

Introduction

The Poetics of Urban Space

A city view is not what we think it is. Even when we live in cities for most of our lives, when we send postcards of them to our friends—Paris by night, or London in a fog—we affirm a longstanding and unconscious relation we have with urban space. The city view, as such, was born in the Renaissance. At a time when print culture, cartography, and literature developed together, the city view, a picture or topographic image of a city, became one of the most distinctive and popular products of the early modern period.¹ Often called “town views” or “portraits,” these images were both cartographic and painterly, they measured the limits of the urban environment and rendered specific architectural features within the city. The town view produced a fantasy of spatial totality, in which engravers represented the city as if captured by a single glance from a vantage point high above the town.² City views demonstrate the extent to which artists and engravers celebrated one of the great inventions of the Renaissance, namely, the development of linear perspective. One of the earliest printed world histories to include engravings, Hartmann Schedel’s *Liber chronicarum* [*Nuremberg Chronicle*] (1493) featured as many as 2,000 different town views, which although crude renderings of urban environments, provided the early modern reader with a means to imagine world history through the visual shape of cities.³ Sold as individual sheets, town views were also marketed as features that increased the value of early atlases and cosmographies from Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographia* (Basel, 1550) to Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg’s *Civitates orbis terrarum* (Antwerp, 1572) and Abraham Ortelius’s *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (Antwerp, 1570).

The city view celebrates the emergence of the modern self in a cosmopolitan world, a world that was to become the object of a generalized impulse to map and

1 This practice of including city views in atlases to increase their value is elegantly discussed by Lucia Nuti in “The Perspective Plan in the Sixteenth Century: The Invention of a Representations Language,” in *Art Bulletin* 76.1 (1994): 105–28. See also the same author’s “Mapping Places: Chorography and Vision in the Renaissance” in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp. 90–108.

2 In “The Origins and Development of the Ichnographic City Plan,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 35, no.1 (1976): 35–50, John Pinto traces the development of what are commonly known as “ichnographic” or “oblique” projections. Renaissance city views, Pinto asserts, “are shown as if seen from a single elevated viewpoint, from which the projected line of sight meets the earth’s surface at an oblique angle ... monuments nearer to the fictive observer suspended in mid-air appear larger than ones more distant, and spatial relationship within the city are distorted” (p. 35).

3 See Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *L’oeil cartographique de l’art* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 28.

represent space.⁴ During a historical moment that witnessed both the invention of print culture and the first exploration narratives of the New World, the technologies of the book and the map worked together to shape forms of self-representation. As early modern authors endeavored to exploit these new technologies, descriptions of urban topography paralleled narrative explorations that reached both outward and inward, toward new continents as well as in the direction of a discrete inner self. These narratives fixed individuals to places, and yet they also paradoxically produced an idea of the self as multiple, as at once regional, relational, and national. Because it makes legible the relationship between the self and space, the city and its impact on human history and cultural production cannot be extricated from what we know today by the name of “subjectivity.”

Traditional narratives of the subject often accord an important place to early modern France: Montaigne, Descartes, and Pascal have long been considered touchstones for understanding how individuals represented themselves in works of literature and in relation to collectivities. Long credited as the historical moment when the “modern” individual was invented, the Renaissance witnessed the production of new models of selfhood that conceived of the individual as autonomous, and as fashioned apart from theological notions of identity. The humanists’ rediscovery of Greco-Roman civilization provided ancient models for conceiving of the early modern individual, yet the Renaissance derived self-identity from a relationship to place, and no place was more important in this process than the city. *Urban Poetics in the French Renaissance* argues that the notion of the modern individual needs to be understood not only in relation to time and history, but also in relation to place, territory, land, and nation.

