

In the American film *Superbad* (2007), Seth (Jonah Hill) reveals to Evan (Michael Cera) one of his childhood obsessions, which has caused him not a few problems, “For some reason, I don’t know why, I used to have this thing... where I would... like, kinda... sit around all day... and draw pictures of dicks.”

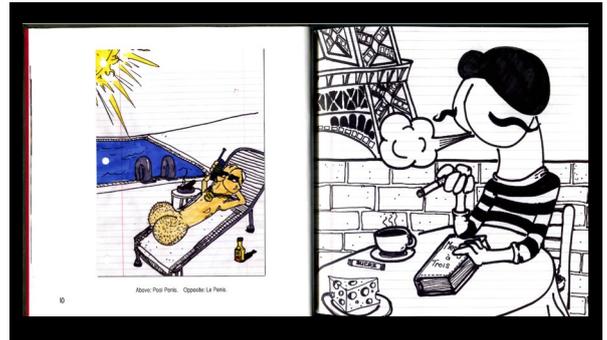


The characters’ names are taken from Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, who wrote the script when they were teenagers and spent, according to them, hours mutually drawing their own genitals. So the flashback showing the younger Seth “sketching dicks” is not a far cry from autobiography.



Some of the drawings we see in the scene, which has become a cult favorite, gave rise to a book that brought together eighty-two “phallographics” by David Goldberg. Most of the penises in the collection are

anthropomorphic, catching some rays pool-side, smoking a cigarette, waging war, etc.



The act of depicting the male reproductive organ—nowadays easily characterized as puerile, schoolboyish, even vulgar—is rarely examined or thought about, and yet it is shared by many and hardly an isolated practice. Although we focus here on the phallic *object* mainly as a graphic depiction of the erect penis, it is also a *word* and an *effect*, as the art historian Patricia Simons points out:

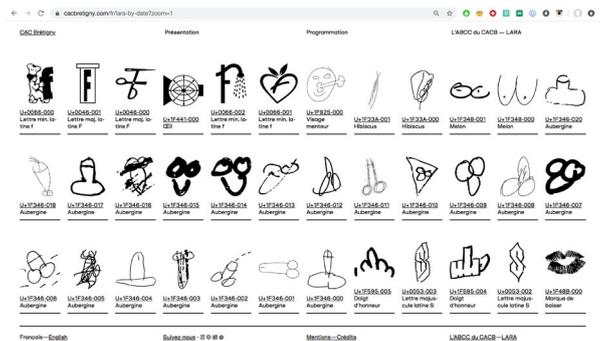
Rethinking the relationship among masculinity, patriarchy and the male body necessitates a critical review of the history of the phallus as an artifact, term and symbol, especially in its psychoanalytic manifestation... Word, object and effect, the phallus has its ups and downs, bobbing along in Greek processions, evoking awe or anxiety but having its funny side as well. (Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe, A Cultural History*, 2011, 52)

We should simply note here that there exists a scholarly word, *phallus*, that is applied to depictions of erect male sex organs. This shows the degree to which it is an established practice, the object of a cult and of study, and a psychoanalytical concept that serves multiple functions. There is no equivalent word for female genitals. To try to understand how this “social iconography” raises, in varying degrees, political, cultural, popular, and sexual histories, we would like to

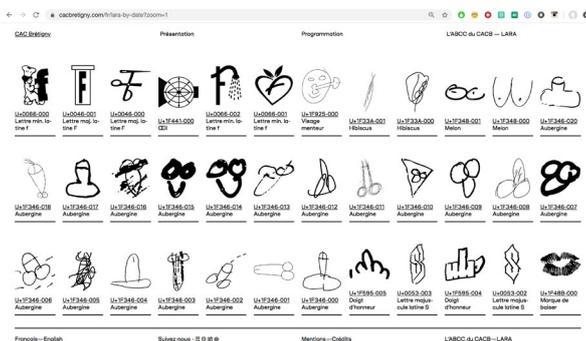
propose below a survey of selected places, periods, and practices, from lunar to digital space, from prehistory to the 21st century, from the *graffito* in the wild to its interpretation by AI.

1 In Brétigny-sur-Orge, 2016

As graphic designers and typographers, we have been in residency at CAC Brétigny since 2016, when we developed the art center's graphic identity. The art center itself was conceived as a space dedicated to long-term research. *The ABCC of CACB* is in fact an alphabet made up of letters and signs either collected in Brétigny-sur-Orge and the *Département* of the Essonne, or selected in light of the art center, its program and invited artists.



In Brétigny-sur-Orge in 2018, as in so many other communes throughout France, 135 streets and twenty-four facilities in the town were named after men while eleven streets and five facilities bore women's names. Thus, CAC Brétigny (formerly the *Gérard Philippe* Cultural Center) can be found along *rue Henri Douard*, in the *Jules Verne* Space, adjoining an education and sports complex that includes the *Lycée Jean-Pierre Timbaud*, the *Léo Lagrange* swimming pool, the *Gérard Philippe* School of Music, the *Collège Paul Éluard*, the *René Audran* Tennis Courts, and the *Auguste Delaune* Stadium.



This corpus has come together as a typeface called LARA, certain signs of which are regularly introduced and activated one by one on communication supports, which are viewed as spaces meant for publications and circulating research. *The ABCC of CACB* associates multiple voices in one and the same typography whose glyphs are constantly growing in number with scripts that are by turns vernacular, institutional, personal, or public. By doing this, *The ABCC of CACB* attempts to *edit* the geographic, political, and artistic contexts in which CAC Brétigny finds itself.



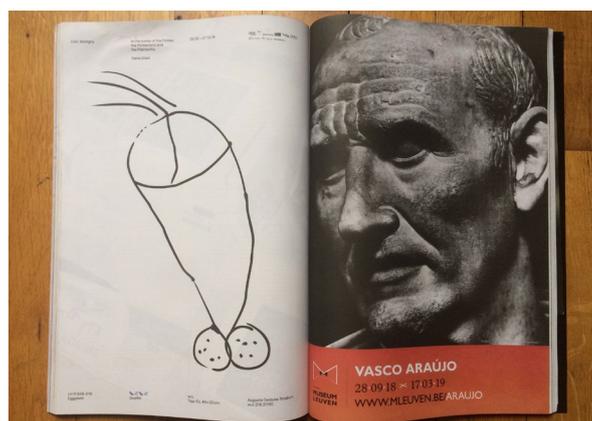
In a French public space that is mostly laid out, constructed, and used by men, it is not surprising then that the sexually or erotically oriented graffiti seen in the Essonne feature almost exclusively male genitalia, sometimes with accompanying text (insults, names, telephone numbers).



Only four vulvas and seven pairs of breasts were recorded by us in 2018 as opposed to 103 penises and five pairs of buttocks. We observed these graffiti in public spaces (streets, parks, squares, etc.) and on or near public and semi-public establishments (administrative offices, educational and religious facilities, public housing).



For the artist Núria Güell's exhibition "Au nom du Père, de la Patrie et du Patriarcat" (In the Name of the Father, the Fatherland and the Patriarchy), this particular collection, reduced to twenty-four signs—scattered throughout the show's communication supports—makes clear the unequal distribution.

