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CONTENTS

French Urban Space: 1. Arriving in the City

Abstract

This research has developed from my teaching French-language literature in Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh since 2005 and as the start of my doctoral work in French at Newcastle University. The research work aims to discover the way contemporary urban literature works to create space. The particular focus is on the French-speaking metropolis of Montreal and on migrant writers or the representation of newly-arriving migrants by contemporary French-language authors in Canada. The approach starts with, and moves on from twentieth-century work in the field by Douglas Ivison (1998) and Jean-Xavier Ridon (2000) and continues with two themes I developed completing my M.LITT Dissertation (presented at the Society for French Studies Leeds Conference 2005), firstly that literary writing functions to reclaim the urban space for the writers and works to re-insert them into a well-documented city. Secondly, the writing seeks to incorporate the writers, by naming the newly-encountered objects and signs with a language and vocabulary that is more authentic to their own experience before they encountered the city. As a practising writer myself, it is an approach I have used in my own poems, for example, in the *Europa* cycle (Mansfield 2006), which explores my move from the English Peaks to teach in Lille and then Paris in the 1990s.

Work in the field of French Studies on nineteenth century French literature has addressed the use of space. In particular Colette Wilson's 2004 work on the Emile Zola novel, *L'Assommoir* and the book-length study by Kristin Ross (1988) on the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud.   My research draws on these primarily as a way of using the theoretical writing of Henri Lefebvre to approach literary texts and also to situate my research in the tradition of twentieth-century French critical study.

Introduction

In this first section I intend to argue that the researcher is able to treat a collection of literary texts as a corpus or archive of a particular geographical place and time by applying constraints to the selection of these texts. In the case of my work, this corpus is: Montreal novels after 2000 and hence the culture is contemporary French-speaking urban Canada.   Then, by literary analysis, such as close-reading, I argue, we are able to form hypotheses concerning that culture's organization of space. I base this claim for the value of literary analysis on the critical approach taken by Ross (1988). This type of analysis is at once illuminating about the society under study; in Ross's case the society is: Paris in 1871, and in my case: contemporary urban French-speaking Canada. This type of analysis simultaneously offers an emancipatory aspect in keeping with the project of French critical theory elaborated since the mid-twentieth century.   A project inaugurated with Simone de Beauvoir's question: 'How are we going to live?' 'Comment allons-nous vivre?' *Les Mandarins, I*, Collection Folio, Gallimard 1954, p.55 and continued by such theorists as Henri Lefebvre.

How I argue draws on the place of work in language. We may regard the text as work. We can explore how the text works to reveal space within the novel. I argue that where work is done, as depicted in the literature of the time, gives us insight into the workings of the social groups in the urban society described. The research also reveals the forces at work in the urban space, for example, how the city draws in its new workers. The close-reading of literary texts may reveal how these new arrivals to the city redefine work by showing where work is done by the characters.

To set the scene of the worker arriving in the city a quotation from the *Europa* collection:

'City'
  So this is city, is it?
  Dug earth, its water fired to air.
  Rust rocks smoothed to steel,
  Shouldering elm,
  And sand for eyes.
               (Mansfield 2006, 73)

'La grande ville'
  C'est la ville, n'est-ce pas ?
  La terre creusée, son eau tirée à l'air.
  Les rocs de rouille lissés à l'acier,
  L'orme endossant,
  Et pour les yeux, on a le sable.
               (Mansfield 2006, 75)

In this literary text, the new arrival to the city sees the buildings and makes sense of them by describing them as simply nature's raw products from a rural or ancient point of view. 'Dug earth' is the clay for making bricks which needs to be fired before being used in building the towers of the modern city. The smoothing of the modern steel pillars indicates how the narrator in this verse sees the building materials in terms of the work done to create the habitable space of the city. The city, here, is a riddle which those arriving from the countryside may decode (and I will return to this word 'decoding'), in this case, using Empedocles' elements of fire, water, earth and air. But this is my writing, what of the contemporary Quebec writers making sense of their urban landscapes:

In the short-story by Canadian writer, Monique Proulx 'The Pointless and the Essential' (Proulx 1996, 35) this same attaching of natural or rural descriptions to the urban appears in her literature; here, for example, the character, Martine, who now lives in Montreal, is meeting her mother from the out-of-town bus, both the original French and its English translation are given:

elles remontaient la rue Berri […] plongées soudain au cœur da la faune cavalant chacun pour soi vers sa tanière
(Proulx 1996, 40)

     they were going back up the rue Berri […] plunged suddenly into the heart of the wild stampede of animals bolting each for itself towards its den
 (Proulx 1997, 35)

It is the narrator to whom these lines are attributed, rather than one of the characters, Martine or Fabienne which is why we must be alert to the multiple voices in a text when searching for indications of how the urban landscape is described.