In the Renaissance, the city developed into the site of a tripartite identity: the *urbs*, an architectural or built space; the *civitas*, or community in which social relations take place; and the *polis*, the space of politics. This coalescence of architecture, community, and politics functioned symbolically to make the city the seat of a nascent national consciousness at a time when cities like Paris and Lyon had nearly doubled in population and were becoming important centers for trade and mercantile production.⁵ Despite France’s long history of distinctive regional and linguistic identities, its cities offered a location for the development of a new cosmopolitan identity. Well before Henri IV declared in 1593 that “Paris vaut bien une messe” [*Paris is worth a mass*], the city played a significant role in the centralizing statecraft of the Valois kings. It redirects the totalizing glance of medieval cosmographies, disseminating a vision of the universe informed by religious universalism, yet rearticulated in urban form as a miniature model for the emerging nation-state. The significance of the city in the ongoing ideological program to advance the political and artistic superiority of France aligned cultural politics with urban poetics. By using the term “urban poetics,” I mean to point to the way the city functioned in

4 Münster’s *Cosmographia* (1550) launches a new vogue in the printing of national atlases and “world theatres” in the sixteenth century.

5 For more on the historical development of the city, see Lewis Mumford’s *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970) and also the same author’s *The City in History. Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1961).

early modern texts as a new aesthetic subject, as a means by which authors expressed the self as a phenomenon related to location. This book does not seek primarily to study how specific locations in the constructed environments of Paris and Lyon were represented in Renaissance literature. Rather, I am interested in understanding the theoretical significance of the city and of place more generally as concepts that contributed to the ways early modern authors worked through the relations between space and the self at a historical moment when the representation of the self became a central literary preoccupation. More precisely, the chapters in this book study how the city reveals the inexorable link between the sites of individual and collective identities. At stake in each chapter is how the city renders material these links between space and self, between cartography and the book.

Although it has long been acknowledged that the city functioned as a key symbolic element in the consolidation of the French nation, what has not been considered until *Urban Poetics* is the extent to which the city also participated in forming individual subjects and how the rise of urban aesthetics prepared the way for the emergence of an autonomous subject. Literature could be said to represent interiority as a nexus of relations between subjects and the objects they encounter: from the site of a “je” who iterates itself in language, to a subject formed by another’s discourse subjected by the experience of love or desire, or to the power of a king or a nation. The subject’s becoming is always paradoxical and multiple. For while the genealogy of the subject, its coming into language as a form of presence, is predicated on the relations subjects bear to the objects they encounter, the entities they “dress” themselves in and define themselves in relation to are nonetheless caught up in the other forces that exert their own influence on the subject.⁶ The primary task of this book is to study instances in which the relationship the self derives from the city and engages with a broader reflection about the nature of self and the sites it occupies in the world and in language.

The theoretical optic that frames *Urban Poetics* is what David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope* has recently termed the “spatial turn” in current literary criticism.⁷ By his use of the term “the spatial turn,” Harvey underscores how space has become a key term in cultural and political theory, where the fields of literary theory, anthropology, political theory, philosophy, and geography intersect. For Harvey, “literature plays an essential role in representing urban life,” it provides a record of the “material world and the social processes (desires, motivations, activities, collusions, and coercions) that flowed around them.”⁸ Theoretical work by critics like Michel Foucault, Henri

6 See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); see especially pages 9–11. In their introduction to *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Margareta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass claim that the early modern subject comes into existence by means of its relation to objects, “the subject passes into the object, the object slides into the subject, in the activity by which each becomes itself . . . the Renaissance subject begins with just that full consciousness of itself that is the ultimate (though hardly assured) end of the Hegelian dialectic of the subject / object or lord / bondsman.” (pp. 2–3).

7 David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

8 See Harvey’s “The Cartographic Imagination: Balzac in Paris” In Dharwadker, Vinay, ed. *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001): 63–87.

