a regular pen and consists of a speech bubble coming out of the woman's mouth, containing the details and location for the Women's Strike. Whereas in the advertisement, the woman is "silently" speaking on the phone, the graffitist writes actual words into her mouth, giving her body a voice by way of the graffiti inscription. The speech bubble added by Deudon and her associates converts the advertisement's passive image of the female body into an active one. While the woman in the original advertisement lounges around and orders herself new clothes, the woman in the graffitied advertisement attends the MLF protest and invites her friends to do the same. The graffitied speech bubble also subtly denounces the content of the publicity itself; it modifies the capitalist message that promotes domestic ideals into a message of feminist revolution that advocates for political protest. Finally, the graffiti also informs the real-life passerby of the protest. Anyone who passes the poster on their morning commute is advised of the details of the Women's Strike. Via this illicit inscription, the capitalist bourgeois woman, taking the metro to her workplcae or her home, is transformed into the militant feminist, who organizes for a revolution at all times, in the metro, at home, even while "flat on her stomach." Deceivingly simple, this graffiti transmits the information necessary to engage in this same sort of militancy—to become a part of a greater militant body of women— to all who pass it by.

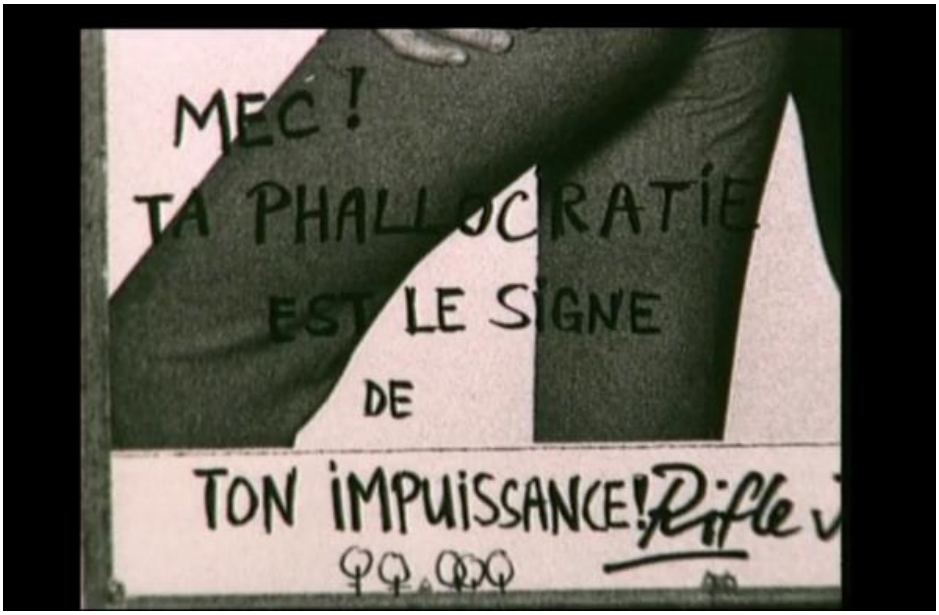


Image 3.5 *Debout !* (37:43)
Photograph taken by anonymous photographer



Image 3.6 *Debout !* (37:44)
Photograph taken by anonymous photographer

In Roussoupolos' documentary, she inserts another photograph of an advertisement for women's clothing that is similarly hijacked by a piece of feminist graffiti, and her unconventional editing of this sequence illustrates the danger of sexist representations about women (Image 3.5 and 3.6, pp. 188). Halfway through *Debout !*, Roussopoulos includes a montage of close-ups of a poster promoting a brand of jeans called Rifle. The first close-up focuses on the graffiti that is written over part of the poster, which reads "MEC! TA PHALLOCRATIE EST LE SIGNE DE TON IMPUISSANCE" ["DUDE! YOUR PHALLOCRACIE IS THE SIGN OF YOUR IMPOTENCE"] with five female gender signs underneath the inscription. On the bottom right of the poster, almost in line with the word "impotency" is the name of the denim brand: "Rifle." Behind the graffiti are the legs of a woman wearing the jeans, legs spread open to create a triangle shape. This triangle shape resembles the MLF triangle hand signal used during protests, which itself is a representation of a vagina. [241] Then, Roussopoulos cuts to a second close-up of the upper half of the poster, in which a man hugs the buttocks of a woman in her jeans with a big smile on his face. The white of his teeth match the white of the tag on her jeans, as if his smile is purchased along with the jeans that hug the backside of the woman. His hand is present in both close-ups, which lets the spectator know that this is a continuation of the same image, despite the fact that the poster is never shown in its entirety. Roussopoulos foregrounds the sinister nature of this image by adding a sound overlay of drums beating to the series of extreme close-ups. Because of the feminist graffiti that precedes the revelation of the man's presence, the man's smile now comes across as a leer and his hand on the woman's legs a death grip. The extreme close-up also contrasts the man's face, which is fully visible, with the woman's only visible body part, her buttocks. By drawing our attention to these two body parts, Roussopoulos'

[241] This symbol is meant to be representative of a vagina and was first used in a 1972 protest and on the cover of *Le Torchon Brûle*. We could read the legs "écarté" ["spread apart"] in the first image as a recreation of this symbol (and also because it draws attention to this part of the body).

camera subtly suggests the dehumanization of women (reduced to an eroticized body part) compared to the humanization of men (their faces are "seen" over their bodies). When looked at "up close" through the camera's lens and when commented on by the feminist graffiti, this innocuous advertisement becomes a threatening reflection of the reality faced by women in France. Roussopoulos' choice to "disrupt" her documentary with this example of feminist graffiti and then utilize the capacities of video to present it through close-ups and haunting music embodies the disruption of the feminist movement itself, and especially its disruption of public space through its messages.[242]

In contrast with Deudon's example, this graffiti is addressed to the male passerby; the vocative interjection "MEC!" ["DUDE!"] indicates that the man in the poster is the graffiti's audience (and by extension, all men passing by). The graffiti writers position themselves as women due to their "signature" on the bottom (the gender symbols). Written on the "Rifle" poster, which is a brand name but also a word that can be translated as either "rifle [gun]" or "fight," this graffiti is positioned as the opening line to a fight between the women and the man. The exclamation "MEC!" evolves into a reverse wolf whistle; the graffiti aggresses men verbally (and visually) in the streets just as women often are, as Savé and Enjeu and Dominique and Josiane remind us. However, instead of sexualizing the man, the graffiti "wolf whistle" demeans and challenges him. The graffiti wields the informal pronoun, "tu," and unmasks the man's "impuissance" (his sexual impotence as well as general weakness), and these two tactics ridicule the man in the advertisement, its sexist producers, and those that pass it by. The sentence itself "ta phallocratie est le signe de ton impuissance" denounces the man in two ways: it condemns the man's obsession with sexual prowess and power (his "phallus" and his "autocratie"), and it suggests that this obsession actually produces his

[242] This word "disrupt" refers back to the citation from Ros Murray's article: "[Roussopoulos] exposes feminist activity as disruptive through the very forms of interruption, rewinding, repetition and insertion offered by video technology" (114).

"impotence" rather than imbuing him with sexual power. The "sign of power" is *actually* that which "signs" the graffiti—the sign of the women. By denouncing the sexualization of the female body in the advertisement, the writers subvert that sexualization in the public space of the streets and undermines the "phallocracy" as a whole through this process of graffiti editing, which Roussopoulos augments via her video editing.

To conclude this section, I turn to a final example of graffiti from Roussopoulos' documentary—the only example that I have found of women being photographed in the act of writing feminist graffiti. Roussopoulos' documentary is not limited in geographic scope to Paris but extends to Geneva where the MLF was also active. In one sequence of the documentary, several interviewees describe a political action that was carried out in Geneva by the MLF. The city of Geneva had promised to build a women's center, but this center was never completed and the entrance to the center was eventually bricked over. In retaliation, a group of activists covered the entrance to Geneva's city hall in bricks and then wrote graffiti on its façade. Roussoupolos inserts still photographs of this action in between the testimonials about the event itself. The two graffiti inscriptions seen in the photographs are: "La ville détruit, les femmes construisent" and "le centre des femmes sera."[243] Just as with the media advertisement, Roussopoulos performs another montage through insertion and close-ups. She begins with a shot of the entire photograph. She then strings together a sequence of close-ups of the same photograph; each close-up focuses on one of the women writing graffiti. She also inserts close-ups of a second photograph that is never shown in full, again centering her lens on the women writing the graffiti.

[243] One of the women interviewed discusses the first slogan but not the second, however you can see it in the photograph included.



Image 3.7 *Debout !* (1:16:36)
Photograph taken by anonymous photographer in Switzerland



Image 3.8 *Debout !* (1:16:37)
Photograph taken by anonymous photographer in Switzerland



Image 3.9 *Debout !* (1:16:39)
Photograph taken by anonymous photographer in Switzerland



Image 3.10 *Debout !* (1:16:41)
Photograph taken by anonymous photographer in Switzerland



Image 3.11 *Debout !* (1:16:42)
Photograph taken by anonymous photographer in Switzerland

This graffiti sequence effectively creates a "collage" of graffiti writers, one in which several photographs of women writing graffiti succeed each other rapidly (Images 3.7-3.11, pp. 192). This collage conveys the impression that countless women are writing graffiti and that these acts of writing are energetic, injecting momentum into the feminist movement. Through this process of creative editing, Roussopoulos transforms one photograph into several images of women's bodies engaged in political action, proliferating the women on screen. As if several women are writing all at once, her editing choices illustrate a protest that is in motion. Again, Ros Murray talks about the performativity of Roussopoulos' camera: "the camera never seems to be simply taping during a protest but is always itself protesting" (116). In this case, it is Roussopoulos' editing process that "protests" *with* these women writing graffiti.

This montage of graffiti writing actually ends with a still photograph of a graffiti reader. The final close-up in the sequence is of an older woman standing and observing the protest (Image 3.11, pp. 185). She stands next to a protest banner with the words, "Un Centre des femmes pour nous organiser" ["A Women's Center for us to organize"] and appears to be reading a partially visible example of graffiti, "VIVE LES FEMMES" ["LONG LIVE WOMEN"]. By including her in the montage, Roussopulos unites both the women writing graffiti and the passersby—demonstrating how the graffiti engaged a greater political body. Although their graffiti "destroys" the city hall, which is depicted as a barren, apocalyptic space in this final photograph, it is only because the city "destroyed" the Women's Center. However, even though the city "destroys," the "women [will] build" their Center anyways ("it will be" as the second graffiti says), and they will build it through their words and actions, through their graffiti. Their collective action effectively turns the city hall, a stand-in for the city as a whole, into a center for women. Just as these women build a vision for the thwarted women's center and feminism more broadly, Roussopoulous builds a coalition of

women through her practice of montage. Despite the alleged "destruction" of the graffiti, Roussopoulos depicts it as an act of creation—one of a feminist consciousness and collective action. This graffiti writing demands for women a space in the city, a way to be seen in that city. These final photographs of feminist graffiti in Roussopoulos' documentary concretize what the other examples expressed faintly: that feminist graffiti is about re-centering female experience and re-situating the female body into the streets, a place from which it has long been banned by the patriarchal State. Just as Roussopoulos' documtary title suggests, these women "stand up" to write and read graffiti that demands a place for women in the city's political agenda and in its physical streets.

"Writing" the Female Body, on the Screen and in the Streets: Agnès Varda's *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* (1977)

Agnès Varda, the Left Bank filmmaker known for films like *La Pointe Courte* (1954) and *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961), was a militant feminist involved in the same MLF protests as Carole Roussopoulos and Catherine Deudon. She was also one of the signatories of the Manifesto of the 343, attesting to having had an illegal abortion and demanding its legalization in France, and she personally supported several women as they traveled abroad to procure abortions. In addition, she filmed and produced *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* (1976) — a love story to the burgeoning feminist movement. Despite criticism she faced from other radical feminists throughout her cinematic career, she reasserted her position as a committed feminist time and time again and envisioned her filmmaking style (her "cinécriture") as part and parcel of that feminism. [244] In regards to *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*, there were mixed

[244] "Son féminisme a été questionné tout au long de sa vie, notamment à propos de certains de ses films comme *Le bonheur*, un très beau film, mais aussi un drôle de film par rapport à la question de l'indépendance et du féminisme. Au point que certaines féministes se sont interrogées sur la réalité de l'appartenance de Varda au mouvement d'émancipation des femmes. En fait, elle s'intéresse au MLF dès le début, elle en fait partie, elle enquête, elle organise des voyages en Belgique et en Suisse pour aider les filles à avorter, elle réalise cette chronique du féminisme qu'est le film *L'une chante, l'autre pas*... Son féminisme, parfois latent mais toujours présent, se renforce au fil des années" ["Her feminism was questioned all her life, most notably in regards to some of her films like *Le bonheur,* a very beautiful film, but also a funny sort of film as it relates to the question of independence and feminism. So much so that certain feminists questioned the reality of Varda's commitment

reviews from feminists regarding the film's political valence, but Varda insisted in interviews that the film was a "feminist film," but her intention was to make a more popular film that would reach a large mass of women, rather than a small minority of people that a more radical film would have reached; as she notes in her interview with Barbara Quart, her goal was achieved because the film got "a lot of people *thinking*" about feminism in France (Quart 28).

Speaking on feminist filmmaking in Marie Mandy's 2000 documentary *Filming Desire*, Varda says: "The first feminist gesture is to say: 'Ok, they're looking at me. But I'm looking at them'…. the world is not defined by how they see me….but how *I* look/see" (3:29-3:58). Put differently, the "first feminist gesture" is to start seeing the world from one's own positionality rather than allowing oneself to be dictated by the perception of others, particularly that of men. Varda's *female filmmaker gaze* is, in some ways, an inversion of Laura Mulvey's *male gaze*. As Mulvey states, "[i]n their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (808). Unlike Mulvey, Varda does not perform a psychoanalytic reading of male filmmaking, but she does suggest something similar to Mulvey about the outcome of films in a patriarchal society, namely that to women are rendered passive through a traditionally male filmmaking lens. To combat the

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to the feminist movement. In reality, she was interested in the MLF from the very beginning; she was a member, she investigated, she organized trips to Belgium and Switzerland to help young women get abortions, and she directed the film *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*. Her feminism, at times latent but always present, grew stronger over the years."] (Interview with Laura Adler on Varda).

Varda speaking on her relationship with feminism and feminists during the 1970s: "…what happened was that there was a huge number of feminist women around and sometimes they used me, sometimes they pushed me away, sometimes they manipulated my work so it would be feminist or not. Some radical feminists hated my work, some feminists loved it-I was like a ping-pong ball. But in terms of real life simple things, and not theoretical-because I never was, never read anything about feminists-all these people, they knew about Babel and Engels, which I came to know very late. But I was naturally involved in fighting whatever was prejudicial to women. So we started in France-I'm speaking about '48, '49, '50-going with other groups to the government, making petitions. I was there, helping women with that, and trusting women and working with them, giving them confidence and pushing them to be technicians-way ahead of others" (Varda Interview with Quart 6).

passivity of female cinematic representation, Varda proposes that the filmmaker must do away with her perception of being "looked-at" ("they're looking at me") and replace that perception with the act of looking oneself ("*I* am looking"). The female filmmaker must transition from her normal position as object of the gaze of others to possessor of her own gaze. Referring back to Varda's words themselves, the "on" (the "objective" perspective, often gendered male) must be discarded for the "je" (the subjective, female perspective), the woman becoming the subject of the sentence, of the "looking," rather than its direct object.[245]

In this statement, Varda uses the term, "geste" or "gesture," a word which she uses metaphorically but which also has a physical meaning related to the body itself. The word "le geste" is derived from the Latin word *gestus,* meaning "attitude, mouvement du corps, mimique, jeu."[246] In modern French, a "geste" is a "bodily movement, especially of the arm, the hand, the head" as well as an "action that reveals a sentiment or manifests an intention." In the interview, while Varda utters this line, Mandy's camera framing, close-up on Varda's face and hands, draws attention to her physical gestures. In this way, Mandy draws a line between Varda's physical gestures and her metaphorical ones. Meanwhile, Varda's reference

[245] The phrase "male gaze" was coined by Laura Mulvey in 1975 in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In this oft-quoted article, Mulvey uses psychoanalysis as a political means to analyze film and the ways it "reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (803). In particular, she argues that, from a psychological perspective, woman is a "signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (804). The visual pleasure of cinema in a patriarchal society is two-fold; it is both "scopophilia" (taking other people as objects, subject to a controlling gaze) and "narcissism" (identifying with the person being seen). Pleasure looking in cinema, then, is split along gender lines with the active/male on one side and the passive/female on the other (808). Then, the male figure projects his interior fantasy onto the female character. Thus, women in films are "simultaneously looked at and displayed," they are part of the "spectacle" of cinema. Because of the threat of castration that the women represent as the "other," the male gaze repeatedly tries to diminish this threat by reinforcing the image of the "silent" woman who can be mastered through this sexual gaze. In 1981, Mulvey returns to this idea in "Afterthoughts." In it, she notes that, in her original article, she suggested that everyone reads film through the male gaze regardless of gender, but, in this second article, she wonders if this is true. Do women identify with the male gaze when watching films? She argues that, in some ways, film with its built-in male gaze allows women to recover the "active" part of their sexuality that is lost in daily life (13). However, a tension remains: the "female spectator's phantasy of masculinisation is always to some extent at cross purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes" (14-15)

[246] See the online Académie française dictionary entry for the word "geste."

to the "feminist gesture" also carries two connotations, one physical and one metaphorical. On the one hand, Varda is speaking generally about a mental shift in perspective regarding film; on the other hand, she is doing so via metaphor anchored in the body (one must "look" differently, move one's eyes differently), and the "gesture" also involves changing *physical* representations of female bodies on screen. This statement, although not explicitly about graffiti, hints at the main thread that will knit this section to the chapter's larger argument regarding the female body. Graffiti, like feminist filmmaking, is a physical "gesture" that has a metaphorical counterpart; it is both corporeal and figurative. In this section, I establish a link between the physical act of writing feminist graffiti and Varda's own "metaphorical" act of cinematic writing, which is exemplified through the way she films the female body. How does Varda "write" the female body, like graffiti, both physically and metaphorically, into her film *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*?

Referring back to this same interview, Varda notes that this feminist "gesture," of looking differently at the world, requires attention to detail and hard work because even women see themselves through the lens of patriarchal standards **(**Mandy 2:55-3:40, 4:48-5:22**).** One such method that she (and other women) employ to combat the passivity of patriarchal cinema is as follows:

> It seems to me that men cut up the body of women and, women, when they film women show them rather as a whole. The pieces are less small…They have a tendency to show the entire female body. (16:12-16:30, my translation)

In other words, male-filmmakers tend to eroticize women by "cutting" up their bodies on screen, reducing them to their component parts and turning them into sexual objects. Many female filmmakers, on the other hand, film the "entire" body of a woman, an act which reimbues her with agency and shows her as she is in her entirety, rather than as parts to be consumed. Filming the "entire" woman is part of Varda's *cinécriture*; it is a cinematic

"writing" choice that she makes, one which transmits a "feminist" way of looking. [247] What does this have to go with Varda's representation of graffiti in *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* ? In the film, Varda only films one single feminist graffiti writing; therefore, her film, like the MLF archives, reveals a certain absence of feminist "graffiti." However, I argue that Varda's choice to center images of the "entire" female body protesting in the streets of the city *replaces* the need to represent "graffiti" writing in those streets. Instead, the female body itself is a type of revolutionary urban writing. I propose that Varda is "writing" women's bodies into the spaces of the "film" in the same way that graffiti "writes" feminist stories into the street. She is using her camera as a pen to write women's bodies in the streets, by doing so re-orders the gender relations in the streets in much the same way that graffiti does.[248] Rather than centering feminist graffiti, she centers the "entire" female body in her lens, and, therefore, the female body itself functions as an alternative graffiti writing, an insurgent inscription, in Varda's fictionalized Paris, one which breaks down the division between the public and private and empowers women to occupy the streets.

[247] Cinécriture is Varda's own term to describe a filmmaker's original style. See this quotation: "J'ai lancé ce mot [cinécriture] et maintenant je m'en sers pour indiquer le travail d'un cinéaste. Il renvoie à leurs cases le travail du scénariste qui écrit sans tourner et celui du réalisateur qui fait sa mise en scène. Cela peut être la même personne mais la confusion persiste souvent. J'en ai tellement assez d'entendre : C'est un film bien écrit, sachant que le compliment est pour le scénario et pour les dialogues. Un film bien écrit est également bien tourné, les acteurs sont bien choisis, les lieux aussi. Le découpage, les mouvements, les points de vue, le rythme du tournage et du montage ont été sentis et pensés comme les choix d'un écrivain, phrases denses ou pas, type de mots, fréquence des adverbes, alinéas, parenthèses, études continuant le sens du récit ou le contraignant, etc. En écriture c'est le style…Au cinéma, le style c'est la cinécriture" ["I coined this term [cinécriture] and now I use it to describe a filmmaker's work. It distinguishes between the screenwriters' work—who writes without directing—and the director's work—who directs the film. This could be the same person, but the confusion often persists. I'm so tired of hearing: 'It's a well-written film,' knowing that the compliment is for the screenplay and the dialogue. A well-written film is also well-shot; the actors are well-chosen, the locations too. The shot composition, camera movements, camera angles, the rhythm of filming and editing were felt and thought out just like the choices of a writer—whether the sentences are dense or not, the kind of words, the frequency of adverbs, paragraph breaks, parentheses, and studies that either extend or constrain the nature of the story, etc. In writing, this is style…In cinema, style is cinécriture."] (Varda qtd in Smith 14)

[248] Varda's cinécriture is derived in part from Alexandre Astruc's concept of the camera-stylo and the auteur, originally published in an article in 1948 in L'Écran français. For more, see his book Du stylo à la caméro, de la caméro au stylo (1992). Varda differentiates herself from Astruc, by extending this concept to "all aspects" of the filmmaking process (Farmer).

Varda's *L'une chante, l'autre pas* (1977) follows the lives of two young women, Pauline (later called "Pomme") and Suzanne, over a decade. In 1962, Pauline, a passionate girl of seventeen living in Paris with her parents, stumbles upon the photography shop of a man named Jérôme. Jérôme has two children out of wedlock with Suzanne, a twenty-two-year-old who used to live in Pauline's building until her parents disowned her. Through Jérôme, Suzanne and Pauline meet, bonding quickly when Pauline helps Suzanne, pregnant with Jérome's third child, acquire money for an illegal abortion. Pauline soon quits her baccalaureate and moves out of her parents' traditional home to pursue her dream of becoming a singer. The 1962 chapter ends when Pauline and Suzanne find Jérôme in his workshop. He has committed suicide by hanging himself from the ceiling of his shop, surrounded by photographs of Suzanne. Suzanne is, then, forced to move to the countryside of Soissons to raise her children on her parents' farm, while Pauline's parents give her money for an apartment, and she grows her musical career in Paris.

Ten years later, in 1972, Suzanne and Pauline (now using the stage name, Pomme) are reunited at a demonstration outside the Bobigny courtyard during the trial of Marie-Claire Chevalier in 1972.[249] At this point, they have both taken on different roles in the growing feminist movement. Pauline leads an itinerant musical group in Paris called The Orchids, singing folk songs in the streets about women's right to bodily autonomy. Meanwhile, Suzanne, after taking typing lessons and finding work as a medical secretary, eventually opens a Family Planning Center in the south of France, helping women secure access to contraception. Their chance encounter at the Bobigny trial (Pomme accompanied by her musical troupe and Iranian boyfriend, Darius, and Suzanne by her adolescent daughter, Marie) leads to a rekindling of their friendship. The remainder of the film is concerned with

[249] For more information on this trial, in which Marie-Claire Chevalier, a 16-year-old girl, was put on trial for pursuing an abortion after she was raped (along with four other women who helped her), see *Le procès de Bobigny* (Halimi 2022).

their lives over a period of four years (1972-1976), focusing on their roles as mothers, their sisterhood with one another, and their evolving forms of feminism. The film ends in 1976 with Suzanne and Pomme, their children, and The Orchids, meeting for an (almost) all-female retreat in the countryside, to which each woman has brought family photographs to share with the group. In the final scene, the narrator, likely Varda herself, muses via voice-over about the future that Suzanne's daughter, Marie, might have as a woman in the world.[250]

Varda *does* represent 1970s feminist graffiti once on screen, during the 1972 protest outside the Bobigny courthouse. This protest scene in Bobigny (a suburb ouside of Paris), is modeled on an historical one; in October of 1972, a 16-year-old girl named Marie-Claire Chevalier was put on trial in Bobigny for acquiring an illegal abortion after she was raped by a classmate. Gisèle Halimi, a lawyer and abortion activist, defended her before the courts, and this trial received massive media coverage, becoming a critical turning point for the MLF. In addition to being important historically, the fictionalized protest is also important to Pomme and Suzanne's sisterhood; the "manifestation" manifests, or makes possible, the two women's reconnection in time and space. It also represents a figurative confluence of Pomme's radical feminism and the more reformist tendencies of Suzanne. [251] In this film, and, specifically in this scene, solidarity and sisterhood (despite ideological differences) are seen as the cornerstone of both women's feminism. At the end of the film, when Pomme sings her song "The Bubble Woman" at Suzanne's Family Planning Center, a disagreement arises with an

[250] For more on motherhood in the film, see Ruth McCormick's interview with Varda and "Beyond the Spectacle of Suffering" (Oliver-Powell 2020). In the final scene of the film, Marie, Suzanne's daughter, is played by Varda's own daughter, Rosalie, so we can see the ways that Varda's real-life feminism has mixed with the fictional.

[251] Pomme, along with the Orchids, certainly seem to share radical feminist idea from the MLF years. During a street performance, two of the Orchids sing a song with the lyrics: "Friedrich Engels l'avait dit dans la famille aujourd'hui, l'homme est le bourgeois et la femme est la prolétariat, il avait raison !" ["Friedrich Engels has said that, in today's family, the man is the bourgeois and the woman is the proletariat, he was right!"] an idea taken directly from the FMA's critique of the women's issue through a Marxist lens (1:45:30-1:46:01). Pomme also participates in both agit-prop and street performance as methods of feminist engagement, again aligning herself with radical feminist practice. Suzanne, on the other hand, works at a Family Planning Center and focuses on more practical solutions to women's rights issues, like access to contraception and to the workforce.

audience member who takes issue with Pomme's idolization of motherhood.[252] Pomme, somewhat curtly, responds that she is merely singing of her own personal experience not forcing women to become mothers. Besides occasional doctrinal differences such as this one, the women in the film rarely fight about their feminist theory, in contrast with what we know about the larger history of the MLF. Varda's film brings to life the early years of the MLF, years when multiple "currents" were united despite their ideological differences.[253] By inserting the historical trial of Bobigny into the fictional film, Varda metaphorically unites these different currents of feminism in one physical space on screen.

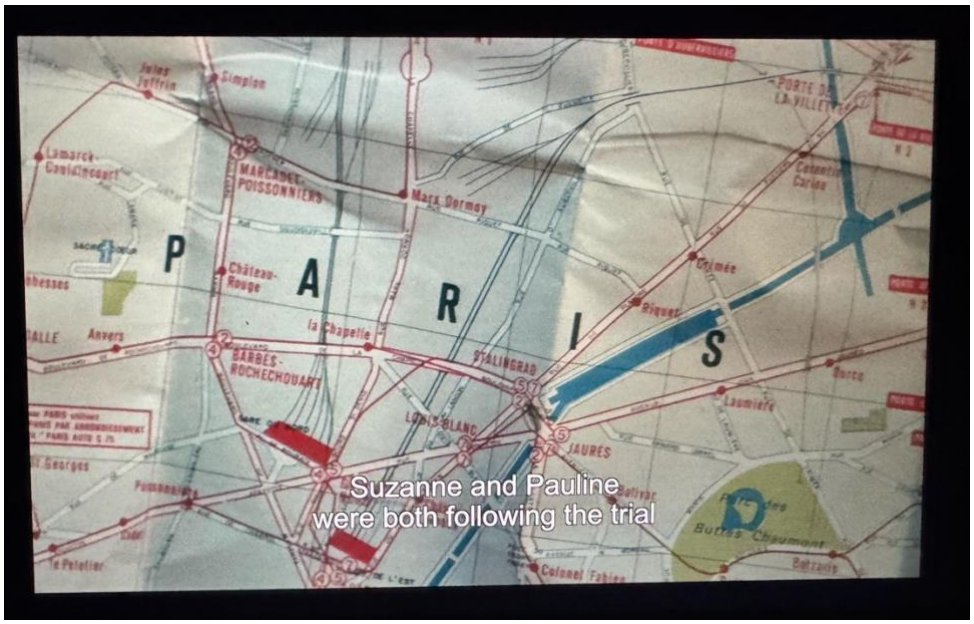


Image 3.12 *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* 31:33

[252] The song's lyrics are as follows: "Ah, que c'est bon d'être une bulle, ah que c'est bon, d'être un ballon, un atelier des molécules, un bel ovule, une fabrique de cellules, un gros poisson…Ah, que c'est bon d'être un gros rêve, ah que c'est beau, d'être un ballon, un arbre vert rempli de sève, un pain qui lève…" ["Ah, how nice it is to be a bubble, ah it's nice, to be a balloon, a workshop of molecules, a beautiful egg, a cell factory, a large fish…ah, how nice it is to be a big dream, ah it's nice, to be a balloon, a green tree full of sap, a loaf of bread rising…"] (1:52:10-1:55:10)

[253] She also brings these different ideas together because for her the plurality of French feminism was important. See McCormick and Quart interviews.

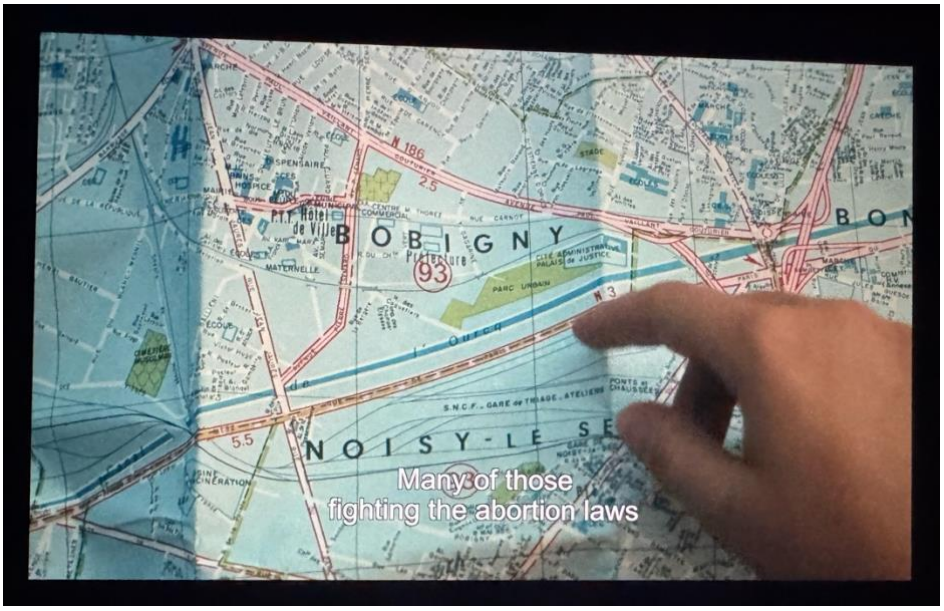


Image 3.13 *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* 31:40

The Bobigny scene itself begins with an extreme-close up of a physical map of Paris. The narrator in a voice over describes how, in 1972, Suzanne and Pomme were both "following" the trial of Marie-Claire from their respective cities, Paris and Hyères (in the south of France) (Image 3.12, pp. 201). A hand, with pointer finger extended, traces a line from Paris to the suburb of Bobigny on the map, while the handheld camera follows the hand's movement via a shaky tracking shot (Image 3.13, pp. 202). The hand and camera both embody the narrator's description of events; they are (like Suzanne and Pomme) literally following the trial to Bobigny. Although never identified, the hand may belong to Pomme, who owns a similar-looking map. If so, Pomme's hand traces the trajectory from Paris (where she lives) to Bobigny. In doing so, her hand becomes a visual synecdoche for her own body making the trip. Despite this hand being severed from a body, this "cutting up" is not like that of the male filmmakers that Varda references; she does not cut up the female body in order to eroticize it. Instead, she separates the hand in order to draw our attention to the absence of the body, which will be resolved in the following scene.

