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Cities literary factory: The mobilization of literature in urban planning in Europe

Geraldine Molina

EESO (UMR CNRS 6590), IGARUN, Campus du Tertre, BP 81 227, 44 312 Nantes Cedex 3, France
IRSTV (FR CNRS 2488), France

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ABSTRACT

Over the past twenty years or so, cities have been including literature and writers on architectural and urban projects, by more readily asking them to participate in the urban policy creation process. In response to requests, writers have collaborated with architects on planning projects involving tangible depictions of literature in the city. The present article proposes an analysis of this increasing literary presence within urban planning and landscapes: How is literature physically incorporated into the layout and management of today's cities? Results from qualitative surveys conducted across various French and European cities over the past several years help frame this investigation. A number of "literary" urban planning projects built in French cities during the mid-1990's will serve as a focal point for this endeavor. The projects analyzed herein were executed by members of the OuLiPo movement (a literary group dedicated to enhancing the potential of literature). Intended for both scholars and practitioners alike, this study explores how such new literary practices interact with the modern city, in revealing the professional realignments and changes in operating patterns occurring in both urban planning and urban design. It also critically assesses the models, values and paradoxes underlying today's cityscapes. The integration of literature into urban projects influences modern spaces in a way that contrasts: between striving towards democratization and social inclusion, between an initially subversive project and a shift favoring the mainstream, between a collaborative contextual approach and the dual effects of exclusion and relegation, all of which stem from stamping a "high-minded culture" on the city.

1. Introduction

The role of artistic movements in city construction offers a topic of great interest to researchers and professionals working in the field of urban planning and development. From a research standpoint, considerable works have sought to establish how art and culture actually contribute to laying out and managing modern cities (Cole, 1987; Grésillon, 2008; Miles, 1997; Paddison & Miles, 2007; Terrin, 2012; Zukin, 1995). For a long time, the emphasis behind such efforts had been placed on the central role played by contemporary art in the dynamic urban revitalization process. The mobilization of other more marginal and more discreet artistic or cultural forms, like literature, has given rise to an emerging body of research (Bonniot & Fournier, 2013; Molina, 2014b, 2016).

The quest to understanding how literature participates in the production, transformation and management of cities provides a more insightful lead given the special bond formed between contemporary literary practices and cities. Writers have adopted the city as a laboratory for new literary experiments (Molina, 2014a; Redondo, 2015).

In response to requests formulated within European cities, spearheaded by French metropolitan areas, writers have collaborated with architects and/or visual artists on urban design projects that champion the concept of a tangible depiction of literature in the city. Accordingly, literature has seeped into the heart of an architectural or planning strategy aimed at promoting functional urban spaces. This article proposes an exploration of the interplay between these new literary practices and urban spaces: how in concrete terms is literature being incorporated into the layout and management of today's cities, and what do inter-professional practices involving writers and architects reveal about the way contemporary cities are taking shape? What effects, both expected and unexpected, what types of spaces and what social practices does this urban literary composition ultimately help produce and promote?

In drafting answers to these questions, this article will rely on various surveys conducted on the mobilization of writers and literature as part of the projects of a number of French and European cities, uncovered in thesis and post-doctoral research. Given the extent to which they portray this recent dynamic and movement overall, the literary

E-mail address: geraldine.molina@gmail.com.

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projects created by this OuLiPo group, in partnership with urban planning professionals across a number of French cities, will receive special attention herein. Founded at the beginning of the 1960's, the OuLiPo workshop, dedicated to the potential of literature, consists of an international group of writers and mathematicians undertaking playful and experimental exercises that involve language, in the aim of impelling a new set of literary dynamics. Some of the research carried out in geography and literature has already indicated with great precision how OuLiPo members' contemporary literary practices maintain their unique and strong ties with places (Schilling, 2003, 2006, 2011). With the Oulipians, space is not only occupied as a literary theme, i.e. a topic of representation, but also as an experimental field exploring new ways to produce literature (Molina, 2014a). Indeed, the city has been a favorite topic for poets and novelists, the place where Baudelaire and Rimbaud walked, the surrealists' beat (Stierle, 2002). Yet with Georges Perec, the city became the laboratory of a new experience: in situ writing, whose context is capable of manufacturing an immediate relationship with the place (Molina, 2014a). During the 1960's, Georges Perec initiated a number of "projects executed in the field", as described by Derek Schilling in his analysis of the "Place" projects of this Oulipian author (2003, p. 144). As such, with Oulipian practices, literature has taken a "spatial turn". The physical staging of this literature factory seems to be part of a more general thread of contemporary artistic practices. Since the 1960's, the contemporary plastic arts have tended to be embedded in a "contextual art", being produced *in* and *with* their environment, as explored in the geography of art field. This contribution seeks to observe how Oulipians in particular have extended their practice of constraint-based writing all the way to the fields of architecture and urban planning.