Lefebvre, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel de Certeau have taught us to conceive of space as a phenomenon, as a signifying practice that participates in the creation (and location) of the subject and also reveals the interaction between subjects and discourses of space and power.⁹ As Jeffrey Peters has recently suggested, many of these critics portray the early modern period “as having housed the origins of a primarily rationalist and increasingly geometric notion of physical space that was next consolidated and reinforced with the rise of modernism, and finally demythologized by postmodernist revision.”¹⁰ I draw from the relationships these critics posit among space, power, and identity in order to engage urban space as a critical term in early modern self-representation. Yet I also wish to avoid conscripting the early modern subject into a teleological narrative that privileges modern notions of subjectivity. What is especially fascinating about the emergence of the subject in the texts considered in this book is the way that they combine modern aspects of subjectivity within premodern cosmological systems.¹¹ The spatial turn, as it were, allows us

9 To cite only a few seminal works about the space as a critical concept in theory, see Foucault’s essay on heterotopias, “Des espaces autres,” in *Dits et écrits: 1954–1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 752–62, and his conference on the politics of spatial and epistemological discourse, “Espace, savoir, pouvoir,” in *Dits et écrits: 1954–1988*, edited by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 270–85. See also Henri Lefebvre’s discussion of the shift from “absolute” to abstract space in *La production de l’espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 2000) and also the same author’s collected writings about urbanism in *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonor Kaufman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Gilles Deleuze’s chapter, “Un nouveau cartographe,” in *Foucault* (Paris: Minuit, 1986) about the diagrammatic aspects of Foucault’s thought in *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); and Michel de Certeau’s work on spatial practice and walking in the city in *L’invention du quotidien I. Arts de faire* (Paris: Folio, 1990).

10 Jeffrey N. Peters, *Mapping Discord: Allegorical Cartography in Early Modern France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 18.

11 In addition to Jeff Peters recent book on cartography and literature in seventeenth-century French literature, this book builds on important recent scholarship devoted to early modern cartography, nationalism, and identity, including Richard Helgerson’s *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (1987); Barbara Mundy’s *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Relaciones Geográficas* (1996); Richard Kagan’s *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493–1793* (2000); and more recently Ricardo Padron’s *The Spacious Word. Cartography, Literature, and Empire in New Spain* (2004), and Simone Pinet’s forthcoming book, *Archipelagoes: Insularity and Fiction in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, all of which examine the intersection among literature, cartography, and empire in the early modern English and Hispanic worlds. In the French context, Tom Conley’s *The Self-Made Map. Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (1996) engages contemporary theoretical work in psychoanalysis and cartography to examine how Renaissance literature produces a graphic sensibility in early modern printed works. Timothy Hampton’s *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century. Inventing Renaissance France* (2001) examines contemporary debates about imagined communities (Benedict Anderson) in order to assess how Renaissance authors (Rabelais, Navarre, and Montaigne among others), participated in shaping an emerging sense of French national identity.

to consider the intelligibility of the Renaissance subject from new vantage points, while at the same time maintaining historical specificity.

Recent works by Cynthia Skenazi, *Le poète architecte en France* (2003), and Chantal Liaroutzos, *Le pays et la mémoire* (1998), have studied the role the urban environment played in the construction of French national and monarchical identity, however, to date there has been no comprehensive examination of the relationship of the city to individual identity in early modern France. In what follows, each chapter brings focus to texts from an array of different genres (poetry, guidebook, essay) that feature representations of the self and the city. Although the relation between subjects and the built environment varies, at stake in all of the works studied here is the way urban space functions as a site for the consolidation of an emerging autonomous self. In their totality, the chapters investigate how the turn to urban poetics, that is to say the city as a new aesthetic form, participate in conjuring a discrete inner self from within the urban environment.