The film then cuts to a medium shot of the front of the courthouse. The frame is tight around the words: “TRIBUNAL POUR ENFANTS DE LA SEINE ST DENIS” [“La Seine Saint Denis Juvenile Courthouse”] (Image 3.14, pp. 203). In the large square windows of the courthouse, protesters holding banners are reflected; one such banner is then shot in extreme close-up and a tracking shot (Image 3.15, pp. 205). It reads “nous voulons des enfants désirés,” [“we want children who are wanted”], a common pro-choice MLF slogan. The font on the courthouse mirrors the font on this banner, underlining the irony that at a “children’s courthouse,” protestors are fighting for children, like Marie Claire, to be able to choose whether to have children or not. The banner is also clearly painted *by hand*, which I insist is a continuation of the previous scene. The disembodied hand first traces the route to the courthouse on the map. The hand returns, in an even more immaterial fashion, via the reflected hands of the protestors holding up the banners, and the handwritten messages on their banners. A specter of graffiti writing hangs implicitly over this sequence—a hand traces the space of the city on a map, and then it shapes that same space through revolutionary writings.



Image 3.14 *L’Une chante, l’autre pas* 31:42

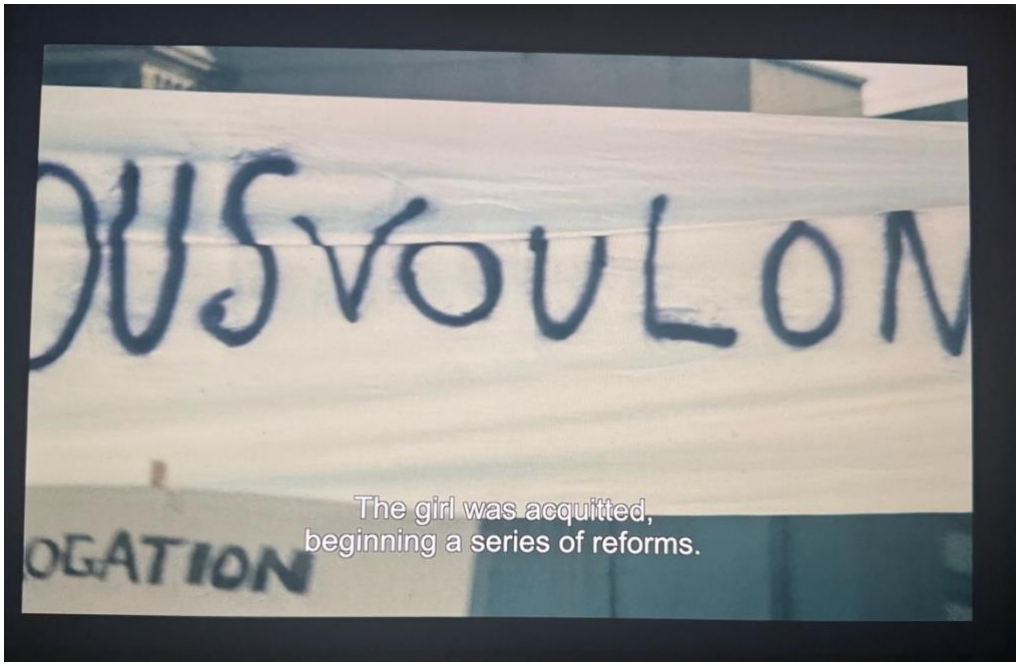


Image 3.15 *L'Une chante, l'autre* 31:51



Image 3.16 *L'Une chante, l'autre* 35:23-35:53



Image 3.17 *L'Une chante, l'autre* 35:23-35:53

When the camera finally turns to face the crowd gathered in front of the courthouse, the spectators are reintroduced to the two female protagonists. Their bodies are no longer absent, their hands merely alluded to, but fully present on screen. Pomme begins singing with her bandmate a song called, "Mon corps est à moi" ["My body is mine"] (yet another reference to the body), and her performance draws Suzanne's attention, which facilitates their reunion. After a brief conversation, Pomme and her boyfriend Darius walk Suzanne and Marie to the closest bus stop. Varda utilizes another tracking shot to capture them as they walk towards the bus station (Image 3.16 and 3.17, pp. 204-5). Two graffiti writings, written in black spray paint appear behind them as they walk. The first reads, "Libérez Marie Claire !" ["Free Marie Claire"], and the second, "l'avortement libre et gratuit" ["Free and accessible abortion"]. *Libérez Marie Claire* refers, first and foremost, to the young woman, Marie-Claire Chevalier, who is on trial for receiving an illegal abortion. On a more implicit level, this graffiti writing is also a critique of bourgeois ideals of female domesticity, gender roles, and beauty standards as incarnated in the women's magazine, *Marie Claire*. To liberate *Marie*

Claire, a woman's magazine, would be to "free" women to find their identities outside of a patriarchal and capitalistic system. The second writing is the same MLF slogan that we saw in both Deudon's photograph and Roussopoulos' documentary. These two graffiti writings are unmistakably political, reproducing historical ideas shared by participants in the MLF.

In this final section of the Bobigny sequence, the women are in the center of the shot, captured at eye-level from a medium long shot, their "entire" bodies revealed. By utilizing a tracking shot, Varda accomplishes two things. First, she gives the spectator the illusion of sharing the protest with the women, being immersed in their reunion as if present on the ground. Second, she recreates the act of reading the graffiti for the spectator. By slowly moving the camera along the wall, Varda allows the spectator to read the inscriptions, like she did earlier with the protest banner, as if they were passing them by while walking in the streets. All things considered, these writings still remain a part of the background – what is important, in the eyes of the camera, are the women, connecting on screen and moving unfettered through the streets of the city. This scene illustrates Varda's cinécriture, her use of the camera like an author's pen. Just as the anonymous hand traced the path to Bobigny, anonymous hands traced the banners and the graffiti. Varda's camera acts as another anonymous hand. Through the use of tracking shots, which effectively recreate the action of both "writing" and "reading" graffiti, the camera "writes" these graffiti inscriptions on the walls and "reads" them for the spectator.

Throughout this extended scene, Varda never provides an unimpeded view of either the handwritten banners or the graffiti. Instead, she always reveals the writings in segments, through tracking shots and close-ups. By refusing to show the totality of the writings, she draws our attention to the totality of the women on screen. Their appearance marks the end of a sort of Brechtian distancing, as Varda shifts the film back into a more traditional narrative

mode.[254] In other words, there is a movement from the parts to a whole, from close ups of the map, the hand, the banners to a "whole" scene (medium-long shots of the women at the protest). Their sisterhood, more than the actions of the political actors, is the motor for the feminism of the film.

Furthermore, Varda sets up a series of subtle connections between the "hands" of the women in the film, that reveals her ultimate "hand" as the filmmaker. In these first series of parts, hand tracing the map of Paris, the handwritten banners, and the graffiti written by hand), anonymous hands form the feminist movement, tracing the physical and metaphorical streets with different resistance writings. This final tracking shot, following the women as they pass the graffiti, reveals Varda's hand as the film's "cinematic writer." Like the other anonymous hands, she works behind the scenes to "write" the political resistance of her characters. She traces the feminist movement and these women as they move together through the streets; her camera both "writes" the political writings into being (the banner and the graffiti) and "writes" the female body into the streets. As the film progresses, Varda continues to utilize tracking shots and "moving" portraits to write the bodies of these women. These women, acting as political agents, in the streets of the city from which they were to - requote Savé and Enjeu, "forbidden," are insurgent inscriptions in the space of the film, just as graffiti writings insurgent inscriptions in the space of the street.

Apart from this exceptional example of an MLF manifestation and its subsequent graffiti, how does Varda "write" the female body onto the walls of the city of Paris? I propose that, throughout the film, Varda performs a practice of "moving portraiture" on her female characters; in other words, she frames these women as if taking a still photograph, but does so through the film camera lens, permitting them to break free from the stillness of photography. In this way, she permits the "entire" body (including their spirit) of the female characters to

[254] For more on Brecht, see Rebecca DeRoo's "Confronting Contradictions" (2009).

be present on screen, rather than deactivating the dynamism of their bodies through still photography. [255] This practice is contrasted with Jérome's artistic practice as a male photographer. The film's opening credits are accompanied by still portraits of several women taken in black and white. Taken with low-key lighting, the facial expression of these women reveals a certain emotional weight, even sadness. The photographs, accompanied by the opening credits, create an archive of disaffected women, whose faces haunt the viewer (Image 3.18, pp. 209). Varda, then, cuts to a moving image of Pomme walking down a street in Paris (Image 3.19, pp. 210). Pomme is centered in the frame, the sun hugging her curls as she walks confidently towards the camera's lens. In contrast with the opening credits, Pomme is moving, represented in color and with brighter lighting. As Pomme stops in front of a photography shop, the dark photographs from the opening credits appear in the store's window (Image 3.20, pp. 210). This is the store of Jérôme, the father of Suzanne's children, a tortured artist who tries to capture the "essence" of the "Woman" through his photography. The framing of the last shot before Pomme enters the shop demonstrates the polarity between Jérôme's vision of Woman and Varda's representation of women. As Pomme looks at the photographs, she is shown twice: once in a side profile shot and the second time in a reflection in the window superimposed over the photographs. In comparison with the portraits, her side profile reveals an indifference to the camera's lens. This is reiterated by Jérôme later on when he tries to photograph Pauline is his studio. At one point, he gets frustrated and asks her to pose nude to see if that will help him capture her. Even this tactic does not work, and he laments the fact that she is "escaping him" to which she retorts that he cannot capture her because she will not play the "victim" like his other subjects, even in a photograph (15:30). Pomme refuses victimization or sexualization at the hands of a man; she

[255] This practice is undoubtably influenced by her first artistic career as a portrait photographer. See Rebecca DeRoo's article "Agnès Varda: Photography and the Early Creative Process" (2021).

retains control of her image even when she removes her clothing. Pomme's body which moves freely down the street and then moves freely under Jérôme's gaze/lens is the antidote to Jérôme's reductive (and static) vision of "Woman." [256]Still, the second image of Pomme in this shot (that of the reflection) superimposes a faint image of Pomme onto the faces of the women; in this way, Pomme could easily be one of these women, and it is this realization that allows her to maintain her autonomy and agency. Refusing to immobilize women in its frame, Varda's camera allows for the movement of her female characters on screen, centering them but not freezing them.



Image 3.18 *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* (3:09)

[256] Jérôme gets frustrated that he cannot capture Pomme's "feminine" essence and accuses her of withholding something from him, protecting herself from him: "Ce que je cherche c'est quand une femme renonce à plaire, quand Elle est dans sa vérité nue"["What I am looking for is when a woman stops trying to please, when She is in her naked truth"] (15:40-45). A few minutes later he says: "Le secret des femmes c'est vous qui avez en vous. C'est un secret très lourd" ["The secret of women, *you* have within you. It is a very heavy secret."] (16:05-16:20). Still, he does not manage to capture her and ends the session.



Image 3.19 *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* (1:48)



Image 3.20 *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* (2:09)

Varda uses this practice of "moving portraiture," most notably during the postcard montages of Suzanne and Pauline's lives from 1962 to 1972. After their 1972 reunion in Bobigny, the two women promise to write each other letters to catch up on each other's lives over the last ten years: Pauline explicitly says, "De longues lettres !" ["Long letters!"] before Suzanne gets on the bus (36:28-36:30). Following this sequence, a montage of clips of the two women's past is shown while Suzanne and Pomme narrate the events in a voice-over and postcards appear to be exchanged through the women. Through this sequencing of events, Varda convinces the spectator that these voice-overs are readings of the postcards that these two women sent to each other in the intervening years, recounting their pasts and presents. However, halfway through the montage, Varda as narrator (a third voice-over) explains that Suzanne and Pomme are only exchanging short postcards and the long monologues that we have heard from the women are actually "imaginary dialogues…that form an air bridge" between these two women. During this montage section of the film, both Pomme and Suzanne "remember" the communities of women that became like family to them during the intervening years: for Pomme, the women at the abortion clinic in Amsterdam where she had her abortion, and for Suzanne, her coworkers at the toy factory in Soissons where she worked for financial autonomy from her parents. While Pomme's voice over recounts this experience, the camera pans the abortion clinic (and the same for Suzanne's factory); the camera stops on each woman's face, taking a "moving" portrait of each of them. In this way, Varda replicates Roussopoulos' tactic in the opening of her documentary *Debout !* Just as Roussopoulos layers the "L'Hymne des femmes" over her "moving" portraits of the MLF activists, Varda layers Pomme or Suzanne's description of the solidarity of these women over their moving portraits. By doing this, Varda provides space for the women in the film to gesture, to laugh, to move freely on camera – to explode the frame that contains them, whether that is in the streets of

Paris or Amsterdam or in the confines of private space, like Jérôme's studio or an abortion clinic.



Image 3.21 *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* (26:41)

I will conclude this section with one final scene from the film, a scene in which we see a female character actually "writing" on the walls. In 1962, Pomme and Suzanne break into Jerome's photography studio to find him, having committed suicide, hanging from the ceiling. While they are discovering this, Suzanne's daughter Marie, writes in chalk on the stone wall outside the studio (Image 3.21, pp. 212). Her graffiti has no written content; it is the result of a child scribbling on the walls. In this way, it is reminiscent of the graffiti that fascinated French-Hungarian photographer Brassaï.[257] In this 1961 collection *Graffiti, Le language du mur*, Brassaï describes graffiti rather traditionally— as a "primitive art," which allows one to access their inner child, and as a gendered act. For him, the wall is deemed a "male affair" (65, my translation). However, interestingly enough, Brassaï sees graffiti as the "survival instinct" of those without political power; the wall "purifies, exorcises, liberates"

[257] Brassaï was fascinated by graffiti, taking many photographs of Parisian graffiti from the 1930s to 1950s. These photographs were collected from various exhibitions in the 1950s and published in 1961 in *Graffiti: Le language du mur*.

(143, my translation). The graffiti that interests him is a far cry from the graffiti in the protest scene, but, in some ways, it does resemble Marie's infantine graffiti in this scene: simple drawings written on stone walls. However, Marie's act of writing challenges Brassaï's assumptions about graffiti writing. It is not her father who "takes on the wall." It is Marie, as a graffiti writer, who shoulders the burden of this "masculine" affair; therefore, she upends, like the rest of the female characters in the film, the gender binary. Throughout the film, it is the female characters that remain "strong" (or traditionally "masculine") and endure together, while men come and go in their lives. Marie's graffiti, albeit a "primitive" or childlike impulse, can be read as a visual "usurping" of the graffiti status quo and a metaphorical overturning of the patriarchal status quo, a "survival instinct" against the oppression she will experience as she grows up.

Jérôme's suicide is a tremendous loss for both Suzanne and Marie, but it also acts as a catalyst which pushes Suzanne towards rebirth and, eventually, helps her find feminism. This feminism, in turn, is passed down to Marie. The stone wall where Marie scribbles as a child is at once a tomb for her father and a clean slate for herself and her mother to write to write new story. This feminist narrative, which her mother has already began through her work at the Family Planning Center, is later carried out by Marie and her friends. Some years later, when Marie is a teenager, it is evident that she has already adopted a feminist perspective on the world. When she hesitates about having sex with her first boyfriend, he asks if she is a "feminist like [her] mother" to which she replies "yes." At another point, she debates the pros and cons of marriage as a feminist with a female friend. This same friend, annoyed with her older brother, retorts: "Le MLF vaincra" ["The MLF shall overcome"] (1:43:53). This scene of the young Marie "graffiti writing" during her father's suicide can, therefore, be read as a foreshadowing of her feminist future. The younger generation to which Marie belongs, those

who came of age during the 1970s, have the tools to "write" on the walls of the future thanks to the feminism of their mothers who came before them.

In conclusion, I have suggested, by evoking her own notion of cinécriture, that Varda handles her camera like a pen. Through various filmic techniques, she centers the "entire" female body in her lens and in the streets. Female characters have the agency, in Varda's lens, to protest, to fill the space of the streets and the screen with their presence, with their own words, and with their sisterhood. Although graffiti writing is not central to this representation, I have argued that we can interpret the female body in Varda's film as a kind of "graffiti." If women make visible their bodies in the streets of the city, through protest, street theater, graffiti, or other interventions, they disrupt the gender status quo, they make porous the distinction between inside and outside, between public and private, between man and woman. Perhaps this is why so many feminist artists and activists during this time used the female body as a motif in their urban interventions. These last photographs I discuss reiterate this idea: for many feminists in the 1970s, the female body had to be re-written, re-conceived, and seen as more than a sexual object in order to fight back against sexism, discrimination, and harassment, and the street was the arena in which this was possible.

The Female Body as a Porte-Parole for Poetry – Graffiti Stencils of Miss.Tic (1985-2022)

Only eight years after the release of Varda's film, *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*, a woman named Radhia Novat began tagging the walls of Paris with graffiti stencils (*pochoirs*) under the pseudonym, Miss.Tic. Miss.Tic is an epigram. The prefix of the name, "Miss," discloses the persona's age and gender (young and female). The second part of the name, "Tic," highlights the artist's particular style, which is described on her website as "a subtle mix of levity and seriousness, recklessness and provocation" (Miss.Tic, "Biographie"). In other words, Miss.Tic presents herself as a young woman with her own style or quirk ("Tic," def. (3)), as well as someone who writes spontaneously or without reflection ("Tic," def (2)).

Furthermore, the reference to "tic" is yet another implicit reference to the body; like Varda's "gesture," Miss.Tic's "tick" consists of *representing* the female body in the streets of Paris. Finally, Miss.Tic's epigrammatic name has another meaning; when "Miss" and "Tic" are read together, it sounds like the French word *mystique*, or "mystic." This Miss.Tic, then, is a mystic who speaks to the Divine and trades in magic and secrets; she is a "witch" whose spells and incantations cling to the city's walls, associating her with the centuries of "witches" who were persecuted for their nascent feminism.[258]

Born and raised in Paris, Miss.Tic began stenciling in the early 1980s in Parisian neighborhoods like Ménilmontant and la Butte aux Cailles. She loved poetry and was particularly fond of the Surrealists. [259] [260]She also was intrigued by the ideas of the Situationists, particularly that of Belgian Raoul Vaneigem whose slogans from the 1967 *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* ended up on the walls of the Sorbonne during May 1968. Ultimately, she credits her inspiration to start stenciling from two experiences: her years in California in the late 1970s and early 1980s where hip hop and graffiti culture were emerging and encounters in Paris with stencils written by a group of Beaux-Arts students, including VLP (Vive la Peinture), Jérôme Menager, and Speedy Graffito (Miss.Tic qtd.in Granovksy 3:00-4:00).[261] It was around 1983, when she had a "déclic" and started to "write on the walls," graffiti was still a relatively new phenomenon; as she

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[258] Some women who participated in the MLF created a feminist journal called, *Les Sorcières*, or "The Witches." See *Des sorcières comme les autres: artistes et féministes dans la France dans les années 1970* (Dumont 2014), "Forms of Difference in Sorcières" (Spencer 2019) and *Counterpractice* (Balaram 2022).

[259] "Ce que j'aime aussi c'est que la poésie soit investis notre quotidien et que notre quotidien soit investis dans la poésie…la poésie c'est tous qu'on ressent…la poésie c'est la vie quoi, c'est pas juste de la littérature" ["What I also love is that poetry is woven into our daily lives and that our daily lives are woven into poetry…it is poetry that everything we feel…poetry is life, really, it's not just literature"] (Miss.Tic qtd.in Granovksy 1:31-2:05)

[260] In an interview with Quentin Gassiat, Miss.Tic says that writing is, for her, a process of revealing the "unconscious," which was a key element of both Surrealist art and writing. She is also influenced by Rimbaud, particularly his statement "Je est un autre." As she states, although she writes using the pronoun "je," that does not mean she is writing autobiographically (265).

[261] She spent three years in California, returning to France at the end of 1982/beginning of 1983.

reminisces, “Paris c’etait à nous. C’était des territoires vierges….c’était nouveau, c’était transgressif, et c’est ça qui m’a plu et m’a intéressé” [“Paris was ours. It was uncharted territory…..it was new, it was transgressive and that’s what attracted and interested me”] (Miss.Tic qtd.in Granovksy 4:02-4:05, 4:20-4:40) She was passionate about this new art form and thought of the “street” as a new medium for poetry itself; unfortunately, the movement of “poésie de rue” [“street poetry”] that she had envisioned never emerged, and she remained one of the few graffiti artists to incorporate poetry in her work. [262] In the beginning, she would paint illegally, like other graffiti artists, without the permission of shop owners.[263] However, after being convicted of vandalism in 1999, she decided to stencil only in locations where she had received the express permission of the owner. Still, she asserted her agency by only stenciling on buildings where owners would give her a “carte blanche” to write whatever she wanted. In contrast with her tagging contemporaries in the 1980s who were more concerned about either “getting tags up” (writing their tags in difficult places to reach, such as metro cars and tops of buildings) or “writing pieces” (often in a script that was illegible to the untrained eye), Miss.Tic writes at ground level and produces legible graffiti. In some ways, nevertheless, her stencils are similar to tags; because of her stencils, she can reproduce

[262] “Donc avec ces artistes de la première heure, eh ben, on avait trouvé notre terrain de jeu. Notre terrain de jeu c’était Paris. Et je me suis pas laissé jusqu’à aujourd’hui, d’écrire sur les murs. D’ailleurs ce qui m’a surprise quand même et ce qui me surprend toujours, c’est que je pensais que d’autres se mettraient à écrire sur les murs, j’ai pensé que ca ferait sortir les poètes dans la rue aussi, j’ai pas été suivie. Ben tout ce qui est art plastique, tout ce qui est d’image, la prevue on en est aujourd’hui, c’est tellement riche, par contre, l’écriture, ben non, les poètes ils ont pas suivi, ils sont reste dans leur club, dans le club des poetes, je trouve ça un peu dommange, ça aurait fait un autre mouvement, des littéraires, mais ça a pas eu lieu” [“So with those artists in the early days, well, we’d found our playground. Our playground was Paris. And I haven’t stopped writing on walls to this day. In fact, what surprised me back then—and still surprises me—is that I thought others would start writing on walls too; I thought it would bring poets out onto the streets as well, but no one followed suit. Well, when it comes to visual art, to imagery—the [graffiti] scene we have today is so rich—but writing? No, the poets didn’t follow suit; they stayed in their own little world, the poets’ club. I find that a bit of a shame; it could have sparked another movement, a literary one, but it never happened.”] (Miss.Tic qtd.in Granovksy 4:50-5:50)

[263] She was not divorced from the Paris graffiti movement, which began in the 1980s; however, she does seem to differentiate herself and certainly never tagged in a graffiti crew. For instance, she participated in the first meeting of graffiti and street artists in 1985 in Bondy. She also collaborated or worked with other graffiti artists, such as Blek Le Rat.

her art quickly and consistently throughout the city, which she finds integral to her practice. Like other taggers and graffiti artists, she always signs her pen name.

The two constituent elements of each of Miss.Tic's stencils are an image of a "distinctive" woman, what she calls her "spokesperson," and an accompanying caption, or what she calls "street poetry" (Miss.Tic, "Biographie"). This multi-faceted approach renders her work difficult to classify into a specific genre of art, a fact which Christophe Génin discusses in his monograph *Miss.Tic, Femme de l'être* (2008). Génin names Miss.Tic's stencils "épigraffs," because they are "composed of an epigraph, aphoristic poetry, a drawing, and a signature (one of the meanings of the English word, tag), all affixed with spray paint like graffiti (graffs)" (25, my translation). The poems that accompany her drawings rely heavily on wordplay, with each word having several possible meanings, especially when read aloud. When she first began her art practice, these poems were accompanied by a self-portrait, a stencil that resembled herself. However, soon afterwards, she created her "spokesperson," her signature woman inspired by stereotypical media and advertising depictions of women (long hair, often scantily clad, perfect figure). Claire Humphrey reads Miss.Tic's *porte-parole* as an attempt to subvert the "femininity" of the mythic figure, *La Parisienne*. However, she also notes that Miss.Tic's "repeated use of sexualised imagery" has drawn critiques about her solidarity with feminist struggles (Humphrey 260-1).[264] As Christophe Genin points out, Miss.Tic herself sees her "porte-parole" as a *subversion* of traditional media representations rather than a reinforcement of those representations. She even goes as far as using the verb "détourner" to describe how she subverts "magazine girl"

[264] "Many of the works [of Miss.Tic] invite the presumed male gaze of the street and then add an element of the unexpected that addresses women…Christophe Génin stresses this voyeuristic aspect of her work as a male viewer claiming that it makes visible the sexual dynamics of the street…The repeated use of sexualised imagery of women —she employs one female figure, a stylicized self-portrait— has led some to question the feminist status of her work, yet she asserts that it is a postmodern critique of identity: 'Les images des femmes que je représente sont issues des magazines féminins, je les détourne. Je développe une certaine image de la femme non pour la promouvoir mais pour la questioner' (in Genin, 2008 : 9)." (Humphrey 260).

images through her work (Genin 9). Like the Situationists in the 1960s and Catherine Deudon in 1974, Miss.Tic "hijacks" advertisements in order to politically undermine their messages about female sexuality (9).[265]

Like Agnès Varda, Miss.Tic has been criticized by feminist communities for her female-centered artwork; however, in contrast with Varda, Miss.Tic often circumvents the question when it comes to her personal affiliation to the feminist movement.[266] In one interview in 2010, when asked directly about her thoughts on feminism she says: "I see feminism as a social movement. I advocate it although I do not participate in any form of it. I also see the limitations of it. Most of my thoughts contain views of feminism and these are displayed in my feminine works—the work of a woman" (Miss.Tic qtd. in Koe). In several other interviews, she laments the "reductionist" label that "feminism" presents, affirming her feminism but saying "Je suis pire qu'une féministe….je suis anarchiste, hédoniste, je suis activiste…je suis artiste" (TVMonde 5).[267] As Rebecca Pursley proposes in her article "Shake Off the Law," Miss.Tic's interest in the "feminine" rather than the "feminist" does fit into certain courants of the 1970s MLF paradigm, especially that of Psych et Po who were seeking to define a sacred feminine identity (Pursley 55). Despite this complicated connection with the feminist movement, I argue that Miss.Tic's manipulation of the image of the female body, her subversion of media representations of women's bodies, and the creativity of her poetry aligns her with the ideals of the MLF, namely their focus on the female body as a vehicle for a feminist revolution. Therefore, Miss.Tic's work reproduces the theoretical claims of the

[265] For more on the practice of detournement, see *Arts et pratiqes de detournement* (Berthet 2023), "Politics and Play: Situationism, Détournement, and Anti-Art" (Ko 2008), "Détournement in Language and the Visual Arts" (Zacarias 2020), "Le detournement des affiches" (Michel and Schwach 1973).

[266] It is important to note that much of Miss.Tic's discussion of feminism is more recent. It is unclear her connections to the MLF or her sentiments regarding feminism in the 1980s when she began to write her pochoirs.

[267] "Yes, except that it's a bit simplistic. I'm not only a feminist, I am also an anarchist, hedonist … I'm full of the feminine "ist" . And if I have something to add on feminism, I would say that I am even worse than feminist…" (Miss.Tic qtd. in Revault) She says the same thing in the TVMonde 5 interview.

MLF: concern over the sexualization of female bodies in the media and in the streets and the desire to reclaim one's own body through "reappropriation."

By reproducing a stereotypical image of a female body throughout the streets of Paris, Miss.Tic "makes visible the sexual dynamics of the street" (Génin 9); she confronts the passerby with the overt sexualization that women experience in public spaces, from sexual harassment to metro advertisements like the ones in Catherine Deudon's photograph or Carole Roussopoulo's documentary.[268] Miss.Tic's "porte-parole," unlike the real women in the city, has agency over her own body, her sexual desire, and even over the passerby; according to Claire Humphrey, she is "a graffitied *passante* whose presence reflects back to the viewer her place within this dynamic of seer and seen, and yet at the same time elevates her to the status of seer/*flâneuse*" (Humphrey 261). The female figure in Miss.Tic's work attracts the male gaze on a superficial level, as Christophe Génin mentions. At the same time, she attracts the female gaze, reminding female passersby of their positionality in the "seen/seer" dynamic (men gaze at her just as men gaze at all women who pass by), and challenging that dynamic by "elevating her to the status of *seer*/flaneuse." If the male flâneur can walk the streets unafraid, Miss.Tic's flaneuse can do the same. If you are watching her, she is already watching you. Like Varda's "feminist gesture" of looking from one's own positionality, Miss.Tic's spokesperson reminds the female passerby that she too can look from her own positionality. I assert that Miss.Tic utilizes the image of the female body as embodied by her "sexualized" spokesperson to force the passerby to question these representations.[269] In these photographs culled from several of Miss.Tic exhibitions, I argue

[268] It is important to note that as Miss.Tic began to acquire fame, she began to collaborate with both art galleries and with luxury brands. This transformation of Miss.Tic's work from illegal and "scandalous" stencils to commodified art and branding would certainly have been perceived by MLF feminists as problematic. I am most concerned with her early work (in the 1980s and 1990s) prior to her arrest because of this fact, her work was not yet commodified.

[269] See *Je prête à rien mais je donne à penser* (Miss Tic, Grasset, 2008), *Je ne fais que passer* (Miss.Tic, Florent Passot 1998), *Re garde moi* (Miss.Tic, Editions Alternatives, 2003).

that, in addition to this focus on the female body, Miss.Tic also engages the physical body of the passerby so that they question their situation in this seer/seen dynamic.

Unlike those taggers who look to write in the most difficult of locations, Miss.Tic often stencils closer to the ground, in locations where the passerby can easily encounter her work.[270] In this first example, written on Rue Quimcampoix in the 8th arrondissement of Paris, her caption plays on this situation in the city (Image 3.22, pp. 224). A woman wearing a black turtleneck is stenciled in black spray paint on a beige stone wall. Her mouth is open, her eyes wide, and her hand moves to cover her mouth, as if she is shocked by or afraid of something she is witnessing. Her eyes appear to look at the accompanying caption, painted in Miss.Tic's signature black and red print: "J'écris à hauteur d'homme." Under the caption, Miss.Tic has also tagged her signature. Although the photograph does not capture the exact location of this graffiti inscription on the wall, her caption alludes to its physical situation, "à hauteur d'homme" (or at eye-level). Therefore, we can translate the caption from an urban space lens: "I write at ground (or eye level)." As a graffiti artist, she writes "on the ground" for people, and her work speaks the passerby "on their level" in their everyday. Instead of tagging illegibly as many of her contemporaries did, she presents an image that she tags for *everyone*.[271] And yet, the shock of the female figure in her stencil clearly protests. Even if written "at ground level," her graffiti is not accepted by her "stereotypical" spokeswoman, who is shocked by the audacity she has to "write" in public space and for everyone.

