

Cahiers de Littérature Orale

Special Issue - "Theater, performance and political speech in the public space", 2021.

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Deadline to submit paper proposals: **January 10th 2020.**

This issue of *Cahiers de Littérature Orale* will focus on the role of political speech in artistic performances expressed in the public space, understood in its “material” (urban space open to audience) and metaphorical (space of public debate) sense (Fleury, 2010).

"Political speech" plays an increasingly important role in the various African metropolises, particularly in "street parliaments" but also during rallies and collective actions led by activists campaigning for more democracy and social justice (*Le Balai citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *Y'en a marre* in Senegal, *Filimbi* and *LUCHA* in DR Congo...). In Western cities, there is also a collective construction of this "political speech" which, in response to the economic crisis, is increasingly displayed during meetings in the public space (Banégas, Brisset-Foucault, Cutolo, 2012). The artistic practices of interest for this issue are thus at the crossroads of a public speech policy and a space occupation policy, sometimes transformed into spaces of anti-establishment, sometimes into spaces of reproduction of the hegemonic order. Circulating through the bodies of actors, performers but also through different media (visual, audio, digital...), occupying squares, backyards, streets, political speech performed in the public space stems from the social and political context in which it is formulated, while also being a part of it.

In the French field of theatre, the "hyper-reference" to the concept of public space reflects the omnipresence of the imaginary of democracy in the discourse of its actors (Hamidi-Kim, 2018). Indeed in France, the institutionalization of the street arts movement in the 1990s was driven by a shared will among socio-cultural actors and artists to "rebuild the connection and the political community" through theater in a context of urban space crisis and social ties failure (Hamidi-Kim, 2013). The politics was then driven by the idea of restoring the meaning of urban life in a context of crisis (Chadoir, 2008). In a broader sense, contemporary art and performance, when entering the public space, like performing arts, aim to reconfigure the imaginary of urban space and democracy (Malaquais, 2006). These fruitful forms emerging at the crossroads of the arts and – in some contexts, languages – claim to build new modalities of public discourse and social interaction.

However, it is necessary to pay attention to the specific uses of political speech to measure the real capacity of art to reclaim the model of participatory democracy or to reinvest public space in contexts where its meaning and use have been damaged. In an African capital city such as Ouagadougou, the songs lyrics of *Le Balai Citoyen* during the October 2014 insurrection had a major place in the protest actions accompanying the dismantling of Blaise Compaoré's autocratic regime (Degorce, Palé, 2018). Similarly, the establishment of new festival platforms on the continent (Peghini, Thérésine, 2016), working to build loyalty among a local audience as well as integration in a consecration system that is both Francophone and pan-African, reveals the desire to make artistic gatherings the local and transnational echo chambers for current events in the

countries where these festivals are held, and their socio-political issues. In countries in conflict or post-conflict situations, the urban space – the ultimate space of exposure to others – is synonymous with potential danger or risk and thus hardly opens up to artistic performances, especially when they are used to express a collective political voice whose spread is apprehended.

This issue invites contributors to reflect on the uses of political speech in urban artistic performances. What power relations does it account for or does it allow emancipation? Under what conditions does it become political and goes beyond the "evidence of its 'saying'" (Neveux, 2019)? How does it fit into public spaces that are more or less involved in art production? Does it impact the public immediately or is it delayed via, for example, social networks within "new speaking spaces" (Bornand, Degorce, Leguy, 2015)?

Schedule :

- Deadline for papers proposals (max one page) : January 10th 2020 to aurore.desgranges@hotmail.fr ; e.bertho@sciencespobordeaux.fr ; mlelay@ifra-nairobi.net
- Final papers (max 50 000 characters) to be submitted by April 20th 2020 ;
- Special issue to be released by Spring 2021.

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