Chapter One, “Envisioning the City,” examines the representation of urban subjects in François Villon’s *Le Grand Testament* (1489) studied alongside the anonymous *Journal d’un bourgeois de Paris* (1405–1449). More than simply a spatial framework on which to map the urban worlds described in the *Journal* and the *Testament*, Paris is designated as the domain of individual experience, and in turn, produces “urbane” subjects. The city’s significance in these works reflects not only changing literary tastes, but also the city’s status as a cultural signifier. The ballads that appear in the second half of the *Testament* mark a change in the poem’s spatial organization into two distinct divisions of space: cosmological and topographical. As the poet turns away from the cosmological vision of the early ballads and shifts his focus to the residents of urban brothels and marketplaces, city space functions as a remedy that dispels the poet’s latent anxiety about the inevitability of time’s passage and his own mortality. In the case of Villon, the text provides a vantage point from which the world is perceived and in doing, provides a location through which subjects view and represent themselves in the world. Although the author of the *Journal* sets out to make the city speak in ways similar to Villon, the presence of such voices in the urban environment produce an effect of containment, rather than celebration. Whether to contain the seditious voice of Joan of Ark, or to confine literally the bodies overflowing in the city’s cemeteries, urban space and the subjects that inhabit it are defined in *Journal* by a series of constantly shifting lines of demarcation that separate and structure relations between place and comportment, the living and the dead. By reflecting on the effects of space and environment on the individual, both of these authors provide us with a means to measure different forms of existence in relation to one another. Yet while writing about the subject’s transit from location to location in the urban environment does offer a reflection about the effect of space and environment on the individual, it also reveals a latent anxiety about the place for the self.

Chapter Two, “The Sense of Place in Gilles Corrozet’s *Antiquitez de Paris*,” studies the earliest topographical texts of the French Renaissance and examines a new best-selling genre, the urban guidebook. A hybrid text, part urban history, part folkloric national memoir, the guidebook follows conventions that advocate the amelioration of French letters as part of a larger political program. At the same

time as the exploration of the New World and with the growth and circulation of printed materials in Lyon and Paris, the guidebook provides evidence of an evolving cartographic sensibility in the literary marketplace. In part, a response to the developing market for printed texts, Gilles Corrozet first developed the genre in France between 1530 and 1550. The guidebook performs a political task by aligning writings on cities with an emerging politics of centralization. As they narrate cities in their physical aspect, guidebooks inscribe in the public imagination a specifically cartographic and spatial history of France. Places thus come to represent an evolving landscape of power eventually centered in Paris around the 1540s, not long after François Ier made Paris the capital of the French Kingdom.

The chapter considers two texts by Corrozet, the *Fleur des antiquitez de Paris* (1532) and the *Catalogue des villes et citez assises en troyz gaulles* (1539) and examines how these guides imagine the history of French places in terms of a spatial genealogy. While these guidebooks identify significant sites and events in history, their portability reveals another function of the guidebook, namely to trace itineraries that provide the book's spatial plan. Like the traveler who might consult it, the guidebook literally mobilizes cultural knowledge. This chapter considers the impact of this knowledge on the individual and on his or her relation to the city. Through their participation as consumers of Corrozet's narrative history of Paris, readers become citizens of a shared rhetorical and visual legacy. The last part of the chapter considers the perils of the reproducibility of such printed works and how the possibility for multiple *destinataires* of the guidebook undoes Corrozet stated aim to educate and to inspire national pride in an exclusively Parisian public. As a portable "lieu de mémoire," it guides the reader to experience place and landscape as engaged in a continuum between the book and its object, yet the guidebook also participates in a larger historical and political demography that reveals the consequences of disseminating knowledge of place when the guidebook travels into the hands of an unintended recipient.

Chapter Three, "Scève's Urban Poetics," takes up one of Maurice Scève's lesser-known works, *Saulsaye. Eglogue de la vie solitaire* (1547), a text that critiques ideas of both place and self and the embedded relationship between the two. After Jean Lemaire de Belges and Clément Marot, Scève's poem is one of the first French eclogues to appear in print. It describes a melancholic shepherd's flight from urban life and his subsequent retreat into solitude. Figured as a remedy for the amorous crisis he experiences after two failed love affairs, the shepherd's move into exile affords him a form of relief from the social identity associated with the city. Although set in a rustic environment, the poem complicates the spatial dynamics of the genre by imagining a third space, which neither breaks entirely with the urban environment nor entirely accepts it. By situating the critique in space, which mediates between the urban and rural environments, his poem complicates the eclogue's inherently dialectical form. Scève effectively breaks down the dichotomy between the city and the country as two poles that deny the utility and presence of the other. The shepherd's retreat into rural individualism, a move originally designed to afford the shepherd relief from the obligations of social identity associated with the city, instead, produces a representation of solitary life as a form of death. Scève's depiction of the relationship between place, affective disposition, and the sense of