In her poetry, Miss.Tic plays with words, each poem being read in several ways. For instance, a literal reading of the phrase "à hauteur de" might be "at eye level" but a more figurative reading would be "at the same level as." Therefore, this caption could also be

[270] "Elle bombe généralement à hauteur d'homme, accessible. Contrairement aux tags qui veulent forcer le regard." ["She generally spray-paints at eye-level, where it is accessible. In contrast with graffiti tags that forces itself into view."] (Génin 33).
[271] Génin seconds this idea. He argues that, while most taggers do not respect the wall, Miss.Tic does. Moreover, these taggers practice "dispersion," which prevents the passerby from reading their tag, while she practices "diversion," which means the tagger can still read her tag, but must think more about it (33-34).

translated as “I write like a man” or even “I write as well as a man.” In this secondary reading, her meaning moves beyond the accessibility of her graffiti and begins to touch on the question of gender politics. In an interview with Thomas Granovsky, she conceives of her work as a way to “inscribe herself” into the memory of Paris itself (j’ai su même que je voulais m’inscrire dans la mémoire de Paris”) (Miss.Tic qtd. in Granovsky 4:45-4:50). She inserts herself into an “inscriptive” history of Paris, one that includes others who “wrote” on city’s walls, like the Situationists, the Surrealists, and even the graffiti artists she mentioned (VLP, Speedy Graffito, Mesager); at the same time, she writes herself into the literary “memory of Paris” by writing “poetry,” putting her in line with Parisian poets such as, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Apollinaire, and Mallarmé. Both the “inscriptive” and the “literary” memories of Paris are populated by men, even the graffiti artists that she was inspired by were all men. On yet another level, these male figures that represent the history of Paris are often further “inscribed” into memory through urban commemorations, street signs, plaques, and statues. With this particular example, Miss.Tic asserts her writing capabilities within a predominantly male Parisian landscape. Miss.Tic “writes like (or as well as) a man,” and, by signing her own name to this tag, she actively “writes” her name onto the stones of the city itself.

Miss.Tic’s poems rely on wordplay; they are meant to “faire tourner l’imagination” and create new “associations” between “word and image” (Genin 97-99). Moreover, she writes “poetry,” which is meant to be read aloud, and, often when read aloud, these lines resemble other words. In this example, “j’écris,” (I write) *sounds* close to “je crie,” (I scream/shout). In this example, the proximity between the word (j’écris) and the image (screaming woman) allow this meaning to emerge; to quote Genin again, Miss.Tic’s poetry creates “new associations between word and image.” Now that we have destabilized the written word from its meaning, we might ask what exactly this woman is “screaming about.”

With a little more wordplay and a small edit, we can arrive at something like: "je crie: hauteur d'homme[s]" or "I shout: the arrogance of men." The female figure incarnates this new expression; she effectively shouts the words, her mouth open-wide. Just as Miss.Tic's words are ambiguous and their meaning changes with each new reading, the passerby reads the image of the woman differently with each subsequent iteration. In the first two readings ("I write at eye-level" and "I write as well as a man"), the woman in the stencil seems to be shocked or horrified by the statements (i.e. that a woman could be as good as a man or bold enough to write in public space). However, in the third reading ("I shout: the arrogance of men!), the woman becomes angry; she is not merely highlighting her artistic capabilities, she is livid, screaming at the arrogance of the men around her. If we read Miss.Tic's image through the histories of the MLF, a triptych of meanings materialize; the first reading states a seemingly innocuous fact ("I write at eye-level"), the second reading reveals the gendered politics of writing in the street ("I write as good as a man"), and the final reading reveals Miss.Tic's feminist underbelly ("I scream: the arrogance of men"). The MLF also often used the open mouth as a "metaphor for articulation, expression, and emotion", and Balaram argues that this fixation with the mouth in MLF images is a representation of the *cri*, an emotional reaction that is often associated with female hysteria. (Balaram 172) However, both MLF activists and female creators in the 1970s reconceptualized the *cri* as a "source of power by appropriating 'hysteria'" that could be "used effectively and *consciously* to overthrow patriarchal power" (174).[272] Reading Miss.Tic's example through this lens, the distressed/shocked/horrified female figure is embodying a stereotypical representation in order to challenge patriarchal power.

[272] Balakee also talks about the continuities between the open mouth and images of the "sexualized vagina" that appeared on screens in pornographic films such as *Emmanuelle* and *Histoire' O* (175).

In this second example, Miss.Tic's stencil fragments the female form into a triptych —this time focusing on the legs of her female spokesperson, identifiable by mini skirt and heels. (Image 3.23, pp. 224). Painted on a stone wall with cracks, crevices, and etchings, including the anarchy symbol visible in the top left part of the frame, the deteriorated location of this stencil highlights the "danger" implicit in Miss.Tic's triptych, which will be reinforced by a close reading of the pochoir itself. In the first of three images, the lower-half of a woman faces the passerby. Directly between her "legs," a stenciled man, with his entire body visible, walks to the right. To the right of the image, the words, "Je t'ai fait marcher" (I tricked you), are stenciled. Here the woman's lower body is larger than man's entire body; she visually dominates the man on the wall. If the street is a space, as Enjeu and Savé suggested, where women learn to "fear" men, Miss.Tic's stencil inverts this situation—drawing her female spokesperson in such a way that she might *be feared* by the men that pass her by. In addition to her physical prowess, the graffitied woman also subjugates the men who pass her by mentally. The accompanying caption draws on this interplay between physical and metaphorical through the use of the word "walk." Just as Miss.Tic "makes" the graffitied man "walk" through the legs of the woman in her pochoir, Miss.Tic's spokesperson also "tricks" the men who pass by (i.e. she "makes them walk" figuratively).

In the second image in the trio, the woman has turned to face the man, who is running, while looking behind him, as if afraid of someone chasing him. Once again, the man "embodies" the accompanying inscription, "Je t'ai fait courir" or, literally: "I made you run." The man "runs" between the legs of the woman. The figurative meaning of the inscription is "I made you jump through hoops"), and this inscription builds upon the first. In one reading, these first two images are a recreation of a "typical" male-female interaction in the streets (the woman "turns" the man's head and then makes him "work for it"). In the third image, the woman is turned to the right and the man lays crumpled on the ground between her legs. The

last caption reads: “je te ferai tomber” (“I will make you fall”). For a third time, the man manifests the caption corporeally, his body enacting the words of Miss.Tic. Figuratively, the caption can be understood two ways: “I will make you fall (in love)” and “I will bring you down.” Miss.Tic recreates a scene of street harassment (he gets interested in her, he works to attain her, and he falls in love with her) but destabilizes it by making her female figure the aggressor, able to overpower him.

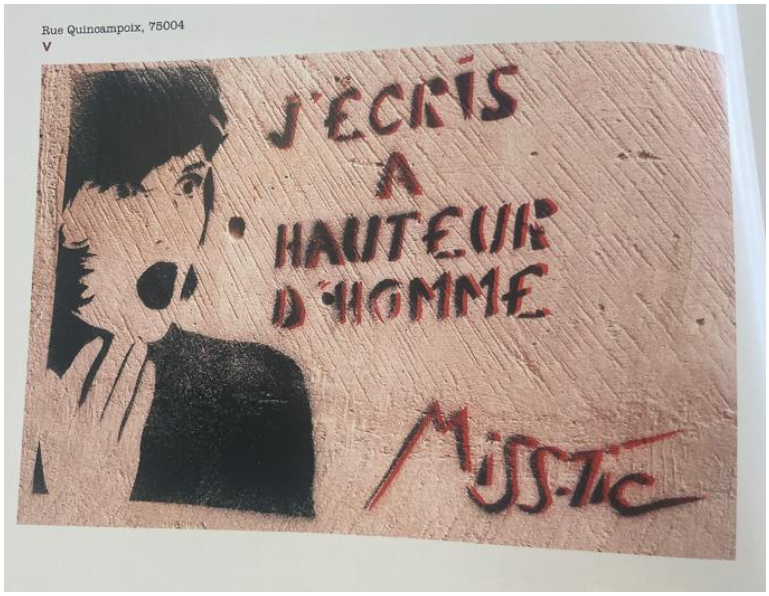


Image 3.22 Miss.Tic, *Miss.Tic in Paris* (pp. 46)

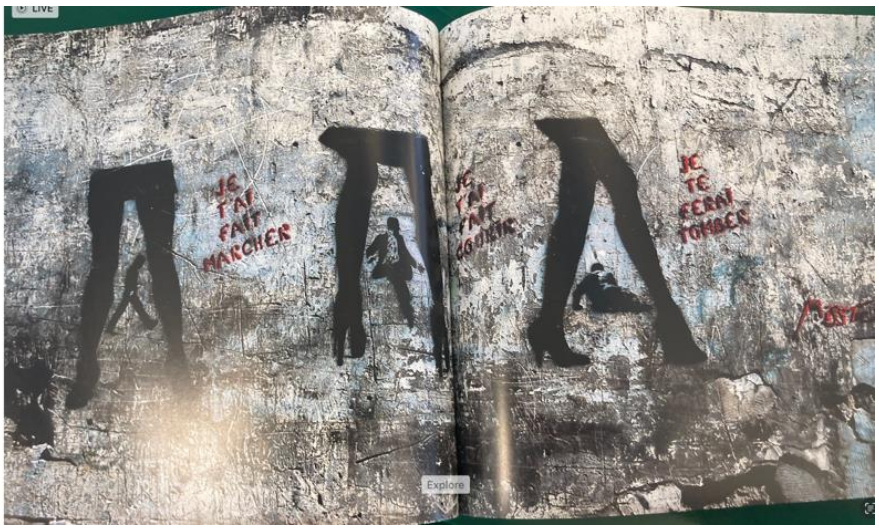


Image 3.23 Miss.Tic, *Miss.Tic in Paris*



Image 3.24 Photograph by Christian Weiss *for Libération*

By magnifying the female body to twice the size of the male body and by having the male body "concretize" the graffitied words, Miss.Tic undermines the traditional gender dynamic of the streets, with men as the pursuer and women as the pursued. Although the woman is represented by her body parts, namely her "sexualized" lower half, this sexuality affords her power rather than diminishes her power; her legs *imprison* the man, preventing him from escaping her clutches. Moreover, the triangle of her legs recalls the diamond-shaped hand signal that the MLF used during protests, used to connote the female genitals, and, by extension, a celebration of female sexuality and bodily autonomy (Image 3.24, pp. 225). In this way, Miss.Tic pochoir finds resonance with the feminist movements that preceded her, despite explicit ties. When the streets are normally spaces of predation by men, Miss.Tic's words are performative attempts to authorize women to take back their bodily autonomy in these spaces. Furthermore, this pochoir is an implicit warning to men about their own actions towards the women who pass them by. Finally, in both of these examples, Miss.Tic also taps into historic media archetypes of women, which is part of her tactics of subversion, as well as horror tropes. In the first example, the woman bears a resemblance to Marion Crane when she screams in the famous shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The second pochoir is reminiscent of Nathan Juran's *Attack of the 50-Foot Woman*

(1958). Like Nancy Archer in Juran's film, Miss.Tic's female protagonist towers not over the man but over the city itself. In this pochoir, the female passerby sees herself, both her lived experience (of being "looked at" as a sexual object by the men in the street) and what she might hope to be true (having sexual agency over her own body). The "danger" of this pochoir is its hidden reality: that this "image" does not reflect reality, but represents an image of a possible future where women have agency over their movement in the streets.

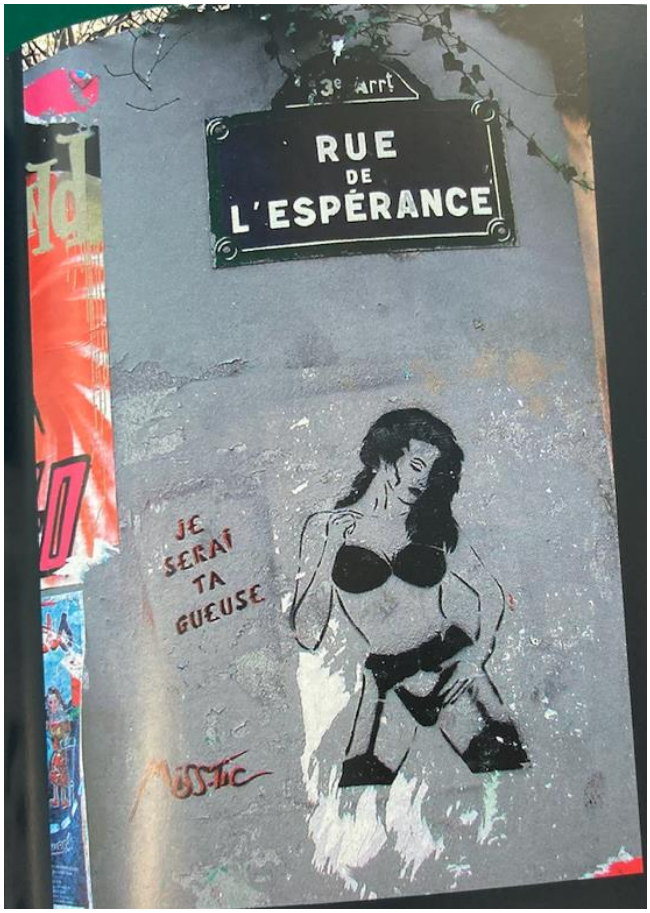


Image 3.25 Miss.Tic, *Miss.Tic in Paris* (pp. 177)

In this final example, Miss.Tic gives her spokesperson a conspicuously sexual aesthetic (Image 3.25, pp. 226). The pochoir, which appears, in the 13th arrondissement on the Rue de l'Espérance, depicts a woman, dressed in black lingerie; her body faces the street, but her face looks away, coy. Again, her pochoir draws on prototypical portrayals of women; in this particular image, her spokesperson looks like a pin-up model from the 1950s or an underwear model of the 1980s. At first glance, the way that the female body is portrayed in the pochoir does nothing to contest this stereotypical image. However, Miss.Tic uses her poetry to disrupt ("détourner") her illustrations of women. The poem or caption reads: "Je serai ta gueuse" ("I will be your hooker/harlot"). This first reading describes the image itself, in which the woman is presenting herself to the passerby, who she refers to casually with "tu." Her stance and her clothing might suggest to the passerby that she is a prostitute. Her pochoir is positioned below the street sign (Hope Street), which implies that the passerby "desires" her in some way, that she is the passerby's "dream." Furthermore, by "exposing" herself in the street, where women are both accosted and solicited, she fulfils this "expectation," by appealing to the male gaze.

This word "gueuse" has another literary meaning: "beggar or social outcast." This secondary meaning suggests an unspoken equivalence between being a prostitute and being an outcast. Like the prostitute, the beggar also works in the streets, and their "capital" also comes from the presence of their physical bodies in the street. Just as the prostitute disrobes and reveals her body to acquire clients that pass by, the beggar practices his destitution through his body, kneeling, busking, and begging for money from that same passerby. If Miss.Tic is supplanting the images that the media and advertising companies disseminate regarding women, this image looks similar in nature to the metro advertisements that Deudon and others re-wrote with feminist graffiti. With this in mind, the "prostitute" represents the wealth of sexual imagery that the advertisers capitalize upon in order to sell a product to the

passerby. By implementing the term "gueuse," Miss.Tic emphasizes the interconnections between consumerism and sexism. Despite the perceived "power" of this representation, it elides a darker and more sinister truth, that this sexualization camouflages the machinations of a capitalist and patriarchal society.

Just like with the previous examples, Miss.Tic's caption contains a pun; when read aloud, "je serai ta gueuse" (I will be your hooker) sounds like "je serai tageuse" (I will be a tagger). With this word play, the boundaries between the tagger (Miss.Tic) and the woman tagged (the "gueuse") are blurred; both women, in different ways, "tag" the walls with their images. Like the male "taggers" who spray paint their pseudonyms around Paris, Novat tags her own pseudonym (Miss.Tic), as well as the image of her "spokesperson" who functions as a corollary to her tag, both self and Other. If tags, as Baudrillard argued, use "radical anonymity" to break down the "space-time of the terrorist power of media, signs and the dominant culture" as well as the capitalist city more generally, Miss.Tic uses the "radically anonymous" female form to break down this very same "space-time." Miss.Tic's tags are not "meaningless" like the traditional tag (Baudrillard); instead, Miss.Tic's tags multiply "meanings" (including both word and image, modeling her ideas off of female magazines, street advertisements, cinema, and television) in order to explode all of these categories, destroying the "terrorist power" of these "male-centric" signs in her wake. To go back to Varda, Miss.Tic performs that "first feminist gesture, and, by positioning herself specifically as a female tagger ("je serai tageuse"), she "looks" from her own perspective. The hidden phrase ("je serai tageuse") eliminates the objectification nascent in the previous inscription ("je serai ta guese"). What was once a statement of possession foisted upon the passerby ("I will be *your* hooker") becomes a concealed statement of self-possession ("*I* will be a tagger")— the "your" traded in for an "I." Therefore, Miss.Tic uses the female body to destroy the capitalist consumerism rampant in public space of the city. By stenciling this

sexualized image of a female body onto the city's walls, she "diverts" our preconceptions of the sexualized female form, transforming the sexual objectification into a practice of *conscious* subject-formation.

Although Miss.Tic was not affiliated with the MLF, the work she produced in the two decades following the movement bespeaks a shared mindset with second-wave feminists. Like the MLF, Miss.Tic's artwork takes up themes concerning the autonomy of the female body, such as sexual harassment in public spaces, objectifying mediatic representations, and fear of female sexuality. Just as the MLF graffiti writers would practice *détournements* of sexist media advertisements, Miss.Tic's pieces are meant be *détournements* of the images of women that are proliferated in "female magazines"; they are meant to unsettle and potentially dismantle the conflicted images we construct of women ("domestic" and "docile" but, at the same time, "erotic" and "dangerous") and how they are propagated in public space, through a litany of advertisements wherever we turn. Miss.Tic's graffiti also "centers" the female body, like Varda does in *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*. For Miss.Tic, the female body itself *is* graffiti. She inscribes the city, over and over again, with the female form. However, instead of centering an "entire" female body and allowing women to show their non-sexualized side as Varda does, Miss.Tic sometimes cuts up the female body, sexualizes it, and reproduces stereotypical images of the female form. Her graffitied poetry, nevertheless, animates the female figure, imbuing her with her own voice. It transforms the regressive image of the female body into something more than a consumer product—into a woman who has agency over her own representation and knows it and into a tug of war between the conscious and unconscious. Like the layering of graffiti on a wall, the passerby must be patient to peel back the layers of meaning present in Miss.Tic's graffiti. The passerby must take time to make sense of the poetry; he or she must even read it aloud to discover the wordplay, the hidden meanings. In that moment of pause, the passerby confronts their own assumptions about the

female form, and, for a brief instant, women reclaim their rightful place in the streets, in public space, in the "political realm."

Conclusion

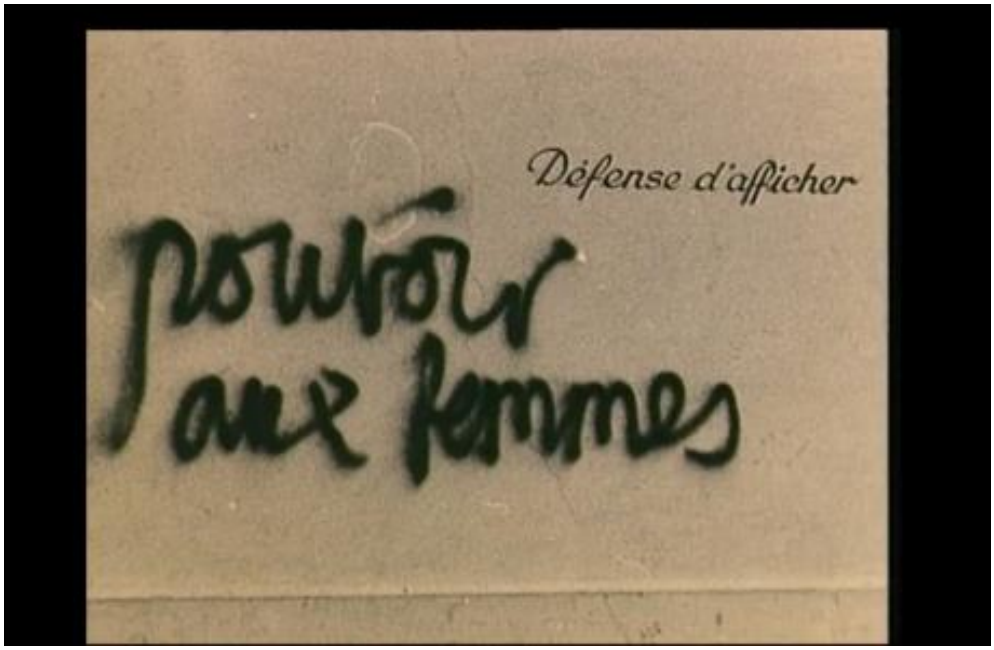


Image 3.26 *Debout !* (37:50)
Photograph taken by anonymous photographer

I conclude this chapter with another example of feminist graffiti taken from Carole Roussopoulos's *Debout !*. This still photograph (Image 3.27, pp. 230), which was integrated into the documentary, depicts a simple graffiti inscription, "Power to women," written in black spray paint on a wall and positioned below an official *Défense d'afficher* ("No Posting") sign. This graffiti writing summarizes well several of the characteristics of the MLF. First, this graffiti ressembles, in its simplicity, the style of the graffiti from May 1968, reminding us of the ties between those who protested in May and those who continued to advocate for women in the 1970s. Moreover, the graffiti's location, under the "No Posting" sign as if challenging it, denotes an attack on the French State and its power over public space, in much the same vein that those of May '68 attacked and reordered public space

through their graffiti.[273] Where it differs, however, is in its explicit focus on "women." For many of the women who participated in the MLF, the rhetoric of May '68—that all struggle was purely class-based—began to ring false; their experiences as women were discounted both in the personal and the political realm. Therefore, these women demanded "power for women." They fought political battles against the French State, fighting for the right to free and legal abortion and contraception, just as this graffiti suggests through its implicit confrontation with the French State's laws, and they fought personal battles against harassment and discrimination. Just as this graffiti is written in the street, the feminists of the MLF fought for equality publicly in the streets, through large demonstrations, street theater, songs, and graffiti; through these various creative outlets, the MLF made "the personal…political.".[274] What type of "power" and how to achieve that "power" was often debated within the movement. However, one thing that knitted the disparate groups together was their desire to fight for bodily autonomy and their recourse to new representations of the female body.

In this chapter, I have argued that, in contrast with the proliferation of graffiti during May 1968, graffiti played an important but less-widespread role just a few years later during the MLF years. Instead, female activists were more concerned with allowing creativity to flow: allowing their words to jump from walls, to posters, to revolutionary songs. Graffiti, then, was just one tool to bring "power" back to these women—to break down the barrier between the public and private sphere and to transform the street itself from a space of

[273] The "Défense d'afficher" signage was developed from the July 29th, 1881 law protecting the freedom of the press. As Philippe Artières outlines in his book *Police de l'écriture* (2013), this law was created in the wake of the Commune to "protect" public space from the "degradation" of non-official political posters (42). Implicitly, this law was targeting activists such as those during the Commune who would write their own "laws" and post them in public space (36). This same frenzy of postering occurred during the French Revolution, which demonstrates that this law was an attempt by the French State to control what media was or was not allowed in public space under the guise of protecting the "freedom" of the press. See Artières' chapter "Cadres."

[274] This was a common slogan in the American Women's Liberation Movement but there was also a similar understanding in the French, that women's lives, particularly at home, must change. They often borrowed this phrase in their own protests.

repression to one of expression. I have also asserted that, during the MLF years, the female body itself was transformed into a form of graffiti. If graffiti is understood in this dissertation as an illegal and insurrectionary urban inscription, the female body becomes transgressive by "written" into the streets, through Catherine Deudon's photography, Carole Roussopoulo's videos, Agnès Varda's film, and Miss.Tic's stencils. Deudon and Roussopoulos write and capture graffiti that satirizes traditional images of the female body as a sexual object or reproductive vehicle, Varda writes the women in her film into the center of the Parisian streets, and Miss.Tic complicates representations of the female body through her *pochoirs* and poetry. By writing the female body into the street, each of these female creators enfranchises women, transforming them from something that is "looked-at" in the streets of the city to someone who has the power to "look" at those in the streets and demand more.

Chapter 4: Disembodied Bodies: Graffiti in the French Banlieue in the 1980s and 1990s

Matthieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995) is one of the most well-known examples of *banlieue cinema*—a genre depicting life in the impoverished and under-resourced *banlieue* neighborhoods that circle large French cities, like Paris and Lyon. Filmed in black and white, with a highly aestheticized cinematographic style and a predominantly amateur cast, Kassovitz's film positions itself both within the fictionalized universe of "classic cinema" and within the "real-world" of the 1990s *banlieue*.[275] When his film was released in 1995, Paris had already experienced several periods of unrest in its *banlieues*, often resulting in clashes between police forces and the younger generation.[276] In the opening credits of his film, Kassovitz recreates this reality by knitting together a montage of documentary footage of protests both in Paris and its banlieues. These clips are set to Bob Marley's 1973 song "Burnin' and Lootin,'" an anthem for liberation from police oppression, connecting the political situation in France to other countries like Marley's Jamaica. As the song progresses, the clips build in intensity, showing increased physical violence by officers who beat protestors or throw tear gas into crowds and vandalism by protestors as they shatter glass storefronts. The documentary footage, then, abruptly gives way to the diegesis of the film, with a fictional newscaster reporting on a young man named Abdel's hospitalization following an altercation with police forces. With this exposition, Kassovitz blurs the lines between reality and fiction, urging viewers to "see" his film as a reflection of the reality experienced "on the ground" in the banlieue.

[275] See "Suburban Cinema Between Art and Genre" (Pettersen 2023) and "So Far So Good...: La Haine and the Poetics of the Everyday." (Sharma and Sharma 2000).

[276] See the extensive work of Guillaume Roux on the subject of altercations between banlieue residents and the police. See also: "Les polices en banlieue après les émeutes de 2005" (Jobard 1998), "Police Marginality, Racial Logics and Discrimination in the Banlieues of France" (Body-Gendrot 2000), *Police et société en France* (Maillard and Skogan 2024).

Like Kassovitz, I bring together the "real" and the "fictional" in this chapter in order to analyze representations of the French banlieue in the 1980s and 1990s, focusing, in particular, on protests against police brutality, discrimination, and racism. In order to do so, I analyze several photographs taken by photojournalists during protests against police brutality in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as two cultural productions, set in the banlieue during this same time period, Kassovitz's feature-length film *La Haine* (1995) and Mehdi Charef's novel *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983).[277] Like Kassovitz' film, Charef's novel also aims to portray an "authentic" vision of the banlieue, especially the experience of the young men who live there, with Charef writing from his personal experience of growing up in the Parisian banlieue of Nanterre.[278]

One such mark of the "authenticity" of representations of the banlieue is the presence of graffiti writing. The French "graffiti" movement, inspired by 1970s New York subway graffiti culture, emerged from the Parisian banlieues in the 1980s, spreading from there to city centers some years later.[279] Young people, often men, established writing "crews," tagging metro cars and creating their own "pieces," throughout the banlieues and the city of

[277] In this chapter, I do not focus on the French graffiti movement, which was occurring during the 1980s and 1990s. While this graffiti is relevant to this chapter and will be referenced at various points, it does not have an explicitly political message that is "readable" to the general public, which is the purview of this project.

[278] Azouz Begag also attests to the "reality" of the banlieue experience, describing resonance with Charef's novel :"C'était la première fois de ma vie que la lecture d'un livre avait en moi autant de résonance. Elle me décentrait littéralement par rapport à la vision que j'avais jusque- là du monde possible dans lequel un enfant d'immigré pouvait concevoir sa place en France. L'histoire de la galère sociale et urbaine de Madjid, le héros de Mehdi Charef, avait tant de similitude, de proximité avec ma propre expérience sociale, familiale et urbaine, que je m'extasiais à chaque page tournée de retrouver des impressions, des idées, des émotions qui m'étaient très familière" ["It was the first time in my life that reading a book had resonated so deeply with me. It literally upended my previous view of the possible world in which a child of immigrants could find their place in France. The story of the social and urban struggles of Madjid, Mehdi Charef's hero, bore such similarities to my own social, family, and urban experiences that I was enthralled with every turn of the page, rediscovering impressions, ideas, and emotions that were deeply familiar to me."] (10).

[279] This movement emerged out of the 1960s and 1970s graffiti culture in New York. As Marc-Aurèle Vecchionne's 2004 documentary *Writers 1983-2003 : 20 ans de graffiti à Paris* demonstrates, several early Parisian graffiti writers spent time in the United States, where they were introduced to graffiti culture and tagging. They then brought back this culture to Paris in the mid 1980s, where it developed into its own graffiti culture in the next decade. Graffiti itself becomes a global phenomenon during this time period as writers from Europe and the United States exchange with one another. See also David Fieni's article "Graffiti and street art in Paris" (p.289).

Paris. Although several of the first graffiti writers came from middle-class families who did not live in the banlieue, graffiti culture soon came to dominate this space, especially through its connection with anti-establishment hip hop music and other street culture.[280] Like in the United States, graffiti was not perceived positively by French authorities. Writing in the 1990s, French sociologist Alain Vulbeau describes how tagging was understood as a "delinquent act," one that destroys the city itself with "graphic violence, visual racket, urban pollution" (67, 54).[281] This distaste for tags led, then, to a sort of "anti-youth racism" and an institutional crusade against taggers by the Parisian municipal government, the Parisian metro system (RATP), and the French railway system (SNCF) (Rosenczveig 11, Vulbeau 46). Frustrated by the amount of money they were spending to erase graffiti writing and tags, these three governmental organizations started increasing penalties for graffiti vandalism in the 1990s, moving the crime itself from the category of "contravention" (infraction) to that of the much more serious "délit" (misdemeanor), which introduced the possibility of jail time for taggers (Vulbeau 48). Angered by the RATP's new tactics to thwart graffiti writing, a group of young men decided to make a statement in May of 1991. In the Louvre-Rivoli metro station in central Paris, the Louvre Museum had installed recreations of its famous artworks. In secret, at night, several writers descended into the station to "tag" these artworks, as well as the walls of the station. The media reported on the event with anger, vilifying the young men, suggesting that their act was one of "spectacular excess" and implicit violence towards the metro station, the station itself being described as a "*victim* of taggers" ("Vandalisme").[282]

[280] See "Postcolonial Soundtrack: Hip-Hop Music and Culture in Contemporary France" (Stovall 2022).

[281] Vulbeau's text is critical of this reductionist conception of tagging. Instead, he makes the argument that the graffiti writer is not just a young person blowing off steam, but an individual reacting to a larger system of marginalization and oppression…He calls the tagger "un scriptambule" ["scriptambule"] whose practice is one of "errance" ["wandering"] and a "refus de posséder de façon normalisée un nom et un lieu" ["a refusal to possess in any formal way a name and a place"] (84).

[282] The newscaster said that the Louvre-Rivoli metro "ont subi un bien specatulaire outrage" ["underwent a spectacular offense"], again suggesting that graffiti is an act of violence that these writers enacted against the metro station.

Despite the fact that members of less-stigmatized groups had already been spray painting on the walls for decades, such as French painters Jérome Mesnager and Gérard Zlotykamien, graffiti only came to be synonymous with the violence and discontent of the banlieue itself in the 1980s and 1990s, when it became associated with what Rosemary Wakeman calls the "stigmatized space" of the banlieue (Vulbeau 38, Wakeman 86).