A further example from a contemporary Canadian writer, and winner of the 2006 Booksellers' prize for the Quebec Novel, returns to the same type of authentification of urban experience by the use of an image from nature. The novel opens with the description of waves on the beach but the sound heard by the slowly awakening narrator (Dickner 2005, 9-10) is not the sound of the sea but the noise of the refuse collectors in a Montreal street, 'Douteuse poésie de banlieue' (Dickner 2005, 10). What, then, is the creative function of this doubtful poetry of the suburb?

It is a two-way process: the migrants or migrant writers arrive in the city with their own non-urban experience, which is apparent in the language they use. Then the impact of the new urbanized space may be incorporated, as the writer or their character absorbs new spatial practices. Douglas Ivison, a critical writer mentioned earlier, has an approach to spatial practices in urban literature (Ivison 1998 *passim*) where he, like Ross and Wilson, makes use of the theoretical work of Henri Lefebvre. Since the work of Lefebvre seems so influential on critical writing on French urban space, it is worth presenting a simple overview Lefebvre's thesis to gain a foothold in his work. The ideas from Lefebvre shift us far from our concept of physical space. He challenges us to go further than simply decoding literary texts in our research work on the city.

The Science of Space

Henri Lefebvre approaches the study of space by defining his science of space with three points. Lefebvre's science of space:

 a) équivaut à l'emploi politique du savoir

 b) implique une idéologie masquant cet usage [et]
   se confond avec le savoir pour ceux qui acceptent cette pratique

 c) contient une utopie […] simulation ou programmation du future dans les cadres […] du mode de production existant
<div align="right">(Lefebvre 2000, 15-16)</div>

From the English translation, space:
 1. represents the political use of knowledge

 2. implies an ideology [which] conceals that [political] use [of knowledge] [and,] for those who accept the practice [, the ideology] is indistinguishable from knowledge

 3. embodies […] a utopia […] a sort of computer simulation of the future […] within the framework of the existing mode of production.
<div align="right">(Lefebvre 1991 , 8-9)</div>

Lefebvre's approach to space, then, is as much about society as it is about architecture. He invites the serious researcher to ask how we can move from thinking of space as a mental concept to it being a working practice and on into theorizing on how social life unfolds in space (Lefebvre 2000, 14) but cautions that if we look at literary texts, taking them as part of our research practice on urban space, we risk remaining at a descriptive level and simply offering a decoding.

Andy Merrifield (2000) gives us a good reason for using Lebfebvre, and a clarification of the French writer's emancipatory project:

> Lefebvre knows too well, for example, that the social space of lived experience gets crushed and vanquished by an *abstract* conceived space
>
> (Merrifield 2000, 175)

Reading the Corpus

How then to operationalize the research around the urban novel? Three approaches have demonstrated a practice which goes beyond Lefebvre's feared, unproductive message decoding, Kristin Ross (1988), Michel Sirvent (2000) and Colette Wilson (2004). In fact, Ross and Wilson both make explicit reference to Lefebvre's work (Wilson 2000, 344). These critical writers move beyond a decoding of the urban literary texts they are analyzing to work up economic and political proposals from their work. Wilson, for example, detects a political sympathy in Emile Zola's Paris novel *L'Assommoir* which is not readily apparent from Zola's own comments on his politics.

Wilson's work on *L'Assommoir* finds geographical locations the city's landscape which she discovers are sites of key importance during the Paris Commune in 1871. This is a period of French history when the place of work in urban France was being re-defined by unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers who would turn their hand to new trades. Kristin Ross, too, focuses on this period of social upheaval and again uses the lens of literary texts, in this case, Arthur Rimbaud's poetry.