self provides further evidence that place participates in defining individual identity. Yet, this relationship is explicitly acknowledged in the text as dangerous since the nature of the place from which the subject emerges is shown to be inimical to his subsequent well-being.

In Chapter Four, “Montaigne’s Topophilia,” I turn to the genres of travel writing and the personal essay to consider how the question of place becomes central to self-representation in a book that claims to be consubstantial with its author. A literary form designed as a series of self-portraits, the *Essais* reproduce Michel de Montaigne’s forays into the world in a text designed as a spatial edifice that bears the marks of both the author’s absence and his presence. As Renaissance cartographers sought to represent the world with ever more accuracy, artists adopted a newly singular point of view, a vantage point from which one might observe, project, and represent the world. Whether one is an artist or essayist, at stake in the representation of space is the organization and depiction of perspective. The significance of such a shift in perspective affects not only the way objects appear in relation to one another in a visual field, but also how viewers direct their gaze, and how they move through and understand their own relation to space. Montaigne underscores the significance of these new relations between place and representation in his call for topographers, specialists of landscape, who survey space in new and different ways.

I argue that the nature of the subject that emerges from Montaigne’s self-portraits is one who bears a longstanding relation with place, and more specifically with the urban environments of Rome and Paris. As Montaigne narrates his multifaceted self-portraits, he also depicts a series of landscapes and city views that reiterate the conjunction between discursive and spatial forms, and between place and self-representation. The author’s emotional relation to Paris aligns topography with a sense of belonging, and depicts the self as simultaneously individuated, relational, and French. Such knowledge stages a scene of psychogenesis in which the author’s reflections on urban space contain the embedded trajectory of a lifelong narrative. By expressing his longstanding affective relationship to Paris, the same place from which he derives his sense of what it means to be French, Montaigne infers that belonging is predicated on a relationship between place and the love of place, and, more specifically, on the essayist’s tender affection for the infelicitous features of Parisian topography. By locating the origins of his subjectivity in his affection for Paris, Montaigne identifies the origin of another subject, his textual belonging and becoming.

In the epilogue, “Topology of the Subject” I conclude that these attempts to understand and represent the self in terms of place anticipate new ways of conceiving of the individual in a schematic manner. As Descartes compares a rational mind to an urban grid in the *Discours de la méthode* (1637), he likens his method to the work of an engineer, a term often used to designate the early modern cartographer, who reconfigures a cumbersome medieval city plan. To imagine the mind as a spatial form is not an especially new concept; one might recall the tradition of the *ars memoria*, which imagined the mind as a series of architectural spaces in order to

organize information and prompt human memory.¹² However, what is significant about Descartes's use of a spatial metaphor to imagine the form of the mind is the extent to which urban aesthetics participates in the process of forming an autonomous subject. To distill the *cogito* through the logic of an urban planner by reconfiguring the mind into the form of a grid effectuates a transformation in the agent of thought and subjectivity.

The notion that thought has a shape, a distinct and easily navigable form that allows the thinker to impose a rational order onto the representation of thought, the process by which Descartes verifies being, allocates new significance to place in its relation to the subject. For it affirms what the texts in this study allude to, namely, the ontological freight of place. The larger aim of this study is thus to look backward from Descartes in order to trace the consequences of place on self-representation.

12 See Frances Yates's elegant study of memory systems from the classical age through the seventeenth century, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).