In this chapter, I explore several examples of historical and fictional graffiti written in the banlieue in order to challenge the ways in which banlieue graffiti has been perceived by both the media and larger public as dangerous acts of unprovoked "graphic violence." Instead, I propose that these examples of graffiti are actually embodied attempts by writers to fight against the violence enacted against them — the politicization, racialization, and victimization of *their own bodies* by the French State through the arm of its police. In other words, banlieue graffiti writers are demanding ownership over their own space and their own bodies in the face of an ever-present police force. In his seminal essay on New York tagging, Jean Baudrillard argues that tags transform urban architecture into a "body, a body with no end or beginning, completely erogenized by writing like the body can be during the inscription of a primitive tattoo" (36). Just as tattoos give one's body meaning as a "material of symbolic exchange," in primitive societies, tags, in Baudrillard's reading, liberate the walls from the constraints of architecture and render them "live material," part of a "moving [social] body" (36). Graffiti destroys the restrictive accoutrement of the city and its spatial politics (the "quadrature of four walls," "the repressive space/time of urban transport"), and it brings the city back, perhaps ironically, to a time "before writing," a pre-historic time marked by "group initiation and affiliation" rather than individual subjectivities (36). [283] In his

[283] By suggesting that graffiti allows us to go "back" in time, Baudrillard falls in line with Brassaï's conception of graffiti as "primitive" art tied to the deep past want to be careful to differentiate my reading from that of Baudrillard, which reproduces certain problematic colonialist notions of graffiti writing, namely that tagging is a "savage" practice. Although Baudrillard suggests that this practice is revolutionary and liberatory, it does feel tied to certain negative presuppositions about the populations that write graffiti, which are in New York Black

analysis, Baudrillard is particularly convinced that tagging is a methodology that subverts the power of capitalism, something which Parisian graffiti writers some twenty years later in Marc-Aurèle Vecchione's documentary, *Writers: 20 ans de graffiti à Paris*, also see as a key part of their graffiti practice.[284]

Indeed, the graffiti examples in this chapter are attempts to fashion a "moving [social] body" made of "live material." However, this metaphorical graffiti body is fighting not only against capitalism, but against a long history of colonialism and xenophobia against those living in the banlieue. Strangely, this metaphorical body is also one that, I would argue, has considerably more agency over its movements than the individual bodies who write the graffiti. In other words, I propose that these graffiti writers are endeavoring to fight against the restrictions they experience in their physical by "writing" this political banlieue body into existence on the city's walls. However, this "banlieue" body struggles to establish its salience in a political landscape which often considers banlieue residents to be "un-integrated" into the French Republic. Therefore, their graffiti inscriptions are similarly dismissed as deviant, to be controlled by an acceptable police body. Despite their best efforts to graffiti "write" their bodies into existence, the political body of the banlieue fights against constant annihilation by this larger, more powerful police body. How do these graffiti inscriptions speak about the "body" of those in the banlieue? Furthermore, what role does the passerby have in this power struggle? In this chapter, I will argue that the reception of the graffiti writings by the passersby suggests a sort of ambivalence towards the political power of these writings—instead of a "live" political body emboldened by the inscriptions, the passersby often reveal an inoperative political body, one which is increasingly alienated from the space it inhabits.

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and Puerto Rican populations, and in Paris, often but not also young people from stigmatized "Other" racial and ethnic groups.

[284] See *Writers* about how graffiti was working "outside" the capitalist system (43:19).

Banlieue as Space and Place

Although this chapter is focused on the banlieue of the 1980s and 1990s, the residential neighborhoods that populate what was considered the banlieue during this time period were actually built in the 1950s and 1960s.[285] After World War II ended in 1945, France experienced a thirty-year boom in economic stature and manufacturing production, known as the *trentes glorieuses* (1945-1975). During this period, two changes occurred that would eventually lead to the precarious situation of the Parisian banlieue in the 1980s and 1990s. First, the French government built many large housing estates, called *les grands ensembles*, on the outskirts of cities. These estates were viewed as a utopic solution to the problem of affordable, safe, and salubrious housing, as, even into the 1960s, many homes did not have running water within Paris.[286] Some, but not all, of these *grands ensembles* were *hébergements à loyer modéré* (HLM) [low-income housing]. During this early period, the white middle-class populations that had previously lived in the city of Paris settled in the "banlieue." Second, this same economic boom that shifted purchasing power into the hands of the French middle class and modernized homes necessitated more workers; therefore, the French government invited immigration to metropolitan France from its various colonies in order to support the need for workers in manufacturing plants (Ross "Fast Cars," 9, 152-3). During the 1960s and 1970s, the number of immigrants in France increased to support that need: first in 1962, due to the end of the Algerian War, and then again in 1968, with the signing of a Franco-Algerian agreement increasing Algerian workers in France. Finally, in 1976, Giscard d'Estaing's government passed a "family regrouping law," which allowed male workers to bring their wives and children from their homes to settle in France (Xavier 330).

[285] For more on the creation of the banlieue, see "From Red Belt to Black Belt" (Stovall 2001).

[286] See the documentary *Chronicle d'un été* (Chris Marker 1961)

These immigrants were first relegated to the outskirts of the cities; in the 1960s, they lived in *bidonvilles*, or shantytowns, often without running water or any amenities. As middle-class families rose in economic stature, they moved out of the HLMs and into single-family homes in the French suburbs, called *pavillons* (Ross "Fast Cars," 152-3). Therefore, by the mid-1970s, the HLMs were largely populated by immigrants who had lived before in the *bidonvilles.* This economic upturn became a downturn following the oil crisis of 1973, and many young men and immigrants, particularly those living in the banlieue, lost their jobs. This crash left many young men without a career path, which, when combined with job discrimination against immigrant populations, meant that many young men in the banlieue simply had nothing to do once they left high school. By the 1980s and 1990s, media perceptions of the "banlieue" had turned negative.[287] It was portrayed as a "dangerous" space of violence, drugs, joblessness, reckless youth culture, and immigrant populations who refused to "integrate," a space that became synonymous with both "immigration and racial conflict" (Douzet et Robine 40-2, Stovall 9).[288] In newspapers in the 1990s, for example, the word "'banlieue' was most often associated with 'malaise' and 'crisis,' and was frequently linked with words such as 'drama' 'emergency,' 'cops,' 'violence,' 'death,' 'explosion'" (Zisserman et Nettelbeck 84). Despite the fact that these media perceptions were and continue to be incorrect, they delineated an imagined space that was to be feared by the urban

[287] These portrayals of the banlieue are certainly distorted, but anger amongst the banlieue residents was still real, incited in large part by the government's lack of care for these neighborhoods: "Banlieue residents thus develop an increasing rage against authority that is often expressed through repeated bouts of active or indirect destruction. Buildings become dilapidated due to a chronic lack of maintenance, with paint peeling from the walls, elevators out of service and defective sanitation, all of which mark a permanent state of decay. Active aggression is demonstrated through vandalism and indifference toward authorities, including law enforcement, municipal officials and landlords alike. Such active aggression is matched by the aggression of police, fueling a vicious cycle of urban violence" (Angélil and Siress 62).

[288] For more on the Parisian banlieues' communist history, see the chapter "Paris Rouge" in Eric Hazan's book *L'invention de Paris* (2004).

population.[289] These stereotypes about the banlieue continue to feed the xenophobic politics of groups like the far-right National Rally (previously the National Front) and have contributed to banlieue youth becoming the most disillusioned group in French society in 2015 (Douzet and Robine 41-44).

As many scholars have noted, this association between the banlieue and violence is a remnant of colonialist thinking.[290] As historian Tyler Stovall points out, the relegation of marginalized groups to the peripheries of Paris has always been a part of the spatial politics of the French State. By relegating the marginalized groups to the outskirts, power remains centralized and those in power remain in control over these populations: "the city has long symbolized citizenship. The relationship of the suburbs to the city, functionally integrated but legally marginal, neatly replicates the relationships between immigrants and citizens in contemporary France" ("From Red Belt" 20). In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues something similar from a Marxist perspective: "strategic space [another name for the abstract space of capitalism] makes it possible simultaneously to force worrisome groups, the workers among others, out towards the periphery; to make available spaces near the centres scarcer, so increasing their value; to organize the centre as locus of decision, wealth, power, and information…" (375). In other words, both capitalistic pressures and colonialist ideologies lead to a segregation of certain populations to the banlieue in the 1980s and 1990s.

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[289] As geopolitics scholars Fédérick Douzet and Jérémy Robine write as late as 2015, these peripherical neighborhoods are still associated with joblessness, violence, and drugs (40-2). In contrast to this negative media perception, most banlieue residents enjoy their neighborhoods, preferring them to the city. They enjoy being far from the perils of the city, such as pollution and noise (84). François Maspero and Anaïk Frantz's *Les passagers du Roissy Express* tells a similar story from their interviews with banlieue residents.

[290] "Compromised from the outset by a prioritization of quantity over quality, the dilemma of the 'new towns' was further exacerbated by the spatial partitioning. Although such partitioning resulted from strict adherence to official land-use policies, the consequence was segregation along social lines. These projects were conceived basically as ghettos to accommodate workers recruited from North African states and former colonies to assist in postwar industrialization. To keep the underprivileged at a distance is 'very much in line with the history of Paris,' a process in which 'the combined action of town planners, property speculators, and police has never stopped pressing the poor, the 'dangerous classes', further from the centre of the city.' Though it is question whether or not urban planners consciously sought to enact a discriminatory spatial design, the impact is clear. In the creation of the banlieues, France found itself replaying a former colonial refrain, only this time within its own national borders" (Angélil and Siress 59-60).

One important theme of both Charef's novel and Kassovitz's film is this dichotomy between Paris and its banlieues—between center and periphery—a relation which Myrtos Konstantarakos characterizes as the central pillar of banlieue cinema, the subgenre to which *La Haine* and, to a lesser extent, Charef's 1985 cinematic adaption of the 1983 novel *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed,* which goes by a slightly different name *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède*, belong (161). This chapter uses this argument concerning space as a foundation, understanding that the graffiti written in the banlieue and in Paris is always contending with these questions of power, citizenship, and belonging, which stem from and are reproduced through the power differential of spatial politics between the center and periphery of the French city.

Historical Banlieue Graffiti: A Case Study of *Nacer Mraïdi and the March of 1983*

On February 14th, 1983, a young man named Nacer Mraïdi was riding his moped in the Parisian banlieue of Châtenay-Malabry, when police officers began to pursue him for not wearing a helmet and running a red light. Suddenly, during the car chase, one of the officers shot Nacer in the head, despite the fact that he was fleeing the scene. This injury put Nacer into a coma, from which he eventually recovered; however, he was rendered handicapped for life. The officer was eventually charged with a crime ("involuntary manslaughter") and sentenced to one year in prison.[291] A few days later, Senegalese photographer Amadou Gaye, employed by the "weekly immigration newspaper" *Sans Frontière*, went to *Châtenay-Malabry* to photograph spontaneous protests that broke out in support of Nacer, one of

[291] Historian Emmanuel Glais, who blogs about "State Crimes" on Le Club de MediaPart, writes this regarding Nacer: "1983, Châtenay-Malabry : Nasser Mraidi, 17 ans, roule en mobylette sans casque. Il est visé à la tête par le brigadier Lapeyre. Nasser tombe dans le coma et en garde des séquelles à vie. L'agent est inculpé dans un 1er temps pour 'tentative d'homicide volontaire'. Puis dans un second temps pour 'coups et blessures involontaires'... Jugement en correctionnel. Verdict : un an avec sursis" ["1983, Châtenay-Malabry: Nasser Mraidi, 17, was riding a moped without a helmet. He was shot in the head by Sergeant Lapeyre. Nasser fell into a coma and suffered lifelong disabilities. The officer was initially charged with 'attempted murder.' Then, subsequently, for 'unintentional assault and battery'… Trial in criminal court. Verdict: one year suspended sentence" ("Scandales et crimes d'État des 13 au 15 janvier 2021").

several young men who were killed by police forces in the Parisian banlieues in the 1980s.[292] During this protest, Gaye took a photograph of graffiti written in the neighborhood, a photograph which would later be used on a banner during the famous 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism (Image 4.2, pp. 235):

> J'ai aussi fait des photos à Châtenay-Malabry : des policiers ont poursuivi un jeune à mobylette, Nacer Mraïdi. Il n'avait pas de casque. Ils l'ont poursuivi et lui ont tiré dans la tête. Il est resté handicapé à vie. Et il y a eu une manifestation. Des jeunes, des mômes, ont tagué sur un mur "Nous sommes tous du gibier à flics." J'ai pris la photo de ce tag… On dit souvent qu'on a de la chance de faire une photo. Sur cette photo, il y a le tag et il y a l'aîné devant qui regarde, le cadet qui court, et le tout petit qui marche insouciant. Photo symbole n'est-ce pas ? Moi j'aime beaucoup. Cette photo a fait l'objet d'une fresque, apposée en contrebas du podium des Marcheurs à l'arrivée le 3 décembre 1983, gare Montparnasse à Paris. (Gaye 186-7) [293]
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> [I also took some photos in Châtenay-Malabry: police officers chased a young man on a moped, Nacer Mraïdi. He wasn't wearing a helmet. They chased him and shot him in the head. He was left disabled for life. And there was a protest. Some young people,

[292] Amadou Gaye was born in Saint-Louis, Senegal and arrived in Paris in 1976. Soon afterwards, he became a photographer, taking night classes to refine his art and eventually getting accepted into CE3P, a professional photography school (Gaye 184) From there, he met someone who worked for the photojournalism agency, Viva, and secured his first job. In the late 1970s, he was working for Viva, as well as the immigration journal, Sans frontière. In an interview with Mogniss H. Abdallah and Anne Volery, Gaye says that he became a photographer to fight against the negative images of young people in the French banlieue that he saw in the French media. Instead, he saw his work as a photographer as equivalent to that of a "griot" or storyteller in Senegalese culture; his goal became to "photographier les jeunes, les enfants de l'immigration, et rendre ces gens beaux. Comme le griot. Montrer leur beauté" (184). In 1981, Gaye was called to cover the protests that broke out between young banlieusards and the police in Minguettes. He then covered several protests in the banlieue. In particular, he covered the March for Equality and Against Racism in 1983, in which he felt particularly implicated: "Et puis moi aussi, avec mes cheveux en afrobataille à l'époque, j'ai été victime de l'îlotage. Constamment arrêté, fouillé dans mon quartier de Ménilmontant par des flics en civil ou contrôlé systématiquement dans le métro. Alors oui, il y avait de quoi rejoindre naturellement cette marche avec mon appareil photo en bandoulière. Je l'ai rejointe à l'étape de Strasbourg, en équipe avec Macoudou N'Diaye et Fatima Belhadi de Sans frontière" (187-8). For more on Sans Frontière, see Mogness Abdallah's article "Sans Frontière, 'le journal fait par et pour les immigrés' (1979-1985)."

[293] In 2023, the Musée de l'Immigration collected photographs of the March against Racism and For Equality, to mark its 40th anniversary. Gaye's photograph along now belongs in this collection.

kids, tagged on a wall, “We’re all fair game for the cops.” I took a photo of that tag… People often say you have to be lucky to take a good photo. In this photo, there’s the graffiti, and there’s the oldest kid standing in front of it watching, the younger one running, and the little one walking along, carefree. A symbolic photo, isn’t it? I really like it. This photo was turned into a mural, placed below the podium for the Marchers at the finish line on December 3, 1983, at Montparnasse Station in Paris.]



Image 4.1 *Nous sommes tous du gibier au flic, cité de transit de la Butte Rouge Chatenay-Malabry*,
Photograph taken by Amadou Gaye
1988, Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration



Image 4.2 Arrivée de la marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme, 1983 – BRAHIM CHANCHABI/AIDDA
Reproduced in "L'Histoire par les dates" (Mikaël Bertrand)



Image 4.3 Atelier Populaire poster

In Gaye's original photograph, three boys of varying ages (a toddler, a grade-schooler, and a pre-teen or teenager) are positioned in front of a concrete building in the banlieue of Châtenay-Malabry (Image 4.1, pp. 243). The building is spray-painted with dark graffiti that reads in English: "We all are game to the cops." The environment captured in the photograph is sterile: it is the middle of winter as evidenced by the leafless tree in the background and the large coat that the oldest boy wears in the foreground. The photograph is also developed in black and white film, which further diminishes the warmth of the image; moreover, the exposure both produces a high contrast between the boys, the graffiti, and the surroundings and leaves several shadows within the image, creating both a striking and unsettling composition. In the image, the oldest boy is in the foreground of the photograph facing the camera, hands in his pocket and an inscrutable expression on his face. The two younger boys are in the background of the shot, bookending the graffiti inscription. The youngest "walks" to the right of the inscription and the middle "runs" on its left.

The composition of Gaye's photograph implicates the three boys in the graffiti's message. The use of the pronoun "we" and the boys' proximity to the graffiti suggest that the "we" of which the graffiti speaks is describing the boys. In other words, by framing the boys and the graffiti together, Gaye implies that it is these young boys who are "game" to the police. The toddler, as Gaye describes him, is "walking in a carefree manner," seemingly unaware of the danger of the graffiti's message. His youthful innocence contrasts with the dangerous implications of the graffiti, conjuring a certain moral indignation in the viewer against the reality of police violence. If we are "all" targets, this toddler is also a target of violence by the police forces patrolling the banlieue. The toddler might also be sneaking away from the graffiti and its implications, hiding himself from being a target of police brutality. Again, this secondary reading highlights the cruelty of police violence, which does not distinguish between the guilty or the innocent but paints all with the same brush. In contrast with the toddler who walks away from the graffiti, the grade-schooler is running into the graffiti, seemingly both afraid of its message and, thus, of the police, and also running into its "trap." Running towards the graffiti, he gets trapped like "game" in the crosshairs of the police officer who hunts him for sport. In the photo, both of these two boys are also moving forward, which allows their physical bodies to embody the message of the graffiti. By walking away from or running towards the graffiti, it is as if the two young boys are running from the police who are chasing them as hunters would chase "game."

Finally, the third young man who is in the foreground of the photograph stands to face the camera. We might read this stance as one of frustration with the situation of the banlieue or as one of rebellion towards the police that treat the young men as "game." No matter the three boys' bodily "stance" in relation to the camera (walking, running, standing still), I propose that they are "all" still targeted by the police, at least within the confines of the photograph. Still, the defiance of the third young man, who looks at the camera rather than

running away as the other two boys do, acts as the "punctum" of the photograph, to borrow Barthes terminology. The punctum is the part that "stands out," the part that "punctures" us unexpectedly, and creates an emotional, subjective response to an image (Barthes 17). I argue that this young man, staring down the barrel of the camera, is the punctum, this "unexpected flash" which touches the viewer. By standing still, he is not attempting to escape the metaphorical police; he accepts his fate as "game," allowing himself to be captured by the camera, by the graffiti, and by the police. And yet, it is this decision to stop moving and stare at the camera that demands something emotional of the viewer; it demands us to look inward and personally consider the reality of this graffiti and its repercussions for each of the young men in the photograph. If they stop running from the police, what will happen to them? The young man's immobility in front of the camera is both resignation to his fate as "game" (allowing himself to get "caught") and subversion of that fate (demanding the viewer do something about it). He puts the onus on those who "see" this violence occurring and do nothing to stop it. Gaye's photograph suggests that all three boys, despite their presumed innocence as children, are targets for police violence. They are dehumanized by the police, conceived of as animals ("game") rather than people. The two younger boys' make manifest this brutalization; they "play the part" of the game through their bodies. The third boy, perhaps unwittingly, instrumentalizes his own body to fight this oppression; he "stands up" to the police who are extinguishing the bodily autonomy of those in the banlieue.

In addition to the boys in the image, we, as viewers of the photograph and those who saw the graffiti in real-life, are also included in the purview of the graffiti inscription. Because of the use of the ambiguous subject pronoun "we," the graffiti can be about the banlieue youth, like the boys in the photograph or Nacer Mraïdi, but it can be about anyone who reads it — the collective or universal "we." Thus, this graffiti message functions similarly to a famous May '68 slogan: "We are all German Jews." This slogan was created by

the Atelier Populaire after a student organizer named Daniel Cohn-Bendit was disciplined and then expelled by the University of Nanterre for his political action during 1968. After this expulsion from university, Cohn-Bendit, who was born in France to two German-Jewish parents who fled Germany in 1933, was subsequently deported from France to Germany, with several right-wing media outlets calling him pejoratively a "German communist." [294] In response, the Atelier Populaire printed posters with a reproduction of a famous photograph of Cohn-Bendit smiling in the face of the riot police (Image 4.3, pp. 244). Underneath the image, the slogan "We are all German Jews" was screen-printed. This slogan participates in what Michael Rothberg might call "multidirectional memory" or Max Silverman "palimpsestic memory." [295] It establishes a parallel between the French State's actions against student and worker protests in 1968 and the German State's actions towards the Jewish population prior to and during World War II. The repression and expulsion of university students, like the German-Jewish Cohn-Bendit, who spoke out against the French government replicates the repression and expulsion of German Jews during the Holocaust and the German communists who spoke out against the German government at that time. In the context of the 1983 Châtenay-Malabry protests, this analogous slogan ("We are all game for the cops") can be read as a continuation of this same record of State violence; the police brutality towards those in the banlieue is yet another iteration of violent State repression, in keeping with May 1968 or Nazi Germany. This formulation, "we are all," also indicates a certain ubiquity to this situation. Any individual, indeed, all individuals, are targets of State violence; no one is immune to the possibility of being targeted by the police or the State. At the same time, this formulation also encourages a certain solidarity amongst those who read

[294] See "'Nous sommes tous des juifs et des allemands'" (Neumann 2012).

[295] See *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Rothberg 2009) and *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (Silverman 2013)

it, proposing that all resistance will emanate from a community that recognizes its shared experience. This confluence between the May ’68 slogan and the 1983 graffiti may be incidental, but its similarities speak to the interconnections between previous iterations of State violence and what was happening in the French banlieues at the hands of police forces in the 1980s and 1990s.



EN MARGE

“NACER, C’EST MOI ! NACER, C’EST NOUS !”

Châtenay-Malabry. Cinq heures du matin. Lundi 14 février. Le brigadier Lapeyre est ivre mais en fonction. Même lieu et même heure : Nacer Mraïdi, 17 ans, roule sans casque sur sa mobylette. Direction son ghetto de la Butte Rouge. Il grille un feu, il est jeune, il est nord-africain. Il n’en faut guère plus. Le brigadier Lapeyre, fils de militaire mort en Indochine, l’ajuste et tire. La balle frappe Nacer à la tête. Une fois de plus. Comme à Nanterre, à Genesse, comme un mois plus tard à Montreuil, les flics font la chasse au faciès. Pourquoi se gêneraient-ils ? Flics et racistes restent impunis. Souvenons-nous des “5 ans avec sursis” de l’autre brigadier Marchaudon. Pensons aux comportements et aux propos racistes de la FPIP, groupuscule syndical d’extrême-droite qui continue à exister sans être le moins du monde inquiété. Qui est donc réellement responsable ? Les socialistes qui se rengorgent de leur politique : *“nous avons fait plus pour les effectifs de police que pendant tout le septennat précédent”*. Ainsi la petite délinquance continue à faire les frais du discours majoritaire sur “l’insécurité”.

La colère des 4 000 jeunes manifestants le 19 février, aux cris de *“Nacer, c’est moi ! Nacer, c’est nous !”* devra déboucher, pour être efficace, sur la mise en cause de l’idéologie et des pratiques policières socialistes.

USINOR TUE ENCORE

Décidément, il ne fait pas bon être travailleur à Usinor-Dunkerque. De 1963 à aujourd’hui, pas moins de 99 morts. Et depuis juin dernier, les accidents se multiplient. Le dernier en date, le 4 février 83, s’est encore soldé par un décès. Le Syndicat de Lutte des Travailleurs (SLT), très implanté dans l’usine dénonce par tracts et brochures les conditions de travail, la vétusté du matériel qui sont à la source de ces accidents. On s’en doute, cela est vu d’un très mauvais œil par la direction, d’autant que chaque fois, le SLT se porte partie civile. Le patronat essaie donc de marginaliser ce syndicat et surtout de se débarrasser de ses militants.

Le secrétaire de section, F. Flatischler a ainsi été licencié le 26 décembre dernier alors qu’il faisait grève à la suite d’un nouvel accident de travail. Depuis, Usinor, qui a porté plainte pour “violation de domicile” (sic) lui demande 1 000 F de dommages et intérêts. Le SLT tout entier s’est mobilisé sur ce cas et des comités de soutien se sont mis en place à Paris et à Lyon. Ils doivent d’autant plus recevoir notre appui qu’à Usinor-Dunkerque, le SLT ne peut compter sur aucune aide de la part de la CFDT dont la plupart des militants du SLT sont issus. Dans les grandes confédérations on n’aime pas beaucoup les petits syndicats démocratiques et combatifs.

OBJECTION : LA RÉSOLUTION DE STRASBOURG

Davantage tissu de mesures vexatoires et dissuasives que réelle reconnaissance du droit à l’objection, le statut juridique des objecteurs est, dans la plupart des pays d’Europe, si affligeant que la résolution adoptée, le 7 février, par le Parlement européen, se révèle à bien des égards encourageante. Voté à une très forte majorité, à la suite du rapport de Maria Antonietta MACCIOCCHI (élue député du Partito Radicale italien et depuis lors apparentée au groupe socialiste), le texte considère en effet l’objection comme un droit fondamental de l’individu : Affirmant **“le droit de refuser d’effectuer le service militaire armé et celui de se retirer de ce service pour des raisons de conscience”** (donc la possibilité d’obtenir le statut pendant le service militaire), les députés européens estiment que la durée du service de remplacement **“ne devrait pas excéder la durée du service militaire”** ; Enfin, ils considèrent que **“nul tribunal ou commission ne (pouvant) pénétrer la conscience d’un individu”, “une déclaration individuelle motivée doit donc suffire, dans l’immense majorité des cas”**, à l’obtention du statut. Les législations européennes sont nettement moins avancées et la volonté proclamée d’harmoniser les dispositions législatives des dix Etats membres sur ces propositions a suscité la satisfaction des pacifistes.

Certes, cette résolution n’a pas force de loi et les Etats européens ne sont nullement tenus de s’aligner sur ces recommandations. Certes, la définition de l’objection est étriquée, le service civil et donc national ne sont pas plus remis en cause que le militarisme. Simone VEIL, qui a usé de son influence dans l’adoption du texte, ambitionne même qu’**“une telle réforme, qui permet à certains de trouver leur propre chemin, (...) réduise la portée des thèses pacifistes”** (sic). La volonté de récupération n’est, bien sûr, pas absente de ce vote de principe, en définitive plus d’ordre moral, humanitaire, que politique. Mais le Parlement européen n’est pas, que l’on sache, composé d’antimilitaristes opposés à la conscription...

A l’heure où les Etats multiplient les atteintes aux libertés et ce, notamment, en ce qui concerne l’objection (durée plus longue du service civil en RFA, situation lamentable des objecteurs en Grèce — socialiste —, retour des procès d’objecteurs insoumis et vote de la nouvelle loi sans cesse reporté en France), cette résolution n’en est que davantage utilisable comme référence tant auprès des tribunaux que des parlementaires de chacun des Etats. Ce n’est déjà pas si mal pour les objecteurs qui doivent, plus que jamais, éviter le double piège de la neutralisation et de la marginalisation.

KLAUS BARBIE

L’extradition de Klaus Barbie et le procès “historique” qui se prépare remettent à l’ordre du jour la question des crimes de guerre.

La présence en France d’un tortionnaire nazi agite beaucoup les esprits en ce moment. Peut-être est-ce l’heure de rouvrir des dossiers plus récents, et bien français, ceux de la torture en Algérie...

La vie tranquille de Klaus Barbie en Amérique Latine choquait beaucoup de nos contemporains. Qui s’émeut aujourd’hui de la retraite dorée, ou de la brillante carrière politique que connaissent nos anciens généraux tortionnaires d’Algérie ?

Quelle serait la réaction de l’opinion publique et du gouvernement français si l’Algérie demandait l’extradition des généraux Massu et Bigeard, ou de certains de leurs nombreux subordonnés qui, de près ou de loin, participèrent aux tortures de 1954 à 1962 ?

Peut-on établir des degrés dans l’horreur ? Attention ! Un tortionnaire peut en cacher beaucoup d’autres. (Groupe Antimilitariste des Mureaux, 14, chemin des Sarrazins , 78250 Meulun).

Image 4.4 “Nacer, c’est moi ! Nacer, c’est nous!” (*Agora* pp. 10)

While this first example of graffiti challenges the dehumanization of police's actions against young men in the banlieue, a second example related to the same protest illuminates more concretely the connection between the body and graffiti. A self-proclaimed "international libertarian review" based out of Toulouse called Agora published a short fait-divers about the 1983 protest, along with two photographs one of which contains graffiti, in its April 1983 edition (Image 4.4, pp. 248). [296] In the fait-divers, the anonymous author explicitly states that the policer officer who shot Nacer did so out of racism *("*Il grille un feu, il est jeune, il est nord-africain. Il n'en faut guère plus" ["He ran a red light; he's young; he's North African. That's pretty much all it takes."]) and drunkenness ("Le brigadier Lapeyre est ivre en fonction" ["Sergeant Lapeyre is on duty while intoxicated"])*;* he or she also situated the incident within a string of other incidents of police violence (in Nanterre and Montreuil) and racism (by right-wing FPIP). [297] The author even goes as far as to suggest some hidden connection between the police officer that shot Nacer and the fall of the French Empire *("*Le brigadier Lapeyre, fils de militaire mort en Indochine, l'ajuste et tire" ["Brigadier, Lapeyre, son of a military man who died in Indochina, takes aim at him and shoots"]). The author finally describes the protest in support of Nacer, which occurred on February 19th 1983, with some 4,000 young protestors participating, shouting the slogan *"*Nacer c'est moi ! Nacer c'est nous !" ["I am Nacer ! We are Nacer !"] (10)

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[296] For more information, see the entries for Agora on the *Fragments d'Histoire de la gauche radicale* website.

[297] The entire fait-divers, translated to English, is listed here: "Châtenay-Malabry. Five o'clock in the morning. Monday, February 14. Sergeant Lapeyre is drunk on duty. Same place, same time: Nacer Mraïdi, 17, is riding his moped without a helmet. He's heading toward his ghetto in La Butte Rouge. He runs a red light; he's young; he's North African. That's pretty much all it takes. Sergeant Lapeyre, son of a soldier who died in Indochina, takes aim and fires. The bullet hits Nacer in the head. Once again. Just like in Nanterre, in Gonesse, and a month later in Montreuil, the cops are hunting people based on their appearance. Why would they hold back? Cops and racists go unpunished. Let us remember the "five-year suspended sentence" handed down to that other Sergeant Marchaudon. Let us consider the racist behavior and remarks of the FPIP, a far-right union splinter group that continues to exist without the slightest interference. Who, then, is truly responsible? The Socialists who boast about their policies: "We've done more for police staffing than during the entire previous seven-year term." Thus, petty crime continues to bear the brunt of the mainstream discourse on "insecurity." The anger of the 4,000 young protesters on February 19, chanting: "I am Nacer! We are Nacer!" must, to be effective, result in the questioning of socialist police ideology and practices" (Amoros et al 10)

In the photograph on the bottom left, several protestors carry signs with a headshot of Nacer accompanied by the slogan "Aujourd'hui Nacer Mraïdi / Demain Qui ?" ["Today Nacer Mraïdi / Tomorrow Who?"]. In the photograph on the bottom right, a young man, who resembles Nacer from behind, paints more posters of Nacer's face on the town board of Sceaux, an upper-class city south of Paris. Beneath him, Nacer's name has been written in black spray-paint. Although his hand is in the air to glue the posters to the board, his situation in the photograph alludes that he may be the graffiti author. While Agora with its articles and photographs inscribes Nacer's story into "archival" memory, the protestors who took to the streets on February 19th inscribed Nacer's memory into the "repertoire," to borrow Diana Taylor's terminology.[298] Nacer, like other victims of police violence, was physically attacked and handicapped; his physical body (as well as his psyche) was forever altered by this interaction with the police. Although Nacer is not dead, the protestors "remember" a Nacer that existed before the attack by the police officer. Through ephemeral, "embodied" practices (carrying images of him during protests, posting posters of him on town bulletin boards, writing his name in spray-paint), the protestors attempt to "re-embody" Nacer – to give him agency to move through the streets in decency, a movement that has been denied to him by the police officer's actions. In this particular instance, graffiti brings Nacer's story, as well as his body, into the public arena. Indeed, in the second image, Nacer's body is "tripled": the man who looks like Nacer paints Nacer's image on the board, while the graffiti of Nacer's name acts as a third iteration of Nacer's body.