It is Ross's propositions of vertical, horizontal and social topographies (1998, 40), though, that offer a way into at least two of the post-2000 urban novels of Montreal in my study. Ross sees the language in the literary texts of Rimbaud as shifting 'proper place' (Ross's term) in revolutionary Paris during the Commune of 1871. The proper place for work, for example, was being shifted by the workers who took up revolutionary posts on the barricades. We can detect a shift in the proper place of work in Proulx' more recent, 2002 full-length novel *Le cœur est un muscle involontaire* (The Heart is an Involuntary

Muscle) and in Nicolas Dickner's prize-winning 2005 novel *Nikolski*. In Proulx' *Le cœur* the central characters meet and conduct their working day in a suburban café yet dream of one day renting headquarters in the fashionable city centre of Montreal. In *Nikolski*, too, a similar horizontal topography is at work. For example, his character of Joyce Doucet, a village girl, is made to travel horizontally across French-speaking Canada to Montreal to find work of a rather unconventional kind, piracy.

Returning to Proulx' characters, their horizontal trajectory, once achieved leaves only the vertical topography to explore. It is this vertical topography that forms a pivotal moment towards the end of the story, demonstrating that these spatial shifts are useful entry points for the analysis of the newer urban novels.

Let me explain more about the production of 'proper place' in Proulx' *Le coeur*. One of the main protagonists of the action owns a small web-design company, he is portrayed as a new urbanite in Montreal because his father was from Europe and his mother is of First Nation descent. The character, Zéno, is inventive about work space, essentially for economic reasons like the impoverished workers in nineteenth-century Paris. Zéno chooses a Greek café as a place for his meetings with his single member of staff. Proulx, too, gives her character a type of work activity that allows for great spatial freedom since Zéno and the narrator character, Florence, can communicate via laptop computer and internet from virtually anywhere. The communications technology seems to liberate Zéno and Florence from the older, twentieth-century constraints of work-place, yet, in reality they know they cannot afford to occupy office space in the urban centre.

With the utopian freedom offered by the emerging technologies, new 'proper places' for work are explored in this French-Canadian novel, this reminds us of Lefebvre's point 3. The goal or aim, though, of Proulx's new-knowledge workers remains traditional. They want to move horizontally, across the city to a prime office location, and then upwards to the top of a tall office block. At the moment of the realisation of their traditional goal Proulx steps into the narrative to show how at the pinnacle of the tall tower all can go wrong. Thus, her characters must continue to invent new spaces for working.

Both novels, *Nikolski* and *Le coeur* reveal a concern with proper place, the proper place to work, to practise one's trade or profession and hence occupy the space of one's job description. Proper work places are shifting in Proulx's and Dickner's post-2000 society in their western metropolis, in a way parallel to the shifting everyday work places that Zola identifies in *L'Assommoir*. For example, the second key scene of Zola's Paris novel unfolds in a *lavoir*, a place where working-class women wash their dirty linen in public. Here, like the twenty-first century characters it is economic constraints that determine the space these poorer women occupy when they are at work.

For the poorer women in Zola the work is unpaid, and, since running water in the home, and the technology to heat it, is still unusual, they gather to where the water is heated on a semi-industrial scale to pay to wash their clothing by hand. Gervaise, the principal female character in Zola's novel, has travelled all the way into the city of Paris but as a poor, new-arrival to the city she finds her way to this spot where the water is fired to air.

Returning to Wilson on Zola's *L'Assommoir*, we see how her critical writing shows us a city rehearsing for revolution. The novel form allows Zola's characters to enact, through their movement through the city space, the roots of the uprising of the workers' Commune. The city may be constantly redesigned to resist insurrection but at every turn the newcomers to the city space press for change by creating their own spaces of work and their own working practices.

Tentative Conclusion

If we may conclude tentatively, since this is only the beginning of new research work, the places within the literary text where we detect that space and work are closely linked may provide us with points of entry to see social, economic and political shifts taking place in the society described by the novel.

Future Work

I would also like to talk a little about new methods of research that I am experimenting with at this stage in the work. These are: (i) Corpus Analysis by Computer-based Spatial Modelling, and (ii) Fieldwork.