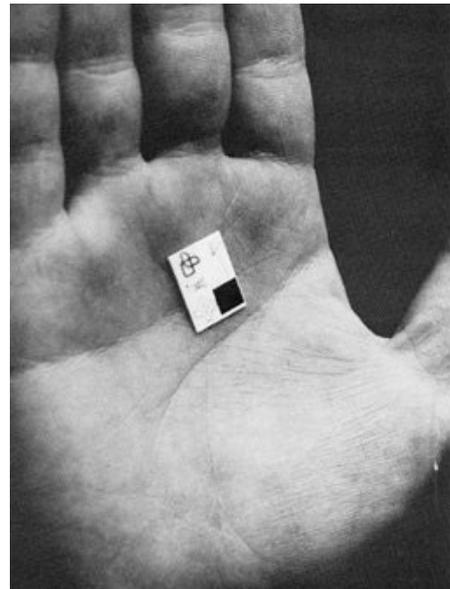


Nowadays the functions of this kind of graffiti vary. They include appropriating territory or leaving behind some trace of having been there; indicating the reappropriation of a site; making fun of someone in particular; amusing or provoking the passer-by; killing time by indulging in graphic play; anonymously expressing a desire or frustration; even serving as a form of sex education for young taggers and graffiti artists.



While for the most part they display a provocative or abusive character, such penises—here mostly drawn by young men given the insults or first names accompanying them—didn't always have this reputation and managed to serve several functions. The tirelessly repeated gesture—its initial manifestations go back 40,000 years—has become a language containing both an "immutability" and a "mutability" that shift it from an "image-symbol" to a "sign-symbol"

(to borrow terms coined by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure concerning language and the typographer Adrian Frutiger on the subject of signs).

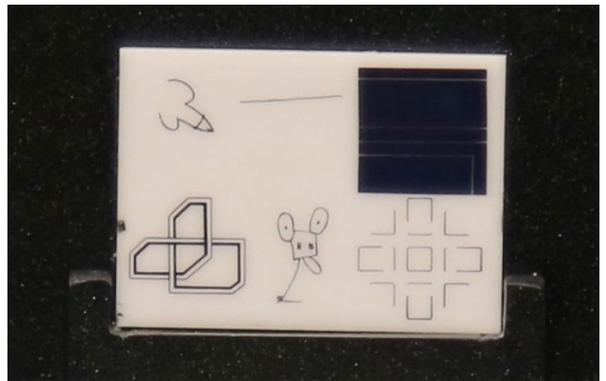


We can see here on the picture below Warhol's "micropenis" scratched out in two or three lines—penis and testicles, then the head of the penis (the glans) and the urethra—diagonally positioned with the tip down. The first of a series of six pieces and pointing towards the other five, the penis is simplified to the point of becoming a sign that suffices unto itself, although it could appear to be a rocket in the eyes of the gullible.

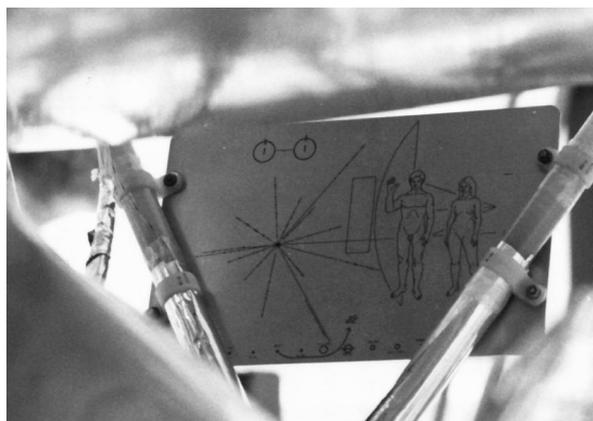
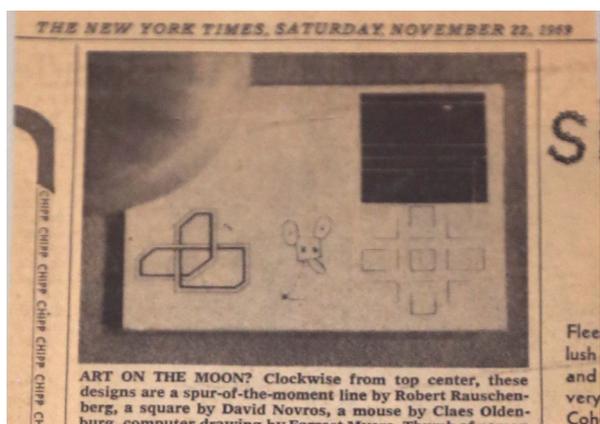


2 In space, 1969-1972

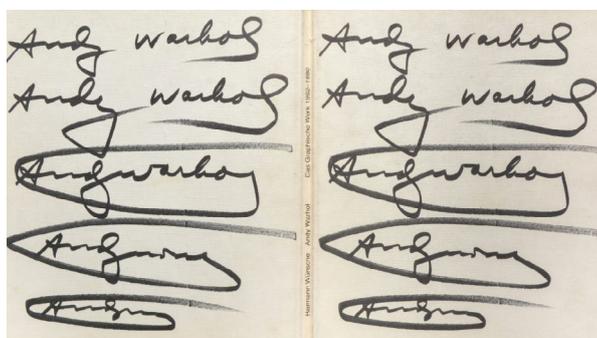
Why does everybody draw "wieners" and "wil-lies" everywhere and all the time? So much so that a penis drawn by Andy Warhol has apparently been on the Moon since 1969, reproduced on a tiny ceramic plaque the size of a segment of one's finger that was secretly embarked on Apollo 12. The plate is the *Moon Museum*, a micro-museum featuring six works of art created solely by male artists, viz., Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, David Novros, Forrest Myers, Claes Oldenburg, and John Chamberlain.



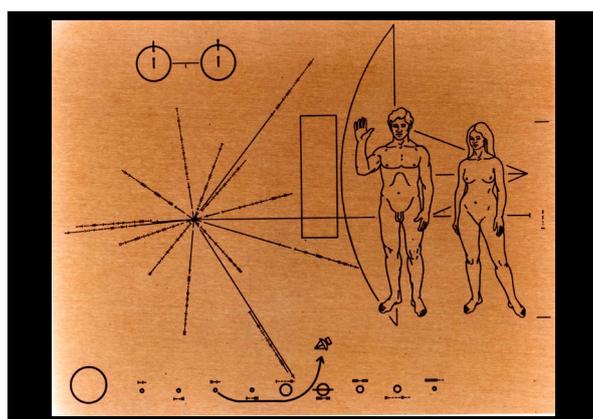
The project was revealed in the *New York Times* on 22 November 1969, once the Apollo 12 crew left the Moon. On the photograph accompanying the article a thumb deliberately covers Warhol's drawing. The greatest surprise lies in the image's caption, which mentions that the "thumb of [the] person holding [the] wafer covers [the] signature of Andy Warhol." The piece is described in the article as "a calligraphic squiggle made up of the initials of his signature," a lovely euphemism.



The Warhol "scribble" is identified then as being the artist's signature. The historian and anthropologist of writing Béatrice Fraenkel characterizes the act of signing something as a performative act. Thus, drawing a penis or affixing a signature reveals, it would seem, the same need, i.e., to mark out one's territory, a "here and now," by signifying one's attributes to the world. Obviously Warhol's signature, on the face of it, has little to do with a penis, as the cover of *Andy Warhol: Das Graphische Werk 1962-1980*, makes amply clear.



Drawn by one and the same hand—Linda Salzman Sagan's—on a single support, the woman is depicted in a relaxed pose with her genitals very much simplified, if they exist at all, while the man, larger and solidly upright on his two legs, raises his arm in salutation, his reproductive organs clearly identified.



3 In Egypt, 5000—100 BCE

Thanks to NASA yet again, two other depictions of the human body, male and female, were—in a more official way—sent into space in 1972, this time as a message addressed to extraterrestrials. They appear on an engraved metal plaque attached to the Pioneer 10 and 11 space probes.

In Egyptian hieroglyphs, the mixed formal writing system in use from about 5000 to 100 BCE, there are depictions of man and woman that are akin to those seen on the Pioneer plaques.



The classification of hieroglyphic signs by the English Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge includes 137 depictions of a male figure in as many activities—greeting, praying, building a wall, etc.—as opposed to only sixteen of a female figure. The woman is represented twice standing, three times leaning forward, and eleven times seated.