[298] "'Archival' memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change…Archival memory works across distance, over time and space; investigators can go back in time to reexamine an ancient manuscript, letters find their addresses through time and place, and computer discs at time cough up lost files with the right software…The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge…As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire to not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning" (Taylor 19-20).

In his analysis of October 17th, 1961, Algerian philosopher Sidi Mohammad Barkat argues that the violence that police officers enacted on protestors that evening—a violence that directly contradicts the French Republic's ideals of universalism and human dignity—was actually evidence of the Republic's long-standing practice of governing colonized populations differently than French citizens. Legal statues, such as the "Indigenous Code" of 1874, essentially outlined an "exceptional regime," in which the very bodies of Algerians were seen as fundamentally "different" and therefore subject to a "special regime of discipline and control" (156). The Algerians' "exceptional bodies" demarcated "a physical space subject to the rules of common law and perpetually governed by an oppressive police force," just as was seen on October 17th (156). That evening, however, the Algerian protestors attempted to overturn this "exceptionality." They practiced a "corporeal exhibition" in the streets of Paris (158); they made themselves visible in public spaces, and this action constituted a temporary freedom from this exceptional system ruling the colonial body. Although Barkat speaks about the Algerian War, I suggest we see vestiges of this colonial system in the ways in which the banlieue was policed at the end of the twentieth century. If instances of police brutality against immigrant youth in the banlieue are illustrations of the "exceptionality" of their bodies, the protestors in these two photographs are making visible their own bodies in an attempt to interrogate both their and Nacer's "exceptionality." This act is performative: it gives Nacer a new body that is not exceptional to but part of the French State.[299] Therefore, the protesters are using Nacer's body, particularly image of his face, and his graffitied first name to undermine this system of bodily exclusion. By making Nacer and *his body visible,* they question the legitimacy of the French State's power over their bodies. Moreover, their chant ("*I am Nacer ! We are Nacer !") and the caption of the photograph of*

[299] As Barkat says "[L]'exposition des corps est l'expression, chez le colonisé, d'un mode inédit d'existence" ["Displaying bodies is, for the colonized, an unprecedented manner of existence."] (Barkat 161). Hannah Feldman makes a similar argument about the importance of seeing the bodies of the protestors in *From a Nation Torn*.

*Nacer (“*Today Nacer Mraïdi / Tomorrow Who ?”) does something similar to Gaye’s photograph of graffiti. It groups together all passersby who are hearing the chant or reading the poster and reminds them of the possibility of being swept into the State’s violent politics at any moment. In other words, “we” are all Nacer, we are all “game” to the cops.

Later in that same year of 1983, altercations broke out between young people in the Lyon banlieue of Les Minguettes and police officers. During these events, a young organizer named Toumi Djaïda, the president of the SOS Avenir chapter in Les Minguettes, was shot and injured by a police officer. [300] Frustrated by the violence of the police and the rise of racist attacks on immigrant populations, Djaïda joined with Father Christophe Delorme and Pastor Jean Costil to organize a peaceful “march” against racism inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi. This march, called the March for Equality and Against Racism, began in October 1983 in Marseille with seventeen marchers. Drawing significant media attention, it eventually culminated in Paris in December of 1983 with more than 100,000 protestors. Djaïda and several of his co-organizers were welcomed into the Élysée by President François Mitterand where they discussed changes they would like to see for immigrants in France. Amadou Gaye, along with several other photographers, participated in the March as members of the press, documenting it for various publications, including Sans frontière, which published several exclusive editions on the March.

In December of 1983, the immigration newspaper Sans Frontière published a special edition, Marche: Marseille 15 octobre 1983 — Paris 3 décembre 1983, reporting on the march through photographs and texts.[301] In the Sans Frontière publications, I have found

[300] See “Marche: Marseille 15 octobre 1983 — Paris 3 décembre 1983” (1983) and *La Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme* (Hajjat 2013).

[301] This edition had several sections: introduction to the historical situation for the March, spotlights on organizers and participants of the March, reactions to the March, a photojournalism section on each part of the March, section on the important cities of the March, and finally a section on racist attacks against the marchers during their trajectory from Marseille to Paris.

several photographs of graffiti; however, this graffiti is not like those of the first two examples. It does not support immigrant populations, the youth in the banlieue, or the 1983 March. Instead, these graffiti inscriptions use racist rhetoric to express anger towards an immigration population living in France. However, both the situation of the photographs within the context of the "pro-immigration" newspaper reporting favorably on the March and the internal compositions of the photographs to include "passersby" challenge the nature of these racist writings. The first photograph to be analyzed appears in December 1983 edition in a photojournalistic section called "Égalité: Les premiers pas." On the page titled "La route est longue," there are three photographs, two taken by Alain Lefevre and a third by Brahim Chanchabi.[302]The image on the top right of the page, taken by Lefevre, shows protestors "editing" racist graffiti that they encountered on their journey (Image 4.5, pp. 254). The caption is:

> C'est dur de marcher…n'est-ce pas Driss à droite de la photo notre envoyé très spécial qui se détend… /À Marseille, des jeunes ont durant la marche effacé tous les graffitis racistes qu'ils ont trouvé sur leur passage / Mr Blocquaux, Chargé de mission auprès de Mme Dufoix est présent à titre officieux. Il se refuse à toute déclaration. Les premières fatiguées se font sentir, on se repose, on boit un coup. La route est longue…(23).
>
> It's hard to walk… isn't it, Driss, on the right of the photo, our very special correspondent, who's taking it easy… / In Marseille, during the march, some young people removed all the racist graffiti they found along the way / Mr. Blocquaux, Special Advisor to Ms. Dufoix, is present in an unofficial capacity. He refuses to make

[302] Copies of these editions were located in the Contemporaine Library archives.

any statements. The first signs of fatigue are setting in; we're taking a break, we're having a drink. The road is long…]

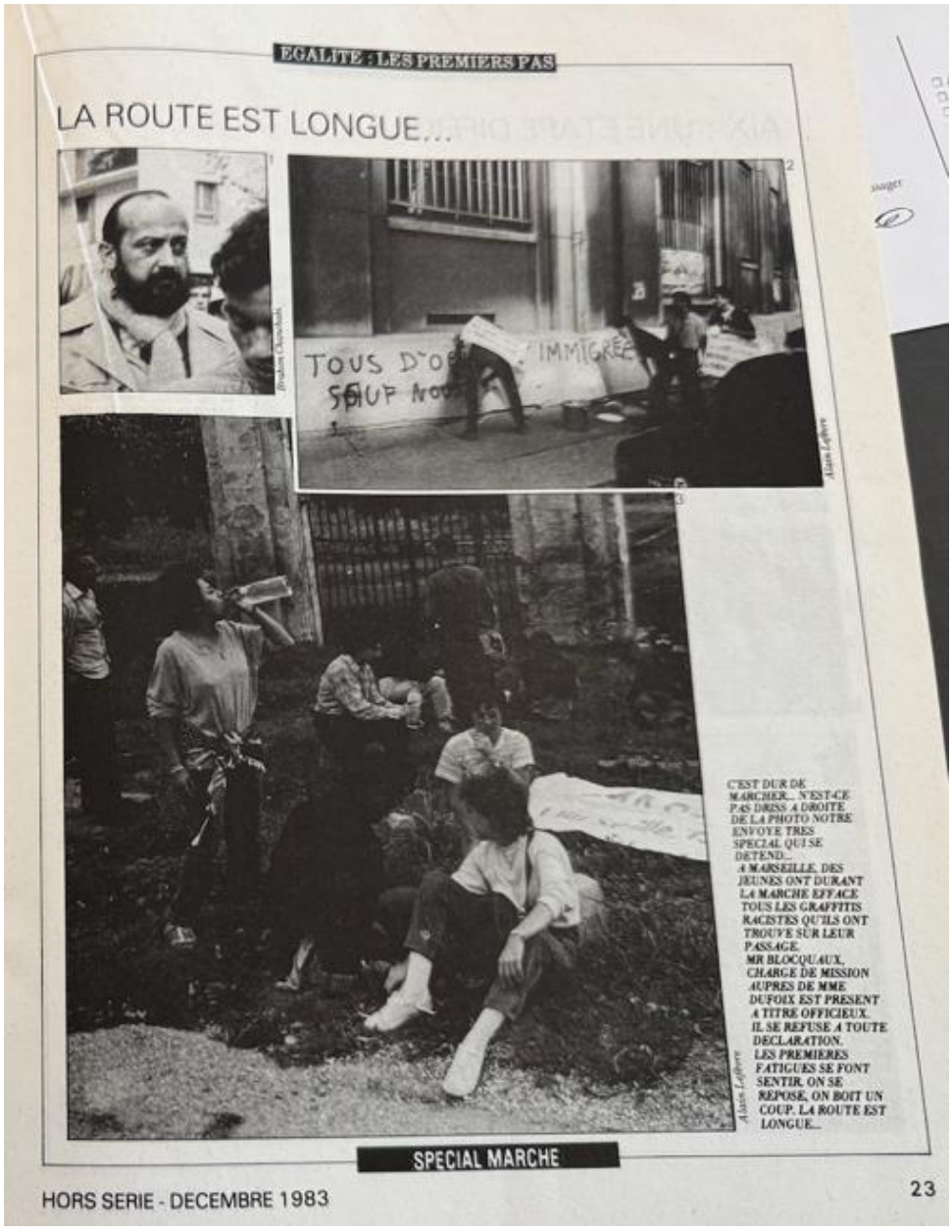


Image 4.5 "La Marche." *Sans Frontière,* December 1983, pp. 23.

According to the caption, this graffiti is written in the streets of Marseille, encountered early at the beginning of the March. It reads: "TOUS D'ORIGINE IMMIGRÉE SAUF NOUS" ["All of them are immigrants except for us."] Four young men are stopped in front of the graffiti, three of them are wearing signs on their bodies, presumably banners in support of the protest: one of the young men hunches over and appears to be striking through the "except for us" part of the graffiti with a marker or black paint. A second man hunches over next to a bucket of white paint and examines the graffiti, as if he is contemplating painting it over completely. The last two men watch the other two men.

This photograph illuminates several of the questions that emerge out of these debates and protests of the 1980s and 1990s: debates over immigration rights, question of national identity, and the role of the body in these concerns. In the French graffiti inscription, the phrase "d'origine immigrée" is better translated as "of immigrant origins" and this phrase often refers to the second-generation of Maghrebi immigrants, those young people who were born in France to immigrant parents. Summarizing research on the subject, Ayşe Tecmen notes:

> The use of the term 'immigré' is not only applied to those who are themselves immigrants, but also immigrants' children born and raised in France. Migrant, or 'étranger', was used to refer to the temporary character of migration, while the term 'immigré' highlights the permanence of African immigrants, perceived as being threatening national, cultural and social unity with unwelcome cultural, religious, social and linguistic differences (7).[303]

[303] In the mid 1970s, after a fairly liberal period of immigration in the 1960s and early 1970s, the Chirac and Barre governments stopped the flow of immigrants into France (Tecmen 8). In the 1980s and 1990s, Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front party began attacking immigration as a key element in their political domination – in 1986, for instance, they demanded, for instance, that "the second-generation immigrant needed to demand French nationality rather than acquiring it via the jus soli principle" (10). For an overview of immigration policies in France from the post-war period to present day, see the "Background" section in Dr.Ayşe Tecmen's report: *Migration, Integration and Citizenship in France between 1990 and 2018: The State of the Art* (2020)

By utilizing the term "d'origine immigrée" the graffiti alludes, therefore, to these tensions; it targets people from these populations that it considers non-French, despite their right to French citizenship through their birth and long-term residence in France.[304] This rhetoric reproduces the ideas of the far-right, in particular that of Jean-Marie Le Pen, who campaigned on a platform of "zero immigration" and advocated for sending immigrants back their countries of origin. Secondly, the graffiti uses, once again, the term "nous" to designate a circle of belonging. This "nous" is not inclusive to the passerby like the ones we have seen before; it designates two different groups that are at odds with one another. In this inscription, "everyone" is of "immigrant origins" (in the country? in Marseille? in their workplaces and universities?), except for "us," the anonymous writers of the graffiti. The protestor is erasing the "except for us" part of the graffiti; in that way, he makes the graffiti more inclusive. The new graffiti would read: "Everyone has immigrant origins." He erases the divisive "we," leaving behind the more extensive "tous." In addition to the strikethrough, his physical body blocks the word "d'origine" —leaving behind an even shorter phrase: "Everyone [is] an immigrant." Through both his physical re-writing and his body placement, the marcher "erases" the "racism" of the graffiti. Perhaps the final step will be to erase the entire graffiti, as the bucket of white paint might suggest, but, for now, this act of "editing" is an act of "creating" space for the bodies of those in the banlieue.

[304] The second-generation (those born in France) have the right to acquire citizenship when they come of age through France's mixture of jus soli and jus sanguinis. In 1993, the Méhaignerie law was passed which required all children who were born in France to immigrant parents to formally ask for citizenship between the ages of 16 and 21 instead of being awarded it automatically.

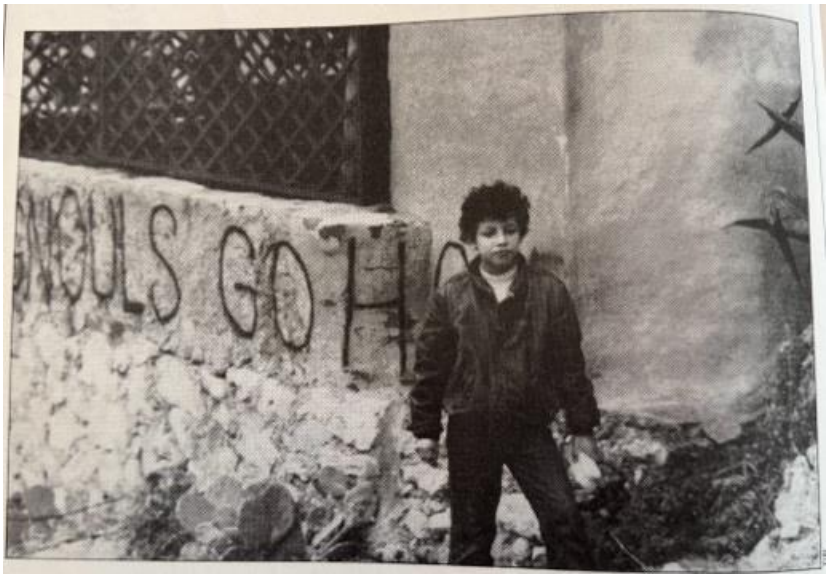


Image 4.6 Photograph taken by DR

Article “L’Effet marche” in *Sans Frontiere,* Janurary 1984.

A second photograph of graffiti taken during the March appears in the "After-March" section of the January 1984 volume of the Sans Frontière journal, called "The March Effect" (Image 4.6, pp. 257). This photograph is situated in an article, "The Immigrant March," written by Paul Priol, of the Immigrant Commission of the Unified Socialist Party. In his article, Priol responds to certain critics of the 1983 March who felt that it was the incorrect way to fight for immigration rights. [305] Priol refutes this by stating that the March accomplished two important tasks for the movement: it raised awareness for the debates around immigration and racism, and it concretely improved the lives of immigrants by securing the ten-year carte unique for certain immigrants who had lived in France for some time. In this short article, the author also suggests that the March was an important rebuttal against the extreme right-wing (especially the National Rally—then called the National Front) which had been on the rise in France since 1981, when they launched "a virulent campaign against undocumented immigrants, through the conflation of illegal = immigrants = problem populations" (11). The March, for Priol, is an antidote to this campaign because it both demonstrates how immigration is an advantage for France and upends the negative "image that certain people want to give about immigration" (12). At the end of the article, there is a corresponding "image" of immigration—a photograph, taken by someone called "DR," of a young boy, likely of Maghrebi origin, standing in front of a cement building with the graffiti inscription "Bougnouls Go Home" behind him. This inscription uses a derogatory French term for those of Maghrebi origin ("bougnouls"), as well as the English phrase, "Go

[305] In the article on pages 11-12 of the edition, Priol presents two part-counterargument to other immigration rights activists who critique the March and perceive it as form of "competition," referring specifically to the group Campagne Carte Unique. He argues that the March has the same goals as the Carte Unique, namely to open up discussion about immigration in national politics and to improve the lives of immigrants by some concrete measure. He argues that the Marchers accomplished both of those aims. They secured a step forward for immigrants (the Carte Unique) and they projected a new image of immigration: "Les Marcheurs sont tout bouleversé parce qu'ils n'ont rien à justifier. Ils sont d'ici et cela suffit pour qu'ils aient les mêmes droits que tout un chacun et surtout droit à la justice, à l'égalité" ["The Marchers are all shaken up because they have nothing to prove. They belong here, and that is enough to give them the same rights as everyone else—especially the right to justice and equality."] (12).

Home," often associated with anti-immigration rhetoric. Without background available on this anonymous graffiti, we cannot ascertain the intentions of the writers, but it is clear that the writing's message is xenophobic, denigrating North Africans with a pejorative term and suggesting they leave France to "go home" to North Africa. The irony of this writing is that the "immigrants" in question were previously subjects of the French Empire, many of whom immigrated to France after the fall of that Empire to support the French economy, and now castigated by inhabitants of that same ex-Empire.

The framing of the photograph "cuts" up the graffiti, both limiting the intensity of its racist writing through its framing by the photographer and through the body of the young boy who stands, in the center of the image, covering up the word "HOME." The photographer does not center the graffiti in his image; it is a part of the background. This framing, which prioritizes the young boy at its center, dismantles the racial slur behind him. The photographer "cuts" the racial slur with the edge of the frame, leaving only half of the word: "nouls." The viewer must reconstitute this word in his own mind, and therefore participate somewhat in the racism of its inscription. Second, the body of the boy also obstructs the graffiti message. Like the first image in Sans Frontière, the body of the protestor disrupts the racist graffiti. By positioning himself in front of the word "HOME," the boy's body comes to be a symbol for the idea of "home." In other words, in defiance of the graffiti, his physical body is "at home" in France; he belongs in the political and metaphorical body of the French Republic.

Graffiti Without a Body in Mehdi Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983)

In 1983, the same year as the March, Franco-Algerian Mehdi Charef published his first novel, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, one of the original *beur* novels, a literary genre that describes the experiences of the second-generation of Maghrebi immigrants living in

France. [306] [307] The protagonist of the novel is a young man named Madjid, son of Algerian immigrants, who lives in a low-income Parisian banlieue with his parents and siblings. His father, injured in a work accident, is mentally handicapped and cannot work. Therefore, his mother, Malika, works multiple jobs to keep the family afloat and urges Madjid, who left school early due to poor academic performance, to find a job to help support the family. Throughout the novel, Madjid struggles to find work or purpose in his life and spends a significant amount of time with his best friend, Pat, an impoverished "Français de souche" who also lives in the HLM. Together they commit petty crime, smoke marijuana, and loiter with other friends. At the end of the novel, Madjid finally finds a factory job in which he excels; however, he quits the job when the foreman fires Pat for incompetence. Finally, the two of them join other friends and take a joy ride in a stolen car. Pat and Madjid are arrested by the police for speeding and grand theft auto. Although Madjid escapes arrest at first, he decides to turn himself in, so that he can go to jail with Pat, who was caught by the police in the first raid. The novel ends with the two friends riding in the back of a police car on their way to jail together, Madjid falling asleep.

In Charef's novel, the space of the banlieue is marked by graffiti. Graffiti is, for the general public, a recognizable marker of this particular urban space, so much so that, on the back cover of the novel, the publisher uses graffiti as a way to introduce the story's setting:

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[306] Only two years after its publication, Mehdi Charef was asked to adapt the novel for the film screen. The film, with a slightly different name Le thé au harem d'Archimède, was released in 1985 and received critical acclaim (Xavier 328). It also marked the beginning of a genre of films depicting the experiences of second-generation immigrants (beur cinema) which was later transformed into banlieue cinema (Millérili).

[307] Beur literature is a genre that began in France in the 1980s; it focuses on the experiences of the second-generation of Maghreb immigrants in France, like Charef who immigrated to France from Algeria when he was eleven years old. Beur literature often takes inspiration from the real lives of its authors, touching on themes related to the cultural confusion of growing up with immigrant parents in France, a lack of and consequent search for personal identity, racial and societal discrimination, poverty, childhood or adolescent experiences, and catharsis through writing (Reynés-Linares 2015). Charef's novel focuses on many of these themes, and he has spoken about how it was loosely based on his own life and his time living in both the "bidonville" of Nanterre and, later, a "cite de transit." The word "beur," a verlan (inverted slang) of the word "arabe," was originally used as a racial slur to refer to Arab people, specifically those from the Maghreb. In the 1980s, this second generation of Maghrebin immigrants worked to "reclaim" the term "beur," using it to self-describe.

> Une cité H.L.M. Sur les murs : graffitis, slogans, appels de détresse, dessins obscènes. Madjid vit là. Il est fils d'immigrés, paumé entre deux cultures, deux langues, deux couleurs de peau, et s'invente ses propres racines, ses attaches. Il attend. Sans trop y penser à cause de l'angoisse, insupportable. La peur règne. La violence. L'amour aussi. Pour la mère Malika, les frères et sœurs, le père — un petit vieux tombé d'un toit et qui a perdu la raison. Pour les copains et l'ami Pat, celui des bons et des mauvais coups, de la drague et de la drogue. La tendresse, l'amitié, quelques rires : ce sont les seules lueurs dans une existence vouée à l'échec. 'Ça chante pas le béton, ça hurle au désespoir comme les loups dans la fôret, les pattes dans la neige, et qui n'ont même plus la force de creuser un trou pour y mourir. (Back Cover, Charef)
>
> [A public housing project. On the walls: graffiti, slogans, cries for help, obscene drawings. Madjid lives there. He is the son of immigrants, lost between two cultures, two languages, two skin colors, and is inventing his own roots, his own ties. He waits. Without thinking about it too much because of the unbearable anxiety. Fear reigns. Violence. Love, too. For his mother Malika, his brothers and sisters, his father—an old man who fell from a roof and lost his mind. For his buddies and his friend Pat, the one for good times and bad, for flirting and drugs. Tenderness, friendship, a few laughs: these are the only glimmers of light in a life doomed to failure. 'Concrete doesn't sing; it howls in despair like wolves in the forest, their paws in the snow, and who no longer even have the strength to dig a hole to die in.']

While the novel does contain instances of graffiti, it is much less central to the story than this back cover would suggest. Moreover, this graffiti differs from that which we saw in *Sans Frontière* or in the photographs of Amadou Gaye; it does not necessarily attempt to "resist" the French State or to even to participate in the debate around immigration, the banlieue, or police violence. Instead, it expresses the despair felt by those in the banlieue, those who have

found themselves, for various economic and xenophobic reasons, living difficult lives in these spaces. In this section, I assert that, in Charef's novel, the walls of the banlieue are a metaphor for the bodies of its inhabitants. In this way, the graffiti in Charef's novel makes visible the despair experienced by the residents of the banlieue in their bodies; it is this bodily despair which fuels much of the conflict of the novel. The novel's graffiti are attempts by the residents to chronicle their lives– to "write" their existences in a space that threatens to crush them. Like in Sebbar's novella in *La Seine était rouge*, the graffiti writing is never narrated; instead, we read the graffiti through Madjid, the character who "encounters" both examples of banlieue graffiti. Madjid, a passive body himself, has no power to activate this graffiti; therefore, the graffiti remains passive in Charef's novel, a reflection of circumstances rather than a generator of political change.

At the start of the novel, Madjid is working on his motorcycle in the basement of his family's apartment complex. When he leaves the basement, he stumbles upon Farid, a young boy from his neighborhood, semi-conscious from drug usage:

> Et là, dans ce réduit, dans ce débarras, entre un sommier dont les ressorts ont crevé la toile juste qu'aux endroits où il y a des taches d'urine et un Frigidaire, porte ouverte, malade, descendu certainement en toute hâte une nuit, là, dans une forte odeur d'hôpital, est allongé le petit Farid, dix-neuf ans, et qui en paraît quinze, le visage sec et amaigri sous une barbe juvénile, complètement dans le cirage. (Charef 10)
>
> [And there, in that tiny room, in that storage closet, between a box spring—whose springs have pierced the fabric just where there are urine stains—and a Frigidaire with its door open, broken, no doubt hastily brought down one night, there, amid a strong hospital-like smell, lies little Farid, nineteen years old but looking fifteen, his face gaunt and emaciated beneath a youthful beard, completely wasted away.]

This scene of Farid in the basement is macabre. The space is small and constricted ("réduit," "débarras"), decaying, disintegrating, and sickly ("un sommier dont les ressorts ont ***crevé*** la toile," "des taches d'urine," "un Frigidaire…malade," "une forte odeur d'hôpital"). In this opening scene, the narrator paints a picture of decomposition. The basement, where Farid has made his "home," has been left to rot, to ooze, to fester (11). As a result, Farid himself has begun to take on the characteristics of his home, the basement; he has a "dry and thin face", and his body skeletal (10). Death and decay surround Farid, so much so that he becomes an embodiment of destruction. Charef also demonstrates Farid's self-destruction through a long series of prepositional and adjectival phrases, linked by commas, and a passive verb construction. These grammatical choices delay the reader's access to the subject of the sentence, "Farid," and reinforces Farid's lack of subjectivity and agency in his own life. Barely alive, Farid is simply another inanimate and dirty "object" in the space, like the fridge and bed springs that precede him in the list of describing phrases. Moreover, this "build-up" to Farid's presence creates a sense of fatigue in the reader, who is presented with a series of negatively charged images before arriving at Farid. This choice highlights the hopelessness of the situation with which Madjid and Farid are faced. Farid is barely conscious and, according to the narrator, "certainly in the middle of working himself to death, and everyone doesn't care" (10-11). Madjid is unable to breathe in the basement faced with this sight. There is a fatalism to this opening scene: Farid is dying from drug abuse, everyone is aware, and yet no one in the banlieue reaches out to help him. Rather, they leave him alone in the dirty basement of the HLM to die in a grave below their feet.

Curiously, it is in this situation that graffiti first appears in the novel. Madjid becomes uncomfortable with the sight of Farid, takes out a cigarette, and leaves it on Farid's stomach as an act of kindness before leaving. Ignoring the cigarette, Farid sips instead on his canister

of ether, a habit which has garnered him the nickname “Rustine” after the brand name of a famous bike patch:

> Madjid s’impatiente. Les toiles d’araignée poussiéreuses pendant du plafond suintait de cette cave dont Farid a fait sa maison. Les murs sont chargés de graffiti, desseins, slogans.
>
> Dans l’obscurité, on peut lire, entrevoir, des mots ou moitiés de mots, “foutre,” “cri” “j’irai bien,” “marre,” à la craie rouge.
>
> Madjid essaie de lire, de piger. Il n’y a rien à comprendre, que dalle ! Rien à dire ! Rien à faire !
>
> Vaut mieux ne plus revenir dans cette putain de cave, se dit-il.
>
> Tout est devant lui, le désespoir, ça fout les jetons, ça fourmille au creux de l’échine, et ça refroidit le dos. Faut mettre les santiagos, et pas demander son reste. Madjid quitte Rustine en grillant sa gitane.
>
> Dans le hall, il retrouve la lumière forte et blanche des néons, et c’est mieux comme ça ! Il respire. (11-12)
>
> [Madjid is getting impatient. Dusty cobwebs hang from the ceiling, oozing from this basement that Farid has made his home. The walls are covered with graffiti, drawings, and slogans.
>
> In the darkness, you can make out, or catch glimpses of, words or half-words: “fuck,” “scream,” “I’d feel better,” “fed up,” written in red chalk.
>
> Madjid tries to read, to make sense of it. There’s nothing to understand, nothing at all! Nothing to say!
>
> Nothing to do!
>
> Better not to come back to this fucking basement, he tells himself.

It's all right in front of him, despair—it's terrifying, it sends shivers down his spine, and it sends a chill down his back. He's gotta get the hell out of here, and not look back. Madjid leaves Rustine, lighting up his cigarette.

In the hallway, he's met with the bright, white light of the overhead lights, and that's better! He breathes.]

The scrawled and illegible graffiti is represented as part and parcel of this decrepit environment, which includes a skeletal Farid, an abandoned fridge, a destroyed bedframe, and dusty spiderwebs. The walls are described as "full" of graffiti, busy and hectic with the burden of a series of inscriptions. The graffiti inscriptions themselves are also "full" of emotions; "**f**outre," "cri" "j'irai bien," "marre," are all terms connected to pain or strong emotion (fear, anger, frustration, depression)**.**[308]

When describing the wall of graffiti, the narrator switches to the impersonal pronoun ("one"), which appears rarely in the novel. The novel's third-person omniscient narrator typically narrates through Madjid's perspective, but this "one" detaches the narrator from Madjid for a moment. This subtle shift in subjectivity invites the reader to try to "see" or "glimpse" the writings themselves rather than through Madjid's eyes. The reader becomes, for a brief moment, an independent "passerby" to the graffiti. This moment passes quickly. Madjid "tries to read, to understand" the graffiti on the walls, and the narrator dons Madjid's perspective again, exclaiming: "There is nothing to understand! Nothing!" The exclamation points reinforce both the frustration and anger of Madjid, and the omniscient narrator by proxy. Written in red chalk, partially erased, and illegible, this fragmented graffiti has no staying power and no real message for the passerby. It is irrelevant both to Madjid and to the reader, and this passage highlights the graffiti's inability to speak to the plight of the people it

[308] "Foutre" could be related to mocking someone or something ("se foutrer de quelqu'un") or to anger towards someone ("Va te faire foutre"- go fuck yourself), and "marre" could be something similar ("marrer" meaning to giggle) or "J'en ai marre" (I'm fed up!)

surrounds; it simply has "nothing to say" about Farid or the desolation that surrounds him. [309] Finally, Madjid leaves after lighting Farid's cigarette, and the "strong and white" neon lights of the apartment lobby allow him to finally breathe. It is as if Madjid emerges from Farid's tomb into the light of day, from death to life. The fragmented graffiti in the basement mimics the fragmented and deteriorated nature of Farid and his environment; it also marks his body's (potentially final) resting place, like the words on a tombstone, but the meaning of this graffiti is as inscrutable and "unreadable" as the situation Madjid finds Farid in.