Corpus Analysis

My research with Professor James Laidlaw on the Middle French manuscript of Christine de Pizan (British Library Harley 4431) under an AHRC award has enabled me to develop software tools to explore textual corpora. I have begun to use one of my applications, called SIFT, where I make innovative use of the Document Object Model with JavaScript (ECMAScript) to model and re-model the corpus spatially on the computer screen. The interactive 'sifting' of the corpus allows scholars to highlight places in the text where the language of space occurs. In linguistic terms, I can search for distances, measurements, linguistic prepositions of up and down, or verbs of movement. Once

highlighted the researcher can read around the section where clusters of highlighted words occur, for example here:

```
-- Huit mille mètres, entends-tu! Deux lieues!... Hein! un bout de

colonne de deux lieues! Il y a de quoi entortiller le cou à toutes les

femelles du quartier... Et, tu sais, le bout s'allonge toujours.

J'espère bien aller de Paris à Versailles.
```
<div align="right">SIFT of Zola's L'Assommoir</div>

In the above example the SIFT corpus research tool uncovers a scene where the character, Lorilleux, who makes the tiny links for gold neck chains, is describing his painstaking work. SIFT reveals the language of distance: leagues and metres, the language of space: districts within the city, and the language of movement: *aller*, to go, all closely packed here in the character's speech. Subsequent close analysis of the speech highlighted by SIFT shows that Zola's gold-worker character, Lorilleux, has the ambition to move from Paris to Versailles, shifting his 'proper place' of work, to the centre of power represented by Versailles.

It is worth noting, too, in the light of my opening proposition, that vocabulary changes occur as workers arriving in the city take on urban language, that we see in this highlighted text the old measurement of travelled distance, leagues, being converted to metres. The metre was adopted for use in Paris by the French Academy of Sciences in 1791.

I have documented the SIFT corpus analysis and modelling tool in Appendix A and will lodge this research paper in the Edinburgh Research Archive for access by other researchers interested in experimenting further with corpus analysis. A working model of SIFT applied to the Zola novel is available on our Christine de Pizan AHRC project web-site here at Edinburgh at
http://www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/zola.htm
with on-line notes to help users at
http://www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/notes.htm

Fieldwork

Lefebvre includes lived experience as his third spatial element, so how can Montreal be explored this way, and at the same time be linked with its contemporary literature? My first exploration in Montreal seemed to me to be reminiscent of Ross's piercings of the buildings. The passageways through office spaces in particular, did not seem like the experience of British or French cities; these spaces are usually off-limits. However, my photographs only

captured a depth, a vertical topography. Proulx's novel, too, bore this out, the character of the narrator's father spends time in the basement and later is seen, as a ghost-like figure, in the underground shopping mall.

Taking another idea from Lefebvre, and one that is developed by Merrifield (2000), is that conceived space is crushing to everyday life. This may prove a fruitful line of enquiry. A major development project of condominiums is being built currently (2006-07) just a few hundred metres from the old railway station. Interestingly, this station was the entry point for new arrivals into Montreal. See my earlier photograph from above, but also these night-time images. The new apartments or condos of Montreal are a promised space, with signs that use the language of an architectural utopia.

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Appendix A

Technical Description and Sample Code from SIFT

The two key JavaScript functions of SIFT make calls to the Document Object Model of the HTML page containing the corpus text.

1) SIFT uses a JavaScript function to find and highlight strings with the call : document.getElementById, more detail of the code is given below:

In the script section of the head

```
var array9 = document.getElementById("source");
var col_array = array9.innerHTML.split(hifind);

array9.innerHTML = array9.innerHTML.replace(find,
replace);
```

and in the body section of the HTML web-page the whole corpus is given the division identity (id) of source so that the split call can address the whole corpus in that div.

```
<div id="source">
```

2) SIFT makes the call getElementsByName to adjust font colour and size within the whole of the preserved format text of the body of the web-page.

Please note that this is a plural 'get' on Element**s** and is supported by the web browser Mozilla Firefox version 5 and later. The plural array is segmented by the incrementing [i], which I discuss later under section (3) Extension.