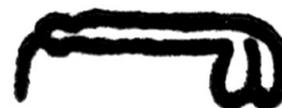
2. FIGURES OF WOMEN

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|--|
| 1. | <i>hater</i> | two women grasping hands, friendship |
| 3. | <i>behem</i> | woman beating a tambourine, to rejoice |
| 4. | <i>beb</i> | to bend, to bow |
| 5. | <i>Nut</i> | the goddess Nut, i. e., the sky |
| 6. | — | woman with dishevelled hair |
| 7. | <i>sat</i> (?) | a woman seated |
| 8. | — | a sacred being, sacred statue |
| 9. | — | |
| 10. | — | a divine or holy female, or statue |
| 11. | — | |
| 12. | <i>ari</i> | a guardian, watchman |
| 13. | <i>behem</i> | see No. 3 |
| 14. | <i>beg</i> | a pregnant woman |
| 15. | <i>mes, pāpā</i> | a parturient woman, to give birth |
| 16. | <i>menā</i> | to nurse, to suckle a child |
| 17. | <i>renen</i> | to dandle a child in the arms |

Specific signs represent the genitals. The penis is depicted on a male body to signify the act of urinating,



or separate from the body as a sign in its own right, signifying the phallus but also more broadly what is male, the husband, or the bull. It is depicted in profile pointing leftward—like most figurative elements of hieroglyphic writing—with the testicles, the penis, and the glans, but also with sperm or urine issuing from it, which always presupposes a sign that is “in action.”



Superimposed on other signs, it becomes the verb *utet*, “to breed, to engender, to generate.”



It can also be depicted erect coupled with the letter S to form the name *seshem*.



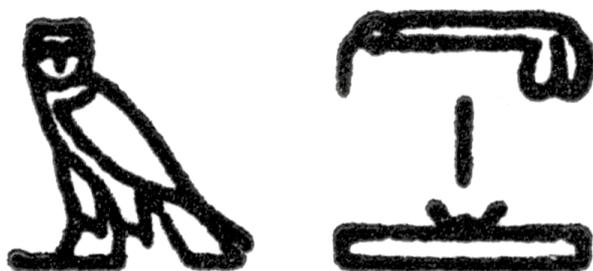
The testicles get their own depiction.



As for female genitalia, there is only one depiction as opposed to seven for the male organ, and it is fairly abstract and passive. It means both the female organ and woman.



The penis is called *baḥ* and its sign, when combined with others, becomes a word that has nothing to do with the representation, which is quite common in Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, where one and the same sign can be interpreted, according to the context, as a phonogram (phonetic reading), ideogram, or determiner (semantic reading). Here, for example, the *baḥ* penis, combined with an owl and a papyrus scroll, becomes the word *em baḥ*, meaning “before” or “in the presence of”:



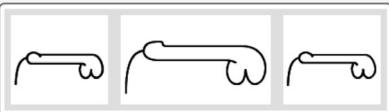
Nowadays a typographic version of these signs is available to Egyptologists for their scientific transcription.

Input

Type here:

Input was:

Character:  (U+130BA)

Character image (experiment): 

Characters near this

Before: 

After: 

Most body parts have their own sign, often in several versions. Although no complete list of Egyptian hieroglyphs exists, a limited number were added in 2009 to Unicode after the list established by the Egyptologist Alan Gardiner. Launched in 1991, standard Unicode is the official world coding system for digital typefaces; it covers around one hundred writing systems and assigns to each character or glyph a name and numerical value.

Egyptian Hieroglyphs																
13000	1301	1302	1303	1304	1305	1306	1307	1308	1309	130A	130B	130C	130D	130E	130F	1310
0																
1																
2																
3																
4																
5																
6																
7																
8																
9																
A																
B																
C																
D																
E																
F																

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4 In digital space, 2010—

Since 2010, Unicode has also included emojis, a term coined in Japanese that literally fuses “image” (e) and “letter” (moji). The Unicode Consortium regularly meets to add new ones to its list, considering proposals submitted by citizens from around the world.

Emoji Charts

Full Emoji List, v13.0

[Index & Info](#) | [Issues & Bugs](#) | [See | Pasting Additions](#)

This chart provides a list of the Unicode emoji characters and sequences, with images from different vendors, CLDR name, date, source, and keywords. The ordering of the emoji and the annotations are based on [Unicode CLDR data](#). Emoji sequences have more than one code point in the Code column. [Recently-added emoji](#) are marked by a  in the name and outlined images; their images may show as a group with "... before and after.

Emoji with skin-tones are not listed here; see [Full Skin Tone List](#).

For counts of emoji, see [Emoji Counts](#).

While these charts use a particular version of the [Unicode Emoji data files](#), the images and format may be updated at any time. For any production usage, consult those data about the contents of each column, such as the [CLDR Short Name](#), click on the column header. For further information, see [Index & Info](#).

Smileys & Emotion														
face-smiling														
Nr	Code	Browser	Apple	Goog	FB	Wind	Twitter	Joy	Sams	GMail	SR	DCM	KDDI	CLDR Short Name
1	U+1F601													grinning face
2	U+1F602													grinning face with big eyes
3	U+1F603													grinning face with smiling eyes
4	U+1F604													beaming face with smiling eyes

Although there are clear nuances, it is tempting to draw a parallel between hieroglyphic writing and emojis. Among the differences between these two “writing systems”—a logographic and phonetic writing system for the former and something closer to ideograms for the latter—there is one in particular we would like to single out, viz., the lack of emojis for depicting genitalia. It is a surprising absence among the emojis listed in Unicode whereas the questions of gender and skin tone have already been raised and most members of the human body have been incorporated.



The emojis with the most pronounced sexual connotation known are the eggplant 🍆, the peach 🍑 and waterdrops 💧, so much so that Facebook and Instagram have supervised and censored their use since late 2019 because they are considered “sexually explicit language.”

Recent postings of #🍆🍑💧 are currently blocked because the Instagram community has flagged content that possibly does not meet its guidelines.

body-parts														
#	Code	Browser	Apple	Google	FB	Wind	Twitter	Joy	Samsung	GMail	BB	DCM	KDDI	CLDR Short Name
186	U+1F385		🍆	🍆	🍆	🍆	🍆	🍆	🍆	🍆	🍆	🍆	🍆	flexed biceps
187	U+1F9B6		🦾	🦾	🦾	🦾	🦾	🦾	🦾	🦾	🦾	🦾	🦾	mechanical arm
188	U+1F9B7		🦿	🦿	🦿	🦿	🦿	🦿	🦿	🦿	🦿	🦿	🦿	mechanical leg
189	U+1F93D		🦵	🦵	🦵	🦵	🦵	🦵	🦵	🦵	🦵	🦵	🦵	leg
190	U+1F93E		🦶	🦶	🦶	🦶	🦶	🦶	🦶	🦶	🦶	🦶	🦶	foot
191	U+1F442		👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	ear
192	U+1F939		👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	👂	ear with hearing aid
193	U+1F443		👃	👃	👃	👃	👃	👃	👃	👃	👃	👃	👃	nose
194	U+1F900		🧠	🧠	🧠	🧠	🧠	🧠	🧠	🧠	🧠	🧠	🧠	brain
195	U+1FAC0		🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷 anatomical heart
196	U+1FAC1		🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷 lungs
197	U+1F9B1		🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	tooth
198	U+1F9B5		🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	🦷	bone
199	U+1F445		👁️	👁️	👁️	👁️	👁️	👁️	👁️	👁️	👁️	👁️	👁️	eyes

Emojis depicting male and female genitalia have been submitted to the Unicode Consortium but the proposed designs were rejected. To make up for this lack, users have reappropriated a certain number of existing emojis, turning them away from their original meaning. It then becomes possible to have multiple readings of a figurative sign in terms of its appearance—which varies according to the platform or terminal being used—and the context in which it is written. For example, this combination of signs is not meant to conjure up a light meal in the country complete with a gushing bottle of champagne at the end...

