

[Urbaphobia, or, the hatred of the city, 16th-21st Centuries. An international and multidisciplinary conference, to be held in Bordeaux, France, January 2023](#)

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Fears created by the « city » as are probably a phenomenon as ancient as the urban phenomenon itself. "Urbaphobia" is literally the hatred of the city, especially large ones. This theme remains rather innovative in the field of French historical sciences. Internationally, a few researchers have explored the subject. Morton and Lucia

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White have analyzed the hostility of American intellectuals towards the city__. Klaus Bergman, for his part, has worked on the origins of urbaphobia in Germany and its

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implications in the Nazi regime__, an approach that can be found in Anna Treves

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(1981) and Ricardo Mariani (1976) in relation to Italian fascism__. Finally, we can cite the work of Anton King on the characteristics of English urban phobia between

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1880 and 1939__ and Joëlle Salomon Cavin's analysis of the city's disenchantment

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in Switzerland__.

Geographers were pioneers, but historians progressively took interest in the topic. In 2007, a Conference was held in the famous Cerisy Conference Centre : *Ville mal*

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aimée, ville à aimer (" Poorly Loved Cities, Cities to Love")__, organized by Bernard Marchand and Joëlle Salomon Cavin, both of them geographers. On that same year, a Conference in Paris led to a collective publication, with Arnaud Baubérot and Florence Bourillon as editors : *Urbaphobie, la détestation de la ville aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles* (Pompignac, Ed. Bière, 2009), with historians and a chronological focus on the modern and contemporary period. But in Bernard Marchand's anthology, *Les*

Ennemis de Paris^[7], it is obvious that as early as the 18th Century, the French capital did not have only good-willed friends.

The *Centre d'études des mondes modernes et contemporains*, research centre for early-modern and modern historians at Bordeaux-Montaigne University (France), organizes a Conference with a timespan going from the 16th to the 21st centuries, in a multidisciplinary perspective. This conference will stand in line with two previous international conferences organized by the same institution, the first on « Urbicides », the second on « Urban Fears », the two of them having been published in book form subsequently^[8]. « Urbaphobia » will be the last panel of the triptych.

In this conference, urbaphobia will be addressed under various angles. What follows is a non-exhaustive list of suggestions :

- **Urbaphobia and environmental risks** : the theme of the city, as a « man (and woman) eater » is as much an image as a reality. Poor sanitary conditions until the second half of the 19th century meant that epidemics were much more lethal in the city than in the countryside. Progressively, urban populations became conscious of the strong pollution of where they were living in. This dates from before the industrial revolution, as can be seen in the early-modern period with the focus on « miasma » (bad air, or night air), or the success of the aerist theories. Nineteenth-century cities were increasingly considered as a nuisance (especially in France and Britain), due to their rapid demographic growth, their sanitary conditions, the growing industrialization and the concentration of workers, sometimes assimilated to « new barbarians ». Serious sanitary or environmental crises (e.g., cholera, or London's Great Stink) make these fears more acute. In this conference, we will not so much address the reality of these phenomena than the way they create a multi-faceted rejection of the city.
- **Urbaphobia and demoralization** : in the Bible, Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah are the very images of the city as the place where the traditional structures of society are destroyed, and it has been a recurring topos ever since. If, for a great many, the city embodies the ideal of a better life, when the dream turns to nightmare, the city is pointed at as the source of all social evils : crime, violence, poverty, immorality, degeneration of the race,

[9] alienation, anomy___... The city may be seen as the concentration of places traditionally perceived as subversive : taverns, pubs, cafés, music halls, hotels, brothels, gambling places, etc. A geography of urbaphobia could be an interesting approach : places or areas of bad repute, which are the focus of urbaphobia, vary across the centuries - or do they ? This approach could be doubled with a sociology of urbaphobia, focusing on the segments of the urban population targeted by urbaphobic discourses.

- **Expressions of urbaphobia** : urbaphobia takes many guises. The theme has fed and still feeds a powerful rhetoric, which can be found in petitions and pamphlets. It can serve as the basis for a political programme. It can also manifest itself in a very practical way, by phenomena of flight, of the whole population or of certain categories of population. Special attention will be given to the way in which urbaphobia is expressed in the arts. This fear of the city has long inspired artists, whatever their art. In literature, anticipation novels take up this dark imaginary to draw a terrifying portrait of a sick and murderous city, to which respond either the ideal of the countryside or that of a healthy city freed of pollution. Graphic novels, mangas, photography or the cinema have also addressed the theme of urbaphobia. In the pictural art, a painter like Edward Hopper has given anti-urban feelings a wide audience. The conference will try to decipher the modalities of representation and the codes of urbaphobia in the arts, and their evolution through time.

[1] ___ Morton and Lucia WHITE, *The intellectual versus the city: From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press and MIT Press, 1962.

[2] ___ Bergmann KLAUS, *Agrarromantik und Grossstadtfeindschaft*, Meisenheim am Glan, Verlag Anton Hain, 1970.

[3] ___ Anna TRIVIES, « La politique anti-urbaine fasciste et un siècle de résistance contre l'urbanisation en Italie », *L'espace géographique*, t. X, 1981, p. 115-124 ; Ricardo MARIANI, *Fascismo e « citta nuove »*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1976.

[4] Anton KING, « Historical patterns of reactions to urbanisme: the case of Britain, 1880-1939 », *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 1980, p. 453-467.

[5] https://serval.unil.ch/resource/serval:BIB_05BBD2FFD461.S001/REF

[6] Joëlle SALOMON CAVIN, Bernard MARCHAND (dir.), *Antiurbain. Origines et conséquences de l'urbaphobie*, Lausanne, PPUR, 2010. The historiographical overview is borrowed from Joëlle Salomon Cavin. A survey on Cairn and Persée has showed a limited number of publications on urbaphobia.

[7] Bernard MARCHAND, *Les Ennemis de Paris. La haine de la grande ville des Lumières à nos jours*, Rennes, PUR, 2009.

[8] Philippe CHASSAIGNE, Christophe LASTÉCOUËRES, Caroline LE MAO (dir.), *Urbicides. Destructures et renaissances urbaines du XVIIe siècle à nos jours*, Bordeaux, Presses de la MSHA, 2021 ; Philippe CHASSAIGNE, Adèle DELAPORTE, Caroline LE MAO (dir.), *Peurs urbaines (XVIIe-XXIe siècles)*, to be published by the Presses de la MSHA en 2022.

[9] On this particular topic see, for example, Sebastian ROCHÉ, *Le Frisson de l'émeute. Violences urbaines et banlieues*, Paris, Seuil, 2006.

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