These collaborative phenomena between literature and the city will be examined according to a three-stage process. The first stage will be devoted to theoretically framing the task at hand. It will build a perspective through the lens of geography and urban studies, establishing the underlying dynamics in contemporary urban development and presenting the methods deployed. In the two following segments, such literary mobilization will be placed into perspective through the use and introduction of other artistic and cultural forms within the city's factory. We will therefore be comparing the common and specific features of literature as an "ingredient" in the production of urban spaces with other forms, while highlighting research that has critically examined both the expected and real effects of art and culture in cities' production, rehabilitation and management. Stage 2 will then focus on determining the buoyancy of these urban literary surges and the ambitions held by their designers, as revealed by our surveys. The process through which a writer substantively and symbolically participates in constructing urban spaces and then transitions to becoming an actor in the urban production process will be detailed. The third and final stage will analyze how literary design infused into urban planning projects opens a discussion on the paradoxes these developments raise in terms of appropriation, social dynamics and acceptance by city residents and users.

2. Co-production of literature and cities

2.1. The literary substance of European cities, as witnessed in contemporary trends

In the area of European city composition and management over the past twenty years, literature tends to be included as a project component. Since the 1990's, projects focusing on the literary treatment of buildings or urban open spaces have in fact been on the rise in various European cities, like Paris, Madrid, Prague, Amsterdam, Dublin and Naples. The most tangible results involve public venues and buildings open at least partially to public use (libraries, public places) and mobility corridors (metro, tramway stations, etc.), i.e. spaces where intense social practices and interactions play out (Molina, 2014b, 2016;

Redondo, 2015). France offers an emblematic case regarding this permeation of literature into architectural and urban projects, as well as a perception into how various cities are managed (e.g. Paris, Saint-Denis, Strasbourg, Rennes, Nantes, Aix-en-Provence). In Paris for example, the writer Jean-Christophe Bailly collaborated with architect Antoine Grumbach in developing the François Mitterrand station on Line 14 of the city's subway system. The opportunity provided through public policy embracing modern culture and art by adopting an artistic creation subsidy system (1% cultural allocation on all public procurement projects) (Moulin, 1992) helps explain this expansion of literary references within the built urban landscape.

The use of literature in urban development is not necessarily confined to public buildings and moreover is not solely justified by legal obligations or financing opportunities. This trend can actually be traced to many other projects, like major private-sector facilities or private housing complexes showcasing the extent of cultural, social and political challenges. A number of imprints of literary and poetic citations are on display across an array of European cities. Quotes from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke have been used by architect Jean Nouvel on the facades of an office building and department store (Zlatý Anděl) located at a high-profile intersection in central Prague (Czech Republic). A text from Victor Hugo on freedom of the press has been imprinted onto the facade of the *Le Monde* newspaper's Paris head office, designed by architect Christian de Portzamparc. This literary imprint technique was also used in the development projects of large luxury hotels in some of Europe's largest cities, like Madrid's Hotel Las Letras.

Within contemporary European cities, various phenomena also underscore the desire to promote a literary heritage. Such determination is displayed not only in statues of writers, poets or literary celebrities in urban open spaces (Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Geneva, the famous character who walks through walls in Paris' Montmartre district, Jules Verne in Nantes (France), James Joyce in Dublin, Fernando Pessoa in Lisbon), but also by museums and writers' houses (e.g. the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam, Jules Verne Museums in Nantes and Amiens in France) (Bonniot-Mirloup & Blasquie, 2016; Molina, 2014b). Some recent public space projects can be cited as examples, including a homage to Spain's Golden Century of literary heritage in Madrid's "Barrio de las Letras" (Literary District), renowned by tourists. As another example, on June 16th every year for Bloomsday, a series of events (public readings, literary circuits, etc.) is held in Dublin, James Joyce's birthplace and one of his favorite literary settings, attracting throngs of residents and tourists and significantly contributing to the city's cultural life and economy. An entire array of actors participates in the staging, maintenance and operations of urban literary heritage promotional campaigns (city managers and public works departments on the front lines, along with cultural heritage and tourism agencies, tourist offices, and cultural actors chiefly artists, led by sculptors, designers and private entities like hotels and tour operators) (Fig. 1).

2.2. A playground for literary geography and urban studies

The literary construction of contemporary cities was first explored via the "geography of literature" (Brosseau, 2015; Molina, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Peraldo, 2016), which has taken root since the beginning of the 2000's among geographers interested in literature. Focusing on a specific topic, this approach has molded a current of thought that more broadly falls under the banner "geography of art", which addresses the co-production relationship existing between art and space (Guinard, 2014; Volvey, 2008, 2010). The "geography of literature" distinguishes itself from "literary geography", which proposes a textual approach, i.e. an internal analysis of literary work. "Literary geography" actually sheds light on how space is represented in textual passages. Various works have analyzed the city's depiction in literature (notably Lehan, 1998; McNamara, 2014). Paris, for example, appears as a "capital city of signs", crystallizing into many imaginary and literary works (Stierle, 2002; Kennedy, 1994). Los Angeles has also been viewed as one of the

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