With the fruit and vegetables included in the Food & Drink category alone, the emojis for eggplant 🍆, maize 🌽, banana 🍌, carrot 🥕, cucumber 🥒, peach 🍑, avocado 🥑, and cherries 🍒 are now part of the great sexting classics; sexting, of course, is a portmanteau word that appeared in the 2000s and joins the terms sex and text to describe sending sex messages electronically, i.e., sexually explicit texts or photographs. Phallic signs evoking the penis, it should be noted, make up the vast majority of these questionable emojis.



5 In Italy, 15th—16th century

The culinary metaphors currently in use to indicate the organs of reproduction are nothing new, however. Among the legion of examples we would like to point to a detail from a vegetal fresco in the Villa Farnesina, Rome, painted by Giovanni da Udine in 1517 under Raphael’s direction. It features in particular a *zucchini phallus* sporting *eggplant testicles* that is penetrating a *fig vagina*.



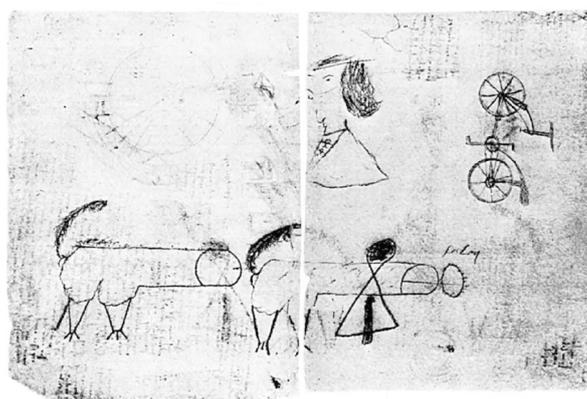
Pulpy juicy fruit bursting with seeds was painted on lots of objects and in decorative interiors throughout the Italian Renaissance; it symbolizes fertility, sexual pleasure and its excesses, as much as it does abundance, power, and prosperity. All of which is displayed in Raphael's fresco for the Loggia di Psiche ceiling of the sumptuous Villa Farnesina of Agostino Chigi, who happened to be Pope Julius II's banker.



If the vulva as such is represented less often, the "cunnic" fig or *fica* sign (the fig standing in for female genitalia, as can be seen in Raphael's fresco) takes over from that bit of anatomy with a range of meanings—from the derisive to the protective, apotropaic gesture.



One double page of Leonardo's notebooks features—alongside a portrait and a bike—two phalluses sporting animal legs and tails, one following closely behind the other, the tip of the first pointing towards a hole, in all likelihood an anus. They are not in Leonardo's hand but may have been drawn by his assistant and lover, Salai, whose name is written next to the orifice. Separated from the body to become an entity in its own right, the penis lives the life of a kind of animal.



This majolica plate from 1536 attributed to Francesco Urbini depicts a *testa di cazzi* (or "head of pricks") accompanied by an inscription written from right to left, recalling Leonardo's mirror handwriting: OGNI HOMO ME GVARDA COME FOSSE VNA TESTA DE CAZI ("Everybody looks at me as if I were a dickhead"). The inscription in the first person personifies the portrait and hence leads readers to believe it is

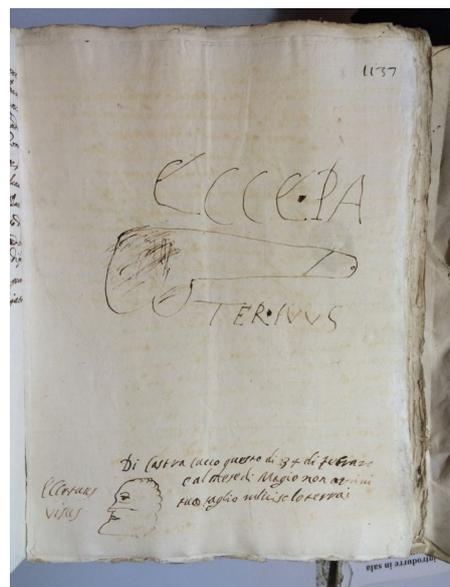
the image that is speaking, i.e., a twisting heap of penises endowed with the gift of speech in which readers can project themselves. The image draws on both popular codes (humoristic, explicit, even obscene language and depictions) and erudite ones (pictorial and typographic mastery), producing a contrast and an effect that are all the more striking.



In popular Italian iconography of the same period, the mocking or insulting penis is very widespread. During our research, begun in 2014, we had access to records of lawsuits from the 16th and 17th centuries, conserved in the State Archives in Rome. It was the paleographer Armando Petrucci who pointed us toward this rich vein, an archive of 80 *cartelli infamanti* that were done between 1584 and 1646. The *cartelli infamanti*, or derogatory “infamous” broadsheets, are defamatory and insulting posters that sometimes sport obscene drawings as well.

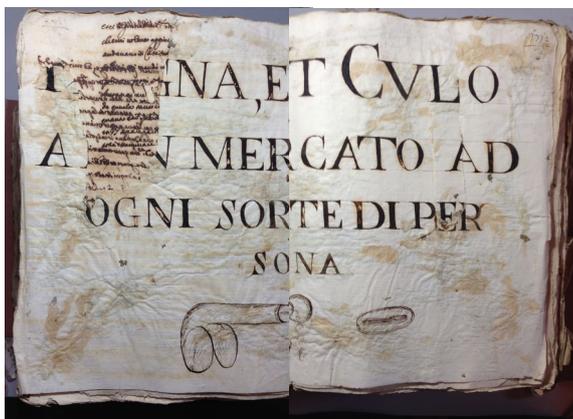


Written out anonymously by hand, they were stuck up in public for all to see while targeting one person in particular. At the time, slander and insults were taken very seriously and posting a *cartello* was considered a crime. It was precisely because the practice was criminal that these documents were conserved in the records as evidence and can be consulted and studied today. They are a form of “graphic delinquency,” to borrow the historian Philippe Artières’s term concerning similar practices developed by the French police in the late 19th century.



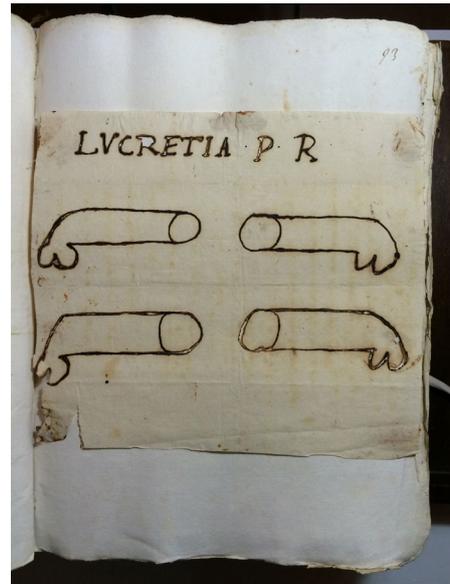
In Italy the 16th century witnessed growing literacy, and certain demands of Rome's inhabitants took publicly posted written form. Tokens of a popular writing practice, the articulation between official and semi-official writing is occasionally striking, as in this case, where the composition of the message is based on the stone-carved writing of the authorities which is everywhere on the walls of Rome, a true city of the written word. The insulting message would become something solemn almost. Added to the text, illustrations served to both make the content obvious and echo it. Whether you knew how to read or not, the message was indeed clear.

