

Annick Louis CRAL-EHESS

Report on Clara Zgola's PHD, EHESS/Université de Varsovie

Urban identities of Parisian novelists from the post-war era to contemporary extremes

Supervisors Annick Louis (Centre de Recherches sur les Arts et Langage-EHESS) and Agnieszka Karpowicz (Institut de la Culture Polonaise-Université de Varsovie)

Miss Clara Zgola's PHD takes for object of study the Parisian urban literature of the contemporary extreme. The reflection is led well, the research is original and innovative, and constitutes a considerable contribution in these emergent field. The originality of the approach comes from the fact that it integrates three types of practices: The speeches of the authors, their practices exposed in their narratives, and the data concerning their sociocultural positions. The candidate proposes the hypothesis that it is a type of literature who asks for a contextualization of the conditions of production and writing because it exceeds the text and project on social practices. Her conclusion is that, contrary to a commonly held idea, the contemporary urban literature establishes an innovative and productive, and constitutes a growing corpus. Unfortunately, the thesis presents problems of exposure and argumentation, as well as writing and language defaults which often make it difficult to follow and understand the reasoning.

The hypothesis of departure being that the transformations of Paris during the second half of the 20th century and in the 21th century determined the emergence of new urban practices and of new strategies of writing – two phenomena closely related but not by cause-consequence links. The thesis puts in dialogue analytical methods coming social sciences and tools of the literary analysis, stating that the concepts being of the second half of the 20th century, which take for base the literature of the city of the 19th century and of the first decades of the 20th century, are not productive anymore. The approach is thus anthropological, being a matter of a field in constitution, the urban cultural studies, which positions in the crossing of the humanities and the social sciences. One of the most interesting aspects of this thesis is the link between the social sciences writings and the literary practices.

The corpus is vast and integrates the following works : *Qu'as-tu fait de tes frères* from Claude Arnaud (2010), *Le tigre en papier* d'Olivier Rolin (2002), *La dérive gauche* from Hélène Bleskine (1976), *À l'abri du déclin du monde* from François Cusset (2012), *À nous deux, Paris!* from Benoît Duteurtre (2012), *Poupée Bella* from Nina Bouraoui (2004), *Paris Gare du Nord* from Joy Sorman (2011), *Montparnasse monde* from Martine Sonnet (2011), *Le mal de Paris* from Régine Robin (2015), *Métro : Instantanés* from Leïla Sebbar (2007), *Fenêtres Open space* from Anne Savelli (2007), *Le métro est un sport collectif* from Bertrand Guillot (2012), *Fragments du métropolitain* from Jeanne Truong (2011), *Le sentiment des rues* from Joël Cornuault (2017), *La Direction de l'absent* de Ruth Zylberman (2015), *Paris, musée du XXI^e siècle* from Thomas Clerc (2007), *Bistros* from Hélène Millerand (2016), *Paris intérieur* from Philippe Le Guillou (2015), *La ville de Paris* from Gérard Gavarry (1987), *Au pied de la butte* from Vicente Ulive-Schnel (2015), *Enquête sur des lieux* from Petr Král (2007), *75* from Anne-Louise Milne (2016), *Les jours d'exil* from Juliette Kahane (2017). Beyond the studied works, the candidate makes a reference to other numerous works just like in the film production close to the urban literature.

The PHD is organized in four chapters. In the first, « Pratiques insurrectionnelles : poétiques de la révolte. Situationnisme-Mai 68-Années 1980 », Miss Zgola studies the urban transformations and on the way of practicing the space that took place with Mai 68 ; writing as generational transmission and as a « auto-archiving » practice is analyzed, to show the link

between the revolutionary practices, the modes of occupation of districts and the literature. The second chapter, « L'écriture en route et en partage. Gares et réseau métropolitain », propose a contextualization in relation to social sciences works, such as *Paris, ville invisible* from Bruno Latour; chapter concentrates in « ordinary writings » and the procedures that make it possible to turn them into literature. The third chapter, « Micro-polis : mémoire d'un quartier. Archiver le quotidien », resumes the question of the urban citizenship, from a transverse analysis dedicated to the spirit of suburb, but also of the city experience, familiar and memorial. The last chapter, « Explorations : un étranger dans la ville. De la métropole à la ville-monde », explores the practice of the city of a series of foreign writers, which rises the question of the committed citizenship.

The candidate highlights the importance of the notion of project in the writers of the corpus writings, which takes a specific sense because it is translated in urban practices. Miss Zgola proves that literary creation is a way to live in the city, of practicing it. Moreover, urban literature would be an aesthetic and existential modality according to which we could arrest the characteristic phenomena of the contemporary Parisian urban life. An urban knowledge produced by writings, that shows the attachment of the writers to the city.

Among the more stimulating hypotheses proposed by the candidate are : the idea that urban Parisian literature can be considered as opposing the idea of national literature ; the idea of urban Parisian literature as a production that tries to fit into topography of the city and to become a part of it.

I have no doubt that Clara Zgola's PDH is a main contribution to urban cultural studies. I only regret that she did not give herself the time and the ways to finish the writing and argumentative exposure in agreement with the ambition of her hypotheses.



Annick Louis
Paris, 26/09/2018