When faced with Farid's dying body and accompanying graffiti inscriptions, Madjid's own body experiences a sense of "despair": "Tout est devant lui, le désespoir, ça fout les jetons, ça fourmille au creux de l'échine, et ça refroidit le dos." The despair is felt in his body, and it produces physical sensations: the feeling of sudden excretion (foutre les jetons), a tingling of pins and needles in his spine (fourmiller l'échine), and a chilling feeling in his back (refroidir le dos). Furthermore, when he is in the basement, his breathing is restricted, only returning when he escapes the scene and returns to ground-level, to the entryway of the apartment complex. I propose that Madjid's experience in the basement with Farid is an allegory for the experience of living in the cité itself. As we will see, Charef's novel constructs an image of the banlieue that mirrors that of Farid's basement home. Some pages after Farid's introduction, the narrator describes the banlieue (somewhat ironically) as a space

[309] For Charef, writing was both a "refuge" and a "crime," and he credits the he credits the banlieue as the space where he developed this desire: "La banlieue, c'est aussi l'école où j'ai appris à lire et à écrire, où j'ai été porté par des instituteurs et institutrices bienveillants qui, en lisant les textes que j'écrivais, m'ont donné envie d'écrire. De toute façon, des voisins français nous n'en avions pas. Tout est passé par les instituteurs et les institutrices. Lors des résidences que je réalise en banlieue, je constate que c'est toujours l'école qui assure ce rôle d'accompagnement aujourd'hui. Et les bibliothèques sont ouvertes à tous, dans tous les quartiers. Moi-même, tous les samedis matin, je vais à la bibliothèque de Bezons où je retrouve des amis et je vois ce qui s'y passe, comme un petit rituel hebdomadaire." ["The suburbs are also where I went to school—where I learned to read and write, and where I was supported by caring teachers who, by reading the stories I wrote, inspired me to write. In any case, we didn't have any French neighbors. Everything came through the teachers. During the artistic residencies I do in the suburbs, I see that it's still the school that plays this mentoring role today. And the libraries are open to everyone, in every neighborhood. I myself go to the Bezons library every Saturday morning, where I meet up with friends and see what's going on there—it's like a little weekly ritual."] (Charef "L'écriture est un refuge et un délit" 190).

of fear: "fear reigns in the cité**"** and "fear dominates the cité and its inhabitants**"** (#) This fear, whether real or imagined, is felt corporeally by several inhabitants. The narrator couches these statements about "fear" in sarcasm, satirizing how older inhabitants "defend" themselves from this fear (which is localized in the "youth" populations) by buying stronger locks or guard-dogs. This fear comes to a head multiple times, in particular during the violent fights between the younger and older generations of HLM residents and in the interactions with police officers.[310]

The second instance of graffiti in Charef's novel occurs some ten pages later when Madjid is walking through the HLM. Madjid leaves his parents' building on "Azalea Alley," turning onto "Acaia Alley." The omniscient narrator emphatically comments on the floral street names: "Toutes les allées ici portent des noms des fleurs. La Cité de Fleurs, que ça s'appelle !!!" ["All the alleys here are named after flowers. The City of Flowers—that's what it's called!!!"] (23). This exclamation is laced with sarcasm and irony. Although the streets all are named after flowers, there are no *actual* flowers anywhere in the *cité*. In lieu of nature, the banlieue is industrial and urban, characterized by "concrete," cars, and stark architecture, its only "natural" element the excrement of dogs and humans: "Du béton, des bagnoles en long, en large, en travers, de l'urine et des crottes de chiens. Des bâtiments hauts, longs, sans cœur ni âme. Sans joie, ni rires, que des plaintes, que du malheur" ["Tall, long buildings, soulless and heartless. No joy, no laughter—just complaints, just misery."] (23-4). The "immense" cité is trapped between freeways, factories, and the police; even the soccer field is "fenced with wire." Just as the basement crushes both Farid and Madjid in the first excerpt, the banlieue itself crushes the "joy" of its inhabitants through its prison-like

[310] One such altercation is early in the novel when the young people are playing music on a boombox outside. One of the older neighbors gets angry and throws a beer bottle at them. Later, Pat sets fire to that neighbor's car. The most serious altercation is the climax of the story: Madjid and all of his friends go to the basement to hang out and smoke a joint of marijuana when several older residents, led by Pelletier, storm the basement with tear gas and physically attack them.

structure, which, like the basement, smells of "urine" and is "soulless." This irony of the street names is further highlighted as the narrator, again, laments*: "*Les fleurs ! Les fleurs ! … Et sur les murs de béton, des graffitis, des slogans, des appels de détresse, des S.O.S., en forme de poing levé" [" The flowers! The flowers! …And on the concrete walls, graffiti, slogans, cries for help, S.O.S.s, in the shape of a raised fist."] (25). In lieu of flowers, the cité is saturated with graffiti. This graffiti springs up naturally and spontaneously, like flowers, but, as we will see, it does not ease the hopelessness of the overpowering "concrete."

The inscriptions Madjid encounters in this passage are multi-faceted attempts to chronicle life in the banlieue. Some of this graffiti seems vaguely political, specifically the reference to the raised fist, a symbol of revolt used by Marxists, communists, anarchists, and Black liberationists. Moreover, the reference to "slogans" also suggests some sort of political writing that is never explored in detail. Alongside these writings appear graffiti related to young love affairs or male bravado: hearts of adolescents who have crushes on each other and crude drawings of genitalia. There are also those graffiti writings that the narrator describes as "stupidities," or graffiti inscriptions that belittle other members of the banlieue (25). For instance, these graffiti inscriptions often attempt to sully the reputations of young women who live in the neighborhood: "'Annie F. prend la pillule' and 'Fatima B. s'est avorter [sic]'" ["'Annie is on the pill'" and 'Fatima B. got an abortion [sic]'".[311] These sorts of inscriptions are ways for the banlieue inhabitants to disparage their neighbors in order to assert control and fight against their hopelessness: "Tout ce qui rit ou se moque du malheur des autres s'inscrit sur les murs. Une façon comme une autre de se croire supérieur, dans la même connerie, le même désespoir" ["Anything that mocks or laughs at other people's misfortune

[311] This graffiti inscription utilizes the infinitive of the verb instead of the past participle, a common mistake especially because the two spellings sound exactly the same when read aloud. By recording this grammatical error, Charef implies perhaps the fact that many in the banlieue have limited schooling, such as Madjid, or are second language-learners, like Malika.

gets scrawled on the walls. Just another way of feeling superior, caught up in the same nonsense, the same despair"].

This graffiti registers the lives of the banlieue residents on the walls; returning to Baudrillard, it is an effort, albeit failed, to make the walls into some sort of "social body." However, as this graffiti shows us, this "social body" does not exist in the banlieue and cannot be created via urban inscriptions. Instead of liberating the people of the cité, the graffiti in Charef's novel perpetuates an atmosphere of surveillance where "everyone spies on each other," "[there is] no private life," and everything is used to "counterattack one's neighbor" (26). This interpersonal guerilla graffiti, then, effectively reinforces the oppressive architecture of the banlieue and its residents' precarious social and economic situations. Despite the vague reference to "raised fists" and "slogans," the graffiti described by Charef's narrator is not empowering the banlieue residents; it tears them down. By anonymously sharing the secrets of their neighbors on the walls, the banlieue residents draw attention away from themselves and make themselves feel "superior" to their neighbors. Unfortunately, this practice of graffiti is another form of "policing" the banlieue, and, in the case of Annie and Fatima, policing the bodies of young women. The graffiti denigrates the young women for practicing bodily autonomy and having sexual intercourse, while the young men of the banlieue frequent prostitutes without being "written up" on the walls. Furthermore, the young women who are having sexual intercourse may be doing so not because they desire it, but because they are under economic duress, like Pat's sister, Chantal, due to the unemployment that plagues the young *men* in the banlieue. Madjid himself discovers Chantal working as a prostitute in Paris, when he goes to solicit sex work and discovers that the woman that he is interested in is Chantal. The shame and disgust he feels after this revelation mimics the shame he feels when faced with Farid. The banlieue graffiti writers take none of these things into consideration but rather see these secrets as tools to get something they want ("un joint,

une baise, une cuite…" ["a joint, a fuck, a drunken binge"]). Furthermore, certain people write the type of graffiti, like the graffiti about Fatima's abortion, that causes physical violence and the intervention of police officers: "Ou alors : 'Fatima B. s'est avorter', le genre, là qui fait d'énormes histoires dans le sang parfois…et les flics" ["Or: 'Fatima had an abortion,' the kind of thing that makes a huge fuss, sometimes involving bloodshed….and the police"] (26). This graffiti does not unite any sort of political body to fight against the conditions that created the banlieue (or the police violence that plagues it). It represents the last-ditch efforts of despairing individuals to assert agency in their lives, and it reinforces the very police state that plagues the banlieue.

Throughout the novel, Charef uses the descriptor "concrete" to describe the banlieue; as David Fieni says, he "uses "concrete" as a metonym for the drab milieu of the housing project itself" ("Graffiti and Street Art" 298) This descriptor is so frequent that "the concrete" becomes another character in the story. On page 62, "concrete" is personified, transformed into a human body, and revealed to have power over the bodies of the children raised in the neighborhood:

> Dans le béton, qu'ils poussent, les enfants. Ils grandissent et lui ressemblent, à ce béton sec et froid. Ils sont sec et froids aussi, durs, apparemment indestructibles, mais il y a aussi des fissures dans le béton. Quand il pleut, ça les distingue mieux, c'est comme des larmes qui coulent sur leurs joues pâles d'un petit à qui on a taxé ses billes et qu'a pas de grand frère pour le défendre. Ça se lézarde sur leur peau, et ça surprend et ça descend. Comme un fleuve sur une de ces cartes de géographie qu'on essayait de nous faire entrer dans la tête à grands coups de pied au cul, à nous dégouter les voyages. (62)
>
> [In the concrete, the children grow. They grow up and come to resemble it—that dry, cold concrete. They, too, are dry and cold, hard, seemingly indestructible, but there

are cracks in the concrete as well. When it rains, you can see them better; they're like tears streaming down the pale cheeks of a little boy whose marbles have been taken and who has no big brother to defend him. It cracks on their skin, and it surprises and flows down. Like a river on one of those geography maps they tried to cram into our heads with hard kicks in the butt, to make us hate travel]

In this passage, the narrator makes an implicit connection between the absent flowers of the previous passage and the children in the banlieue: the children themselves "grow" and "push through" like flowers "in the concrete." As they mature, they even start to "resemble" the "dry and cold" stone. The bodies of the children become a metaphor for the urban environment that surrounds them. Furthermore, like concrete, "fissures" appear in their exteriors. When "it rains" (another natural metaphor used here to refer to difficult life circumstances), tears fall on their cheeks, just as "fissures" might appear in concrete when it gets too wet. These tears trace "rivers" on the "geography maps" of their bodies. In the first part of the description, the bodies of the children are described to be *like* concrete. In this second part, their bodies become transformed once again into maps, maps that taught these young people to "hate travel," so that they would not be tempted to leave their space in the banlieue, the stigmatized space of the periphery and look for a space in the city center, the place of power. By making this comparison between body and map, the children's bodies become reminders of the ways power maps itself onto the built environment of the city, pushing, like Lefebvre argued, the undesirable populations to the periphery.

The "concrete" of the banlieue affects the children just as Farid's situation affects Madjid: it produces a host of negative physical sensations and bodily experiences. If the youth of the banlieue cannot find some hope in their lives as they grow older, they become violent, like a "volcano…[that] evacuates sluggish energy from its gut" (63). Once someone reaches that point, the narrator argues that they are "irrecuperable," unable to "recover" from

the weight of the concrete. Once a young person hits that point of no-return, the concrete becomes physically embedded in their bodies:

> [Le béton] est partout présent, pesant, dans les gestes, dans la voix, dans le langage jusqu'au fond des yeux, jusqu'au bout des ongles. Sur les bras il se transforme en trèfle à quatre feuilles tatouées en vert bouteille et dédié à sa mère, avec une rose. A jamais. Il suit partout comme une ombre… (63)
>
> [[Concrete] is everywhere, heavy, in his movements, in his voice, in his speech—right down to the depths of his eyes, right to the tips of his fingernails. On his arms, it transforms into a four-leaf clover tattooed in emerald green and dedicated to his mother, along with a rose. Forever. It follows him everywhere like a shadow…]

This concrete "seeps" into the skin, inseparable from one's "shadow,"; it is omnipresent and oppressive. The concrete haunts those who live in the cité; it becomes an inherent part of them, something that marks them forever and inserts itself into their physical bodies like a parasite.

The béton of the banlieue drains not only the bodies of the young people like Farid and Madjid, but also those of the older population, such as Josette. Josette, a friend of Malika, Madjid's mother, is a single mother to the young boy, Stéphane. She lives in the cité and works at a nearby factory, where her fellow factory workers are going on strike. As she is a new hire, she has no legal protection to strike and will likely get fired. In one scene, she contemplates this dilemma as she prepares a meager dinner for her son. Her hopelessness is felt in her body, a body that has lost touch with the world around her:

> La cité s'endort sur les âmes seules. Elle n'attend rien, Josette. Son corps, son corps perdu, elle lui laisse juste une petite fente d'aération, pour qu'il respire, pour se le garder, pour se le préserver, pour des nuits encore plus dures, les nuits sans sommeil, parce que la peur, parce que la solitude. Il faut tirer les rideaux, pour cacher cette

peur, cette solitude, puis il y a toujours plus seul que soi. Faut se donner du courage (67).

[The city falls asleep over lonely souls.Josette expects nothing. Her body, her lost body—she leaves it just a small vent so it can breathe, to keep it, to preserve it, for even harder nights, sleepless nights, because of fear, because of loneliness. You have to draw the curtains, to hide that fear, that loneliness, and then there's always someone lonelier than you. You have to pluck up your courage].

Like with Madjid, the despair of the banlieue produces a disconnection between body and mind. Just as Madjid "must put on his cowboy boots" and flee the scene of despair in the basement in order to escape this bodily discomfort, Josette "must close the curtains…must psych herself up," only allowing herself a "crack of ventilation" for her "lost body." While Glenn W. Fetzer identifies Madjid's key problem in the novel as one of memory, I see Madjid's central issue as his refusal to face the "despair" he encounters every day and make sense of it. However, I do agree with Fetzer's assessment that part of Madjid's failure to secure a personal identity is his "disengagement with the world beyond the immediate moment" (338). He simply cannot linger on the implications of the present, certainly when faced with scenes such as Farid. In contrast with Madjid who uses sexual encounter as an escape from physical discomfort, Josette's disconnect produces a sexual impotency, one in which she cannot remember the last time she could "feel her own body" (68). She fears her body no longer "responds" to her. This comes to a head later in the novel, when she does get fired from her job at the factory, and eventually tries to commit suicide by throwing her body off of the apartment balcony, finally completely disconnected from her life, her child, her body, and the world around her.

Charef's novel is not necessarily optimistic about the liberatory properties of banlieue graffiti, nor does it represent graffiti related to the contemporary political situation in the

banlieues. The graffiti in Charef's novel merely chronicles the daily lives of the banlieue and its residents; in this way, it chronicles, to invoke Baudrillard again, the emergence of some sort of "social body" of the banlieue. However, this "social body" is different from Baudrillard's idea. The graffiti in Charef's novel does not destroy the architecture of the banlieue as Baudrillard's tags do, and it also does not repurpose that architecture into a "body without end or beginning." It also does not challenge the dehumanization of banlieue youth, like the graffiti in Chatenay-Malabray captured by Amadou Gaye. Instead, it merely *reflects* the fragmented and disjointed social body that surrounds it, and, in this way, it *reflects* the intransigence of the concrete (and the banlieue) itself. [312] As David Fieni argues, the graffiti is a "sign of social decay…that parallel's Charef's very writing as the characters echo the uncensored, frequently misogynistic language of the graffiti in the novel" (298). Moreover, many of the graffiti inscriptions "police" the banlieue inhabitants through shame, breeding a social body where individuals cross their neighbors in order to experience some sort of "superiority." There is no solidarity within this greater community, and these graffiti inscriptions reveal that lack of solidarity, like "fissures" in the concrete of the community.[313]

Strangely, Madjid does not write graffiti in the novel and neither do his friends, although they are certainly the young people that we assume would be writing graffiti. In this

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[312] "Beyond using graffiti as a symptom of delinquency or a sign of social decay, Charef's novel in many ways can be said to model itself on the act of writing graffiti itself. Just as he uses the term "concrete" as a metonym for the drab milieu of the housing project itself, graffiti appears in the novel in a way that parallels Charef's very writing, as the characters echo the uncensored, frequently misogynistic language of the graffiti in the novel." (Fieni 298)

[313] This breakdown of social connections is the final characteristic of "advanced marginality" in developed communities according to Loïc Waquant: "In [Loïc Waquant's] comparative research on Chicago ghettos and the Parisian banlieue, he lists six key characteristics that constitute the state of advanced marginality in developed economies and suggests that greater levels of development lead to more evolved modes of exclusion. First is the reintroduction of short-term wage laborers in place of long-term salaried employees. This fragments the labor force in favor of the upper class residing in the city core while peripheral districts become "border zones of the employment sphere." A second facet is the disconnection of the lower class from macroeconomic trends. As the market fluctuates, elites reap the benefits of economic upturns and such gains do not trickle down to the poor; instead, the poor are cut out of the equation altogether. Third, the physical space of the periphery becomes increasingly isolated. Fourth, social alienation is exacerbated by the isolated space. Fifth, Wacquant refers to "the disappearance of a viable hinterland" as a haven for the urban poor. Finally, groups lose their terms of communal solidarity, resulting in a "de-proletarianization" process" (Angélil and Siress 2012).

way, the graffiti is disembodied, disconnected from its writers. This disembodiment grants a certain free-floating significance to graffiti; it can belong to anyone, it could have been authored by anyone. For instance, Fieni argues that banlieue graffiti "creates a *mobile geography, a* new way of relating to the earth and marking one's position on it in a way that does not presuppose a fixed, sedentary writer or reader" ("What a Wall Wants" 79). Fieni goes on to invoke the ideas of Henri Lefebvre, arguing that the "deterriotialized sign" of graffiti "bypasses technocratic legislative procures and claims an immediate 'right to the city'" (79).[314] While this may be true in a general sense, I argue that in the case of Charef's novel, it is quite the opposite. The disembodied graffiti written on the walls of Farid's basement and on the walls of the concrete apartment complexes does not assert an active claim over the city, it functions as passive history of the city. This passivity is magnified by the passivity of the bodies who encounter it, like that of Madjid and Farid. In the first example, Farid is a passive body, incapacitated due to his drug usage, sprawled in front of a wall of graffiti. Madjid, who encounters him, is rendered similarly paralyzed by both the sight of Farid and the meaningless graffiti. In the second example, the Madjid encounters this graffiti on his way to meet his friends, directly after encountering Pelletier, who hates the young people in the neighborhood and threatens them with his German shepherd. Pelletier is one of the HLM residents that is in a "war" with the youth (36); the graffiti in this scene can be read as a reflection of this war. It is impossible for banlieue residents to assert their bodily agency against the French State, if they are constantly locked in a battle with their neighbors. In conclusion, Charef's graffiti illustrates the "passivity" of the banlieue political body, who

[314] When writing about President Nicolas Sarkozy's inflammatory statements about banlieue youth in 2005 ("il faut nettoyer au Karcher" ["we must clean with with Karcher power hoses"]), David Fieni argues that "Sarkozy's comments…equate banlieue youth (la racaille) with their signs of passage through urban space (le graff, as graffiti is often called). The young banlieusards themselves become illegible signs on the new smooth spaces of the HLM housing estates" (73).[314] What I understand from Fieni's statement is that there is a certain conflation on the part of Sarkozy of the young people in the banlieue and its graffiti; therefore, the graffiti itself comes to "stand" in for the young population (i.e. to clean the graffiti of the banlieue with a power-hose is the same as "eliminating" its young population).

cannot rise up politically because their physical bodies are locked in endless struggles, whether with drugs like Farid or with each other like Madjid and Pelletier.

Ambiguous Graffiti in Matthieu Kassovitz' *La Haine* (1995)

Like Mehdi Charef's novel, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, in which Madjid and his friends wander both their *cité* in the banlieue of Paris and the *city* of Paris, Matthieu Kassovitz's film *La Haine* follows three young men from the banlieue who wander around both their neighborhood and Paris. In both the novel and the film, these young men, of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds, are impoverished and jobless, often resorting to petty crime in order to make money or pass their time.[315] *La Haine* follows three young men, Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd, for exactly twenty-four hours beginning at 10:24 in the morning, in the aftermath of an incident of police brutality towards one of their neighbors, Abdel, during riots in the banlieue. Abdel was beaten by a police officer, ending up in a coma at the hospital, and young residents of the *cité* respond by rioting: burning cars, vandalizing the police station, and getting into altercations with officers. Of the trio, Vinz, has the most hatred towards the police and was the only one of the three men to participate in the nighttime riots. Early in the film, he admits to Hubert and Saïd that he stole a police officer's gun, which he carries with him throughout the film, and swears to kill a "cop" if Abdel dies from his injuries. Halfway through the film, the young men head to Paris to pick up money owed to Saïd and end up witnessing or experiencing physical violence, at the hands of neo-Nazis and police officers. The conclusion of the film is tragic, Abdel dies in the hospital, they return to

[315] In La Haine, the trio is interfaith and interracial: Vinz is white and Jewish, Hubert is Black and Christian, and Saïd is Arab and Muslim. When Saïd goes to wake up Vinz, they eat breakfast with his family before leaving to find Hubert. Vinz's grandmother tells him that the protestors have burned the Jewish synagogue and berates him for not attending more often. Vinz wears a star of David around his neck, and a menorah is placed behind him in the shot. When Saïd and Vinz arrive at the boxing gym, Hubert is filmed wearing a cross necklace. Saïd wears a necklace of Fatima's hand and refers to himself as "arabe." In Charef's novel, Madjid is born to Algerian parents, Pat is white, Bengston is Antillais, Thierry is French, Bibiche is an Algerian born in France, Jean-Marc, kicked out of his house, living in a basement, and Anita, born to an Algerian father and a French mother (Charef 26).

the banlieue, Vinz gives up his gun to Hubert, and they go home. Suddenly a police officer arrives on scene, and, while trying to intimidate Vinz with his own gun, the officer accidentally shoots him in the face. The film ends at an impasse: Hubert and the police officer both with their guns drawn, aimed at one another. Gunshots ring out as the screen goes black.

Released in 1995, *La Haine* is one of the most well-known examples of *banlieue cinema* although not the earliest. *Banlieue* cinema, like *beur* literature, emerged in the 1980s with films such as *Interdit au moins de treize ans* (1982), *Laisse béton* (1984), and Charef's own adaptation of his novel with a slightly different name, *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède* (1985). This first wave of banlieue cinema (sometimes referred to as beur cinema) produced small-budget films made by amateur filmmakers; these films were generally perceived by French film critics as somewhat autobiographical or documentary, roughly speaking: "documents to better understand the life of inhabitants of the *grands ensembles*" (Milleliri 4).[316] Banlieue cinema of the 1990s shared similar themes with the cinema of the previous decade, such as representations of "a racially-mixed and socially dominated community," "a pessimistic image of a universe crippled by violence and delinquency," a focus on the experience of young men, a sense of "injustice" perpetrated against these inhabitants, and a feeling that this space was always on the edge of explosion (5).[317] However, as the genre became more recognized by the French film industry, the films of the 1990s were often expected to produce an "accurate and authentic representation of this microcosm" (6). According to Milleliri, it was French film critics, rather than filmmakers, who began to label banlieue cinema a "genre of cinema auteur" (6). Due to its massive appeal and critical

[316] For more on distinctions between beur cinema and banlieue cinema see Carrie Tarr's *Reframing Difference: Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France* (2005).

[317] Rosemary Wakeman describes banlieue cinema of the 1990s in a similar way: "In this cinéma de banlieue of the 1990s, the suburbs are an ugly world dominated by gangs of angry young men. The characters bristle with resentment. Racial tensions are explosive…The cops are vicious. Their insensitivity inflames social anger…The banlieue film usually ends in violence and tragedy" (86).

acclaim, Kassovitz' film, with its unique style, certainly contributed to this conceptualization. Thanks to its international success, 1995, the year of the film's release, became "the official birth of banlieue cinema as a category of reception" (5).

Kassovitz's film epitomizes Millérili's description of banlieue cinema; it tells a pessimistic story of a multi-ethnic group of friends living in the banlieue, participating in hip hop culture, selling drugs, seeking violence, and getting into altercations with police. His film *also* features several instances of graffiti, another trope of the banlieue, which has been less studied in academic articles on the film. In scholarship on the film, the graffiti has been touched on briefly: either as reference to the connections between the banlieue youth and hip-hop culture or as a failed attempt to re-appropriate space.[318] [319] Tom Connelly and Jenny Lefcourt's article, "La Haine et the Caméra-Graffito," is the only article to focus exclusively on the film's graffiti. However, they look at the graffiti as part of a literary tradition of *écriture* in French films; Kassovitz's use of graffiti is conceived of as a contemporary reiteration of Astruc's *caméra-stylo*. Moreover, most articles focus on Saïd's graffiti writing and fail to consider the other iterations of graffiti throughout the film. In this section, I interrogate several iterations of graffiti in the film, drawing particular attention to the role of the body in Kassovitz's representations of these graffiti.

In contrast with Charef's novel, Kassovitz's film tackles the question of police violence in the banlieue directly, like the graffiti we saw in Amadou Gaye's photograph. The defining event of the film, one that haunts all the characters' actions, is the attack on Abdel by a police officer, which happens off-screen. This incident roils the anger of the young residents, especially Vinz, sparking a night of violent riots targeting religious and political

[318] For more on hip hop culture in La Haine, see "You Talkin' To Me?" Mediating Postmodern Blackface in La Haine" (Moscowitz 2009), *La Haine* (Vincendeau 2005) and *French B Movies: Suburban Spaces, Universalism, and the Challenge of Hollywood* (2003).

[319] See Zisserman and Nettelbeck for this idea about the failure to reappropriate space.

centers, like the synagogue and the police station, but also targeting the property of banlieue residents themselves, such as Hubert's gym or Darty's car. While the spatial politics of the banlieue play a role in this attack on Abdel, it is also, quite simply, an attack on Abdel's physical *body*, a body which is never actually seen on camera. One might say that reaction of the young people is in response to this "disappearing" of the body of Abdel. Throughout the film, the Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd are also victimized physically, with Saïd and Hubert being tortured and humiliated in Paris by police officers and Vinz being shot by an officer in their neighborhood. This police violence may be exacerbated by the spatial segregation of the banlieue, but it is *founded* on the exceptionality of the bodies of those in banlieue. Police are able to carry out acts of violence because of the classist and racist ideas in circulation that these young people are "difficult" populations that instigate violence.

Several scholars of banlieue cinema have contended that a central feature of this genre is the representation of a power struggle between the center (city) and periphery (banlieue).[320] This relationship between city and banlieue is based on a power imbalance between centralized State power, represented by the city, and disenfranchised populations relegated to the banlieue (Konstantarakos 161). As historian Rosemary Wakeman asserts, the banlieue is portrayed as a "stigmatized space" and the "domain of the disempowered," while the city is where money and power are centralized in these films (86). In *La Haine,* Kassovitz highlights this dichotomy between the banlieue and the city by filming each space using different cinematic techniques:

> The film is divided into two, the first half being shot in the *cité,* the second in Paris… [Kassovitz] shot *cité* by day and Paris by night, the cité with ample travelling shots and Paris with a small crew…; the cité in stereo and Paris in mono…The result is that,

[320] For more on the role of space in the film, see "Which Mapping of the City? La Haine (Kassovitz, 1995) and the cinéma de banlieue," (Konstantarakos 1999), "Independent Filmmakers and the Invention of the Paris Suburbs" (Wakeman 2013), "Margins versus Centre: Cinematic Tensions and Conflict between the Suburbs and Paris" (Schupp 2017).

> as soon as the protagonists get to Paris, the whole atmosphere and sounds changes and they feel out of place and strangers (Konstantarakos 163).

This disjunction between the banlieue youth and the city of Paris, their "out-of-place-ness," is highlighted by the iconic dolly-zoom on the rooftop of Montparnasse when the three men arrive in Paris, which transmits a sense of vertigo to the viewer that mimics this sense of displacement experienced by the trio in Paris.[321]

One way in which might read this tortured relationship between suburb and city is to turn to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.[322] In this text, Fanon articulates how the colonial city is organized spatially to reinforce the power of the colonizer and disempower the colonized subject. According to Fanon, "the colonized world is split in two"— the space of the "indigenous" and that of the "European" (41). The two spaces are separated by a "border" that "is indicated by barracks and police stations" (41). In capitalist countries, there are "intermediaries" that can subvert the balance of power between these two populations, but, in the "colonial regions," the police act as the intermediary:

> [L]e gendarme et le soldat, par leur présence immédiate, leurs interventions directes et fréquentes, maintiennent le contact avec le colonisé et lui conseillent. On le voit, l'intermédiaire du pouvoir utilise un langage de pure violence…L'intermédiaire porte la violence dans les maisons et dans les cerveaux du colonisé (Fanon 41-42).
>
> [[T]he gendarme and the soldier, through their constant presence and their direct and frequent interventions, maintain contact with the colonized and offer them advice. As

[321] "In *La Haine*, when the three boys arrive in Paris, they are shown in a dolly zoom shot standing on Montparnasse terrace. The centre appears lively in the background, but remains secluded from them as the camera movement immediately distances them from the city background and emphasises their estrangement and inability to fit this environment" (Schupp 183).

[322] See "Bodies, Spaces and Citizenship: The Theoretical Contribution of Frantz Fanon" (Ascari 2018) and "Fanon and Space: Colonization, Urbanization, and Liberation from the Colonial to the Global City" (Stefan 2007).

we can see, the agent of authority employs a language of pure violence…The agent brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonized"]

Although the film takes place in France, colonial relations seem to persist, as demonstrated through the segregation of space; these "undesirable populations" (often immigrants from ex-colonies of France) are relegated to the outskirts of the city where they can be more easily "controlled" by policing.[323] To borrow Fanon's formulation, the police are the "soldiers" protecting the "Europeans" (in Paris) from the "indigenous" (in the banlieue). When the young men get into a verbal altercation with Parisians at an art exhibition, an older man pushes them out of the door, turns sheepishly to the other attendees, shrugs and says, "malaise des banlieues…" ["suburban unrest"] (1:19:04-1:19:12). By attributing the young men's disruptive comments to the "tension of the banlieue," the older man reinforces this metaphorical segregation between the two populations. Fanon's colonial city is also seen in *La Haine* through the violence that is perpetrated by the police in this space, demonstrated, in the film, by Abdel's hospitalization, Saïd and Hubert's torture, and Vinz's later death. Fanon's words echo once more in a line spoken by Hubert upon which the film's title is based : "la haine attire la haine" ["hate attracts hate"] (*La Haine* 53 :48). Through the colonial apparatus, police violence is internalized in colonial subjects, "brought into the homes and the brains of the colonized"; in the film, this internalized violence is seen most clearly in Vinz but also in Hubert and Saïd. Through the "immediate presence" of the police and their constant surveillance of the "colonized" residents of the banlieue, violence is ignited and spreads everywhere, like the Molotov cocktail that opens the film.

[323] "The Parisian banlieue, like so many other places, is still governed through a focus on policing" (Angélil and Siress 64).



Image 4.7 *La Haine* 6:05



Image 4.8 *La Haine* 6:11

In the first shot of the film's action directly following the opening credits, the colonial spatial relations of the banlieue are made evident, and I argue that Saïd's graffiti in this same sequence is used as a mechanism to disrupt those relations. In the sequence, Saïd faces the police station, and a line of police officer stands outside facing him (Image 4.7 and Image 4.8, pp. 282). These officers are numerous, and they are armed, presenting a menacing front to protect the station after the riots. This shot makes visible a "border" between the colonized and the colonizer akin to Fanon's conceptualization of the colonial city. In these two shots, the "border" between "indigenous" and "European" is literally a "police station" and a line of police officers in front of the station, making a "border" with their "bodies." After the close-up on the back of Saïd's head, Kassovitz's camera moves closer to the officers, capturing them in a medium horizontal tracking shot, which traces this "border" of officers. The tracking shot concludes when it reaches Saïd, who is no longer facing the police, as in the previous shot, but is now writing graffiti next to them on the police van, producing the first instance of graffiti in the film: "Saïd fucks the police/Saïd, Fuck the Police." I read this opening scene as an illustration of Michel de Certeau's conception of "tactics," which are sideways maneuvers of the everyday, such as walking, which allow the individual consumer to subvert the capitalistic space of the city. Although De Certeau's "arts de faire" focus on subverting capitalism, I want to invoke this idea of "tactics" to underscore the ways in which Saïd's graffiti writing undermines colonial State power as evidenced through the policing of the banlieue. By writing anti-police graffiti, Saïd undermines the police (and their "strategies" of surveillance, to once again quote de Certeau), as well as the colonialist French State.