[FREG]NA, ET CVLO A [?]N
MERCATO AD OGNI SORTE
DI PERSONA 🍆🍑🌸 (Snatch,
and ass on sale for one and all)



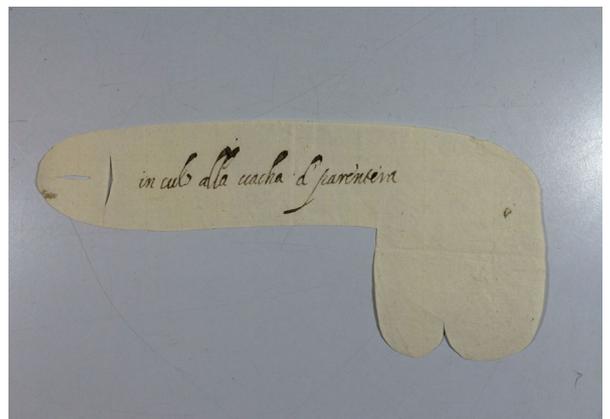
The depictions of genitalia found in this archive include some dozen penises for only one vulva and one anus. It is worth noting that all of the phalluses are depicted in the same manner, surely the popular way to draw them at the time, i.e., separate from the body, with the testicles and horizontally ithyphallic, sometimes pointing left, sometimes right.

LVCRETIA P(uttana) R(omana)



In this *cartello*, the phallus becomes a communications support in its own right since the paper is cutout in the shape of an erect penis bearing a text, like a sheet of paper or manual with directions for use.

in culo alla vacha d'parent[era]
([this] up your damn kin's ass)

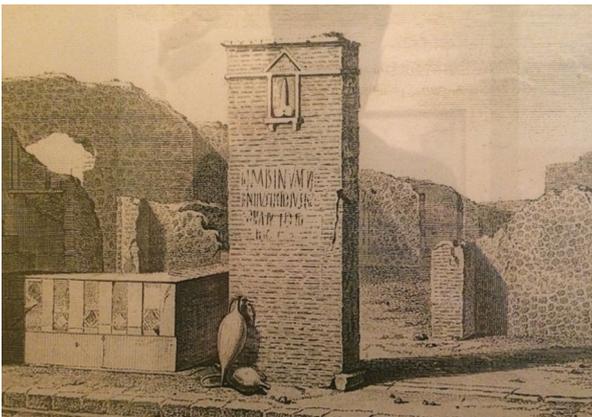


And this one recalls Leonardo's penis with animal legs and a tail, here sporting a bell.



6 In Pompeii and Naples, 79—2015

In ancient Rome the phallus served a protective or curative symbolic function. Thus, in the city of Pompeii, in the 1st century, an inhabitant could place a protective penis at the entrance to his house.



Proud and stiffly upright, the penis itself has a roof of its own. It was put between two columns in this small temple now conserved in the Archeological Museum of Naples. It is both protector and protected. It is not known whether it represents the person that once dwelt in the house... Nevertheless, this long-standing architectural element has nothing insulting about it. The same can be said about this mobile, which is made up of flying hybrid penises (one can easily imagine the twirling clinking bells in action),



these phallic amulets worn as jewelry by both women and men,



in the combined form of a penis and the *fica* sign,



or this votive offering shaped like a penis (accompanied here by a uterus, a breast, and a hand), calling for help with a fertility problem.



It comes as no surprise then that much erotic graffiti have been recorded on exterior and interior walls of dwellings in Pompeii. The city has been conserved “thanks” to the eruption of Vesuvius, which buried it under volcanic ash and pumice in 79 CE.



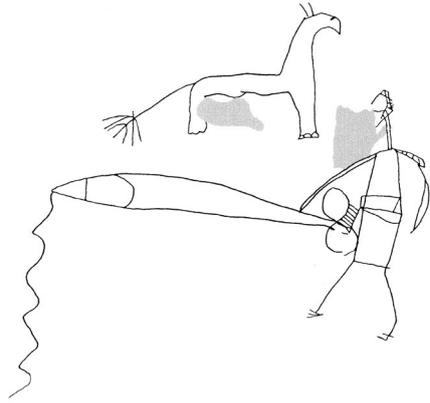
Since the 18th century the city has been the site of major archeological excavations, and the inventory of graffiti provides valuable evidence about the lives and daily practices of the inhabitants at the time. For example, along the theater corridor,



one can easily spot at the height of a standing man this especially long and dynamic penis pointing left.

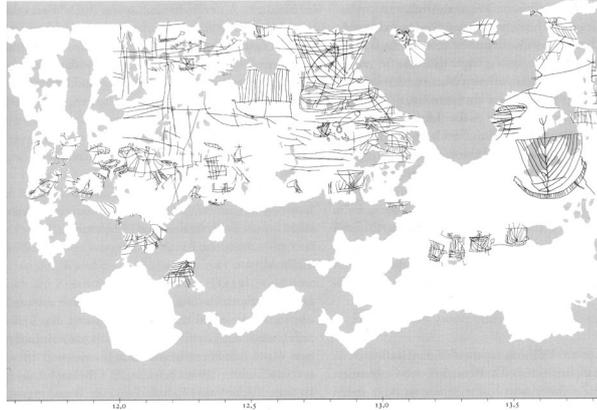
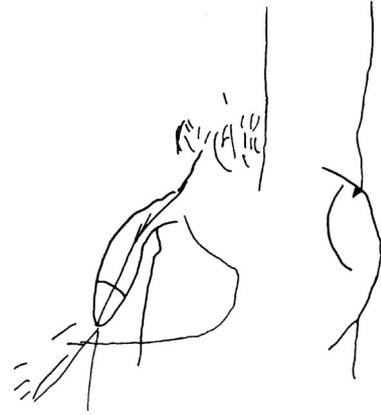


This is its graphic transcription, part of a study on ancient graffiti conducted by the German archeologist Martin Langner. Here we can see more clearly that the penis is not a free distinct entity but rather is connected to its owner, who is depicted as being smaller than his attribute. A right-angled zigzag of urine is dribbling from the member and may indicate that a urinal was found along the passageway, an essential element in a theater. That would seem to explain the disproportionate size of the penis and make this representation part of the building’s signage.

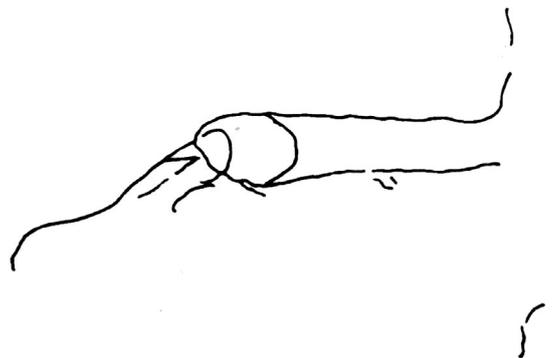
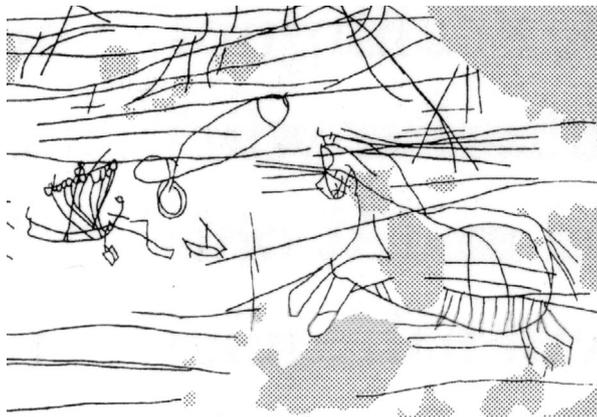


The typologies of erotic representations in Pompeii and in the Roman Empire are of different natures then and are found everywhere. As for the graffiti, Langner's inventory features penises voiding urine or ejaculating,

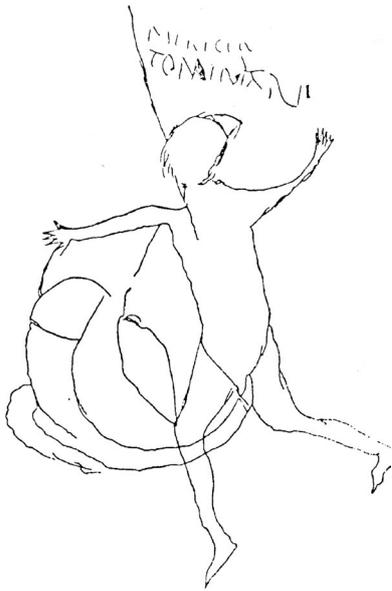
As a passage and a place for meeting and waiting, the corridor is covered on its walls with an impressive palimpsest of graffiti containing all sorts of graphic play, mazes, figures, ships, horses, and so on.