In the script section of the HTML head it is necessary to add this function:

```
function stilo3()
{
thisform=document.dataIn3;
mm=thisform.field5.value+"mm";
colour=thisform.field6.value;
var i=0;
document.getElementsByName("preserve")[i].style.color =
colour;
document.getElementsByName("preserve")[i].style.fontSize =
mm;
}
```

The pre tag must be given the name preserve in the body section so that the DOM call can address the whole section in a single 'get'.

```
<pre name="preserve"> … </pre></body>
```

3) Extension.
The plural array may be used by the JavaScript developer to extend the colour and font-changing feature to a large array of elements of the same division name, thus:

```
function stilo2()
{
thisform=document.dataIn2;
mm=thisform.field3.value+"mm";
colour=thisform.field4.value;
var i=0;
var huge=9999;
var array2=document.getElementsByName("noms");
var textarea2=document.getElementById("textarea2");
for (i = 0; i <= huge; i++)
{
textarea2.value = i;
array2[i].style.color = colour;
array2[i].style.fontSize = mm;
}
}
```

This more complete function allows similarly named span classes to be called and changed in one pass. Please see markup associated with this from the body section below:

```
<span class="names" name="noms">Othea</span>
```

This provides a useful extension for browsing texts tagged in XML and transformed using XSLT into named span classes in HTML. In the above example proper names have been tagged in-line so that they may be highlighted by later scholars with SIFT. Notice, it is the 'name' of the span tag, not its class which makes it available for use in the DOM (the Document Object Model) in SIFT.

Notes on Using SIFT

SIFT is an innovative and flexible software development written by Mansfield in June 2006, which allows the web version of the corpus to be interrogated in exciting new ways. The software takes as its starting-point the Document Object Model (DOM), which it accesses by means of Dynamic HTML (DHTML) and JavaScript (ECMAScript). SIFT enables the scholarly user to highlight tagged text by setting it in a font size and colour which will contrast with the untagged text surrounding it. Having re-rendered the corpus in this way, the user can interrogate it visually. All these changes are performed client-side and do not affect the original corpus file which can be refreshed at any time with the Control R key combination.

An important additional feature of SIFT is its powerful search function which finds all the instances of a given string or keyword and highlights them in bold and red. The examples can then be stepped through, using the Control F key combination.

Options in SIFT Six options have been developed so far, and are displayed at the top of the screen, above the text of the corpus; the options can be implemented singly or in combination. Beside each option are two boxes in which the user can enter a font size in millimetres and a colour. SIFT depends for its effects on visual contrast. Care must be taken before choosing the colours pink or white, since any parts of the corpus for which they have been selected will merge into the background and become near invisible; in particular circumstances, however, that may be a useful option.

LINE NUMBERS controls the line numbers in the left margin. Their visual impact can be reduced by reducing their size, say to 0.5 mm, and changing the colour to pink.

PROPER NAMES makes it possible to highlight the names of the people, places or sources tagged by the transcribers. Proper names will stand out in contrast to the untagged body text if their size is increased, say to 6 mm, and their colour changed, perhaps to blue.

NOTES allows the user to highlight the notes and remarks made by the transcribers, again by increasing the font size and choosing a different colour. Alternatively, they can be shrunk to near invisibility by selecting a very small font size and the colour pink or white.

CORPUS TEXT offers control of the preserved corpus text. If the font size is set small, and a large font in a contrasting colour is chosen for proper names, the user can readily see the extent to which they cluster within the corpus.

SEARCH STRING displays in red and bold all the examples of any string chosen by the user. The Control F key combination further enhances this replace option by letting the user step through the highlighted occurrences.

INTERVENTIONS Accents and apostrophes have been inserted in the transcription files from which the corpus is created. The Interventions function makes it possible to remove those accents and apostrophes, and thus create a near diplomatic version. Ideally, the Interventions function would also permit the user to create a scholarly version of the corpus, by adding punctuation and adjusting capitalisation in accordance with modern editorial practice. Our experiments show that it is possible to move some way in that direction, but it is not yet clear whether the process can ever be made completely automatic. There would be enormous advantage, not least in terms of maintenance, if SIFT can be further developed, so that users can themselves create diplomatic or scholarly versions of the corpus from a single set of transcription files. That development work will be continued in Year 3 of the AHRC project, and conducted in parallel with the preparation of scholarly editions of the works in the Queen's MS. For the moment SIFT is best browsed on a PC with Mozilla Firefox, or on an Apple Mac with Safari.

The flexibility of SIFT is demonstrated by its application to an untagged corpus of text, for example this transcription of the Emile Zola novel *L'Assommoir*
http://www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/zola.htm