Image 4.9 *La Haine* (6:43)

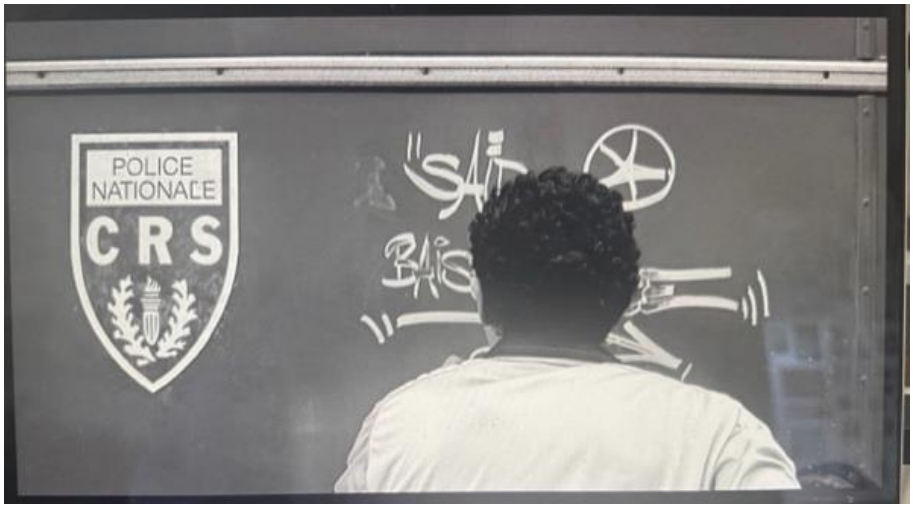


Image 4.10 *La Haine* (6:47)



Image 4.11 *La Haine* (6:49)



Image 4.12 *La Haine* (6:50)



Image 4.13 *La Haine* (6:51)

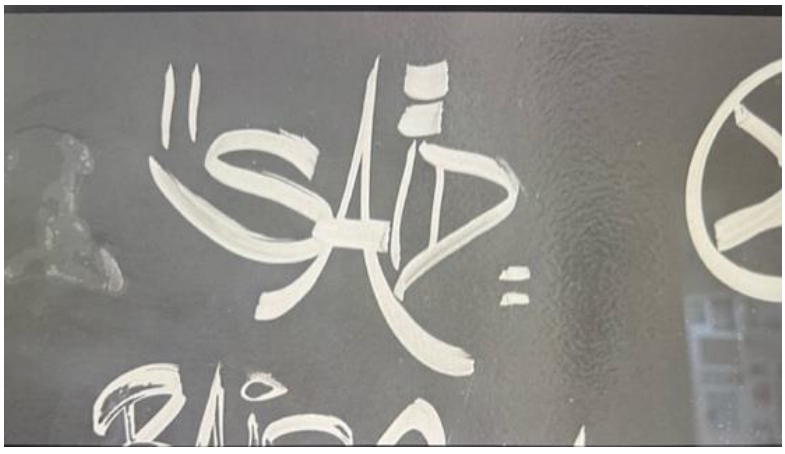


Image 4.14 *La Haine* (6:54)

Kassovitz' opening sequence demonstrates this subversion through a complex interplay of tracking shots and close-ups. Once again, at the end of the horizonal tracking shot of the police officers, the audience hears the squeak of a marker and Saïd appears in a medium close-up shot (Image 4.9, pp. 284). In the tracking shot, the police force is depicted as being immobile; they stand still, facing the lens, expressionless, and the camera simply moves over them. In contrast, when Saïd appears on screen, he is captured in side-profile, his tongue sticks out in concentration and he is moving, checking if the police officers see him. In this way, he resists "capture" by the camera's lens (and by extension by the police force from which he hides). Moreover, Saïd's active posture and facial expression contrast sharply with the stationary poses of the police force and their stolid facial expressions. In this way, Saïd interrupts the "strategies" of the police officers, represented through the tracking shot, through his "tactics," represented through the side-profile shot.

In the second part of the sequence, Kassovitz uses Saïd's graffiti to introduce him as a character. The camera cuts to a close-up of the back of the police van, observing Saïd while he writes (Image 4.10, pp. 286); Saïd stands up straighter, takes a second to look at his handiwork, and walks away towards the camera, as if it is not there. Finally, the camera performs a series of successive cuts, zooming in ever more tightly on the graffiti, starting with a close-up on the graffiti and the CRS emblem (Image 4.11, pp. 284), then a close-up of Saïd's graffiti alone (Image 4.12, pp. 285), and ending with a close-up of Saïd's name within the graffiti (Image 4.13, pp. 285). This series of cuts, culminating in the centering of Saïd's name, is a technique to introduce Saïd as a main character in the film.[324] Kassovitz does the same thing for both Hubert and Vinz; when Saïd goes to Vinz's family's apartment to wake him up, the camera dolly zooms in on Vinz' monogrammed ring, which is highlighted with a halo of light and a whooshing noise. Vinz and Saïd then go to find Hubert at his boxing gym,

[324] See "Reframing the Periphery" (Hardwick 2015).

which has been destroyed by rioters. While he boxes and Vinz and Saïd watch, the camera zooms into a poster advertising a boxing match in which Hubert features; once again, a halo appears around the name "Hubert Diaz." This shot of Saïd's graffitied name, then, acts as establishing character shots that inform the audience of the identity of the character.

While the graffiti certainly introduces us to Saïd as a character, I propose that it also comes to represent Saïd's body standing "off" with the police force in the previous shot, which metonymizes the struggle between the police forces of the banlieue and the banlieue youth themselves. When the camera cuts to a medium close-up from behind Saïd's head, the composition of this shot is separated into two halves: on the left side, the "National Riot Police" emblem, and, on the right side, Saïd's head covering his tag (Image 4.10, pp. 284). Like in the opening scene, where Saïd stands to face the line of police officers, or the "border" between the colonizer and colonized, here he stands to face the police van on which he writes his graffiti. In this way, the camera's framing metaphorically reproduces the physical "stand-off" between Saïd and the police in the previous shot. Despite the illegality of Saïd's "inscription," it takes up as much space, if not more, than the State-sanctioned inscription of the police emblem. It also replicates the CRS emblem in style: both are of similar size, written in white, and a mix of letters and designs.[325] In this way, it mimics the CRS emblem in order to challenge the supremacy of the police over the space of the police van, the space of the screen, and the space of the banlieue.

In the following shot, the camera stays stationary while Saïd exits the frame, revealing the graffiti writing in its entirety. Although his body has left the screen, his tag is taking its place, continuing to "stand off" against the CRS emblem and will continue to do so until the officers notice his inscription (Image 4.11, pp. 284). Once Saïd leaves the frame, the physical

[325] The stand-off is a trope shared with the American film genre, the Western, which James Pettersen notes is often compared to banlieue cinema "Yet, in many discussions of banlieue cinema as a genre, space emerges as the defining feature, and the genre is often compared to the Western because of a similar importance of space in its definition" (Pettersen 11).

bodies from the previous scene (officers, Saïd) are finally metaphorized into their respective symbols (emblem, tag), and thus, they can easily be detached from their particularities in order to represent the larger political bodies facing off within the film (police vs. banlieue youth). Kassovitz then follows up with several progressively closer close-ups on Saïd's graffiti. These close-ups continue the work of the previous part of the sequence and finally force the police (and their emblem) from the camera's frame, now suggesting Saïd's total "dominance" over the scene; he effectively has the "last word," at least in this altercation. In other words, Säid's dynamic disruption of the horizontal tracking shot of the static police officers is reinforced by Kassovitz's dynamic editing of Saïd graffiti tag, which progressively fills the camera's lens. I argue, then, that Saïd's body movements and Kassovitz's editing allow us to read Saïd's act of tagging as a successful subversion of the power of the police force. [326]

The letter A in Saïd's tag on the police van resembles the Eiffel Tower, aligning Saïd not just with his own graffiti but also with the emblematic symbol of Paris (Image 4.13, pp. 285). In this way, Saïd uses his tag to assert power not just over the banlieue and its resident police force but also over the space of Paris and all the representational power therein. However, in comparison with the CRS emblem, which stands apart from Saïd's tag, the Eiffel Tower "A" is integrated into Saïd's name. This integration is an implicit suggestion that Saïd, from a Maghreb background, belongs in France as much as any other citizen, countering the media perception that North Africans in the banlieue refuse to "integrate." Saïd *has* integrated to the point where the Eiffel Tower inhabits his own graffiti tag.

[326] Ultimately, the "winner" is the hand with a gun, not the hand with a pen. In many ways, this scene mimics the While Notre Dame unwittingly "wins" the stand-off between police and banlieue youth in the final scene, in this opening scene, Saïd emerges the "winner," with Tom Conley and Jenny Lecourt suggest, this opening scene "anticipates the immobilized filling the last shot of the film" (236).

This connection to the Eiffel Tower is also an anticipatory reference to the second scene in which Saïd writes graffiti. After a long evening in Paris, Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd climb to the roof of a building and smoke a joint of marijuana. From this building, they have a view of the Eiffel Tower, glittering in the distance. While Hubert and Vinz joke around about the inequities of France, the rise of the far-right, and their frustration with their powerlessness (Vinz says at one point: "I feel like a little ant lost in intergalactic universe"), Saïd wanders around the rooftop and discovers a can of spray-paint. He shouts to the other two: "J'ai trouvé une bombe !" ["I found a spray-can!"] to which Vinz retorts : "C'est toi la bombe !" ["*You*'re the spray-can!"] (1:23:3-1:25:50). This asinine exchange is repeated throughout the film when one of the men is frustrated with another. For instance, when Vinz sees a cow in the HLM, Saïd ignores him and says: "C'est toi la vache !" ["*You're* the cow!"] [327] In this particular instance, however, the phrase "C'est toi la bombe!" ["*You*'re the spray-can!"] can be read as a reminder of the opening graffiti scene, when Saïd's tag stood in as a representation of his body in a stand-off with the police. Although unintentionally, Vinz equates Saïd with his graffiti in much the same way that Kassovitz's framing does. Just as the Eiffel Tower is a callback to Saïd's tag, the reference to a "bomb," another translation for this word in English, is also a callback to the Molotov cocktail that opens the film, exploding on top of an image of Earth as a voiceover of Hubert tells a story about a man who falls from a building. This continuity is further underscored by the fact that Hubert tells the exact same story on the rooftop after Vinz calls Saïd a "bombe." Because Kassovitz's film traffics in intertextuality, we can read Vinz's retort as an implicit connection between the graffiti of the film and its anti-police message. In other words, if Saïd is the "bomb," his graffiti is an explosive tool that can be used to defend against the police.

[327] This exchange appears to be a proxy for the lack of identity that the young men have. Because they lack a stable "identity," they can be anything: a cow, a spray-can bomb, etc.



Image 4.15 *La Haine* (1:27:48)



Image 4.16 *La Haine* (1:27:56)

Shortly after this scene on the rooftop, Saïd takes the spray can with him and writes his second graffiti inscription on a billboard in the streets of Paris. This billboard is a replica of the one Hubert saw from the RER when the trio arrived in Paris after an altercation with the police. At this earlier point in the film, the tagline of the advertisement seems mocking; Hubert squeezes his eyes shut when he sees the billboard, suggesting his awareness of the limitations of their lives in the banlieue (the world is decidedly *not* at their fingertips). In this second appearance, Saïd scratches out the letter "V" and adds an letter "N" above it, affectively re-writing the advertisement to read: "The World is Ours" (Image 4.15, pp. 290). [328] The referent of the "ours" is clearly communicated via several cinematographic choices. By showing Saïd writing the graffiti, we know that the "we" is Saïd and his friends. Saïd then catches up to Hubert and Vinz, and Kassovitz cuts to a split screen close-up of the graffiti inscription (Image 4.16, pp. 290). On the left of the screen, the camera focuses on Saïd's edition to the graffiti, pushing the "world" from the frame and leaving behind only the word "ours." On the right side of the screen, the three men walk away from the site of the graffiti inscription, their bodies blurred in the distance. This second shot reinforces the idea that Saïd is re-writing the graffiti to include the three men.

This scene has been commented on by several scholars, many of whom have read this example of graffiti in the context of identity politics, appropriation of space, class warfare, and social exclusion. [329] Conley and Lefcourt see several examples of cinematic

[328] Conley and Lefcourt also highlight that Saïd's graffiti of the letter "N" is an implicit reference to the title of the film La Haine, which sounds phonetically like the letter "N" in French when read aloud. They also trace a connection between the Heineken poster, which is half hidden in the bathroom scene to produce "Heine," which also sounds like La Haine. In this way, the title is "written" into the film through both "writing" on the walls.

[329] Laïla Amine sees this graffiti inscription as an illustration of the young men's exclusion from society. Saïd writes this graffiti right after the three men were expelled from the art exhibition where "high art" is being appreciated. Therefore, Saïd expresses a desire for "inclusion" in French society by painting themselves into the city's streets. By doing this, Saïd also "clai[ms] Paris streets as a public sphere for the dissemination of postcolonial knowledge" (153). David Fieni simply reads all of La Haine's graffiti as an example of how young people "interact with their environment and counteract official messages that clash with their lived experience" (297).

intertextuality in this scene, noting references to five films, including Jean Renoir's *La vie est à nous* (1932), Howard Hawk's *Scarface* (1932), Jean-Luc Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* and *Pierrot le fou* (1965), and Raoul Walsh's *White Heat* (1949) (235). Pettersen also argues that Saïd's graffiti is a reference to *Scarface*, namely the "The World is Yours" marquee that is a key element of the film. However, by when Saïd rewrites the poster to read "The World is Ours," Pettersen argue that Saïd illustrates the "ethics of solidarity" that characterizes Kassovitz's *La Haine* in contrast with Hollywood gangster films like *Scarface*, which center the individual.[330] Pettersen goes one step further to connect Saïd's graffiti to the police violence in the film, suggesting that Saïd expresses a sense of solidarity with all banlieue youth through this inscription. I agree with Pettersen: I read Saïd's graffiti edit as an expression of solidarity between banlieue youth. Like Laïla Amine suggests, I also see Saïd's graffiti as an expression of a desire for "inclusion" within a Paris that continues to try to expel or ignore them (153). This hope for solidarity is further indicated by the motorbike to Saïd's left, gesturing towards a future in which the men have a certain free mobility in the city of Paris, not yet afforded to them.

While keeping all of these readings of the graffiti in play, I also propose that previous scholars have focused too much on the message of the graffiti and ignored how Kassovitz frames the act of *writing* the graffiti by Saïd and the young men's bodies as they pass it by. I argue that it is the *visibility* of Saïd's body in the act of writing that gives this particular inscription its political power. Through Saïd's mobility and his "sideways" maneuvers with the spray can, a moment of possibility opens up for both the viewer and for the trio. Kassovitz capitalizes on this moment through his close-up on the graffiti, which frames the young men as they "move forward" through the streets of Paris. It is both Saïd's moving body

[330] "By changing the individualistic slogan from Howard Hawk's Scarface to embrace the collective destiny of a society, Kassovitz sets the deaths at the hands of the police at the scale of France as a whole" (Pettersen *French B Movies* 84).

as he writes the graffiti and the trio's moving bodies as they walk "towards" the world in conjunction with the graffiti itself that produces the "hope" of this particular scene. This hope, of course, is short-lived; soon after this brief moment of respite, the men will be assaulted by a group of neo-Nazis, one of which (played by Kassovitz himself) Vinz will almost shoot with his stolen gun, and Vinz will be killed by a local banlieue police officer. Their bodies are not their own and the world is "theirs", despite Saïd's briefly optimistic tag.

In order to illustrate the necessity of a visible graffiti writer to awaken the power of the graffiti in *La Haine*, it is helpful to turn to another example from earlier in the film, which replicates Saïd's graffiti message but to different ends. Before the trio leave for Paris, they are loitering in their neighborhood. Sitting on concrete posts in front of a graffitied building, they listen to a local boy tell a meandering story about a hidden camera show. Their slouched stances indicate their aimlessness, without work or school (Image 4.17, pp. 294). Vinz's boredom is palpable; he responds to the boy's story with an emotionless: "C'est tout?" ["That's all?"]. Saïd kicks a drug needle around, and Hubert sits in silence. Behind them are security doors covered in graffiti pieces. These pieces have inspirational messages: "Force," "Energy" and "Power." Ironically, the four characters sit surrounded by motivational graffiti but very clearly lack force, energy, or power. The spaces above the security gates are also tagged with white graffiti writing: "We are the future" and "We are all the city." Saïd's later graffiti ("the world is ours") seems to *take up* the inclusive language of this earlier graffiti, writing the youth's desire to be included in the urban narrative of Paris *into* the city center. Notably, in this scene, the two inscriptions ("we are the future" and "we are all the city") show a slippage between spaces (the space of the banlieue is equated to the space of the city) and times (the youth of the banlieue are the future). This inscription, like Saïd's, implies that the residents of the banlieue embody the city and the future of France, and, therefore, should provide a similar moment of hope for the audience.



Image 4.17 *La Haine* (24:50)



Image 4.18 *La Haine* (25:51)

While Saïd's tag and the graffiti in this scene share similar messages, their framings by Kassovitz and their effect on the audience are quite different. While the sequence in which Saïd writes graffiti in Paris is accompanied by the active bodies of Saïd, Hubert, and Vinz, in this scene the men are immobilized in front of the graffiti. They do not move forward; they simply do not move at all. Instead, the camera captures them in these spots as if in a photograph. For instance, in a second shot of the sequence, Kassovitz frames Hubert and Vinz in the center of the shot, as they watch Saïd speak to Abdel's brother (Image 4.18, pp. 294). This shot looks like a portrait with the graffiti "We are the future," acting as the caption. Because of the stillness of the camera, the graffiti is "read" in relation to their positions in the shot. In other words, Vinz and Hubert are the "future" and the "city." Once again, however, the irony of this shot is evident; all of these graffiti inscriptions about future and power contrast vividly with the lived experience of the trio. Rather than cultivating a moment of hope, this example of graffiti highlights their ambiguous and ambivalent situation in the film and in society. They may pretend to incarnate this graffiti of resistance, but, as the film demonstrates time and time again, any hope for power in their lives is squashed by the cyclical nature of racism, discrimination, and joblessness.

In contrast with Saïd's somewhat positive example, this example of graffiti comes across as hopeless because Kassovitz *arrests* the bodies of the men in front of the graffiti. It is this practice of "arresting" the men through the camera's lens, with graffiti behind them, that reveals the limited mobility and freedom they have in their own bodies and lives. Another example of this practice occurs when the trio is in Paris. Standing in front of a bus station, Hubert stands in front of a poster, which appears to read: "Mugshot of a killer." This poster plays with the audience, daring you to read into the racialized stereotype: that a Black man is necessarily a killer. When he moves away from the bus stop, the audience sees the actual poster, which is a Perrier advertisement featuring a large bottle of sparkling water and the

tagline “Mugshot of a thirst killer” (1:19:49-1:20:15). The camera, again, captures Hubert immobile before an urban writing, one which provides a false reading of the situation. However, when the men move their bodies, the real message is revealed. Hubert is not a killer; it is merely an advertisement for sparkling water. This same bait-and-switch is happening on a larger level with the example of the solidarity graffiti written in the banlieue. The solidarity of the inscriptions behind them are undermined by the characters themselves and their lived experiences in the film. Kassovitz demonstrates this ambiguous position by displaying the immobility of the men through camera framing and blocking.

Kassovitz also performs this practice of “arresting” the men in front of the film’s graffiti when Saïd is physically arrested by the police at the hospital. Samir, local police officer who knows Saïd’s older brother, arrives on scene and takes Vinz and Hubert to the police station to get Saïd released from the holding cell. When they arrive at the station, the camera follows tightly behind Hubert and Vinz, who is carrying a gun stolen from an officer, preventing the audience from an unhindered view of the station (Image 4.19, 20, 21 on pp. 300). From what we can see, the station has been vandalized, presumably by the rioters the previous evening. Slowly, Kassovitz reveals the scene via a series of tight over-the-shoulder shots alternating between Vinz and Hubert’s perspective. These tight camera shots produce a feeling of fear or paranoia in the audience which mimics the fear of Hubert and Vinz in the presence of police officers; we also know that Vinz has hidden the stolen police gun in his waistband, which adds to the tension of the scene.[331] Through these shots, the station room becomes visible from which two police officers stare directly at Hubert and Vinz, in an similarly static stance to the opening scene with Saïd and the police in front of the station. Behind them are fragments of graffiti that was written by the banlieue agitators. Although

[331] This tight over the shoulder shot is also practiced by Kassovtiz when Vinz enters the hospital with the gun hidden in his pants.

never captured in full in one single shot, we can deduce that the graffiti reads: “Vénégeance pour Abdel” [“Vengeance for Abdel”] In the first shot, the camera frames part of the word “Venge” over the two officers’ heads (Image 4.19, pp. 298). As if a thought bubble, the officers command themselves to “avenge” this crime, and the angry stares on their faces suggest that they are, indeed, plotting revenge on Vinz and Hubert for the destruction of the station. In the second shot, another officer reorganizes the office, putting a framed photograph of President François Mitterrand back up on the wall over the word “vengeance,” as if to “cover up” the anger that the police have towards those in the banlieue and the subsequent violence they will enact to release it (Image 4.20, pp, 298). In a third shot, another man, likely a third police officer, walks past them with a similar disapproving stare (Image 4.21, pp. 298). As he does so, he is framed directly under the end of the graffiti: “For Abdel,” suggesting that this officers’ injuries are always “revenge” for what was done to Abdel.

The three officers in this sequence mirror Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd. First, Vinz and Hubert stare down the two officers, one a Black man and the other a White man. It is as if they are “standing off” with alternate versions of themselves, as well as “mirror images” of one another. The third officer who passes by the two men, framed under a Maghrebi name (Abdel), is a proxy for the third protagonist, Saïd. Therefore, these three police officers are reflections of Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd, but they have found themselves on the other side of the “border” between the colonized and colonizer, aligned instead with the French State. As we see with Inspector “Notre Dame” (the officer who kills Vinz, while wearing a Notre Dame jacket) and Samir (the officer that brings them to the station), many of the officers are seen as traitors to the banlieue youth because they attempt to connect with those from the neighborhood through ethnic ties. Although Samir helps Saïd out of prison, he makes it clear that he only helps him because he respects his more “civilized” older brother. Finally, Vinz is

killed by Inspector Notre Dame, one of these same officers, who attempt to be friendly with the young people.

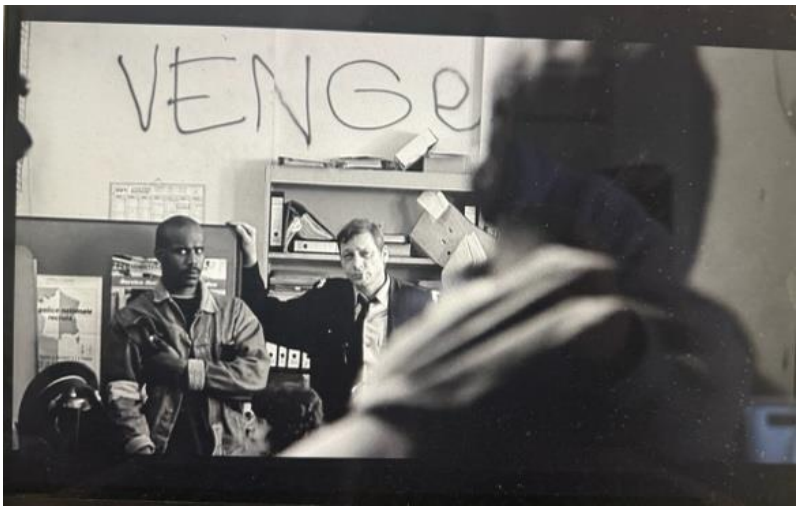


Image 4.19 *La Haine* (33:03)



Image 4.20 *La Haine* (32:59)



Image 4.21 La Haine (32:56)

While Saïd's anti-police graffiti at the beginning of the film was meant to metaphorically denigrate the police, this anonymous graffiti is a physical act of "revenge" for Abdel's life. Accompanied by the destruction of police property and violence against the officers, the graffiti is another metaphorical act of violence that "equals" the physical violence enacted against Abdel.[332] The officers' distrustful expressions intimate to the audience that any young person in the banlieue is assumed to be a suspect of this crime, including Vinz and Hubert. This distrust is mutual. On the way to the station, Samir tries to tell Vinz and Hubert that police officers are trained to protect citizens, to which Hubert cheekily responds: "And who protects us from you?" When Saïd is released by Samir, Samir continues defend the police officers to Hubert, suggesting that young officers are overwhelmed and cannot "last longer than a month" in the banlieue, to which Saïd replies: "And an Arab in a police station can't last longer than an hour" (34:17). As the film continues, suspicion from both sides (the police and the young people) gradually mounts: young men on the roof denigrate the officers, Abdel's brother shoots a police officer in the arm, Hubert punches an officer in the face, Hubert and Saïd are tortured by police officers in Paris, finally coming to a head with both Abdel's death in the hospital, and then Vinz's at the hand of another officer. To quote Hubert again, "hate begets hate": the "hate" of the officers fuels the "hate" of the young people and vice versa. This graffiti, then, plays an actual role in the escalation and exchange of physical violence. Where the young people feel powerless to assert agency over their own neighborhoods and their own bodies, they use graffiti to assert their bodily agency (and that of Abdel's) by "spray-bombing" the walls. However, this graffiti does not provide any power to the young people; in fact, when Hubert and Vinz encounter it, they are rendered immobile, restrained by the camera's lens.

[332] Hubert says to Samir : "Et qui nous protège de vous?" ["And who protects us from you?"] (32:05)



Image 4.22 *La Haine* (49:12)

In a physical encounter with the police later in the film, this tension between immobilized and mobile bodies is represented once again on screen. During a chase with police officers through the banlieue, Vinz draws his gun on an officer as if to shoot him but stands stock still, unable to pull the trigger.[333] Hubert intervenes and punches the officer in the face, so they can escape. They run through a metal door, which swings shut and reveals a graffiti inscription, "Arash ta mère," a misspelling of "Arrache ta mère" (Image 4.22, pp. 300). Literally, this graffiti means "tear out your mother" but metaphorically is a slang phrase, meaning "fuck your mother." On the surface, this graffiti can easily be written off as an immature expression of youth culture. However, the framing of this graffiti directly following the encounter with the police demands a secondary reading. In his book chapter on hip-hip music in contemporary France, historian Tyler Stovall concedes that French gangsta rap can be "hypermasculine" and often expresses "hostile attitudes toward France as a woman, for example, or patriarchal views of young women as sexual pawns," much like this particular graffiti does (222). However, Stovall argues that this type of rap also "expresses a desire to shock established society, and to play into existing stereotypes of banlieue culture as intrinsically sexist. Sexism [in gangsta rap] often mirrors the hostility directed toward the police, or society as a whole" (222).[334] Graffiti culture takes many of its cues from both gangsta rap and hip hop; therefore, we can transpose Stovall's reading of gangsta rap onto this particular graffiti, which reproduces several of Stovall's points. Perhaps the "mother" in this graffiti inscription is not an actual mother, but an implicit reference to the "la police" and "la France," both of which are feminine nouns in the French language. Like Saïd's graffiti in

[333] For Yosefa Loshtizky and David Moscovitz, Vinz's inability to shoot the gun is an allegory for the "represents the larger issue of the postmodern Jew's attempt to grapple with post-Holocaust power" (Moscovitz 9).

[334] "The rap group Suprême NTM claimed that the acronym part of its name stood for "le nord transmet le message," or "message from the north," referring to its origins in the north Paris suburbs. However many argued the word stood for Nique ta mère, "F- - k your mother," a common insult in the banlieue." (Stovall 222-3).

the opening scene, in which he writes, "Saïd fucks the police/ Saïd, fuck the police," this graffiti is an imperative to all in the banlieue, demanding they "fuck" both the police and the "feminine" republic of France. Just as Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd satirize the motto of the French Republic ("Liberté, égalité, fraternité") on the roof in Paris, this example lampoons the image of a maternal French Republic, which embraces the banlieue youth with racism, violence, and discrimination rather than love and acceptance. Furthermore, it demands violent action on the part of the banlieue youth; they are called to "tear up" the banlieue (also a feminine noun) and "destroy" Mother France. This active message is further accentuated by the active movement of Hubert and Vinz through the metal door. Again, the message of the graffiti is only rendered "active" by the active bodies of the banlieue youth.

In the final scene of the film, the three young men return to the banlieue, fatigued from a long night in Paris. Kassovitz captures them in front of a fresco of 19th century poet, Charles Baudelaire. Although not graffiti, this urban installation speaks to the same tensions as the graffiti we have analyzed. This fresco is one of several that were painted in the 1960s by Fabio Riéti on the HLM of La Noé in Chanteloup-les-vignes, which was constructed by Riéti's father-in-law, Emilie Arraud, and is where Kassovitz filmed *La Haine*.[335] While journalist Andrew Hussey describes these frescoes as "well-meant gestures of cultural aspiration from the 1960s," he also proposes that their effect is rather "Orwellian" (Hussey). Instead of encouraging cultural exploration, they are simply reminders of the surveillance of the French State and its attempts to force banlieue residents to culturally "integrate." The irrelevance of Baudelaire's image to those who inhabit the banlieue is demonstrated in this quotation in Hussey's article:

[335] To see images of the buildings and more information on the artist, see Gripon and Sangouard (2012) and Vialles.

> I asked my newfound mates at the sfenj [Moroccan doughnut] stall if they recognised the images [of Rimbaud and Baudelaire] and whether they meant anything to them. They all shrugged with indifference. "To us, they're just like a cultural Gestapo," said Abdel Moulah Bouloudji, who featured in the original film. "Nothing to do with us" (Hussey).

Adam Scovell also sees the presence of Rimbaud and Baudelaire on the buildings of the cité as illustrations of the banlieue's failure, rather than of its ability to provide a bright future for its inhabitants as had been promised when they were constructed (Scovell).[336]

At first glance, Baudelaire's presence in the final scene may seem to suggest his fraternity or similarity with the young men of the film. Just as these three men live on the physical and social margins of society in the 20th century, Baudelaire was known for living on the "margins of society" during the 19th century. According to historian Éric Hazan, Baudelaire was attached to the "melancholic faubourg" of Paris, a "space of misery and death" not unlike Kassovitz's banlieue (Hazan 420). Baudelaire also felt a real empathy those who lived in this marginalized space because "he fe[lt] one of them" (421). Moreover, Hazan claims that Baudelaire always identified politically "with the oppressed" (422). Therefore, one can argue that Baudelaire represents a certain "emblem" of marginality in the French cultural imaginary, both because of this question of political identification and his poetry which often is known for its melancholy and grotesque imagery. Baudelaire exemplifies urban alienation to such a degree that his face is literally painted onto the walls of the banlieue itself— onto the space of the marginalized.