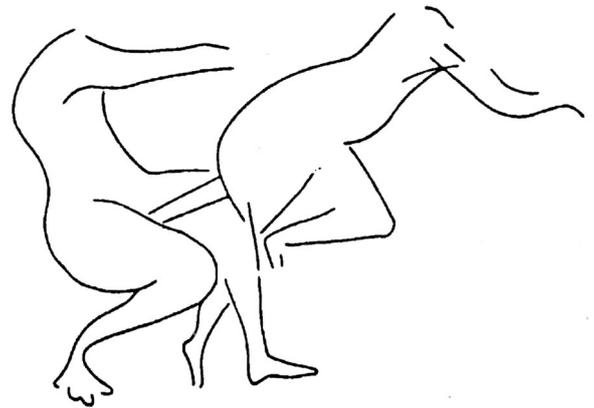
If in the present text we are focusing on one representation in particular, it is clear that this sort of cluster has to be considered as a whole, given that all the signs echo each other and are tokens of the use of the site over time.



overly large penises,

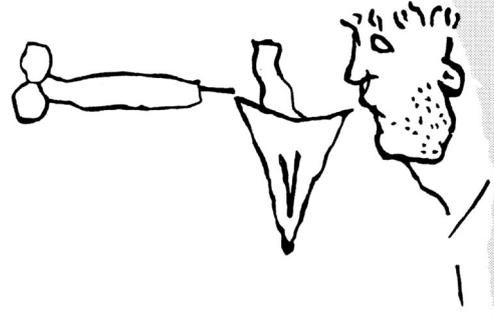


erotic scenes,



including one that contains one of the sole vaginas depicted.

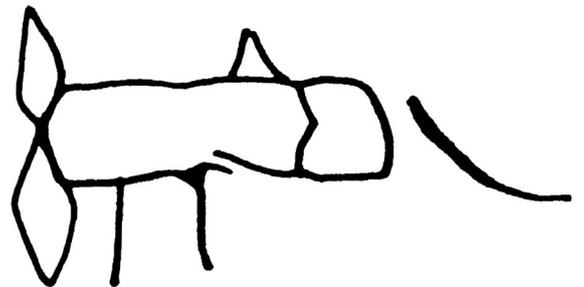
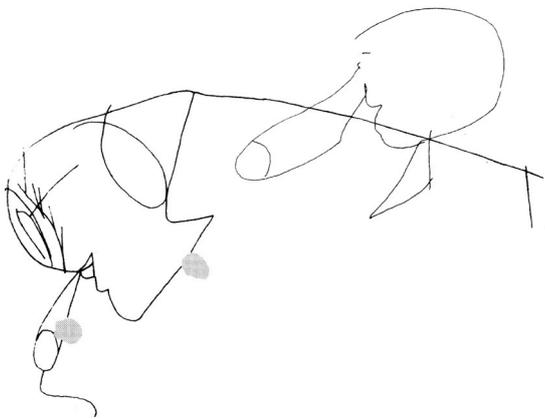
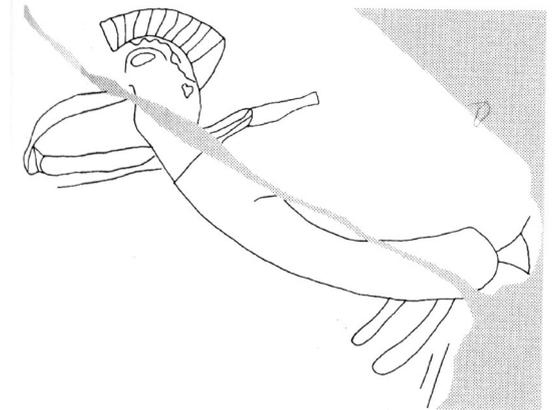
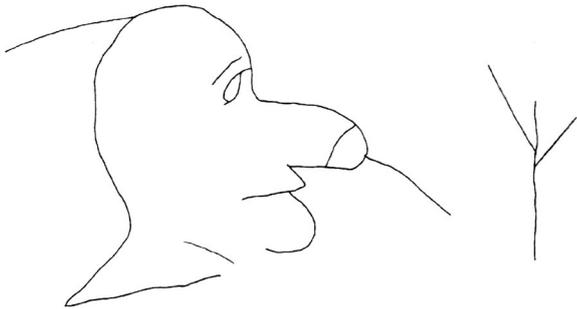
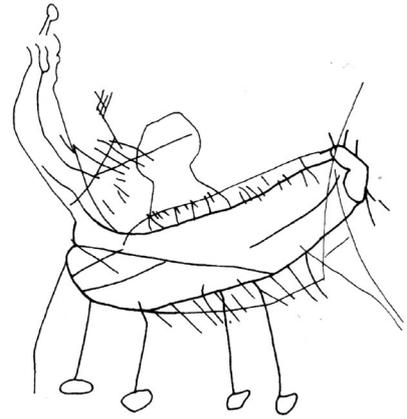
NEIKHONHCIMC



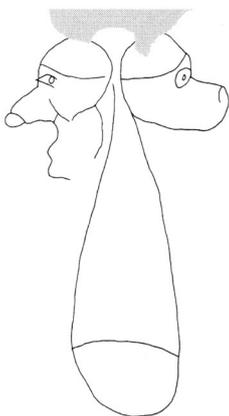
recalling Priapus or this phallic Mercury decorating the entrance to a bakery,



Besides being mischievous and naughty, Romans were not lacking in a sense of humor, as these *teste di cazzo* make clear,



or these phalluses living out their animal lives, equipped with eyes, wings, or legs.



Where are we at two millennia later? In the course of a non-exhaustive survey in the Spanish Quarter of Naples in 2015, we recorded around 160 penises drawn on the

walls, most by children or teens; among these depictions, we encountered a flying phallus,



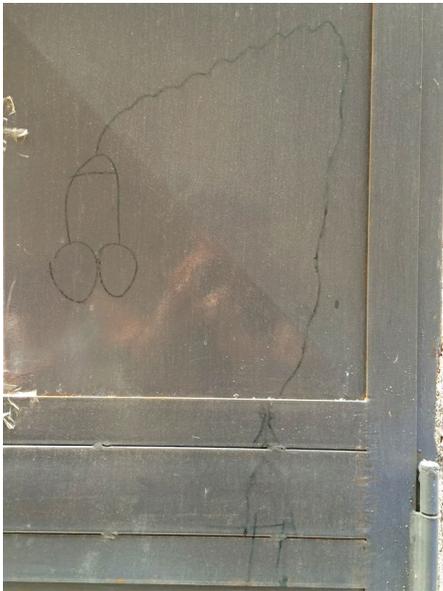
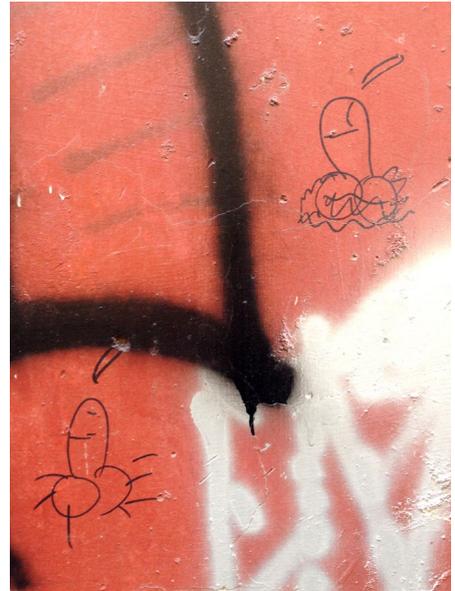
a rabbit-penis,



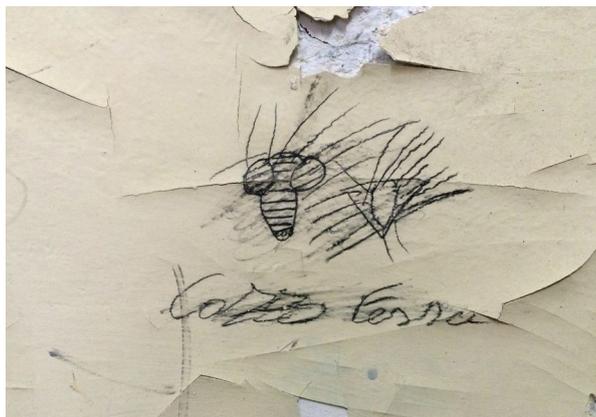
erotic scenes in which the penis plays the main role (penetration, ejaculation, sodomy, fellatio)

numerous *teste di cazzo*,





and again very few vulvas and always in the background...



In many of the examples, image and text are a kind of response to one another. The text serves as a support for the image in that it makes plain a scene or names the person who is targeted. The performative nature of the drawing is amplified considerably.

👄🍌 ← QUESTO E VINNY CHE SUCCHIA (this is Vinny, who sucks it)



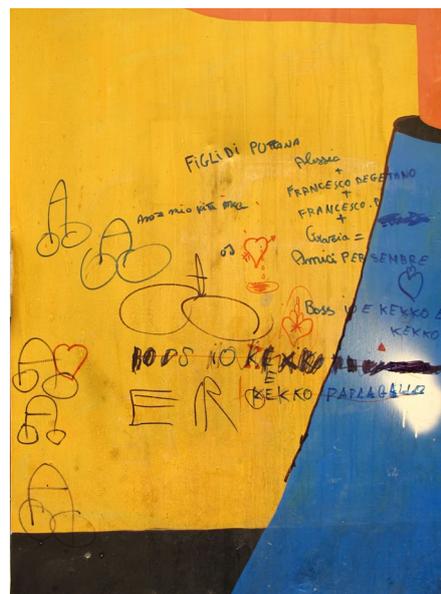
🍌 PER ENZO (for Enzo)



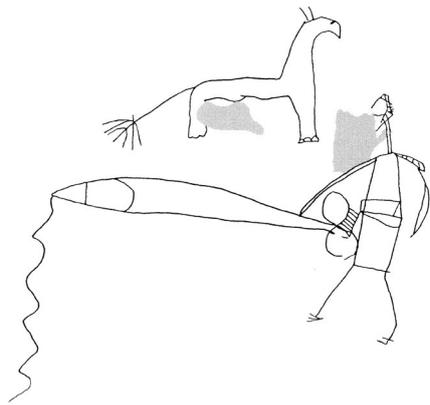
🍌 GLI PIACE A MANUELA ZIZZA DI GOMMA (Manuela likes this / rubber tit)



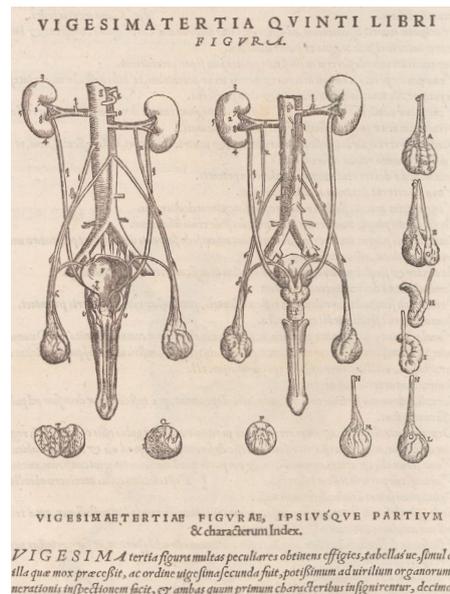
And in this cluster, a mix of love and hate made up of both penises and hearts, messages of friendship and insults, including the famous filial insult FIGLI DI PUTTANA (literally son of a whore).



In all of these depictions, the recurrent phallic motif is almost exclusively represented vertically (the glans pointing up and even down). Thus, while the erotic signs and scenes of Pompeii and Naples graphically echo each other, the penis has changed directions, lifted its head as it were, shifting from the horizontal to the vertical, from a depiction in profile to one that is straight on.



It is a change of direction that may have occurred over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, when representation of the body was standardized and democratized through the spread of printed treatises on human anatomy. *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543) by the physician and anatomist Andreas Vesalius is considered foundational and was widely circulated and copied. Dissociated from the body, the male reproductive organ was depicted frontally in Vesalius's treatise; this straight-on view became a standard for over a century.

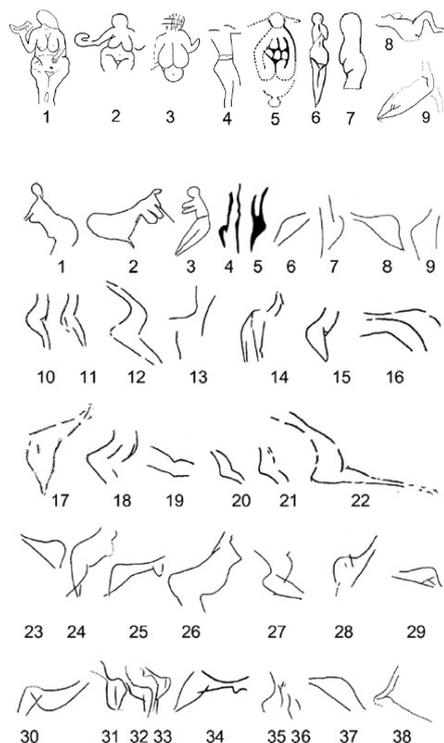


Yet the best-known depiction of genitalia by Vesalius is probably this one.

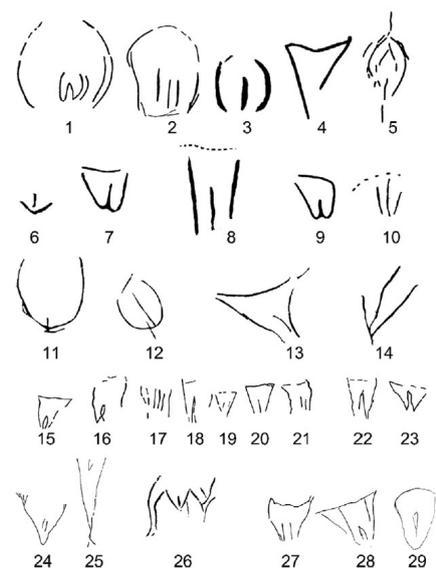
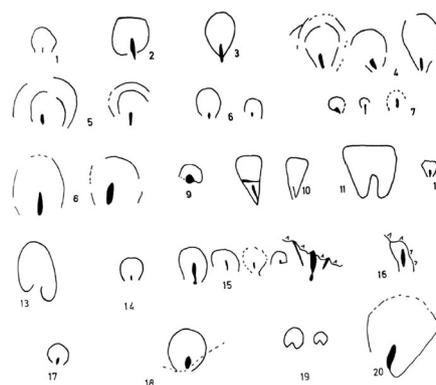


This does not show a penis but rather a vagina. The analogy is striking, though. The vagina is depicted as the reverse of the penis, like a receptacle that takes in the male organ—seen therefore as the paradigm par excellence, dynamic and active. Representation of female genitalia has fortunately evolved since, although it continues to be the subject of debate, notably in school textbooks, where the clitoris seems to have only recently appeared, even though it was “discovered” in 1560.