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[336] The buildings in Kassovitz's Paris curve and wind, swallowing the sky to create concrete labyrinths. The space feels positively dystopian: derelict petrol stations strewn with graffiti, empty car parks haunted by the absence of people and even Hubert's local gym now a burnt husk. The film's noted and shocking final scene possesses an irony thanks to the design of the buildings. Saïd and Vinz are walking back through the project, having left Hubert with the gun, when they are finally confronted by the police in what is to be a fatal meeting. On the walls are giant murals, the eyes of Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud looking down as the final tragedy of the film unfolds. It's a statement on the overall failure of the project at that point in time – as if relying on the exceptionalism of French history and culture were enough to bring together a fractured society rendered volatile by a mixture of poverty, crime, social deprivation and police brutality. (Scovall)



Image 4.23 (*La Haine* 1:35 :36)



Image 4.24 (*La Haine* 1:36:09)



Image 4.25 (*La Haine* 1: 36:27)

However, this moment of connection with and reflection of Baudelaire is brief. After receiving the gun from Vinz, Hubert turns to face the camera and walks away (Image 4.23 and 4.23, pp. 304). For several moments, Hubert and Baudelaire reflect each other, especially the angle of their heads. However, Baudelaire's eyes are slightly blocked by the iron pavilion above. When the police car pulls up behind him, Hubert turns back, and the reflection is completely broken (Image 4.25, pp. 306). At this point, almost all of Baudelaire's face is blocked by the iron pavilion, foreshadowing the jail cell that Hubert may find himself in after this altercation. Amy Siciliano argues that banlieue films, such as *La Haine*, "interrogate[s] universalist notions of citizenship, showing how this concept on which the French Republic was constructed, has for many of the 'urban outcasts', become little more than an empty signifier" (214). The arrival of the police marks the end of any possible comparison between Baudelaire and the young men, all pretenses to universalism of the French Republic eliminated as Vinz is killed by police officers meant to protect "citizens."

The vastly different positionality of Baudelaire in comparison with the three men is also made evident in this scene. Baudelaire was a middle-class White man who had a certain social mobility that allowed him to "stroll" the streets of Paris, certainly without being harassed by police officers (Friedberg 28). Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd, however, do not have this luxury. Their wandering is seen, not as "flânerie" (romantic "strolling") but as loitering, idleness, and possible dangerous behavior.[337] The reality of the banlieue is also less romantic than Baudelaire's: these young men wander not to observe the city but because they lack "direction" in life (Mottet 76)[338]. Immortalized on an HLM building for the last thirty years, Baudelaire holds more ownership over this space than the young men do. Vinz, Hubert,

[337] According to Walter Benjamin, Baudelaire's flânerie is a way to fight against capitalism: "the idleness of the flâneur is a demonstration against the division of labor" (Benjamin "Le Flâneur" 427).

[338] "Because they have no jobs and no money, they have nothing to do other than walk endlessly, without any obvious purpose or intent. The youngsters are in perpetual motion and are not only ejected from localities…but also prevented from entering" (Konstantarkos 168).

and Saïd wander because they have no "place" either in their neighborhoods or in society at large: "their extreme mobility is not without relation to that cry, that utter despair" (Mottet 76). Unlike Baudelaire but like Charef's protagonists, these young men wander to escape the despair of their situations.

As the scene progresses towards its climax, the resemblance between the faces of the protagonists and that of the Baudelaire continues to disintegrate. The camera angle tilts downward capturing Vinz, Saïd and the officers in a long shot, with Hubert's legs in the foreground of the shot as he runs to them (Image 4.26, pp. 304). This moment is the last moment that we see Baudelaire's face, although it is now further disfigured, cut in half, by the framing of the shot and reflected in reverse in the wet stone on the ground of the pavilion. When Hubert approaches the police car, Baudelaire has completely disappeared from view (Image 4.27, pp. 307). The police officer, wearing the Notre Dame jacket, waves his gun in Vinz's face as Hubert and Saïd watch in shock. Then, the officer's gun accidentally goes off, and *he* looks shocked as Vinz falls to the ground with a bullet in his head. In this shot, the officer's Notre Dame letterman jacket faces the camera as he stands in front of Vinz's bloody and crumbled body. Where Baudelaire was an "empty signifier" of French Republicanism just seconds prior, the officer's jacket is another "empty signifier" of culture, this time a strange mix of American and French culture. His jacket, which might be a letterman's jacket from the American Notre Dame University, aligns him superficially with French monument, Notre Dame, and but more profoundly with the "police state" of the United States, one which also polices its "ghettoes" with gun violence. While Notre Dame tries to express his "integration" into France by becoming a part of the French police force, in this final scene, the signification of his jacket rings hollow; he fits neither into the banlieue culture, nor into French culture, instead playing a "part" of an American "cop." In the final shot, Kassovitz centers Saïd, the film's other urban poet, who now takes the position of Baudelaire, as he

stoically oversees the aftermath of this altercation (Image 4.28, pp. 306). In the face of the final act of this scene, Baudelaire's connection with the less-fortunate is revealed to be insufficient and out-of-touch with the sort of absurd violence that these men face.



Image 4.26 *(La Haine* 1:36:38)



Image 4.27 (*La Haine* 1:37:12)



Image 4.28 (*La Haine* 1:37:36)

Despite the breakdown of the visual correspondence between Baudelaire and the protagonists, Kassovitz allows echoes of Baudelaire to permeate the last few moments of this scene. While for Baudelaire, the "shock" of modern life is that of the encounter with the "crowd," for this trio, the "shock" of modern life is the police violence practiced on them, day in and day out. This final scene is the perfect example of this shock, as Vinz is killed so quickly that it shocks the audience; it even comes as a shock to the officer who pulled the trigger. Amy Siciliano proposes that Kassovitz also employs the aesthetic of "shock" as a way to transmit his film's message:

> The film speaks to both the suburbanization of poverty and racialization of the suburbs in France through a postmodern fragmentary aesthetic to "shock," as Walter Benjamin…might say, its viewers into insight. The juxtaposition of images, sounds, and camera angles, alongside the narrative itself evince veiled relations between space and time, prodding its audience to question received attitudes and perceptions, or the various levels of mediation that have enabled the words "banlieue youth" to become synonymous with crime, poverty and arrested social development. (213)

In light of the violence of the 20th-century banlieue, Kassovitz's film utilizes the element of shock to jolt his viewer into questioning their perspectives. This shock is not experienced through encountering people on foot in the city as it was for Baudelaire, but through *watching* these young men walk through the city, encountering an omnipresent police force.

Baudelaire compared his famous modern walker, the *flâneur*, to a mirror; this flaneur was a "kaleidoscope with a conscious," an "always unstable and fugitive" self that reflected the urban crowd around him (14).[339] Despite this obsession with the "mobile gaze" of the

[339] "On peut aussi le comparer, lui, à un miroir aussi immense que cette foule ; à un kaléidoscope doué de conscience, qui, à chacun de ses mouvements, représente la vie multiple et la grâce mouvante de tous les éléments de la vie. C'est un moi insatiable de non-moi, qui, à chaque instant, le rend et l'exprime en images plus vivantes que la vie elle-même, toujours instable et fugitive" ["One might also compare him to a mirror as vast as that crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which, with every movement, reflects the manifold life and shifting grace of all the elements of existence. It is a self insatiable with non-self, which, at every

flaneur, Baudelaire was suspicious about the "virtual gaze" of photography, an emerging technology during his lifetime (Friedberg 30). Kassovitz, on the other hand, leans into the multiplicity of images that the film camera can produce. [340] For example, Ruth Doughty and Kate Griffin remark upon the proliferation of mirrors and reflections in *La Haine*. In their article, they argue that the "central" trope of the film is that of the mirror and that Kassovitz makes use of both cinematography and narrative to bring out this trope, for instance when Vinz re-enacts the famous *Taxi Driver* scene in his bathroom mirror or when the three men are reflected in the bathroom mirrors while the old man tells his story about Grunvalsky (117).[341] Despite the fact that their bodies are constantly *reflected* in mirrors, the young men clearly yearn for stable identities throughout the film (Doughty et Griffin 118). Thus, the mirrors illustrate a certain lack of identity, demonstrating a substantial distance between how these characters see themselves and how the audience views them (Konstantarakos 167). Paradoxically, in this way, Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd *are* like Baudelaire's flaneur; their bodies reflect "images" of the media, television, films, culture, and the society around them, and Kassovitz captures that kaleidoscope on film.

In many ways, the film's graffiti operates as yet another "mirror" in which the men's identities and experiences are reflected for the audience. In this graffiti mirror, the audience

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moment, renders and expresses it in images more vivid than life itself, ever unstable and fleeting" (Baudelaire, *Constantin Guys* 14).

[340] In this way, the proliferation of reflections of Baudelaire in this final scene might represent Baudelaire's ideas about the fugitive nature of images in modern life. This proliferation of images is a central preoccupation for 19th century philosophers, including Baudelaire for whom the camera and photographie more generally, were suspicious (Friedberg 16). Baudelaire was very concerned about photography as he believed that it destroyed the "aura" of objects (Benjamin 338, Friedberg 30). Despite his obsession with the "mobile gaze" of the flâneur, he fears the "virtual gaze" of photography (Frieberg 30). Although the flâneur is a "mirror" in his own articulation, he cannot accept that the camera can also capture and reflect the fugitive nature of modernity.

[341] We already noted that Baudelaire is reflected in the puddle in the final scene of the film. Kassovitz also includes several metaphoric reflections via references to Black American culture. In several scenes, men look at one another in actual mirrors; in a famous scene, Vinz plays Travis Bickle from Taxi Driver and, later, in the same mirror, Said plays Daffy Duck. Moreover, there are scenes where all the protagonists are reflected by a mirror, such as in the bathroom scene in Paris.

sees reflected the bodily oppression of the young men, particularly how they are imprisoned in the banlieue through unemployment, policing, discriminatory politics, and stereotypical media perceptions. Kassovitz creates "static" images of banlieue graffiti, such as that in the police station, in order to highlight the ways in which the bodies of the young men are crippled by repression of the banlieue and its police. He also includes "active" images of banlieue graffiti, namely when Saïd writes graffiti, which demonstrates moments of resistance to the French State and the abstract space of power it has over the city and its peripheries. The graffiti inscriptions in the film, when accompanied by action, by bodies that move, subvert the dehumanization of the young men, overcome their bodily impotence in the face of the police force, and imbue them with agency for a brief moment. In this way, Kassovitz's representation of banlieue graffiti highlights that its political power emerges *not* from the traces of the graffiti left behind but from its ephemerality and its embodied nature. As one graffiti writer who was active in the 1980s and 1990s states, graffiti is never about the "product"; it is about "act of writing." In much the same way, *La Haine*'s graffiti takes its cue from the bodies of those who write it and encounter it.



Image 4.29 "Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme" SOS-Racisme, Photograph by José Michel, Paris, 3 April 1985, La Contemporaine Library

Conclusion

In 1985, an anti-racism activist group called SOS Racisme organized a second iteration of the March for Equality and Against Racism. Photojournalist José Michel captured several shots of the demonstrators as they marched through the center of the city of Paris. In one photograph, four protestors ride mopeds during the protest (Image 4.29, pp. 310). On one of the mopeds, the graffiti inscription "SOS" is written. The second is covered with stickers in the shape of a hand with SOS's slogan: "Don't touch my pal." Like the OAS and FLN tags analyzed in the first chapter, this graffiti inscription is a simple acronym, referring to the name of the political association. However, in contrast with the graffiti we analyzed, this tag is "mobile"; it is written onto a moped, giving it the ability to "move around" and, thus, propagate its message throughout Paris. Its message is two-part: it is a call for help (an S.O.S.), expressing the dire situation experienced by immigrants in France, and it is also an explicit reference to the association attempting to ameliorate these conditions on a national scale. The bodies of the protestors move through the city on the motorized scooter alongside their graffiti, making visible both their "exceptional bodies" and their political messages. In this way, the individual bodies and graffiti merge into one "mobile" physical and political body, transmitting this anti-racism message to other demonstrators and passersby through their very movement through public space.

I have chosen to conclude with this graffiti because it exemplifies several of the ideas that have emerged in this chapter. Firstly, like the peaceful protestors in this photograph who use graffiti to transmit their political message, I have argued against the common conception that graffiti written in the banlieue during the 1980s and 1990s were acts of "violence" against the city. Instead, I have suggested that banlieue graffiti writers, who experience physical and psychological violence at the hands of the French police force, write graffiti in order to protest this violence. Whether unintentional or not, these inscriptions can be read as

attempts to form a social and political "body" out of this lived experience. When Nacer Mraïdi was shot by a police officer in a Parisian banlieue in February 1983, protestors wrote graffiti that denounced the perpetual dehumanization of banlieue residents by police officers and sought to "write" Nacer back into his rightful space in the streets. When Toumi Djaïda was shot by an officer later that same year in a banlieue of Lyon, protesters went on a two-month long pilgrimage, again making visible their "exceptional" bodies throughout the country, all the way to the Elysée. On the way, they encountered several instances of racist graffiti, which they "erased" with these "exceptional" bodies.

Both Charef's novel *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* and Kassovitz's *La Haine* present more ambiguous readings of banlieue graffiti. In Charef's novel, graffiti tells the story of the banlieue; it records the daily lives of its inhabitants. Because of this archival nature, it reflects the desperation and distress of those inhabitants, that are likened to the concrete upon which the graffiti is written. Indeed, Charef suggests that graffiti of Madjid's HLM has no power to overcome the overwhelming weight of the cité. Perhaps this is because it is only Madjid, who leans into his "passivity" in the novel, encounters this graffiti rather than someone else. He has no agency to actuate this graffiti on the ground. Kassovitz sits somewhere between the historical graffiti and Charef's graffiti. In *La Haine*, graffiti's political power always emerges in relation to the movement of the bodies that write it or encounter it. When graffiti is encountered statically, it offers nothing to the passerby or the audience; it merely paints an "image" of the banlieue that reproduces stereotypes. However, when graffiti is written on screen as it is by Saïd, it facilitates a brief moment of political movement, that is quashed later by the policing and surveillance of the banlieue.

Conclusion: Graffiti that Circulates, Looking Back in the 21st Century

In the spring of 2023, while I was a visiting doctoral student at the École normale supérieure (ENS) on Rue d'Ulm in Paris, large protests broke out against President Emmanuel Macron's proposed retirement reforms. Students at the ENS organized protests and demonstrations alongside every major workers' union; one afternoon, we marched down Rue Gay Lussac, the very same street that May 1968 protestors marched on some fifty-five years prior and joined other protestors playing rock music and dancing on Boulevard Raspail. At one point, even the garbage collectors went on strike, and trash lay stinking in the streets for days. During this period, my walks around the 5th arronndissement were peppered with wall-writings; new graffiti inscriptions seemed to crop up every day on the city's walls, alongside makeshift cardboard protest signs and paper posters with political slogans. In March, I encountered a graffiti writing in red paint "G(RÊVE) GÉNÉRALE" ["GENERAL STRIKE"], just like Catherine Deudon's Women's March graffiti, which was itself recreating a general strike graffiti she had read before in Paris (Image 5.2, pp. 316). Underneath this graffiti laid a cardboard sign which read, "Les femmes n'ont pas obtenu le droit de vote en votant !" ["Women didn't get the right to vote by voting!"]— which, again, tied this street intervention back to centuries of feminist protests in the same streets. At at a street corner the following week, I was greeted by a handful of reproductions of the famous 1968 Atelier Populaire poster: *Sois jeune et tais-toi!* (Be young and be quiet!) (Image 5.1, pp. 316). It was as if the ghosts of May '68 and the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* were haunting the streets of the Latin Quarter in 2023.

In her work on contemporary political graffiti in Paris, historian Mathilde Larrère has noted that 21st-century protest graffiti often recycles references and slogans related to historical protests, most notably inscriptions that recall the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, and May 1968. References to these past events, or what she calls "revolutionary

circulations," integrate images and ideas from older political protests into the contemporary urban space and time (169). Philippe Artières, in his analysis of what he calls "displayed writings" during the 2019 *Gilets jaunes* protests, notes that *gilets jaunes* graffiti also took inspiration from May 1968 ("Gilets jaunes" 200). My experience in 2023 was simply another iteration of this circulation process. Although this dissertation is focused on 20th-century graffiti and its representations, these examples demonstrate how historical political movements, and their resulting graffiti continue to inform our 21st-century experience in the city of Paris. People have been writing graffiti for centuries and, despite all of our advances in technology, the desire to "make a [physical] mark" on one's city remains strong. Albeit ephemerally inscribed on the city's walls, these writings somehow also inscribe themselves into our collective memory, re-appearing at various points throughout history, "etched" into the stones of the city. Like Omer wishes for his graffiti in Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, political graffiti of the 20th century gets "incrusted" into the material of the wall, only to be revealed later on. It is as if the city's graffiti always remains just underneath the surface of the wall, only needing activation by a political body to rise to its surface.

Like May '68 graffiti, the graffiti written by the MLF as well as that written in the 1980s and1990s in the banlieues of Paris have produced an urban genealogy that continues to this day. In 2001, a feminist group called NRV (an acronym which, when read out loud in French, is pronounced, "énérvées," or "angry women," committed graffiti "attacks" on metro advertisements, utilizing slogans from the MLF days.[342] In 2019, a group of women, *Les Colleuses,* began first collaging the walls of Marseille with names of victims of femicide, and later began posting messages that reproduce MLF ideas as well, such as "soutien au planning familial," ["support for family planning"] "attaque faciste = riposte féministe" ["facist attack

[342] For more on this, see Clara Lamireau "Les manifestes ephémères."

= feminist counterattack"] "mon corps mes choix" ["my body my choices"] (Les Colleuses, Instagram). In 2023, Nahel Merzouk, a teenager of Moroccan and Algerian descent, was shot in Nanterre by a police officer when he attempted to flee a traffic stop. Protests broke out in Nanterre and other banlieue neighborhoods, just as they did in the 1980s and 1990s. Nahel's name appeared all over the walls of the city, just like Nacer's did some forty years before, an attempt to write Nahel, who lost his life in the shooting, back into the streets of the city. Just as young people from the banlieue wrote "La vengeance pour Abdel" ["Venegeance for Abdel"] in the police station in *La Haine* in 1995, graffiti inscriptions reading, "Justice pour Nahel" ["Justice for Nahel"], appeared throughout both Paris and its banlieues. Both of these 21st-century examples reveal the ways in which protest imagery and tactics continue to resonate with Parisian populations that still fight against the same struggles as they did some thirty, forty, fifty years ago.

Political graffiti is recycled not just trans-historically but also trans-medially. J.M. Ménsion's "ICI ON NOIE LES ALGERIENS" ["HERE WE DROWN ALGERIANS"] graffiti written on the quays of the Seine in 1961 is imitated by the fictional graffiti writer, Omer, in Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*. In Agnès Varda's film *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*, the graffitied slogan of the MLF, "L'avortement libre et gratuit" ["free and legal abortion"] is immortalized as background graffiti during a historical protest in Bobigny. In *La Théorie et la pratique,* Charlotte Delbo transforms May 1968 graffiti inscriptions into light projections on the background of a theater scene. Amadou Gaye's photograph of the graffiti, "Nous sommes tous du gibier a flic," in the banlieue of Chatenay-Malabray becomes a protest banner during the March for Equality and Against Racism in December of 1983. Despite graffiti's situation in a specific place, it acquires a capacity to "wander" through time and space thanks to the prism of a secondary medium, be it film, photography, or literature.



Image 5.1 Personal Photograph, 31 Rue D'Ulm, École nationale supérieure des Arts Decoratifs (March 15th, 2023)



Image 5.2 Personal Photograph, 31 Rue D'Ulm, École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (March 8th, 2023)

However, this practice is not without its tensions and contradictions: by reproducing graffiti through other mediums, graffiti loses some of its political power—power that derives from its ephemerality, its situation in time and space. It is graffiti's immediacy, the spontaneity of its message, as well as its materiality, anchored onto the walls of the city, that draws the passerby's attention. At the same time, graffiti's "remediation" is the only way that scholars can study it, leaving the scholar in a sticky bind.[343] In order to "read" a graffiti like a text, one must also consider its context, its materiality, its spatiality, and its connection to the body. Therefore, part of the thrust of this project has been to re-center these elements that are lost through remediation by i*magining* how the passerby might encounter this work in public space and by reading their body in relationship to the graffiti inscription itself. In this way, I was inspired by historian Saiyda Hartman's practice of "critical fabulation," one in which she uses speculative narration to fill in the blanks about certain untold histories, particularly those of enslaved peoples.[344] While my work differs drastically in its focus from Hartman's, its concern with unknown histories remains the same: graffiti is anonymous, mediated always through a second lens, and this process leaves behind as many gaps as it does physical traces. Where did this graffiti originate? What were the intentions of the author? What are we meant to take away from these inscriptions? All of these questions remain open-ended for the graffiti scholar who analyzes graffiti inscriptions that have no corresponding histories, standing sometimes alone in an archive with little to no commentary.

[343] In this way, this entire project is a curious illustration of Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's concept of "remediation." Remediation, "the representation of one medium in another," is the defining characteristic of new media and its logic is double: it consists of both "hypermediacy" (the multiplication of media) and "immediacy" (the erasure of all media), which are interdependent (45, 6). Although graffiti (in its original form) is not **"**new media," it somehow illustrates the concept of remediation well. Somehow it too becomes a series of "remediations" through literature, film, and photography.

[344] I was also inspired by my work with the Urban Humanities Initiative in the spring of 2022. We constructed a speculative thick map of a neighborhood in Santa Monica, California, where Black populations had been pushed out of their homes and businesses through various racially-motivated repressive tactics. Part of this project was about "imagining" a speculative future in which this *had not happened* and mapping it onto our thick map.

In some ways, this project recreates the practice of "reading" graffiti in the streets. Just as the passerby does not know the whole story behind the graffiti they encounter, as a scholar, I too have taken leaps of faith to "fill in the blanks" left behind by these urban writings. In addition, I have woven together literary and filmic representations of graffiti with these historical photographs in order to knit together a "thick" map of the city. As the postmodern geographer Edward Soja has suggested, the city is not just experienced on the material level, in the built environment (what he calls First Space), but also in our imagined or conceptual space of the city (Second Space) and in our lived reality of the city (Third Space). By linking the historical graffiti to the fictional through the lens of the passerby, I have built a project that explores both the First and Second Space of the city as it relates to graffiti—the built environment and our cultural imaginaries of that space.

This project's focus on the body of the passerby is where Third Space comes into play; by analyzing how the graffiti works on the passerby in their daily trajectories through Paris, I have attempted to reveal another layer to its urban space, that of the interactions between walkers and the insurgent graffiti they encounter. By doing so, I propose that the physical bodies of these passersby become part of a metaphorical political body. The metaphorical political body to which graffiti contributes is policed in much the same way that both the physical body of the activist and their graffiti are policed. This practice of policing writing in the city began in Paris as early as the 19th century, when the population began to become literate and writing in public spaces could be easily transmit political dissent. As Philippe Artière intimates, writing suddenly became something with a life of its own, something that the police needed to surveil, as it contained the seeds of revolution:

> "L'écriture devient au même titre que les autres une composante de la société sur laquelle il faut veiller comme sur un corps vivant. L'écriture agit, se transforme, se reproduit, rassemble, circule, prolifère, se diffuse…Elle n'appartient plus à quelques-

uns, elle vit partout. Et c'est bien comme un corps vivant …" (Artières *La police de l'écriture* 15).

[Writing, like everything else, has become a component of society that must be cared for as one would a living body. Writing acts, transforms, reproduces, brings people together, circulates, proliferates, spreads… It no longer belongs to just a few; it lives everywhere. And it is very much like a living body…"]

According to Artières, writing itself began to form a sort of "living body," that must be policed because its actions, transformations, and circulations might engender an unfavorable political response in the population. Artières' words might remind us of Jean Baudrillard's declaration that graffiti tagging itself turns the city into a "living body." Graffiti, then, is a form of writing that, like both Artières and Baudrillard might say, has the power to equip an entire political body; it *creates* its own political body. These writings challenge both the State-sanctioned writings, like the town notice boards, as well as media writings, like billboards and advertisements. [345] In this way, they overturn the "terrorist space and time of media," to quote Baudrillard, as well as the bounds of the governmental space, to relate back to Artières.

One can sense the anxiety that these sorts of inscriptions incite in those "in power" by the fact that governmental authorities often try to erase them. Turning back to these same protests in 2023, on April 12th, several ENS students enacted a "blockage" of the campus on Rue d'Ulm in order to shut down the university in solidarity with the retirement protests.

[345] Béatrice Fraenkel talks about how public space becomes an "espace du formation du citoyen" ["space of education for the citizen"] through the exposition of political laws ("L'écriture exposée"). In some ways, then, graffiti offers an alternate to this "pedagogy" of the State. Alain Vulbeau also notes that the assumption that tags are delinquent acts "revient à créer une présomption d'innocuité à l'environnent publicitaire ou à toute autre forme d'aménagement graphique urbain ou suburbain. Blâmer les dégradations des graffitistes, c'est donner un satisfecit latent aux urbanistes, aménageurs, publicitaires et autres communicateurs urbains" ["amounts to creating a presumption of harmlessness regarding advertising or any other form of urban or suburban graphic design. Blaming graffiti artists for vandalism amounts to giving tacit approval to urban planners, developers, advertisers, and other urban communicators"] (54).

While this was taking place, someone painted in red a graffiti inscription on the face of the Annex building of the Rue d'Ulm campus. This inscription read: "Ici s'érigent les murs qui enferment le savoir" ["Here stand the walls that enclose knowledge"]. Within merely hours after the protest had ended, this graffiti was painted over in beige; the only mark left of its presence was a slightly darker rectangle of paint that did not match the wall behind it. Despite the École normale supérieure's revolutionary past in relation to May '68, this graffiti hints at the institutional power that lies unchallenged in the ENS. As this example illustrates, just as people continue to write graffiti in the 21st century, those in power continue to work to "erase" that graffiti physically and "erase" metaphorically the histories that these graffiti messages represent.

Just as Artières posits for the 19th century, in the 20th and 21st centuries, all writing, including graffiti writing, continues to be policed, monitored, and surveilled. Certainly, even now, as we become even more trackable through our cellphones and cameras, writing graffiti secretly becomes even more difficult. Despite this fact, graffiti continues to flourish, with graffiti writers using Instagram to share their illegal art. This increase in digital technologies, the rise of the internet, cell phones, and surveillance at the turn of the 20th century, begs an important question when it comes to graffiti and its representations. How does the internet with its ability to share images of graffiti with anyone and everyone change the political power of this graffiti? In the same way that photography and film allowed people who were not present to become passersby to political graffiti, it would seem that the internet has allowed *everyone* to be a passerby to graffiti at an even greater speed. In some ways, this allows political messages to pass more rapidly and groups to form more quickly. But it also allows political groups to get lost in the shuffle. We can fly past graffiti every single day, now at the flick of our thumb rather than with the step of our feet. The outcome of this rearrangement of our bodies in relation to graffiti remains to be seen, especially as we

continue into the uncharted territory of technologies such as artificial intelligence, which has the capacity to even create its own fictional graffiti and pass it off as real. Returning graffiti to its materiality and corporeality will be essential to fight against the dematerialization of the internet.

During this same month of March 2023, another graffiti, this time in the form of a pochoir, like those of Miss.Tic, caught my eye on the Rue de l'Abbé de l'Épée between Boulevard Saint Michel and Rue Saint-Jacques (Image 5.3, pp. 322). This particular graffiti demonstrates well the final and most important part of the graffiti puzzle; it illustrates how graffiti literalizes and mobilizes the political via the individual body. Written in three lines as if a poem, it reads:

bourgeoisie

tremble…

Le people se lève !

[*bourgeoisie*

tremble…

The people are standing up !]

The first two lines personifies the bourgeoise into a single "body," that "trembles." The lines can also be read two ways, lending a certain ambiguity to the graffiti: it can be read as either declarative statement (The bourgeoise is trembling) or a command (Bourgeoisie, tremble!). In any case, the positionality of the bourgeoise is clear; they are cowering in fear. The word "tremble" reminds me of the frenetic energy of the city that 19th-century poet Charles Baudelaire called the "shock" of modern life and 20th-century Surrealist poet Louis Aragon called the "frisson"; however, rather than excitement, this *trésaillement* is a bodily movement of fear, as the bourgeoise contemplates the final line: "*Le people se lève !"* The bourgeoisie "trembles" because the proletariat have found their own bodies again; they have "stood up" in

their collective political body to take on and take down the "bourgeoise." Via this comparison between their two "bodies," the graffiti alludes to a certain "metaphorical" inversion of power between the bourgeoise and the people. The "people" may be at the bottom of the pochoir in a visual sense (the word "people" is "below" the word "bourgeoisie" in the photograph), but they are now standing "above" the bourgeoisie; the hierarchy of power has been upended. At the same time, this metaphorical inversion in the graffiti also evokes the literal mobilization of thousands of people during the 2023 protests. Just as the metaphorical "people" got up, so too did the actual individuals that live and work in Paris (and in many other cities in France). Graffiti again imbricates simultaneously the physical activation of bodies and the activation of a metaphorical political body; indeed, these two bodily movements go hand-in-hand. Finally, the graffiti artist themselves are *also* mobilizing to "get up" and produce this piece. This movement is ecstatic, punctuated by the upwards movement of the exclamation point at the end of the sentence.

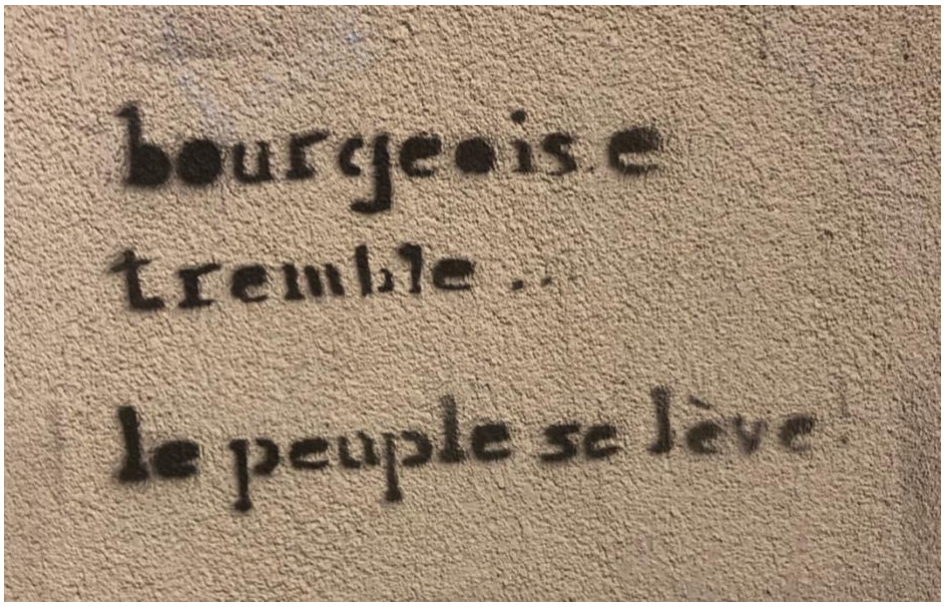


Image 5.3 Personal Photograph, Rue de l'Abbé de l'Épée
March 15th 2023

Graffiti, then, reveals more than just the thoughts of a lone individual; it elucidates the machinations of a much larger political body, made up of these individual bodies with their own wills, desires, and actions. By marking the concrete, it makes concrete the political, societal, and cultural tensions that mark the city. By studying graffiti, an object of "low culture" that is outside of the traditional canon, we are able to see the ways in which the city and our literary and visual representations of the city are influenced by even the smallest of interventions. To study graffiti is to study the city from the ground up rather than from the top down; it is to engage horizontally with the passerby, to practice ourselves "tactics" that subvert the machinations and restrictions of the State and its arm over the "abstract space" of the city and of our readings of those cities. By reading closely the writing on the walls, we too become engaged bodily in the actions of the streets. We are not passive passersby to what is happening on the ground; we are active participants in this discourse between city and inhabitant, between space and subjectivity, between the physical and the imagined.

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