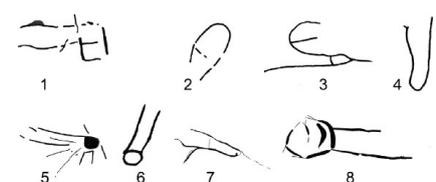
In the Périgord, according to the inventory carried out by Brigitte and Gilles Delluc, female representations are six times more frequent than male ones (ninety-six as opposed to sixteen). Most often the female depictions are reduced to the central area of the body; when the latter is indicated, it is limited to a tiny faceless head, arms and feet, but with disproportionate breasts, abdomen and buttocks.



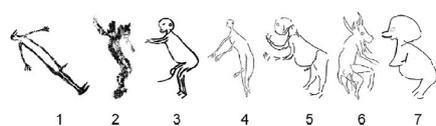
This urge to reduce the body to its central part is pushed to the point of using the genitalia alone to summarize the individual; it is the only organ represented and is done so in a highly simplified, even abstract way, which shifts the depiction into the realm of the sign or even “protowriting.” The vulva sign was likely sketched out by young men for the most part—the researchers suggest this because the female body is indeed reduced to the vulva whereas when the male figure is present, it often occupies a central place in the cave—and would have fulfilled a sacred symbolic function linked with sexuality, fertility, and maternity. The connection with writing, moreover, can be seen in certain paleontologists’ descriptions, comparing the vulva sign to a typographic sign such as a single chevron <, double guillemets «, or the letter V.



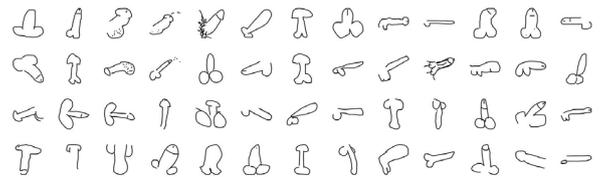
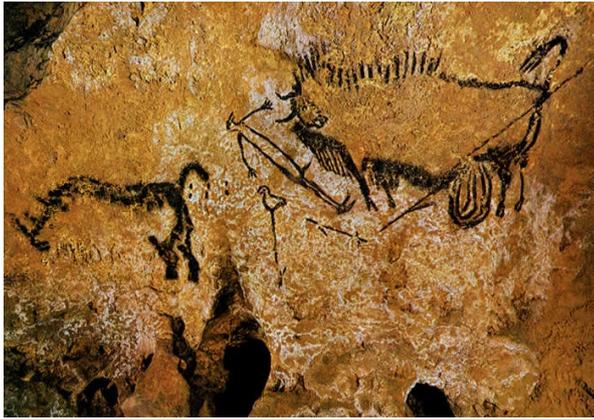
With their smaller number and hesitant execution, drawn penises from the same inventory seem to pale by comparison...



On the other hand, complete male figures appear far less pared down and simplified than female ones.

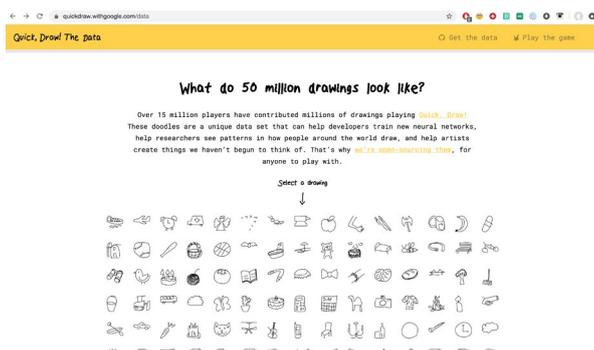


Of the male figures depicted, the one that has sparked the most commentary is doubtless the ithyphallic bird-headed figure from Lascaux (around 18,000–17,000 BP), apparently killed by a bison that he himself has wounded.



8 In the Cloud, 2019

Raised deep inside caves, this question of graphically representing reproductive organs is still very much alive, even in the Cloud. In 2018, when dickpics and eggplants were flourishing in digital exchanges, Google launched its Quickdraw data set, “the world’s largest doodling data set,” an open-source database of over 50 million digital sketches and drawings in 345 categories, which online users can freely contribute to. The objectives of this database include teaching artificial intelligence to recognize figurative elements and draw them itself.



In 2019, the Dutch design studio Moniker came up with an “appendix” for the Google project by adding a category that was missing, penises, which are very much a part of classic doodles, as we have seen. Users of the site *Do Not Draw a Penis*—an invitation-cum-injunction not to do something—can add to the database, which boasts some 25,000 digital penis drawings at the time of this writing.

Indeed, despite the historic and cultural magnitude of the phallic phenomenon, penises are missing from Google’s project. By proposing to add this particular category, Moniker questions the digital giants’ ability to impose their morality and censorship on the community.

<https://donotdrawapenis.com> is a website thematizing the problems we face due to increasing censorship regulations. Not only automated moderation but also the stimulation of self censoring on social media, where community guidelines discourage to post ‘inappropriate content’.

The initiative was hailed by the entrepreneur Elon Musk, “Mean Time To Dick is a key measure of any given human or machine intelligence system.”



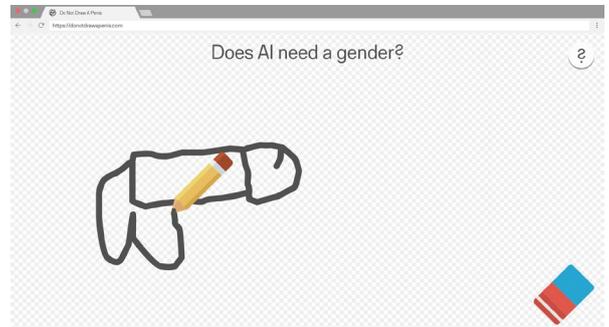
An AI system is henceforth altogether capable of recognizing and drawing a penis by itself. More than ever, the penis seems to live free, at first represented as separate from the body for centuries and now freed from any human hand. From the isolated

doodle to a symbol, it has become, through its presence everywhere, a common sign, a recurrent motif, an “innate” gesture, probably done by men for the most part and not AI. According to Patricia Simons, this personification of the phallus makes it a symbol of patriarchy:

The Lacanian tenet that the phallus is so all-powerful that no one can attain the ultimate desire to “have” or “be” the phallus, is the nihilistic end point of the cultural habit of separation. Overall, the social result is the excuse that “boys will be boys.” Men are apparently disconnected and alien from themselves because that vital body part is too awesome and disobedient. Yet, that astounding grandeur redounds to the benefit of those closest to it, bestowing and enforcing patriarchal privilege. Either way, the phallus is a hard taskmaster, taking control, asserting differences between men as well as between men and women. (*The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe, A Cultural History*, 86)

In 2016, *The Guardian* launched a site that would go on to collect 22,002 drawings of vulvas, most of which are more akin to the observational drawing or an illustration than to a sign. It was an initiative that sought to redress the balance...

We would like to conclude our overview with a question raised by the voice and its caustic sense of humor accompanying the participant, male or female, on *Do Not Draw a Penis*: “Does AI need a gender?”



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We wish to thank in particular Francesca Alberti, with whom we have been in constant touch, a discussion about the phallus that goes back to when we first met in 2014 at the French Academy in Rome—Villa Medici.

Translated from French by John O’Toole.

